

MONTH. QUARTER. YEAR.



Staff Sgt. Sony Merus, the non-commissioned officer of the year for Division Special Troops Battalion, 1st Armored Division, and a Palm Beach, Fla., native, transports a simulated casualty using the fireman's carry Oct. 6 during the DSTB non-commissioned officer of the year competition at Camp Liberty, Iraq.

The results are in...

DSTB LEADERS GROW DURING COMPETITION FOR YEARLY HONORS

STORY AND PHOTOS BY CPL. DANIEL EDDY, 196TH MPAD, 1ST ARMD. DIV., USD-C

BAGHDAD—A four-day-long Soldier and noncommissioned officer of the year competition tested the minds and mettle of Soldiers with Division Special Troops Battalion, 1st Armored Division, United States Division – Center, Oct. 5-8 at Camp Liberty, Iraq.

While being challenged both physically and mentally, the Soldiers also learned about leadership along the way.

During the competition, which is designed to identify the best all-around qualities in a Soldier, leadership seemed to manifest itself more deeply in the contestants with each new day. Through every step of the journey, the competitors were either mentored in some way or exercised leadership themselves.

“(The Soldier of the year competition) helped me learn about leadership and what a good leader should be, and I already have a Soldier now,” said Spc. Katelyn Parente, a driver with the 501st

Military Police Company, DSTB, 1st Armd. Div., and a Plainfield, N.J., native. “I hope to inspire my (Soldiers), I really do, I want (them) to want to excel.”

Parente—the eventual winner of the Soldier of the year competition—went head-to-head with Spc. Anthony Spall, a combat medic with the 501st MP Co., and a Durango, Colo., native, while Staff Sgt. Joshua Dowell, a squad leader with the 501st MP Co., and a Springhill, Fla., native, competed against Staff Sgt. Sony Merus, noncommissioned officer-in-charge of intelligence analysis for the intelligence section with Company A, DSTB, 1st Armd Div., and a Palm Beach, Fla., native, to become the battalion’s top NCO of the year.

“(Having Soldiers compete) is just the best feeling ever,” said 1st Sgt. Paul Smith, first sergeant of the 501st MP Co., and a Dallas native, about having his Soldiers in the battalion competition. “You are in a deployed environ-

ment with all these different missions and Soldiers are still making time to participate in (Soldier and NCO of the year competitions) besides doing their daily missions. That shows a lot of credit upon the Soldiers and the leaders, allowing (them) time to prepare.”

The Soldiers competing said they would go to the gym on a regular basis to be prepared for the physical aspect of the competition, but they also had to focus on the mental challenges that these competitions bring. The NCOs were able to fulfill their leadership roles to the Soldiers they’re responsible for while simultaneously preparing for the board.

“I work at the gym all the time, and I study with my Soldiers, pushing them to go to promotion boards, quarterly boards and monthly boards,” Merus said. “(In return), that helps me prepare as well.”

Physical preparedness alone,

Staff Sgt. Joshua Dowell, a squad leader with the 501st Military Police Company, Division Special Troops Battalion, 1st Armored Division, United States Division – Center, and a Springhill, Fla., native, simulates laying down suppressive fire Oct. 6 during an event requiring Soldiers to react to direct fire while participating in the DSTB noncommissioned officer of the year competition at Camp Liberty, Iraq.

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however, was not enough as day one of the competition began with a written exam, after which the competitors were given the task to write an essay on how the Army Values have impacted their leadership abilities.

During the second half of the first day, the competitors were faced with a mystery task, completed one Soldier at a time. The first part of the task was a tire-flip. After flipping the 300-pound tire for 25 meters, the Soldiers were blindfolded and required to disassemble and reassemble their M4 carbine or M16 rifle.

Merus, the eventual winner of the NCO of the year competition, said he liked the idea of disassembling a rifle while blindfolded and is thinking about having his Soldiers do it as well.

With weapons reassembled, the Soldiers put a tire on a humvee and performed preventive maintenance checks and services on the vehicle to identify a deficiency on it. To ensure the Soldiers correctly identified the deficiency, they had to pick the correct item from a variety of vehicle parts.

