

Combat Arms OSUT Battalion Commander's Thoughts on Command

After almost 22 months of battalion command in a combat arms OSUT battalion from 2001-2003, I fully believe that the key to success in training soldiers in both their basic combat skills and their MOS (AIT) skills lies in vesting drill sergeants with the responsibility, accountability, and authority for executing high-quality, first line supervisor, training.

I've often heard others say that responsibility for training not specifically delegated to the drill sergeant is the responsibility of the instructor/department/unit who has instructional responsibility for that portion of the POI. Hogwash! In the operational Army, the first line, NCO supervisor is always responsible for individual soldier training with officers and others responsible, in part, for collective training as well as enforcing standards and resourcing all training. No reason we should be different. We are in the 'individual training' business--that's why it's called Initial Entry Training--it's basic, 90% individual-focused, and only rarely 'collective' in nature. Our NCO's, the drill sergeant, can do it, are doing it, and should be doing it!

Drill sergeants are responsible for all training and they are the primary instructors for most of it. When they are not the primary instructor, then they must serve as 'Assistant Instructors' where they always participate, occasionally lead, but usually assist the primary instructor. When instructors and drill sergeants are all assigned to the same training battalion this task is easy to execute. When assigned to multiple different units, as is the case where I command, it's a little more difficult.

Clearly articulating commander's intent, ensuring a common understanding of the concept, and a battalion-wide sharing of a clearly understood endstate of training is the key. Once execution begins, company/battery/troop leadership and battalion/squadron leadership are in the resourcing/coordination/and standards enforcement mode. Meanwhile, drill sergeants, assisted occasionally by battery leaders, are in the first-line supervisor instructional mode.

In the operational Army I've never been in a unit that conducted "study halls". We don't do that here either. We call it RTR (reinforcement training) and my drill sergeants execute it as forcefully and deliberately during the "AIT" phase of OSUT as they did during the "BCT" phase. Unlike the "BCT" phase, however, during the "AIT" phase the RTR is frequently more individualized focusing on a single soldier's weakness and often requiring one-on-one drill sergeant/soldier instruction. As an OSUT battalion I enjoy a "BCT-like" drill sergeant to soldier ratio and one-on-one RTR is feasible at all times-- in a pure AIT battalion with the inherently higher drill sergeant to soldier ratio this may be more of a challenge.

I hold my drill sergeants totally accountable for soldier progress. I resource them with training aids and time. I give them authority to make decisions (including one-on-one RTR long after lights-out if necessary to ensure a soldier's success). My drill sergeants have been spectacular. In 21 months of command I have only lost one soldier due to inability to execute the technical and tactical requirements of his MOS---and one of my three MOSs is very technical and "academically" challenging. Our drill sergeants are awesome; they truly are at the very top of their peer group. They can do it! Give them the authority and responsibility to execute, and follow-up with quality resources and standards enforcement, and then watch as our incredible first line leaders, the drill sergeant, accomplish the mission!