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1st Armored Division Soldiers in Iraq compete to become members of prestigious U.S. Army Europe Sergeant Morales Club

By Sgt. Daniel Nichols
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BAGHDAD, Iraq -- Nine noncommissioned officers with the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division competed for entry into the Sergeant Morales Club here, Feb 22. One made the final cut.

Staff Sgt. Eugeniy Mikityuk, a section leader from Ghost Troop, 1st Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, earned the right to join the prestigious club that is U.S. Army Europe's equivalent to the Army's Sergeant Audie Murphy Club.

The club was founded in 1973 by then-Lt. Gen. George S. Blanchard, former VII Corps and USAREUR commander.

Selection for club membership is considered a mark of prestige among NCOs, who, according to club policy, "must exemplify a special kind of leadership that is characterized by a personal concern for the needs, training, development, and welfare of Soldiers."

"It's an elite organization of the most

Who is Sergeant Morales?

Sergeant Morales is a fictional noncommissioned officer who is intended to represent the ideal Army NCO. Here is his story, from the Web site of the U.S. Army Europe Sergeant Morales Club:

"Sergeant Morales was a squad leader for three years in an engineer battalion of a U.S. Army division. He was the proverbial "98-pound weakling" and had not completed high school -- only the GED program. Of Puerto Rican descent, he had only a limited command of English. Despite his physical limitations, lack of formal education, and minority group status, he strove for and achieved the highest caliber of leadership.

"Sergeant Morales began his day by coming from his home to the barracks as his squad was awakening. They participated together in PT and work details as well as unit training. Sergeant Morales pitched right in with the disliked drudgery-type details. He led by example, particularly when it meant getting his hands dirty. In his pre-Army life, Sergeant Morales had some experience as a barber. At the end of the month, when money was scarce in his squad, he arranged for his Soldiers' hair to be cut. He kept a pocket notebook with one page for each member of his squad devoted to personal data: background, education, family, MOS, problems, and so on. At least once a month, everyone in the squad and their spouses got together, socialized, and discussed problems at his quarters. During his three-year tenure, no one in his squad went AWOL, which he attributed to knowing his Soldiers, keeping them informed, and watching out for their interests. His squad consistently placed first in company Army training tests. All of Sergeant Morales's accomplishments were achieved despite the fact that his squad received misfits from other units for rehabilitation.

"While in the division, Sergeant Morales completed high school and the equivalent of two years of college. Sergeant Morales had a lot in his favor but no special advantages. He just worked at his job to the best of his ability. Sergeant Morales was an exemplary leader in whom his Soldiers believed."

(Source: http://www.hqusareur.army.mil/FactFiles/FactFile_7Army_SGTMoralesStory 2007-09.pdf)

professional NCOs that exist in the Army today," said Master Sgt. Melissa McFrazier for the operations section of the Baumholder, Germany-based brigade.

To earn membership in the club, NCOs must face a board in what the club calls a "rigorous, competitive process." Only Mikityuk earned the board's approval. He said leading by example and empowering the Soldiers in his section made the difference.

"I always encourage my Soldiers to exceed and always try to better themselves," said Mikityuk. "In order for me to lead by example, I believe I have to do the same thing, and I'm pretty happy I was selected. When I got back from the board my Solders asked if I made it and I was able to say, 'Yeah I did,'" he said with a smile.

"To be selected you're basically in the top 1 percent of NCOs in the Army," said Master Sgt. Michael Morton, NCO-in-charge of the brigade's Iraqi security forces cell, who sat on the club selection board. "It's the Soldier that is 'be all, know all, do all.'"

SGT DANIEL NICHOLS

Staff Sgt. Gustavo Padilla (left) talks with his sponsor, Staff Sgt. Kofi Kyereme, before his appearance before the Sergeant Morales Club board at the headquarters for the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, in Baghdad, Iraq, Feb 22. Both Soldiers are assigned to the brigade's Task Force 4th Battalion, 27th Field Artillery.

"As a club, we really strive to promote the Noncommissioned Officer Corps and the professionalism of the Noncommissioned Officer Corps," McFrazier said. "To reach back and make sure we continue to mentor those NCOs and those Soldiers who are following behind us."

Board members look for Soldiers who will go the extra mile for their troops; looking beyond problems to see solutions. They want to see if an NCO understands and applies the letter and spirit of Army standards and policies, Morton explained.

"If you can't 'think outside that box,' and [take advantage] of all avenues to help that Soldier, then you're not fulfilling what we consider to be [the qualities of] a Sergeant Morales member," he added.

The board lasted just under two hours for each NCO competing, and covered subjects such as troop-leading procedures, Army programs, wear and care of uniforms and a variety of other Soldier and leadership topics and skills.

“I think the board members are a lot more selective over who they recommend into a Morales board,” said Mikityuk. “They put a little bit of pressure on you so that if you don’t know the answer they’ll just throw another one right after that. You’re under pressure. You’re in the hot seat.”

While the remaining eight competitors were not selected to join the club, Morton said being chosen to compete for membership is an achievement in its own right.

“You have to be hand-selected; you have to be selected by your leadership, your first sergeant, your commander, battalion sergeant major, battalion commander -- all the way up,” said Morton.

“You really set yourself apart, first of all, even just by being recommended by your chain of command to appear before one of these boards,” said McFrazier. “Then, if you are in fact selected, a lot of people strive for it and never make it ... but you may have heard the quote that ‘to whom much is given, much is expected.’ So we want to make sure that NCOs who come before the board … truly understand that it’s not just a ‘check the block.’”

Club members’ obligations don’t end with their selection, McFrazier added. He said Morales Club members participate in community support activities throughout USAREUR, helping to train other Soldiers; organizing study symposiums to prepare Soldiers for competitive selection boards; assisting with Soldier professional and personal development; and looking for other opportunities to give back to their communities.

“It’s a service-based organization. We give back to the community. We want to make sure we are viewed as professionals and that we continue that trend,” said McFrazier. “It’s not unachievable, but it is difficult, and if it wasn’t difficult it wouldn’t be an elite organization.”

Soldiers interested in learning more about the Sergeant Morales Club can get more information online at www.hqusareur.army.mil/NCOoutlook/SMClub%20Page.htm.

(Sgt. Daniel Nichols is currently deployed in Iraq with the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division)