Trainee Abuse in Reception Battalions

I have three points that I want to cover in my essay on trainee abuse. The first deals with best use of a Reception Battalion. The second deals with cadre certification in a Reception Battalion. The third deals with thoughts on soldier abuse. Here are some short paragraphs on each topic to stimulate thought.

1. Best use of a Reception Battalion. In the future, Reception battalions should be structure to support IET commanders. Reception battalions do this by preparing soldiers to enter basic training. There are three major services that the battalion furnishes to the IET commander. First, and foremost, the battalion ensures that the soldier is administratively, medically, and logistically prepared for training. Second, the battalion furnishes a soldier an opportunity to acclimate in a no-threat environment. Soldiers gain confidence in their decision to enlist in the Army. More importantly, the battalion cadre add a human dimension to screening process by frequently identifying soldier issues that earlier screening processes didn't pick up. This human interaction allows us to deal with the issue before the soldier meets the drill sergeant. The outcome, soldiers who are ready to train or a citizen that we return to the streets. The third service is giving the IET commanders a staging area when the number of soldiers that arrive exceeds training seats. This is especially true in the OSUT world. Hence, instead of managing soldiers during sustainment phase, the IET commanders can dedicate the period to cadre training, facilities and equipment maintenance, and furnishing cadre members an opportunity to take care of their families.

There are other things that reception battalions can do to assist IET training commanders. At most places the Fitness Training Unit falls under the Reception Battalion. FTU is commanded by a physical therapist. In addition to running the FTU, he runs the medical committee meeting, furnishes status on injuries, serves as the SME on injury prevention, and assists healthcare providers with developing treatment plans.

The Reception Battalion is operated by the Adjutant General community which makes them the logical element to operate the holding/separation unit. We made this transition and it cut separation processing time I half. More importantly, early separations allow the Army to recruit replacements for these soldiers earlier. This results in soldiers getting into units earlier.

The retraining unit is also an organization within reception battalion. The Bottom Line is the IET training commander turns to one place (the Reception Battalion Commander) for help with soldiers who are having challenges with the IET process. This eliminates most of the administrative burdens that drill sergeants and commanders deal with, which allows them to focused all of their attention on training soldiers.

2. Cadre Certification in a Reception Battalion. One of the things that the NCOs told me when I arrived is that we didn't have a cadre certification process for any of the aforementioned missions. There are no training programs outlined in AR 612-201 or

350-6 regarding the reception and integration process; none on FTU or RHU operations. I asked the NCOs to build it. The programs that they built doubled operational efficiency through reducing the time to process soldiers and by eliminating our error rates. More importantly, they played a vital role in eliminating abuse to soldiers within the battalion. The lesson I learned from this is that the AG school needs to create standard TTPs and MTPs for the reception and integration, FTU, retraining, and holding missions. Failure to do so places good noncommissioned officers at risk. Moreover, it provides for soldiers trained and qualified leaders to lead them.

3. Thoughts on Soldier Abuse. First and foremost, we need to quit calling them new soldiers, trainees, and soldiers in training. They are soldiers. Maybe if we quit giving them a special label, drill sergeants will quit trying to treat them differently. Squad leaders in the field do not feel compelled to treat their soldiers unfairly. So why is it that when we make a squad leader a drill sergeant, he feels that it is necessary to treat soldiers differently than he did in the field. I don't know the answer to that question. However, maybe if we call them soldiers, drill sergeants will treat them like they treated other soldiers when they were squad leaders. Combat is a team sport. If we don't call them teammate (soldiers) then we don't consider them part of the team. And if we don't consider them part of them team, then we won't treat them like they're on the team. It's just that simple.

Second, your first encounter with soldier abuse establishes the standard. One of my soldiers accused other soldiers of harassing him because he is homosexual. Moreover, he charged that a drill sergeant encouraged them to do so. The drill sergeant's commander thought that the soldier just wanted to make trouble to get out of the Army. My response was that I didn't care, and intended to investigate. Although unfounded, I brought in the chain of command in and began reinforcing the need to establish a climate or culture where this type of behavior was unacceptable. Further, I informed all command teams that I would investigate all allegations. I kept my word. Moreover, after each investigation, I would have 350-6, soldier abuse, and consideration of others training given to all NCO in the battalion. It changed the culture.

My conclusion from the two paragraphs above is this. We, as leaders, have to create cultures that reinforce treating all soldiers with dignity and respect. It won't happen unless we make it so. The IET environment is filled with responsible leaders who have made it there business to do the right thing. Academically speaking, these leaders know what right looks like and will always do it. However, life isn't a classroom. People deal with personal pressures and other issues that cause them to act outside of their normal character all of the time. The IET environment is no different. Leadership makes the difference. I watched an OSUT commander prove that you don't have to abuse soldiers to make tough soldiers. I would offer anyone who needs a living example of how to "treat em rough" without abusing soldiers to give him a call.

My goal was to discuss how we can use reception battalion commanders to improve support given to IET soldiers, the need for a cadre certification program within reception battalion, and to share some thoughts on soldier abuse. I hope it helps.