

Candidates battle weather, terrain, medical tasks to earn EFMB

By **CHUCK CANNON**

Command information officer

FORT POLK, La. — Soldiers from more than 46 Army installations conclude testing for the coveted Expert Field Medical Badge today with a 12-mile road march and graduation ceremony, slated for 10 a.m. on Fort Polk's Honor Field.

To highlight the badge's importance and the skill and perseverance needed to pass the grueling class, the badges will be flown in by helicopter just prior to the ceremony.

An important part of the week-long testing is the week of study and training held prior to the event under the watchful eyes and guidance of cadre "Black Hats" who will judge and grade the class members on their efforts. One of the cadre, Sgt. 1st Class Joseph Clifford, 32nd Hospital Center, said the event — both train-up and test — were tough and stressful.

"It's designed that way to make it as realistic as possible," said Clifford, an MOS 68S preventive medicine, who earned his badge a few years ago. "The attrition rate is normally 7 to 15%."

Clifford said the biggest stumbling block most of the candidates face is land navigation.

"Land navigation is a perishable skill," Clifford said. "It's not used often by those testing so they really have to work at it."

Another area that causes class members to stumble are tasks they routinely perform, but not "by the book."

"A lot of time they'll (candidates) develop bad habits and that trips them up," he said. "And many skills they are tested on aren't used every day. You need to study and you can't ask enough questions."

Clifford said a key to graduating is a good study partner.

"You need to find a partner who is focused on getting the badge," he said.

As for what earning the EFMB can do for a Soldier's career, Clifford said his EFMB helped him get picked up for sergeant first class on his first look with 10 years in service.

"It's definitely helps with promotions, especially for senior NCOs and officers," he said. "For young Soldiers, it shows how bright and talented they are. None of this information is secret — you know what the task, conditions and standards are. You just have to want it."

Clifford said the road march is tough.

"You need to start training a couple of months out. You have to be motivated and have an attitude that you're going to make it no matter what."

Pfc. Domanique Bisher is a 68W medic with 5th Battalion, 25th Artillery Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division. She said the course has been tough.

"It's been cold and muddy, but worth it," she said. "I'm confident I can do this."

The diminutive Soldier said the physical part of the testing has been difficult.

"The learning part and the lanes aren't hard, but the ruck and the PT is tough," she said. "I really want the badge because I'm a female and I'm small, so that would show others that I'm capable. And you get more respect from the others in your unit. It will feel really good to have it."

A pair of officers, 2nd Lt. Luke Stone and 1st Lt. Gage Newby, both members of 3rd BCT, 10th



Soldiers testing for the Expert Field Medical Badge tackle lanes that test their ability to perform common Soldier tasks, such as disassembling and assembling firearms, and treat combat casualties and remove those injured in the field of battle, often through muddy terrain and miserable weather conditions.

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