



# 4th Annual Best Sapper Competition

By First Lieutenant James Butler

From 6 through 8 May, the best sappers from across the Regiment converged at Fort Leonard Wood for the 4th Annual Best Sapper Competition. Hosted by the 577th Engineer Battalion and Sapper Leader Course personnel—and sponsored by the Engineer Regiment—the competition gave engineer units across the Army the opportunity to showcase their best Soldiers. The six-phase competition was to determine the best of the best. The Soldiers who stood out here are the best in their units, the best in the Regiment, and some of the best in the Army.

## Best Sapper 2008

This year's competition, which was attended by 25 teams from 19 units across the Army, included ranks from private first class through major. The six major events were—

- Phase I: Nonstandard Physical Fitness Test (NSPFT)
- Phase II: Round-Robin
- Phase III: X-Mile Road March
- Phase IV: Sapper Stakes
- Phase V: Land Navigation
- Phase VI: X-Mile Run

### Day One

Phase I—the NSPFT—set the tone for the rest of the competition, determining who was ready and who wasn't. The NSPFT consisted of 5 minutes of push-ups, 5 minutes of sit-ups, and 3 minutes of pull-ups. Only one member of a two-man team could perform each exercise at a time, but team members could switch throughout the designated time period. The intent was to throw a little strategy into the test. This made the teams think a little more about the event as it progressed. It also added an

extra edge of competitiveness to the event. The NSPFT ended with a 3-mile run in interceptor body armor (IBA) and small arms protective insert (SAPI) plates.

After the NSPFT, competitors moved to Phase II—the Round-Robin—with the first subevent being a 150-meter swim with a poncho raft. As the 24 teams exited the water from the poncho raft swim (1 team had dropped out due to an injury), competitors were loaded on trucks again and sent to six different sites on Fort Leonard Wood to continue the event. The additional subevents for the Round-Robin included the stress shoot, grenade range, timber-cutting charge, counterforce charge, military operations on urbanized terrain (MOUT) breach, and urban challenge. The urban challenge, a new subevent this year, tested competitors' ability to shoot, move, and communicate through a simulated Iraqi village that consisted of realistic battle sounds, opposing forces (OPFOR) in traditional clothing, artillery simulators, and burn barrels, as well as live animals.



A team from 20th Engineer Brigade conducts the buddy rappel as part of the Best Sapper Competition. The buddy rappel was part of the Day Two events on 7 May.

Photo by Multimedia Visual Information Service Center

## 2008 Best Sapper Competition Teams

|  |   |  |   |
|--|---|--|---|
| 2LT Jonathan Browning<br>SGT Jack Ramthun  | 20th Engineer Battalion<br>Fort Hood, Texas                       | SSG Michael Daley<br>PFC Ryan Morison        | 562d Engineer Company<br>Fort Lewis, Washington       |
| SGT Alexander Mack<br>SGT Glenn Taylor     | 20th Engineer Battalion<br>Fort Hood, Texas                       | 1LT Christopher Clare<br>1LT Tyrel Keplinger | 4th Engineer Battalion<br>Fort Carson, Colorado       |
| SGT Justin Gaiser<br>SPC Patrick Hernandez | 20th Engineer Battalion<br>Fort Hood, Texas                       | 1LT Kristopher Valenti<br>PFC James Conley   | 4th Engineer Battalion<br>Fort Carson, Colorado       |
| 1LT Douglas Droesch<br>1LT Kyle Metzger    | 1st Engineer Battalion<br>Fort Riley, Kansas                      | 1LT Brian Burch<br>2LT Richard Miller        | 511th Engineer Company<br>Fort Campbell, Kentucky     |
| SSG Karen Antonyan<br>SGT Matthew Rowsey   | 911th Engineer Company<br>Fort Belvoir, Virginia                  | 1LT Matthew Textor<br>SGT Dustin Hughes      | 65th Engineer Battalion<br>Schofield Barracks, Hawaii |
| 1LT Scott Sann<br>SSG Travis Kaufman       | U.S. Army Dive Company<br>Fort Eustis, Virginia                   | SFC Michael Behnkendorf<br>1LT Shawn Hogan   | 20th Engineer Brigade<br>Fort Bragg, North Carolina   |
| CPT Jason Winkelmann<br>2LT Joel Groves    | 8th Engineer Battalion<br>Fort Hood, Texas                        | SSG Timothy Knight<br>SGT Joshua Morgan      | 2-8 Cavalry Division, 1BCT<br>Fort Hood, Texas        |
| SGT Rory Leslie<br>SGT Kurt Nuhfer         | 37th Engineer Battalion<br>Fort Bragg, North Carolina             | 1LT Nathan Magee<br>2LT Kevin Kirby          | 562d Engineer Company<br>Fort Lewis, Washington       |
| 1LT Scott Eshom<br>1LT Nicholas Soroka     | 502d Engineer Company<br>Hanau, Germany                           | 2LT Chris Williammee<br>SPC James Wiard      | 72d Engineer Company<br>Fort Riley, Kansas            |
| 1LT Nicholas Fox<br>1LT Kyle Moore         | 11th Engineer Company<br>Fort Riley, Kansas                       | 1LT Lucas Hansen<br>SPC Chris Gomez          | 72d Engineer Company<br>Fort Riley, Kansas            |
| 2LT Zachary Taron<br>1LT Matthew Davis     | 3d Brigade Special Troops Battalion<br>Schofield Barracks, Hawaii | 2LT John Davis<br>SSG Keith Novembre         | 562d Engineer Company<br>Fort Lewis, Washington       |
| CPT Christopher George<br>CPT Josh Eggar   | 554th Engineer Battalion<br>Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri           | 1LT Craig Genung<br>SGT Justin Claypool      | 591st Engineer Company<br>Fort Campbell, Kentucky     |
| MAJ Stephen Peterson<br>CPT Daniel Taphorn | 1st Engineer Brigade<br>Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri               |  |   |

