

Camaraderie boosts USASMA's newest students

By Staff Sgt. Timothy D. Hughes

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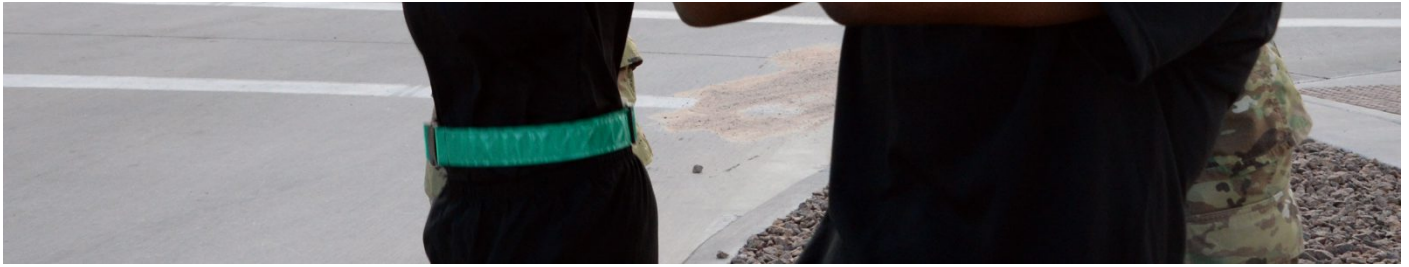


A student in the Sergeants Major Course at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy performs push-ups Aug. 25 during an Army Physical Fitness Test on Biggs Park at Fort Bliss, Texas. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Timothy D. Hughes)

When Soldiers see sergeants major walking to formations across the Army, many feel a sense of pride and respect for the position a select number of career Soldiers are entrusted with.

Many times, Soldiers go as far as fixing the pockets on their trousers when they see a sergeant major within their line of sight to ensure they have no uniform infractions.





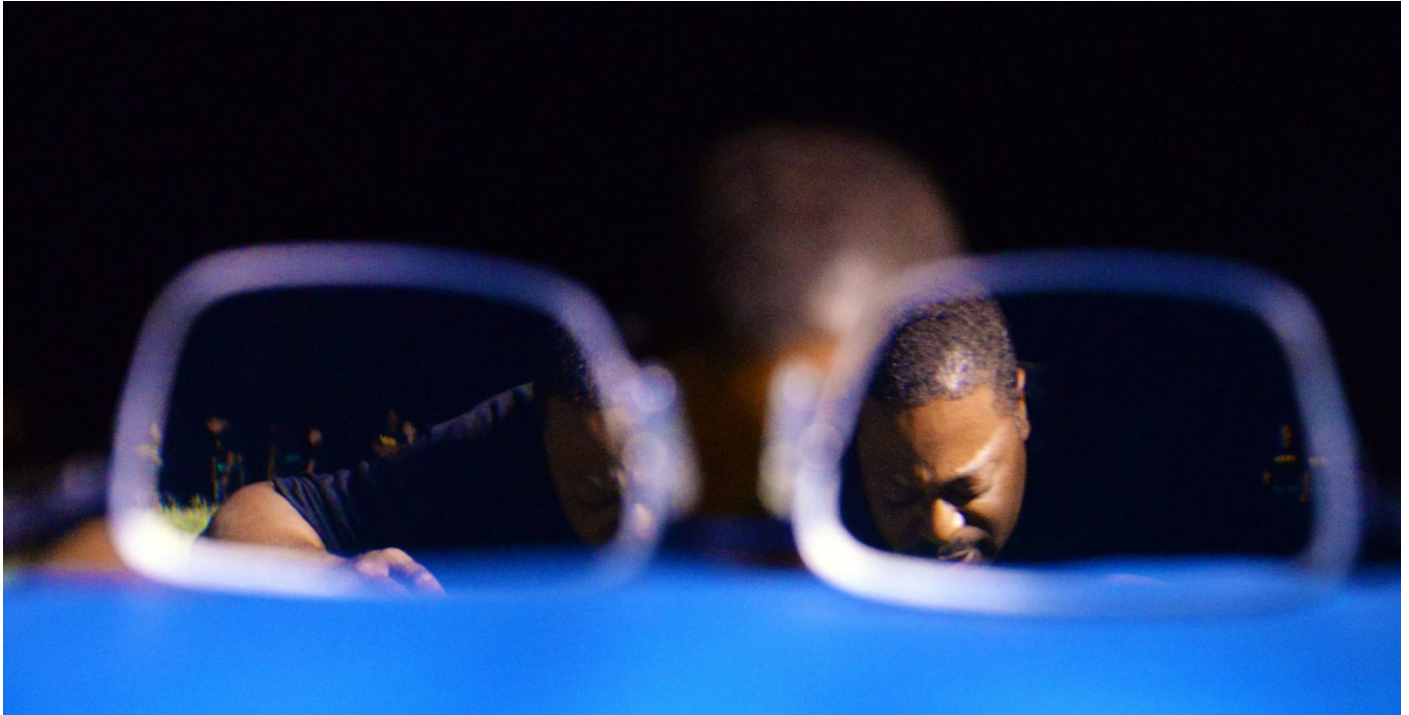
Master Sgts. Latevia Williams-Green, Racheal Terrell, (back right to left) Tiny Jones, and Mildred Lara, students in the Sergeants Major Course, United States Army Sergeants Major Academy, encourage classmates during an Army Physical Fitness Test Aug. 25 at Fort Bliss, Texas. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Timothy D. Hughes)

