

Prevention of Soldier Abuse in an AIT Battalion

The last two years in command of this Advanced Individual Training (AIT) Battalion has been extremely rewarding. The battalion expended long hours and hard work to ensure that the rewards were plentiful. This essay examines the rewards of command and how the unique experiences of this command might help others to discourage actions in their units that lead to soldier abuse. Soldier abuse is an incredibly sensitive subject, but this battalion takes effective preventive measures and actions that promote awareness and quick resolution to any allegations. In particular, the battalion has placed an increased emphasis on soldier abuse awareness programs which has helped to deter soldier abuse cases.

The battalion has a command climate that fosters good order, high morale, and pride in mission. It is important to establish a limitation on the number of policies and procedures that help the command to lead soldiers to success. Many times leaders will try to prevent soldier abuse by imposing more rules, regulations, checks, and policies. This often builds resentment among subordinates and shows a lack of trust by the leadership. Too many rules create confusion. A few good policies will create good order and ensure that military discipline is an integral part of the daily operation. Without discipline, the organization's morale and pride will suffer leading to mission failure. In this AIT battalion, our mission revolves completely around our soldiers-in-training and our cadre soldiers. This battalion has a two-fold mission that includes training for our AIT soldiers as well as maintaining the cadre of soldiers who train our AIT soldiers. As such, this battalion targets its soldier abuse programs at the Drill Sergeant and instructor level. All of these soldiers must stay focused on the mission which is to train or to be trained. Our policies and procedures allow the battalion to quickly extinguish actions that go against good order, such as soldier abuse. Although the battalion can never suppress the ever-present threat of soldier abuse, the good order, continued high morale, and pride in mission will definitely limit its effects on the battalion. This battalion was able to quickly detect possible soldier abuse and identify quick solutions that resolve the affects of this cancer. Although the battalion had numerous cases of soldier abuse because of its vigilance and reaction to this abuse threat, the abuse cases were almost completely unsubstantiated which demonstrated the success of the battalion's abuse programs. As a result, the battalion knew that soldier abuse would not be condoned or tolerated at all.

A positive command climate must be established between the Drill Sergeants and the trainees as well as the Drill Sergeants and the commander. When trainees respect their Drill Sergeants, and are not just intimidated by them, it has been proven that they are more likely to do the right thing. They are also more likely to approach the Drill Sergeant if a problem or abuse occurs. In order to build this respect, our Drill Sergeants ensure that the company's standards are understood right from the beginning of training. The trainees receive their initial counseling and in-briefs the first weekend they are here. A demerit system has been implemented to evaluate barracks and personal appearance in addition to performance. All phase privileges are based on this demerit system and meeting the standard. Privileges are not subjective and no mass punishment takes place. Specifically during Phase IV, one of the class Drill Sergeants will be available in the

barracks until lights out for the sole purpose of being available if a soldier needs help. These measures show the trainees that the Drill Sergeants sincerely care about the soldier's completion of training. This, in turn, develops the positive climate that fosters trust and communication which limits soldier abuse.

Since prevention of soldier abuse is of paramount importance within this AIT battalion, my companies have incorporated some techniques and teaching points to create an atmosphere that deters soldier abuse. One technique is the annual testing of cadre soldiers on the knowledge of TRADOC Regulation 350-6. As part of this annual testing, now in its second year, the cadre soldiers take a 100 question quiz which is derived from the rules and regulations of TRADOC Regulation 350-6. The answers are provided later in an open forum discussion. No cadre soldiers are penalized for incorrect answers, nor are they praised for correct answers. The objective of this annual testing is to refresh the cadre soldier's memory and understanding of the rules and regulations that govern the proper and improper treatment of our AIT personnel.

Another technique that the companies use is the quick, on-the-spot corrections made against Drill Sergeants and other cadre soldiers or instructors that have been identified as being in a situation that would put them or another soldier at risk for abuse. Sometimes cadre soldiers find themselves in uncomfortable situations where they are faced with insubordinate, disrespectful and belligerent trainees who refuse to conform to any Army Values or do what is expected of them. These AIT soldiers may "talk back" to the cadre soldiers, use body language which is disrespectful in nature, or refuse to follow disciplinary or military orders when told to do so. These actions, in turn, may lead to improper actions, verbal or physical, from the cadre soldiers. As part of proper procedures in the battalion, another member of the "battle team" or another cadre soldier will immediately step-in to diffuse the situation, giving the initial cadre soldier an opportunity to regroup, rethink, and reassess the situation in a more professional and calm manner.

Finally, the battalion has developed and implemented a stress matrix. This stress matrix allows the battalion to prevent stress fractures during physical training sessions. This matrix was designed to help reduce or eliminate injuries sustained by trainees during physical training. The program allows for the trainee to receive the proper warm-up, cool-down, and maximum training heart rate to occur during physical training. It is broken down into cardio days which occur three times per week during the first and third weeks of training and twice per week during the second and fourth weeks of training. On the other non-cardio days, the unit provides varying muscular endurance exercises. For soldiers who require corrective physical training, certain repetitive exercises are linked to some stress fractures incurred by trainees. Therefore, the battalion's corrective exercises are limited to ten repetitions or less. Also, the company commanders review sick call slips daily and speak with prospective sick call trainees about their injury or illnesses. These talks help us to influence proper evaluations by our physical therapists and medical personnel.

These are some of the techniques, programs and tools used in this AIT battalion as prevention measures for physical, mental and verbal soldier abuse. They have helped our soldiers to be successful in keeping our soldier abuse allegations to a minimum with only one substantiated case and no removal of Drill Sergeants from the trail in the last two years. Also by implementing our stress matrix, our battalion has not been the cause of any stress fractures. Our policies and procedures are limited in number and directly affect the soldiers. These policies supplement the Army regulations that already exist and provide the structure for good order, discipline, morale, and extreme pride. All of these actions in the battalion have assisted us in preventing soldier abuse and supported us in successfully completing our mission of training soldiers.