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Ranger Challenge

Guts, glory and oh yeah, trophies for the winners

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Blood, sweat, tears and raw emotion are only a few of the things that come to mind when you speak of competition at the collegiate level.

But the competition that spans the military playing field is a totally different ball game.

That game came to the fields and ranges of Fort Dix this weekend as 22 college teams of the 2nd Brigade 1st Region Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) from New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania came to compete in the annual Ranger Challenge.

"The challenge is an eight-event competition. It's really challenging and it's really fast-paced," said MAJ Tony Bell, Liberty Brigade operations officer.

The teams of 8 to 10 cadets competed in varied events including: crossing a single rope bridge, M16 weapons qualification, weapon disassembly, hand grenade assault course, the orientation course, a 16-kilometer road march and patrol exercises.

"The teams begin training for this as soon as the semester begins, some as early as August. Today is a culminating event," said CPT Wade Johnson, cadre member and instructor at Lehigh University.

"What you have here are cadets who volunteer, much like any soldier who volunteers to go to Ranger School. They volunteer to participate," said Bell.

"These are the elite members of the university--the best cadets, the most motivated, the highly skilled," said Johnson.

"All the cadets took time out of their schedules to come out and compete," said Bell. "I think it's very demanding on the cadets. It does challenge them."

"It takes a great deal of training. These are the kids who go to school and practice on their own time to make this happen," Johnson.

According Cadet Brad Horry you give up a weekend, but the challenge is worth it, and it's fun.

"It's about team work and having fun," said MAJ Jeff Williams, Assistant Professor of Military Science at Princeton. "The goal is a team building."

Cadet Ryan Sheer who is in his third year of ROTC at Lehigh University said, "The real challenge is helping to build the new cadets up into a team."

Sheer, who was the far end anchor point and the first member of his winning team to jump into the cold water, said he thinks "this challenge helps promote the skills needed to be a future leader."

Family and friends came out to cheer on their teams through the events held against brilliant fall colors and the awards ceremony that followed.

Following Lehigh in the standings was Slippery Rock University and third went to Bucknell University.

Bell said, "The ceremony is for all the cadets who participated and their family and friends." Bell also said that each team that places gets a trophy. Each member of a placing team gets a plaque and a placement certificate. And all the cadets who volunteered get a participation certificate.

Schools with teams participating in this year's challenge were: Seton Hall, Princeton, Rutgers, St. Johns, Hofstra, Fordham, Penn State University, University of Pittsburgh, Temple, Drexel, Bucknell, Widener, Lehigh, Shippensburg, Gilfoles, Dickinson, Scranton, Gannon, Slippery Rock, Valley Forge Military Academy and Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

THE CHALLENGE--A ROTC cadet stands at attention, top, during the closing ceremonies on Doughboy Field on Sunday. The day before the cadets were tackling the seven events of Ranger Challenge and getting wet at Pioneer Lake, above, Hofstra cadet Richard Gomez is the first to cross to tie the one-rope bridge across the lake. The Rutgers team stands dripping, left, as Philadelphia TV station WB17 interviews the cadets.

Photos by PFC William Jackson and SFC Kryn P. Westhoven / 44th MP(D)

Roping in Ranger Challenge

Hofstra University ROTC Cadet Daniel Gomez scrambles for distance and time Saturday on a one-rope bridge at Pioneer Lake during Ranger Challenge. Brother Richard, who a cadet, lends a hand. Article, more photos, page 6. Photo by Kryn Westhoven