

# On the trail with the

# DRILL SERGEANT 2010 OF THE YEAR

Story and photos by Spc. Samuel J. Phillips

Every Soldier remembers the first day they got off the bus at basic training. Drill sergeants circling in what many refer to as the “shark attack” – those hats breaking above the crowd like a fin above water. Like sharks, they look for any reason to strike, and the slightest mistake is like blood in the water that draws the drill sergeants’ attention and fury.

At first, many recruits think drill sergeants are just there to make their lives a living hell. Sometimes it takes years for them to realize the drill sergeants’ true intentions. But drill sergeants devote themselves to training Soldiers. They work day after day to mold young citizens into disciplined Soldiers who model the Army values. Not a single Soldier today would be where they are without the guidance of their drill sergeants.

For the last 40 years, the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command has recognized these mentors by pitting them against each other to find who is the best of the best.

This year was no different.

After winning competitions at their respective installations and divisions, eight drill sergeants were given the chance to face off for the title of 2010 U.S. Army Drill Sergeant of the Year.

The participants arrived at Fort Monroe, Va., on June 13 for weigh-ins, photos and briefs on safety and media. The drill sergeants also learned about the 2009 Drill Sergeant of the Year winners, who were the masterminds behind this year’s competition along with Command Sgt. Maj. David M. Bruner, the TRADOC command sergeant major.

On June 14, the participants drew their gear and weapons at 6 a.m. and headed to the range at nearby Fort Eustis.

This was no ordinary range: drill sergeants competed in a stress shoot where they had to fire from behind two L-shaped barriers. Their target was a terrorist who had a hostage. To make things more interesting, each participant had four magazines and had to move to the other barrier between magazines, using a different firing stance at each.

The next event was marksmanship qualifying on a pop-up range followed by a combat-fire qualification where the competitors had to fire from behind one of the same barriers as before.

They were graded not only on their ability to hit targets, but also on their skill in correcting weapon malfunctions.

“Each magazine the drill sergeants used during the range had dummy rounds [blanks] in them,” said Staff





**Sgt. 1st Class Philip Richards III, an active-duty drill sergeant assigned to Fort Benning, Ga., fires at a terrorist who had a hostage during a stress shoot at a Fort Eustis, Va., range. The stress shoot was the first official challenge of the 2010 Drill Sergeant of the Year Competition.**

Sgt. Michael Johnston, the 2009 Drill Sergeant of the Year. “This forces the drill sergeants to react and adds an unexpected twist to the competition.”

The entire competition was riddled with twists and surprises. The drill sergeants had no idea what was coming next, Johnston said. The events were closely guarded from the drill sergeants, who were kept in the dark until each event started.

“The competition is designed to be physically and mentally challenging,” said Sgt. 1st Class Edwin Hernandez, an active-duty drill sergeant assigned to Fort Jackson, S.C. “But, not knowing what’s coming next adds a whole new level of stress.”

After the range, the competitors road-marched across Fort Eustis for a brief lunch. Before the meal could settle in their stomachs, the drill sergeants had to prepare for their next task – leading a squad of young Soldiers in a physical fitness training session.

Once the drill sergeants finished the exhausting PT session, they headed straight to the Fort Eustis Dojo, where they were taken one by one to face their next task. In the dojo, each participant was given five minutes to change into the proper combatives uniform – removing all footwear, rings, dog tags and belts.

Each competitor then had to give a block of instruction on Army combatives. They explained and demonstrated how to escape the mount [the opponent straddling their waist and chest], and how to escape the guard [the opponent lying on their back with their legs wrapped around the drill sergeant’s waist]. The drill sergeants also had to explain every step to completely

reverse the situation and get their opponent in their mount and demonstrate an arm-bar submission.

In their final move of the block of instruction, the participants had to show a takedown from the rear clinch – their hands clenched with a thumbless grip around their opponent’s waist with their head pressed against their opponent’s back. Although this marked the end of the block of instruction, it was not the end of the task.

