

THE NCO JOURNAL

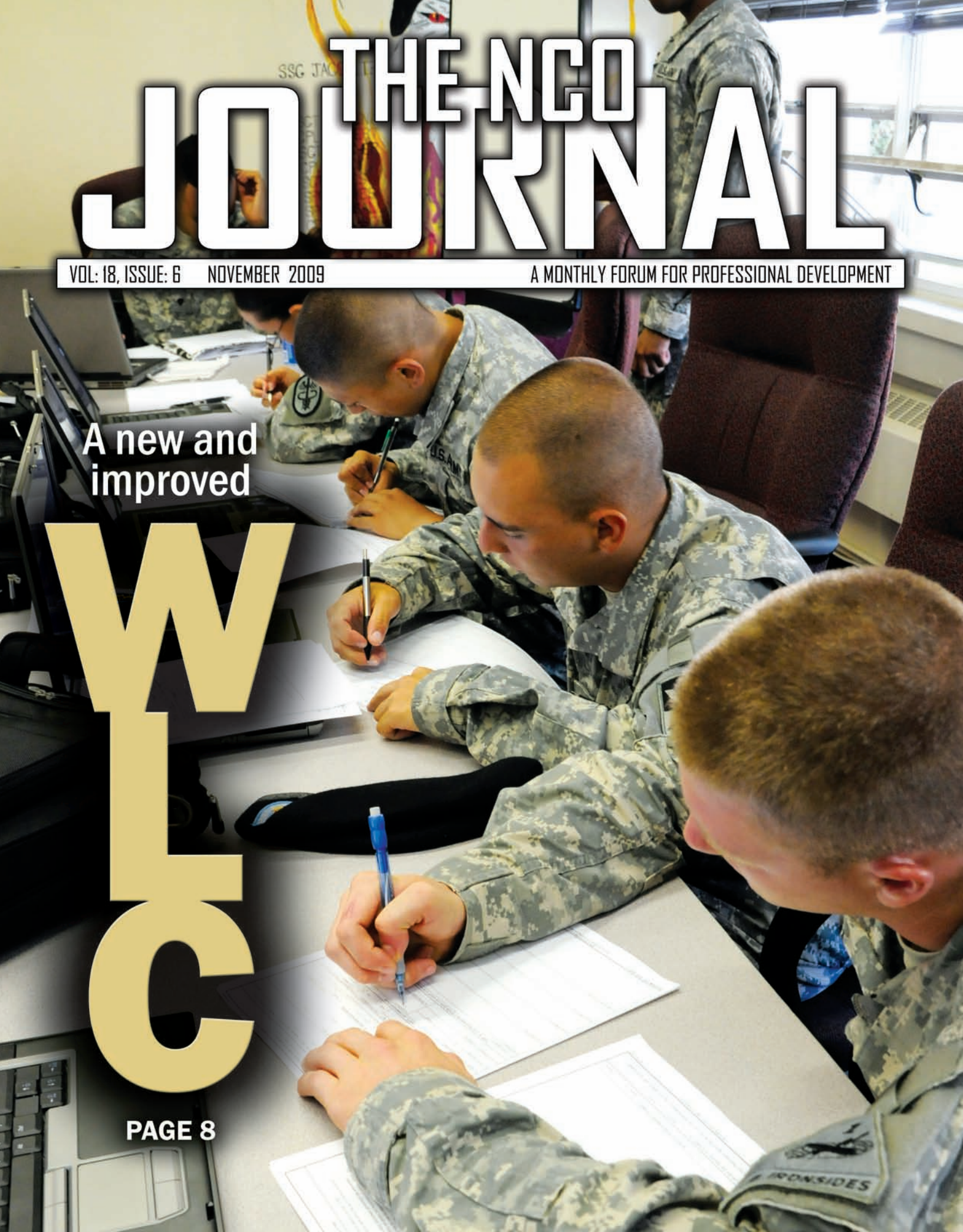
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A MONTHLY FORUM FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A new and improved

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We honor the men and women who have sacrificed their lives in current operations around the world.



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From the CSM

Learn to love learning

Gen. Martin Dempsey, commander of Training and Doctrine Command, and I have a great responsibility. We are charged with charting a course for the training and education of the men and women in the U.S. Army and who voluntarily choose to serve their country in a time of war. This is a challenge we must meet – not only because it is our obligation to these young men and women, but because time and time again in wars throughout history, one truth has held firm. It's simple, as are most truths that stand up through the ages.

The truth is this: The side that is the smartest – the side that has Soldiers who trust their lives to the men and women on their right and left, the side that can adapt quickly and fluidly, the side with leaders who can make complex decisions in the fractions of a second it takes to separate life from death – that side is special. That side wins wars. That side also wins peace.

A few years ago when I was private Bruner, I didn't know any of this and neither did the Army. I remember my first duty station as a young infantryman, standing there nervous and proud in the battalion area. The other new privates and I, still holding our duffel bags, fresh and new with clean stenciled names, stood in front of the first sergeant.

He was what you would expect – a crusty old SOB, a Vietnam veteran – undoubtedly in charge. The Silver Star ribbon and oak leaf cluster on his chest would have been more intimidating, I think, if his swagger and stare hadn't already set the hair on my neck standing as high as it would go.

"Who wants to go to college?" he barked.

We waited a moment, and I raised my hand. So did the other privates.

The first sergeant said a couple things I can't repeat here, ending with a creative way to say "get out of my company."

We left. When we came back a few hours later, it was déjà vu. He asked us the same question.

By now we were a little more seasoned – all of us had learned something that seemed as important as any battle drill. If first sergeant asks about college, say "no" as quickly as possible. A while later, still a young private, I was getting into a little trouble. My platoon leader, who had been a sergeant before he went to Officer Candidate School, took me aside. He had a plan for keeping me out of trouble: He enrolled me in night classes. Not only did he enroll me, but he also went with me every night without fail. It didn't matter what we were doing.

Coming out of the field, we went to class with camouflage

paint behind our ears. The other students would scoot a little further away from us and our infantry "cologne." After a dress uniform inspection, we sat in class as the wrinkles set into our greens. School was that important.

Every day we were there – you better believe we were there each day – I learned how to keep out of trouble, how to pass exams, and how slowly a minute hand can move when you haven't studied and the professor asks a question.

I also learned a larger lesson. I learned the *real* lesson my platoon leader had for me: I learned the power of education; I learned to love learning.

In fact, I learned it so well, that while supporting a wife and three children, I made a tough decision and left the Army for a while to finish my bachelor's degree full time. It was hard, but I made it, and that is still one of the proudest accomplishments of my life.

Thank you for reading about my thoughts on the state of our Army – the strongest Army I have ever seen because of the strength young Soldiers and noncommissioned officers like you. Thank you for your support of our Army.

For the family members reading this, a special thanks as well. I know that each of you contributes to the strength and the culture of service that make this Army and this country great. I appreciate it. The Soldiers appreciate it.

The risk and responsibility you brave young women and men bear on a daily basis – for each other – the sacrifices you make for us every day ... well, there aren't words. You are staggering and awe-inspiring. Many of you have already been to combat, some more than once. All of you will go if called to do so.

Before I close, please remember that right now there are young Americans just like you cleaning their weapons, lacing up their worn boots and preparing for another day in the desert or the mountains. They, like you, are doing it so our lives are better.

Command Sgt. Maj. David M. Bruner is the Training and Doctrine Command, command sergeant major. Prior to arriving at TRADOC, he served as the command sergeant major of the Combined Arms Center, Fort Leavenworth, Kan. He has more than 31 years of service and has held many leadership positions, including platoon sergeant, Special Forces engineer sergeant and team sergeant, first sergeant, senior enlisted adviser for the Joint Chiefs of Staff and commandant.



Command Sgt. Maj. David M. Bruner

Opinion →

When tragedy hits home

On Nov. 5, tragedy hit the Fort Hood, Texas, community in a manner that sent shockwaves throughout the Army populace – the senseless killing of 13 members of our Army family and the wounding of 29 more. To make matters worse, we soon found out one of our own is alleged to be the lone gunman.

As the event unfolded before our eyes on national television, many began questioning how this could happen on an Army installation. Some immediately began to seek blame to satisfy their psyche, lashing out based upon assumptions and stereotypes. Our Army leadership has said this is not the way to go. Now is not the time to second-guess the reasons why, not the time to speculate on the motives of the alleged gunman or the time to lay blame on a segment of our Army community for the actions of one.

While the investigation will most assuredly answer many of the questions now being asked, it is incumbent upon the NCO Corps to do its best to support the leadership while it attempts to find the truth and to help quash any speculation or fear mongering. Most assuredly, there will be lessons learned from this tragedy – actions that could have, and probably should have, been taken. But as our leadership has stated, we should focus on the many success stories that came out of this tragedy.

In talking to the Fort Hood community and the hordes of media who gathered at the gates of the installation on Nov. 6, Army Chief of Staff Gen. George Casey said that while the Army is no stranger to tragedy, we are an Army that draws strength from adversity. Many are prompted to perform acts of courage and heroism, a reason why he said he was very proud to be the leader of such a great Army.

Acts to which he referred include those of a group of medics attending a graduation ceremony in the building next door to the shooting. Once they heard the shots, the medics immediately jumped into action and went toward the sounds of the gunfire because they knew there would be casualties. Stories like the wounded Soldiers who, rather than find safety, remained at the scene to tend to other wounded Soldiers, helping them to safety and further medical treatment. There are many other stories coming out of this tragedy, stories worthy of our praise.


What these stories say about us as a military is that when faced with a situation which calls for quick, decisive action, regardless of the relative danger the decisions may bring, our

Soldiers rise to the top – training instinctively kicks in. This is mostly due to the leadership of the NCO Corps, those individuals who are the trainers of the force – the counselors, mentors and overseers of the Army family – and the keepers of the Army Values. They are the big brothers of the Army family. It is up to the Corps to ensure the family unit remains intact, that the bonds that tie us as comrades-in-arms, keep us together as a family reeling from tragedy.

