



# Galloway takes Soldier mentality into ‘Dancing With The Stars’ finale

By Clifford Kyle Jones — NCO Journal

**T**hese days, Noah Galloway is a television celebrity, a magazine cover model, a personal trainer and a motivational speaker — but he never stopped being a Soldier.

When he takes the stage tonight to compete in the “Dancing With The Stars” finals, among his greatest advantages will be the work ethic, perseverance and endurance he developed as a member of the 502nd Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division.

“That’s what I feel my mission is now: to continue pushing hard and to show that even injured and out, I still have the Soldier mentality,” Galloway told the NCO Journal in a phone interview during a brief respite from preparing for the finale.

In December 2005, Sgt. Galloway was four months into his second deployment to Iraq when his Humvee was struck by an improvised explosive device. He awoke five days later, on Christmas Eve, in Walter Reed Army Medical Center. He had lost his left arm and his left leg below the knee. His right leg and jaw were also injured.

He grappled with adapting to life without two of his limbs. But adapting to life without the Army was as difficult.

“I struggled for a long time,” the 33-year-old said. “The biggest struggle I dealt with, aside from missing

an arm and a leg, was not being in anymore. I loved deployments. I loved my job. And suddenly, that was taken away. ... That bothered me for years.”

He started drinking too much. He was eating poorly.

He was suffering emotionally, but he wasn’t talking. He hid those struggles from his friends and his family, including his then-wife, Tracy, and his three children.

He has said that fatherhood finally motivated him to make a change. But it was fitness that helped him do it.

“Fitness is what got me out of my depression,” he said. “There were several other aspects, but fitness — changing my eating habits, getting back in the gym, and I started running races — that’s what uplifted me and pulled me out of that rut.”

Galloway eventually became a physical trainer and a motivational speaker, using his personal story to encourage others to get in shape and accomplish their goals. He calls his philosophy No Excuses. He has found a way not only to stay in shape, modifying exercises to work his left side, but also to run adventure courses across the country, including the Tough Mudder, Spartan events and Crossfit competitions, in addition to numerous 5K, 10K and half- and full-marathon races. He accepts no excuses from his clients, and he accepted none from his Soldiers.



Noah Galloway poses with his children. (Photo courtesy of Noah Galloway)

His older sister is an educator, and he says he learned from her that every child can excel if he or she is encouraged the right way. As a sergeant, he followed that same philosophy with his Soldiers.

“For example, I had two guys on my team,” Galloway said. “One, I could sit him down and say, ‘Hey, man, this is where you’re messing up.’ The other one, I had to use tough love. I told him, ‘If you do this, this is what your punishment is going to be,’ and I had to follow through with it. But the two of them were so different. Lots of times I would see other guys who would treat a whole group the same, and it doesn’t work that way because we’re all individuals.”

“The military is known for using punishment in a mass group. Even my girlfriend says she’s noticed that I do that with my kids sometimes. I’ll say, ‘Look, this is what’s going to happen if one of you does this.’ And, you know, that works. But when it comes to actually being successful, it’s knowing the individual person. That’s how you’re going to improve them as a Soldier, which makes you a better leader.”

Those are lessons that have served Galloway well in his new career as a personal trainer and motivational speaker (and, of course, as a father). It’s another aspect of his time in the Army that’s helped with his impressive turn on the dance floor.

“I’ll tell you, I think that my military experience has helped me with these end stages of ‘Dancing With The Stars,’” he said. “It hasn’t been extremely physical for me — it is very physical, I mean, it’s nonstop — but I came into it in great shape. And they were impressed with everything when I got here, which is an advantage because I’m working

a little bit harder than everyone else. Each week it’s not just let’s learn a dance, perfect it, be ready to do it on Monday. It’s, ‘OK, can you do this movement? Can I do this?’ So there’s an extra day and a half of just trying to see what I can physically do without falling over or whatever it is.”

At the beginning of this, the 20th, season, last season’s winner, “Fresh Prince of Bel Air” co-star Alfonso Ribeiro, spoke to the new cast and gave them some advice.

“On day one, he told a group of us that this is going to be the most tiring thing you’ve ever done, and it’s going to wear you out,” Galloway said. “And he was right on point.

This is extremely tiring and a lot of people who didn’t make it through the competition couldn’t have made it this far anyway because it is so tiring. But three months of 24/7 does not compare to a year deployment, and I keep that in mind.”

