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23rd Ord. Co. Soldiers compete in USAFE firefighter competition

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23rd Ord. Co. Executive Officer

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany – Four firefighters from the 23rd Ordnance Company, 18th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 16th Sustainment Brigade, represented their unit at the U.S. Air Forces Europe Firefighter Combat Challenge here Oct. 9.

The hand-picked team trained for weeks on honing their skills by practicing tire flips, hose carries, stairwell runs and buddy drags to prepare for the physical strains they would face during the competition. They spent countless hours at the Grafenwoehr Physical Fitness Center conditioning their bodies through cardio and upper body weight training.

The purpose of the competition was to place firefighting personnel in a series of physical challenges beyond what they would face in their day-to-day operations. Competition events included the high-rise pack carry, hose hoist, forcible entry, hose advance and victim rescue, to name a few.

“It was a great opportunity for our new firefighters fresh from the schoolhouse to see what this job is all about,” said Sgt. Michael Wagaman, senior firefighter for the 23rd Ord. Co. “It gave them something to train for while we are restructuring our ongoing firefighting mission with the garrison firehouse on Grafenwoehr.”

An additional objective for the 23rd Ord. Co. Soldiers was to represent the Army at the competition. They were the only Army team competing in what is predominantly a skill set filled by airmen in Europe.

The 23rd Ord. Co. “Ammo Dawgs” team, made up of Staff Sgt. Richard Kessel, from Ripley, Ohio – Spc. Mariano Escalante, a native of Los Angeles; Pfc. Jovon Woodland, from Cleveland; and Pvt. Garrett Russ, a native of Tampa, Fla. – placed fourth out of 10 teams. It has been many years since the Army unit last competed in the event.

“I think we showed these airmen we really know what we’re doing and that we can beat them at their own game with less time, training and equipment available,” said Escalante.

“The whole event was awesome,” said Capt. Christopher May, the 23rd Ord. Co. commander. The 23rd Ord. Co. first sergeant and I brought our families and had a great time watching our Soldiers compete.”

“Even as first time competitors, they hung in there with the veteran teams despite wearing Army regulation equipment, which is 10 pounds heavier than what the Air Force teams had on,” May said.

The firefighters of 23rd Ord. Co. are already planning for next year’s competition, said May, and are looking forward to all the upcoming and intense on-the-job training, which will increase their chances of winning the 2011 USAFE Firefighter Challenge.



Pfc. Jovon Woodland and Spc. Mariano Escalante, firefighters for the 23rd Ordnance Company, 18th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 16th Sustainment Brigade, are briefed by the judges following completion of an event during the U.S. Air Forces Europe Firefighter Combat Challenge at Ramstein Air Base Oct. 9. (U.S. Army courtesy photo)



Firefighters from the 23rd Ordnance Company, 18th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 16th Sustainment Brigade, wait for instructions during the U.S. Air Forces Europe Firefighter Combat Challenge at Ramstein Air Base Oct. 9. (U.S. Army courtesy photo)