

# Squats, Sweat and Sweet Success

## KENTUCKY COURSE CHALLENGES SENIOR ENLISTED LEADERS

Story and photos by Clint Wood

**FRANKFORT, KY**—Nearing the halfway marker of the 2-mile trail at the Boone National Guard Center in Frankfort, KY, I had no idea what was next.

This was no ordinary 2-mile run. It was a run interrupted by a series of insanely hard obstacles. There was no turning back, though.

Known as the Joint Forces Urban Challenge, the event was designed by GX's own Ken Weichert—aka SGT Ken—for the 2009

National Guard Bureau Joint Senior Enlisted Leaders Conference.

If you're familiar with SGT Ken, you know that the 54 senior enlisted Guard leaders in attendance at this summit got the workout of their lives. I know I did. Weichert is a Master Fitness Trainer.

I had just cleared four 4-foot-high hurdles, spaced about 4 feet apart, and executed several bounding long-jumps for 30 meters.

The next obstacle on the steep rocky path was 30 squat-thrust jumps. Like most Soldiers, I dread

this cardio exercise. It works your entire body, and 30 squat-jump-thrusts at once is considered an advanced workout.

After running the course himself in just 14 minutes, Weichert was now shouting at me from the sidelines. "Come to my pit and do 30 squat-thrust-jumps," he barked. Easier said than done.

### METHOD TO THE MADNESS

The Joint Forces Urban Challenge was designed to show these senior enlisted leaders how to set an example for their Soldiers.

"We're demonstrating how a simple run can be turned into a fun, challenging event that incorporates the exercises people would do in combat," Weichert explained. "Once you win over the heart and mind of sergeant majors, the troops will do what they say, because they're the voice of the people in the field."

For me, on this afternoon, Weichert was the voice in the field. His drill-sergeant demeanor had taken over.

During my first squat-thrust-jump, I decided to double-check something with him.

"Thirty?" I asked. "Thirty," he confirmed. "Three-Zero."

The first 10 went smoothly, but then I started sucking air. I was really struggling. Weichert knew it—and was enjoying it.

"You shouldn't have had that burger before you got here," he said with an evil laugh.

Waiting for me after the pit was a hill with a 9-degree slope. Then it got worse. The next slope was 17 degrees; and a few feet from the top, we had to do 30 push-ups in knee-high grass.

Next came two more hills. Then, finally, the finish line with four hurdles directly in front of it. "Just to show it's never over until we say it's over," Weichert quipped.

### AGAINST ALL ODDS

"This was a challenging course, yet rewarding when you see that finish line at the end," said CSM Mark Breece of the Tennessee National Guard. "I think the 2-mile run is always a drag, but the obstacles were pretty fun."

### 3 GRUELING DAYS OF PREP

SGT KEN prepared the senior enlisted leaders with the following schedule:

**DAY ONE:** 45 minutes of aerobic exercises

**DAY TWO:** Exercise outside, performing each circuit for longer periods of time to reach muscle failure sooner. (Exercises included leaping squats while holding a medicine ball, step-ups off of a 24-inch step and push-ups.)

**DAY THREE:** Repeat the second day's routine, but add running up and down 15-degree slopes

Alaska National Guard CSM Gordon Choate, 45, came in first place. He told me this was his second year training with Weichert at this conference.

Choate, in the Guard for 24 years, commented that this program is excellent for overall fitness. "It changes up the muscle groups," he noted.

The run made him sore, though.

"The obstacles make it tough," he explained. "And then that 17-degree slope at the backside is enough to take the wind out of you. It was a lot of fun, though."

In an assessment, CSM John Gipe, Senior Enlisted Advisor of the Army National Guard, said, "[SGT Ken] uses a no-nonsense, practical approach to physical fitness. His methods require little in the way of equipment, are functional and can be done just about anywhere.

"Most of the equipment he uses is transportable," Gipe continued, "so you can stay fit any place or any time, in any environment. Bottom line—he trains you like a Guard Soldier needs to be trained."

CSM David Hudson, Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Chief of the National Guard Bureau, wrote in his review that Weichert and his cutting-edge fitness programs make fitness enjoyable.

"When your exercise session is over, you not only feel like you've accomplished something—you can't wait to do it all again," Hudson said.

"It was so satisfying to see these sergeant majors and command chief master sergeants enjoying something that they told me they would never do on their own," Weichert shared.

The senior enlisted leaders better start training now for next year. I'm sure Weichert will amp it up. And I better start now, too—just to keep up! **GX**

Check out more of SGT Ken's fitness tips on page 92 and online: [www.NATIONALGUARD.com/fitness](http://www.NATIONALGUARD.com/fitness).



**FIRST UP THE HILL**  
CSM Larry Zimmerman of the South Dakota National Guard leads the pack up a hill that has a 9-degree slope.

### PREPARING FOR COMBAT

- HURDLES**—prepare Soldiers to hop over fences or other combat obstacles
- BOUNDING LEAPS**—prepare Soldiers to withstand jumping activities in combat
- SQUAT-THRUST-JUMPS**—prepare Soldiers to jump from a truck and recover quickly, or to jump from cover and quickly return fire
- PUSH-UPS**—develop strength and training to push the enemy off



**ONE BARRIER AT A TIME**  
CSM David Hudson, Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Chief of the National Guard Bureau, clears one of the four hurdles near the finish line.



**CHALLENGE COMPETITORS** Participants of the Joint Forces Urban Challenge smile—or grimace—after the competition. SGT Ken is kneeling in the front.