Reserve NCO, Soldier of Year named

By LTC Randy Pullen

WASHINGTON (OCAR News Release) — "I know you are anxious to hear the results of the board," understated the 2001 Army Reserve Noncommissioned Officer of the Year.

SFC Jody Wilson of the 94th Regional Support Command opened the third annual Army Reserve Soldier and NCO of the Year Recognition Banquet, held Aug. 17 at Fort Myer, Va., with these words.

SFC Paul Mantha receives his plaque from CSM of the Army Reserve Alex Ray Lackey.

She was addressing all those in attendance, but especially the nine Army Reserve soldiers who were sitting where she sat last year, all eagerly waiting to hear which of them would be named the 2002 Soldier and NCO of the Year. The suspense didn't last long because of a suggestion by them to the Command Sergeant Major of the Army Reserve.

Wilson and SGT Jean Stackpole, the 2001 Soldier of the Year, had mentioned to CSM Alex Ray Lackey that because the results of the competition were not announced until after dinner, they and the other 2001 nominees had not been able to enjoy the meal. To eliminate the suspense and allow for better digestion, Lackey accepted their recommendation and began the banquet by announcing the selections.

SPC Charlene Dominguez, 818th Adjutant General Company, 90th RSC, was named the Army Reserve's 2002 Soldier of the Year.

SFC Paul Mantha, Office of the Chief, Army Reserve, was named the Army Reserve's 2002 NCO of the Year.

Speaking to the banquet attendees, LTG James R. Helmly, Chief, Army Reserve, said that recognizing the achievements of these top soldiers was the right thing to do and that he was honored to be among them.

"I can think of nothing more humbling than to be among American soldiers," Helmly said. "For 227 years, this Army has been the vanguard of freedom."

The Chief of the Army Reserve paid tribute to the family members, whose sacrifices allow their loved ones to serve.

Helmly noted that Wilson and Stackpole had both gone up in rank since last year's award ceremony and that Stackpole had added something else to her uniform beside sergeant stripes. She now had jump wings on her uniform, having recently completed Airborne School.

"Airborne, sir!" yelled Stackpole.

Helmly personally congratulated the Soldier and NCO of the Year. He told the nominees that they were all winners, the best soldiers and NCOs of their commands, with each possessing the "warrior ethos" of being a soldier who takes on a challenge and goes at it with everything he or she possesses until told to slow down. He told them not to slow down. Instead he wanted them to take on new challenges, to go back to their units to train and lead soldiers and prepare them for the war America is now waging.

"Our nation is at war," Helmly said. "It is not a war of our choosing. But we will not back down. And we will win this war."

He charged them with remembering those who had assisted them to reach the top. He also said they should go back home, thank all who had helped them along the way, and then begin training and mentoring those who will follow them and aspire to be what they are, the very best.

Besides preparing soldiers for the global war on terrorism and molding future leaders, Helmly also asked for help from the soldiers and NCOs before him in transformation.

"To transform as we must will require the very best in leadership," Helmly said. "I see quite a bit of leadership in front of me right now, leadership ready to come up with the solutions and ideas we need."

The banquet was the culmination of three busy days for the competing soldiers and months of work by the NCOs of the Army Reserve, who planned, organized and then conducted the competition

After all the stress and excitement, after all the awards, the 2002 Army Reserve NCO of the Year reflected on the most memorable part of what had taken place.

"The one thing that stands out the most to me," said Mantha, "is how much of an honor and a privilege it was to compete with the best NCOs in the Army Reserve from all over the world."

Also recognized at the banquet were MSG David Gravunder, the Reserve Instructor of the Year; SSG Charles Alden, the Reserve Recruiter of the Year; SSG James Kolky, the Reserve Retention NCO of the Year; and SSG Triscel Webb, the Reserve Equal Opportunity Advisor of the Year.

LTC Pullen is the Public Affairs Officer, Office of the Chief, Army Reserve.

Fort Leonard Wood drill continues post's streak; Reservist Meister leads from start

FORT MONROE, Va. (TRADOC News Service) – SSG Randy Cheadle became the fifth straight drill sergeant from Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., to win the active Army Drill Sergeant of the Year title. Reserve Army Drill Sergeant of the Year SFC Tobias Meister, 95th Division (IT), led this year's competition from the beginning on June 18.

LTG Dennis Cavin, commander of the Army Accessions Command and Deputy Chief of Staff for Initial Entry Training for Training and Doctrine Command, officiated at the ceremony.

Cavin said drill sergeants are highly prized throughout the Army after they finish their tours training new soldiers.

"I often get calls from division commanders and corps commanders saying, 'Send me some drill sergeants,'" he said. "It's not that their platoons are short or their companies are short. It's because they know what they get when an NCO comes to them who wears that distinctive patch — a patch that says without words, role model, coach, mentor, trainer — someone of extraordinary ability to fill the ranks with competent and confident fighting men and women."

