

Teams prepare for Armywide best medic competition

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Surrounded by smoke, Sgt. David Hull moves a mannequin onto a litter for medical evacuation. The MEDEVAC lane was one of the competition exercises at the AMEDDC&S Best Medic competition. (U.S. Army photo by Meghan Portillo)

Two-Soldier teams across the Army are studying and training hard as they prepare to compete for the title of best medic.

The Command Sgt. Maj. Jack L. Clark Jr. Best Medic Competition, a 72-hour competition that pushes Soldiers to their physical and mental limits, will take place Oct. 24-27 at Joint Base San Antonio – Fort Sam Houston and nearby Camp Bullis, Texas.





After reacting to fire, competitors in the U.S. Army Medical Department Center and School Best Medic Competition had to move an injured Soldier to safety and treat his injuries. Above, Sgt. David Hull inserts an IV into a training arm. (U.S. Army photo by Meghan Portillo)

After proving themselves at lower-level competitions, 42 two-person teams will represent divisions, commands, separate brigades and special operations units from throughout the Army. Each team member must have a 68 medical series military occupational specialty and must have earned either the Combat Medical Badge or the Expert Field Medical Badge to be eligible to compete.

The team members representing U.S. Army Medical Department Center and School, which will host the Armywide event, said they plan to utilize every resource available to them at Fort Sam Houston and Camp Bullis as they prepare. Sgt. 1st Class Daniel Cummings of A Company, 264th Medical Battalion, 32nd Medical Brigade, and Sgt. David Hull of C Company, 232nd Medical Battalion, 32nd Medical Brigade, know too well the bitterness of coming in second, and have vowed it will not happen again.



Sgt. 1st Class Daniel Cummings fires an M16 rifle during the AMEDDC&S Best Medic Competition at Camp Bullis, Texas. (U.S. Army photo by Meghan Portillo)

Hull came in second place at the Best Medic Competition two years ago, and Cummings came in second at the Advanced Individual Training

Platoon Sergeant of the Year competition that took place only the week before the AMEDDC&S Best Medic Competition. The disappointment was fresh in their minds.

"You never live down a second place finish, because you are the first loser," Hull said. "I couldn't go last year, because my unit was in predeployment training. So this is my chance to go back for first place. I've been looking for redemption."

"We already talked about it," Cummings said. "We said, 'Hey, if we are on the team together, we are *not* getting second. First is the only option.'"

Inspiring others to compete

Only five participants competed in September for the title of AMEDDC&S Best Medic. Cummings said he was sad to see younger Soldiers were not making competitions a priority, and decided to compete in both the AMEDDC&S Best Medic Competition and the AIT Platoon Sergeant of the Year competition to inspire his Soldiers and others to compete in the future.

His plan is working. Even before the AMEDDC&S competition came to a close, Cummings said several of his Soldiers approached him, saying, "Hey, let me know what you learn, because I want to compete next year."



Sgt. David Hull, center, instructs Soldiers as they secure a "casualty" to a litter for evacuation during the AMEDDC&S Best Medic Competition. (U.S. Army photo by Meghan Portillo)

"We all need to remember that the Warrior Ethos is more than just for combat," Cummings said. "You live it every single day. Your desire to go out and fight and win should be instilled here, each and every day, with everything you do. There is no room for complacency. There is no room for just getting by. You push yourself every single day, and you push your peers. You motivate each other. That is how you get better."

"If I, a sergeant first class, am willing to go out and do back-to-back competitions – neither one a walk in the park, by any means – and still put forth my best effort and give these guys a run for their money, then that's what it's all about. We are the best military in the world because we push ourselves and we push each other. We need to keep that going. Even if you don't win, it still sets you apart, because you are out there demonstrating that you want to get after it. You want to go and push yourself and test yourself and, if nothing else, you will learn, you will improve yourself, and you will at least give the people who do win those competitions a contest worth winning."

Hull said he also hopes younger Soldiers and NCOs will rise to the challenge and recognize the benefits of competition. Not only would winning set them apart when it comes time for their next promotion, but the process itself is a valuable training opportunity, especially for those who do not practice those skills in their everyday job.

"This is such excellent training," Hull said. "Everyone comes to win, but even if you don't win, you leave having learned a lot. And you rarely get

this kind of support on lanes like we did. The amount of cadre and personal – they provided an enormous amount of training in just two days."

Preparing for the Armywide competition

The Command Sgt. Maj. Jack L. Clark Jr. Best Medic Competition is designed to physically and mentally challenge each team and test its tactical medical proficiency and leadership skills.

Events will include a physical fitness challenge, an obstacle course, a written test, a ruck march, and combat, shooting, medical and land-navigation challenges.

Cummings and Hull said they will be resting up and doing as much as they can to prepare before the end of October.

"Every medical course under the sun is here [at AMEDDC&S], pretty much, and we want to take advantage of that," Cummings said. "We don't have a lot of time, but the more training we can do, the better."

The medical tasks are the most daunting and, for him, require the most preparation, Cummings explained.



Sgt. David Hull, left, and Sgt. 1st Class Daniel Cummings cool down with a tub of ice water during the AMEDDC&S Best Medic Competition at Camp Bullis in September. Hull and Cummings were the winners of the competition, and will represent AMEDDC&S in the Command Sgt. Maj. Jack L. Clark Jr. Best Medic Competition. (U.S. Army photo by Meghan Portillo)

"Only because there are so many steps. If you miss a step, it can throw everything off," he said. "For example, if you start an IV before you secure an airway – that is a huge mistake. You are starting an IV to restore circulation and/or maintain blood pressure on somebody who doesn't even have an airway, so they are dead before you even start the line. You can literally get so focused on what is in front of you that you get that tunnel vision. You can execute an intervention perfectly, but if it is at the wrong time, that is as lethal as not doing anything at all.

"And the chaotic nature of the competition is meant to mimic combat, and it leads to mistakes like that," he continued. "That stress is built in, and it is realistic. You get so focused on your casualties – and you want to do your best for them. You immediately see something that needs to be fixed, but if you are not careful to step back and look at the big picture, you [could lose them.]"

That is why preparation is key, Cummings said. He is determined to prepare as well as he can, and then once the competition begins, he will focus only on the task before him. He said his experience in the recent AIT Platoon Sergeant of the Year competition will certainly help him, but the experience he will rely on most is his teammate's, because Hull has actually competed in best medic.

"Cummings' performance [in the AMEDDC&S Best Medic Competition] is evidence of his ability – after competing for AIT Platoon Sergeant of the Year and having only one day off in between competitions – I think we will make a very strong team " Hull said "Get this guy some rest and he