

## **FORT CAMPBELL LIFELINERS COMPETE TO BE BEST STINGER**

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*At left, Sgt. Gregory Brookes, an Avenger team chief assigned to C Battery, 2nd Battalion, 44th Air Defense Artillery (C/2-44 ADA) Regiment, 101st Sustainment Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), carries approximately 80 pounds of gear including a Stinger missile simulator during the last stretch of a 12-mile road march on 3 October 2013, at Fort Campbell. The road march was the last event in a competition to determine the best Stinger missile team in the battalion.*

**Fort Campbell, KY** – Teams of soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, 44th Air Defense Artillery (2-44 ADA) Regiment, 101st Sustainment Brigade “*Lifeliners*,” 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), competed in six events from 30 September – 3 October 2013, at Fort Campbell. The competition was an opportunity for the soldiers to demonstrate their skills and win recognition as the best Stinger missile or Sentinel radar team in the battalion.

“The best Stinger competition just takes what you know and puts it against what everyone else knows basically,” said Spc. John Rickel, an Avenger crewman with the C Battery “*Hell Fighters*,” 2-44th ADA and one half of the winning best Stinger missile team. “You have your major categories, your crew drills, physical abilities and you’re just seeing who’s the best.”

The competition tested the soldiers in a variety of ways. The first event was an Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT) to assess their overall fitness. Then competitors faced off on the Sabalauski Air Assault School obstacle course. Later they competed on a land navigation course, which helped demonstrate their Soldier skills. Up next was the written portion of the competition that tested the competitors on their technical knowledge, followed by crew drills, requiring them to work together to prepare an Avenger for combat. The competition’s final event was a 12-mile road march.

“The easiest [event] to me was the crew drills and the most challenging one was the ruck march,” said Sgt. Gregory Brookes, an Avenger team chief also with C Battery, and the other half of the winning best Stinger missile team. “Well, basically you’re carrying your basic load which you would actually carry and on top of that you’re adding the Stinger missile. So that made it a little hard.”

He estimated that the total load when carrying the Stinger missile simulator was more than 80 pounds.

Rickel agree that the road march was the hardest part of the competition.

“That was really hard for me,” said Rickel, a native of Meadville, PA. “Sgt. Brookes is in a lot better shape than I am... but I wasn’t going to let Sgt. Brookes finish without me. It’s really difficult. You just kinda gotta take it one step at a time.”

*At right, Spc. Kendal Smithson, an Avenger team chief assigned to C/2-44 ADA, passes a Stinger missile simulator to Spc. Corey Duboise, an Avenger crewman also assigned to C/2-44 ADA, during a timed and graded crew drill event on 2 October 2013 at Fort Campbell during the competition.*



Brookes set a swift pace in the darkness at the beginning of the road march. However, Rickel had to ask him to slow down slightly. He was afraid he'd burn out miles later. Although Brookes had the ability to finish faster, it didn't matter. For this to count, they had to finish as a team.

Although the unit had only paired them together a few weeks prior they quickly meshed. Both said they felt confident in their individual knowledge. Though working together was what helped them throughout the competition.

The event that required the most team work was the crew drills. To achieve success in this two part event required precisely performing a set sequence of actions. Those actions demonstrated their ability to quickly mount an M3P machine gun on an Avenger in the first part and then loading the Avenger's missile pods with Stinger missile simulators in the second. An observer timed and graded them. It required them to closely coordinate their actions to do it efficiently.

"The biggest thing with crew drills is just communication," said Rickel. "If you just communicate well, everything works so much better."



*At left, Spc. Steven Thomas, an Avenger crewman assigned to C/2-44 ADA, works with his Avenger team chief, Staff Sgt. Jeremy Capps (same unit) to mount an M3P machine gun on their Avenger during the completion held at Fort Campbell on 2 October 2013.*

Brookes, a native of Orlando, Fla., added that they went over everything before the event. They made sure they knew the correct way to do everything.

"Then we just went ahead and executed," said Brookes.

It was more than just the two of them forging a sense of unity. Members of their battery offered encouragement, especially on the final leg of the road march. They surrounded the two tired Soldiers and urged them on, urged them to go faster and just urged them to finish strong. Feelings of unit pride motivated both of them. Although they had a lead, other competitors were working hard to close the distance and win the competition.

“The whole time going into [it] we knew we were the first team in the ruck march for Charlie and I didn’t want to be the reason Charlie didn’t get that third victory,” said Rickel. “So it felt awesome being able to get that victory for them.”

“We’re the *Hell Fighters*, always coming in first place, always going to come in first place,” said Brookes.

In the end, the competition is just one way the battalion trains its Soldiers on their air defense skills and maintains combat readiness. The hard work allows them to fulfill an important role on the battlefield.

“Take down anything that flies,” said Brookes. “If it flies it dies.”

**Original source location:** <http://www.clarksvilleonline.com/2013/10/09/fort-campbell-lifeliners-compete-best-stinger/>