The drill sergeants were given one minute to gather their thoughts and insert mouthpieces. They would be facing an attacker armed with 12-ounce boxing gloves entering from a door across the room. Their task: within one minute, close the distance with their attacker and achieve a clinch, one of the holds taught in modern Army combatives that gives Soldiers control over their opponents.

When the drill sergeants let the grader know they were ready, the attacker – silent and focused – burst out of the doorway swinging furiously at the competitors. The blows didn’t stop. The attacker kept fighting, swinging and trying to break free until the grader stopped the event.

Battered and winded, the competitors still didn’t get any time to rest. They were given five minutes to gather their gear and head to the next room where yet another task awaited them. In this room, there were three Soldiers – a male and female in Class A’s and another Soldier in ACUs. The task was to find more than 100 uniform deficiencies among the three.

“You are standing there trying to concentrate on the task in front of you, but you are still feeling the hits that landed dur-



**Left: Sgt. 1st Class Philip Richards III, an active-duty drill sergeant assigned to Fort Benning, Ga., watches his Soldiers to ensure they are executing their exercises correctly as he leads a physical fitness session.**

**Right: Sgt. Scott Sinclair, a reserve drill sergeant assigned to the 98th Reserve Division, Rochester, N.Y., demonstrates how to properly execute an arm-bar during a graded block of combatives instruction.**

“If I had to do it again, I would probably take more time to choose my routes,” said Staff Sgt. Timothy E. Sarvis, an active-duty drill sergeant assigned to Fort Leonard Wood, Mo. “It was dark out there, and all of a sudden you find yourself trying to navigate around a marsh that seemed to never end.”

With no time to reflect on the land-navigation course, the competitors headed to the starting point for the next task, urban orienteering. Competitors split into teams of two, and road-marched around Fort Eustis to find four stations where the teams conducted various tasks.

One of the stations consisted of a combat life saverstest and a care-under-fire exercise. But what the drill sergeants didn’t know was that they would be the ones under fire. Each participant stood on a path in the woods receiving the task, conditions and standards from a grader. In the distance, there was a clearing with a lone Soldier lying face down.

When the drill sergeants were given the command to begin, they rushed to the Soldier’s side and tried to get a response. When that failed, their CLS training kicked in, and they instantly started checking the wounded Soldier for injuries. The drill sergeants, however, were cut short by enemy fire and had to seek cover and return fire.



ing combatives,” Hernandez said. “Since you don’t have time to shake off the blows and clear your head, you just have to do your best to ignore them and focus on finding as many of the uniform deficiencies as you can.”

After each drill sergeant went through this gauntlet, they road-marched to a dining facility for dinner before heading back to the makeshift forward operating base. The base consisted of tents that were called home during the competition.

Two more tasks faced the competitors before they could call it a day. They had to take a test on drill sergeant history and then write an essay on what they thought about the changes taking place in TRADOC.

“This was just day one,” Johnston said. “We still have a lot of tasks in store for the drill sergeants and quite a few more surprises.”

Day two started at 3 a.m. when competitors had to get ready and move to the land-navigation site. Once there, they had half an hour to complete a land navigation terrain brief and plot their five points before heading out on a five-mile course that forced them to navigate dense woods, hills and marshes in the early morning darkness.

**Right: Staff Sgt. Timothy Sarvis, an active-duty drill sergeant assigned to Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., explains how to react to a near ambush to a squad of Soldiers using a crude rock table that he constructed with pine cones.**



**Below: Staff Sgt. Kyle Drube, a reserve drill sergeant assigned to the 95th Reserve Division, uses three- to five-second rushes to advance on an enemy position while conducting a care-under-fire exercise.**



**Below: Staff Sgt. Melissa Solomon, a reserve drill sergeant assigned to the 108th Reserve Division, Charlotte, N.C., adjusts a Soldier's hand while teaching how to properly salute during a drill and ceremony exercise.**



Once enemy forces were suppressed and the area was cleared, the participants returned to the wounded Soldier and finished providing aid. Upon inspection, they discovered the Soldier had a severe gash on his right leg and immediately tried to stem the bleeding.

