

# Building Stronger Signal Soldiers

## *Expert Soldier Badge*

**Capt. Kwabena Antwi**  
*11th Corps Signal Brigade*

Signal Soldiers spend much of their time keeping units connected. They build networks, fix systems, and help commanders stay informed so they can make decisions. This work matters in every operation. At the same time, the Army expects every Soldier to stay ready to fight, move under pressure, and perform basic combat tasks when conditions demand it.

The Expert Soldier Badge (ESB) event hosted by the 11th Corps Signal Brigade at Fort Hood in March shows why technical skills and combat readiness must grow together. It also illustrates the importance of mastering these basic tasks.

The ESB gives Soldiers outside of infantry and medical fields a chance to prove their ability in core warrior tasks. Candidates train and test on physical fitness, land navigation, weapons, and other individual skills every Soldier should master. The process is demanding and forces participants to push past comfort and routine. For many signal Soldiers, it is a chance to reconnect with the basics of soldiering while building confidence in their own abilities.

The ESB has drawn participation from across the installation, with ranks ranging from private all the way to lieutenant colonel competing for the badge. This wide range highlights a shared commitment to readiness and understanding that standards apply at every level.

Signal units often operate in tough environments. Teams establish communication nodes on remote terrain, support maneuver formations in the field, and work long hours to keep systems running. When conditions change or threats emerge, those same Soldiers must be ready to react and continue the mission. Training for the Expert Soldier Badge helps reinforce these expectations. It reminds signal Soldiers that technical knowledge alone does not carry them through every challenge they may face in ever-changing operating environments.

The experience can be both rewarding and stressful. Cpl. Robert Young, network communication systems specialist (25H) assigned to 11th Corps Signal Brigade (CSB), described what it feels like to compete.

“The ESB has been tough but fun. The days are long and training makes you mentally drained at the end of the day,” Young said. “I’m nervous about the medical lane as we go into test week. You have to focus on the small things and make sure to take your



*Sgt. Robert Young, 11th CSB, fills out a 9-line MEDEVAC request while participating in an ESB event hosted by 11th CSB. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Matthew Stepan, 11th CSB)*

time, while still being able to complete the task in the allotted time given.”

His words reflect the pressure many candidates feel as they prepare to meet the standard.

For some Soldiers, the motivation comes from personal growth and a desire to lead. Pfc. Gannon Turner, an intelligence analyst (35F) assigned to 11th CSB, shared his reason for stepping forward.

“I decided to compete to challenge myself and live up to the Soldier’s Creed,” Turner said. “Everything we have been training on will come in handy in real life situations and will allow me to act instantly if something ever happens. It’s great information I will be able to take back to my unit and train other Soldiers on.”

Turner’s perspective shows how the event builds confidence in junior Soldiers. Behind the scenes, leaders play a key role in making the event successful. Sgt. 1st Class Matthew Stepan, a 25H who helped plan the event and serves as the tactical operations center non-commissioned officer in charge (NCOIC), reflected

on the experience.

“It’s been a solid and great experience working as one of the NCOICs for the Expert Soldier Badge,” Stepan said. “I’ve enjoyed watching Soldiers, non-commissioned officers, and officers push past their limits, making sure the standard stays the standard.”

Stepan’s observation captures the pride leaders take in developing others and maintaining discipline throughout the process.

Preparing for the ESB produces lasting benefits. Candidates spend weeks improving fitness and sharpening skills they may not use daily. They learn to manage fatigue, stay focused under stress, and maintain discipline when conditions are uncomfortable. These habits carry into field exercises, deployments, and everyday duties. The Soldiers return to their units with greater confidence and a stronger sense of pride.

The ESB event reinforces a clear truth: Technical expertise remains critical for signal Soldiers, yet physical readiness and combat proficiency hold equal importance. Encouraging Soldiers to compete invests in complete readiness. In the end, the Expert Soldier Badge represents more than a test. It reflects a standard of readiness that strengthens both the Soldier and the formation.



*Sgt. Robert Young, 11th CSB, evaluates a casualty as part of an ESB event hosted by 11th CSB. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Matthew Stepan, 11th CSB)*

### *Author*

**Capt. Kwabena Antwi**, a Boston native, commissioned in 2020 after graduating from the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York. He currently serves as the future operations officer in charge (OIC) for 11th Corps Signal Brigade at Fort Hood, Texas, where he is also the lead planner and OIC for the Expert Soldier Badge.

