

West African recruit discovers family in company, Corps

BY SGT. SHAWN DICKENS
Chevron staff

When Pvt. Mohamed Sesay left Dallas 13 weeks ago and arrived here at the depot, he knew he was in for a challenge. What he didn't know was that he would be greeted by someone who had made the same journey he had several years prior, someone who just so happened to be family.

Although Sesay came here from Texas, he was actually born and raised in Freetown, Sierra Leone, a West African country bordered by Guinea to the north and Liberia to the southeast. The Civil War of Sierra Leone had just recently started in 1991 and fighting was breaking out all over the country.

"My father left Freetown when I was 2 and came to the United States to try and start a better life for us here because of the civil war that was starting," said Sesay. "My mother eventually came over as well, while my brothers, sisters and I stayed in Freetown with my uncle."

As the fighting spread through the country, his uncle was forced to relocate, taking Sesay and his siblings with him.

Around his 10th birthday, Sesay and the rest of his family were able to reunite with their parents in the states. It wasn't until he got to San Diego, however, that he would meet a possible family member he didn't know made the trip to the United States.

When Company G classed up 13 weeks ago, there were two Sesay's on its roster: One recruit and one drill instructor.

Sgt. Yusuf Sesay, drill instructor, Co. G, came to America in 2001 from Sierra Leone, joined the Marine Corps, and was waiting for his new group of recruits when Recruit Sesay arrived.

Although he would be in charge of a different platoon than the one recruit Sesay was assigned, he noticed the name right away.

"The name Sesay is unique," said Sgt. Sesay. "I know for a fact that we are related, but I just don't know how."

Because he is a drill instructor, rules dictate that the sergeant can't have a personal conversation with a new recruit. But as Co. G graduates this week, that status of drill instructor and recruit becomes one of fellow Marines and they can talk about how they are related.

"I never favored him because of the relationship we may have," said Sgt. Sesay.

Although there was never any favoritism, Sgt. Sesay gave Pvt. Sesay special attention in the way drill instructors are famous.

"My platoon got in trouble one day and were getting some extra attention," said Pvt. Sesay. "Drill instructor Sgt. Sesay came over and focused on me. At the time, I didn't realize it, but now it is kind of funny that Sesay was yelling at Sesay."

After graduation Pvt. Sesay will continue on to combat training at the School of Infantry West, Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif., before continuing on to his military occupational specialty training where he will learn to be a food service specialist, training he hopes to use later in life to open his own restaurant in Texas.

"There are a lot of African immigrants where I am



Pvt. Mohamed Sesay, Platoon 2146, Co. G, responds to his drill instructor during a rappel class at the depot rappel tower, March 26. Sgt. Shawn Dickens/Chevron

from and I want to eventually go back and open a restaurant that specializes in African-style food," said Pvt. Sesay. "So they can have a place to go and not only get a meal that reminds them of home, but also relax and have a good time."

As Pvt. Sesay begins his journey as a new Marine, Sgt. Sesay will begin preparing to receive his next group of new recruits. Both, however, will leave graduation this week with the knowledge that they are both members of the Marine Corps family, and possibly each other's family as well.

Co. G drill instructor gains experience, enlists at 31



Sgt. Patrick Sheedy, drill instructor, Platoon 2141, Co. G, instructs recruits on how to prepare the Service Alpha uniforms for the Battalion Commanders Inspection. Lance Cpl. Rebecca Lamont/Chevron

BY LANCE CPL. REBECCA A. LAMONT
Chevron staff

Many young men and women leave for recruit training with memories of their high school prom still freshly imprinted in their minds. Others arrive years after high school. One drill instructor, after having

earned two college degrees and several years of work experience, celebrated his 32nd birthday in a recruit squad bay.

"Enlisting in the military was something I wanted to do since high school," said 37-year-old Sgt. Patrick Sheedy, drill instructor, Platoon 2141, Company G. "As time passed, I knew I was pushing the cut-off age of enlistment and that I had to go before I was 32 years old."

Prior to reaching that point, Sheedy worked at United Parcel Service of America while attending Mohawk Valley Community College, Utica, N.Y., where he obtained an associate degree in advertising and design. Seeking an advanced education, he later earned a Bachelor of Science in graphic design from Cazenovia College, Cazenovia, N.Y.

Once he obtained his bachelor's degree, he worked as a manager for a shipping company for more than five years.