When tragedy hits home, the typical family unit comes together, works to console one another, tries to make sense of it all and begins to heal the wounds that cannot be seen. The same is true for the Army family; it's just a lot bigger than most.

Secretary of the Army John McHugh said, "The Army family is strong. But, a great source of that strength is what we derive from each other. In times of crisis and challenge, how we hold each other straight and how we make a difference [is what matters most]."

He added, "This is a time for the Army family to stand together. This is a time for 'Army Strong' to mean what it says. And this is a time to know we are working, every moment, to ensure that [Soldier and family] safety and security is met to the highest possible degree."

Our hearts go out to the families of the fallen, and the Soldiers and families of those wounded in action. Nothing we can say here will change the events of that day. That page of history has been written. Where we go from here, however, largely depends on what the Corps does to keep the family unit intact. 



David Crozier

David Crozier
Editor

Post-9/11 GI Bill: eligibility, entitlement and application

By Douglas DeMaio
IMCOM Bamberg

The Post-9/11 GI Bill program began funding veterans' aspirations for higher education this semester.

The program took effect Aug. 1, but some servicemembers and veterans may not know the eligibility requirements, entitlement rights or the application process.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill is implemented through the Department of Veterans Affairs. The department's Web site for the GI Bill, www.gibill.va.gov, has a step-by-step program to assist visitors with understanding their GI Bill benefits and the terms for its use.

Additionally, the Web site provides insight to the application process and the systematic approach a veteran should take to start using educational benefits.

The first thing a potential beneficiary should do is determine eligibility.

Beneficiaries who want to use the Post-9/11 GI Bill to further their education must meet certain criteria to take full advantage of the 100 percent entitlement.

Once eligibility and entitlement percentage have been determined, beneficiaries should consolidate important documents regarding their military service.

The Web site states the following documents are required for the program:

- DD 214 Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty for the most recent period of active duty
- Transcripts for all periods of education after high school.
- Kicker Contract (the Department of Defense may be able to provide this information if the Soldier cannot locate a copy of the contract)
- The next step is to select a school

Schools need to have approved educational programs with Veterans Affairs. Beneficiaries should check this status on the GI Bill Web site since some organizations are misleading.

A recent article by Jacqueline M. Hames titled, "Army warns against education counseling scams," explained how some civilian organizations are taking advantage of uninformed veterans. These organizations use the Veterans Affairs logo and military images on their Web sites to entice veterans into paying for an expense that should be free.

Some of the approved educational programs have additional benefits. Choosing a school that participates in the Yellow Ribbon Program can provide added value to veterans if their tuition exceeds their entitlements. Veterans attending schools under this program may receive additional entitlements when tuition expenses exceed the highest public in-state undergraduate tuition rate.

The maximum in-state tuition for a public school in the state



U.S. Army courtesy graphic

where a veteran will attend college, along with the percentage entitlements level, sets the maximum payment that the VA can give a veteran through the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

The Web site provides a list of maximum tuition and fee entitlements for all 50 states, along with an overseas category for veterans who want to study abroad or attend a school in a U.S. territory.

Once beneficiaries have evaluated their choices and made a decision, the process of applying for benefits should begin.

Beneficiaries need to complete VA Form 22-1990, "Application for VA Education Benefits."

According to the Web site, beneficiaries may also receive an application form at the school or training establishment they wish to attend. The VA-certifying official at the school (usually located in the registrar's or financial aid office) should have the forms available, can assist beneficiaries in completing them and will submit them to VA.

Applicants can send their VA Form 22-1990, along with required supporting documents, to be processed by doing one of the following:

School Selected: Mail the completed application to the VA Regional Processing Office for the region of that school's physical address. Alert the veterans' certifying official at the school or training establishment about the application for VA education benefits. Ask the official to send the enrollment information using VA Form 22-1999, "Enrollment Certification," or its electronic version. Wait for the VA to process the application and send notice of its decision concerning eligibility for education benefits.

School Not Selected: Mail the completed application to the VA Regional Processing Office for the region of the Soldier's home address. Wait for the VA to process the application and send notice of its decision concerning the eligibility for education benefits.

Contact a garrison education office for more information.

Command and Key Billet Program: Changes to CSM / SGM selection process announced

Editor's note: The following information was released by e-mail from Col. Jon Finke, director, EPMD.

Background

The Army recently announced its intent to implement a centralized selection process to select and slate eligible command sergeants major (CSMs) and sergeants major (SGMs) against brigade CSM, battalion CSM and approved SGM key billet positions, still to be determined.

This change ensures placement of the best qualified Soldiers in key leadership positions to best serve our nation, the Army and our Soldiers.

This decision, along with others, was outlined by Army leadership in a director of military personnel management memorandum dated June 2 as part of an overall update to senior noncommissioned officer management policies. The plan was specifically mentioned in another DMPM memorandum dated Aug. 21. The decision to centrally select CSMs and SGMs for these positions represents a significant change in culture and current practices regarding CSM and SGM management and requires the support of leaders across our Army, military and civilian alike, for it to succeed.

Current

To accomplish this task, the Enlisted Personnel Management Directorate and the Army Human Resources Command stood up the Command Slating Branch. CSB's mission is "to execute the Chief of Staff of the Army and Sergeant Major of the Army Centralized Selection List Command and Key Billet Program while maintaining the integrity of the process so as to place the best qualified CSMs and SGMs in CSM positions and key billets that will best serve the nation, the Army and its Soldiers."

Points of contact in the CSB who can answer your questions are Kurt Fedors at kurt.fedors@us.army.mil; Master Sgt. Anthony DiFondi at anthony.difondi@us.army.mil; and Master Sgt. Garvin Walcott at garvin.walcott@us.army.mil.

Remember, CSB personnel are program and process managers for CSM central selection. CSM and SGM assignments, slating, and professional development questions should be referred to the CSM and SGM branch chief, Sgt. Maj. Gabriella Russum at gabriella.russum@us.army.mil in EPMD.

An ongoing review of current regulations, policies and procedures is intended to identify appropriate changes to support

the conduct of our first CSM CSL board(s) in fiscal year 2011 for the active component. Eligible CSMs and SGMs selected during these boards will be slated against previously identified positions based on selection board Order of Merit Lists, Soldier qualifications, and Soldier preferences to fill positions during fiscal year 2012. The inaugural active component brigade level board(s) are approved and scheduled during October 2010; battalion level boards are scheduled during January 2011.

Keys to implementing the change

Keys to a smooth transition for the selection process include the following: establishing projected change of responsibility dates for all currently serving CSMs at brigade and battalion levels and for those serving in projected key billets; establishing tour lengths at 24 months for brigade and battalion billets (other key billet tour lengths may vary); synchronizing the selection, training, and change of command and change of responsibility dates for incoming commanders and CSMs.

This information was covered in military personnel (MILPER) message 09-210 released on Sept. 11, 2009. AHRC released MILPER 09-235 on Oct. 8, 2009. This MILPER message detailed the year-long CSL process with the simple intent of providing this process information to commands and Soldiers to increase situational awareness. AHRC will continue to communicate changes and all relevant information to Soldiers and commands in the field and will release information as decisions are made and implementing procedures are established.

It's important that every eligible Soldier understand the changes taking place with regard to CSM and SGM management, and in particular how the CSM CSL will be implemented. More information will be forthcoming.

The central selection of brigade and battalion CSMs and SGMs for key billets represents a positive step toward improving how the Army professionally develops its most senior enlisted leaders and selects those best qualified to serve in the positions.

For questions regarding the CSM CSL, contact the Command Slating Branch in EPMD, AHRC. For further information, you can also go to <https://s1net.bcks.army.mil> and select "CSM CSL."

Year of the NCO Suggested Reading

Brokaw, Tom. *The Greatest Generation*. New York: Random House, 1998.

Fischer, David Hackett. *Washington's Crossing*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

McCullough, David. *1776*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006.

Palmer, Dave R. *Summons of the Trumpet: U.S.-Vietnam in Perspective*. San Rafael: Presidio Press, 1978.

Tzu, Sun, and Sun Pin. *The Complete Art of War*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1996.

Willard, Tom. *Buffalo Soldiers*. New York: Forge Press, 1997.

Obama signs executive order banning texting while driving

By Jennifer Casteline

Texting took a back seat to safety this October with an executive order prohibiting text messaging while driving on military installations or driving anywhere in government vehicles.

Executive Order 13513, signed by President Barack Obama Oct. 1, specifically bans federal employees from texting while driving government-owned, -leased or -rented vehicles. It also prohibits texting while driving privately-owned vehicles on official government business. The policy also extends to federal contractors.

“Despite the shocking accident reports and warnings, people still text while driving,” said Mario Owens, safety officer for the Army’s Installation Management Command.

A number of studies show that text messaging while driving is the “modern day, top driving distraction” that causes auto accidents, Owens said.

According to Owens, texting while driving has been found to be more dangerous than driving while intoxicated, “something to remember the next time you text message while driving,” he said.

Driver distraction, which includes the use of electronic devices while driving, accounted for 16 percent of fatal crashes in 2008, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation.

A recent study conducted by the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute reports that out of all cell phone-related tasks – including talking, dialing or reaching for the phone – texting while driving is the most dangerous. The study also states that for every 6 seconds of drive time, drivers sending or receiving a text message spends 4.6 of those seconds with their eyes away from the road.

In 2007, Washington became the first state to ban texting while driving. Seventeen other states and the District of Columbia



Photo by C. Todd Lopez

A new executive order bans federal employees from texting when driving any type of vehicle while on government business or when driving on a military installation.

have followed suit.

By way of the ban, the federal government hopes to set an example for state and local governments, private employers and individual drivers, as well as mitigate the rates of unnecessary and sometimes deadly accidents caused by being distracted by electronic devices while driving.

Before reaching for any hand-held devices to engage in a text-messaging-session, officials said it’s important to know that the executive order very broadly defines texting as “reading from or entering data into any handheld or other electronic devices,” to include, “e-mailing, instant messaging, obtaining navigational information or engaging in any other form of electronic data retrieval of electronic data communication.”



