

# Cooking competition offers feedback

By Barbara L. Sellers  
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The menu looked similar to what people would find in a family restaurant — grilled steak and eggs for breakfast, with rotisserie chicken and Santa Fe steak, green beans, mashed potatoes and gravy for lunch.

But this was no restaurant. It was a remote field-cooking site on North Fort Lewis, and the five cooks were from the Special Troops Battalion dining facility, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, I Corps.

Sgt. Maj. (Ret.) Brenda Parks and Chief Warrant Officer Azzalee Brown, food service advisers, Forces Command, Fort McPherson, Ga., evaluated the Philip A. Connelly field cooking competition July 13.

"We actually started this project April 19, and we have been tweaking it ever since," said Staff Sgt. Derwin Wesley, food operations sergeant, HHC, I Corps.

Part of that tweaking process included a practice meal June 3, with a courtesy visit from FORSCOM.

"Parks gave us a lot of feedback and helpful tips," Wesley said. "From the day she left, we started making improvements. We spent nights and days out here trying to make sure we got everything up to standard."

Some of the things they did to improve the site were to add log packs and move the head count and hand wash area because they were too close to the entrance.

"We look to see if everything is set up according to doctrine, the rules and guidance in the field SOP (standard operating procedures)," Parks said.

That includes sanitation (like the temperature of the water where the pots and pans are washed), how the food is presented (appearance and quality of the food), opening and serving the meals on time, and everything related to food preparation and storage.

"Our strongest area is the quality and presentation of the food," Wesley said.

Although three of the five cooks are new, privates fresh out of Advanced Individual Training, he said they are a "very strong and high-speed" crew.

"I'm confident that we will make it to the next level," Wesley said. "All I have to do is tell them, who, what, when, where, why, and how, and they will do the rest. But, whether we win or lose,



Pfc. Brian Jensen, sanitation team leader, and Sgt. Kresassidy McKinney, shift leader, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, I Corps, wash their hands July 13 during the FORSCOM Philip A. Connelly field cooking competition.

they are all winners in my eyes, because a lot of units would not even dream of doing something like this."

He explained that the reason it's so important for the cooks to participate in the Philip A. Connelly competition is because they gain valuable experiences they can take with them, and it gives them a chance to come up with creative, new ideas that can be shared with other Army cooks.

The HHC, I Corps-STB cooks came up with the idea of making "warrior racks" to hold the cook's flak vest, Kevlar, and light battlefield equipment. The "warrior racks," shaped like a cross with feet on the base, were standing just outside the cook's field kitchen for quick and easy retrieval. They were painted Army green, with a cook's name on each one.

Additionally, the competition gave

the I Corps cooks a field-cooking learning experience that they don't often get.

"This will help them a lot in the future," Wesley said. "We try to train all cooks for a deployed field environment, but because of the type of unit we are in, we seldom get the opportunity to do this."

Brown explained that preparing meals in a field environment is a lot

more challenging than cooking in a modern dining facility, with all of the latest kitchen gadgets readily available.

"The cooks must keep the food hot from the first person to the last person in line, and this team of cooks did that," she said. "Breakfast was excellent!"

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