

Soldier Readiness: Past to Present, Initial Entry Training

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This case study looks at Soldier Readiness through the evolution of Initial Entry Training for United States Army enlisted members. The study was conducted via a semi-structured, open ended qualitative interview of a senior enlisted Army Soldier. Manual coding was used after transcription by way of In Vivo first cycle coding and Focused second cycle coding to discover themes over the last twenty plus years. Changes in culture via technology and world events changed the American society, the Military changed with it.

INTRODUCTION

Initial Entry Training has evolved in the last twenty plus years for Military members. Initial Entry Training consists of what is called ‘Boot Camp’ in both the Navy and Marine Corps and ‘Basic Training’ in both the Army and Air Force. For the author, an Army Officer of 23 years of service, the first eight years were marked by remnants of Cold War Training...needing Soldiers who followed order without question of their officers. Then the world changed on September 11th, 2001. Suddenly, training became reality employed in combat, which still goes on today with little end in sight. During the career of the author, assigned as a Recruiting Company Commander from 2002-2004, it was his responsibility to manage the recruiters of the Army’s newest Soldiers. Soon after, the author spent the next 10 years in four different combat tours and unit assignments. The Soldiers had changed, the mission had changed, the environment had changed, and the nation had changed. These changes sparked questions in the author’s mind. Which led to this study and its’ research question: How has Soldier Readiness changed in the last 20 plus years in Initial Entry Training of the United States of America’s Military? What has happened to how leaders train the Army’s newest Soldiers?

The respondent in this case study agreed to participate and give his own thoughts and experiences on the matter.

Sergeant Major (SGM), is the highest rank attained in the enlisted ranks. It is the grade of E-9 (Enlisted level 9) and is called SGM in both the Army and USMC, but called different titles in the Air Force and Navy. In the Air Force it is Chief Master Sergeant and in the Navy it is Master Chief Petty Officer. The senior enlisted Army leader that agreed to participate in this case study started his career in the United States Marine Corps in 1992, staying a few years until transferring to the Army in 1997. His current duty assignment is the SGM of the Distribution Management Center (DMC) of Army Sustainment Command (ASC) located at Rock Island Arsenal, Rock Island, Illinois. SGM is an Ammunition Specialist 89B as his Military Occupational Specialty (MOS), starting in the USMC and transferring into the Army with the same job (Bio attached as Annex 1). SGM has had numerous leadership positions in the enlisted ranks and has been a Drill Sergeant of Army enlistees at Basic Training. He has witnessed

and contributed to the changes in the way newly enlisted members of the United States Army have been trained in the last 10 years.

METHOD

As noted in Yin (2014), a case study is preferred to other methods when : “the main research questions are ‘how’ and ‘why’... , a researcher has little or no control over behavioral events, or the focus of the study is contemporary...” (p. 2). This case study definitely fits the first and last quite notably, and to an extent the second. The research question proposed attempts to get at the “how” has Soldier Readiness changed in the last 20 plus years in Initial Entry Training of the United States Military. Very little, if any has been written about this subject and its present status and the researcher had little control over the events that have unfolded. The researcher has had some control as he was a Company Commander of an Army Recruiting command from 2002-2004 in the beginning of the War on Terror and received changing guidance as to who could meet the qualifications and target populations of recruits. At one point in 2003-2004, the guidance from higher headquarters United States Army Recruiting Command (USAREC) was to seek out Muslim speaking foreign nationals as interpreters.

The author and researcher chose the SGM for his unique experiences with the USMC and Army Drill Sergeant time as well as the fact that he is believed by the author/researcher to be an exemplary leader of the highest quality and standards. Conducting an audio recorded qualitative semi-structured interview consisting of five open ended questions with some follow up questions resulted in nine pages of single spaced transcribed text (see Annex 2). According to Saldaña (2013), Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) can assist greatly with the process of coding. However, with smaller projects and even smaller number of respondents manual coding works just as well. The researcher started off with the intent to try to use a free trial example of ATLAS.ti software but it only provides a document of up to 50 codes and once the researcher got to over 90 codes, the changes would not save. So manual coding had to be completed.

In Vivo coding, according to Saldaña (2013), is “literal coding” and has other names but basically it is direct segments of quoted transcription, actual language found in the data (p. 91). In Vivo coding is appropriate for all qualitative studies (Saldaña, 2013) and often used for beginner researchers in qualitative method. In Vivo coding was utilized for the first cycle coding. Focused coding often follows In Vivo coding for it “searches for the most frequent or significant codes to develop” (p. 213) the most comprehensive themes or categories requiring decisions of which codes make the appropriate themes.

DATA ANALYSIS

Of the nine pages of transcribed texts from the interview with SGM, 260 In Vivo coded segments were identified, some of which were parts of follow on questions from the researcher for clarification. This completed the first cycle coding. Next the researcher further refined the coded sections into 127 thematic word(s)/statements. From the 127 second cycle coded sections 12 categories for the section entitled the Old Way for Training and 12 categories for the New Way of Training with a section called the Bridge of categories which spanned the time frame of over 20 years, see Table 1 Second Cycle Coding.

