

Class 61 is in session



Class 61 students Master Sgts. Richard M. Peterson, left, and Matthew T. Gruidl.

By Cindy Ramirez

Photos by Pfc. David M. Gafford

With the presentation of the colors for all the Army's components, its sister services and numerous countries from across the globe, Class 61 of the Sergeants Major Course was formally welcomed to the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas, in August.

"Congratulations, this is a huge milestone in your career," Sgt. Maj. of the Army Kenneth O. Preston told members of Class 61 during the Opening Day Ceremony at USASMA. "You are the best across the board, and you have a very unique opportunity to learn from each other here."

Class 61 comprises 328 students, including 46 international students representing 38 countries. This year for the first time, the flags of the international students' home countries were presented as part of the opening ceremony.

"Standing here today, representing your country or your nation or your service component is quite an honor, and I hope over the next year you have an opportunity to reflect over that and your accomplishment in making it to this point," Command Sgt. Maj. Raymond F. Chandler, USASMA commandant, told the class. "But it doesn't end here. For us in the Army, lifelong learning is something that we're inculcating across the NCO Corps. For us, this is just a step in the journey."

Members of Class 61 said they were impressed with the ceremony, many of them noting the diversity of their peers in

nationality as well as military background and experience.

"To see all those flags up there from all those countries and our sister services next to our flags, that really touched me," said Master Sgt. Ruth Potter, a member of Class 61. "It really struck me as appropriate at a time when we're talking about unifying nations."

Potter said she is looking forward to learning from her fellow classmates. "All of us coming together to share our knowl-



Sgt. Maj. of the Army Kenneth O. Preston

edge and experience is what really has me excited."

Preston asked three things of the members of Class 61: that they learn, spend quality time with their families and build lifelong friendships. Preston told members of the class their selection was testament to their mastery of the "how to" at the tactical level and to their expertise in training and preparing Soldiers for their duties on and off the battlefield. Nearly

51 percent of the Sergeant Major Course students have served three or more deployments, and 57 of these Soldiers have deployed five times or more in their careers.

More so, however, Preston said, the students' selection to the course is testament to their "potential as leaders at higher levels of responsibility."

EXTENDED LESSONS

The class will graduate in June 2011 under an extended 10-month course schedule. The course was six months long before 1995, when it was extended to nine months. This year, the course was extended another 30 days to accommodate the vast amount of material presented and to allow students time to better absorb and understand the course curriculum.

The Sergeants Major Course underwent a major transformation last year, with a tougher curriculum heavy on critical thinking and problem-solving, intense college-level reading and challenging writing assignments, said Command Sgt. Maj. David L. Yates, director of the course at USASMA. The course material was previously delivered primarily through lectures and multiple-choice tests, he said.

"Bring it on," said Master Sgt. Michael Clauss, a Class 61 student, adding that aside from the classroom lessons, he is eager to learn from his peers. "The most powerful tool I get from NCO schools, and that I hope to get here, is what I learn from my fellow students. There's a wealth of knowledge to tap into."

Learning blocks in the course focus on joint, interagency, intergovernmental and multinational operations; counterin-



From left: Class 61 members Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Rodney L. Stovall, Army Reserve Master Sgt. Maneasseaha R. Bartimus and Italian Republic Master Sgt. Gianluca Mattei present their flags.



surgency; force management; and advanced warfighting.

BACK TO THE BASICS

Yates said while the curriculum won't change much from last year's, the focus of many discussions will "go back to the basics, looking at the leadership manuals more than we have in recent years."

"We'll have to knock the dust off the field manuals and Army regulations," Yates said. "I think we had drifted away from the manuals and focused a lot on strategic concepts. We kind of lost focus on involved leadership, and that's what really counts."

Yates explained refocusing on strong leadership is especially important given the Army's suicide rates, increased on- and off-duty accidents, and other such issues that could be curbed, in part, with the help of stronger senior NCO leadership and involvement.

Also new this year, the course will have two or three instructors per classroom, in some cases pairing Soldiers with Army civilians or contractors, many of them retired military.

"Having two instructors in the classroom is going to be great," Yates said. "You'll have twice as much experience to share with the students."

"And it's also easier on the instructors, to allow them to

work closer with the students and have the support of a second or even third instructor who may have stronger expertise in a different area than they do," Yates added.

THE ROAD TO CSM

The 328 students make up a much smaller class than in years past; Class 60, for example, had more than 600 students. The smaller number is due to changes in the Command Sergeant Major/Sergeant Major Management and Utilization Program.

"The smaller class reflects how many open billets Human Resources Command thinks are going to be open in the next two years," Yates said. "We suspect our enroll-

ment will increase next year."

The new noncommissioned officer career management program will centrally select Soldiers for command and key billet assignments through open competition and selection boards much like that of the officer corps.

Under the changes, sergeants major must spend two years working in their military occupational specialties before they're eligible to compete for a command sergeant major position.

The Army will hold annual boards to select candidates to serve as command sergeants major at the brigade or battalion level.

The selection preference window for the command sergeant major brigade selection boards in October opened in July and is available through Sept. 15.

Board appointments will take effect in fiscal year 2012. Battalion-level boards will be held in January.

The Sergeants Major Course is considered the pinnacle of the NCO Education System, established in 1971. The Sergeants Major Course has graduated more than 21,000 students since its inception in 1973. 🇺🇸



Command Sgt. Maj. Raymond F. Chandler, U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy commandant, and Command Sgt. Maj. David L. Yates, Sergeants Major Course director, unveiled a proclamation by the City of El Paso, Texas, declaring Aug. 12, 2010, as "Sergeants Major Academy Day" during the Class 61 Opening Day Ceremony.

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