



# Army Reserve Crowns First-Ever Best Sapper Team

*By Staff Sgt. Jeremy Fowler*

362nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

**S**oldiers from the 382nd Engineer Company, 365th Engineer Battalion, 411th Engineer Brigade of the 412th Theater Engineer Command (TEC) from Harrisburg, Penn., received the distinct honor of being titled the first Army Reserve Best Sapper Team on May 8 at Fort McCoy, Wis.

The Sapper Stakes competition was hosted by the 412th and 416th TECs, which account for all Army Reserve engineer assets and support units of more than 26,000 Soldiers including all Reserve Sapper teams. The two TECs collaborated to provide a unique competition for this unique type of Soldier.

Sappers are highly trained combat engineers who specialize in the forward support of infantry units conducting reconnaissance of bridges and roads, mine-detection and clearing operations, bridge, road and airfield construction and the use of explosives to aid allied units and impede enemy forces. Sappers often work with, or ahead of, infantry units on the front lines, so a variety of physical and mental demands were integrated as part of the competition.

“It feels pretty good,” said Spc. Dennis Kianka, a Peque, Penn., native and member of the 382nd team, “to come out here and actually win the whole thing. It’s just great.”

Team leader for the 382nd competitors, Staff Sgt. Chad Thomas, a native of Newtown, Conn., was thrilled to finish with the new title, but more impressed at the performance of his team in their efforts at the competition. He attributes their victory to their close-knit team spirit and drive.

“We’re not the best; we’re just the most well-rounded. We just did better than the other teams here,” Thomas said. “To have (an officer) here come up to me and say we were ‘the ones that stuck with it as a team,’ that to me, as a leader, is gratifying.”

Two other Sapper teams were honored for placing in the top three teams of the inaugural Reserve Sapper Stakes.

Soldiers of the 469th Engineering Company, 372nd Engineer Brigade, 416th TEC, from Dodgeville, Wis., claimed second place in the contest, only a few points shy of the 382nd Engineer Company.

The Wausau, Wis., Sapper team from the 428th Engineer Company, 372nd Engineer Brigade, 416th TEC, claimed the honor of third place for the overall competition.

Teamwork was essential to winning the events, and despite Thomas' modesty, he does relent their camaraderie propelled them to first.

"We were all able to work together to get where we needed to be," Thomas said. "We made a list of what we thought were going to be critical tasks for our team to execute so we could just get those points where we could. After that, I just told these guys to go out and, 'you do you and we'll be fine.'"

The competition consisted of a series of combat engineer tasks with each team competing against 14 other

teams from across the country vying for the title. Teams were graded on their ability to conduct the tasks to standard in many events in the shortest time possible.

The events included two challenges testing the teams' knowledge of conducting controlled blasts, bridge reconnaissance, land navigation, approaching and clearing a house in an urban environment, detecting and clearing mines, emplacing 30 meters of barbed wire, completing a ruck march of more than 10 miles and various other stations.

The TECs plan on conducting this competition annually to ensure Soldiers keep pushing themselves to learn more and be better trained, and be better trainers, for their units. ■



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