

The Spartan Scroll

Fall 2013



SPARTAN COMMAND REPORT



We continue to have Paratroopers who set the example for all those around them. SSG Degosh Reed, from 1-40 Cav, dominated the U.S. Army Pacific NCO of the Year competition, earning him a place at the Department of the Army NCO of the Year competition later this month. U.S. Army Pacific recognized our rear-detachment Unit Ministry Team with the USARPAC UMT of the Year award and USARAK recognized SSG Armando Delgado, the 3-509 REUP NCO, as the best in the command. The Spartan Steel and Centurion teams shined as CPT Matt Hickey braved the Indian Army's High Altitude Warfare School, finishing as the course honor graduate and 1LT Laura Condyles returned from graduating second place at the Indian Army Rigger Course. We had several Spartans represent our Army. The 425th BSTB "Warrior's," SGT Ashley Walker was named the Army's Female Athlete of the Year. Speaking of athletics, CPT Jamie Pecha from our Centurion Battalion, and Spartan Steel's own PFC Brandon Nichols took the gold medal at the 2013 Armed Forces Volleyball tournament. These are just a few of the outstanding accomplishments that set this brigade apart from our friends across the Army.

Greetings to the Spartan Family!

You are reading the return of the Spartan Scroll! The members of the Spartan Team have done so much over the last year that we wanted to give our Paratroopers, Families, and friends a quick snapshot into the amazing things that this brigade has accomplished. Even for those who follow us closely in the news or on Facebook, it's easy to miss many of the incredible things happening across this great organization. For that reason, we're reintroducing the redesigned Spartan Scroll that we will publish semi-annually to help highlight the tremendous work of our battalions and our Paratroopers.

The past several months have been busy for the Spartan Team. One of the great things about summer training in Alaska is the moderate climate and long days full of sunshine. We made great use of the time to complete our post-deployment RESET, push most of the brigade through ITC rotations, parachute a battalion into Australia for Talisman Saber 2013, conduct the first ever Sparta Week, and we integrated 21st century technology into our airborne program with the T-11 transition. We'll never forget watching over 1,500 Paratroopers conduct "Operation Spartan Reach" in June, a forcible entry exercise which occurred both at JBER and Donnelly Training Area near Fort Greely. Day in and day out, our Paratroopers' performance continues to be exemplary.

So we have a lot to be proud of and we want to provide a quick snapshot of just a few of the highlights from the last year. Three of our Paratroopers earned the right to wear the Expert Field Medical Badge and 136 completed the grueling time-honored certification requirements to earn the Expert Infantry Badge. We added 26 new Pathfinders to the brigade as well. Hundreds of Spartan Paratroopers conducted Australian partnership jumps both at JBER and at Shoalwater Bay, Australia. Our Denali Team, 1-40 Cav, fielded a team to participate in and win the Gainey Cup, the Army's best Cavalry Scout competition; 1 Geronimo, 1-501 IN, was awarded the Valorous Unit Award for actions during OEF X, and 3 Geronimo, 3-509 IN, added their airborne expertise to operation Ulchi Freedom Guardian in Japan, after they assumed the Army Contingency Response Force on 1 July- the first rapid deployable status in the history of the Brigade. The Brigade and its subordinate units won multiple JBER and USARAK competitions- from USARAK combatives first place in April to the recent JBER flag football victory by F Company, 3-509th.

So you can see that we have a solid foundation of units and individuals striving for excellence. We continue to improve all systems to support our new mission "azimuth" of developing a responsive and engaged force to support United States Pacific Command. We recently transitioned to our new role as the rapid response force for the Asia-Pacific Area of Operations and we continue to build our Airborne capacity. In September, the brigade initiated our transition to the T-11 parachute system, a 21st century personnel delivery system that will reduce injuries and increase our combat effectiveness.

Our training will continue in the upcoming winter months with an Arctic focus as we put our Arctic Tough motto into action. In March, several Spartans will jump onto a sea-ice drop zone, hundreds of miles north of the Arctic Circle! Over 500 Paratroopers can also look forward to once-in-a-lifetime training opportunities as we build our partnerships with Thailand and Japan. For those who heard the great stories about Talisman Saber, just wait for the jump into Cobra Gold next year! The Brigade will then spend some time away from home while we conduct a training rotation at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, La. in April. It will be a great opportunity to sharpen our skills as the Brigade executes a decisive action training environment rotation. The Brigade will be funded and resourced to ensure high level of readiness.

One of the perks of being the only Airborne Infantry Brigade Combat Team in the Pacific is the chance to do things that most people only dream of or watch on television. Here in the Spartan Team, it's just what we do. Get the most out of wearing this patch and living in the Last Frontier. These memories will last a lifetime.

Thanks again for all that you do for our Army, our Nation and for each other. We are proud of all that our Paratroopers have accomplished and in awe watching our Paratroopers everyday! There is no greater honor than to serve the Paratroopers and Families of the Spartan Brigade.

Arctic Warriors!
Sparta Lives!
MATTHEW W. MCFARLANE
Spartan 6

FRANK E. HACKER
Spartan 7



Spartan Brigade leaders jump with Army's T-11 parachute

Story and Photos by Sgt. Eric-James Estrada

Senior leaders from the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division Brigade cemented their trust in, and readiness to use, the T-11 parachute during a test jump over Malamute Drop Zone at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, Sept. 19, 2013. The T-11, which is replacing the T-10 Delta parachute, has a larger canopy and is able to carry more weight than its predecessor.

Prior to the airborne operation, all jumpers, whether they had jumped the parachute before or not, participated in new equipment training at JBER's Airborne Sustainment Training Area to become familiar with the parachute system and its components.

"It's a great day to be a paratrooper here at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson," said Col. Matthew McFarlane, the commander of the Spartan Brigade. "As we work with our Air Force partners and start utilizing some new equipment that will help everyone be a little bit more capable in our mission set."

This is the first time the T-11 parachute system has been jumped at JBER by the Spartan Brigade.

"I've been jumping my whole career in the Army and every time when I land I do a parachute landing fall," said McFarlane.

"And I equate that to a mini explosion because you're drifting with the wind. This slows that and will significantly reduce lower body extremity injuries and head injuries when paratroopers hit the ground hard."

When it was decided that the newer system was going to be used at JBER, the senior leaders decide to jump with the parachute before the rest of the Spartan paratroopers start to use the T-11 for airborne operations.

"We've got the brigade key leaders out here and the parachute riggers who pack these parachutes to demonstrate to the entire force how safe these new parachutes are and how much confidence we have in them," said the Spartan commander. "This new parachute is safer by all accounts."

All jumpers must be certified to jump the T-11 before they are allowed to jump with it, and jumpmaster-trained paratroopers attended a weeklong T-11-specific jumpmaster course before they were T-11 certified.

