



From left to right, the AIT Platoon Sergeant of the Year, Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Russell; the Drill Sergeant of the Year, Staff Sgt. Jonathan Miller; and the Army Reserve Drill Sergeant of the Year, Staff Sgt. Christopher Croslin. (Photos by Jonathan (Jay) Koester)

# Drill Sergeants, AIT Platoon Sergeant of the Year announced

*By Jonathan (Jay) Koester*

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**T**he final day of the 2014 Drill Sergeant and AIT Platoon Sergeant of the Year competitions began with the nominees going through a formal board, and ended with the announcement of the winners.

The 2014 Drill Sergeant of the Year is **Staff Sgt. Jonathan Miller** of the 787th Military Police Battalion, 14th MP Brigade, at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.

The 2014 Army Reserve Drill Sergeant of the Year is **Staff Sgt. Christopher Croslin** of the 95th Training Division, U.S. Army Reserve, at Norman, Okla.

The 2014 AIT Platoon Sergeant of the Year is **Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Russell** of B Battery, 1st Battalion, 78th Field Artillery Regiment, at Fort Sill, Okla.

Miller, who also took home the 1st Sgt. Tobias Meister Award for achieving the highest score on the Army Physical Fitness Test during the competition, talked about the emotions he felt when he heard his name called.

"I knew it was a tight race from the very beginning," he said. "Really, to hear my name called, was overwhelming. I

was filled with emotions, a lot of pride, honor. This competition was truly the most difficult, most challenging, the best competition that I've ever been a part of. So for that, I'd like to thank Drill Sergeant [David] Stover [2013 Drill Sergeant of the Year] and Drill Sergeant [Ryan] McCaffrey [2013 Army Reserve Drill Sergeant of the Year] and their team for really putting together a tough, awesome competition."

Now Miller steps into Stover's shoes. The three winners move into new jobs at the strategic level at U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, a special perk of winning this special competition. Miller said he was looking forward to his new role.

"As we move forward, as we progress, as our Army evolves, I just want to make sure our Soldiers, our NCOs, our officers are getting the very best training," he said. "I want to make sure that we continue to develop the absolute greatest training for our Soldiers."

For Russell, the applause of the crowd after his name was announced was lost in the thrill of victory.



From left to right, the AIT Platoon Sergeant of the Year, Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Russell; the Drill Sergeant of the Year, Staff Sgt. Jonathan Miller; and the Army Reserve Drill Sergeant of the Year, Staff Sgt. Christopher Croslin. (Photos by Jonathan (Jay) Koester)

“My heart was pounding all the way up until my name was said,” he said. “Then the immediate rush was gone, and it was complete silence. I couldn’t hear a thing. It means a lot. I hope I can get up there and change how things are run and better the program.”

During the 5-mile ruck march on the first day of competition, Miller, Russell and Croslin were ahead of the pack. As they walked, they began to talk and realized

they were each from different components, and, if things worked out, they could be the three winners.

“All three of us kicked off and were rucking together, and we came to the conclusion that we weren’t competing against each other,” Russell said. “We ran together and kept pushing each other to keep going. We all looked at each other and ... figured out that all three of us could potentially move on and be working together for the next year.”

After a bit of hesitation, Croslin agreed that the three competitors came together during that first ruck march.

“Well, what happens on the ruck march stays on the ruck march,” he said. “But I will say that we knew at that moment that the three of us were definitely big competitors for our respective components. We

also knew that the other sergeants were just as willing to win as we were and just as capable of winning. So, we just made a pact to push each other through all the physical events. It wasn’t something that was necessarily said. You just knew after that ruck march that we were going to push each other.

“In the 10-mile ruck march following, that’s exactly what happened,” Croslin said. “There were many times that



The 14 competitors prepare to learn who will be named Drill Sergeant and AIT Platoon Sergeant of the year.





Command Sgt. Maj. (Retired) Allen Carpenter speaks at the awards ceremony Thursday at Fort Jackson, S.C. Carpenter was the first Drill Sergeant of the Year.

I wanted to slow down, but I saw my two competitors up there in front of me and we just kept driving each other.”

As for his new position at TRADOC, Croslin said he was honored to be able to step into such an important role for the Army.

“I’m definitely looking forward to doing big things for the Army,” he said. “It’s one thing to be able to be part of a Soldier’s life when you are training them at basic training. You have 60 Soldiers at a time, and to be able to train those Soldiers and know that your training is personally affecting the rest of their careers — and you are setting the foundation for the rest of their careers — it’s important. Well, now we’re in a position where we are affecting the entire Army. We’re affecting all the training that goes on in the Army. To be able to even make a little bit of a shift in the positive direction with your influence is phenomenal. It’s such an honor to be in a such a big position in the greatest force in the world.”

In a special moment for all the competitors, they got to hear from the first Drill Sergeant of the Year, Command Sgt. Maj. (Retired) Allen Carpenter. Carpenter was introduced at the awards ceremony by Command Sgt. Maj. Dennis Woods, command sergeant major for the U.S. Army Center for Initial Military Training at Fort Eustis, Va.

“This is a year of firsts,” Woods said. “This is the first year that we’ve come up and and started a national Drill

Sergeant Association. This is the first year that, here at Fort Jackson, we’re establishing a Drill Sergeant Hall of Fame. What we want to do with this is have a reminder of the past that made possible our present, and we want to honor the past that makes possible our future. And I am here to introduce the first Drill Sergeant of the Year, to commemorate all these other firsts, Command Sgt. Maj. (retired) Allen Carpenter.”

Carpenter said he was thrilled and honored to share the stage with all the competitors. He spoke of the NCOs’ drive to be better.

“When these competitors got up this morning, and they looked in the mirror, they saw honor and pride,” he said. “But there was a shadow of discontent in the back of their minds. They knew they had put forth their best effort in the tasks, and the tasks were complicated and challenging. But that little bit of disappointment was there. Right now, they feel honor, but at the same time, in the back of their minds, they are wondering about that little bit of disappointment. Well, there is no room for disappointment in this group. Whether they come out first, or they come out last, it doesn’t matter. They should be honored, because they are here.”

However, Carpenter couldn’t resist taking a few digs on some newer Army traditions.

“Whoever come up with ‘hooah’ must have been smoking rope,” he said to nervous laughter from the



Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Russell, B Battery, 1-78 Field Artillery Battalion, Fort Sill, Okla., (left to right), Staff Sgt. Christopher Croslin, 1st Brigade, 95th Training Division, Norman, Okla., and Staff Sgt. Jonathan Miller, 787th Military Police Battalion, 14th MP Brigade, Fort Leonard Wood., Mo., lead the way during the ruck march on the first day of competition. The trio ended up being the three winners of the competition.

crowd. “Don’t ‘hooah’ me. What happened to ‘Yes, sir. No, sir. Yes, sergeant major. No, sergeant major. Yes, 1st sergeant. No, 1st sergeant. Yes, sergeant. No, sergeant.’”

To be a part of this moment, to stand on the stage with the first Drill Sergeant of the Year, and to share the moment with two great NCOs — two NCOs who he got

to know back on that first ruck march — was something special that can never be taken away, Miller said.

“To be here on the 50th anniversary of the drill sergeant program, to share that honor and legacy, is forever going to be with us,” he said. “To be a part of that is the single most proud moment in my life.” ■

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