

Running head: ETHICS AND THE UNITED STATES ARMY SERGEANTS' MAJOR ACADEMY

Ethics and the United States Army Sergeants' Major Academy

SGM William Rizzo

United States Army Sergeants Major Academy

Class # 58

Mr. Vazquez

06 December 2007

Abstract

This paper will examine the ethical dilemma posed by the Sergeant's Major of the Army decision to keep the length of United States Sergeants Major Academy (USASMA) at nine months. This paper will address the following questions: Does USASMA need to remain nine months long when at least half of the time at the academy is spent on non-testable material to include programmed time off for college? How does the senior NCO justify the cost involved in the PCS moves and the costs involved in taking the Sergeants Major out of the fight to, in essence, attend college and be with their families? How should a Soldier, leader and senior NCO justify this to a nation at war?

USASMA and Ethics

During his initial brief to the students of class 58, the Command Sergeant Major (CSM) of the United States Army Sergeants' Major Academy (USASMA), CSM Wright, stated that several high ranking people both in the military and other parts of the government questioned the need for USASMA to remain nine months. CSM Wright also stated that the Sergeant Major of the Army (SMA) said that USASMA would not be shortened. (Wright, 2007) Several senior leaders have made multiple suggestions as to why the academy should not be shortened, the leading suggestions include: for increased family time, "time to take a knee" (SMA Preston, 2007) or time to go to and complete college. How much thought did USASMA and the SMA put behind the ethical dilemma of the decision to keep the academy at nine months? Were the needs of the Army and the Soldiers attending the academy balanced against the budget and the taxpayers of America; how about against the needs of the junior Soldiers who would have to do without these senior leaders? Was this a political, ethical and morally just decision based on all the facts, or was it something else?

Many of the students at USASMA have already held the job of a SGM prior to arriving at the academy. Why does the army feel their senior NCO academy needs to remain nine months when the Air Force senior NCO academy is four months and the US Navy's and the USMC's Senior NCO academies are only six weeks? USASMA has the ability to put 720 students from all branches of the Armed Services through the training at one time, 50 or more of which are from foreign militaries. Soldiers can also complete the academy by correspondence over the course of two years. While the academy services all branches of the armed forces – the USMC does not send Marines because of the course length.

Many of the lessons at the academy are skill level I, and most of the students have been doing skill level I tasks for almost 20 years. Many of the lessons at the academy do not have tests with them. Over half of the time spent at the academy is in the auditorium, commonly referred to as the bore-atorium or

the master bedroom, due to the lack of testable information presented in the auditorium as well as the inability of many of the guest speakers to prepare a brief for such a group of senior military personnel. There are several review or critique processes built into the academy to combat such issues. Some are internal to the students of the academy and some are done by panels of CSMs from outside the academy.

After each lesson at the academy, the students are required to submit critiques. Most students agree that many of the lessons are a waste of time and cover subjects that the students trained on in at least one of their previous NCO development courses. After several lessons, the students agreed that these particular lessons were a waste of time due to their structure – these lessons were geared to a skill level I soldier; they also agreed that these lessons would be more appropriate if the academy built and taught them at a higher level. The common theme at the academy is that lessons taught at a skill level I should be eliminated and should be refocused and taught at skill levels appropriate for senior NCOs and field grade officers. Many students openly question the course content, length and reasoning behind both. When the students look at the current curriculum after having only been through half of the course, the following theme is apparent: the academy can be cut in half, without detracting from the academic knowledge learned or presented. It appears to the students that many of the lessons are in the curriculum just as time fillers, to keep the academy at nine months.