Prior to this jump, not only did the paratroopers and jumpmasters receive training, but the parachute riggers and their leadership also received specialized training for the T-11.

"We received the parachutes this July," said 1st Lt. Kelsie Cabrera

the rigger platoon leader for Headquarters Company, 725th Brigade Support Battalion (Airborne), 4-25 IBCT, hailing from Petoskey, Mich.

"We've just been training up and starting to pack them up for people to jump here."

The training for the riggers leading up to the first T-11 jump consisted of a team of trainers from Fort Lee, Va. spending nine days training the Spartan Brigade's 80 riggers on how to service and pack the T-11.

"We trained on a lot of small things, down to the last retaining band," said Cabrera.

The major differences between the T-10 and the T-11 are that the T-11 allows more weight to be carried by the paratrooper. It is able to handle a load capacity of more than 400 pounds to accommodate today's paratrooper and their equipment load.

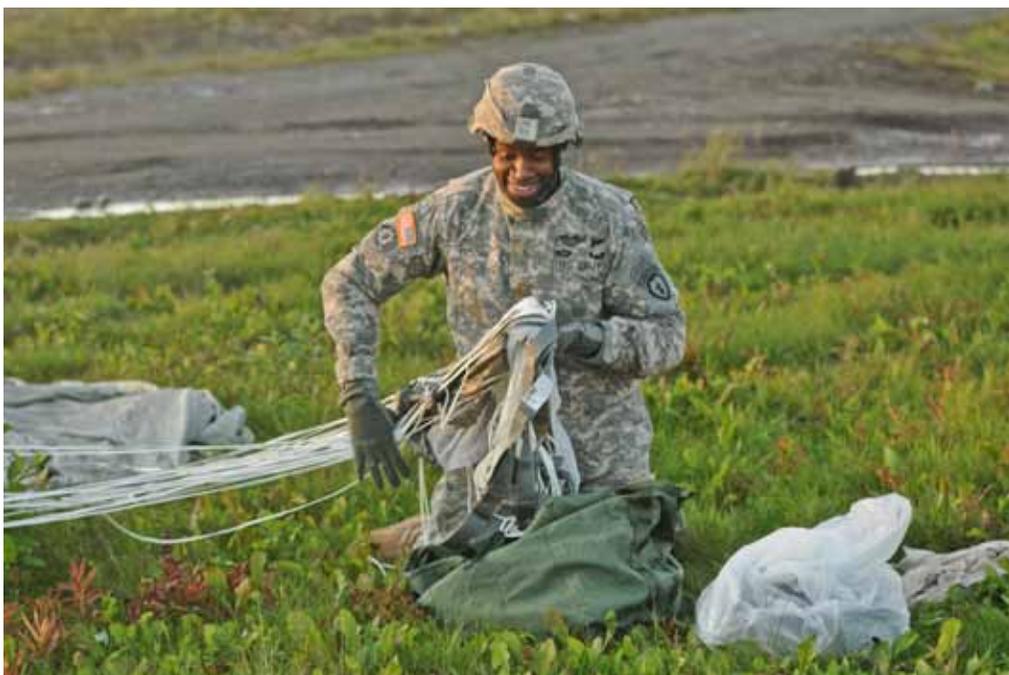
The new parachute is cruciform in shape, as opposed to a circle, like its predecessor, with a larger surface area and diameter. The T-11's design aids in slowing the rate of descent from 22 feet per second to 19 feet, which significantly lowers the possibility of jump-related injuries.



Paratroopers from the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, jump from a U.S. Air Force C-17 Globemaster over Malamute Drop Zone, the primary drop zone for Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, Sept. 19, 2013.



Col. Matthew McFarlane, commander of the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, congratulates the brigade riggers after senior leaders and riggers from the Spartan Brigade jumped from a U.S. Air-Force C-17 Globemaster to demonstrate a vote of confidence with the T-11 parachute as the brigade transitions from the T-10 model parachute over Malamute Drop Zone at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, Sept. 19, 2013.



Maj. Alfred Boone, the brigade personnel officer, assigned to Headquarters Company, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, packs his T-11 in his aviator's kit bag after landing on Malamute Drop Zone at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, Sept. 19, 2013. Senior leaders and riggers from the Spartan Brigade jumped from the aircraft to demonstrate a vote of confidence with the T-11 parachute as the brigade transitions from the T-10.



A U.S. Air Force C-17 Globemaster drops heavy cargo pallets, using the Mass Tactical Canopy (T-11) Personal Parachute System on Malamute Drop Zone at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, Sept. 19, 2013.



(As seen on the cover)
Maj. Brian Mayer, the Brigade Signal Officer and resident of Wasilla, Alaska, assigned to Headquarters Company, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, packs his T-11 in his aviator's kit bag after landing on Malamute Drop Zone at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, Sept. 19, 2013.

Spartans reignite Arctic partnership in Japan

Story by Sgt. 1st Class Jason Epperson

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska - Members of the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division recently completed a trip to Japan to focus on building partnerships with U.S. Army Japan, 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force, and the 1st Airborne Brigade of the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force, headquartered at Camp Narashino, Japan.

U.S. Army Col. Matthew W. McFarlane, commander of the 4-25 IBCT, said the weeklong meeting was a great opportunity to engage and work with military partners in Asia, learning more about their organizations and educating them about the Spartan Brigade's forced entry capabilities.

"It's important, as we've learned in the last 10 years of war, that we are going to operate on the battlefield with joint, interagency and combined partners," McFarlane said. "So now we're conducting training that incorporates those lessons learned to ensure we are a better force when we have to fight alongside our joint and combined partners again on the battlefield."

McFarlane said the leadership is putting emphasis on the importance of knowing and understanding our military partners and their capabilities.

"So we are familiar with our partners, we know what equipment and capabilities they bring to the fight and they know what we bring to the fight so we are more effective from the get-go, instead of waiting until we get to an area of operations when we're actually in some type of conflict or situation that requires us to work together or alongside each other," he said.

The partnership visit was all part of the brigade's involvement in Ulchi Freedom Guardian 2013.

Staff members in the 3rd Battalion (Airborne), 509th Infantry Regiment, who are part of the Spartan Brigade, integrated with the 3rd MEF to participate in the joint exercise, along with 3,000 military personnel from the U.S. and around the Pacific.



"At the end of our exercise, we exercised staff functions and joint war fighting systems in a simulated warfare environment and then we've also established relationships and educated each other so all of the leadership that participated has greater depth of experience," McFarlane said.

McFarlane and members of his staff also met with their partner brigade the 1st Airborne Brigade of the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force, headquartered in Camp Narashino, Japan.

