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United States Army Drill Sergeant

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21 September 2006

Class 57

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In October of 1989, I was selected to attend the United States Army Drill Sergeant School located at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Drill Sergeant duty is not something all noncommissioned officers look forward to. The one who wants to perform this duty often times volunteer, others are selected and do the minimum just to get by. I applied for this duty and was happy to be selected to join the ranks of some of the most professional Soldiers that serve the army. I prepared myself for the challenges of what some considered being the toughest school in the army. The United States Army Drill Sergeant School is a school of excellence with high standards and I was expected to live those standards.

Drill Sergeant School is mentally and physically challenging. Memory is a vital part of being a Drill Sergeant candidate and Role Models is something that really tested my memory. The Drill Sergeant Leaders had high expectations of us. I was not going to let them down. During the eight weeks I was in attendance, every part of me was put to the test. While I was a Staff Sergeant, I was treated as a private. Time seems to stand still and the physical demands were wearing me down; however, I was experiencing exactly what the Soldiers I was going to train would experience. Motivation was the key to my success. Obstacles came and went, but they each taught me some valuable lessons especially as my physical fibers seem to come undone with the stress of being put through Basic Training all over again. In the beginning December 15th 1989 seemed a long way off, but before my mind was totally gone it was graduation day. As I stepped across the stage to receive my Drill Sergeant hat, commonly called the round brown, a sense of pride overcame me that brought on a new sense of inspiration. I was now officially a Drill Sergeant, feared by all yet respected by many. It was now time to move to

the “trail” and assumed my place among a distinguished group of professional noncommissioned officers.

I received my first platoon of Soldiers 10 January 1990. I was highly motivated, super dedicated, and prepared to train them all. My first platoon was challenging and yet rewarding. I trained my platoon to exceed many Army standards, resulting in the Soldiers receiving the Honor Platoon Award. This was the most prestigious award a platoon can receive in Basic training. Drill Sergeants have the responsibility to teach, coach, and mentor Soldiers attending Basic Combat Training. I challenged my platoon with realistic training everyday and it always reaped favorable results.

Training new Soldiers to become technically and tactically proficient in Basic Training is a difficult task. It is the Drill Sergeants’ responsibility to make sure that all Soldiers are trained to meet or exceeds the parameters of training that the basic Program of Instruction has set forth. I challenged my Soldiers to achieve individual excellence in every Basic Training Task and they never disappointed me. This was indicative of the many Soldiers in the platoon that exceeded the Army Physical Fitness Standards.

Soldiers in basic training typically have an uphill challenge when it comes to Basic Rifle Marksmanship training. I developed and led a well organized and thorough program. This program stretched them to the max and paid high dividends for both me and them. Ten of the fifty Soldiers that were assigned to my platoon qualified expert with their assigned rifle during my first cycle.

Team building in today’s Army promotes a sense of Duty, Honor, Country but most of all Pride in a unit that allows a Soldier to hold his/her head up high. As their Drill Sergeant one of my primary goals was to ensure that the Soldiers in my platoon displayed that pride. I initiated

some measure, which sometimes seems drastic as I look back on them, to let every one of the Soldiers know that they were now a part of my team.

It was my duty to let them believe that their input was important in the overall success of bringing each of them to function as a well oiled machine, every part doing a job that was important to the other. The key to success was not the individual but the team. My Soldiers achieved a sense of belonging, by being a part of a team. This allowed them to commit themselves to me, each other, and to overall mission success. Drill Sergeants in Basic Training units today focuses on the importance of the seven Army Values and how they influence the Soldiers; in 1989 I did not have those to guide me although I wish I did.

As a Drill Sergeant, I fully understood the requirement for my unit to become a Company of Excellence. In other words, everyone had to know and understand how they contributed, as individuals, to the organization as a whole. I trained my platoon hard on the tasks required to win the Company of Excellence Award. I conducted Physical Fitness Training twice a day to improve on my platoon fitness score. The Soldiers collectively hated me for it; however, the reward that came later was a result of their accomplishment.

I trained my platoon longer and harder during Basic Marksmanship Training. I kept them in the prone unsupported position for long periods of time. This position was demonstrated to yield less success than the supported position and I needed results not excuses. My platoon fired their M16A1 rifles more than any other platoon in the Company. Overall, the training yielded results for the platoon which exceeded the Company's standard in Basic Rifle Marksmanship. I proved that effective and demanding rifle marksmanship, that critical task required to succeed and win on the battlefield, could be taught to a Soldier even though his/her confidence level was low.

Today, more than ever, the Army need units trained to excellence. Standards are important and should not be compromised as Soldiers train to perform their technical and tactical missions. This cannot happen without the unending professional effort of the Drill Sergeant. A trained and disciplined Army is the one thing that makes America strong. I was a part of that tradition of strength. I still stand proud today knowing that I served this nation as a trainer of the future Army. I did not just teach Soldiers. I made America strong. I also learned a few valuable lessons myself.

Family is important. I did not get to see mine as often as I wished, but their support for me was unquestionable. I could always count on them to be there on those days when it seemed that I could no longer go on. I could put up a front for the Soldiers but my family could see the weariness I demonstrated. Soldiers are trainable if one is willing to invest the time in them. They will give all they have to ensure the success of the team regardless to how long they have been in the Army. Do the tough jobs in the Army and the rewards will be fulfilling, eventually. Most of all, as a Drill Sergeant, when you train Soldiers keep in mind that the ones you produce may eventually turn out to be you squad leaders and platoon sergeants when you are a first sergeant.

I believe that the professionalism I possessed greatly benefited the Soldiers of our great nation that I had the privilege of training. While serving as a United States Army Drill Sergeant, I witnessed several your men and women entering the military with no direction in life prior to Initial Entry Training. Many of these men and woman had no idea what goals were, what they wanted out of life, and most of all no discipline. The greatest reward I received in my military career was seeing the joy of proud parents hugging their professional Soldiers' on Graduation Day. I really enjoyed taking undisciplined civilians and transforming them into professional

Soldiers. The change was notably visible. It gave me a feeling of great pride and accomplishment.

I was especially gratified when the parents would show up on Graduation Day and did not recognize their own son or daughter due to their discipline and improved physical condition. The parents were very grateful in their expression for the role I played in transforming their children into professional Soldiers. Like any other professional job, being a Drill Sergeant will take its toll on you, but I have no regrets. I will always maintain the motto “Professional by Choice”.