Once they stopped the bleeding, drill sergeants had to move the wounded Soldier to a more secure location to continue their evaluation and call for a medical evacuation.

Drill sergeants were also tested on disassembling and reassembling an M16 rifle, firing an AT4 anti-tank weapon, teaching a Soldier how to handle and throw a grenade, demonstrating how to react to a chemical attack, teaching a squad how to react to an ambush and teaching Soldiers proper communication skills.

"The urban orienteering was probably my favorite part of the competition," Sarvis said. "It added a whole new aspect, instead of just grading us on different tasks. We actually had to find the stations."

They wrapped up the day with an M203 grenade launcher range, a written test on squad physical fitness, an after action review and noncommissioned officer professional development training session.

On day three, the competitors, again, woke up at 3 a.m. – this

time to clear the FOB and take another written test before heading to the Engagement Skills Trainer 2000, a simulated range accommodating multiple weapon systems. Here, the drill sergeants were tested on their skills with the M16 rifle, M249 light machine gun and M240 machine gun.

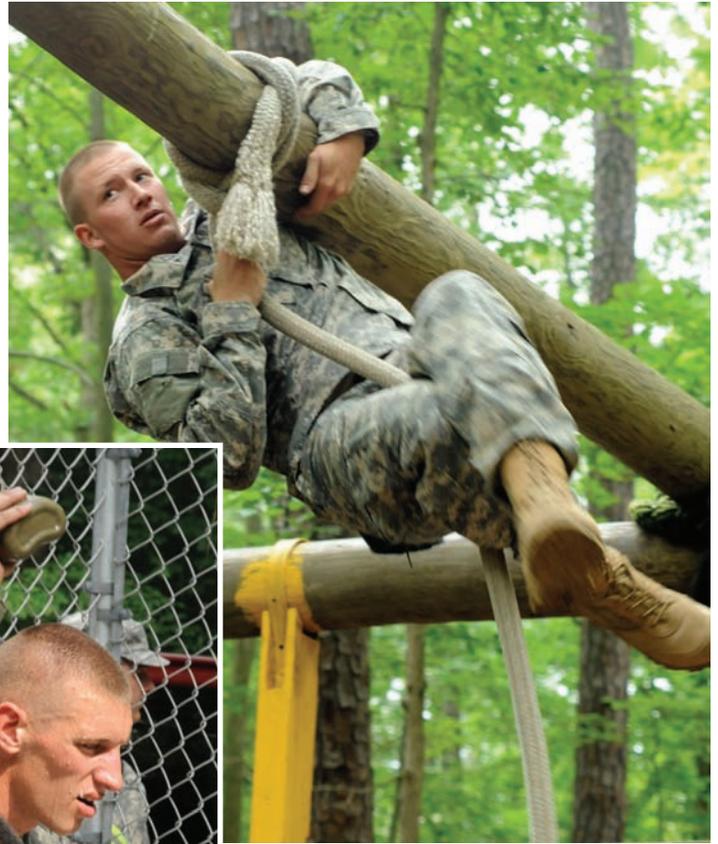
Another round of urban orienteering followed. This set of stations included two surprise tasks, situations drill sergeants may face during their time on the job such as a suicidal Soldier and a Soldier who refuses to train.

Competitors were given the task, conditions and standards to teach Soldiers how to execute a rear march. Upon commanding the demonstrators to fall in, one of the Soldiers did not respond, seemed to be distressed and not fully aware of his surroundings.

At this point the task changed and the drill sergeants had to properly handle a Soldier who no longer wanted to live. Immediately, the participants confronted the Soldier in a non-aggressive manner to help him and find out if he showed any immediate risk to himself or others.

