

Basic training gone soft?

By Kelly Kennedy

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You might say that Marine Corps Capt. Josh Gibbs stands among the few and the loud. He dared to publicly criticize Army basic training after a brief visit to Fort Jackson, S.C. It proved to be an explosive taunt.

The Army recruits he saw at a basic training graduation program showed no pride or professionalism, he wrote in a Dec. 11 Army Times column. The enlistees were coddled, he said, and the drill sergeants stripped of the power to aggressively enforce discipline. He called it the result of lowered standards that bode ill for all.

"How will these products of eggshell training handle the sights and sounds of battle?" he asked.

He ended: "The Army is training soldiers for a pillow fight, not a war."

And, of course, he claimed that Marine Corps basic training is tougher.

The column, and an online forum at www.armytimes.com, drew hundreds of responses, primarily from active-duty Army noncommissioned officers. But you might be surprised at what they had to say. Rather than using pen and keyboard to slit his leather neck, they agreed with him by a ratio of about 2-to-1: Army basic training just isn't tough enough, they said.

Even a drill sergeant weighed in with what he says is wrong.

"We as drill sergeants here at Fort Jackson, S.C., have been fighting this issue for years," wrote Staff Sgt. Armando Luna.

A Marine claims Army recruits are coddled, and NCOs weigh in — to agree

"It's a shame that a Marine who was here for a short time observed that much."

Luna, who went through basic in 1989, said in a telephone interview, "It's gotten a lot different — a lot softer."

If circumstances were normal and recruiting standards were higher, he said, the training changes might work pretty well. But some of the recruits have "gangster" attitudes, he said, and don't always qualify mentally.

"I think the whole thing would be better if they would change the standards back. The training is great — it's so much more advanced than when we came through."

But on the discipline side, the new recruits have classes before they enter training that teach



them exactly what drills can and can't do: They can't harm them physically. They can't yell at them. They can't smoke them until the new soldiers can't move.

They can counsel them, and they can hit them with Article 15s and loss of pay, he said.

"That kind of disarms us," he said. "If they know we can't yell at them, they're not so worried about doing something wrong. We're sup-

posed to be nice and calm with them. But some of them need more than that because they didn't grow up with a lot of discipline."

Yet Luna said some things are better, and he loves his job.

"Don't get me wrong: We have some outstanding soldiers," he said. "I'm down with the caring of soldiers, but some of it they take too far."

Staff Sgt. Erik Guidotti, of the

Softer or smarter? What readers say about basic

Here are a few of the letters to Army Times in response to a Marine's comment that Army basic training goes too easy on recruits:

The recruiters seem to care only about their numbers. They aren't used car salesmen; they are recruiting future soldiers and paratroopers. They seem to have forgotten that.

Maybe it's because once the recruit leaves for basic, he is no longer the responsibility of the recruiters. It doesn't matter to them if that recruit turns into a substandard soldier. They aren't the ones who have to deal with the problem soldiers. It's that recruit's receiving unit that has to deal with it.

I have served as a platoon leader

for 17 months and have spent so much time and resources on problem soldiers that it's mind-boggling.

These problem soldiers are helping to drive the good, outstanding soldiers out of the Army. The good soldiers are getting just as frustrated as the leaders and therefore would rather leave than stick around.

1st Lt. Christopher G. Loschiavo
Fort Bragg, N.C.

I trained at Fort Knox, Ky., where I learned everything from A to Z on how to shoot, communicate and move.

I later decided to go into the Marines on active duty. For 13 weeks, I learned to stand still, be

quiet and be yelled at, among other less-talked-about areas of study.

Had I not had my previous soldier-warrior training, I would have been as clueless as the rest of my graduating series.

The difference between the way soldier-warriors and Marine-warriors are trained is just that: different.

In the Army, I was challenged to perform and succeed and I was taught to do my job.

In the Marines, I was challenged to conform, to not stand out, to not think, to not express observations, or especially not to seize the initiative and move out.

Sgt. Robert W. Anderson Jr.
Williamsburg, Va.

I went to basic training in 1992 at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., and am very proud of the toughness of what I went through. Had I known that the Army would eventually take the kinder, gentler route, I would've saved myself the embarrassment and become a Marine.

Capt. Roderick Little
Lansdowne, Va.

Marine Capt. Josh Gibbs is selling his Marines way short if he thinks they react to their leaders out of some Pavlovian response brought about by Marine Corps recruit training.

Neither Marines nor soldiers are successful in battle for this reason. It is because they are smart, resourceful and commit-

ted. It is because they learn and maintain a strong sense of honor and duty.

Maj. Wade Wallace
Charlottesville, Va.

My wife is finishing up Army basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo. Out of the nine weeks of training, they participated in only about 28 days of actual training due to the weather.

I understand that safety is paramount, but when a risk assessment rates for no training due to the snow, our enemies in Afghanistan are laughing right in our faces. It's not as if we can call off a battle, or a war for that matter, due to poor weather. We need to train like we intend to fight.

Cpl. Glover Gossett
Las Cruces, N.M.