Year of the NCO Stories

Have a great NCO Story? We want to see it and help you spread the word. Need a topic or an idea to get you started? Visit the Year of the NCO Web site at <http://www4.army.mil/yearofthenco/home.php> and click on the “initiatives” tab. There you will find a host of information about your year. Send your story to: NCO Journal, USASMA, 11291 SGT E Churchill St., Fort Bliss, TX 79918-8002, or e-mail them to ATSS-SJ-NCOJOURNAL@us.army.mil. If submitting photographs, please identify all individuals in the picture. We reserve the right to edit your story based on length, content and grammar.

“Real Warrior” medic hopes her stress story helps others

By **Jim Garamone**
American Forces Press Service →

Megan Krause’s words come out in a rush, as if she wants everyone to hear and learn from her story.

Krause, an Army reservist with the 365th Engineer Battalion in Pennsylvania, does want people to hear her story, and connect with servicemembers so they don’t go through what she did.

The 27-year-old staff sergeant is a part of the “Real Warrior” campaign, which aims at getting the word out to servicemembers about post-traumatic stress disorder and other psychological trauma. The Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury sponsors the program. Krause spoke about her experiences during the Warrior Resilience Conference in Norfolk, Va., in November.

On active duty, Krause served as a medic in Afghanistan and Iraq with the 101st Airborne Division. With her “can-do” persona, she felt she had it all together – she already knew how her life was going to go.

“I was going to go off active duty, get a degree at Penn State and then get a job in Washington,” the Illinois native said in an interview. “When I got home, I never thought I had any psychological issues. Not me. That was for other people. I had goals,” she said.

What she also had were flashbacks and nightmares. Still, she said, “I really felt fine. I knew what triggers to avoid, and I was coping quite well.”

Yet, she was drinking. “But, I attributed that to just being a college kid,” she said. Once in college, she enlisted in the Army Reserve and took pride in serving and taking care of her troops.

Krause was on her way to reaching her goals when post-traumatic stress disorder crashed down on her last year.

She was going through a rough patch – her father had lost his job, her brother and sister-in-law had deployed, and she had no job to go to after college. Her unit had also been put on stand-by for hurricane relief.

“What I did not realize was that increases in symptoms were causing increases in bad choices, which were causing increases in problems,” she said. “But I was so busy worrying about other

things and drinking my life away. It all piles on itself, and there was no good way to start to fix it.”

Krause was blowing off classes and papers. She skipped Reserve duty. One of her Soldiers sat her down and told her people were worried about her, and she should get help. Her first sergeant reached out and tried to get her to seek help, too.

“Everybody around me noticed there was a problem, but I didn’t,” she said. “My first sergeant said, ‘Let’s fight this together.’ But I still didn’t get help.”

Her epiphany came after a night of drinking. She was talking with friends after the bars closed when a truck backfired. She took off running across campus to get to her apartment.

“There was a light on, and I didn’t remember leaving a light on,” she said. “I called the State College police and told them that someone needed to come check my apartment, because I think the terrorists are waiting for me.”

A police car and an ambulance arrived. Krause said she didn’t want to go to the local hospital but to the Veterans Affairs hospital in Altoona, Pa.,

about 45 minutes away. So, her roommate drove her there.

“I spent three days in detox, talked to psychiatrists, psychologists and care coordinators, and they helped me,” she said.

Krause worked with the Penn State veterans outreach office and her professors to get back on track for school, and graduated in December. She also received a job offer from a public relations firm in Washington, D.C.

“It’s really amazing how as soon as you make the choice to get help and address the issue, things start falling into place,” she said.

Krause credits her friends, Soldiers, military leaders and the medical system for the help.

She volunteered to be part of the “Real Warrior” campaign in March. “What I hope to do is take what was a really horrible experience and turn it into a positive experience for other veterans and servicemembers who may be struggling and don’t necessarily see the light at the end of the tunnel,” she said.

“If one other Soldier out there sees my profile and can relate enough to say, ‘I can do that. I can get help,’ that’s what I hope to accomplish with this program,” she said.



Courtesy photo

Staff Sgt. Megan Krause, an Army Reserve medic who has served in Iraq and Afghanistan, hopes to help other Soldiers by telling her story of seeking help when post-traumatic stress had her spiraling out of control.



From left, Sgt. Justin Emmer, Sgt. Ruba Jackson and Sgt. Gregorio Estrada access a handout on their laptops during class at the Fort Bliss NCO Academy in September.

A new and improved

WARRIOR LEADER COURSE

Land navigation is out and laptops and written tests are in as students and instructors pilot an all-new Warrior Leader Course

Story and photos
By **Michael L. Lewis**

The students didn't realize they would be trailblazers. Like thousands of other Soldiers each year, they were selected from units across the country to attend the Army's standard course to become junior NCOs and leaders of Soldiers.

They had been forewarned by their senior leaders back home what the Warrior Leader Course would be like, what they should brace themselves for and how helpful (or not) the course would be. But, what they were told was neither exciting nor encouraging.

"I was expecting to be on lockdown for two weeks, doing [physical training] tests and land navigation," said Sgt. Jacob Hairston, a unit supply specialist with the

229th Military Intelligence Battalion at the Defense Language Institute, Presidio of Monterey, Calif.

"Back to basic training ... and no sleep – everybody just told me to go and get it over with," said Spc. Angel Wood, a health care specialist who was with the Regimental Support Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, Fort Irwin, Calif., but is now a sergeant stationed at Fort Wainwright, Alaska.

Rather than the torturous two weeks they were expecting, they were instead surprised by a completely new and improved Warrior Leader Course. They were among 90 students in the September class at the NCO Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas, who became the first in the Army to study under



missioned officers and Soldiers to meet the needs of the Army,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Raymond Chandler, commandant of the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, in an address to the pilot class. USASMA is not only the parent unit of the NCO academy where the course was piloted, it is home to the team who wrote the new course.

The updated program is a complete overhaul of its predecessors, the former 30-day Primary Leadership Development Course and current 15-day modified Warrior Leader Course. The new 17-day WLC, which will be implemented Army-wide beginning in January, “has little in it that was in the previous course,” Chandler said. “The course is more challenging with more time for reflection and learning. The lessons are all new and based on input

from the field – what they said junior leaders need in today’s Army.”

Command Sgt. Maj. Gary Hall, commandant of Fort Bliss’ NCO Academy, emphasized the completeness of the overhaul.

“This is not the WLC of old. The old curriculum was out of date and not how you build a leader in today’s Army,” Hall said. The new course is more relevant to today’s soon-to-be junior leaders, the vast majority of whom have combat experience, but lack the leadership and administration skills senior NCOs say are vital to be effective first-line supervisors.

Building a better course

As WLC is the foundational and first course in the NCO Education System, the impetus for the revision came from the very top.

“We went back in and really took all the lessons and feedback from the field,” Sgt. Maj. of the Army Kenneth Preston said during a visit to the pilot class. “Leaders out there who have watched



Top: Students practice drill and ceremony skills by marching in formation to lunch at the dining facility.

Center: Sgt. Melvin Cortes reviews his packing list while setting up his room in the student barracks. Students are not required to stay in the barracks but are expected to maintain a room for inspection.

Below: Command Sgt. Maj. Gary Hall, the NCO Academy’s commandant, welcomes the students of the pilot class during orientation on Day 1 of the course.

a new program of instruction – one that course designers, instructors and students agree better prepares newly minted NCOs for the tasks of leading and guiding today’s Soldiers at the squad or section level.

Instead of burning out students with exhausting combat-skill drills, sleep deprivation and physical fitness tests reminiscent of basic training, the new WLC curriculum is more academic, focusing on classroom discussions, oral presentations and written exams. In short, students must prove themselves scholastically and be mentally fit to lead others and are given new tools to do so.

“This is really a first among firsts, a test the Army has asked us to conduct on how we can better educate our noncom-





Above: Students prepare for a formation run during a pre-dawn physical fitness workout.

Right: Sgt. 1st Class Shandrel Stewart, a senior small group leader, instructs her class on what they should expect during the course.

first-line supervisors come out of the old PLDC or the old Warrior Leader Course and watched their performance out there as noncommissioned officers in their units said, “This is what we need noncommissioned officers to be able to do. These are the additional subjects we think they should get and are not getting.”

Tasked with figuring out what new subjects should be included was Sgt. Maj. Russell Hurley, who was the course chief for WLC and is now the sergeant major of the Directorate of Training, Doctrine and Education at USASMA. Hurley’s team began by integrating into the course the most recent research in adult education – how best to teach a student who is older, has a family or has been deployed.

“We wanted to employ the adult learning model – not train them as adolescents in Soldier tasks, but in a way where they are given higher learning outcomes and where the complexity of the tasks is greater,” Hurley said. “We had to find a way to look at the age demographics and determine the way those students learn best. I told [the development team] to find a way to gain their interest. If they’ve got to be in that classroom, we’ve got to make it interesting and make the subject hit home with them so they’ll buy into it.”



The shift in teaching style was to complement higher expectations now placed on junior leaders, who increasingly make decisions at lower levels than ever before.

“We’ve tried to develop training and education that helps them understand they will make decisions that affect them, their Soldiers and everyone around them,” Hurley said. “Some of those decisions will be life or death, possibly. With that responsibility on them, it’s our responsibility to try to expose them and educate them on the decision-making process.”

In another departure from previous practice, the new course is specifically designed to be used by active Army, Reserve and National Guard Soldiers. This is to align WLC with the new One

Army School System, where all Soldiers, regardless of component, receive identical instruction in the same courses. However, balancing the time requirements of both the Army and the Soldier proved to be a challenge for course developers.

“We had to make some tough decisions and had to prioritize,” Hurley said. “If [students] had more time for the course, the course would be longer and there would have been more things. But, that’s not reality. When you consider all the things – the [Army Force Generation] cycles, time away from the unit, time away from the family – we tried to come up with the right mix.”

