Press Release

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Leading from the front: Fort Drum NCOs promote community service through Sgt. Audie Murphy Club

FORT DRUM, N.Y. (Dec. 23, 2020) -- Over the past few weeks, members of the Fort Drum community have been popping up on television screens across the North Country with messages of holiday cheer.

Among these groups, and perhaps not as familiar a name as the 10th Combat Aviation Brigade or the 10th Mountain Division Band, is the Fort Drum Sgt. Audie Murphy Club (SAMC).

Although its members are quite active in the community, it’s a military organization that even some Soldiers aren’t entirely knowledgeable about.

First Sgt. Raymond Huff was introduced to this prestigious club while serving as an instructor at the NCO Academy at Fort Rucker, Alabama.

“I felt that this was an organization I wanted to be a part of because they give back to Soldiers and the local community,” he said. “The Sergeant Audie Murphy Association connects Soldiers from the installation with each other and with the local community through volunteer work.”

Over the past four years, Huff said that he has participated in food drives and assisted with organizing road races and fitness events to support charitable causes. The Fort Drum chapter has volunteered with local events ranging from a law enforcement torch run and a Special Olympics polar plunge, to a beautification project in Watertown’s Thompson Park.

“The most meaningful experience I had as a member was when we coordinated to provide gifts for Soldiers and families in need,” Huff said. “Units identified Soldiers by name in certain ranks and the entire installation came together to donate gifts to give to these families in need so that they could provide a meaningful Christmas. It was an outstanding event.”

Connecting to local communities is also what attracted Staff Sgt. Alix Serrano to the SAMC.

“The prestige is what drew me in, but the commitment to the local community is what really stood out to me,” he said. “I've always wanted to be more involved in the community but never really knew about how to go about it. The SAMC was my gateway to assist me with helping my community.”

Serrano said that he learned about the SAMC while stationed in Hawaii. All of the NCOs he admired – and who were considered best of the best – had competed for SAMC, but not everyone made it through the selection process. That was something he would experience himself.

Serrano fell short of the minimum qualifications during his first attempt in 2016, but he knew it wouldn’t be his last.

“It felt like unfinished business,” he said.

The selection process is conducted in four phases, beginning with a candidate’s evaluation and nomination by a senior NCO. Next is a performance test, followed by a brigade selection board and then the division selection board, which includes a written exam.

When he arrived at Fort Drum, Serrano served as a platoon sergeant in B Company, 41st Brigade Engineer Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team. He is now assigned to the 10th Mountain Division Noncommissioned Officer Academy as a small group leader.

Serrano said that his progression as a leader and the support of key mentors helped him toward achieving his goal.

“I was fortunate enough to have a first sergeant and command sergeant major who were SAMC inductees, so they assisted me with studying, and inspecting my uniform and paperwork,” he said. “It involved lots of studying and stumbling on the biography. But after a lot of trial and error, when it was time for the board, I felt I was more than ready.”

Huff also felt tested by the selection process.

“It was very elaborate and detailed, (but) the most challenging part was knowing myself well enough as a leader,” he said. “Being able to apply my leadership style to situational questions was difficult because I had to know those topics more than surface deep and apply that knowledge. This took the most time for me to prepare for.”

Sgt. 1st Class Eric Guzman, assigned to 3rd Battalion, 6th Field Artillery Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, is Fort Drum’s most-recent SAMC inductee.

According to Sgt. 1st Class Nicole Palmer, Fort Drum SAMC vice president, candidates underwent a grueling and intense selection board in October.

“The events included a four-mile ruck march, immediately followed with the Army Combat Fitness Test, range qualification, written exam, a mystery event and the oral board,” she said. “Sgt. 1st Class Guzman was the only one of three to be nominated for induction due to his performance on this very intense and newly revamped division selection board.”

Guzman had joined a SAMC study group in 2015, while deployed in Afghanistan, but he never had the opportunity for the selection board until this year.

“Being part of the SAMC is something I wanted to do for a long time,” he said. “Most of the great NCOs that I have worked with are members of the club. The knowledge and professionalism that you can learn from each member is something that I want to continue – to learn from and be able to coach and mentor other NCOs during my career.”

Guzman said that he felt as prepared as possible, but he also knew that the scenarios that could be presented during the selection process were limitless.

“I had to be committed to the process and spend time studying Army regulations and Audie Murphy history,” he said. “The hardest part of the process was the actual board. You have to maintain your military bearing and focus on each question while trying to answer it to the best of your ability using regulation knowledge and experience. At the same time, you have to demonstrate your skills as a professional leader in the Army.”

Guzman will officially be inducted into the SAMC during a ceremony in early 2021, but he said it was a thrill to learn that he was accepted.

“There was a tremendous sense of pride and accomplishment,” he said. “Once I was told I was going to be selected, a weight off my shoulders was lifted. It brought back memories of great accomplishments in my career like being selected for sergeant first class or graduating from the U.S. Army Drill Sergeant Academy. It is a great accomplishment and an honor to be a member of the Sgt. Audie Murphy Club.”

SAMC membership is open to Soldiers with the rank of corporal to master sergeant / first sergeant, and whose leadership achievements and performance merit special recognition.

“The selection process helps assess for the right leadership qualities and behaviors to keep the association filled with the right leaders,” Huff said.

“Those who resemble the qualities of a doer, who lead from the front and take care of people, are highly likely to earn their medallion. Soldiers want to be a part of SAMC, but there are many who see the selection process and get intimidated by it.”

Huff said that Soldiers should not be discouraged by the process, but they should see it as an opportunity to grow and develop as an NCO.

“We are looking for high-quality leaders who are not afraid to put themselves out there and lead from the front in the community and within the Army,” he said. “Those who possess this quality are likely to continue leading from the front in the association.”

To learn more about the Fort Drum SAMC, visit www.facebook.com/10THMTNSAMC.

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Caption: There are many reasons for enlisted Soldiers to join the Sgt. Audie Murphy Club. At Fort Drum, several members cited the opportunities for community service and networking within a professional noncommissioned officer organization as reasons for committing to the arduous selection process. (Graphic by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)