



U.S. Army Europe's command sergeant major, Command Sgt. Maj. Shery Lyon, and commander, Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges (right), congratulate USAREUR's competitors in the Best Warrior Competition, Soldier of the Year Spc. Jared R. Tansley, and third place NCO of the Year Sgt. 1st Class Elijah Dean Howlett. (Photo courtesy of U.S. Army Europe)

2015 Soldier of the Year is Already Eyeing His Next Title

NCOJ Staff Report

Spc. Jared Tansley wasn't surprised to be on the stage at the Sergeant Major of the Army's Awards Luncheon on Monday. And he expects to be back soon.

The 11B infantryman with 3rd Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment, in Vilseck, Germany, was named the winner of this year's Best Warrior Competition. He represented U.S. Army Europe.

"I always thought I would (win), because I was going to push myself forward and eventually accomplish as much as I can," he said in an interview after being named the Soldier of the Year. "And hopefully I can get the NCO of the Year in 2016."

This year's NCO of the Year wasn't always quite as confident about his success.

"They're just great NCOs and competitors all around" Staff Sgt. Andrew Fink said of the 26 Soldiers and NCOs who competed from the Army's 13 commands. "Everybody had a chance at the end to win, I was just lucky enough to come out on top."

Fink, a medic with the 409th Area Support Medical Company in Madison, Wisconsin, represented U.S. Army Reserve Command.

Fink said that until his name was announced Monday afternoon, he had no idea how he was doing. That's partially by design, he said. Organizers keep competitors separate as they participate in events, so keeping track of how they're faring compared to their opponents is nearly impossible.

"For me, the toughest part of the competition was the 12-mile ruck march, the very last physical event," Fink said. "Because I'm a little bit shorter, I have shorter legs, it's hard for me to keep up with those taller boys. But you have to just grit your teeth, go on and do your best."

This year's event marked several firsts for the competition. It was the first under Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel A. Dailey, and he refocused the already grueling events to be even more physically challenging. It was also the first year the competition was organized by the Asym-

metric Warfare Group, which was intended to simulate combat conditions even more realistically. Dailey also moved the bulk of the competition to Fort A.P. Hill, Virginia, because of the post's tougher terrain.

Most of the changes were designed to further challenge the competitors, but one of Dailey's adjustments may have frustrated others. He kept the names of the winners under tight wrap until his Awards Luncheon on Monday. In his opening remarks at the luncheon, Dailey said the Office of the Chief of Public Affairs wrote him



Spc. Jared R. Tansley is the 2015 Soldier of the Year. The 11B infantryman is with 3rd Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment, in Vilseck, Germany. (Photo courtesy of U.S. Army Europe.)

a three-page email explaining why that office should be notified in advance of the results.

"You know what it must feel like after you write a three-page note to the SMA, and you get a two-letter response back: No," he said. "No, because this is special, and it deserves to be special."

The "final" event at Fort A.P. Hill was the ruck march Oct. 7, but Dailey noted that even after the competitors were brought to Washington, they were always being monitored, graded. The group was invited by Dailey to participate in the Army 10-Miler on Sunday, and he said he promised them that after the tough week they had endured, he would maintain a leisurely 9- to 10-minute mile pace.

"They quickly found out that that turned into about a 6:30 pace, and you know what they said?" Dailey asked. "Hooah!" They showed up for that 10-mile run and said, 'I'll do it, sergeant major.' ... Thank God we have Soldiers like the ones who are going to be recognized today."

In addition to the physically challenging events, competitors are graded on their knowledge, composure under pressure and other mental tasks.

"This four-day competition tests aptitude, urban warfare, board interviews, physical fitness, written exams and warrior tasks and battle drills relevant to today's operating environment," said Gen. Daniel B. Allyn, vice chief of staff of the Army and the keynote speaker at Monday's Awards Luncheon. "The Best Warrior Competition recognizes Soldiers who demonstrate commitment to our Army values, embody the Warrior Ethos and represent the force of our future."

Fink noted that the skills tested are no surprise.

"They're all basic Soldier tasks, so it's something that every Soldier should be able to do," he said. "They just grade you as hard as they can."

Allyn noted that any day he could spend with Soldiers was a great day, and he lauded the quality of all U.S. Soldiers. "And frankly," he said, "the greatness of our Soldiers is inspired by the greatness of our Noncommissioned Officer Corps."

That high standard was evident in the 2015 NCO of the Year — not just in Fink's performance in the competition, but even in his reasons for participating.

"The driving factor for me to get going and started with these competitions was really my Soldiers," he said. "I wanted to show them that commitment to excellence. Being in the Reserve, you don't get a lot of opportunities, but when they do come along, you have to do your best, make a plan, stick to it."

"My training from active duty — when I was on active duty for four years — really helped me out a lot with that, being with the Ranger battalion and just that never-quit attitude," he continued. "I wanted to show my Soldiers that they could do that as well, that a Reserve soldier could go through the ranks and win this competition. Hopefully, I inspired them to do the same next year."

The Soldier of the Year isn't an NCO yet, but he's ready to return to his duty station and begin the transition to leader.

"I'm ready to set the standards for my men, the new team I got, and I'm eager to teach and learn," Tansley said.

Tansley was thankful for all the support he received from his command and his family, including his wife who helped him study with flash cards.

"Even my dog is going to be happy because all that running has paid off," he said.

The winners receive substantial amounts of recognition and gifts, but Tansley seemed most excited by one of the side benefits.

"I did get to meet the wonderful 11 Bravo hero Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel Dailey, and he is everything we always dreamed of," Tansley said after winning and he



Staff Sgt. Andrew Fink, the 2015 NCO of the Year, accepts his award from Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel A. Dailey (left) and Vice Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. Daniel B. Allyn. (Photo courtesy of U.S. Army)

noted that Dailey was proud that a fellow 11B infantryman had taken the title of Best Warrior.

“This whole event has made me realize a lot of things about myself, things that I can always improve on,” Tansley said. “When you’re trying to control the four fundamentals of marksmanship and treat a casualty at the same time, you realize in a stressful situation, you always need more and more practice to come out overall.”

COMPLETE LIST OF WINNERS

Soldier of the Year:

- Third place: Spc. Emanuel L. Moore, U.S. Army Special Operations Command
- Runnerup: Spc. Cruiser Barnes, National Guard
- Soldier of the Year: Spc. Jared R. Tansley, U.S. Army Europe

NCO of the Year

- Third place: Sgt. 1st Class Elijah Dean Howlett, U.S. Army Europe
- Runnerup: Staff Sgt. Kevin Simpson, Military District of Washington

- NCO of the Year: Staff Sgt. Andrew Fink, U.S. Army Reserve Command

Individual honors

The Best Warrior competition recognizes excellence in weapons qualification, a timed event that included hitting pop-up targets with three weapons systems; top scores on the Army Physical Fitness Test administered on the second day of the competition; and top finishers of the 12-mile road march, which included 35-pound packs for the Soldier of the Year competitors and 45-pound packs for the NCO of the Year competitors and required the marchers to find items as they marched.

- Top guns: Sgt. 1st Class Elijah Dean Howlett and Spc. Shane A. Sital
- Iron Warriors: Sgt. Michael L. Hooks, with a 316 score on the extended scale, and Spc. Jared R. Tansley, with a score of 321.
- Road march winners: Sgt. Robert Cunningham (2 hours, 13 minutes) and Spc. Emanuel L. Moore (2 hours, 11 minutes). ■

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