As manager, Sheedy was responsible for 45 drivers, trained new drivers and worked a variety of shifts, including night shifts. "I tried for the longest time making use of my degree," said Sheedy, a Syracuse, N.Y., native. "I was making decent money, but it wasn't all fulfilling. I finally realized this job wasn't aggressive enough for me."

Once Sheedy a decision to enlist in the Corps, he had to pass physical performance test to receive an age waiver. After he received his waiver, he was at recruit training a week later.

"There were other recruits that were only a couple

of years younger than me, so it didn't really bother me," said Sheedy. "I was in physically good shape so I didn't feel like I had a disadvantage."

As for the drill instructors, he knew they had years of experience in the Corps and many had deployed in the past, so he respected that, Sheedy said.

"I never have taken age into account," he said. "I just treat people based on their professionalism."

Before he was a drill instructor, Sheedy's military occupational specialty was assault amphibious crewman.

"Initially I was put into artillery but because I had a swim qualification of level two, I was moved over to the amphibious side," said Sheedy.

"I am very happy where I am," said Sheedy. "I may be a few years behind my peers, but all my previous experience helped me to where I am now."

"The maturity I gathered from my previous jobs helped me tremendously as a noncommissioned officer," he said.

After three deployments to Iraq, Sheedy feels having the experience prior to enlisting aided him in adapting to the conditions of combat and deployments.

"I think there are some advantages to joining as late as I did," he said.

Sheedy never got into trouble as a junior Marine, and he thinks his age and maturity were contributing factors.

"I look forward to what's ahead of me," said Sheedy. "I have 20 more years to advance in my career and better myself."

Sgt. Maj. Ramona D. Cook

Parade Reviewing Officer

Sgt. Maj. Ramona D. Cook was born in 1962 in Los Angeles. She reported to Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, S.C., in September 1982. On December 5, 1982, she was declared a Marine, and departed MCRD Parris Island as a proud private first class.

In December 1982, she reported to Marine Corps Communications and Electronics School, Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, Calif., and later received her military occupation specialty of aviation radio repairer. In January 1984, Cook reported to Marine Air Control Squadron 4, Okinawa, Japan. While in Okinawa, she participated in Operation Team Spirit in Pohang, South Korea, and was promoted to corporal in May 1984. In February 1985, she reported to Headquarters/Headquarters Squadron 38, Marine Air Control Group 38, El Toro, Calif. In November 1985, she was meritoriously promoted to sergeant and

began serving in a new MOS, maintenance management specialist.

In June 1990, she was promoted to staff sergeant, and later transferred to Headquarters Battalion, 1st Marine Division, Camp Pendleton, Calif., as the battalion maintenance management chief. In 1993 she reported to Marine Wing Support Squadron 372, Camp Pendleton, and was promoted to gunnery sergeant in March 1995. In April 1995, Cook reported to Drill Instructor School, MCRD Parris Island. Upon graduation, she was assigned to duty as a drill instructor in Company N, 4th Recruit Training Battalion. While at Parris Island, she also held the billets of senior drill instructor, series gunnery sergeant, and was the first company first sergeant for the newly-activated Co. P.

In August 1997, Cook again reported to MACS-4, in Okinawa. There, she held the billet of squadron maintenance management chief until May 1999, when she was promoted to first sergeant. She then reported to H&S Bn, 1st Force Service Support Group, to serve as the Service Company first sergeant, and the Combat Service Support Detachment 34 first sergeant. During this time, she

participated in Operation Ulchi Focus Lens '99 in Pohang, South Korea. In July 2000, Cook returned stateside, and reported to Weapons and Field Training Battalion, MCB Camp Pendleton, Calif., to assume the duties as the Range Company first sergeant.

In February 2003, she was promoted to the rank of sergeant major. That month she deployed with her new unit, Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 462, in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom until September 2003. In October 2004, Cook deployed to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom until March 2005.

In May 2005, Cook was recognized by the Congressional Caucus for Women as the Outstanding Female Marine SNCO for May 2004 through May 2005.

In January 2006, Cook reported to H&S Bn, School of Infantry where she served as the battalion sergeant major, until January 2007. In March 2007, Cook reported to Okinawa, Japan, and served as the director of the Staff Non-commissioned Officer Academy until December 2008.

In February 2009, Cook reported to Camp Pendleton to assume her new

duties as the Marine Corps Base sergeant major.

Her personal awards include the Meritorious Service Medal with gold star in lieu of second award; Navy Marine Corps Commendation Medal and two gold stars in lieu of third award; the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal, with three gold stars in lieu of fourth award; and various campaign and service awards.

