



NOT JUST ANOTHER SPORTING EVENT: Best Ranger Competition is Training for Combat

COLONEL GREG HAGER

In July 1981, the Ranger Department was asked to design and conduct a “Ranger Olympics” in order to identify the best two-man Ranger team in the Army.



The guidance was clear from the start - the competition should place extreme demands on the team’s physical, mental and technical abilities as Rangers, and the standards of performance should vastly exceed those required of the average Soldier.

A group of prominent Florida businessmen, belonging to an organization called the “Chairborne Rangers,” stepped forward and offered to sponsor awards for the competitors. These patriotic citizens have long been avid supporters of the U.S. Army and Fort Benning in particular. The Best Ranger Competition was appropriately named in honor of Lieutenant General David E. Grange Jr., former Ranger instructor, Ranger Department director, and commanding general of Fort Benning.

Command Sergeant Major Doug Greenway reports information on a simulated casualty during the second day of the competition.

David K. Dismukes

In the 26 years since its inception, the competition has grown from a local Ranger community competition in which the best team of Ranger instructors was identified, to a nationally televised, Armywide event with more than 100 sponsors. The only requirement — participants must have successfully completed the Ranger Course.

This year’s field of competitors included more than 40 teams from force generating units and operational units, both active and Reserve.

Although initially referred to as an “Olympics,” the Best Ranger Competition is far from a sporting event. It’s training for combat. The three-day competition revolves around events that are derived from areas common to units training for combat. They include physical training, marksmanship, small unit drills, first aid and mobility.

In 60-plus hours, Ranger teams move approximately 60 miles by foot with a 70-pound load, fire 10,000 rounds, conduct a parachute drop, demonstrate an expertise of orienteering, and demonstrate life-saving skills along with 29 other combat-related individual Soldier skills.

Colonel Greg Hager is currently serving as the commander of the Ranger Training Brigade, Fort Benning, Georgia.

2007 Best Ranger Competition

This year’s competition was held April 20-22. Of the 42 teams that began the competition, only 21 finished the competition. The following are the results:

1st place — Major Liam Collins and Master Sergeant Walt Zajkowski, U.S. Army Special Operations Command

2nd place — Captains Andrew Farina and David Uthlaut, 25th Infantry Division

3rd place — Sergeants First Class Adam Nash and Billy Pouliot, 75th Ranger Regiment

4th place — Sergeant Luke McDowell and Staff Sergeant Michael Broussard, 75th Ranger Regiment

5th place — Sergeants Nathan Anderson and Andrew Wallace, 75th Ranger Regiment

(Additional results and information can be found on the Ranger Training Brigade’s Web site at <https://www.benning.army.mil/rtb>.)





David K. Dismukes

A competitor takes on the rock climbing wall during the second day of competition.

David K. Dismukes



Master Sergeant Walt Zajkowski and Major Liam Collins of the U.S. Army Special Operations Command exit the water after the helocast event. The pair took first place in the competition.



Captain Kamil Sztalkoper

Staff Sergeant Michael Broussard of the 75th Ranger Regiment negotiates the Darby Queen obstacle course during the last day of competition.

PEO SOLDIER UNVEILS NEW COMBAT SHIRT

DEBI DAWSON

The Army Program Executive Office (PEO) Soldier will soon provide an improved Army combat shirt to Soldiers deploying to Iraq and Afghanistan.

The flame-resistant long-sleeved shirt, which retains the moisture-wicking capability, breathability, and durability of other components in the ACU, also has many of its other features, including cargo pockets, infrared identification tabs, and hook-and-loop fasteners for the American flag.

The new shirt has a foliage green torso and sleeves in the universal camouflage pattern, and sports seamless shoulders and side panels for comfort, along with integrated anti-abrasion elbow pads, and a small Army Strong logo centered on the chest.

The high performance shirt, designed to be a base layer, can be worn directly under the Interceptor Body Armor, according to Major Clay Williamson, assistant product manager for clothing and individual equipment.

The ACS is made of an antimicrobial cotton and rayon blend fabric treated with a new process that penetrates to the fiber level. It provides fire-resistance for the life of the garment. "It is completely safe, non-toxic, and allows us to treat fibers that were once not treatable," Williamson said.

The shirt integrates with other flame-resistant components, such as the Army combat pants, to provide head-to-toe protection against burns. The Army combat pants are the same as the ACU pants, except they are made of a flame-resistant material, according to the major. Soldiers' hands are protected by flame-resistant



Courtesy photo

The new improved Army combat shirt will be issued to Soldiers deploying to Iraq and Afghanistan.

gloves that have been a part of the Army's Rapid Fielding Initiative.

This ensemble further complements the Army's system-of-systems approach to force protection, which integrates layers of protection for Soldiers on the battlefield.

"I want to assure the American public, the Soldiers, and their Families that they have the best equipment when and where they need it. If there were something better, we would buy it; and we're always looking for something better," said Brigadier General R. Mark Brown, Program Executive Officer Soldier.

(Debi Dawson serves with the Program Executive Office Soldier Strategic Communications Office)

Bonus, Incentives Available for Some Captains

ARMY NEWS SERVICE

A new Critical Skills Retention Bonus of \$20,000 is available to more than 7,000 regular-Army captains who agree to remain on active duty beyond their initial active-duty service obligation.

The bonus is part of a "menu of incentives" targeting officers nearing completion of their initial active-duty service obligation who are willing to remain on active duty an additional three years. Other incentives include graduate school, military school, transfer of branch or functional area, or post of choice.

The incentives will help the Army retain company-grade officers with valuable experience, said Colonel Paul Aswell, chief, Officer Division, Directorate of Military Personnel Management, Army G1. The Army is currently growing to increase capabilities and reduce stress over the long term. This has led to an increased need of nearly 6,000 captains and majors since 2004, according to Aswell.

The branches considered critical for the purposes of the CSRB include: Air Defense, Adjutant General, Armor, Chemical, Engineer, Field Artillery, Finance, Infantry, Military Intelligence, Military Police, Ordnance, Quartermaster, Signal Corps and Transportation Corps. Officers originally commissioned in these branches are eligible for all incentives on the menu. Officers commissioned into the Army nurse corps or medical science corps are also eligible for the CSRB.

Eligible captains must have a date of rank between March 1, 2005, and January 1, 2007. Similar incentives will be offered to captains in other year groups, Aswell said.

The CSRB and other incentives are just part of the Army's efforts at eliminating the officer shortage, Aswell said. The Army has moved up the promotion to major from 11 years to 10, and is considering moving it to the 9th year of service. Aswell noted that earlier promotion points and higher rates reflect the Army's recognition of the higher experience level among today's company grade officers, and the value of their service.