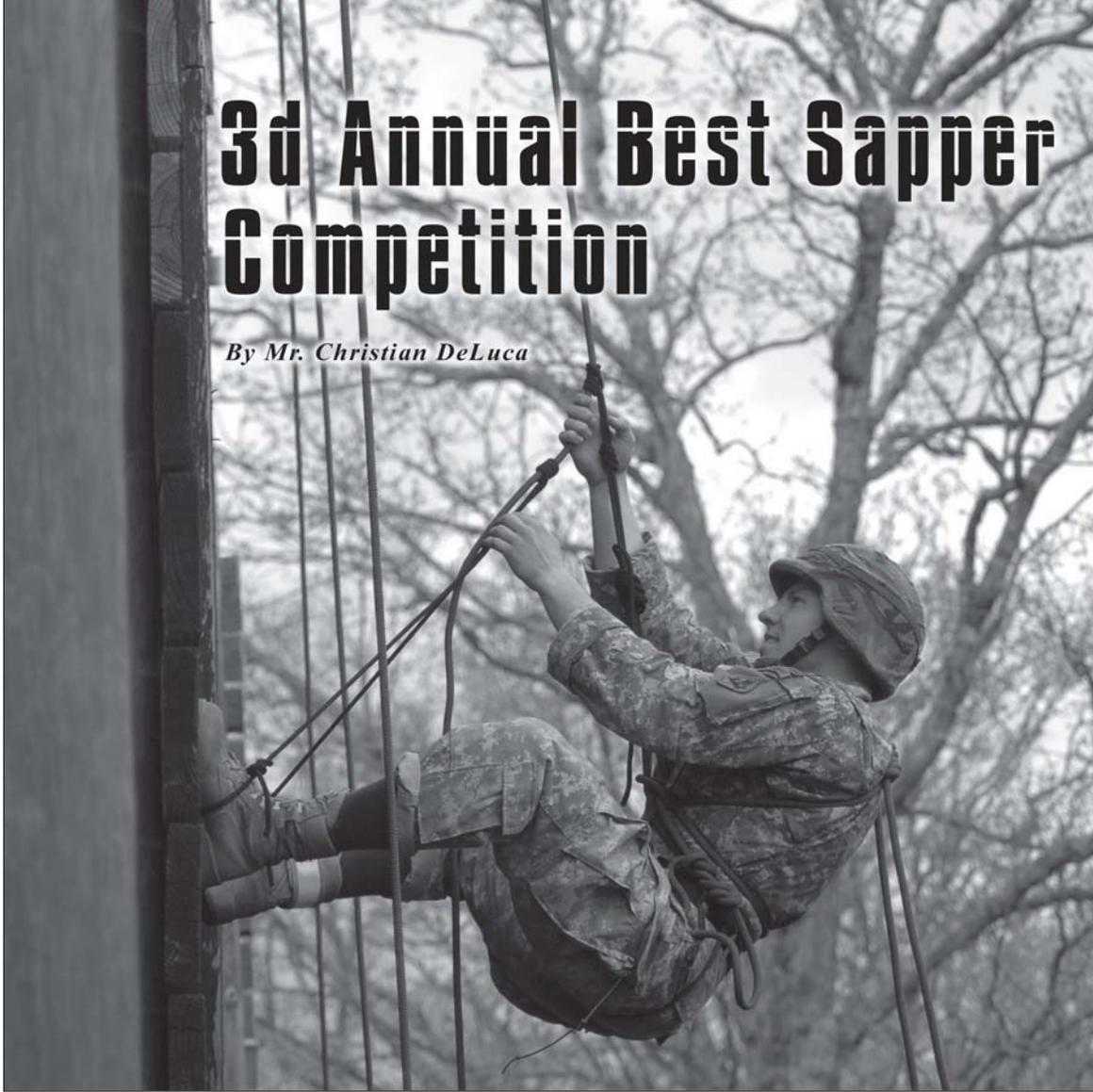


3d Annual Best Sapper Competition

By Mr. Christian DeLuca



The 3d annual Best Sapper Competition at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, lived up to its name from 1 – 3 May as mental and physical exhaustion took its toll on seven of the thirteen 2-man teams, leaving only six to cross the finish line—and one to be named best sapper team. The “Tropic Lightning” team from the 66th Engineer Company, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, took top honors in the grueling three-day ordeal that tested the combat engineer skills of participants, while subjecting them to substantial physical strain.

Over the three-day course, competitors must—

- Pass a physical fitness test.
- Perform a military operations on urbanized terrain (MOUT) breach of two exterior doors using explosive breaching methods.
- Tie knots used in mountaineering.
- Use an AN/PSS-12 mine detector to locate five mines.
- Qualify on the grenade range.
- Calculate the placement of timber cutting, steel cutting, breaching, and field expedient charges.
- Construct and swim with a poncho raft.
- Negotiate a vertical obstacle using the prusik climbing technique and the buddy rappel technique.
- Identify threat mines.
- Transmit a 9-line improvised explosive device (IED) report.
- Assemble and perform a function check of weapon systems.
- Destroy a wooden target using an abatis charge.
- Engage targets with pistol, rifle, and squad automatic weapon.
- Perform a MOUT breach, enter, and clear a building and engage multiple targets.
- Calculate and place an inert charge on a steel target.
- Provide combat lifesaver (CLS) medical care to injured Soldiers.
- Transmit a 9-line medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) request.
- Destroy a concrete target using a counterforce charge.
- Perform a 9-mile run with nine arduous “mystery” events.

