

Basic

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dom to teach what they believe soldiers will need, she said.

"We apply the lessons learned immediately," Draves said. "We don't wait for it to become doctrine."

However, she said the approach to training has changed.

"Instead of yelling at soldiers, there's respect for them," she said. "You don't have to tear a person down. We want soldiers to think."

But does that lead to a lack of discipline, as Gibbs argued?

"That's not true," Draves said. "We teach soldier values. All the young soldiers I run into are certainly demonstrating those values."

The Army's Drill Sergeants of the Year certainly disagreed with Gibbs' take.

In fact, Sgt. 1st Class Steve Howd said that nobody yelled at him when he went through basic in 1984 at Fort McClellan, Ala.

"It wasn't a mission to strip away everything you came with and build up the Army model," he said. "It was, 'You're here to train.'"

He called the idea of "breaking them down to build them up" a myth, and dismissed toughening up soldiers with methods such as push-ups in gravel as useless, especially with a new model of recruit.

Describing how much more information soldiers receive in basic training than they used to, Howd said, "What benefit are you getting from going through your first day in the Army with bloody hands?" he said. "[Today's soldiers] don't run out and play. They're not outside like they were 15, 20 years ago, so they're not conditioned the way we were."

But things have changed, he said, in that soldiers are expected to learn more.

"When I went through, they said, 'We're going to feed you with a fire hose,'" he said. "Now it's a waterfall."

And, he said, if sergeants are seeing a lack of discipline, maybe they should look at their own methods.

"I think that still goes back to standards," he said. "If the NCOs allow disrespect, that falls back to the NCOs."

Sgt. 1st Class Mike Behkendorf went through basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., in 1996, and said he remembers arriving at his unit packed into a cattle car with the other new soldiers.

"When we got off that cattle car, we were moving," he said. "Then we moved into the barracks for shakedown. We were encouraged to run and hustle."

But he also didn't have to qualify with his weapon in body armor, and he had to shoot only from the prone and unsupported prone fighting positions — rather than



RICK KOZAK/STAFF

Pvt. William Holdreith, 34, and other soldiers start morning PT at Fort Jackson last March. Some soldiers worry that too many of today's trainees start basic training out of shape and are still out of shape because of lax Army standards.

taking a knee to shoot. The training is better, he said, and soldiers who went through basic in the past may have a false idea of today's training.

"I think a lot of it is perception," he said.

Sgt. Harry Doremus IV, who works at the troop medical clinic at Fort Jackson, often sees another side of today's recruits as they stream through for treatment.

"We see all the sick-call soldiers," he said. "There are a lot of them who are just trying to get out of work."

Every day, he said, he sees those same soldiers disrespecting the sergeants.

"You see them throw their hands on their hips and talk back, 'You can't talk that way to me,'" said Doremus, who went through basic training in 1999. "It really has changed over the last 10 years. There was some it when I went through basic, so I don't think it's a new issue, but there's more of it now."

Doremus sees the problem as societal — parents aren't teaching their kids respect — but also institutional.

"When I got here, I was briefed that I could try to correct a soldier if I saw a deficiency, and if they

get mouthy, I could put them at parade rest," he said. "But then all I could do is contact their unit. I'm not allowed to make them do push-ups or low crawl or what we used to call 'smoke 'em.'"

He said the change could be because sergeants may have abused their power, but he hears drill sergeants complain often that their power has been taken away from them.

"It's just the way the Army's headed," he said. "These kids spent way too much time playing computer games and not learning life's lessons, and now we expect drill sergeants to instill discipline in nine-and-a-half weeks when their parents couldn't do it in 18 years."

And he said it won't translate well in the battlefield.

"They're already questioning authority here, and it makes the day-to-day mission more difficult," he said. "In a combat zone, you don't have time to react to a soldier questioning your authority."

