



(From left) RDECOM Command Sgt. Maj. Lebert Beharie congratulates the newly selected APG Noncommissioned Officer of the Year, Staff Sgt. Thomas Walker of ATEC, as Staff Sgt. James Colling, Sgt. Joshua Boggess, and Staff Sgt. Christopher Gilbert look on at the conclusion of the NCO and Soldier of the Year selection board at Billingsley Hall April 23. Photo by Yvonne Johnson

Top NCO, Soldier selected

By Yvonne Johnson

APG News

Staff Sgt. Thomas Walker of the U.S. Army Test and Evaluation Command and Spc. Taylor Sykes of the 22d Chemical Battalion (TE) outshined competitors to be named the Aberdeen Proving Ground Noncommissioned Officer and Soldier of the Year after selection board proceedings at Billingsly Hall April 23.

The two will be honored during the Military Appreciation Week Luncheon hosted by the Harford County Chamber of Commerce May 15 and will be tasked to represent APG during programs and events throughout the coming year. It is the second consecutive year that an ATEC NCO won the top honors. Board president, Command Sgt.

Maj. Lebert O. Beharie called the group of competitors “highly professional” and said they represented their units well. The two winners simply rose above their competitors, he said.

“This is easy for us because we have all the answers. But for these Soldiers to be able to sit here and keep their composure under all this pressure the way they did is commendable. In the end they [Walker and Sykes] stood out as the most professional.”

Though he had no vote, Beharie said he based closing questions on observations from the Soldiers’ board packet or the sponsors’ Leader Book. *“If I observe a problem I need to make sure they’re aware of it and that they need to fix it,” he said. “I also make recommendations when needed.”*

For example, in acknowledgement of two female sergeants major on the board, Beharie recommended that male Soldiers take the time to ask female NCOs about their careers and experiences.

“The only way we can gain their perspective; to understand the Army through their eyes, is to ask them. You have to walk a mile in someones’ shoes to understand what they go through,” Beharie said.

Board members included Sgt. Maj. Adrienne Harris, 1st Area Medical Laboratory; Sgt. Maj. Alicia Singer, U.S. Army Public Health Command; Master Sgt. David Henderson, 20th CBRNE Command; 1st Sgt. Paul Cottrell, U.S. Army Test and Evaluation Command; and 1st Sgt. David Griego, 22d Chemical Battalion (TE).

Sponsors reported to the board members prior to the candidates. With Leader Books in hand they answered questions about their Soldier or NCO and then took a seat. After knocking loudly, candidates entered the room, executing sharp facing movements while centering themselves in front of and reporting to the president. After more facing movements during which board members observed the candidates uniform and decorations, the candidate is seated and instructed first share their background goals and reason they should be selected and then respond to questions from the panel.

Board members delivered a series of questions ranging from Military Customs and Courtesy, to Land Navigation, the Army Physical Fitness Test, Drill and Ceremonies, the Uniform Code of Military Justice, and much more. At the end, scores were tallied by Board Recorder Sgt. Christopher Serna of CECOM and then

Staff Sgt. Thomas Walker

Walker thanked all who supported him through his quest, especially Parker.

“Thanks to everyone who pushed me and believe in me,” he said.

Walker’s sponsor, Master Sgt. Linwood Parker, also sponsored last years’ NCO winner. Parker said he expected only the best from Walker.

“His job is to take care of Soldiers every day and that’s what he does,” Parker said. *“He’s a hard worker in a leadership position who consistently distinguishes himself. We expected him to win.”*

Spc. Taylor Sykes

Sykes said he felt confident after his appearance before the board. *“I feel I did well; I know I did my best,”* he said, adding that it took a moment to sink in when he heard his name announced as the winner. *“I was surprised and relieved. I felt I was prepared and that confirmed it.”*

The explosive ordnance disposal specialist added that he plans to complete his education before leaving the military and pursue a civil service career.

The candidates

Candidates for NCO of the Year included Sgt. Joshua Boggess, 1st AML; Staff Sgt. James Colling, 22d Chem.; and Sgt. Eric Jimenez, PHC.

Competitors for Soldier of the Year honors included Spc. Stephen Murray, USAPHC; Spc. Christopher Roper, 20th CBRNE Command; and Pfc. Gina Esposito, 1st AML.