

New club member looks to make a difference

**Story and photo by Larry D. McCaskill
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It takes a special kind of noncommissioned officer to be associated with a real American hero and Staff Sgt. Zenda Mendez is one of them. Mendez, a motor transport operator in the Expeditionary Contracting Command headquarters, and three other Army Materiel Command noncommissioned officers were welcomed into the Sgt. Audie Murphy Club after appearing before the club's induction and membership panel in April.

NCOs are selected to apply to join the SAMC. Induction and membership is a reward for noncommissioned officers whose leadership achievements and performance merit special recognition. The club honors the memory of Sgt. Audie L. Murphy, the highest decorated American Soldier in World War II. For his battlefield heroics, he received the Medal of Honor, the U.S. military's highest award for valor, along with 32 additional U.S. and foreign medals and citations, including five from France and one from Belgium.

"The opportunity for an NCO to appear before the SAMC Board is a prestigious honor, and to become a member of the SAMC is a great accomplishment," said Command Sgt. Maj. John L. Murray, ECC command sergeant major. "It says you already possess those traits that Sergeant Audie Murphy and other members of the club have demonstrated, and that you are already taking care of Soldiers under your care and setting the example for your peers. Staff Sgt. Mendez has shown through her actions and hard work that it is possible to become a member. She has blazed a trail for other NCOs in the command to follow," Murray said.

"Going before the board is a privilege, and it was offered to me by my command sergeant major at my old unit," said the eight-year veteran from Atlanta, Ga. "When I got here I started asking about the board. I wanted to go back and try it again.

"I understood the significance of belonging to such an elite organization and I thought it was a way of standing out among my peers," said Mendez, who first went before the SAMC board while deployed in Afghanistan in 2007.

Between 2004 and 2007, Mendez appeared before more than 20 NCO and Soldier boards at her various units, winning Soldier and NCO of the quarter boards at different levels. With all of that experience, the butterflies were fluttering more than ever during her appearance.

"I was more nervous this time than the last time. I was prepared and knew I would do well, but my nerves were still there," she said.



Mendez said that NCOs today must be able to remain flexible. "It takes a lot of dedication. You have to have the ability to adapt to certain situations, but more important, you have to know yourself. You deal with other people's issues as well as your own. In a word, understanding," she said.

Mendez said her new status as a SAMC member affords her more opportunities to provide input on NCO matters that will affect the Corps as a whole.

"SAMC members provide input and suggestions on new ways of developing the NCO Corps. Now that I'm a member, I'm not just a regular Soldier, I'm looked at a little bit differently. I can provide input to help the NCO Corps professionally," said Mendez, who sees a future full of possibilities.

"My goal is to be a command sergeant major with an elite organization, a place where traditionally, you don't usually see female CSMs," Mendez said. "I mean units like the 82nd Airborne Division. If I could, I'd love to be the 18th Airborne Corps CSM."

She acknowledges that it's a big step.

"Who knows what can happen in 10 years. There are a lot of female Soldiers out there laying the ground work for others to follow. I plan on being right behind them, ready to start opening more doors for females and my NCO Corps," Mendez said.