Ultimately, Hurley believes an ideal combination was achieved, one that skillfully blends modern educational theory and current technology with Army doc-

trine and leadership skills.

“This course is the right mix, at the right time, to get our noncommissioned officers where they need to be in the future,” he said.

Teaching the new course

Instructors charged with piloting the new course say it is a comprehensive improvement and contend it is now more student-centered, better cultivating their self-sufficiency, self-reliance and self-development.

“I think it shifts a lot of the responsibility from the instructors to the student and develops a more responsible leader,” said Sgt. 1st Class Douglas Ostheimer, the chief instructor at the Fort Bliss NCO

Academy. “The students who have the self-discipline to meet the challenges put in front of them are going to rise to the challenge; that’s beneficial to the Army.”

Instructors and students had to adapt to a much more academic and classroom-oriented focus in the new program. Written tests, laptop-based texts and study time were added to the curriculum. The result, instructors say, is that students are retaining more information.

“With this new POI, they react more,” said Sgt. 1st Class Shandrel Stewart, a senior small group leader. “They take the time to study. They take the time to reference the material. We have three exams, so when we put out information, they’re actually taking notes now and putting more effort into learning the material.”

For one student, the differences be-

to be learning a lot of stuff I pretty much already knew,” said Sgt. Martauza Fleeks, an information technology specialist with the 111th Military Intelligence Brigade, Fort Huachuca, Ariz. “You know, a lot of useless stuff, like sitting around in the hot sun doing training – because most of us have already been deployed and have been doing this stuff like 10,000 times over. I’m actually learning a lot of stuff I didn’t know, especially on the administration side of being a leader.”

That’s different than what students were told the previous course was all about – a change for the better, they said.

“We’re coming here because we have leadership potential,” said Spc. Lakeshia Livingston, a Patriot launching station enhanced operator/maintainer with 2nd Battalion, 43rd Air Missile Defense Regi-

ment, 11th Air Defense Artillery Brigade at Fort Bliss. “We’re not coming here to get trained over again; that’s probably how it worked before. [Students] weren’t going back with knowledge. They were going back with just basic training skills.”

Learning in the new course

Students overwhelmingly said they appreciated the course’s updates, especially the added concentration on administrative tasks some view as mundane but are an indispensable part of leading and mentoring Soldiers. Completing award recommendations correctly, filling out NCO Evaluation Reports according to standard and counseling Soldiers appropriately were seen as important skills they don’t have the opportunity to learn back at their units.

“You rarely find a leader – and there are some good ones out there – who pulls you to the side to teach you the admin part” of being an NCO, Livingston said.

“It’s setting you up for long-range success,” Fleeks said. “Because sooner or later it’s not just about *your* NCOER; you’re going to be giving someone else an NCOER. If you focus on it now, by the time that you get to that point [as a supervisor], you’ll be highly efficient at it. It’s helping you in the long range, not just

Left: Staff Sgt. Alexander Franklin teaches a class on Army writing skills. Students later practiced by writing award recommendations.

Below: Behind closed doors, students take one of three written exams. They are able to reference notes, documents and other material on their supplied laptops.



tween the old and new courses were staggering. Sgt. Randall Malone, a reservist from Columbus, Ohio, and a unit supply specialist with the 412th Civil Affairs Battalion, 360th Civil Affairs Brigade, was in the unique position of having attended part of PLDC before coming to the new WLC this fall.

“I started when I was on active duty, when it was called PLDC; I had to stop due to an injury,” Malone said. “I came in [the new WLC] with the mindset of knowing what to expect, so it wasn’t going to be a culture shock or anything for me. But the culture shock happened anyway.”

The added relevancy of the new course was a pleasant surprise to another student. “I honestly thought I was going



in being a first-line supervisor.”

In some cases, students were discovering the correct standards for the first time.

“Being in these classes, I realize I’ve been learning things totally wrong,” Wood said. “Once I go back, I’ll be doing things the right way instead of teaching my Soldiers the wrong way.”

“It’ll save a lot of time,” Livingston added. “Instead of making a big deal and panicking and spending a whole week just trying to write an NCOER because it keeps getting pushed back so many times, you just knock it out and continue with the mission.”

Fleeks agreed. “I always thought I did a good job with my counselings. But, listening to all the stuff [in class], I just feel like I’m a better leader because there was some stuff I was leaving out. I feel I could have probably gotten more out of my Soldiers with the knowledge that I’m gaining now.”

Another novel feature of the new course is that laptops are issued to students. Pre-loaded with a digital library of classroom texts, field manuals, Army regulations and other oft-referenced documents, the computers add to WLC educational technology that has been incorporated into other NCOES courses. Students are taught not just what the information is, but how to find it later when the need arises back home. They are able to use their laptops during exams, simulating the information that will be available to them when making comparable decisions in the real world.

“It teaches you how to reference – everything for the Army is written somewhere,” Livingston said. “It really hits you that it makes life easier if you just know where to look it up.”

“When you’re doing PT and you’re not sure exactly how this exercise is done, you know exactly which manual to go to,” Malone said. “You’re not sitting there going through 400 FMs.”

While PT tests are no longer a part of WLC, practice in the Army’s new Physical Readiness Training program was integrated into the course, preparing future leaders for the program’s projected roll-out. A replacement for the current PT program, PRT seeks to reduce injuries and build strength, endurance and mobility by incorporating exercises other than the standard push-ups and sit-ups. Since the new program has yet to be fully

implemented, students said they enjoyed becoming skilled at it to inform others in their units upon their return.

“That’s something I was talking to my commander about,” Malone said. “It’s something that he’s already told me, ‘Be prepared when you get back to show everybody else how it goes.’”

Hairston said the same was expected of him. “When we get back to our units, we’re all going to be putting that new PT

three or four hours after class; getting three or four hours of sleep a night; then doing the same thing the next morning, seven days a week for 30 days.”

“I don’t even see how they were performing back then – those many hours of rehearsing, practicing and studying,” Livingston said. “Because, even now, I’m like, ‘I’ve got to do this; I’ve got to do this.’ And, I have 12 hours to do it all.”

Course instructors say more down-



program together,” he said. “That’s a big step for all of us.”

Outside of course content, the new WLC went from being a resident course where students were not permitted to leave the school’s barracks, to a non-resident course where students are “on pass” and able to go home at the end of the school day. Students now have far more downtime for sleeping, studying and relaxing than before.

Malone recalled the differences compared to the old course he experienced. “The training style of PLDC was more like what my senior NCOs went through. It was the rigorous 3:30 a.m. wake up; spending eight or nine hours in class; then going to do hands-on training for another



Top: A student reacts to an ambush during performance evaluations at the situational training exercise at Fort Bliss’ training complex.

Bottom: Sgt. Jacob Hairston, left, and Pfc. Derek Smith complete a written exam.

Right: Sgt. Shandrel Stewart, clipboard in hand, evaluates students as they defend their position during the situation training exercise at Fort Bliss’ training complex.

time was incorporated into the schedule to develop students' self-discipline and time-management skills. Somewhat surprisingly, some students who had homes on or near Fort Bliss spent time at the school barracks anyway, finding it a quieter and less-distracting environment for studying and preparing for class.

Advice for future students

Learning the Army way to be a leader



shouldn't be a fear-inducing prospect, but unfortunately, that was too often the case, academy leaders said.

"People have different ideas about training; some think students need to be yelled at. I disagree," Hall said. "Here, it's a dialogue, not a monologue. You don't have to be scared to come, and some students are. They're afraid they're going to be dogged for two weeks straight. But you've got to put your head into it now. The days of going to WLC and standing on your head for 15 days are over."

Far from making students soft, the new approach is already creating better leaders, Hall's chief instructor finds. "The changes that have been implemented into the program are making a more responsible, more independent leader who can make decisions on his or her own at a lower level in a quicker manner," Ostheimer said.

Forgetting what you've heard about the course in the past is key to getting the most out of WLC, he said.

"It all boils down to the attitude of the students when they come here. Those who come here with an attitude and think, 'Why do I have to go to this school? I'm already in charge of Soldiers. I'm already leading,' and maintain that attitude throughout the course don't really get a lot of information and development because

they're closed-minded to it. Those who come and see an opportunity to develop themselves or to make changes in the way they've operated in the Army prosper and bloom and grow into great leaders," Ostheimer said.

Other instructors emphasize the importance of pre-course screening at the unit level, where marginal Soldiers should be weeded out and everyone else re-taught the basics.

"[If] they're ill-prepared, leadership has failed them," Stewart said. "They're overweight. They're not prepared with the packing list. They're not prepared with the drill and ceremony – things that the unit should prepare, some have no clue. We should not catch those problems here; we cannot overcome that. We are world-class trainers, but you have to give us something to work with."

Students also shouldn't expect WLC

to give them instant leadership abilities. At the pilot class' graduation ceremony, Chandler reminded students that their professional development as NCOs has really just begun.

"This course does not make you a leader," he said. "This course provides you with the skills necessary for you to develop yourself along with your leaders into a better leader. We did not turn you into high-performing, skilled sergeants ready to lead squads from the time you cross this stage. But what we have given you is a set of tools you can take back to your unit, that you can use with your Soldiers so you can be better and they can be better, making your unit more effective."

Contacted a month after graduating, the trailblazing students in the pilot class said they were already putting to good use the leadership lessons they learned.

"All the knowledge that I gained, I haven't forgotten any of it," said Fleeks, back at his Fort Huachuca unit. "In each task I give out to my Soldiers, I remember what I've learned. One of my Soldiers is ready to go herself. I told her to be open to learn; take advantage of the experience."

