

Job of a Drill Master

In a small office decorated with Marine Corps art resides a Marine whose duties go unknown to the visitors of each graduating company on the depot.

Gunnery Sgt. Michael J. Mullins ensures perfection in almost every ceremony that takes place here. He is the Recruit Training Regiment drill master and takes charge of the three battalion drill masters on the depot.

Mullins, a native of Annapolis, Md., joined the Marines Dec. 12, 1990 with no intention of becoming a regimental drill master—a billet held by only two Marines in the Marine Corps. The other drill master is at Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, S.C.

After four years working as an ammunition technician, he took on the task of being a primary marksmanship instructor at Weapons and Field Training Battalion, Edson range, Camp Pendleton, Calif.

When he completed two years of teaching recruits how to accurately fire their weapons, he returned to his previous military occupational specialty before he decided to become a drill instructor in 1997.

After three years on the drill field Mullins returned to the Fleet Marine Force where he spent another five years as an ammunition technician. He then returned to the depot for another tour as a drill instructor.

Only six months into his second tour aboard the depot he was hand-picked by the sergeant major of RTR in 2005 to serve the Marine Corps as a regimental drill master.

"His love of the drill field brought him back," said Staff Sgt. James D. Doss, narrator, RTR and native of Indianapolis. "The way he talks and feels about drill is beyond comparison of that of his peers."

Mullins works with officers and depot staff by going over the ceremonial routine to perfect each graduation. In addition to these responsibilities, he is also tasked with coordinating retirement ceremonies, change of command ceremonies and most recently, the enlisted Marine Corps birthday ball.

Throughout an individual's career in the Marine Corps, he will be reintroduced to the basics of drill that were first brought to his attention in boot camp. Whether it is simply standing at attention or saluting an officer, drill is something a Marine encounters daily.

"I've been out of boot camp for more than a year now, and I still use drill for things like physical training and ceremonies," said Pfc. John A. Chretien, depot combat camera. "It was instilled in us for a reason. Everything we learned, we use."

While the recruits are in boot camp, their drill instructors teach them everything they need to know about drill whether it is standing in formation for uniform inspections or reporting to a new unit. The drill masters from each battalion help test these skills during drill competitions, where they critique the drill instructors' recruits and recommend improvements.

Mullins has to ensure that each battalion is consistent in its execution of drill movements. His peers say he meets and exceeds the standards of drill master by going out of his way to seek perfection in all that he does.

One of the purposes of drill is to instill discipline and instant, willing obedience to orders in the recruits who pass through the depot during their 13-week training cycle.

"A basically-trained Marine is introduced to the basics of drill throughout training, whether it is in the squad bay or on the parade deck," said Mullins.

Drill in itself is the building-block from which all recruits learn how to be Marines, Mullins said.

Drill instructors spend more time on drill than anything else in boot camp, he added. Everything recruits go through is important, and the discipline they need to accomplish those tasks is provided through drill.

Drill has been an essential part of the Marine Corps' past and will continue to be a part of its future. Although some aspects may change, the concept of drill assisting in the making of Marines will remain the same, said Mullins.