TABLE 1. SECOND CYCLE CODING

Old Way of Training	Bridge	New Way of Training
+	Rushing	-
+	Yelling	-
~	Standards of Discipline	~
+	Breaking You Down	-
Self-Doubt		Train the Trainers
Follow Orders Only		Developing Leaders
Physical Training, one way		Physical Training, individual
+	Scripted	-
All Male		Mixed Gender
Manual Training		Technological Training
Drill Sergeants		Drill SGTs & PLT SGTs
DEP		FSP

There were five Bridge Categories that were present in both the Old Ways of Training (20+ years ago) and New Way of Training (current evolving practice of the last 10 years). This signifies that there are certain things in Army training that have endured the test of time when training new recruits. In the Old Way, training new recruits was about tearing down individuality to build up everyone as a functioning team, trained to follow orders and do what they were told to do and hence scoring more in the following categories: Rushing, Yelling, Breaking You Down, and training being very Scripted. The Old Way created tremendous self-doubt as the trainees were not to ask any questions, just Follow Orders Only. Physical Training was designed to pass your Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT), increase muscle strength and stamina for long missions where a lot of physical exertion and manual labor was required. The Old Way training was All Male for all services. Training consisted of Manual Training and very little computerized systems and foot marching everywhere. Drill Sergeants were in charge of Basic Training, AIT, and the just in infancy One Station Unit Training (OSUT) where Soldiers after Basic Training conducted AIT in their unit. Toward the end of the Old Way, introduced a program called the Delayed Entry Program (DEP) where civilian enlistees awaiting travel to Basic Training were developed by the Recruiters who recruited them. These civilian enlistees would be exposed to Drill and Ceremony, very little Physical Training, and basic Soldier tasks to keep them interested and not fail to ship before their date of travel to Basic Training (some could wait months). This approach came out of the Cold War mentality where if you did not follow orders, people died (paraphrased excerpt from SGM's interview).

In the New Way, there is less Rushing, Yelling, Breaking You Down, and not as Scripted all done on purpose to be discussed why in the next section. But there are several changes in the New Way, with the most important one being Developing Leaders. After 9/11, newly trained Soldiers, upon completion of Basic Training and AIT (or the OSUT program) were expected to arrive at their first unit and immediately be prepared to deploy to combat. With this in mind, the Military's senior leaders recognized that this expectation had to be indoctrinated into the New Way of training. Drill Sergeants must deal with technological advances by recognizing that the Soldiers of today grew up with cell phones and computers, they were smarter, faster in obtaining information and wanted to know why they were doing something before they did it. Technological Training advances, Mixed Gender formations and this generation of Soldiers that asked why, could comprehend more and so Drill Sergeants (like SGM) came up with the idea of Train the Trainer, where the Drill SGTs would teach the leaders of the trainee platoons and they would in turn teach their peers the task at hand. This took away the Self Doubt of old and developed leaders who could be expected to walk into combat and make life and death decisions in the absence of their leadership. Physical Training was tailored to individual needs and not just to pass an APFT. Drill SGTs were taken out of AIT and replaced with regular Army Sergeant First Class' (SFC) and senior Staff Sergeant's (SSG) to act as mentors and leaders, coaching and encouraging along the way with significantly less Yelling. The DEP program morphed into the Future Soldier Program (FSP) where the

Recruiters acted as mentors and leaders showing the civilian recruits more of what they would encounter in Basic Training. The FSP consisted of Drill and Ceremony, more intensive Physical Training (as they will experience in Basic), Soldier tasks and skills. All of this to better prepare the future Soldiers and lessen the shock and awe of old.

DISCUSSION

As a Recruiting Company Commander during the transition to the New Way and brought up in the Old Way of training, the author/researcher identified with the SGM in that all the vivid explanations in the transcript came to life in his own stories. The author/researcher didn't fully understand or agree with the New Way of training until he saw it through the words of the SGM in his personal experiences. The respondent was a normal teenager of the early 1990's defiant to authority and didn't follow the rules but the Old Way gave him standards of discipline and an idea of inspiration to be a Drill Sergeant himself one day and he could make some changes. In fact, the respondent did make some changes and applied his own experiences to developing leaders of the future. By taking off his hat, a coveted symbol of the Drill SGT, he became a person again and not that perfect, flawless, piece of iron and grit always barking orders at the new Soldiers and making them conduct sometimes endless sessions of physical training when they made mistakes but some who valued their opinions, conducting question and answer sessions without reprisal so that they understood the task at hand.

Culture changes and the Army changes with it, but in moderation, changes without direction cause chaos. Changes with scripted task, explained to an inquisitive, understanding new generation of Soldiers make better leaders. The author/researcher gained valuable insight into the changes witnessed but not fully understood or agreed with by the Army during the last 20 years.