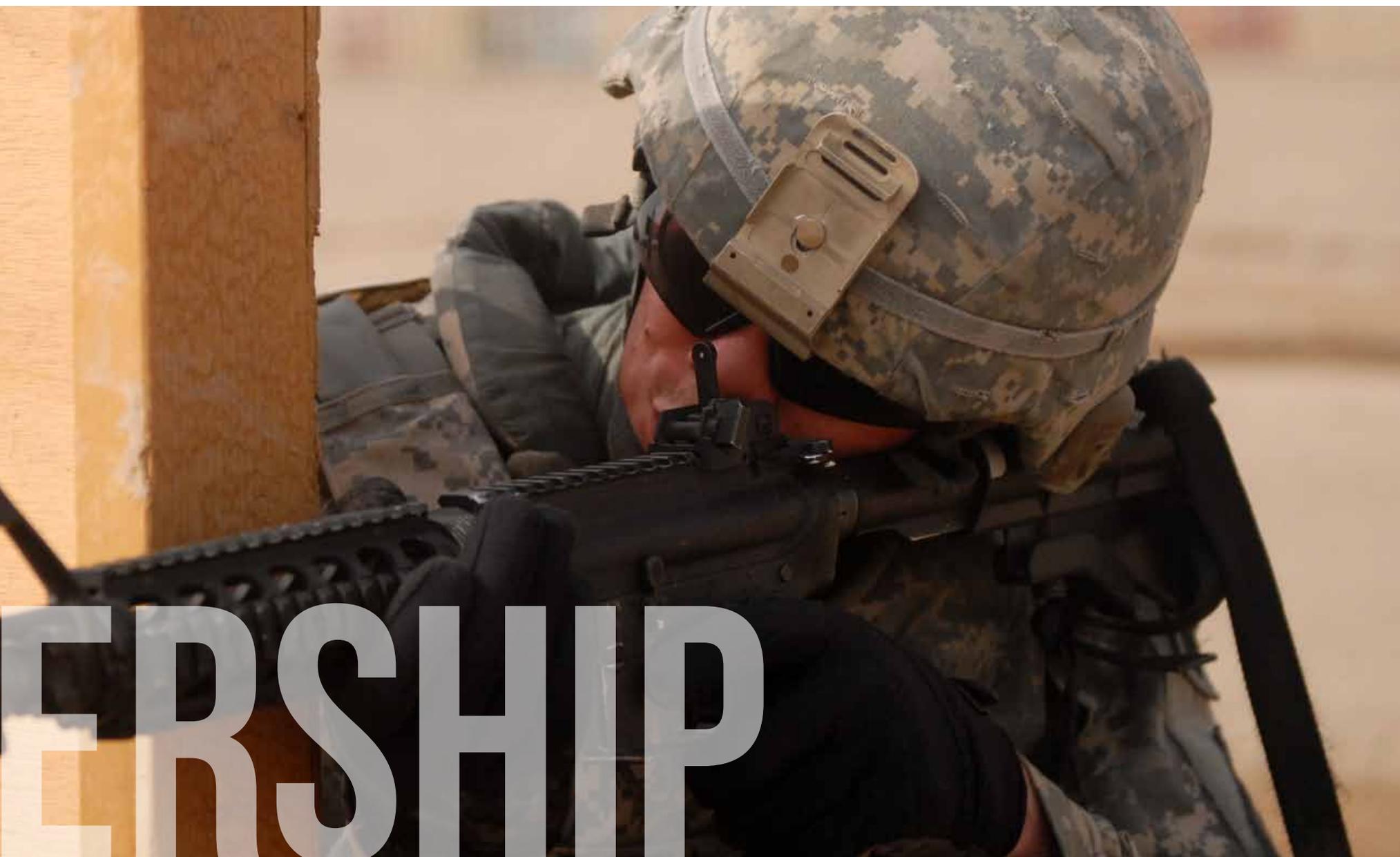
Before departing for the day, the Soldiers had to recite the “Soldier’s Creed” and the NCOs recited the “NCO Creed.”