More soldiers stay

Gibbs, who took part in a spirited online forum, declined to comment further. On a spring visit to Fort Jackson — the same post he visited before writing his column

— Army Times learned that because of new policies, soldiers get more sleep, do sit-ups on sleeping mats, and are yelled at less than previous generations of soldiers.

But they also learn more, have to make decisions rather than only follow orders, and can multitask their way through a day's training like no previous generation.

And the leaders at Fort Jackson say the new training means fewer injuries, which means more recruits graduate, and they retain more of what they are taught.

"The soldiers have already committed. They know they're going to war," commander of 1st Combat Training Brigade, 13th Infantry Regiment, Col. Jay Chambers, told Army Times during the visit. Chambers leads the basic training units at Fort Jackson. "It's to our benefit to lead them instead of train them."

And, attrition rates showed that something had to be done to retain

soldiers: A Government Accountability Office report issued in April 2000 showed that in 1998, 36.9 percent of all service members were leaving the military during their first year of service. The Army ranked at the top of the list for lost recruits. The GAO found people left within their first six months for three main reasons: medical problems caused by training, fraudulent enlistment and performance problems, such as failed PT tests or the inability to adapt to military life. Other reasons included being overweight, character and behavior disorders, and alcoholism and drug use.

But interviews with out-processing soldiers showed that many of them left because of poor leadership techniques, such as obscene language or humiliating treatment, and the GAO concluded that "negative motivation has a detrimental effect on some recruits' desire to stay in the military."

After Sept. 11, 2001, when it became difficult to bring in new soldiers, those numbers became even more important. In 2003, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command changed Regulation 350-6 to ban drill sergeants from using abusive language, allow recruits more personal time, give new soldiers seven hours of sleep a night and cut down on injuries. As of winter 2006, graduating recruits may also earn off-post one-day passes, rather than the on-post family-day passes they received in the past.

In just one year of training changes, the Army is seeing a difference. At Fort Jackson, the basic-training attrition rate stood at 12.6 percent in fiscal 2004. In fiscal 2005, that percentage sank

to 8.8 percent, according to Fort Jackson spokesman James Hinnant. Armywide, about 11 percent fail to make it through basic now compared to 18 percent last May.

A different generation

Soldiers on both sides of the basic-training fence agreed that the new generation of soldiers is different: They grew up on video games. Their parents didn't spank them. Most of them did not participate in high school sports. But that's where the agreement ends.

"I would rather have five trained and disciplined soldiers than 10 who were able to join up because of the new lower standards," wrote Staff Sgt. Jason Jackson of Wiesbaden, Germany.

Chief Warrant Officer 3 Duane Schultz, of the 51st Maintenance Company at Fort Bliss, Texas, had no nebulous feelings about the new training.

"I had six new guys in today," he told Army Times during a phone interview, referring to soldiers who had just completed their initial training and reported to their new unit. "Two of them couldn't pass the PT test. It's like, 'What are you guys being taught?' When they get here, they barely know the basics."

As an example, he talked about a new mechanic who did not know how to fill a Humvee tire with air.

"There's a lot of pressure on our recruiters to bring people in, and I think we have lowered our standards," he said. "And then there's pressure on the drill sergeants to just get them through the training."

"We need to go back to breaking them down, building them back up and then molding them into something we can use," he said.

But Brooks, the reservist from the 91st Division, said times are changing and older soldiers need to adapt, too.

"Before, you were a number," he said. "You didn't have rights. My new soldiers? Their impression of the system is they have the respect of their senior NCOs. That's a change."

For him, new soldiers have led to a new leadership style. If he needs to reprimand a soldier, he takes him aside. He allows soldiers to make decisions about the way they're going to carry out his orders. And he doesn't raise his voice — though sometimes, he said, he changes his tone.

"I've been in 22 years, and I've had to adapt, too," he said. "But soldiers appreciate that I speak to them in a respectful manner. They get the job done. And it's up to us to carry on what they learn in basic training." □



Shultz



Doremus