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Cadets’ mental, physical toughness put to the test

MARY ALFORD The News-Enterprise 6 hrs ago

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Hundreds of ROTC cadets from Kentucky, Tennessee, Indiana, Ohio and Michigan were at Fort I the U.S. Army Cadet Command 7th Brigade Ranger Challenge.

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Hundreds of ROTC cadets from Kentucky, Tennessee, Indiana, Ohio and Michigan were at Fort Knox this weekend competing in the U.S. Army Cadet Command 7th Brigade Ranger Challenge.

The competition is conducted over two days with the mission to challenge cadets' mental and physical toughness and develop leadership while fostering teamwork.

The cadets competed in performing tasks such as first aid, creating and crossing a one-rope bridge and team obstacle courses. Each team, comprising nine members and two alternates, is awarded points based on how well they perform in each event. Each team also was required to have at least two female participants.

Cadet Michael Bentley, a senior at Western Kentucky University and graduate of John Hardin High School, said the challenge was more of a mental game than he thought it would be.

"I thought I would come in here and be able to go through all the competitions and use my strength to my advantage, but it turned out I had to think through the competition more so than just running through it or trying to use my strength. It was almost like a puzzle the entire way through," he said.

Cadet Avery Duvall, also a John Hardin graduate and a junior at Western Kentucky University, agreed.

“The challenges, I would say, were both physical and a lot of mental,” he said. Duvall, who was team captain, said the biggest challenge was coordinating the tasks and being able to be flexible and work as a team.

Command Sgt. Maj. John Woodson said the Ranger Challenge is a great event. He said the cadets learn a lot about themselves “because this event tests their physical and mental ability and probably areas they have not had to be tested.”

Bentley said he volunteered for the Ranger Challenge because he wanted to be part of a team that works together to push themselves physically and mentally.

“And to be around a group of guys and gals who enjoy challenging themselves and pushing themselves further than sometimes they think they can,” he said. “That’s what motivates me.”

Woodson said the event also is about improving leadership skills, which is exactly what Duvall wanted. This was Duvall’s second time participating in the challenge. He said he may compete again next year.

Cadet Cole Wilson, a freshman at the University of Kentucky, said he joined the Ranger Challenge because he wanted to challenge himself within the ROTC program and not be just another cadet.

It was the same for Cadet Kayla Reynolds, a sophomore at the University of Kentucky.

“I like to push myself being as tiny as I am,” she said. “I like to just push

myself and do things I didn't think I could do. Rise above everyone else. Show them I'm good, too."

Cadet Kamoni Green, also of the University of Kentucky and a graduate of Fort Knox High School, said he tries to challenge himself in everything he does, which is why he decided to compete in the Ranger Challenge.

Cadet Grayson Bedard, a senior at the University of Kentucky, said the event also gives the cadets the opportunity to bond as a team.

Col. David Welch said this year was the first time in a long time they brought in all 38 school host programs for the 7th Brigade Ranger Challenge. Last year, only 18 programs competed.

"Out of about 4,000 cadets in 7th Brigrade we've got a little under 400 here," Welch told cadets Sunday at an award ceremony. "Ten percent took the challenge. You should be proud of what you accopmlished this weekend whether you take home a streamer or trophy or not. ... Every one of you gave it your all."

The top two teams of the Ranger Challenge, Austin Peay State University and the University of Louisville, will represent the 7th Brigrade at the Sandhurst Military Skills competition at West Point, New York, in the spring.

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