CONCLUSION

This case study is not complete. It is a start for future research that needs to be conducted to learn and understand the 'how' and 'why' changes have affected Soldier Readiness in the last 20 plus years. Old leaders, like the respondent and the author/researcher may not understand and support the New Way of changes in training. The respondent and author/researcher have children the same age as the new Soldiers of this generation and often compare this generation to their children but have trouble seeing the reason for change and its goodness.

REFERENCES

- Saldaña, J. (2013). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 2nd Edition. Los Angeles, CA. Sage Publications.
- Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 5th Edition. Los Angeles, CA. Sage Publications.

ANNEX 1



U.S. ARMY SUSTAINMENT COMMAND

Sergeant Major Brian L. Marone **SGM, Distribution Management Center (DMC)**

SGM Brian L. Marone serves as the Sergeant Major of the U.S. Army Sustainment Command (ASC), Distribution Management Center (DMC) Sergeant Major, a position he has held since July 2013. As Sergeant Major, SGM Marone serves as the primary advisor to the DMC Commander on all matters pertaining to enlisted personnel assigned to the DMC, particularly in areas related to their training and development and to the quality of life and well-being of Soldiers and their families. SGM Marone also responds to the concerns of civilian and contractor employees of the DMC, and performs community outreach activities.



SGM Brian L. Marone, a native of Windber, PA., entered the United States Army on April 11, 1997 through the prior service program as a former United States Marine. He completed Marine Corps Boot Camp at Parris Island, SC., and Advanced Individual Training at Redstone Arsenal, AL. He has held various leadership and operational positions, to include Team Leader, Squad Leader, Ammunition Sergeant, Battalion Ammunition Manager, Ammunition Section Sergeant, Drill Sergeant Platoon Sergeant, Division Ammunition Manager, First Sergeant, and is currently the DMC Sergeant Major.

His stateside assignments include: The United States Army Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas; 115th Brigade Support Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team; 1st Cavalry Division Headquarters G-4, Bravo Company DHHB; 2nd Battalion 8th Cavalry Regiment; 15th Brigade Support Battalion, and 2nd Brigade Combat Team First Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, Texas. His overseas assignments include: 3rd Marine Division Okinawa, Japan; 1st Marine Division Camp Pendleton, California; 41st Ordnance Company and 23rd Ordnance Company, 191st Ordnance Kaiserslautern, Germany.

His military schools and education includes Warrior Leaders Course, Advanced and Senior Leaders Course, Drill Sergeant Course, and First Sergeant Course and is a graduate of the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy, Class 63. He has a Bachelors of Professional Studies in Business Management from Excelsior University.

His awards include: three Bronze Star Medals; Meritorious Service Medal; five Army Commendation Medals; Army Achievement Medal; Navy Achievement Medal; the Army Meritorious Unit Award; five Army Good Conduct Medals; Marine Corps Good Conduct Medal; two National Defense Service Medals; the Kosovo Campaign Medal; Two Iraqi Campaign Medals; the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal; the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal; four Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development Ribbons; the Army Service Ribbon; two Overseas Service Ribbons; the Navy/Marine Corps Overseas ribbon; the NATO Medal; the Drill Sergeant Badge and the Combat Action Badge. He is also a member of the Sergeant Audie Murphy Club.

SGM Marone is married and they have three Children.



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ANNEX 2

Thank you for speaking to me today. With your permission I shall record and transcribe (verbatim) this interview, to include all questions, responses and comments. Following the conclusion of the transcription I shall provide you with a draft copy for your review in order to ensure I have properly documented the context and meaning of your statements. You shall expect me to include the contents of this interview into a paper in partial completion of requirements for course LPHD 757 Quantitative Analysis Methods with Regent University.

This interview aims to collect data from Initial Entry Training Army Soldiers past and present, in order to compare differences good and bad in Soldier readiness. As a subject matter expert in training Army Soldiers and an exemplary leader you have attained the highest rank in the enlisted realm...Sergeant Major E-9, your input will be valuable in obtaining the objective.

You shall expect me to ask a series of semi structured open-ended questions in order to illicit descriptive, meaningful responses; these are the same questions I provided you prior in order to prepare you for the interview.

Please answer each question freely in order to obtain as much detail and context. If the questions are unclear, please ask me to clarify and I shall do so. You may end the interview at any time; however I respectfully request you complete the interview in its entirety to maximize the value of your responses. At this time are there any questions before we begin?

Questions:

1) Describe how training was Initial Entry Training for you when you joined the Army? What were the good and bad things about Initial Entry Training?

2) What did you learn from Initial Entry Training as a new Soldier? How did you apply it when you arrived at your first Army duty station?

3) When you were a Drill Sergeant what was different then when you were a Basic Training Soldier? Were there things you could or could not do as a Drill Sergeant that was done to you as a Basic Training Soldier?

4) Describe how training is now for Basic Training Soldiers in today's Army, what is different?

5) Is training of Basic Training Soldiers better or worse today and if so why?

End of Interview