Respect for the position did not happen overnight. The rank of sergeant major was established in 1958 and has been worn by the likes of the retired Sgt. Maj. of the Army William O. Wooldridge, and Command Sgt. Maj. Cynthia Pritchett, the first female to be nominated to compete for sergeant major of the Army (twice).

No matter the pedigree, their journey had to start somewhere.

Enter the Sergeants Major Course in the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas. The academy was established in July 1972 and is hosting its 67th iteration of resident NCOs.

Class 67 features master sergeants, sergeants major from the Army Reserve and National Guard components, and equivalent ranks from various branches of the U.S. Armed Force and 39 international allied-partner nations.

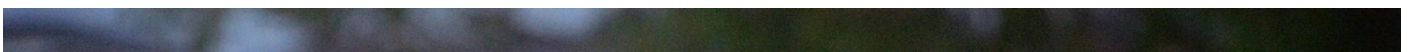


A student in the Sergeants Major Course at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy rests after competing his push-ups during an Army Physical Fitness Test on Aug. 25 on Biggs Park at Fort Bliss, Texas. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Timothy D. Hughes)

The 10-month-long course covers a range of topics including ethics, oral and written communications, counterinsurgency operations, the legal process, strategic concepts, and the joint operation planning process.

Like other NCO Professional Development Schools, no one — regardless of rank or position — is accepted into the academy without passing the Army Physical Fitness Test, which on Aug. 25 brought out the best in the classmates who displayed remarkable camaraderie after being together for fewer than three weeks.

"We are building relationships that [will] help us move forward with this class for the next 10 months," said Master Sgt. Latevia Williams-Green, a student at the course.





Australian Army Warrant Officer Darren Murch, staff group advisor, Sergeants Major Course, United States Army Sergeants Major Academy, gives marching commands as students transition to the run event of an Army Physical Fitness Test on Aug. 25 on Biggs Park at Fort Bliss, Texas. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Timothy D. Hughes)

"Camaraderie is important ... we're all in this journey together," said the Estill, South Carolina, native. "We started together and our goal is to actually finish together."

The contagious feeling of camaraderie was not limited to the students as it spilled over to the hardened veterans of the academy's cadre.

"It makes me feel really good to see the camaraderie," said Sgt. Maj. Kerry Guthrie, the chair of the Department of Command Leadership of the Sergeants Major Course.

"It helps the students very much because they are from all different [military occupational specialties]," Guthrie said. "It allows them over the time of the course to establish relationships with each other and network."

The challenging graduate-level course may not always be so light-hearted. The students are required to pass 19 exams and eight written assignments.

Although it is not a requirement, students who have not obtained a degree will have the opportunity to do so while at the academy.

"It's all about education," Williams-Green said. "Every chance you get to try to learn or take some classes — get there! The opportunity's there for us to get degrees and attend different [NCOPDSs]. We just have to take advantage of it."

The class is scheduled to graduate next June after USASMA fulfills its mission: to provide professional military education that develops enlisted leaders to meet the challenges of an increasingly complex world.