

## U.S. Army Europe and 7th Army

contact: paoci@eur.army.mil  
phone: 49-6221-57-5815 / DSN 370-5815  
fax: 49-6221-57-6376 / DSN 370-6376



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### U.S. Army Europe paralegal Soldiers compete for top Soldier, noncommissioned officer titles

By Sgt. Daniel J. Nichols

U.S. Army Europe Public Affairs Office

**HEIDELBERG, Germany** -- "The JAG Corps is really small, but we have a lot of pride, and it's a pretty distinguished thing to be competing," said Sgt. Karen Shevelev, halfway through the U.S. Army Europe Paralegal Noncommissioned Officer and Soldier of the Year competition.



SGT DANIEL J. NICHOLS

Pfc. Hannah Alojado, 39th Transportation Battalion, 21st Theater Sustainment Command, a competitor in the U.S. Army Europe Paralegal Soldier of the Year Competition, breaks into a run during the 4-mile rucksack march portion of the Oct. 24 event. Five USAREUR Judge Advocate General Corps Soldiers competed in the daylong challenge.

Shevelev, a military justice paralegal NCO with the Southern European Task Force Staff Judge Advocate office, was one of five USAREUR Judge Advocate General Corps Soldiers who took on the he daylong competition here Oct. 24.

Competitors spent months training for the event. Each had to compete in and earn top honors in competition at their respective organizations before moving up to the USAREUR-level event.

Participants said the focus of all the competitions was on total Soldier skills, not just a test of legal know-how.

"This competition is important because it is going to identify the best paralegal specialist and NCO in USAREUR, and it's also going to test their abilities as a Soldier," said Master Sgt. Darrel Wade, SETAF chief paralegal NCO, who was present at the event as Shevelev's sponsor.

"Everyone, no matter what their (Military Occupational Specialty), is a Soldier first," said Shevelev.

The competing Soldiers began the competition day at 4:30 a.m. by preparing for an Army physical fitness test an hour later. After a quick change of uniforms, the group set off on a 4-mile rucksack march to the range in Oftersheim for their next test -- qualifying on their assigned weapons.

After the range, the competition moved into more academic challenges. Competitors completed a written test covering Soldier and job skills, took a quick break to grab lunch and change into Class A dress uniform, and ran through last-minute preparations for the competition's final event: an appearance before a board of senior USAREUR Office of the Judge Advocate NCOs.

"When it comes down to it, I really believe the board is the hardest part," said Sgt. Maj. Louis DiNatale, command paralegal NCO with the USAREUR Office of the Judge Advocate, who served as the panel's president. "They've been challenged physically all morning ... at the board they have to keep it together. They can't doze off, they can't gaze, they have to come up with the answers right then, and there's no second chances."



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Spc. Michelle Lathe, the pretrial noncommissioned officer-in-charge for the V Corps Staff Judge Advocate office, takes aim at the Engagement Skills Trainer range simulator during the weapons qualification event of the U.S. Army Europe Paralegal Soldier of the Year competition in Heidelberg, Germany, Oct. 24.

something because it's not something everyone can do," said competitor Sgt. Sierra Caldwell, 1st Armored Division SJA pretrial NCO-in-charge.

At the end of the long day of competing, Shevelev was named USAREUR Paralegal NCO of the Year and Spc. Michelle Lathe, pretrial NCO-in-charge for the V Corps SJA earned the title of USAREUR Paralegal Soldier of the Year.

Louis said it was inspiring to see young troops proving their mettle as experts in their chosen field and as Soldiers.

"It lets me know that when it comes time for me to take my rucksack off, that I have Soldiers who can continue the mission and do it in an outstanding fashion," he said.

As for the competitors, several said it was an honor and achievement to be able to compete at this level at all.

"I think that even if you don't win, you feel great. You feel like you've accomplished

Lathe said she originally entered the competition to prove to herself that she was capable of competing and earning the title. “I am proud to have been the one chosen to represent V Corps in this competition,” she said. “The blisters were worth it.”

“She worked hard for this,” added Staff Sgt. Dejan Pajic, Lathe’s supervisor at the V Corps SJA. “From doing extra PT, rucksack marches, and studying for hours -- she is simply one of the Soldiers you can always count on to accomplish a task to the highest standards.”

In addition to their titles, Shevelev and Lathe earned Army Commendation Medals for their efforts.

DiNatale said Shevelev will also be submitted as the USAREUR nominee for the Sgt. Eric L. Coggins Award of Excellence, a Department of the Army award for outstanding paralegal Soldiers.



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