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Hometown News Release

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Franklin Guardsman named brigade Soldier of the Year

FRANKLIN, Tenn. – A Franklin Guardsman competed in the 30th Troop Command’s Best Warrior Competition and was selected as the Soldier of the Year at Tullahoma’s Volunteer Training Site, Oct. 24.

Spc. Benjamin Cunningham, a combat medic with the Tennessee Army National Guard Medical Detachment in Smyrna, competed in his first Best Warrior Competition against eight top candidates. Soldiers and Airmen were evaluated through a series of events such as a stress shooting course, an 8-mile ruck march, weapons qualifications, a combat run, land navigation course, the Army Combat Fitness Test, and an inspection board.

Cunningham trained vigorously for two months with Staff Sgt. Daniel Baggett, the 2020 noncommissioned officer of the year, and Sgt. William Lukens, the 2021 Army National Guard Soldier of the Year.

“Overall, the event showed me that I have a lot more gas in my tank, even if I feel like I’m on empty,” said Cunningham. “Staff Sgt. Baggett and Sgt. Lukens were integral in teaching weapons skills, combat tasks, and working on physical endurance and mental resilience.”

Cunningham will compete in the next phase of the competition in February 2022 with National Guardsmen from across the state for a chance to earn the title of Tennessee’s Soldier of the Year.

“I’m expecting longer events, more intricate tasks, shorter breaks, and tougher competition,” said Cunningham. “It will be a longer, more grueling marathon.”

Cunningham enlisted in the Tennessee Army National Guard in January 2020 and works as an emergency medical technician in his civilian career. He is currently applying to nursing school programs and plans to use the Tennessee STRONG Act to pay the cost of tuition.

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Spc. Benjamin Cunningham, a combat medic with the Tennessee Army National Medical Command Detachment in Smyrna, conducts the leg tuck event of the Army Combat Fitness Test. Cunningham won the Soldier of the Year at the 30th Troop Command's Best Warrior Competition at Tullahoma's Volunteer Training Site on Oct. 24. He will compete in the next phase of the competition in February 2022 (Photo by Sgt. James Bolen Jr.)

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