



PHOTOS BY RICK KOZAK/STAFF

Many readers agreed with a Marine captain who, after visiting Fort Jackson, S.C., for one day, concluded the Army coddles recruits. Soldiers with Alpha Company, 2nd Battalion, 13th Infantry Regiment, begin basic training at Fort Jackson last March.

309th Military Intelligence unit at Fort Huachuca, Ariz., told Army Times in an interview that he worried that, "When [today's trainees] get into the combat zone, they're going to fold like origami."

But other soldiers said the new recruits arrive smarter and better able than yesteryear's troops to

think quickly in tough situations — and that trying to train this generation's soldiers the old-school way would fail.

"He's attacking the method, but that's different from the outcome," Sgt. 1st Class Marlon Brooks, of the 91st Division at Camp Parks, Calif., told Army Times in a tele-

phone interview.

"Soldiers are performing tremendously. They have the ability to think and overcome and adjust, and that's because of what they're learning from their drill sergeants."

Col. Jody Draves, spokeswoman for Training and Doctrine Com-



Soldiers of B Company, 2nd Battalion, 39th Infantry Regiment, search houses for insurgents during Falcon Challenge as part of training at Fort Jackson. Sgt. 1st Class Marlon Brooks says today's basic is better because it teaches new soldiers "to think and overcome and adjust."

mand, said the critics are mistaken.

"We have worked really hard to make the training appropriate to today's mission," she said. "Training is more rigorous and more geared toward making soldiers adept in their soldier skills."

As an example, she cited the requirement that basic-training soldiers carry weapons with them at all times, rather than only during

weapons training or field training exercises, and clear their weapons every time they enter a building — key training considering there have been more than 70 negligent-discharge deaths in Iraq. Drill sergeants who have just returned from theater make up a large portion of basic training leaders, and they have the free-

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I am a Judge Advocate General's Corps captain with 22-plus years of service in the Reserve and National Guard, with one tour in Iraq. I served at Al Asad Airfield in a unit supporting the Marines.

Far and away the No. 1 Uniform Code of Military Justice issue I had to deal with in Iraq was disrespect of a senior-ranking soldier.

The Army needs to return to the old ways and quit coddling the young troops. Failure to do so only leads to continued discipline problems that have to be addressed and take time away from already-too-busy Army leaders.

Capt. Paul Ailsieger
Wichita, Kan.

Prior to my unit's deployment to Afghanistan, I received more than 30 new soldiers from Fort Jackson, S.C. Some did lack discipline but

most were easily converted and, through proper mentorship, became valuable assets to the team.

I am by no means calling these soldiers perfect, but I am proud to be serving with them.

Sgt. 1st Class Anthony W. Anderson
Carthage, N.Y.

Why do Marines look so good in formation when marching? Why is it that their reputation is so good? Why is it that Marines know how to effectively kill someone before they ever go on to learn their job specialties?

It's because they have their priorities straight. The Marine Corps doesn't change its basic skills to fit the needs of those who think training needs to be more gender-specific. They don't change how basic Marines learn how to be Marines. Every Marine is a grunt first.

I went through basic training

for the first time in 1986 at Fort Knox, Ky.; it wasn't that difficult. I went again in 1989 and went to Fort Benning, Ga. It wasn't better.

It's time we put the edge back into basic training and make our new soldiers something to be admired and feared.

Staff Sgt. Patrick E. Sloan
Brownwood, Texas

I find it interesting that a Marine captain would make a conclusion about the Army's basic training process from a single visit to Fort Jackson and talking to a friend with nine weeks of military training. I find it more interesting that he would feel so righteous in his opinion that he would submit it as criticism and as an opportunity to bolster his own service.

I commanded an Infantry One Station Unit Training company for

a year in 2001, and then had the privilege to see some of the results of our "soft serve" training executing combat operations in 2003. Those soldiers from the "kinder, gentler Army" were the same troops that toppled a dictatorial regime, using combat action, but were disciplined and aware enough to take knees in the city of Najaf, preventing countless civilian and military casualties. Army basic consists of nine weeks, currently, including reception week and graduation week. Contrasting that, the Marines advertise a little over 12-week program, presumably with equal or less indoctrination and administration time. I won't argue that you can make more professional soldiers with an extra month to train them.

As to drill sergeants being stripped of their "heavy-handed

parental figures" role, anyone who understands psychology and training of human beings will likely agree that you do not have to yell at people like they are animals in order to motivate them to successfully complete, even complicated tasks. If this were the case, I would imagine that our school systems, at all grade levels, would advocate and condone yelling and screaming.

The Army has not forgotten that it is training men and women to deal with the stresses of combat. The Army is doing the largest share of the fighting in Iraq, and I do not see many indications of self-implosion, lax standards or inability to conduct their missions under the stresses of combat.

Maj. Aaron Luck
Monterey, Calif.