Galloway is as surprised as anyone by his success on the show. He has consistently said that he thought he might last two or three weeks before being sent home. When he reached week four, he and his partner, Sharna Burgess, performed an extremely personal dance that highlighted both what Galloway had lost and what he has achieved. The song was Toby Keith’s “American Soldier.” The dance opens with Galloway standing by a mirror, so his body looks whole, before the mirror is pulled away to reveal his missing limbs. It culminates with Galloway lifting Burgess with one arm and holding her aloft as the amazed audience gasps, then cheers.

It was a breakthrough for Galloway.



Sgt. Noah Galloway, right, poses for a photograph during his second deployment to Iraq. (Photo courtesy of Noah Galloway)



“That was the dance that really put in perspective for me what dance can actually do,” he said. “Now I understand more that you can tell a story in your movement and in your dance.”

It was a breakthrough for others, as well. In the video that aired on the show before the dance, Galloway talked about his emotional struggles. A friend of his, a veteran, called him after the show to tell him that another veteran struggling with his feelings had reached out because of Galloway.

“In the video that played before [the dance], I mentioned that the biggest mistake I ever made was not talking to anybody,” Galloway said. “It was enough to reach him. That veteran had called [my friend] to tell him that he needed to talk about some things. [My friend] said you need to know that if anything, one veteran was touched by that. And it was amazing to know that.”

Galloway started to realize the impact he was having on service members after he became the first reader-selected cover model for Men’s Health magazine. He said veterans and Soldiers from around the world, including some stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan, began to reach out to him to tell him what an inspiration he was.

“And then being on this show, the amount of people who have been in support of me, ...” he said. “I mean, even General Odierno shared one of my videos on his Facebook page. That’s why I feel like I’m still connected with all the men and women in uniform and other veterans.”

Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. Raymond T. Odierno shared the story of the standing ovation that followed Galloway and Burgess’ performance to “American Soldier.” Odierno’s only comment: “#inspired.”

Galloway said, “When I say I feel like it’s just my mission has changed, instead of being the guy on the front lines in the middle of the fight, I am the story that keeps them motivated when they’re away from home, when they’re deployed, when they’re pushing themselves more than they’ve ever pushed themselves before. I’m a reminder of what’s possible.”

It’s true. The thousands he’s inspired at races, the tens of thousands who saw his Men’s Health cover and the millions who cheer for him on “Dancing With The Stars” would agree. But Galloway is too humble to own it completely.

“Ugh, it sounds kind of cocky and arrogant when I say it out loud.”

Stephen Mills, executive director of Operation Enduring Warrior, says that Galloway has never been one to talk up his accomplishments and that his contributions extend far beyond what the television audience sees.

Mills and Galloway met through Mills’ nonprofit organization, which helps get injured veterans active by helping them participate in races and obstacle-course runs by providing schedules, encouragement and travel



Noah Galloway lifts his partner Sharna Burgess during the contemporary dance portion of “Dancing With The Stars.” Galloway and Burgess danced to Toby Keith’s “American Soldier.” Galloway’s one-armed lift brought the audience members to their feet. (Photo courtesy of ABC’s “Dancing With The Stars”)

expenses. OEW volunteers go further: They run with the participants, in fire-team-, squad- or platoon-style formations, and they do it wearing gas masks in honor of the obstacles injured veterans must overcome to race.

Galloway is an active OEW team member and has become friends with Mills and other members of the nonprofit’s board. Mills and his wife attended one of the episodes of “Dancing With The Stars” to show their support for Galloway. The same week they were there, Galloway had flown in a young double amputee, originally from Vietnam who has been adopted by a family in Missouri, to watch the show. Haven Shepherd, 12, lost both of her legs and her parents in a family suicide attempt. She hasn’t let that stop her from participating in races, and she had contacted Galloway to let him know what an inspiration he was to her. He worked with another nonprofit group to bring her to the show.

“When Noah came over prior to the show starting and talked to her, I mean, she was the happiest kid on Earth,” Mills said. “And he had other people, like Riker (Lynch, another finalist and brother of Disney Channel star Ross Lynch), come over and talk to her. And I think that’s something that Noah does that probably gets overlooked sometimes, because he’s doing things like that all the time and nobody truly highlights it and he doesn’t expect it.”