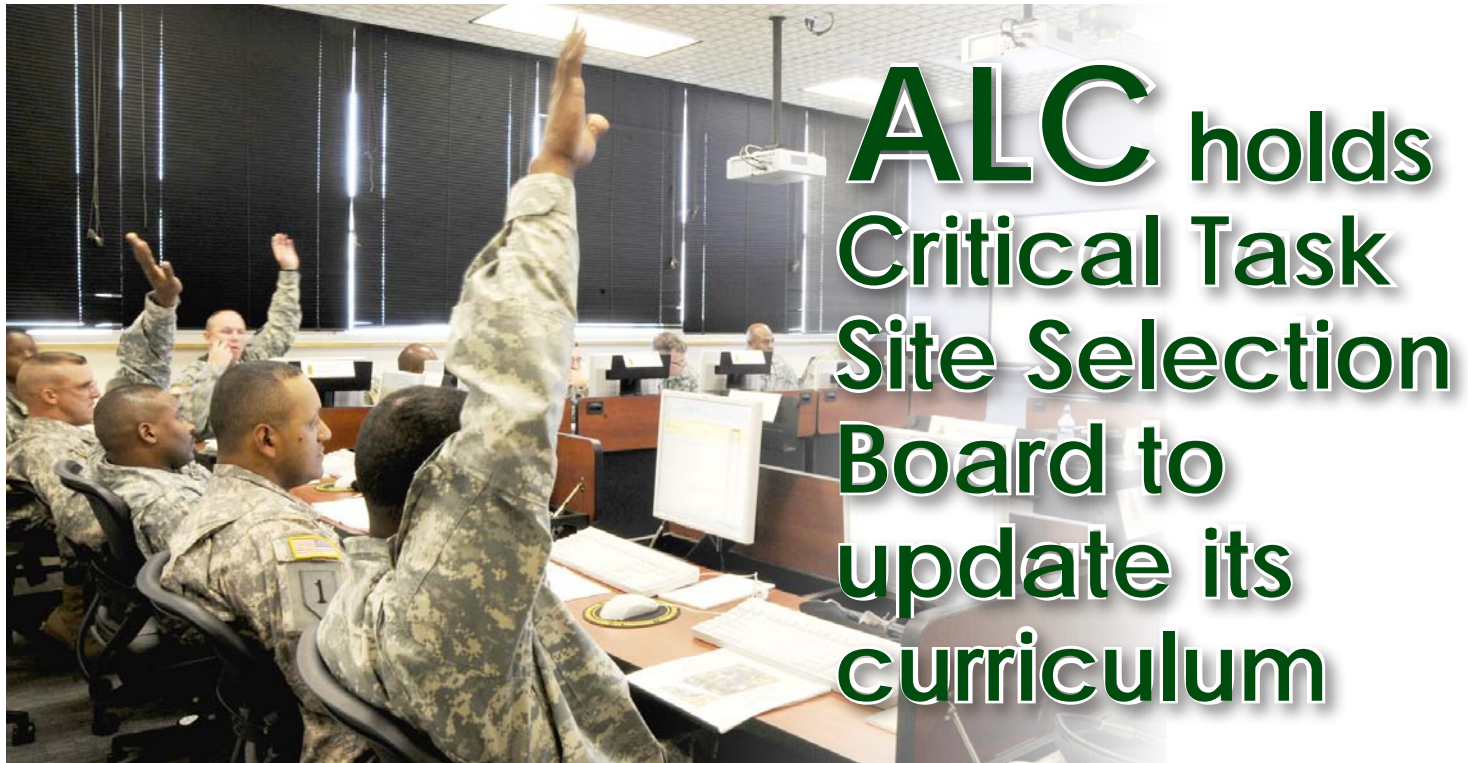
Hairston has found his WLC experience to be beneficial as well. As expected, he's already started training his squad's Soldiers in the new PRT regimen he learned. But, he's seen the seeds of WLC bear fruit in other areas, too.

"My leadership has improved," he said. "I feel I'm interacting with my Soldiers more and leading them better." His advice to future students was simple: "Make sure you pay attention; don't be falling asleep."

Hurley, too, has been pleased with the product his team has produced.

"As the course chief, every end-of-course survey, from every class, from every NCO academy, came through my desk – hundreds and hundreds every week," he said. "The feedback I heard from the old course and the new course was like night and day, both from the students and the cadre. Holistically, if you set up the environment better for learning – for the cadre and the student – ultimately, the product will be better in the end: better warrior leaders." **J**

Editor's note: For a closer look at how to prepare for the new course, see our new Sergeants' Corner feature on page 24.



ALC holds Critical Task Site Selection Board to update its curriculum

By Linda Crippen

More changes are in store for the Advanced Leader Course (formerly the Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course), which recently transitioned Phase I Common Core from a resident course to online delivery, allowing Soldiers to complete the self-paced program in 90 days while remaining at their home unit or duty station. Reserve and National Guard units will complete the transition in fiscal year 2011.

The first ALC Common Core Critical Task Site Selection Board convened at the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas, to deliberate changes to the current online curriculum, ensuring ALC students remain current in their education and better prepared for ongoing Army missions and leadership. Such boards will take place every three years to provide continuity in the curriculum relative to leader development.

The first board members were selected to participate based on their experience, military occupational specialties and rank. The board began Oct. 19 for the weeklong assembly, with 12 sergeants first class chosen to serve as voting members from across the warfighting functions. According to class documents, the experience requirements for voting members were as follows: “assigned to warfighting units,

served as supervisor of the tasks in question and participated or accomplished the tasks continuously for the past 18 months.”

Additionally, two master sergeants and two sergeants major sat on the board as subject matter experts and advisors, guiding the CTSSB when more information was needed about tasks and helping them stay focused on the agenda. Facilitating the entire process was Sgt. Maj. David Queen, director of ALC Common Core, along with his team: Master Sgt. Michael Robledo, Sgt. 1st Class Cheryl Barton and David Darby.

“Since this is for the Common Core, not MOS specific, we wanted to ensure we included personnel from the field, Army Reserves and National Guard. We wanted a mixture of MOSs from maneuver and fires, operations support and effects, and force sustainment (formerly combat arms, combat support and combat service support, respectively). We wanted to get a representative mixture of the whole Army and what’s going on out in the theater,” Queen said during the board’s after action report.

Queen described the significance of carefully choosing board members because “the platoon sergeant should select the tasks squad leaders are trained [in], which includes training them here at the institution, the unit level or Structured Self-

Development. Our mission was to conduct a CTSSB, review those tasks and select those tasks the board wants to include.”

Once Queen’s staff compiles and analyzes the board’s results, the suggestions will then be forwarded to USASMA’s commandant, Command Sgt. Maj. Raymond Chandler, for approval.

Choosing which particular tasks to include required the board to negotiate and weigh the criticality of each task, including appropriate skill level. The board used the Eight Factors Task Selection Model for identifying and determining each task’s criticality, based on a numbered scale, 1 through 5 with 5 being the most critical. Tasks receiving a rating of 3 or higher were considered critical to the course. TRADOC Regulation 350-70 defines a critical task as a “collective or individual task a unit or individual must perform to accomplish [his or her] mission and duties and to survive in the full range of Army operations. Critical tasks must be trained.”

Along with rating each task’s criticality, the board also determined in which learning domain the tasks should be taught. The learning domains are comprised of the operational level, the institutional level and self-development. Each domain lends itself to conveying certain types of information and learning. Since self-development is conducted online, historical or informa-

tional learning such as rank structures for all military services would be an appropriate topic. The operational or unit level is the ideal place for hands-on training. First-line supervisors practice with Soldiers one-on-one leading a physical training formation, for example. With the recent transitions within the NCO Education System, the institutional domain now centers on education, which can include both experiential and informational learning. Hence, ALC Phase I is now an online course, but Phase II is still a resident course.

“We will analyze the results, and based on that analysis we will provide [the board] with feedback about what was and was not selected,” Queen said. “We will then have our course developers redo the course to reflect these changes. All this

it, what they think the institutions should include in their curricula, and what should be taught at the operational level.”

Participating board member Sgt. 1st Class Marcus E. Price, senior BNCOC instructor for 3rd Battalion, 218th Regiment, South Carolina National Guard NCO Academy, Eastover, S.C., explained his stance. ALC students “know how to do their job. It’s the little things that we picked [for] this course, like writing NCO Evaluation Reports, ethical situations, how to handle personal things, how to handle their Soldiers – these are the things they need. The [tasks] we picked will help them take better care of their subordinates.”

Most of the board members agreed and were satisfied with their decisions.

thinks the proposed changes will improve ALC. “Soldiers are going on deployment multiple times. There are things they’ll need to know for those deployments, because we all know, eventually everyone’s going to end up going sooner or later. The changes for the classes that we’re teaching will help [prepare] Soldiers for their deployments,” he said.

Overall, Queen is pleased with what the board did and the tasks they selected. “However, I think [the board] leaned a little bit more toward performance-oriented tasks versus tasks that probably could be done at the schoolhouse versus tasks that could be done at the unit. We really have to take a look at that, do an analysis piece, and kind of make a determination of [whether] we actually train this online or [if it is] best trained at the unit,” he said.

Much work remains before any changes can be implemented. Queen explained that his team must look at each task selected and determine in which domain it should be trained. “We’ll make that determination based off those tasks. Once we do that, we’ll put a piece together and send it back out to the board members, so they’ll get feedback on the process,” Queen said.

“Once that’s complete and all tasks are selected and approved by the USASMA commandant,” he said. “TRADOC could direct us to incorporate other mandated tasks in addition to the ones chosen by the CTSSB.”

Queen, however, is confident most of the changes will be accepted by the commandant. “Once those tasks are approved, then we go into the process of developing courses for those particular tasks,” he said. “We can then have them developed into interactive multimedia instruction products for the course. From this time, we’re looking at about a good year process before you’ll actually see those lessons go in the course.”

Queen offers advice to leaders selected for future CTSSBs. Most importantly, come with an open mind, because their views may be changed. Potential members should “be prepared to exchange their ideas and experiences amongst other people, who are perhaps in a different career field. They should feel honored to be selected to sit in on the process,” he said. **J**



Photos by Linda Crippen

Above: ALC Director Sgt. Maj. David Queen (left) and USASMA Deputy Commandant Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Rosen (right) present CTSSB members with coins and certificates for participating on the board. Left: CTSSB members vote on tasks to update ALC curriculum.

must be approved by the commandant before actually being implemented into the course – the commandant could say yes or no to our proposed changes.”