The two staffs exchanged briefs and overviews of their organizations and then toured the Airborne Training School.

"We took the day to tour and see firsthand the airborne training school, some of their rigging procedures for heavy drops and for personnel, and then we got hands on with their parachutes," McFarlane said.

It's a great way to get hands on and to establish a better understanding of our partners and we hope to reciprocate in the future.

McFarlane explained that this was the Spartan Brigade's first event with the bi-lateral partnership and a key leaders meeting with Japanese Maj. Gen. Tadao Maeda.

"Maj. Gen. Maeda was a gracious host who clearly has

a lot of experience with airborne operations. His brigade was very disciplined and professional and will be a great partner to work with as we move forward in the future,” McFarlane said.

The trip was a learning experience for everyone involved.

“Not only did it provide me an opportunity for a personal relationship, but also the brigade command group who went met their counterparts,” McFarlane said. “Command Sgt. Maj. Hacker was able to meet their senior enlisted adviser. Our brigade XO met their chief of staff and they were able to discuss things at their level that they do on a daily basis.”

U.S. Army Maj. John J Geis III, Spartan Brigade executive officer, said it was his first time in Japan and he was impressed with what he saw.

The people were incredibly friendly and cared about everything,” Geis said. “As we came into Camp Narashino, we saw soldiers standing at the position of attention and extremely disciplined. They were running around trying to make sure we were squared away. You looked at them and went, ‘Wow! Those are airborne soldiers.’ They had spit shined boots to the tee. They understood what it was like to be a disciplined airborne trooper.”

Geis said there were similarities between the airborne brigades.

“What was amazing was the progression very similar to ours. ... They progress from airborne school, then they go to jump master school, and after they may go to ranger school or free-fall. That all happens at one school within the brigade.”

McFarlane said his Japanese counterparts sent Japanese soldiers to participate at the Northern Warfare Training Center and participate on airborne training missions back in

the ‘90s.

“Based on our up-tempo with our frequent deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq, we’ve not been able to regale since we’ve been an airborne brigade,” McFarlane said. “At the brigade level this is certainly the first opportunity we’ve had to meet with our Japanese ground-defense force partners in a like brigade with an airborne brigade with similar capabilities to start working alongside them and start working with each other.”

McFarlane said that the Japanese are a natural partner for the Spartan Brigade with their airborne background.

“It’s a very strong partnership we have in Japan. Bi-lateral training improves the ability of all forces involved to respond to the wide range of contingencies in the Pacific area of operation,” McFarlane said.

U.S. Army Col. Matthew W. McFarlane (center), commander of the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, poses with members of the 4-25 IBCT staff and members of the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force at Camp Narashino, Japan, Aug. 29, 2013. The 4-25 leadership team conducted a partnership visit with the Japanese 1st Airborne Brigade and toured their Airborne School facilities. (Courtesy photo)



Spartan Paratroopers and Arctic Wolves descend from the skies over JBER

Story and photos by Sgt. Eric-James Estrada

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska - Members of the Spartan and Arctic Wolves brigades began a joint emergency deployment response training exercise Monday, Sept. 10, 2013 at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson.

Army Lt. Col. Tobin Magsig, commander of the 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, explained how his battalion fit into the overall interoperability of the exercise.

“What we’ve really done is test the readiness of all of United States Army Alaska, beginning here, with testing elements of my battalion,” Magsig said.

The battalion was alerted and conducted an 18-hour sequence that included an in-flight parachute rig and an airborne insertion into a combat scenario.

After his element took control of the situation in the training scenario, they were pinned down and needed heavy forces to be able to conduct a non-combative evacuation operation for identified personnel to be extracted.

The 1/25th SBCT answered the call.

“We brought in Strykers from the 1st Brigade, the Arctic Wolves, from up north and they flew into

an aerial port of debarkation, drove off the aircraft and arrived [to complete the mission],” Magsig said.

The colonel said this was a significant opportunity to test the interoperability between the two different forces.

“This was a great mental and physical test for the battalion,” he said. “First of all, the guys, through the exercise, have gone 34 hours without sleep and without food. It involved physical and mental toughness in terms of moving nine or 10 miles, and then stepping right into a difficult and delicate scenario on little sleep. An element of physical and mental toughness is always important in these kinds of training exercises.”

Army Staff Sgt. Nathan Raymond, a squad leader assigned to 3rd Platoon, Comanche Company, 1-501st Infantry, role-played as the community leader for the city where the scenario took place.

Raymond, a native of Amherst, N.H., said the training helps because it puts the unit in an unexpected scenario.

“There’s no battle drill for this,” Raymond said. “You don’t really know what the right answer is, and you have to make a decision. You’re just going with what you think is the right answer and rolling with it and just trying to calm down the situation. They did a really good job of that.”

Raymond said it’s not just a battle drill.

“You can’t just go into a [field manual] and get all the answers,” he said. “There are multiple variables here and you have to act accordingly, and I definitely think this is a big thing we should train on.”

Army Staff Sgt. Kris Babbes, assigned to C Company, 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, 1/25th SBCT, said they were ready for the challenge.

“We definitely didn’t expect the amount of contact, not from the intel that we were told,” Babbes said. “We have to be fluid if we have to change mission. If it goes from peaceful to trigger pulling then so be it.”

The rapid response exercise combined all elements that would go into a real-world forced-entry operation, including a robust mission command element and a multifaceted Air Force transportation mission.

Since returning from Afghanistan in late 2012, the brigade has focused on returning to its roots to provide a rapid response force capable of operating anywhere in the Pacific on short notice. On the heels of Talisman Saber 2013, this was one more demonstration of that capability.



U.S. Army paratroopers assigned to 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, conduct security on a rooftop during an emergency deployment response training exercise at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, Sept. 10, 2013. The paratroopers partnered with Soldiers assigned to the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, who are stationed at Fort Wainwright, Alaska.



U.S. Soldiers with Charlie Company, 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, arrive to a training scenario in a Stryker armored vehicle to relieve Soldiers with Alpha Company, 1st Battalion (airborne), 501st Infantry Regiment, 4-25 IBCT, during a joint training exercise at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, Sept. 10th.

Arctic Cavalry Scouts win 'The Gainey Cup'

Story by Staff Sgt. Jeffery Smith

The 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, now lays claim to having best cavalry scouts in the Army after winning the Army's inaugural Gainey Cup competition held the first week of March, 2013 at Fort Benning, Ga.

The 1-40th fielded a team of two non-commissioned officers and three junior enlisted paratroopers.

The team members included Staff Sgt. Justin Miller, Staff Sgt. Zachary Adkins, Spc. Mitchell Sanderson, Spc. Alexander Berlin, and Pfc. Joseph Calderon.

