



A poster for the 50th anniversary of the U.S. Army Drill Sergeant School was signed by all the attendees of the drill sergeant reunion Sept. 12 at Fort Jackson, S.C. At left is the signature of the 2014 Drill Sergeant of the Year, Staff Sgt. Jonathan Miller. (Photo by Jonathan (Jay) Koester)

Week of Competition Ends with Drill Sergeant Reunion

By Jonathan (Jay) Koester

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A week of competition wrapped up with a night of memories as the U.S. Army Drill Sergeant School celebrated its 50th anniversary with the opening of a Drill Sergeant Hall of Fame and a drill sergeant reunion dinner at Fort Jackson, S.C.

More than 300 people attended the dinner Sept. 12, and another 500 watched the festivities online through a live feed, said Sgt. Maj. Thomas Campbell, the G3/5/7 (operations/plans/training) sergeant major for the U.S. Army Center for Initial Military Training at Fort Eustis, Va. This year was the first drill sergeant reunion, but there now will be one every year to coincide with the AIT Platoon Sergeant and Drill Sergeant of the Year Competitions.

Each year, the events will take place the week of Sept. 10th (the date the Drill Sergeant School was founded), with the competitions running Monday through Thursday, and the reunion dinner on Friday.

"There are people right now making plans to attend the 51st anniversary reunion because they couldn't make the 50th," Campbell said.

Conrad Ragland, who was a drill sergeant from 1996 to 1998, and who retired from the Army in 2004, said he was glad drill sergeants were starting to get some of the recognition they deserve.

"[Coming to a drill sergeant reunion] is something that I always wanted to do," Ragland said. "I always felt that there was something that was missing. They never

recognized the drill sergeants. So, I just wanted to come and be a part of this and meet people who I hadn't met before. It's been excellent, and I've run into a bunch of friends that I was 'on the trail' with."

Fred Glenn served in the Army for only three years. But two of those years were as a drill sergeant. Glenn served as a drill sergeant at Fort Bragg in 1966 and 1967 after he did a tour of duty in Vietnam.

"When we were pushing troops at Fort Bragg, I had already done a tour in Vietnam," Glenn said. "So when I came back to the States, they sent us to Drill Sergeant School because of our experience in the infantry.

"I just felt it was my duty, once I was a drill sergeant, to train them best I could," he said. "There was no way we could train them for all they were going to face over there in those jungles. But what we could try to do is train them to stay alive and help their fellow Soldiers. My thing was the four life-saving steps. We lost a lot of troops because they bled out or went into shock and just died. So I focused on teaching the Soldiers the life-saving steps. I just felt like it was a blessing that I was in that position to give them the experience I gained from my tour in Vietnam."

As one of the oldest attendees, Glenn said he wanted to attend the 50th anniversary reunion because he wants to make sure he remains part of the history.

"I came through Fort Jackson as a trainee 50 years ago, this year," Glenn said. "And then for me to be trained as a drill sergeant in 1966, it was only two years after the whole drill sergeant program started, so I feel like I'm part of the history. I'm here representing. I see these young drill sergeants, and they are emulating what we started. That's why I came, because I feel like I'm part of the history."

Regina Farrow, a drill sergeant from 1987 to 1989, admitted her years as a drill sergeant weren't easy and weren't filled with rosy memories. But she came to remember, nonetheless.

"Out of 21 years in the Army, the two years that were so challenging for me as a noncommissioned officer were those two years that I was on drill status," she said. "Coming back is part of healing. I feel good here now. It feels good to sit back and say everybody here has been where I've been at. They might not have had the same struggle, but we've all been through the drill sergeant program and got something in common."

As well as the first reunion, the year marked the beginning of a new U.S. Army Drill Sergeant Association, and the start of a Drill Sergeant Hall of Fame located at the Drill Sergeant School at Fort Jackson.

"On Sept. 13, we had the first Drill Sergeant Association meeting ever," Campbell said. "It's brand new, but it's growing rapidly, faster than we can keep up with."

Those wanting to be a part of the Drill Sergeant Association can get more information at the association web site, www.armydrillsergeants.com.

"From that page, they can join, they can pay their dues, they can buy drill sergeant memorabilia," Campbell said. "We're going to build a drill sergeant brick garden at the Drill Sergeant School, and they can go in there and buy bricks to go in the garden. And we're not going to seal the time capsule until later in the year. So if they still want to put stuff in the 50th anniversary time capsule, they can get information on how to do that." ■

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