In total, the board reviewed 103 tasks and recommended adding six new ones, among other changes. Helping make sense of all the results was Master Sgt. Judith Jones, senior analyst for Directorate of Training, Doctrine and Education at USASMA. “What we’re going to do next is analyze it and take mandatory tasks that have to be included by TRADOC and put those in first. I crosswalk it; I make it make sense,” she said. “We break it down as far as what the board wants to see in the Structured Self-Development part of

Sgt. 1st Class Keith Jones, BNCOC instructor at the Fort Dix, N.J., NCO Academy, Active Guard Reserves, said, “We’re moving in a good direction. I believe our current situation, the Global War on Terrorism, has opened our eyes as far as the areas our Army needs to focus on. The NCO Corps has been reawakened, and training Soldiers is once again a priority.”

“Most of the stuff we voted on here was geared toward what’s going on in today’s climate with the military,” said Sgt. 1st Class Richard Woods, senior small group leader, 199th Leadership Regiment NCO Academy, Louisiana National Guard, Camp Cook, La. Woods

NCOs: Key mentors to West Point cadets

By David Crozier



On the campus of the United States Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., the echoes of Gen. George Washington and the Baron von Stueben drilling their troops on “the plain” can be heard amongst the rustling of trees. On this same field, and within the hallowed halls of the institution, many of those who helped forge the Nation’s history have been taught: Generals Douglas MacArthur, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee, and of more recent note, Gen. David H. Petraeus, commander, United States Central Command.

The Academy’s mission is to train, educate and inspire the Corps of Cadets so that each graduate is a commissioned leader of character committed to the values of Duty, Honor, Country, and prepared for a career of professional excellence and service to the Nation as an officer in the United States Army. In August, it was named the “Top Public Liberal Arts College” by *U.S. News and World Report* in its “America’s Best Colleges 2010” rankings. Earlier that same month, *Forbes* called it “America’s Best College.”

While the Academy and its cadets receive plenty of recognition and accolades for prowess in academia and its ability to produce great leaders, a little known fact is that the Army’s “backbone” – its corps of noncommissioned officers – is an integral part of that success, as well as the model for the growth of their leaders.

“It is absolutely essential and I wish I could triple or quadruple the number of [NCOs here],” said Col. Casey Haskins, director of military instruction. “It is hugely important [to have NCOs here] when teaching styles of leadership, what you should expect, roles and missions, hard lines and blurry lines.”

Haskins explained that while much of the instruction at West Point is carried out by officers and civilian professors, the Academy intentionally has some training accomplished as “NCO-specific” to allow the cadets to get a full picture of Army leadership.

“A big part of a lieutenant’s life is contact with NCOs, so we have sergeants assigned here and have some come in and do training. This summer we have NCOs from the 101st Airborne Division out of Fort Campbell, Ky.,” Haskins said. “They are teaching, less because I need them to teach, but more because I need them to talk to the cadets and interact with them so they will understand more about what sergeants are, which is hugely important.”

The commandant of cadets couldn’t agree more.

“It is value added to have the NCOs here training the cadets,” said Brig. Gen. Michael S. Linnington. “When we talk to our cadets on graduation and after they leave West Point, we ask them what would they have done differently or what they viewed we should do that we haven’t done. And consistently, without question, they say, ‘I wish I had more time with my TAC (tactical) NCOs, [and] the NCOs in DMI (Department of Military Instruction). I wish we had more exposure to the NCO Corps.’”

Once accepted to West Point, cadets attend Cadet Basic Training – a seven-week course of instruction designed to transition them from civilians to Soldiers. During CBT, the cadets are

trained on general military skills: marksmanship fundamentals and first aid, mountaineering and obstacle course, physical training and foot marches, and also spend six nights in the field. During Year 2, they complete a four-week cadet field training requirement. Here, advanced individual skills – small arms tactics and leadership – are taught. During this time the cadets deploy to Fort Knox, Ky., for a three-day mounted maneuver training exercise. During the summer of Year 4, rising first class cadets attend Cadet Leader Development Training, an intensive three-week training program. CLDT focuses on troop leading procedures and leadership development during a 19-day tactical field training exercise. Here, cadets rise from the cadet noncommissioned officer ranks to become cadet officers, the leaders of the cadet corps for that year.

All throughout the four years of summer training, and during the course of the academic year, the cadets are trained and mentored by active duty NCOs. These NCOs are handpicked using a command referral approach. Before becoming part of the cadre, the NCOs had to have been recently deployed in support of the Global War on Terrorism in Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom, explained Command Sgt. Maj. Anthony W. Mahoney, command sergeant major of the Corps of Cadets.

“We only take the best. They can have no marks on their career and they have to be recommended by their commander,” he said. “It is also integral that they have recently been deployed,



Courtesy photo

TAC NCOs act as mentors and counselors throughout the academic year, and also play an integral role as instructors and overseers during the cadets’ summer training.

because what we want here are seasoned NCOs who have experienced current operations. We want them to be able to relate that knowledge to the cadets.”

One such NCO is Master Sgt. Jeffery F. Mays, TAC sergeant major, who has been at West Point for 2½ years.

“[Having us here] is a good experience for the cadets; they want to know what a platoon sergeant looks for in a brand new lieutenant,” he said. “So we bring to the table that NCO side of the house where we can tell them, ‘This is what I think makes a good or outstanding second lieutenant.’”

Mays explained that the cadet training command basically runs everything – cadets are in control – but through mentoring and coaching, the TAC NCOs assist the training command to develop their subordinates, how to take care of subordinates, plan for training, and execute training, through coaching and mentoring them.

“Some cadets may have personal problems, and we will sit them down and talk to them about their issue(s). Some may have problems deciding what branch they want to get into when they graduate,” he said. “The TAC NCOs try to look at that cadet and his/her personality and mentor them on what branch they would be best suited for. All of them want to start out and go infantry, but after knowing them for a couple of years, we try and look at them and give them the truth. We try to guide them along.”

Cadet Command Sgt. Maj. Tony Nash, a native of Buffalo, N.Y., in his final year at the Academy, had nothing but praise for the guidance and mentoring he has received during his educational experience.

“The NCOs [are] one of the most valuable pieces here because they mentor and talk to us. Officers give you the quick answer, but NCOs give it to you straight up – ‘This is what works. This is what happens. You need to lean on your NCOs or else you will have nothing,’” said Nash. “In the regular Army, there is only one officer per platoon. It’s not like here where there are 40 officers and three NCOs. So we need to know how the NCO Corps works, know how an NCO lives out his or her life, their family, pay, etcetera.”

Nash said being able to talk to NCOs like Mays and Mahoney has been very important to him becoming a future platoon leader.

“Just how hands-on they are; they want everyone to succeed; they don’t want anyone to fail; and they will go above and beyond the call of duty. I think it is great that this is the Year of the NCO because you can really appreciate what they do for us,” he said. “To get their leadership and mentoring – learn how a platoon works, find out about unit cohesion, and then go from



Cadets listen on as a TAC NCO provides instructions on how to proceed through a situational training lane on the grounds of the Academy. Once the objectives are explained, the cadet leadership becomes responsible for mission success.

Courtesy photo

Stewart, Ga., where he was a 13B artillery crewmember. “You are dealing with individuals in college now and not in the force. When they leave they go straight into the force, either to a deploying unit or to an operational unit.”

He added, “When you are dealing with these [cadets], you can’t really give them what you give a guy out in the force. You can bring that with you, and when you are mentoring those cadets that are getting ready to graduate and go out into the force, you can tell them, ‘What you are doing can get someone killed; What you are not doing can still get someone killed.’ We try to give them advice and mentor them.”

West Point not only uses the NCOs to help train the cadets, the Academy also emulates the NCO Corps grade structure and responsibility track – cadet sergeant major, cadet first sergeant, cadet sergeant, cadet corporal, and cadet private. Under this structure, cadets learn the hard lesson of leaving their “buds” behind as they get promoted taking on increased leadership roles.

“That was the toughest for me. From plebe year, where you are nothing, to our sophomore year, where we are just team leaders and we have command over them because we are a class higher. Then this year, of course; this is the first time I am leading my peers as a first sergeant. That took me a couple of days to get used to the concept,” said Cadet 1st

there and work with my NCOs and make the unit team-focused – I have been blessed [to have these NCOs here].”

While the cadets appreciate everything the TAC NCOs and DMI instructors do for them throughout the year, the NCOs find themselves in a different environment from whence they came.

“When you come to West Point, you have to scale back from what you normally do in the regular Army, within a platoon or whatever your job was,” said Sgt. 1st Class Willie Murphy, a TAC NCO who came to West Point from Fort



Courtesy photo

A TAC NCO shouts out instructions at the firing range during summer training.

Sgt. Cory Elich. “Even though you are friends – buddies – and you know them in class, you can’t show favoritism. You have to be an NCO and maintain the standard. If they get out of line you have to knock them back into line. Or if they are below the standard, you have to bring them back up above the standard. It is a really odd transition because they teach everything you need to know about leading subordinates, but when you get to the top; the peer leadership; the leading the guys that you know and see every day; that took me a couple of days to get used to. The experience of being a first sergeant has helped me [grow] so much.”

Even though the NCOs are lauded by the cadets for the amount of eye-opening experiences they bring to the table, the same is said of the experiences the NCOs have in dealing with the cadets.

“I have learned more about leading here at West Point than I have in my 11 years in the Army,” said Sgt. 1st Class William Tomlin, who came to West Point from the 82nd Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, N.C. “I have learned more about how to treat people and how to motivate them without just using directives; how to talk to someone who is smarter than I am. New cadets have a lot of questions [for] NCOs because we come here with more experience. A lot of the cadets will ask what their platoon sergeants or squad leaders are going to expect [of] them once they get out to the Army, and we just tell them straight up that we expect them to be subject matter experts and to be motivated and willing to learn at all times. We expect them to know how to interact with NCOs, and we expect them to listen to their senior NCOs at the same time.”