The five-day competition fielded a total of 19 teams from cavalry units around the Army as well as one team from the U.S. Marine Corps.

The events tested each team's knowledge and proficiency in fundamental cavalry scout tasks. There were nine graded events which included a test of physical fitness, vehicle identification, live fire operations, weapons knowledge and handling, area reconnaissance, establishing an observation point, a written examination, a foot march, and an obstacle course.

The Gainey Cup event is named after the first senior enlisted advisor to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, retired Command Sgt. Maj. William J. Gainey.

Gainey, a decorated, accomplished, and well known former cavalry scout in the Army was at the competition to cheer on and support the teams as they competed.

Spc. Alexander Berlin, a 1-40th team member, said of Gainey, "He is a colorful character, you know. He's been in it seems like, every unit in the Army!"

Berlin said the competition was challenging both physically and mentally, and the other teams kept him and his team pushing forward

"We had to work really hard. Otherwise we were not going to come away with the win. We were fighting for every point. The win felt great! I hate losing, so it was very nice to win," said Berlin. "I didn't want to leave that trophy down there!"

Berlin said his wife and parents are very happy about his team's accomplishment.

"My mom has posted me on Facebook like 10,000 times! Every picture she has found me in seems to be up on Facebook now," Berlin jokingly said.

Staff Sgt. Justin Miller said the junior enlisted guys on his team were great to work with.

Miller said, "Two specialists and one private first class, these guys operated at an NCO level the entire time, and pretty much made it a really easy job for me and Staff Sgt. Adkins to do what we had to do."

"These guys were just lifting each other up!" said the 1-40th's team coach, Sgt. 1st Class Jamieson Barnes.

"Spc. Berlin is an outstanding test taker. He can just blink at something and he remembers it," said Barnes. "Calderon, he doesn't know how to climb a rope with his legs, but he doesn't even care, he'll just do it with his upper body ...Sanderson had the 240 [machine gun, 7.62 mm, M240] the whole time, and he wanted it! ...Sergeant Miller and Sergeant Adkins are both great leaders. I've worked with both of them since they came to the unit and there is nothing but great things. Their leadership and their mental abilities really carried the team along in this event... It has been an absolute honor to work with these guys and bring home the hardware back to Alaska."

Each teammate received an Army Commendation Medal, The Order of Saint George medallion, a cavalry saber, a .44-caliber Pietta 1860 black powder revolver, and of course for the team, the coveted Gainey Cup.



Gainey Cup champions with the 1-40th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, pose for a picture with the Gainey Cup, March 9, 2013, at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska. Pictured from left is Staff Sgt. Zachary Adkins, Spc. Alexander Berlin, Pfc. Joseph Calderon (holding Gainey cup), Spc. Mitchell Sanderson, and Staff Sgt. Justin Miller. The Gainey Cup competition pits the Army's best cavalry scout teams in an event designed to test them on Cavalry Scout specific tasks and physical fitness. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Smith/Released)



Gainey Cup champions with the 1-40th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, stand proud as their squadron honors their achievement during a ceremony March 9, 2013, at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. Pictured from left is the team's coach Sgt. 1st Class Jamieson Barnes followed by team members Staff Sgt. Zachary Adkins, Staff Sgt. Justin Miller, Spc. Alexander Berlin, Pfc. Joseph Calderon, and Spc. Mitchell Sanderson. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Smith/Released)

Spartan sapper unit parachutes in to conduct demolition mission

Story by Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Smith

Alpha Company set up 16 shots (rounds of charges), to blow over a total of 57 trees. As a follow-up mission, their heavy equipment operators are scheduled to come in to clear it all away.

On a clear, cold Alaskan day, combat engineers with Alpha Company, 425th Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, jumped out of a C-23 Sherpa aircraft and conducted a follow-on mission which utilized C-4 explosives to create an abatis (trees interlaced over a roadway to impede enemy vehicle advancement), March 21, 2013, at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska.

The 45-member team conducted the timber cutting demolition training at Forward Operating Base Sparta, which is a training area on JBER designed much like a FOB in an actual combat zone. The demolition training was coordinated with JBER's Range Control as part of an ongoing project to enlarge the FOB and clear lines of sight.

Alpha Company has also been involved in clearing trees with heavy earth-moving equipment, which has helped the unit maintain soldier proficiency in its horizontal engineering mission, according to Capt. Douglas Droesch, the company's commander.

Droesch, a ranger, sapper, and airborne qualified officer, who hails from West Boylston, Mass., said there are several types of uses for timber demolition, including abatis construction, clearing helicopter landing zones, and clearing fields of fire for a unit in a defensive position.

Droesch said his unit's sapper platoons provide support for maneuver forces with mobility support, counter-mobility support, and survivability support.

The training day weather was clear, but cold, with a temperature which started out at around one degree Fahrenheit. Droesch was not discouraged by the cold.

"I think the weather is beautiful! It's the second day of spring and it's about six degrees out here, so it's pretty

phenomenal. I love Alaska."

There are, however, some challenges associated with the cold weather, said Droesch. The C-4 gets hard and brittle in the cold which makes it difficult to seat priming knots into the explosive material. More tape is needed than usual in order to adhere the explosives to trees because it doesn't stick as well in the cold. The troops, however, were ready for the training.

Paratroopers in Alpha Company have trained in Alaskan temperatures all winter, so they were able to conduct the mission with no cold-weather injury issues, said Droesch.

"Staying out here in the cold is nothing new for these guys. They have the entire sustainment packing list of cold weather gear with them. It could drop down to 40 below, and we have enough gear and knowledge to be able to survive and conduct this mission in those temperatures too."

Spc. Juan Reaves, from Atlanta, and one of the unit's paratroopers who parachuted in for the day's training, said he likes being a paratrooper and a combat engineer in the Army.

During his recent deployment to Afghanistan, Reaves said his primary mission was route clearance and looking for Improvised Explosive Devices. He said his Military Occupational Specialty has many skill-sets to train for, which include timber cutting demolition and breaching demolition.

Reaves said the airborne operation phase of the training was neat because he had not jumped from a Sherpa before.

"The snow was soft, kind of cushy, and deep. I thought the landing was going to hurt, because I was thinking ice, ice, ice! So, I got into a good PLF (parachute landing fall) posture, knees bent, fists to my face, elbows to my side, and my chin down. As soon as my feet touched ground, I tried a PLF, and I just sunk into the snow!"

Pvt. Zachary Price, also with Alpha Company and from Houston, Texas, said he loves being a paratrooper in Alaska.

“The view is pretty awesome for a little while. You’re not up there long, but it is definitely something! Up here (in Alaska), it is very scenic, so you definitely get to see things from a different perspective ... It kind of makes you realize how small you are. You look at the mountains and you are eye level with them, and it is something you won’t experience anywhere else,” Price said.

