

Dailey, Predecessors Select First ‘Honorary Sergeant Major of the Army’

By Clifford Kyle Jones - NCO Journal

April 12, 2016



Retired Gen. Gordon R. Sullivan, center, was honored as the first “honorary sergeant major of the Army” by Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel A. Dailey, right, and five former sergeants major of the Army.(Photo by Spc. James Seals / NCO Journal)

A former chief of staff of the Army received an equally impressive title on April 12, 2016 — the first honorary sergeant major of the Army.

Retired Gen. Gordon R. Sullivan was honored by current Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel A. Dailey and five former SMAs during Dailey’s first International Training and Leader Development Symposium, held April 12-14 at Fort Bliss, Texas. The conference brought together dozens of U.S. and international senior enlisted leaders.

Sullivan, who was chief of staff of the Army from 1991 to 1995, was honored to be selected as the first to receive the title.





Gen. Gordon R. Sullivan, chief of staff of the Army from 1991 to 1995, ran his fingers through the campaign streamers on the flag of the U.S. Army and said, "This is the essential nature of the Army." (Photo by Spc. James Seals / NCO Journal)

"I'm kind of speechless to tell you the truth, ..." he said. "A sergeant major of the United States Army? Are you kidding me? I wasn't always a four-star, and some of the best [mentors] I ever had were noncommissioned officers in the United States Army in some really bad places."

Dailey said he consulted with former SMAs and his current leadership when he had the idea to honor a person who had demonstrated a lifelong commitment to Soldiers, NCOs and officers. He said the honorary SMA title will only be bestowed once a year and only with the approval of three acting or former SMAs. He said he consulted with many more of his predecessors for this first year, and the decision was unanimous. In fact, there was only one nomination.

Dailey announced Sullivan would be the first honorary sergeant major of the Army at the Association of the U.S. Army meeting last year, but there hadn't been time for a ceremony.

"Today, I'd like to formally recognize Gen. Sullivan as the first honorary SMA but also as a great mentor, a great leader and a great Soldier, through his entire life, who still to this day represents who we are and what we stand for," Dailey told attendees at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy just before the conference's keynote address.

The 15th sergeant major of the Army was joined on stage by the eighth, the 10th, the 12th, the 13th and the 14th.

Former Sgt. Maj. of the Army Julius W. Gates, who served from 1987 to 1991, said Sullivan "was always concerned with just a few things — Soldiers, Soldiers' families, training and getting the job done. ... I have a lot of respect for him."

Gates also had the honor of being the first to salute Sullivan when he received his fourth star.

"I said, 'Sir, you owe me \$10,'" Gates said he told Sullivan after that salute.

"What?!" an incredulous Sullivan replied.

"When you're promoted to second lieutenant, the first person to salute you, you have to pay them \$1," Gates said he told Sullivan. "You're an O-10, you owe me \$10."

Gates said Sullivan refused then, but about a week later, he presented Gates with a plaque — a \$10 bill in a frame.

"I still have that plaque today," Gates said.

Former Sgt. Maj. of the Army Gene C. McKinney, who served from 1995 to 1997, said one of the most impressive things Sullivan did was selecting "one of the best sergeants major I've ever worked with," Richard A. Kidd, as his SMA from 1991 to 1995.

McKinney also praised the general's stewardship and assistance throughout his own promotion and tenure as SMA. "He really took care of me mentally throughout the whole process."

Former Sgt. Maj. of the Army Jack L. Tilley, who served from 2000 to 2004, noted that he was in the Army for 36 years.

"Of all the officers that I ever had the opportunity to work with, Gen. Sullivan is by far one of the most professional, most dedicated and most supportive of the noncommissioned officer corps,"

he said. "He's an officer who didn't just talk about taking care of us, he took care of us. ... It's such an honor for him to be one of us, but I'll tell you, he's always been one of us."

Retired Sgt. Maj. of the Army Raymond F. Chandler, who was SMA from 2011 to early 2015, agreed.

He said the No. 1 thing that stands out about Sullivan "is and has been and will be his commitment to the noncommissioned officer corps."

"Throughout the entire time that I've known him, he has been committed to NCO development and also the empowerment of noncommissioned officers to do their job," he said. "He holds the NCO Corps in high regard."

Chandler, who was also the first enlisted commandant of USASMA, said Sullivan's commitment to NCOs was one of the reasons he was among the first people inducted into USASMA's Hall of Fame.

As chief of staff of the Army, Sullivan's contributions to the NCO education system include overseeing the establishment of the Battle Staff NCO Course in 1991, which has since trained thousands of NCOs. He also helped usher in video teletraining, which was first used in the Primary Leader Development Course, one of the precursors to today's Basic Leader Course. He was responsible for taking the Sergeants Major Course from six months to nine months and shifting the focus to battle staff training for division- and corps-level assignments.

Former Sgt. Maj. of the Army Kenneth O. Preston noted that Sullivan has continued to help the Army through his work at AUSA and by continuing to be involved in NCO instruction.

"Gen. Sullivan has continued to take care of Soldiers and their families each and every day."

Sullivan is still a frequent visitor to USASMA and speaks with sergeants major to be, and he continues to be impressed with the quality of the NCO Corps.

"I've been coming here for 25 years, and I've seen lots of changes in the NCO Corps over 25 years — all for the better," he said.