

2015 NCO of the Year Was Motivated By Setting Example for His Soldiers

By Clifford Kyle Jones - Army News Service

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Sgt. 1st Class Andrew Fink first entered the 2015 NCO of the Year competition to inspire his Soldiers in the Army Reserve to great things.

"I'm a platoon sergeant, and I wanted to show them that being a reservist and being in the Reserves doesn't mean that you can't compete at a high level," he said during a visit to Fort Bliss in November. "I wanted to be that leader and that example that they could look to to inspire them to go outside their comfort zone as a reservist and to be successful."





Sgt. 1st Class Andrew Fink speaks to Class 66 of the Sergeants Major Course in November at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy. (Photo by Clifford Kyle Jones / NCO Journal)

It seems to have worked. In the months since he won the competition at Fort A.P. Hill, Virginia, one of his Soldiers has already been inspired.

"I had one of my Soldiers come up to me and say that he wanted to re-enlist if I would be able to sponsor him for next year's competition," Fink said.

Fink, a medic with the 409th Area Support Medical Company, 307th Medical Brigade, 807th Medical Command, in Madison, Wisconsin, represented U.S. Army Reserve Command at the annual competition that also selects the Best Warrior. He competed against representatives from 12 other commands.

"They're just great NCOs and competitors all around," Fink said of the 26 Soldiers and NCOs who participated at Fort A.P. Hill. "Everybody had a chance at the end to win, I was just lucky enough to come out on top."

Fink was visiting Fort Bliss with Command Sgt. Maj. Luther Thomas Jr., senior enlisted advisor for the Army Reserve. They spoke to members of Class 66 of the Sergeants Major Course at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy about the importance of the Reserve component to Army operations.

Fink was an active-duty member of the 75th Ranger Regiment of Fort Benning, Georgia, and deployed to Afghanistan twice as a combat medic with the 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment.

"I hesitantly transitioned into the Reserves after my four-year stint on active duty was complete in order to finish my degree and, honestly, so that I wouldn't be recalled," he told members of Class 66. "The [Active Component to Reserve Component] career counselor gave me a stabilization contract so that I couldn't be deployed and I would be able to focus on finishing my bachelor's degree."





Students in the Sergeants Major Course greet Sgt. 1st Class Andrew Fink after the 2015 NCO of the Year spoke to Class 66 in November at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy. (Photo by Clifford Kyle Jones / NCO Journal)

"I say 'hesitantly,' because I think anyone who has ever served on active duty either doesn't know what the Army Reserve is about or has at some point heard the bad impressions of some — not all — in the active component have" of the Reserves.

It turned out, though, that the Reserves were exactly what Fink needed.

"I certainly had no intention of staying in the Reserves, but I would not be standing here before you today if it were not for the Army Reserve, ..." he told members of Class 66. "I had lost something when I left active duty, and the Army Reserve enabled me to regain a sense of purpose and pride that civilian life alone could not do."

He credited a sergeant first class with working with him when he first started in the Reserves and gradually increasing his responsibilities until he was fully engaged. When an opportunity arose to return to full-time duty with the Active Guard Reserve, he took it.

Fink — and his Soldiers — are glad he did.

When he first flew back to Wisconsin after being named NCO of the Year, Fink said a large group greeted him.

"My whole full-time staff picked me up from the airport, which was awesome to see," he said. "It was in front of all the civilians (at the airport), and they didn't really know what was going on."

Later, he was recognized in a larger ceremony.

"To be able to share that experience with them in battle assembly, to kind of share the win with them — they were the majority of the reason why I was competing — and to have it brought home to the 409th and represent, it was a special thing," Fink said.

Thomas was especially proud of Fink's win, noting that representatives from the Army Reserve Command have taken the NCO of the Year title home two of the past three years.

"When I travel, I get the opportunity to meet Army Reserve Soldiers," Thomas said, "and these Soldiers are doing some phenomenal things."

Fink credits the support of his command and his training, both in the active and Reserve components, with helping him win the competition.

His command gave him "the resources and trainers that enabled me to get to that level."

His time in Advanced Individual Training and then Ranger School laid the foundations for his success in both the Reserves and the Best Warrior Competition, he said, noting that the competition consists of nothing beyond Level I or II basic combat skills.

And his time in AGR prepared him to deal with the stresses of competition.

"Being an AGR Soldier, I am asked to wear many hats," Fink said. "This gives me a breadth of knowledge that most Soldiers would not necessarily have."

As a platoon sergeant for Soldiers coming in on their Reserve training days and the training operations NCO during the week, he said, he's learned time management and the ability to "execute without instruction, which came in handy during my time in the Best Warrior Competition."

He has said this year's competition came with several surprises.

"We did a prone, unsupported zero with our M4 rifles," Fink said. "Typically, every Soldier is used to zeroing in the prone, supported position, so that was a little surprising. In another lane we had to crawl through a tunnel system, gather some intelligence the commander wanted, then they

called, 'Gas! Gas! Gas!' so we had to put on our protective mask and then file our report on what we observed.”

He said the scenarios they encountered throughout the competition were “incredible” and he praised the Asymmetric Warfare Group for “testing and training us.” The AWG coordinated the competition for the first time last year.

His toughest challenges in the competition were common Soldier tasks, though.

He said that, physically, the 12-mile ruck march that took place on the last day of the competition was his toughest event, because he's a little shorter than many of his competitors.

“The most mentally challenging event for me was probably the board,” he said. “Going in front of the sergeant major of the Army and all these other high-ranking sergeants major, you think you're ready for it until you walk in that door. It's kind of a mental trap.”

Still, he took the advice he regularly gives to his Soldiers and persevered.

“Keep driving on and never give up,” he said. “That's what I always tell my Soldiers. Be committed to excellence each and every day. There are going to be setbacks, but giving your best every day is what's important.”

The Army News Service contributed to this story.

Photos Below from the NCO of the Year Competition 2015