Price, who just recently hit his first anniversary in the Army, said the training was good for his unit because it gave them training in explosives handling, and it provided hands-on experience.

“Hands-on with demo definitely gives us a lot more confidence...It helps to really ‘cement-in’ the tactics and procedures we use,” said Price.

Alpha Company set up 16 shots (rounds of charges), to blow over a total of 57 trees. As a follow-up mission, their heavy equipment operators are scheduled to come in to clear it all away.



Paratroopers assigned to Alpha Company, 425th Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, use C-4 explosives to create an abatis (trees interlaced over a roadway) to impede enemy vehicle movement during a training exercise March 21, 2013 at JBER, Alaska.



Army Pfc. Jordan Parish from San Juan Bautista, Calif. (left), and Pfc. Jake Royce from Warsaw, N.Y., Combat Engineers with the 425th Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, affix explosives to a tree in order to bring it down to block a roadway access during a training exercise March 21, 2013, at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska.

3-Geronimo school partnership puts Gruening students in an airborne state of mind

Story and Photos by Sgt. Eric-James Estrada

Paratroopers from the 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, held an airborne operations demonstration day to educate students from Eagle River's Gruening Middle School on the rigors of airborne training here May 16, 2013.

As part of the JBER School Partnership Program, Gruening Middle School students received classes on how to conduct a proper parachute landing fall, how to wear the parachute, exit an aircraft with a static line, and how to safely hold and operate various Army weapons, such as the M4 carbine at the Airborne Sustainment Training Area.

The program's objective is to provide the surrounding Anchorage, Matanuska-Susitna and Kenai area communities greater exposure to JBER missions and roles the Air Force and Army play in supporting the nation's defense.

"The closer we are to the community, the easier it is for them to understand us and for us to understand them," said U.S. Army Lt. Col. Patrick S. Altenburg, commander of the 3rd Battalion, 509th Infantry, 4-25 ABCT, hailing from Cincinnati.

The Gold Geronimo commander expressed the importance about informing and educating children



U.S. Army Spc. Alex Reynolds with Able Company, 3rd Battalion, 509th Infantry, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, instructs students from Gruening Middle School how to safely and properly handle the M4 carbine weapon at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson May 16, 2013. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Eric-James Estrada/Released)

on what it is the military does on a daily basis.

"We have a pretty close relationship with Gruening Middle School. We have some soldiers who go over there and help them," said Altenburg. "This is our turn to help them and give back to the middle school, give them a good orientation on what we do."

Gruening Middle School has a high percentage of military children in attendance, making up 70 percent of the student body.

"Gruening has such a high military population and we have a goal to make sure the military feels supported within our school system,"

said Loi Luts, a faculty member with Gruening Middle School. "I just think that it's a fabulous way ... to be outside the classroom and learn about resources and facilities that are so close to them."



U.S. Army Pfc. Anthony Golden with Charlie Company, 3rd Battalion, 509th Infantry, 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, instructs a student from Gruening Middle School how to safely and properly handle the M249 squad automatic weapon at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson May 16, 2013. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Eric-James Estrada/Released)



U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Fernando Gonzalez, platoon sergeant for 3rd Platoon, Dog Company, 3rd Battalion (Airborne), 509th Infantry Regiment, instructs students from Gruening Middle School how to exit an aircraft while attached to a static line at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson May 16, 2013. (Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Eric-James Estrada/Released)

Arctic Army officer excels on India's high ground

Story by Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Smith

Eleven weeks of rigorous high-elevation training in India culminated with the "Best Student" trophy awarded to U.S. Army artillery officer Capt. Matthew Hickey with the 2nd Battalion, 377th Parachute Field Artillery Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division.

Hickey, a 26-year-old officer hailing from St. Paul, Minn., attended two courses while training at the Indian army's high altitude warfare school located in the Himalayan Mountain Range near Sonamarg in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Hickey's first course in high-altitude training was the mountain warfare basic course, which lasted seven weeks. He successfully completed the basic course and spent another four weeks at the mountain warfare advance course, where he distinguished himself by earning the best student award.

Mountain warfare basic training began in early May 2013 with a class size of approximately 225 service members. The top 75 students progressed to the moun-

tain warfare advance course which was completed in late July.

Hickey said HAWS, which dates back to India's inception in the 1940's, is a well-known and prestigious school within the Indian army and around the world.

"It's akin to our airborne school a little bit, like how we pioneered this idea of putting paratroopers behind enemy lines ... HAWS is kind of like that. It has evolved into this very important and advanced mountain warfare school that has a training side and an operation side, and it has a lot of strategic value... It was a neat place to be at because of the history associated with it."

High altitude warfare school students are predominantly Indian soldiers, but Hickey was joined by three other American soldiers: a sergeant first class from the 1st Special Forces Group, a sergeant first class with the 19th Special Forces Group and a staff sergeant with the 2nd Ranger Battalion. Hickey's class also included soldiers from Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Botswana and Bhutan.



U.S. Army Capt. Mathew Hickey (left), with the 2nd Battalion, 377th Parachute Field Artillery Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, hailing from St. Paul, Minn., leads the way up a steep slope while on his way to winning an endurance test during training at the Indian Army's High Altitude Warfare School, June 10, 2013, near Sonamarg, Jammu and Kashmir, India. (Courtesy photo)

Main curriculum points at HAWS include mountain warfare and survival skills.

“It’s just as much of a warfare course as it is a mountaineering course ... Everything is taught with military operations in mind. It’s not just, ‘How do I climb a mountain?’ It’s, ‘How do I get a lot of soldiers to a particular place on the mountain to achieve a particular objective?’”

According to Hickey, the course is broken down into five-rated categories: rock craft, ice craft, endurance testing, tactical operations and written exams.

Rock craft, the school’s core curriculum, measures a soldier’s skills in knot tying, rope fixing, rock climbing, and choosing the best route to employ a group of soldiers for a cliff assault. Ice craft measures skills in traveling across glaciers and establishing camps in a snowbound environment.

An endurance test is held every week. The test includes running over undulating terrain for distances typically ranging between 10 to 15 km. Soldiers are tested in low-oxygen, high-elevation conditions of around 12,000 feet while carrying loads ranging between 20 to 50 pounds.

The tactical exercises, generally 36 hours in length, employ skills learned at the school. Tasks include moving squads and platoons through mountainous terrain in order to set up patrol bases to conduct combat operations.

All events were graded, and upon completion of the course, written exams were taken.

The daily routine was physically demanding. Rock craft required a hike of anywhere between 8 to 15 km from base camp to arrive at the training site, while the ice craft portion required an ascent from 12,000 to 14,000 feet to get to its training area.

