

USAFA firefighters impressive in regional competition

By John Van Winkle

Academy Public Affairs

Academy firefighters claimed a first, second and third place finish June 2 in their first showing of the 2007 Firefighter Combat Challenge season at Carlsbad, N.M.

It was the season's second regional competition.

The Firefighter Combat Challenge puts firefighters through a timed course of five back-to-backbreaking tasks, testing their basic job skills, technique and stamina.

"Every part is designed to be a task you would accomplish on a fire ground. It simulates a working fire to a 'T,'" said Academy Firefighter Combat Challenge team captain Roy Dalton.

In order, the Firefighter Combat Challenge has firefighters:

? Climb a five story tower carrying a 42-pound fire hose

? Hoist a rope weighted by a 42-pound fire hose up five stories, while leaning over the top of the tower

? Hit a 160-pound steel "Kaiser" beam with a mallet, to move the beam five feet horizontally

? Run 140 feet, then drag a fire hose 75 feet and hit a volleyball-sized target with water

? Drag a life-sized, 175-pound dummy 100 feet while walking backward, across the finish line

Competitors wear 60 pounds of firefighting gear while running the course.

Firefighter teams must have three of their five members finish with a combined time of less than seven minutes to qualify their team for the nationals. Individual firefighters who complete the entire course in two minutes or less qualify individually for the nationals.

"Two minutes of this would compare to 10 to 15 minutes of strenuous work on a working fire," said Dalton.

The Firefighter Combat Challenge also has a relay competition, where each team member takes one of the five events and tags out to a teammate after completing that leg.

It was in the relay the Academy team showed its stamina and earned a first place finish.

Dubbed "Team USAFA," the Academy started the relay competition with the best time in the seeding round of 1:20.63. That earned them a first-round bye, advancing to the quarterfinals to face the Hobbs Fire Relay team. Team USAFA clocked in at 1:26.15 in their next relay, to beat Hobbs' 1:45.95, to advance to the finals against the El Paso Fire Department's Fire Fro's relay team. The El Paso team finished at 1:27.21, but Team USAFA set the day's fastest relay time on their third run, at 1:18.22, to claim the top spot.

The Academy team took second in the team competition, with a team time of 6:04.23, just 10 seconds behind a team from the El Paso Fire Department, and seven seconds ahead of their nearest competitor.

That time was a combination of Team USAFA's best times. They came from Dalton, Staff Sgt. Danny Arens and Senior Airman Horace Conney. Dalton's individual run time of 1:50.43 was the third-best time of the competition, while Sergeant Arens took fifth place with a clocking of 1:57.74.

Both qualified as individuals at the firefighter combat challenge nationals.

Team USAFA is targeting its seventh straight appearance in the national and world firefighter combat challenges. The team members are: Dalton, Pat Kraft, Hans Barkley, Lance Gore, Sergeant Arens and team alternate Airman Conney.

Qualifying for the nationals will not ease Team USAFA's training or competition. They'll compete at the July 28 regional competition in Westminster, Colo., and sign up for another regional competition for the practice.

The Firefighter Combat Challenge nationals are Oct. 12 and 13 in Atlanta.

Given Team USAFA's annual visits to the world Firefighter Combat Challenge in previous years, they have the world competition dates of Nov. 4-8 in downtown Las Vegas marked on their calendars.

Photo outline:

Academy firefighter Mr. Patrick Kraft shows off his hose technique during the 2006 Firefighter Combat Challenge regional competition at Westminster, Colo. Prior to turning the hose on to hit a volleyball-size target, he ran 140 feet then dragged the hose 75 feet. It's one of five events each participating team performs at the regional, national and world competition levels. "Team USAFA" started its 2007 campaign impressively in Carlsbad, N.M., earlier this month. Photo by John Van Winkle

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