

## BLACK LIONS TAKE PRIDE IN FIRST PLACE FINISH

By David S. Kolarik and Diana McCoy

The U.S. Army's only prime power unit competed with more than 3,000 attendees from around the world for the honor of being called World Champions at the 27<sup>th</sup> Annual International Lineman's Rodeo and Expo held Oct. 16, 2010.



The 249<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion (Prime Power) competed in the Military Category at the National Agricultural Center and Hall of Fame in Bonner Springs, Kan.

The battalion is the only Army Engineer battalion that reports directly to the Chief of Engineers, Lt. Gen. Robert L. Van Antwerp, and is the only battalion with both global responsibilities, as well as continuous forward deployment missions.

“The annual International Lineman's Rodeo is a terrific opportunity for our Army linemen from the 249<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion to truly test their technical competencies,” said Lt. Col. Matthew R. Tyler, 249<sup>th</sup> commander. “It gives them an opportunity to show the civilian electrical power industry how serious the military is about this career field and the training we conduct.”

The Lineman's Rodeo, which is comprised of four timed events, attracts the best linemen from around the world to compete in events based on traditional linemen tasks and skills. It has grown to more than 200 teams and 250 apprentices.



“The lineman's rodeo is a unique experience because they bring teams from around the world,” said Staff Sgt. William S. Test. “I was supposed to compete last year, but we got deployed to American Samoa to assist with the tsunami.”

Test, a first-time competitor, was one of three members of a team from the battalion's Bravo Company, which took first place in the Military Category.

Staff Sgt. Michael A. Hughes, who comes from a family of linemen, was also a member of the winning Bravo Company team. He said he enjoyed watching the civilian utility companies' techniques at the rodeo.

“Being able to watch them helps us improve our techniques,” said Hughes.

Of the overall experience, Hughes said it was a great feeling to come out on top. Army linemen receive their training at the



Powerline Distribution Course taught by Air Force linemen at Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas.

“It was especially nice to be part of the first prime power team to ever bring home the gold and finally defeat the Air Force participants,” said Hughes. “To defeat those individuals that trained us in the first place is especially gratifying.”

In addition to participating in the rodeo, the 249<sup>th</sup> had a recruitment table at the expo held Oct. 14 and 15 in Overland Park, Kan.

“Our participation definitely sparked a significant amount of interest in how current civilian power lineman can serve in either the active or reserve elements of the battalion,” added Tyler.

Staff Sgt. Erik M. Zielinski, a member of the 249<sup>th</sup>'s Delta Company, has a civilian job with NSTAR Electric and Gas Corporation. Delta Company is the 249<sup>th</sup>'s Army Reserve component, which has three platoons in Cranston, R.I., and one platoon with the rest of the 249<sup>th</sup> at Fort Belvoir, Va.

“I would tell someone thinking of becoming a lineman with the 249<sup>th</sup> that it's a good opportunity,” said Zielinski. “You can use it as a stepping stone to get a good job with a civilian company that can pay more than \$100,000 a year.”

The commander of the 249<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion also serves as the commandant of the U.S. Army Prime Power School, the institution responsible for the development of Army and Navy power generation specialists. It is a year-long program of instruction designed to train students to deploy, install, operate and maintain the Army's commercial-grade, medium-voltage power generation and distribution assets in support of theater commanders.

The Prime Power School is relocating to Fort Leonard Wood, Mo. The design and construction on the new facilities was conducted by the Kansas City District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. A ribbon cutting ceremony for the new state-of-the-art schoolhouse is scheduled for Nov. 22, 2010.

“Being a lineman in the Army is great,” said Staff Sgt. Rustin L. “Nemo” Owen. “We get to help the warfighter and civilians. We provide a service to everyone.”