“It hardens people...It’s difficult to live and operate in a mountainous environment,” said Hickey.

“The course was taught in Hindi...It was translated to us, but a



U.S. Army Capt. Matthew Hickey (left), with the 2nd Battalion, 377th Parachute Field Artillery Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, hailing from St. Paul, Minn., accepts the Indian Army High Altitude Warfare School’s Best Student Trophy from the school’s commandant, Maj. Gen. K.C. Singh, July 26, 2013, at the HAWS camp at Sonamarg, Jammu and Kashmir, India. (Courtesy photo)

lot of the language of mountaineering is not necessarily spoken. It's in the actions: tying knots, inspecting knots, inspecting harnesses, knowing the sequences, so it wasn't all that difficult to pick up on things, even when it was in Hindi."

Learning mountain warfare was the biggest objective for Hickey, but he also obtained insight into the Indian culture and how the Indian army operates. He said Indian cultural norms hold economic and social status in high regard, and these fundamental norms reciprocate into their Army and how they operate militarily.

"The Indian army is hard working. Their enlisted soldiers work extremely hard...When their soldiers get into the Army they are excited to get the opportunity to prove to the junior commissioned officers, and the officers that they are capable of accomplishing things."

"As much as I learned about mountaineering and military tactics, I learned just as much about the Indian culture and how it affects the way they do their operations."

"I developed some relationships with some of their NCOs and their officers, both on the student side and the instructor side, that hopefully I can maintain as we [U.S.] and India continue to develop a relationship."

In another cultural and humorous learning opportunity, Hickey's roommate, an officer from Kyrgyzstan, showed up at the training with little guidance and a small amount of gear.

"We called him Eddie. He was a lieutenant from Kyrgyzstan. His real name was Elzair Abdykaimov. When he showed up, he said his real name, and he said it kind of funny, so I told him I would call him Eddie if it was alright, which he said it was alright to."

"My name for almost the entire time was Michael instead of Matthew," said Hickey. They couldn't pronounce my last name either, so my name was Capt. Michael Hankey, instead of Matthew Hickey. I knew I was going to butcher a lot of their names, so if Michael Hankey was easy, I was good with it, same thing with Eddie."

"Everybody was pretty laid back and low key. Even some of the instructors, if they had difficult names we would just give them a nickname, and they loved it. We would nickname guys after animals. We had Rhino, and Cobra, and Tiger, and all sorts of stuff, and they loved it. It was a lot of fun!"

Abdykaimov spoke very little English, and did not know Hindi. He relied on another officer from Tajikistan, Lt. Rajabov Umedjon, to translate English and Hindi to his primary language, which was Russian.

"The funny thing about Eddie was, not only did he not speak English or Hindi, and he was at this course where they only spoke English and Hindi, he didn't know what course he was going to. His Army just kind of sent him out, telling him he is going to this course in India...So all he brought with him was one suitcase. In it he had his combat uniform, his boots, his beret, he brought a couple of gifts from Kyrgyzstan, and the rest of it was full of Marlboro Red cigarettes."

"And, that's all he brought with him...Eddie had never climbed a day in his life. He didn't know anything about mountaineering, and by the end of the course, he was the number one rock climber. It was pretty remarkable how he just showed up there, not knowing what he was going to do, not even knowing what people were saying, and he just had this incredible natural ability to feel the rock, and understand balance, and rhythm, and the techniques associated with rock climbing, and by the end he was head and shoulders above anyone else."

"In between every rock climb, and in between every endurance event, and before PT, he'd be sitting there smoking a Marlboro Red cigarette...He was just going with the flow, so long as he had a cigarette nearby, he'd be doing just fine."

"Eddie and I got to know each other pretty well. His English improved, and then for some reason it got worse as the course went on, so we goofed around about that...I'll stay in touch with Eddie...He has a bright future. So does Umed [Rajabov Umedjon], from Tajikistan. I probably became closest friends with those guys. Any time you go to a foreign school, and you

find some other foreign officers, you kind of latch on, because you have that in common.”

top and most prestigious schools in their Army.”

In addition to the best student award, Hickey was given a pin for his uniform, and officially certified in the Indian army’s basic and advanced mountain warfare courses. He was honored to be one of four American service members selected for the training.

“It’s important to understand that the high altitude warfare school has a long history...Ever since the 1940s they have been doing some remarkable stuff, so high altitude warfare school is regarded as one of the



U.S. Army Capt. Mathew Hickey (left), with the 2nd Battalion, 377th Parachute Field Artillery Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, hailing from St. Paul, Minn., and Indian Army Maj. Sanat Kumar, pause for a photo after reaching the summit of Machoi Peak, July 7, 2013, in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, India. Hickey and Kumar were there for training at the Indian Army’s High Altitude Warfare School. (Courtesy photo)



Spartan chefs throw it down at Alaska State Fair

Story and Photos by Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Smith

Sheltered from a drizzly day by the Alaska Glacier Products Borealis Plaza Tent, chefs and food service specialists with the 725th Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division prepared and served beef specialties at the Rancher's Reserve Beef Showdown Sept. 1, 2013, at the Alaska State Fair in Palmer, Alaska.

The 4th IBCT's Spartans from Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson competed against culinary artists from the University of Alaska Anchorage, headed by Chef Naomi Everett, and the Alaska Vocational Technical Center, led by Chef Chip Dunlap.

The Spartan team submitted three recipes for official grading and public sampling.

First out were flank steaks stuffed with maple sausage and diced peppers along with tricolor penne rigate with creamy pesto sauce, julienned mixed vegetable medley, and burgundy demi glace.

The second submission was Guinness-glazed flat steaks (roulade) with spinach pine nuts and hickory smoked bacon sided with creamy risotto and Parmesan cheese, and seasoned cauliflower on a bed of red and yellow peppers.

For their last submission of the day, the Centurions presented the judges with sirloin steaks topped with fresh herb lemon garlic butter with sides of caramelized onions, crimini and morel mushrooms, tourned potato fingerlings roasted with rosemary truffle oil, steamed asparagus with béarnaise sauce, and red leaf lettuce salad with blood orange vinaigrette and crisp parsnips.

"We do meat, starch, and vegetable plating designs with sauces, so we like to show that technique," said



U.S. Army food service specialists with the 725th Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, pose for a group photo after competing in the Rancher's Reserve Beef Showdown competition Sept. 1, 2013, at the Alaska State Fair in Palmer, Alaska. Pictured clockwise from front left are Sgt. Christen Oxendine, Staff Sgt. Steven L. Horne Jr., Pvt. Alexander Sanchez, Sgt. Rafael Bonair, Sgt. Christopher Jackson, Spc. Terrance Stewart, Sgt. 1st Class Randall Summerford, Spc. Christopher Lounsberry, Spc. Phillip Wallace, and Spc. Robert Cottrell.