Sapper Teams

- | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. First Lieutenant Mark Gillman
Sergeant Gordon Paulson | 66th Engineer Company
Schofield Barracks, Hawaii |
| 2. First Lieutenant Colby Krug
Staff Sergeant Erasmo Flores | 66th Engineer Company
Schofield Barracks, Hawaii |
| 3. Captain John Evangelista
Captain Jason Winkelmann | 554th Engineer Battalion
Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri |
| 4. Second Lieutenant Christopher Vernon
Second Lieutenant Brad Miller | 554th Engineer Battalion
Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri |
| 5. Staff Sergeant Douglas LeBoeuf
Second Lieutenant Kenneth Stover | 554th Engineer Battalion
Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri |
| 6. Sergeant First Class Eric Prescott
First Lieutenant Alex Viox | 911th Engineer Company
Fort Belvoir, Virginia |
| 7. Specialist Michael Cessaro
Specialist James Parthemer | 37th Engineer Battalion
Fort Bragg, North Carolina |
| 8. Sergeant Brian Telega
Specialist David Menjares | 37th Engineer Battalion
Fort Bragg, North Carolina |
| 9. Specialist Nicholas Wardwell
Specialist Jarred Wade | 50th Engineer Company
Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri |
| 10. Sergeant Jeremy Gaspard
Sergeant Aaron Cole | 50th Engineer Company
Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri |
| 11. Staff Sergeant Kevin Wiseman
First Lieutenant Daniel Hayes | 515th Engineer Company
Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri |
| 12. Specialist Robert Overstreet
Sergeant Jeremy Coffman | 5th Engineer Battalion
Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri |
| 13. Sergeant Michael Robinson
Specialist Jose Payes | 5th Engineer Battalion
Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri |

2007 Best Sapper Competition Winners*

Overall

First Place	Team 2	9. Threat Mine Identification	Team 6
Second Place	Team 3	10. 9-Line IED Report	Team 3
Third Place	Team 1	11. Weapons Assembly Evaluation	Team 1

Events

1. Physical Fitness Test	Team 3	12. Demolition Calculation	Team 1
2. MOUT Breach I	Team 2	13. Stress Shoot	Team 8
	Team 3	14. MOUT Breach II	Team 1
3. Knot Tying	Team 1		Team 2
4. AN/PSS-12 Mine Detector Evaluation	Team 1	15. Steel-Cutting Charge Evaluation	Team 3
5. Grenade Range Qualification	Team 6		Team 1
6. Timber-Cutting Charge Evaluation	Team 1	16. CLS Evaluation	Team 2
	Team 3	17. 9-Line MEDEVAC Request	Team 6
	Team 4	18. Counterforce Evaluation	Team 1
	Team 6		Team 3
7. Poncho Raft Swim	Team 2		Team 4
8. Prusik Climb and Buddy Rappel Evaluation	Team 3	19. 9-Mile Run	Team 1

* Multiple entries indicate that more than one team achieved maximum scores.



A team from the 66th Engineer Company prepares their charge during the steel-cutting charge evaluation.

Team 2, from the 66th Engineer Company, which also placed in last year's competition, said they came back to the competition for just one reason—to win. They said the



A team prepares for the breaching event in the competition.

competition seemed to be a little tougher than they remembered from last year.

During the awards brunch, Major General William H. McCoy, United States Army Maneuver Support Center and Fort Leonard Wood commanding general, said that all the participants should consider themselves winners.

"I'm tremendously proud of the competitors," Major General McCoy said. "To go through what we put you through these past couple of days, you should all be proud of yourselves individually."

A Soldier from another team said nothing he had done before compared to the Best Sapper Competition. Although he had been through a lot of training, he said it was the toughest thing he had ever done in his life. The commander of the 577th Engineer Battalion, the sponsoring unit, said the competition allows sappers to test their skills and will, while increasing their esprit de corps. Teams compete for about 58 hours and cover about 50 miles. The events test their combat engineer and infantry skills.

The winning team was presented with a bust of retired Lieutenant General Robert B. Flowers, former Chief of Engineers, on 23 May during ENFORCE 2007.



Mr. DeLuca is a photojournalist with the Fort Leonard Wood newspaper, the Guidon. He served as a combat correspondent with the United States Marines from 1997 to 2001. He is a graduate of the Basic Journalism Course and the Intermediate Photojournalism Course at the Defense Information School, Fort Meade, Maryland, and holds a bachelor's in film studies.

Photos by Christian DeLuca