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MEDIA RELEASE: 2023 MCoE Drill Sergeant of the Year

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FORT MOORE, Ga. – Staff Sgt. Sarah Escarcega assigned to the 198th Infantry Brigade emerged as the 2023 Maneuver Center of Excellence Drill Sergeant of the Year, after three days of close competition.

"It was a highly competitive event, and the standings were constantly changing all the way until the end," said command Sgt. Maj. Jerry Dodson, MCoE command sergeant major. "Currently there are 1,049 drill sergeants assigned to this installation, and these nine individuals are the top nine drill sergeant that we have."

Drill sergeants bear the responsibility of coaching, counseling, and mentoring hundreds, if not thousands of Soldiers as they transform them from a civilian to a combat-ready Soldier according to Army.mil.

A typical day for a drill sergeant is demanding; it starts before dawn, and they are with trainees until lights out. Even though it is a tough job, Staff Sgt. Randall Smith, who competed representing the 197th Infantry Brigade, said it is also very rewarding.

The most rewarding part of being a drill sergeant, Smith said, is seeing the development of trainees and the positive influence of drill sergeants. "By the time they are graduating, you can see the hard work that the drill sergeant put in."

Staff Sgt. Tomas De Jesus Perez, representing the 198th Infantry Brigade, has a similar take. For him, it is about seeing results. "When you get a group of civilians, and you stay with them for long hours – long days – and you start seeing how their behavior changes – their proficiency increases – that's how I know I'm making an impact."

Drill sergeants must teach their recruits the proper way to do everything in the Army from making their bunks to firing their rifles. They must also instill the Army values to set them up for success.

De Jesus Perez said the best way to instill the seven Army values is to lead by example. "Once you teach it, you live by it." He believes drill sergeants and their behavior have strong influence on trainees, who see them as role models.

The NCOs who volunteered to compete for the coveted recognition of drill sergeant of the year won competitions at their unit and brigade level to qualify for the post-wide event. Those who made the cut represent the best of the best.

Escarcega credits her "well-roundedness" as her biggest advantage as competitors faced many different challenges.

During the three-day event, each competitor was tested on a variety of tasks designed to be physically and mentally demanding. The competition began with the Army Combat Fitness Test and ended with a formal board comprised of four command sergeants major to include the MCoE command sergeant major. Soldiers commonly refer to a formal board as one of the most nerve-racking experiences in the Army.

Staff Sgt. Michael Torres, 197th Infantry Brigade, served as a board sponsor. Appearing before a formal board is intimidating, he said, because the board members will be able to see whether you are "a good Soldier or not." In a formal board, "you have to stand in front of your superiors and sell yourself, and how you sell yourself is how they will be able to judge your professional character." Board performances are graded on appearance, knowledge, and military bearing.

In between the ACFT and the board, and while having to recover from grueling physical events, such as an obstacle course and a 10-mile road march, competitors were challenged to demonstrate a high-level of proficiency in tasks and drills from the basic training program of instruction. Some of the topics covered in the tasks included rifle marksmanship, first aid, and land navigation (day into night).

The drill sergeants were also tested on modules, which must be recited verbatim. Modules are step-by-step instructions used by drill sergeants for drill and ceremony and physical readiness training. Unlike physical tasks, such as negotiating an obstacle course, competitors only had one chance to get the modules correct.

Not only do competitions like this produce winners, but they also instill a sense of teamwork and esprit de corps among the competitors, Escarcega said. She explained that in these events, a "cohesive team" emerges because Soldiers are experiencing the same challenges and start bonding and working together as a result.

As the winner of the MCoE competition, Escarcega received the Army Commendation Medal, and she was awarded the Order of Saint Maurice and Noble Patron of Armor Award during the award ceremony.

She is proud of her achievement and will start training for the TRADOC competition, which will be held at Fort Jackson, S.C., in September. She understands well the upcoming competition will be even more competitive since she will be tested with the Army's top drill sergeants. Her goal is simple: "Win TRADOC."

Escarcega is a 35F intelligence analyst, and she trains initial-entry Infantry Soldiers as part of the Infantry one-station unit training with the 198th Infantry Brigade.

For the link to the article online and accompanying pictures, visit:

https://www.army.mil/article/267419/2023_mcoe_drill_sergeant_of_the_year

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