Cheadle is a drill sergeant with B Company, 795th Military Police Battalion, at Fort Leonard Wood. He went on the "trail" last year after finishing as the Distinguished Honor Graduate of his drill sergeant school.

He has been an MP at Fort Carson, Colo.; Hanau, Germany; and Fort Bragg, N.C. Cheadle has also deployed to Desert Shield/Desert Storm, Saudi Arabia; Operation Restore Hope, Somalia; and Operation Joint Endeavor/Joint Guard, Bosnia, among others.

He joined the Army in March 1989. He and his wife, Terry, reside at Fort Leonard Wood with their two children.

Meister, from Tulsa, Okla., joined the Iowa National Guard in 1992 two years before graduating from Remsen-Union Community High School, Remsen, Iowa.

He also served with the Texas Army National Guard before joining the 95th Division, headquartered in Oklahoma City.

Meister is a former middleweight Golden Gloves champion in Dallas, and had an undefeated career in kickboxing. His athleticism was showcased when the Drill Sergeant of the Year competition began Tuesday with the Army Physical Fitness Test. He finished first in the two-mile run and did 100 push-ups and 114 sit-ups.

In his civilian life, Meister works for Horizon Natural Resources, an independent oil and gas company, in Tulsa.

Cheadle and Meister were presented the Meritorious Service Medal and a $500 savings bond from the Army. They also received awards from the Army Times, Noncommissioned Officers Association, Association of the United States Army, Armed Forces Insurance, American Military Society and First Command Financial.

The 17 other drill sergeant competitors received the Army Commendation Medal.

SSG Randy Cheadle

SFC Tobias Meister

Fort Hood soldier becomes AG NCO of Year

By SPC Stephanie Shepard

"I'm here if you need anything."

These comforting words are what many distressed soldiers hear from a noncommissioned officer who has made it her goal in life to put soldiers first.

Because of this and many other noteworthy qualities, a voting panel at Fort Jackson, S.C. chose SFC Linda M. Kessinger to be the U.S. Army Adjutant General NCO of the Year.

She is the 3rd Personnel Group's equal opportunity NCO and so much more, said COL Ron Higham, the commander of the 3rd Personnel Group.

When the order first came down to find aspirants for the prestigious award, Kessinger began looking for other soldiers worthy of the nomination.

"She's always looking out for the junior NCOs, and always trying to empower them," said CSM Annette Joseph, command sergeant major of the 3rd Personnel Group and Kessinger's current supervisor.

CSM Bobby Sanders, command sergeant major of 502nd Personnel Service Battalion, and Kessinger's previous supervisor, ended Kessinger's hunt by naming her a candidate.

"I didn't say *no*, and I didn't say *yes*. I wasn't looking for my name to be in the spotlight," said Kessinger. "I know competitions are very widespread out there, and it's very competitive to win anything."

Sanders put the paperwork together and gave it to Joseph to sign.

In April, a panel at Fort Hood, Texas chose Kessinger to be its Adjutant General NCO of the Year, so her paperwork was sent to Fort Jackson. In May, Kessinger was chosen to be the U.S. Army Adjutant General NCO of the Year.

Joseph and Higham were at Fort Jackson when the decision was announced.

"When they read out her name, I started jumping up and down and yelling, 'that's my soldier,'" said Joseph. "The people there probably thought I was the one who won with the way I was carrying on."

"There were other senior NCOs competing for the award, but there are aspects about Kessinger that set her above the rest," Joseph said.

Kessinger was at home with her husband when Joseph called with the news.

"My first reaction when I heard was a big smile on my face, and then I turned to my husband and said 'I won,'" said Kessinger. "I was so thrilled because to get something of that prestige is pretty cool."

Many of her peers, leaders and soldiers deem her more than worthy of the recognition.

"There is nobody who is more deserving of this award," said SGT Audrey Riley, administrative assistant to Higham, and a soldier Kessinger's supportive nature has touched.

Kessinger firmly believes in the importance of mentoring soldiers, she said. So when Riley's own NCOs wouldn't go that extra mile to guide her through promotion board preparation, Kess stepped in and took over.

"She would stay up with me until midnight to help me study for the board," said Riley. "That was my first board I had ever gone to. She was that one who got me through, and at the end, I came out of that board with 149 points out of 150."

"There are no other NCOs like her," said Riley. "She is so far above her peers that it's unreal."

Kessinger feels she needs to help out in every way she can, she said. "I don't care if you're my soldier or not. If you're somebody who needs help, I will do everything in my power to help."

The reason why is because she thinks that "it's very important to help soldiers because they are the future," she said. "If I don't answer their questions, and the next NCO doesn't answer their questions, then they will think that we don't care. The soldiers need to know that there are NCOs out there who care."

Kessinger loves being a direct influence in the development of a soldier, but as an EO officer, she feels she doesn't have that kind of interaction with soldiers.

