

Chapter 16 Additional Material

Ground Combat in OIF in April 2003

The U.S. military and allied forces launched their invasion of Iraq on March 19, 2003. In the face of the large invasion and its overwhelming firepower, most units from the Iraqi Army crumbled in the face of the overwhelming American firepower. However, heated combat did occur in some sectors. A little more than two weeks later, on April 4, 2003, near Baghdad International Airport, a large Iraqi force attacked Sergeant First Class Paul Ray Smith and other soldiers of Bravo Company, 11th Engineer Battalion, 3rd Infantry Division. The Iraqi enemy threatened to annihilate the Americans. The Iraqis occupied decisive positions from which they could sweep the Americans. SFC Smith stood his ground, fired three boxes of .50-caliber machine gun ammunition at the Iraqis, and endured several wounds from enemy small arms. He was found dead at his machine gun as the engagement ended.

Two years later in 2005 at the White House, Paul Ray Smith's 11-year-old son received his father's posthumous Medal of Honor from President George W. Bush. The citation tells what happened:

Sergeant First Class Smith was engaged in the construction of a prisoner of war holding area when his Task Force was violently attacked by a company-sized enemy force. Realizing the vulnerability of over 100 soldiers, Sergeant First Class Smith quickly organized a hasty defense consisting of two platoons of soldiers, one Bradley Fighting Vehicle and three armored personnel carriers. As the fight developed, Sergeant First Class Smith braved hostile enemy fire to personally engage the enemy with hand grenades and anti-tank weapons, and organized the evacuation of three wounded soldiers from an armored personnel carrier struck by a rocket propelled grenade and a 60 mm mortar round. Fearing the enemy would overrun their defenses,

Sergeant First Class Smith moved under withering enemy fire to man a .50 caliber machine gun mounted on a damaged armored personnel carrier. In total disregard for his own life, he maintained his exposed position in order to engage the attacking enemy force. During this action, he was mortally wounded. His courageous actions helped defeat the enemy attack, and resulted in as many as 50 enemy soldiers killed, while allowing the safe withdrawal of numerous wounded soldiers. Sergeant First Class Smith's extraordinary heroism and uncommon valor are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, the Third Infantry Division "Rock of the Marne," and the United States Army.



Sergeant First class Paul Ray Smith during Operation Iraqi Freedom within weeks of his death in 2003.

Credit: U.S. Army

Smith was laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery. Several buildings at Forts Leonard Wood, Stewart, and Benning are memorialized in his name.

Short Bibliography

“Sergeant First Class Paul Ray Smith Memorial,” *Engineer: The Professional Bulletin of Army Engineers* (July–September 2005): 41.

U.S. Army. “Sergeant First Class Paul R. Smith, Medal of Honor, War on Terrorism,” <https://www.army.mil/medalofhonor/smith/profile/> (accessed June 30, 2013).

Army Engineer Divers Help Relief Effort in Haiti, January–March 2010

On January 12, 2010, a massive earthquake rocked Port-au-Prince in Haiti. It killed at least 250,000 Haitians, injured 250,000, and left another 500,000 homeless. The quake also demolished the main pier in the city’s harbor. Without that pier in operation, the offloading of humanitarian supplies would be delayed. This catastrophe drew aid from the United States and other nations and organizations.



U.S. Army Engineer divers building a rebar cage for a pile cap.

Source: U.S. Navy Photo

At that time, the U.S. Army's 544th Engineer Dive Team was conducting a training exercise in the Caribbean. The U.S. Southern Command diverted the 544th to Port-au-Prince to assess the damage to the pier and begin rehabilitation as part of Operation UNIFIED RESPONSE. Arriving on January 18th, the Americans found that more than half of the 1,000-foot pier was damaged beyond repair, however some 400 feet could be rehabilitated. Once in operation, the pier could receive the desperately needed medical and construction supplies. Seventeen Army Engineer divers spent the next 10 weeks repairing or completely reconstructing 234 piles (pillars that held up the pier). Each of these needed to be reconnected to the pier by replacing reinforced concrete caps. The divers faced environmental hazards caused by toxic water and harsh conditions in Port-au-Prince's harbor. Equipment breakdowns and weather changes also slowed progress. Nevertheless, the Engineer divers rehabilitated the 400-foot section of the pier by March 18, 2010. Ships then docked and used it to offload humanitarian supplies for the suffering Haitian people. Each of the divers in the 544th logged about 350 hours of bottom time. The U.S. Navy provided logistical support to enable the Army divers to accomplish their mission. Even in time of war in two distant theaters in Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. military could still project the manpower and material in disaster relief efforts such as this one in Haiti.

Short Bibliography:

Sann, Scott, Jerry M. Hallman, and David J. Ulbrich, "Army Engineer Divers: First in Port-au-Prince Harbor," *Engineer: The Professional Bulletin of Army Engineers* (September–December 2010): 7–12.

Establishing the Sapper Leader Course

The U.S. Army Engineer School established the Sapper Leader Course in 1985 as a means of ensuring that a few combat engineers became experts in their craft. Three decades later,

the course is open to E-4s or higher, cadets, officers at the O-3 rank and below. Although open to any branch, the priority is given to engineer, infantry, and cavalry soldiers.

The course took the term “Sapper” from two sources. During the Vietnam War, the U.S. Army Engineers grudgingly applied the term to highly Viet Cong fighters who infiltrated ARVN or American positions at night, wreaked havoc by damaging equipment or vehicles, and tried to escape unharmed so they could do so again in the future. The Viet Cong sappers mastering these infiltration tactics were the most feared enemy combatants. The other source for the term dates back to the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, when sappers performed missions similar to today’s combat engineers.

At the small unit level, mission success requires competent leaders capable of taking the initiative and acting independently in support of their higher commander's intent. Combat engineer leaders must be highly motivated, physically and mentally tough, and technically and tactically proficient in order to accomplish their missions and provide effective support to their maneuver elements. The Sapper Leader Course is designed to develop tough, hard, and knowledgeable leaders who are confident in their abilities and capable of operating under the harshest of conditions. The 28 days are extremely fast paced and challenging. It instills a high level of self-confidence and quickly enhance the cohesion within units. The primary focus of the Sapper Leader Course is troop leading procedures by training Combat Engineers in troop leading procedures, demolitions (conventional and expedient), and mountaineering. The course culminates in an intense field training exercise that reinforces the battle drills and specialized engineer techniques learned throughout the course.

Those graduating Soldiers earn the right to wear the “SAPPER” tab. It is one of four permanent individual skills tabs authorized by the Army – the others being the “President’s Hundred,” the “Special Forces,” and the “Ranger” Tabs.

Sources: USAES, Sapper Leader Course Webpage, <http://www.wood.army.mil/sapper/>; USAES, Sapper Leader Course Pamphlet, ROTC, 2010, <http://armyrotc.mst.edu/media/academic/armyrotc/documents/sapperschoolinfo/SapperPamphlet.pdf>