Squats, Sweat and Sweet Success

KENTUCKY COURSE CHALLENGES SENIOR ENLISTED LEADERS

Story and photos by Clint Wood
FRANKFORT, KY—The halfway marker of the 2 mile trail at the Boone National Guard Center in Frankfort, KY, I had no idea what 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 GEN’s own Ken Weichert—a.k.a 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 leaps, as well. The next obstacle on the steep, rocky path was 30 squat thrust jumps. Like most Soldiers, I dreaded this cardio exercise. It works your entire body, and 30 squat jump thrusts at once is considered an advanced workout. After running the course myself 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. “Thirty-Zero.”

The first ten went smoothly, but then I started sweating. 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 Breeze of the Tennessee National Guard. “I think the 2 mile run is always a drag, but the obstacles were pretty fun.”

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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 transport able,” Gipe continued, “so you can stay fit anywhere or anytime, 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 want 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 with X.

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**PREPARING FOR COMBAT**

SGT KEN encourages the following exercises to help Soldiers become fit to fight:

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

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**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.

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**CHALLENGE COMPETITORS**

Participants at the Joint Forces Urban Challenge smile—or grimace—after the competition.

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**3 GRUELING DAYS OF PREP**

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

**DAY TWO:** Exercise outside, performing each circuit on larger portions of time to reach muscle failure sooner. (Exercises include jumping 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.

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Check out more of SGT Ken’s fitness tips on page D2 and online: www.NATIONALGUARD.com/fitness

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