

SIUE Army ROTC Cadets 'Do It Like Damra' at Northern Warfare Challenge

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EDWARDSVILLE – With a fierce motivation to ‘Do It Like Damra,’ Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Army ROTC Cadets put their physical and mental skills to the test Feb. 20-21 at the Northern Warfare Challenge in La Crosse and Fort McCoy, Wis.

The competition annually tests 5-person teams in physical and mental endurance, mountaineering and mountain warfare techniques, and basic soldiering skills. The host locations’ snowy terrain, long-distance ruck-march, elevation changes of over 1,000 feet and -19-degree morning added to the event’s difficulty.

Participating from SIUE's Cougar Battalion were team captain John Galinski, of Troy, Adam Krisby, of Sparta, Sterling Howard, of Windsor, Blake Unterbrink, of Hartford, and Dawson Whitten, of Effingham. Accompanying them were Cadets Bryan Sims, who was in charge of coaching and training, and Keith Elden, a supportive and experienced mentor, as well as Army Major Josh Fields, who helps coordinate the competition teams.

"We had two weeks and three days to prepare, but these young men did not let that worry them," said Sims, head of special staff and public affairs officer for the SIUE Army ROTC. "Our cadets performed incredibly tactfully and showed utmost resilience throughout the competition. They were constantly complimented for their attention to detail, overall skill level and thoroughness on the knowledge testing lanes."

Competition participants and supporters referred to SIUE's participants as "that team that always had a smile on their faces, and was always motivating each other at every point in the competition." The accolade was especially meaningful, given the team was participating in memory of their friend Moneer Damra, a fellow cadet who was tragically killed in an off-campus shooting in January.

"Moneer was known for his ability to smile in the face of the most physical and mentally demanding tasks," Sims explained. "We all chose to participate in this event, even given the last-minute warning to begin training, because it was exciting, challenging, difficult, and something that Moneer wanted to do more than any other competition. The team gave 100%, so that they could walk away knowing they went there to 'Do It Like Damra.' This has been the motto that has carried our tight-knit battalion through the troubles of the recent weeks since losing one of our cadets."

Sims is currently training Cougar Battalion teams for their next big event — the Ranger Buddy competition at Kansas State University.

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville provides students with a high quality, affordable education that prepares them for successful careers and lives of purpose to shape a changing world. Built on the foundation of a broad-based liberal education, and enhanced by hands-on research and real-world experiences, the academic preparation SIUE students receive equips them to thrive in the global marketplace and make our communities better places to live. Situated on 2,660 acres of beautiful woodland atop the bluffs overlooking the natural beauty of the Mississippi River's rich bottomland and only a short drive from downtown St. Louis, the SIUE campus is home to a diverse student body of nearly 13,000.

Photo: (L-R) SIUE Army ROTC Cadets Keith Elden, John Galinski, Sterling Howard, Dawson Whitten, Blake Unterbrink, Adam Krisby and Bryan Sims.