In the end, the drill sergeants convinced the Soldier to continue training until they could get him proper care from mental health professionals and placed

**Right: Staff Sgt. Benjamin Brady, an active-duty drill sergeant assigned to Fort Knox, Ky., prepares to descend a rope after climbing over a wall on an obstacle course.**



**Above: (From top to bottom) Sgt. 1st Class Edwin Hernandez, Staff Sgt. Benjamin Brady and Staff Sgt. Kyle Drube rest and drink water after finishing an obstacle course.**



**Left: Sgt. Scott Sinclair, a reserve drill sergeant assigned to the 98th Reserve Division, Rochester, N.Y., low crawls under an obstacle.**

him on a 24-hour watch.

In the next situation, a Soldier refused to train because he had financial problems and wanted to go take care of them. Each drill sergeant assured the Soldier that any pay issues would be taken care of.

“These are tasks drill sergeants might not think would be in the competition,” Johnston said. “However, they are things drill sergeants regularly run into and have to know how to handle when they come up.”

Other tasks included in the day were a media interview, numerous drill and ceremony movements and teaching Soldiers how to do the prone row exercise, in which the Soldiers lie on their stomachs and flex their back, raising their heads off the ground while pulling their arms back in a rowing motion.

The competitors had one more major task that would test their endurance more than anything else they had already faced. Having no idea what was coming, drill sergeants boarded vans and soon found themselves staring at the Fort Eustis obstacle course.

With a delayed start, they charged onto the course, which consisted of dozens of obstacles such as vaults, a rope climb, a low crawl pit and a net ladder. As the drill



**Staff Sgt. Kyle Drube, a reserve drill sergeant assigned to the 95th Reserve Division, Oklahoma City, Okla., (front) and Sgt. Scott Sinclair, a reserve drill sergeant assigned to the 98th Reserve Division, Rochester, N.Y., participate in the push-up event during the physical fitness test in the 2010 Drill Sergeant of the Year Competition.**

sergeants crossed the finish line, Soldiers they had been working with for the last three days cheered them on. One could see they had left every ounce of energy on the course.

Exhausted, the drill sergeants ended day three with a packing list layout and another AAR. What the competitors didn't know was that they would have to muster as much strength as they could to face the task that was going to greet them the following morning.

On day four, the drill sergeants woke up at 4:30 a.m. and headed to Fort Monroe, where they faced one of their hardest challenges yet – a PT test. “By the time of the PT test, I had bleeding blisters on my feet, and all I could do was just give it my best,” Sarvis said.

Despite exhaustion and injuries, drill sergeants pushed through the PT test, proving to all those watching that they truly were the best of the best, Johnston said.

Next, the drill sergeants had to shift gears and change into Class A's to attend a mock promotion board. Each competi-

tor was bombarded with questions from sergeants major who forced them to prove themselves mentally after their bodies had already been pushed to the edge.

“I had some low moments during the competition,” said Staff Sgt. Melissa C. Solomon, a reserve drill sergeant assigned to the 108th Training Division. “However, the important part is to bounce back, and keep giving it everything you have. The board is what gave me my biggest glimmer of hope.”

After all was said and done, Sarvis outshined four fellow active-duty drill sergeants to be named the active-duty Drill Sergeant of the Year, and Solomon bested two other reserve drill sergeants making her the reserve Drill Sergeant of the Year.

No one knew who the winners were until their names were announced during the official ceremony at Continental Park, Fort Monroe, Va., June 18.

“Honestly, I was a little surprised when I won,” Sarvis said. “It was an honor and a privilege to compete against the best of each respective organization.”

Solomon had a similar reaction when

her name was announced. “I was in shock when I heard my name called. I thought I was going to pass out, and I just wanted to call my mom and let her know,” she said.

Sarvis and Solomon's determination is what saw them through to the end, Johnston said. Now the 2010 Drill Sergeants of the Year have to get ready for yet another challenge – becoming the drill sergeant liaisons for the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command.

In a ceremony at the White House later this year, Sarvis will receive the Stephen Ailes Award and Solomon will receive the Ralph Haines Jr. Award. Ailes was secretary of the Army from 1964 to 1965 and was instrumental in originating the first Drill Sergeant School at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo. Haines was commander of the Continental Army Command (the forerunner of TRADOC) from 1970 to 1972. **■**

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