## 2008 Best Sapper Competition Winners

|                     |  |   |
|---------------------|--|---|
| <b>First Place</b>  | CPT Jason Winkelmann<br>2LT Joel Groves    | 8th Engineer Battalion<br>Fort Hood, Texas          |
| <b>Second Place</b> | SFC Michael Behnkendorf<br>1LT Shawn Hogan | 20th Engineer Brigade<br>Fort Bragg, North Carolina |
| <b>Third Place</b>  | MAJ Stephen Peterson<br>CPT Daniel Taphorn | 1st Engineer Brigade<br>Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri |

Scoring for the individual events was designed so that no one event could outweigh any other. That was done so a team wouldn't completely knock themselves out of the competition by doing poorly at one event. The idea was to look at the total Soldier, the most well-rounded sappers.

### Day Two

At 0200, the 24 teams began Phase III—the X-Mile Road March. Designated the “X-Mile” because competitors were not told the total distance, the road march served as another hurdle in the competition to set the best sappers apart from their competitors. By the end of the road march, 5 teams had dropped from contention.

At 0730, the remaining 19 teams loaded trucks for their dropoff at the Sapper Stakes (Phase IV) events, which would add 5 more miles to the 16 the teams had already covered. The subevents that made up Sapper Stakes were the weapons assembly, foreign mine identification and improvised explosive device (IED) report, combat lifesaver (CLS) techniques, inert steel cutting, knot tying, Prusik climb and buddy rappel, mine detectors, and the obstacle course and physical endurance course (PEC). Throughout Sapper Stakes, teams moved on foot to each event to total 5 miles.

The biggest subevent of the phase is the Prusik climb and buddy rappel. However, due to safety concerns caused by lightning, this subevent—as well as the obstacle course and



**The 554th Engineer Battalion team assembles the M9, M16, M240, M249, and AK-47 weapons.**

PEC course—had to be removed from the competition. With heavy lightning in the area, it was too risky for Soldiers to conduct rappels on the 45-foot Sapper Tower.

At 2100, the remaining 18 teams began Phase V—the Land Navigation Course. The event added another 6 miles to the 21 miles the teams had already covered and took them right up to 1 hour before the X-Mile Run of Day Three. By the completion of the land navigation course, another team had dropped out.

### Day Three

Phase VI of the competition was the X-Mile Run, and only the top 10 teams advanced to this phase. Before starting

the run, the competitors were unaware of the total distance or the mystery events on the route. The mystery events this year included carrying items weighing up to 110 pounds for various portions of the 9-mile run. By the completion of the event, the teams would have covered a total of 32 miles during the competition.

### Best Sapper 2009

Overall, the three-day event set the standard for the Best Sapper competitions in the future. This year's competition was considered to be the best one yet; and since it was tied in with ENFORCE, it had a lot more visibility than it had in the past. The 2009 competition is expected to be even better. The Sapper Leader Course cadre are already assessing the 2008 competition and beginning to plan for next year. Although they expect to use some of the same types of events in 2009, they will definitely make some changes to continue to challenge the competitors. The cadre encourage teams to begin preparing now and register as early as possible to make the cut for next year's competition.



*First Lieutenant Butler is the executive officer of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 577th Engineer Battalion, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. Commissioned through the Army Reserve Officer Training Corps, he is a graduate of the Sapper Leader Course at Fort Leonard Wood and the Ranger School at Fort Benning, Georgia.*



**A Sapper cadre member inspects knots tied by a Soldier from the 1st Engineer Brigade team.**