The cooking events coordinator, Haley Forkner, from Palmer, Alaska, said it was a great event attended by more than 1,800 visitors.

"We really loved having the team from JBER here. We had several people come through and when we told them we had a team from JBER they were really excited about it. They were supportive, and I think that's awesome," said Forkner.

Summerford, along with Sgt. Rafael Bonair, led the JBER team to a respectable finish, but it was the UAA team headed up by Chef Naomi Everett who won the overall competition.

Bonair, originally from Trinidad, who set down roots in Fayetteville, N.C., said it was neat to meet other culinary arts professionals from the Anchorage area.

“The connections you make out here are lasting. We actually met Alaska’s ACF (American Culinary Federation) vice president last week!”

While making local connections, JBER’s team also supported the Anchorage area’s agricultural industry by purchasing local ingredients to use in their recipes.

“Most of the vegetables we used were locally purchased at the farmer’s market. We purchased some items here at the fairgrounds when we were here last week, and we went to a few organics shops that are here in Anchorage, so we are trying to promote Alaskan ingredients,” said Summerford.

In addition to Summerford and Bonair, the team from JBER also included Spc. Phillip Wallace, Spc. Christopher Lounsberry, Pvt. Alexander Sanchez, Spc. Terrance Stewart, Spc. Robert Cottrell, Sgt. Christopher Jackson, Sgt. Christen Oxendine, and Staff Sgt. Steven L. Horne Jr.

The Spartan brigade also had an official judge on the competition’s panel, Spc. Lucas Brockett.

This year was the first time a team from the Spartan brigade competed at the showdown, with hopefully more to come, Summerford said.

“This is our first competition, so we want to have a good standing, so future soldiers can go out and represent our food program here in Alaska,” Summerford said.



U.S. Army food service specialists Sgt. 1st Class Randall Summerford (left) and Sgt. Christen Oxendine, both with the 725th Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, prepare food for the People’s Choice portion of the Rancher’s Reserve Beef Showdown competition Sept. 1, 2013 at the Alaska State Fair in Palmer, Alaska.

Spartan Infantryman is USARPAC's 'Best Warrior' NCO

Story and Photos by Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Smith

SCHOFIELD BARRACKS, Hawaii - The Army's Best Warrior Noncommissioned Officer in the Pacific Command lives and works in Alaska.

Staff Sgt. De Gosh E. Reed, an Infantryman team leader with the 1-40th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, won best noncommissioned officer at the U.S. Army, Pacific's 2013 Best Warrior Challenge competition held June 10-14, 2013 at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.

The competition tests competitors in several soldier skill categories. The five-day event included a pre-combat inspection, a media interview, an Army physical fitness test, a written exam and essay, a command sergeants major board, an M16 zero and qualification, warrior task testing, a mystery event which was an Army body fat tape test, a Land navigation course, an urban orienteering course, and a combatives tournament.

Reed had the highest cumulative score, and bested out eight other division level NCOs from across US-ARPAC.

Reed, a former drill sergeant and mechanized leader's course instructor, said he did not have a lot of time to prepare for the competition, but his experience in the Army helped him win.

"It's not about specializing in any one thing. You have to be good across the board. Every major soldier skill, you have to be proficient at. If you don't have proficiency you're not going to be able to compete," said Reed.

"The mystery event we did was like, 'Alright, now perform a tape test. Here's the book. Here's the form. You have 15 minutes. Do you understand your task? Okay, ready, go!' and there is no one to help you, so you have to know how to do that!"

Reed does, however, have support from the home front.

Reed's wife, Jennifer, was really happy and proud of his achievement. She flew to Hawaii to be there for him and to celebrate at the Army Commemoration Ball where he was honored as the NCO of the year.

While in Hawaii, the couple took advantage of the state's unique leisure opportunities.

"We went swimming with sharks. We went parasailing. We did a Sunlight Dinner Cruise. We went snorkeling with turtles. We went swimming with dolphins. We did everything you could think of! We tried to do it all!"

As for the competition, Reed said the victory came as a total surprise to him and Jennifer. He said he kept a confident air about him, telling everyone he thought he won, but he truly didn't know until the final announcement on stage in front of about 800 people at the Army Commemoration Celebration.

Reed said he swore he heard another name called as the winner.

"When they call your name you're supposed to step forward and move to center stage. It took me a good half of a second to realize they had just said my name," Reed said as he laughingly recalled the moment.

The 1-40th Cavalry's Command Sergeant Major, Shane Pospisil, said Reed is a seasoned NCO, a quiet professional, and a family man.



“When we were looking for volunteers, he quietly came up and said, ‘hey I would be interested in doing this,’ and at first we were surprised because he has never been a showboat type of guy, and we were concerned because of the short notice, but I tell you, he was obviously a lot more prepared than we gave him credit for,” said Pospisil. “He did excellent, both here at USARAK at JBER [Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson], and then went forward to USARPAK in Hawaii and just crushed it!”

It was a good year for USARAK soldiers. Reed, along with Spc. Adam T. Christensen with the 472nd Military Police Company, 793rd Military Police Battalion at Fort Wainwright, Alaska, combined to win NCO and Soldier of the year honors in the USARPAC competition.

The USARAK and USARPAC competitions were not the only times Reed had been recognized for his outstanding work. As a drill sergeant, Reed was twice selected as the drill sergeant of the cycle.

Continuing to better himself as a soldier, a goal for Reed is to become a member of the Sergeant Audie Murphy Club. He continued to test himself through when he and Christensen traveled to Fort Lee, Va. to represent USARPAC and compete for Best NCO and Soldier in the U.S. Army.



U.S. Army, Alaska's 2013 Noncommissioned Officer and Soldier of the Year winners Staff Sgt. De Gosh E. Reed (center left) with the 1-40th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, and Spc. Adam T. Christensen (center right) with the 472nd Military Police Company, 793rd Military Police Battalion, 2nd Engineer Brigade, pose with their trophies for a congratulatory photo with U.S. Army Alaska's Chief of Staff, Col. James E. Anderson (left), and USARAK's Command Sergeant Major, Bernard L. Knight (right), May 17, 2013 at USARAK's Headquarters at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska. (Courtesy Photo)



Spartans compete in Best Junior Leader and Best Squad competitions

Story by Sgt. 1st Class Jason Epperson

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska – While Spring has begun for most soldiers in the lower 48 states, the Arctic paratroopers assigned to 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division are still training hard in the snow.

The 4-25 IBCT hosted two days of “Best Junior Leader” and “Best Squad” competition on Joint Base Elmendorf all day April 2-3, that began both days in the early hours.

