



Competitors in the 2015 Drill Sergeant and AIT Platoon Sergeant competition stand at attention after being announced as winners. They are, from left, Staff Sgt. Jacob Miller, Drill Sergeant of the Year; Staff Sgt. Mark Mercer, Army Reserve Drill Sergeant of the Year; and Sgt. 1st Class Samuel Enriquez, AIT Platoon Sergeant of the Year. (Photo by Clifford Kyle Jones / NCO Journal)

Drill Sergeants, AIT Platoon Sergeant Of The Year Announced

By Jonathan (Jay) Koester — NCO Journal

The final day of the 2015 Drill Sergeant and AIT Platoon Sergeant of the Year competitions began with a 12-mile ruck march. As each of the competitors completed the last quarter mile of the march, they were greeted with cheers and the inspiring strains of Survivor's "Eye of the Tiger."

With the ruck march complete, the competition was finally over and there was nothing left but to wait for the final announcement. After four days of grueling competition, the three winners were announced Thursday night.

Staff Sgt. Jacob Miller, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Maneuver Support Center of Excellence, Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., was selected as the 2015 Drill Sergeant of the Year; **Staff Sgt. Mark Mercer**, 3/378 Battalion, 95th Infantry Division in Norman, Okla., was the 2015 Army Reserve Drill Sergeant of the Year; and **Sgt. 1st Class Samuel Enriquez**, Company D, 232nd Medical Battalion, 32nd Medical Brigade, Fort Sam Houston,

Texas, was the 2015 Advanced Individual Training Platoon Sergeant of the Year.

The three victors will spend the next year working at the strategic level in TRADOC's U.S. Army Center for Initial Military Training at Fort Eustis, Va.

Miller said he was proud to hear his name called as 2015 Drill Sergeant of the Year after such a difficult competition.

"It was unbelievable," Miller said. "There are no words to express how much of a moment this was for me. The whole competition lasted four days against the top of the top of drill sergeants. Just hearing my name called was surreal.

"We did a lot of mental and physical stuff to prepare," he said. "We started in about May really training hard, getting ready to go. We did foot marches, we did long runs, a lot of full body workouts. But we also had to put the mental aspect into it because that's huge with this competition. You have to spend long hours and miss



Staff Sgt. Clark Burns takes off his pack after a 12-mile ruck march, the final event of the 2015 Drill Sergeant and AIT Platoon Sergeant of the Year competition. (Photo by Clifford Kyle Jones / NCO Journal)



Sgt. 1st Class Samuel Enriquez calls his wife after being declared the 2015 AIT Platoon Sergeant of the Year. (Photo by Clifford Kyle Jones / NCO Journal)

time with your family as you're going through all this stuff."

Miller's message to the NCO corps was, "We have to continue training Soldiers. Be there. Day in and day out, be that leader. Be a mentor. Be that coach."

After the many months of preparation, hearing his name announced as the 2015 Army Reserve Drill Sergeant of the Year felt like a relief for Mercer.

"It was a lot of weight, a lot of pressure taken off my shoulders," Mercer said. "I've been prepping for this for 10 months. Hours of study every day and physical activity every day, just trying to absorb as much as I could. Seeing the hard work pay off was a huge relief. I know my wife was relieved. She was happy that I could stop studying. Maybe we can spend some more time together now. It was relief and excitement all wrapped up together."



Soldiers cheer as Sgt. 1st Class Heidi Anne Hartman finishes the 12-mile ruck march during the 2015 AIT Platoon Sergeant competition. Hartman won the 1st Sgt. Tobias Meister Award, which goes to the competitor who achieved the highest score on the Army Physical Fitness Test. (Photo by Clifford Kyle Jones / NCO Journal)

“Preparation was key,” he said. “I prepared every day. As far as the physical stuff, I had some hiccups with my legs, but I just kept grinding it out, pushing through it, knowing that if I did what I needed to do and demonstrated what I knew, I could be here.”

Mercer’s recommendation to the NCO corps was, “Always strive to be better. There is always something that you don’t know. Always look to exceed the current standard. Set a new standard for people to look at.”

Enriquez faced the most competitors, with seven others competing against him for the title of 2015 AIT Platoon Sergeant of the Year. So hearing his name called came as a shock, he said.

“I was honestly surprised,” Enriquez said. “I felt competitive, but I felt like there were a lot of people

who were also competitive, so I wasn’t quite sure. I wasn’t doubting my skills, but I knew there were some other pretty strong people out there, as well. When they called my name, it didn’t feel real.”

Enriquez said his message to the NCO corps was, “Keep doing what you’re doing. I know you don’t always get the praise you deserve, but someone out there appreciates you. Just because you don’t get the praise doesn’t mean you can stop working.”

Also announced Thursday night was the winner of the 1st Sgt. Tobias Meister Award, which went to the competitor who achieved the highest score on the Army Physical Fitness Test. The test took place Wednesday night after a grinding

day. **Sgt. 1st Class Heidi A. Hartman**, AIT platoon sergeant for Company C, 1-81 Armor Battalion, Fort Benning, Ga., took the coveted award. ■



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