

## What I Have Learned About Trainee Abuse

As a Brigade CSM for two years, I have had the opportunity to see training abuse at both spectrums of the organization. That is, within the school environment and at the company level. Training abuse seems to derive from the extremes of either absolute discipline or friendliness.

Most training abuse in the schoolhouse starts with a relaxed environment. Training departments identified with having repeated training abuse cases usually have instructors who will create a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom. To the instructors, it made it an easier learning environment than the stern Drill Sergeant mentality back at the barracks. Unfortunately, with the lack of discipline, there is also a lack of NCO professionalism. The NCO will become engaged in casual conversation with the soldier, which often leads to identifying common interests between the two and, before you know it, the NCO and the soldier are exchanging phone numbers. If the NCO is successful, after the soldier's PCS they will do it again until they get caught, each time becoming bolder and using different tactics in their advances (i.e., isolating soldiers). This also creates confusion with the victim. At first, the victim is greeted by a friendly escape from the company discipline and, if the victim enjoys the attention, they will do what the NCO wants. But if the attention is viewed as harassment, the victim can feel trapped. In the victim's mind, the NCO making the advances is a source of power that has the ability to pass or fail the student (do this for that or Quid Pro Quo). Inexperienced soldiers (often younger soldiers) either give in just to graduate, try avoidance, or rationalize the situation, which doesn't work. Often they will tell a battle buddy and the battle buddy will report it. A more experienced soldier that views the attention as harassment will report it immediately. Another aspect that often gets overlooked is the lack of some NCOs to make on-the-spot corrections when they see or perceive a certain situation.

Training abuse at the company level not only follows the pattern of sexual harassment as stated above but also when the discipline becomes abusive. The form of abuse is sometimes overlooked or just not enforced because of lack of knowledge (i.e. profanity, excessive exercising, punishment that don't fit the crime).

Often we ask ourselves why the soldiers do not report the unlawful actions. These same actions are sometimes confusing and accepted as the norm by the soldiers for fear of reprisal and intimidation, or because of a lack of knowledge/education.

The keys to preventing abuse are:

- Identify abuse and inform our cadre and students about what is and is not abuse.
- Continue the engagement of the EOA and IG element in enforcement of official guidance.
- Look for indicators of potential training abuse (perception of favoritism between cadre members and IET soldiers)
- Stop the complacency among instructors.