In fact, the very next week, Galloway helped bring another young amputee to the show, 8-year-old dancer Alissa Sizemore, who lost her leg in an accident. The “Dancing With the Stars” judges haven’t always been



Noah Galloway participates in an adventure race with other members of Operation Enduring Warrior. The nonprofit group pays for injured veterans to travel to and participate in the races. (Photo courtesy of Operation Enduring Warrior)

generous with Galloway's scores, but Alissa had no such reservations. "He was awesome," she told *People* magazine. "He makes it look easy."

Mills said Galloway's generosity has been — and continues to be — a great benefit to the veterans helped by Operation Enduring Warrior.

"He's very busy with what he's doing," Mills said of Galloway. "But he has his own charitable fund (called No Excuses) that he set up, and now he is taking money from that charitable fund and giving it back to Operation Enduring Warrior to help one of our programs where we can help more veterans get to races or go skydiving. So here's a guy who was wounded, who's joined the organization, and he has now found a way to use his celebrity not just to raise money but to give back to the organization."

Operation Enduring Warrior is one of Galloway's favorite charities because it helps veterans through one of his own passions, fitness, and because it keeps its focus so clearly on the veterans it helps.

"I mean if you're going to race, especially in a gas mask, you're going to have to train. And if you're training to do a race, well, you can't be sitting around taking pills, drinking, eating like crap," Galloway said. "And no one's expected to get out there and just be a beast in

their first race. That's one thing where a lot of veterans have struggled when they've gotten on board. No, we're all about working with whoever that veteran is to get through the course. I just love the mentality that they have: It's all about helping one another, and it has that physical fitness aspect to it."

After his first deployment to Iraq in 2003, Galloway said, he knew that all he wanted to do was be an infantryman, a Soldier. When an IED took that away, it was fitness that helped pull Galloway out of his depression. And it's fitness that has become his new mission, but those he served with and the lessons he learned in the Army stay with him.

"Ever since the invasion of Iraq, we've all had to deal with the people who say, 'We should have been there' or 'We shouldn't have been there' but to me, it doesn't matter," he said. "I was doing what was asked of me and I did it to the best of my ability and so did the men I served with. And that's what made me proud. I worked with all these guys who were tough as nails but then also had these big hearts. And we worked really hard at what we did. And that connection, I couldn't imagine finding anywhere else. I loved it. It was on that deployment that I knew that was all I wanted to do."

He doesn't wear a uniform anymore, but his new mission keeps him connected to his fellow service members and he continues to try to help them, just in a new way.

"I feel like I'm still a Soldier. For guys who are out, you've got to remember that you're still that Soldier, Sailor, Airman or Marine. We're all the less than 1 percent of the nation that was able to do what we do. Have pride in that. Don't lose that. I think of that when I think of people who really just kind of lose it and go crazy, ..." Galloway said. "The biggest mistake I made was not talking to anybody. And I see that now. It took me awhile. And it was a struggle. And being able to open up now takes all that weight off my chest.

"Fitness is what I love. Racing. It's my passion now that I'm out of the military. I've met with other veterans and told them, 'You don't have to get into fitness. You don't have to race. I don't care if you get into knitting. But if that's what you love, do it. And do it the best that you can.' You've got to have that thing. If you sit around and: One, don't talk to anybody, and Two, don't have any passion for anything, you will go crazy."

Since Galloway opened up and started following his passion, he's found fitness, fame, success — and love. Last week, during the semifinals of "Dancing With The Stars," he proposed to his girlfriend, who is also a Soldier, Army Reserve Spc. Jamie Boyd. Since Galloway made his first appearance on "Dancing With The Stars," she completed Basic Combat Training at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo. (She was released a couple days early, so she could surprise him after one of his performances.)

So now he'll be in the Army family in another way, as a spouse.

"I'll tell you what, when she went through basic training, being on the other side of that — being the one waiting — even though she was just in training," he said and paused. "That sucked."

But Boyd has graduated and she'll be in the audience tonight and tomorrow, watching along with millions of others in and out of the service as Galloway performs his last dances with the stars. But regardless of whether he walks away with the mirror ball trophy, you can trust this won't be his last competition. In one way or another, he'll continue to compete, to push himself, to strive — to Soldier on. ■

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