The competitions included a 15-mile foot march, an obstacle course, an M249 machine gun assembly challenge, a stress shoot event, a modified physical fitness test, a harness rigging, and challenge events for field radio communication and first aid.

Out of approximately 60 junior leaders that competed individually April 2, 2013, Sgt. Justin Siegfried, assigned to Fox Company, 3rd Battalion (Airborne), 509th Infantry Regiment won the Becker Non-Commissioned Officer Award.

“It feels amazing,” Siegfried said. “I’m a little surprised and proud to represent 509th. I can’t wait for the next one!”

First Lt. Thomas Mussmann, assigned to Charlie Company, 3rd Battalion (Airborne), 509th Infantry Regiment won the Andrews Junior Officer Award.

The competition was not without challenges.

“I’d say the hardest part was just to ruck the whole way. Fifteen miles is pretty far away, especially when you are trying to keep your place and trying to beat everyone else.”

Out of approximately 30 nine-member squads, the best Spartan Squad came from Comanche Company, 1st Battalion (Airborne), 501st Infantry Regiment.

Staff Sgt. Christopher Norris, the squad leader said, “It feels good to represent our company and battalion.”

The awards are named for Staff Sgt. Shane Becker, who was posthumously awarded the Silver Star for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving with the 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment during Operation Iraqi Freedom, and 2nd Lt. Darryn D.



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Jason Dean, a paratrooper assigned to the 725th Brigade Support Battalion, crosses the climbing bars, known as the “Tarzan,” during the Best Junior Leader Competition at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, April 2, 2013. The “Tarzan” is one of 10 obstacles paratroopers attempt to complete during the Confidence Course. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Jason Epperson/Released)

Andrews, who was posthumously awarded the Silver Star for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action against the enemy while serving with the 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry Regiment during Operation Enduring Freedom.

The purpose of the competition was to reinforce esprit-de-corps through competition, and further develop the brigade’s arctic fighting skills, while honoring the sacrifices of our paratroopers who made the ultimate sacrifice while serving the nation in combat.

This was the first brigade-level competition hosted by the 4-25th since redeploying from Afghanistan in October 2012.



A Paratrooper assigned to 4th Airborne Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, low crawls under barbed-wire in the “belly crawl” obstacle during the Best Squad Competition at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, April 2, 2013. The “belly crawl” is one of 10 obstacles paratroopers attempt to complete during the Confidence Course. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Jason Epperson)



U.S. Army Alaska commander Maj. Gen. Michael X. Garrett (right) presents coins to the winners of the “Best Junior Leader” and “Best Squad” competitions. First Lt. Thomas Mussmann, assigned to Charlie Company, 3rd Battalion (Airborne), 509th Infantry Regiment won the Andrews Junior Officer Award., Sgt. Justin Siegfried, assigned to Fox Company, 3rd Battalion (Airborne), 509th Infantry Regiment won the Becker Non-Commissioned Officer Award. Staff Sgt. Christopher Norris accepted “Best Squad” for Comanche Company, 1st Battalion (Airborne), 501st Infantry Regiment. Col. Matt McFarlane, commander of the 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division with also presented the winners with a 4-25 Brigade coin. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Eric-James Estrada)





U.S. Army 1st Lt. Jacob Haag assigned to 1st Squadron (Airborne), 40th Cavalry Regiment, engages in the “vaults” portion of the obstacle during the Best Junior Leader Competition at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, April 2, 2013. The “vaults” is one of 10 obstacles paratroopers attempt to complete during the Confidence Course. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Jason Epperson/Released)

U.S. Soldiers assigned to the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, climb over the balance beams on the “Tarzan” obstacle during the Best Squad Competition at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, April 3, 2013. The “Tarzan” is one of 10 obstacles paratroopers encountered during the Confidence Course. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Eric-James Estrada/Released)



U.S. Army 1st Lt. Michael Blanchard, the executive officer for Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry Regiment (Airborne), participates in a 15-Mile road march during the Best Junior Leader Competition at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, April 2, 2013. The road march crossed over 18 checkpoints, with different events along the course. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Jason Epperson/Released)

Spartan paratroopers earn the Torch

Story and photos by Spc. Eric-James Estrada



JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska-Paratroopers from the 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, demonstrated their commitment and fortitude, earning the Pathfinder badge here, May 31, 2013.

JBER's most recent graduates of the Army Pathfinder School know what it means to be both the best and brightest. After a three-week course run by a Mobile Training Team, or MTT, from Fort Benning, Ga., 26 out of 68 Spartan paratroopers who began the training can now call themselves Pathfinders.

Composed of less than 1 percent of the total Army, the modern Pathfinder is a specialized airborne leader. Pathfinders set up parachute drop zones and helicopter landing zones for airborne and air assault missions in hostile locations.

"It was a tough course. It was a fire hose full of information," said, San Antonio native U.S. Army 1st Lt. Kedrick Palmer of 725th Brigade Support Battalion (Airborne), 4-25 IBCT.

Palmer added that the most challenging phase he faced was the classroom instruction on drop zones.

"There was a lot of information and not a whole lot of time to retain it," said Palmer.

U.S. Army Pathfinders originated during World War II, establishing and operating landing and drop zones. They were the first American soldiers on the ground on D-Day in 1944, and despite evolutions in doctrine and tactics, continue to lead the way in airborne operations today.

Students in the Pathfinder course went through rigorous training and testing in areas such as learning to navigate cross country on foot to establish and operate day and night helicopter landing zones and parachute drop zones, rig and inspect sling loads and provide air traffic control and navigational assistance to aircraft, amongst other tasks.

The honor graduate for the Pathfinder course, U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Larry Forrest, Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion (Airborne), 501st Infantry, 4-25 IBCT, hailing from Coeur d'alene, Idaho, said "It was an academically challenging course. You have to study for hours and having family around and wanting to be with your family at the same time ... it's a lot on you."



U.S. Army Lt. Col. Kevin Perera, commander of the 425th Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, pins the Pathfinder badge on U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Larry Forrest, Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion (Airborne), 501st Infantry, 4-25 ABCT, hailing from Coeur d'alene, Idaho, May 31, 2013. Forrest was recognized as the honor graduate for achieving the highest grade point average during the Pathfinder course. (Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Eric-James Estrada/Released)

The three week course is demanding of the students. Prospective Pathfinders must go through multiple exams, hands-on tasks and one final field training exercise. When factoring in the off-duty time spent studying, it's a huge amount of information that is required to memorize and retain in a short amount of time.

U.S. Army Specialist Jennifer Lane, a Paratrooper with B Company, 425th Brigade Special Troops Battalion (Airborne), and U.S. Army Private Kasey Beckman, inspect an unmanned aerial vehicle while conducting UAS training at Donnelly Training Area near Fort Greely, Alaska.



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