"As an EO, I don't have any soldiers, and that's what hurts me the worst," said Kessinger, but she doesn't let that stop her from using her job as a means of being there for soldiers whenever she can.

"My job is important because the soldiers know that I'm there even if I'm not their first-line supervisor," said Kessinger. "They are always free to talk about what they want to talk about."

Her love of what she does, and her dedication and determination to be a guiding light for anybody who needs it is why she won, said Joseph.

"The military is my life. The soldiers are my life," Kessinger said.

That's why Kessinger's next goal is to become a first sergeant. She wants to be more of an impact on the progress of future NCOs for tomorrow's U.S. Army.

SPC Shepard is assigned to the 4th Public Affairs Detachment, Fort Hood, Texas.

Alaska Guardsman wins endurance race

By Jamie Dvorak

Imagine the most brutal environment an Alaskan winter can summon. Now, imagine a 100-mile race through it.

Sean McPeck, an Army ROTC cadet and an Alaska Guardsman, tackled exactly that in winning the Susitna 100, this spring. The race is an ultimate endurance event that has even been named *Alaska's toughest human-powered ultra-marathon.*

Growing up in the Knik Valley, McPeck is accustomed to rough conditions. McPeck's father homesteaded land outside Palmer, Alaska, and expected Sean to be self-reliant and hard working. Without the modern luxuries of running water and electricity, going through hard times wasn't occasional, but a daily way of life. Along with his upbringing, McPeck's active-duty military training as an Army Ranger in the 3rd Ranger Battalion and his five-hour training runs in Fairbanks helped McPeck in his five-month preparation for the event.

When asked whether or not he would be sleeping, McPeck replied that his "goal was to not sleep, as long as his body could hold up."

Although no fatal injuries have occurred in the 5-year history of the Susitna 100, competitors have and will continue to suffer frostbite and hypothermia, the two most common injuries of this sport. This fact alone justified a checklist of required survival equipment that included a minimum amount of food and a pot capable of melting snow and a minus-20 sleeping bag, among other items.

McPeck, along with the other participants, also used a sled because when you're relying on foot power, hauling 20 pounds on your back over 100 miles of rotten, "punchy" snow is extremely difficult.

Apart from contending with sub-zero temperatures, McPeck, along with the other 50-plus athletes, had to deal with barely distinguishable terrain and navigate through a trail marked only by four-foot wide snow machine trails that run for miles across lakes and rivers and through breaks in the tree line. Although the trek was unbelievably taxing on all competitors both mentally and physically, the trails would have been impossible to find without these tracks.

The race began at Big Lake Lodge in Wasilla, Alaska, and traveled 100 miles as it made a "lollipop," ending where it began. There were 14 checkpoints along the trail and a time limit of 48 hours.

Dvorak is with the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, Army ROTC program.

Army paratrooper defends duathlon title at 44

Courtesy U.S. Army Southern European Task Force (Airborne) Public Affairs

CSM William "Wade" Gunter successfully defended his world championship title Aug. 18 in the International Triathlon Union's Duathlon World Championship in Weyer, Austria.

Running in the over-40 Clydesdale Division (200-plus pounds), Gunter, 44, finished the 97-kilometer course in 4:11:24. The event featured a 14-kilometer run and a 76-kilometer bike course, followed by a run of another seven kilometers.

As an Army paratrooper, Gunter is accustomed to pushing himself.

"I hate anyone being able to outdo me. I talk a lot of trash sometimes, so I have to back it up," Gunter said.

As the command sergeant major of the Army's 173d Airborne Brigade in Vicenza, Italy, Gunter is the highest-ranking enlisted man in the unit and must continually lead his soldiers by example.

"He's kind of like a poster child for any leader. I'm really, really proud of him," said COL William Mayville, 173d Airborne Brigade commander.

Gunter has been competing in duathlons since he gave up competitive wrestling in 1986. His training routine includes lifting weights throughout the year. He does most of his running in the morning during physical training (PT) with his soldiers. Occasionally, he runs during the mid-day to get his body accustomed to the heat. He cycles regularly, too, either on the indoor trainer in his office, or during long outings on the roads in and around Vicenza.

"I want to have the mental toughness the young soldiers have. I can achieve this through working out more than the young soldiers," Gunter said.

Originally from Melbourne, Fla., Gunter joined the Army in 1977. He says competing in duathlons is "just a hobby," but he has competed in about 400 events.

"I like to challenge myself for my own athletic achievements. I like to look at it as an additional preparation for combat," Gunter said.

Currently ranked No. 1 in his category by *Inside Triathlon* magazine, Gunter also won the last two U. S. titles and captured his first world title last year in Venray, The Netherlands.

In addition to being an extraordinary athlete, Gunter is a combat veteran. He saw action as an infantryman in Grenada in 1983 and Operation Desert Storm in 1991.