Day two commenced with an Army Physical Fitness Test, but it was not a typical one. The Soldiers were told to report at 5 a.m. in their Army Combat Uniforms, not the standard physical training uniform.

“It was taxing,” Dowell said about running 2 miles in ACUs, “You would think it wouldn’t be

Spc. Anthony Spall, a combat medic with the 501st Military Police Company, Division Special Troops Battalion, 1st Armored Division, United States Division – Center, a Durango, Colo., native, qualifies with an M4 carbine Oct. 7 during the DSTB Soldier of the year competition at Camp Liberty, Iraq. Rifle qualification took place on day three of the four-day competition.





that difficult, but there really is no breathability in the flame retardant ACUs, and there is nowhere for the heat to go, so you are in a sauna for 2 miles, your boots are weighing down on you and you're just struggling."

Spall said it was more difficult, but Soldiers don't fight in PTs and therefore a Soldier has to be ready to run in ACUs. It is now something he plans to incorporate into his PT regimen in the future.

After the APFT, the Soldiers ran through battle drills testing their reaction to improvised explosive devices, reporting IEDs in the proper format, reacting to indirect and direct fire and administering medical aid. During the last task, the Soldiers had to neck drag Spc. Jonathan Worden—a generator mechanic with Company B, DSTB, 1st Armd. Div.,

and a Clemson, S.C., native—a 230-pound "casualty"—to safety; it was not an easy task for some.

"I am actually good friends with (Worden)," Parente said. "He just kept telling me 'one more push.' It seemed like every single push I did only moved him about an inch."

In the afternoon, the Soldiers and NCOs competed to see who could assemble an M16, an M249 squad automatic weapon, and an M240B machine gun the fastest.

On day three, the Soldiers arrived at the Iron Gym at 5 a.m. wearing full gear and a rucksack.

The morning's task was an 8-mile foot march to a rifle range where they were required to qualify with their weapon and conduct a stress fire. During the stress fire, the competitors had to hold their weapons in front of them, run, do push-ups and then fire at targets.

"In a combat environment when Soldiers come under indirect fire, their heart rate (increases)," Smith said about the importance of practice firing while tired. "The adrenaline begins to run, but then (the adrenaline drops) and (the Soldiers) get tired ... it's that extra 'umph' they have that will keep their focus and make sure they can shoot and hit their targets."

Merus said it was very physical, but mental too, and by com-

peting he would set a good example for his Soldiers. His Soldiers were excited to see how he did everyday and he could not let them down, which helped him endure when the idea of giving up was on his mind.

On the final day of the compe-

tion, the Soldiers went before a board, which helped the evaluators determine the competitors' knowledge of Soldier skills.

Spall said he studied a lot while preparing for the Soldier of the quarter competition, but because the Soldier of the year

competition is more comprehensive and prestigious, he anticipated even higher expectations.

"If it were my board and I had a Soldier coming in for Soldier of the year," he said, "I would be asking questions about leadership, because at that point you are on your way up to a leadership position."

At the end of the fourth day, Parente and Merus were named the Soldier and NCO of the year, respectively, but all the contestants congratulated each other on a job well done.

"(This competition) is not cut-throat at all," Spall said. "We are all there for each other, talking to each other ... and that is what I like about it. Everyone is really helpful and really nice and open because we're all Soldiers."

Merus said the competition put him through some tough situations, but it was personal courage that helped him continue.

"Out of all seven Army Values, I believe personal courage to be the foundation," he said. "Because without personal courage, you cannot really live up or have the fortitude to live up to the other values, like doing what is right or completing your duty when no one is around. So it took a lot of personal courage to come out and compete and excel ... I think that is how this has made me a better leader." ▲



Spc. Katelyn Parente, a driver with the 501st Military Police Company, Division Special Troops Battalion, 1st Armored Division, United States Division Center, and a Plainfield, N.J., native, performs first aid on a simulated casualty Oct. 6 during the DSTB Soldier of the year competition at Camp Liberty, Iraq. Other events during the four-day competition included disassembly and reassembly of an M4 carbine or M16 rifle while blindfolded, reacting to direct fire and reacting to an improvised explosive device.

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