Former cadets – those who have graduated and gone to lead troops in the field – have nothing but praise for their experiences with NCOs while at West Point. As Linnington alluded to, many have commented on that fact. One such graduate, who came back with the 101st Airborne unit to conduct summer training, echoed those thoughts.

“Having the NCOs here is so important because whenever you go into the platoon leader position that is who you deal with. Company commanders, commanders and staff officers they deal officer-to-officer mostly, and with sergeants major and first sergeants. But as a new lieutenant if you don’t have the TAC NCOs and the DMI NCOs up here on staff, the cadets never get exposure with whom they will actually be dealing with after graduation,” said Capt. David Clayman, a 2006 West Point graduate. “Secondly, you understand how NCOs are trained and how they work because when you go to your platoon, they are the ones who carry out your directives, carry out training. They are the boots on the ground with the Soldiers. If you have never been around them before, you are not going to be as able to work with them and understand what their lane is, or how they look at situations. Probably the most important thing – when I was here it got it beat into me – ‘Complete your mission and take care of the boys and listen to your NCOs.’ That was developed into me by the TAC NCOs and the DMI instructors. They are the ones first and foremost taking care of your Soldiers. You may be a platoon leader with 30 guys, but your NCOs are the ones who will be taking care of them.”


Perhaps Washington and von Steuben had this in their plan all along; it just took a couple hundred years to come to fruition at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. But taking a note from von Steuben’s “Blue Book,” however, it is easy for all to see why it is important for the cadets to understand today’s NCOs:

“The choice of noncommissioned officers is an object of greatest importance. The order and discipline of a Regiment depends so much upon their behavior, that too much care can not be taken in preferring none to that trust but those who by their merit and good conduct are entitled to it...

“It being on the noncommissioned officers that the discipline and order of a company in a great measure depend, they cannot be too circumspect in their behavior towards the men, be treating them with mildness, and at the same time obliging every one to do his duty...

“Each Sergeant and Corporal will be in a particular manner answerable for the squad committed to his care. He must pay particular attention to their conduct in every respect; that they keep themselves and their arms always clean; that they have their effects always ready; and put where they can get at them immediately and even in the dark, without confusion; and on every fine day he must oblige them to air their effects...

“In teaching the recruits, they must exercise all their patience, by no means abusing them, but treating them with mildness, and not expect too much precision in the first lessons, punishing those only who are willfully negligent.

“They must suppress all quarrels in the company; and where other men fail; must use their authority in confusing the offender.” 

Editor’s note: According to officials at West Point, NCOs have been a part of the Academy experience for the last 25 or 30 years. The exact date of their start could not be established at the time of this writing.



Courtesy photo

TAC NCOs are integrators of West Point’s developmental programs and oversee individual cadet development in the academic, military, physical and moral-ethical dimensions. As members of the Brigade Tactical Department, they train the cadets with a continuous focus on leader development.



Drive Safely, Save a Life

As POV deaths decrease, Army launches winter safety campaign

By Cindy Ramirez

The bad news is that motor vehicle collisions account for more Soldier deaths than any other category of non-combat-related accidents in the U.S. Army.

The better, if not good, news is that the Army has recorded the lowest number of privately owned vehicle fatalities in seven years – a trend safety officials and noncommissioned officers are diligently working to extend through an array of awareness initiatives and training programs.

In fiscal year 2009, 107 Soldiers died in accidents involving privately owned vehicles, a 17 percent decrease from the previous year, according to statistics from the U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center, Fort Rucker, Ala.

However, that figure still accounts for 64 percent of the 167 total accidental fatalities – more than in an Army combat vehicle, motor vehicle, aviation or through personal injury combined.

“We attribute the reduced number in POV accidents to engaged leadership, focus on the issue and Soldiers taking responsibility for their own safety by doing the right thing and looking out for their fellow Soldiers,” said Walt Beckman, loss prevention program manager for the Driving Task Force at the Safety Center. “Leaders continue to accentuate to Soldiers the impact POV accidents have on their units and readiness as well as their families.”



Photo by Cindy Ramirez
Safety trainer Scott Howes works with Pfc. Peter Townley on a vehicle simulator at Fort Bliss, Texas.

‘No time to chill’

As colder weather and holiday travel near, the Safety Center has kicked off its fall/winter safety campaign, with its theme reminding NCOs, senior leaders and Soldiers that the next few months are “no time to chill” when it comes to safety.

Beckman said the key safety messages are basic: Slow down, buckle up and don’t drink and drive.

“Remember, seatbelts are mandatory. They are not an option,” he said. “Speed across all vehicle categories has been a factor in 39 percent of all our fatal accidents, and many of those [Soldiers] were not wearing seatbelts.”

With increased driving – and drinking – over the holidays, Beckman warns of the dangers of driving while intoxicated.

“The loss of one Soldier has devastating effects on the entire organization’s readiness,” he said. “If you are going to drink and celebrate with your buddies, always make sure you have a designated driver who will not be drinking.”

Death toll

Army safety officials and senior leaders are working to minimize the death toll of their Soldiers due to vehicular accidents and say 2009 figures that show a trend of fewer accidents and fatalities are promising.

Overall, the Army reported 828 total fatalities in fiscal year 2009, of which 27 percent were related to combat. That translates to 222 combat deaths – a decrease of 33 percent over 2008.

Also of that total:

- 20 percent (167) were accidental – a 19 percent decrease from 2008
- 53 percent (439) were medical, criminal, suicide or undetermined – a 24 percent increase from 2008

The death toll is more than a statistical figure, Beckman said.

It represents lives cut short, families left grieving and an Army deprived of its most precious resource – its Soldiers.

Knowledge: Official Safety Magazine of the U.S. Army regularly reports accident briefs, listing privately owned vehicle traffic fatalities, among others. A few of the fatal accidents listed in the October 2009 issue:

- A Soldier was speeding when his POV struck a dirt mound, vaulted into the air, struck a utility pole, overturned twice and ejected him, killing him.
- A Soldier was riding his motorcycle during emergency leave when he rear-ended a vehicle in his lane. The Soldier died.
- A Soldier died after crashing while riding his all-terrain vehicle on an improved road.
- A Soldier who was speeding died when he lost control of his POV, struck a tow truck, a sedan and a tree, causing a multi-vehicle fire.

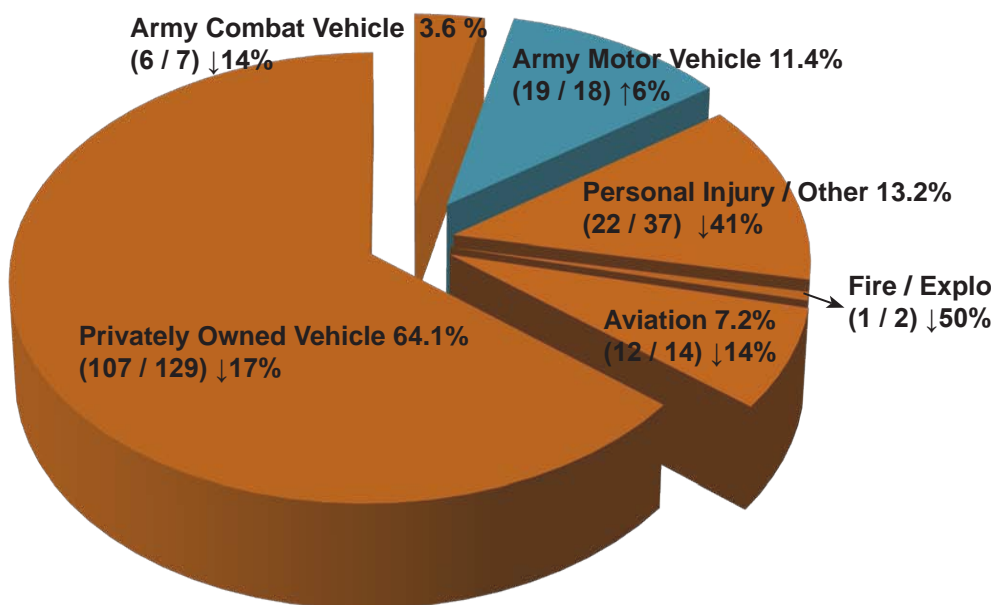
The sample list is just that, Beckman said. It doesn’t give names or report that the majority had not yet seen their 30th birthday. It doesn’t portray the suffering felt by parents, spouses, children – and the Army – when they buried their Soldiers.

“Any loss of life is tragic; it affects the families and their

**In FY 2009,
107 Soldiers died
in accidents involving
privately owned vehicles —
the lowest in seven years.**

FY 2009 U.S. ARMY ACCIDENTAL FATALITIES

YTD Comparison (2009 / 2008) and Percent Change



LEGEND

- Greater than last year
- Equal to / less than last year

2009 ARMY FATALITIES

ACCIDENTAL	
Off Duty	115
On Duty	52
Total	167
TOTAL	
Accidental	167 (20%)
Combat	222 (27%)
Other	439 (53%)
Total	828 (100%)

Source: U.S. Army Combat Readiness / Safety Center, Fort Rucker, Ala.



Photo courtesy Cape Fox Professional Services

The Army Traffic Safety Training Program offers mandatory basic and optional experienced motorcycle refresher courses at 52 installations across the world.



Photo by Cindy Ramirez

Soldiers at Fort Bliss, Texas, train on video game-like motorcycle simulators.

units deeply," said Command Sgt. Major Arthur L. Coleman Jr., command sergeant major of Fort Hood, Texas, and III Corps.

"Across the Army, leaders have recognized that POV accidents have a direct impact on unit readiness and have aggressively initiated training and/or retraining briefings, promotional material, along with corrective actions and counseling," he said.

Fort Hood was recently honored by the Safety Center for its efforts to promote motorcycle safety.