CSM Wright stated that he had a panel of CSMs looking at the curriculum of USASMA to determine if the lessons were the right mix. Potential pitfalls filled this approach with problems and placed the course in its current state. During the review of the curriculum, course titles, lesson titles and number of hours available for those courses are the topics of the review, instead of course content. When one looks only at course titles and numbers of hours per lesson, one does not get an accurate story of the quality of the classes. Another problem with this approach is that the CSMs conducting the review went through the academy a long time ago and may not be familiar with all the changes made since their classes. Perhaps both the SMA and the other CSMs should review not only the titles of the

courses, lessons and the number of hours but also the content of the courses provided at the academy, to determine how much time the academy wastes and how many lessons are useful to future SGMs.

Another review technique is to poll all the academy students a year after graduation to determine what information and which lessons presented at the academy the former students used or found useful during that year. The academy could use the results to also determine which courses and lessons were irrelevant to the former students' jobs after the academy and to determine which classes they would have liked to have received at the academy because the academy did not prepare them for their current job.

When the author questioned the senior enlisted advisor to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, (SEAC) CSM Gainey about the benefits and the duration of the academy, the SEAC responded that most Sergeants Major (SGM) would not really learn anything new at the academy. The SGMs may get a better understanding of a few things, but really they would not learn anything except maybe in college. He stated that it was time to relax, that the students had earned it at this point in their career; that the students should network while at the academy and that those friendships would help them out later in their careers.

When the author asked his CSM about the relevance of the academy prior to coming, his CSM told the author that it was a necessary evil. That it was something that had to be done, that it was a waste of time and many people agreed with this opinion. When the author asked why these people did not shorten the course he was told that it was because it was something that needed to be protected; the duration of the course needed protection. He also stated that it was a time when enlisted men and women in the ranks of Enlisted eight and nine (E-8 / E-9) would be afforded time to go to college, time to get surgeries, time to take a knee and be with family.

Why would the staff and faculty place so many filler courses and lessons to make and keep the academy nine months long? The staff and faculty of the academy built their schedule, nine months worth, around the local school year to allow Soldiers' Family members time to start and complete one

year of elementary, middle or high school in El Paso. The costs to PCS the students with their Families for nine months are extremely expensive however; this ethical dilemma is overcome by the correlation between the Soldiers' and the children's school years justifying the costs of the move. The Army could move the students through Temporary Change of Station (TCS) to El Paso instead of Permanent Change of Station (PCS) saving thousands of dollars per student. In today's world of cost cutting and savings it would seem that many in the chain of command would want the best product for the cheapest price. Another technique the academy could use to cut costs would be to shorten the school, allowing the students to attend the academy via Temporary Duty Travel (TDY), saving thousands more per student. The lack of either of these two cost cutting measures and the fact that much of the courses' materials are irrelevant and inappropriate for senior NCOs are further evidence that the academy is kept at nine months for reasons other than academia.

The SMA stated that some people wanted to shorten the academy or even get rid of it but that he would not allow the course to be shortened. The SMA also stated that we (the students of the academy) need to be honorable and do the right thing. To the author these two statements are at ethical odds when looking at the decision to keep USASMA length at nine months and keep the current curriculum with the wasted time, irrelevant lessons and lectures and inappropriate course material. The senior leaders of the academy should not try to fill the curriculum with minutia and guest speakers to keep the course at nine months. If it is true that the Soldiers have earned a nine month break from combat, time to "take a knee" with family, time to get surgeries and time to take college courses, and the academy was the place for them to receive these earnings, then the focus of the academy should be providing that time and providing the SGMs with the knowledge they need for their next jobs. The SMA and Chief of Staff of the Army should give the above listed reasons to senior leaders in Congress, the Departments of Defense and Army. If Congress approves of the reasoning behind USASMA being nine months in length, then the academy staff should adjust the curriculum to reflect the reasoning behind the current length.

However, if the civilians in charge of the military do not approve of such reasons for a nine month course, the course should then be cut to relevant and useful training and lessons allowing the military's senior NCOs to get back to the troops, their Officers in-charge and the fight. Either of these two options would remove any ethical dilemma faced by the new senior NCOs when questioned about the course relevance and the true reasons for an Army senior NCO course that lasts nine months as well as make completing USASMA a more respectable achievement.