

Fort Drum Soldiers earn coveted German badge

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FORT DRUM, N.Y. – After multiple days of testing, 65 Fort Drum Soldiers recently earned the prestigious German Armed Forces Proficiency Badge, signifying they have surpassed superior standards in a historic test of soldiering. To earn the badge, Soldiers were tested in multiple track and field, swimming and military events.

“It was a nice change of pace from doing regular competitions like ruck marches or long-distance runs,” said Cpl. Brandon Moss, an infantry team leader with B Company, 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment.

More than 90 Soldiers, mostly from 1st Brigade Combat Team and a handful from 2nd BCT, met at Magrath Gym to attempt the first event: a 200-meter swim. By the end of the first day, only 75 Soldiers remained in the running for the coveted badge.

“I think the most challenging event was the 200-meter swim, because not a lot of people swim often,” said Capt. Kurt Able, fire support officer with B Company, 1-87 Infantry.

Over the following two days, Soldiers had to complete a 100-meter sprint, a 3,000-meter run, a shot put event, and either the high jump or long jump.

“I train with a lot of running and ruck marching, so it is really weird to get out there and do the high jump and the shot put without doing any training for it,” said Moss, who earned a gold badge.

After completing all of the track and field events, the Soldiers had qualified for the German Sports Badge, which is a prerequisite to earn the GAFPB. Traditionally, German soldiers have up to a year to meet the standards for the sports badge, but these 65 Soldiers achieved the feat in three days.

On the fourth day, the Soldiers took to the 9 mm range at Wheeler-Sack Army Airfield to complete the most important part of the qualification.

“Every event up to the 9 mm event is the German Sports Badge,” Moss said. “Then the range and the ruck march determine what color badge you earn.”

To earn a gold badge, Soldiers had to shoot five of five shots into three 25-meter targets. In order to earn silver, four of five shots had to hit the targets, and for bronze, three of five shots.

For some Soldiers, it was their first time firing a 9 mm.

“It was the first time in eight years I have fired a 9 mm, so it took a little getting used to,” said Sgt. John Posko, a mechanic with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Brigade Special Troops Battalion.

Once the range portion was complete, the Soldiers knew which badge they were competing for and how far they had to ruck march the next morning.

Soldiers gathered bright and early for the final event and only thing standing between them and their new badge. With 33 pounds on their backs, the Soldiers ruck marched six, nine or 12 kilometers around Fort Drum.

In the end, 46 walked away with gold badges, 12 with silver and seven with bronze.