



Sgt. Curtis Bittner, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command's 2013 Soldier of the Year, meets a selection board via video teleconference. Like all Soldiers competing for the coveted title of Soldier of the Year, Bittner completed events such as land navigation, media interviews, the Army Physical Fitness Test, a comprehensive test covering military knowledge, and proficiency in the 10 Warrior Tasks and Battle Drills and their nearly 60 subtasks. Assigned to B Battery, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Field Artillery, Bittner represented the Fires Center of Excellence at Fort Sill, Okla. (U.S. Army photo by Marie Berbera)

TRADOC Selects NCO, Soldier of the Year Using New Techniques

By Tony O'Bryant

U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command

FORT EUSTIS, Va. — In an effort to balance the tradition of recognizing Army professionalism and being good stewards of limited funds, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command revamped the way it challenges, chooses and celebrates its best enlisted Soldiers. NCO C3 increases unit efficiency across the Army.

Chosen from a field of 17, Sgt. Curtis Bittner, from the Fires Center of Excellence at Fort Sill, Okla., and Staff Sgt. Benjamin Steele, from the Initial Military Training Center of Excellence at Fort Jackson, S.C., were named TRADOC's best Soldier and noncommissioned officer, respectively, during a video-teleconference hosted at TRADOC headquarters, with 11 units throughout across the United States.

Before the winners were announced, Gen. Robert W. Cone, commanding general of TRADOC, emphasized that although the announcement was done via VTC, the recognition was no less important.

"I'd like to congratulate each and every one of you for aspiring to compete — to be the man or woman in the

arena — to step forward and say 'I'm going to take a shot at this,'" Cone said. "I will guarantee you just because of your participation and just because of the preparation you have made, you are, in fact, a better Soldier or non-commissioned officer — and your units are better — for having had this experience."

After the winners were announced, Steele said he still wasn't sure if he could put into words how it felt to take the title of TRADOC's 2013 NCO of the Year.

"It'll take awhile for it to sink in, but I'm extremely excited and happy to represent Fort Jackson this week," Steele said. He added jokingly that although his wife will be excited, she might be a bit disappointed to hear that "there are going to be many more nights of studying and practicing."

During the competition, the competitors were confronted with events such as land navigation, media interviews, the Army Physical Fitness Test, a comprehensive test covering military knowledge, and proficiency in the 10 Warrior Tasks and Battle Drills and their nearly 60

subtasks.

“These Soldiers were not just challenged physically, but they were also mentally tested to ensure they are experts in their profession and standards,” said Sgt. Maj. Jerry Taylor, TRADOC’s G-3 sergeant major, who also oversaw the competition.

Bittner, TRADOC’s 2013 Soldier of the Year, said there is a lot of hands-on training that goes into the competition — in addition to the missions that must still be completed within each competitor’s unit. However, setting the example for his Soldiers is what kept him motivated.

“I feel great,” Bittner said. “The Soldiers below me get to see how far you can really go. I look forward to the next level, and I plan on winning it all.”

Because of reduced funding and the requirement to prioritize spending, TRADOC leadership decided to run the competition differently than in previous years. Some of the events, such as the Warrior Tasks and Battle Drills, were graded by the competing Soldier’s unit at location, and the land navigation event was conducted at the Noncommissioned Officer Academy nearest each competitor.

“In the past, there would be costs for travel, lodging and per diem for each competitor, and all of the support staff needed to run the competition for an entire week at a location, probably more than 70 people in all,” Taylor said. “Now, we cut costs by conducting some events at the competitors’ locations and other events virtually, using technology such as video conferencing.”

The culminating event in the competition was the final board appearance. Steele and Bittner, along with the other competitors, took turns answering challenging questions from a board of senior noncommissioned officers, including Taylor and TRADOC Command Sgt. Maj. Daniel Dailey. Although their chairs were seemingly right in front of the board, each competitor was actually facing a camera in a VTC room back at their home station.

Dailey said finding cost savings in annual competitions like the TRADOC NCO and Soldier of the Year is

important for the Army that is operating under tough financial conditions.

“This is important,” Dailey said. “Not only for the Soldiers that win, but important to resonate across the command with their leaders, peers, fellow Soldiers and noncommissioned officers because this builds esprit de corps. This is part of the Army Profession, and it sends



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the message that we are still an Army Profession, and even during a time of limited resources, we can still do what our nation asks us to do.”

Steele and Bittner will now represent TRADOC against other competitors — in person — from across the Army during the Best Warrior Competition held Oct. 15-17 at Fort Lee, Va.

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