



Drill sergeant candidates from the active component Army, Army Reserve and National Guard receive on-the-spot corrections from Staff Sgt. Logan Robbins, a drill sergeant leader, on “zero day” at the U.S. Army Drill Sergeant Academy at Fort Jackson, S.C. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Brian Hamilton)

Army Learning Model Changes Drill Sergeant Training

By David Vergun

Army News Service

Feedback from the field regarding the Army Drill Sergeant Academy’s change in August 2014 to Army Learning Model training is positive, said Sgt. Maj. Ed Roderiques, the academy’s deputy commandant.

Army Learning Model is the informal name given to “The Army Learning Concept for 2015,” Pamphlet 525-8-2, published by U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, or TRADOC, and intended for implementation Army-wide.

The academy, located at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, uses drill sergeant leaders to train drill sergeant candidates who, in turn, train recruits at one of the Army’s four training centers, located at Fort Sill, Okla.; Fort Benning, Ga.; Fort Jackson and Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.

The academy also uses the new training model to train platoon sergeant candidates, tasked with follow-on advanced individual training, following basic combat training.

Ever since 1964, when the Drill Sergeant Program was established, legions of drill sergeants have received their training at Fort Jackson.

“Anyone who has been through the [program] can tell you war stories about snapping to and being reminded what it’s like to be a private again,” Roderiques said. “And, it was pretty much like that the whole way through. We were graduating really, really good privates.”

Then last summer, “we flipped the switch to that approach,” Roderiques said, meaning that academy’s

commandant, Command Sgt. Maj. Lamont Christian, implemented the new training approach.

Under the Army Learning Model, drill sergeant candidates are put more in charge of their own training. Previously drill sergeant leaders took on the role of drill sergeants and the candidates took on the role of privates, Roderiques said.

Candidates are now given more responsibilities for planning, coordination, resourcing and execution their own training. The role of leaders emphasizes facilitating and mentoring, Roderiques said, providing an example using physical readiness training.

Previously, one candidate at a time led training from the platform, while the candidates executed the exercises, he said.

Now, the candidates take turns on the platform. Each takes a turn leading the exercises on the platform, while other candidates on the ground take turns evaluating each other and offering spot corrections as needed, Roderiques said.

After candidates receive relevant training instructions, they are expected to lead and assess, doing the tasks once done only by the drill sergeant leaders. "The difference is the candidates acting as assistant instructors in making on-the-spot correction in the ranks of the other candidates," Roderiques said.

Another example involves training at the rifle range, he said. Besides running the candidates through the marksmanship training and re-teaching them basic concepts such as trigger control and sight pictures, they are also given higher-order training processes as well.

For a drill sergeant, teaching new Soldiers to shoot involves more than just hands-on training with a rifle. Drill sergeants must understand the details of such things as safely opening and executing a range training operation, range logistics and resourcing, risk management, first aid requirements, and concurrent training.

"By the time they graduate and get down to the trail, not everything is brand new to them," Roderiques said. Trail is jargon for the time drill sergeants spend training recruits.

The candidates "didn't just observe training from a slide, or from part of a larger group, they've actually put their hands on it," he said. "They've developed muscle memory and they have a better handle on things."

The new training approach is especially helpful to noncommissioned officers who come from lower-density military occupational specialties who may not have ever had the opportunity to stand in front of large formations during their time as leaders prior to coming to the academy, Roderiques said.

For example, electronic repair technicians may work in shops with two or three other Soldiers.

"They may have been masters of systems, but they might not be comfortable standing in front of a formation," Roderiques said. "We get them there. We get them to the comfort level where they can project some presence in front of those Soldiers."

While the Army Learning Model may have changed the approach to training, the program of instruction, or POI, remains essentially the same, he said. Even so, the POI is updated on a continuing basis as relevant Soldier competencies are validated by the Proponent Development and Integration Division, a TRADOC entity.

Roderiques said he has an appreciation for the role doctrine plays in training requirements, especially since he's had a recent tour of duty at TRADOC headquarters on Fort Eustis, Virginia. He also has seen the positive changes brought about since he was a drill sergeant at Fort Leonard Wood from 1994 to 1996.

Among the positive changes he said he's seen is creation of a safer and more secure environment for all recruits, especially females. Roderiques became a drill sergeant in year-two of gender-integrated training.

Lastly, Roderiques said there are openings for drill sergeants if anyone is interested. Besides special duty pay and increasing the chance for promotion, he said the experience itself is priceless.

Drill sergeants train America's finest fighting men and women, he said. Soldiers remember their drill sergeants, "I certainly do mine. And, I'm sure Soldiers remember me." ■



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