Coleman said Soldiers' attitudes and behaviors about motorcycles have changed through a variety of campaigns and programs, including requiring Soldiers to enroll in, and complete a motorcycle safety course, to execute a contract with their commanders affirming they will comply with training and requirements on and off post, and to carry a card as proof of course completion at all times while operating a motorcycle.

"We've shown them what 'right' looks like by conducting postwide motorcycle rides that bring together more than 1,000 motorcycle riders," Coleman said.

"The idea is that by bringing our motorcycle riders together, we can mentor our less experienced riders, promote safe riding habits and have some fun at the same time," he continued. "I also think Soldiers recognize the efforts being made to increase awareness and are being more responsible."

Doing time

Aside from hurting or killing themselves, Soldiers' unsafe driving can injure or kill others – and they can face grave consequences. One example of this tragedy is Staff Sgt. Edison

Bayas of the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, who was found guilty this summer of intoxicated manslaughter in the December 2007 death of a 19-year-old woman in El Paso, Texas. Bayas, 36, will have to spend seven years in jail before he's eligible for parole.

The *El Paso Times* reported that Bayas had a blood-alcohol level three times the legal limit when he crashed into the woman's car. He had been at Fort Bliss for only 10 days after returning from a tour of duty in Iraq.

His defense attorneys argued he was suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and had a flashback at the time of the crash, the *Times* reported.

"It's not just their loss; it's my loss, too. I'm sorry for what I've done," Bayas said during his sentencing, according to news reports.

The P's of Safe Winter Driving

Prepare • Plan • Practice
Protect • Prevent

Safety training

To help prevent such tragedies, the Army Traffic Safety Training Program, or ATSTP, began in September 2007.

Developed by the Safety Center and managed by the Installation Management Command, ATSTP provides courses for both privately owned vehicle and motorcycle drivers at 52 installations worldwide.

The program standardized the Army's driver safety training through a series of five instructor-led classes and one online course. ATSTP also includes a mandatory basic and optional experienced rider motorcycle course that combines classroom instruction with motorcycle riding. The POV course topics include local hazards; intermediate-, advanced- and supervisory-level driver improvement; and remedial training. Motorcycle courses include basic, experienced, refresher and sport bikes.

ATSTP reports more than 61,000 motorcycle riders and nearly 440,000 privately owned vehicle drivers have been trained in the program from its inception through July 2009.

One of the ATSTP initiatives provides installations with video game-like vehicle and motorcycle simulators, which replicate realistic road conditions and test drivers on their skills.

"This is helpful training for riders of all levels to practice their skills, and it helps them be aware of basic safety techniques that will help save their lives and the lives of others on the road," said Rodolfo "Rudy" Pino, deputy safety director at Fort Bliss. The post received the simulators in 2008.

Other initiatives under the ATSTP include the Army Safety Management Information System, the Travel Risk Planning System, known as TriPS, and the Motorcycle Mentorship Program.

Engaged leadership


When it comes to vehicle safety, NCOs must continue to maintain standards, promote prevention and enforce regulations.

But NCOs are not just responsible for ensuring the safety of their Soldiers.

Beckman emphasizes that NCOs need to practice what they preach: About 73 percent of all fatal motorcycle accidents involve those in ranks E-5 through O-3.

Beckman said the secretary of the Army and the chief of staff have emphasized that commanders' programs must include components for leaders to check other leaders, not just the Soldiers they supervise. Fort Hood's Coleman agrees.

"NCOs are the cornerstone, the most critical piece to ensure vehicle safety," he said. "The old saying, 'What gets checked, gets done,' is absolutely true. And, as with everything we do in the Army, NCOs do the checking and ensure it's getting done right. This directly relates to vehicle safety."

"The bottom line: It's about maintaining standards," he added. "We must enforce, at every level, an understanding that vehicle accidents are preventable and engaged leadership is a crucial part of that prevention." 

PREPARE FOR THE TRIP

- Maintain your car.
- Check battery and tire tread.
- Keep your windows clear and use no-freeze fluid in the window washer reservoir.
- Check your anti-freeze.
- Have the right equipment handy: Flashlight, jumper cables, abrasive material (sand or kitty litter), shovel, ice scraper, flares and blankets.
- For long trips: food, water, medication, cell phone.
- Have a stall plan: Stay with it, don't overexert yourself, put bright markers on antenna or windows and shine dome light. If you run your car, clear the exhaust pipe.

PLAN YOUR ROUTE

- Allow plenty of time and check the weather.
- Be familiar with maps and directions. Let others know your route and arrival time.

PRACTICE COLD WEATHER DRIVING

- During daylight, rehearse maneuvers slowly on the ice or snow in an empty lot.
- Steer into a skid.
- Know what your brakes will do: Stomp on antilock brakes, pump non-antilock brakes. Stopping distances are longer on ice.

PROTECT YOURSELF

- Buckle up and use child safety seats properly.
- Don't idle for a long time with the windows up or in an enclosed space.
- Never place a rear-facing infant seat in front of an airbag. Children 12 years old and younger are much safer in the backseat. Sit at least 10 inches from an airbag.

PREVENT CRASHES

- Drugs and alcohol never mix with driving.
- Slow down and increase distances between cars.
- Keep your eyes open for pedestrians.
- Avoid fatigue. Get plenty of rest before the trip, stop at least every three hours and rotate drivers.

Information: <https://safety.army.mil>

Source: Army Combat Readiness / Safety Center,
Fort Rucker, Ala.

SERGEANTS' CORNER

BY MICHAEL L. LEWIS

Preparing for WLC

Soldiers selected to attend the Warrior Leader Course have been identified as ready – with the proper education – to assume the responsibilities of leading Soldiers. Yet, that education will be difficult to obtain and comprehend without adequate preparation before attending WLC, course developers and instructors say.

Small group leaders at the Fort Bliss, Texas, NCO Academy, where the new course was piloted, offer these tips for Soldiers about to attend the new course, which will be implemented Armywide beginning January:

BRING THE RIGHT STUFF: While WLC is no longer a resident course, students are still expected to maintain a room for inspection. This means students should double-check that they have all the items on their packing list before departing their home units for the course.

KNOW HOW TO USE A COMPUTER: Students are issued laptops to use during class and exams. A godsend to many, they can simplify a complicated search through reams of material to just a few keystrokes. However, instructors are finding that some students don't possess the computer skills needed to make good use of their electronic tools.

"We may live in a computer age, but some are computer illiterate," said Sgt. 1st Class Shandrel Stewart, a senior small group leader. "You may need to take a computer class," she advised.

PRACTICE PUBLIC SPEAKING: Classroom discussions and oral presentations are now integrated throughout the course. Students not comfortable speaking in public should seek assistance from their leaders.

"Before you come here, you should



Spc. Angelica Diaz, a radiology specialist at William Beaumont Army Medical Center, Fort Bliss, Texas, references her laptop while completing an assignment during the Warrior Leader Course pilot at the Fort Bliss NCO Academy in September.

practice," Staff Sgt. Clifford Dewitt, a small group leader, said. "You should go to your first-line supervisor or another NCO who you know is squared away. If you need help, get a mentor and prepare [with him or her] to get in front of somebody and be able to talk for five to seven minutes on a certain topic."

Those who don't prepare will have a hard time once they arrive, Dewitt said, especially those afraid of speaking in front of a group. "You have some who can get up there and just talk away – that's just how they are. Then you have

some whom you just have to put a rope around and pull. You just have to build that confidence that you can do it."

GET READY FOR NEW SUBJECTS:

The new course incorporates additional classes in administrative skills, some of which are detailed on the opposite page. These were added to help students get ready to take on the responsibilities of leadership.

"[Some] are signing a hand receipt and taking responsibility for multi-million dollar equipment without understanding the process. If something is lost, who pays for that?" Stewart said. "That's something NCOs need to know. The last block [on the form] is responsibility and accountability."

DO YOUR HOMEWORK: Soldiers don't have to wait until they are WLC students to become familiar with course material. In fact, all training support packages are available for prospective students' review on Army Knowledge Online. After logging into AKO, enter this address to view them: <https://www.us.army.mil/suite/files/19954312>.

HAVE AN OPEN MIND: The changes to the Warrior Leader Course were made to give soon-to-be leaders better tools to lead effectively in today's Army. However, some arrive at WLC with a stubborn attitude that prefers the status quo. An open mind, on the other hand, will help you far beyond the course, said Sgt. 1st Class Douglas Ostheimer, chief instructor at the Fort Bliss academy.

"There's a certain resistance to change – there always was and always will be. But those who can embrace the change, adapt to it and demonstrate resiliency; those are the leaders of the Army."

A monthly spotlight on the knowledge junior NCOs need to grow as professionals



THE NEW WLC: WHAT'S IN & WHAT'S OUT

Based on input from NCOs in the field and from previous graduates, course designers made numerous changes to the Warrior Leader Course to make it more relevant for today's junior leaders. Here are a few of the more significant changes and the reasons course designers and instructors say they were made:

What's out:

- ✗ **Land navigation and map-reading skills:** Those skills are more appropriately taught at the unit level and are redundant at an NCO academy, which focuses on leadership and administration skills.
- ✗ **Physical training tests:** PT evaluations also should be done at the unit level before students attend WLC. Marginal students who are sent to the course risk having a negative report follow them throughout their careers.
- ✗ **After-hours lock down:** Students are given more downtime after classes are done for the day and are able to leave the student barracks. This added accountability tests students' self-discipline and time-management skills and matches what is expected of NCOs when back in their units.
- ✗ **Separate curricula for different components:** Reservists and National Guard members formerly attended an abbreviated WLC. Now, they will attend a course identical in content to their active-duty counterparts'.

What's in:

- ✓ **Written tests:** In addition to performance evaluations, which have always been a part of WLC, the new program of instruction contains three written exams. Students are allowed to reference notes, texts and documents on laptops during the test, just as they would in real-world situations.
- ✓ **Oral presentations:** Students practice their public speaking skills by delivering to their classmates a briefing concerning the history of the Army and the contributions of NCOs.
- ✓ **Drill and ceremony:** This tests students' precision, comprehension and ability to deliver commands to their squad. Students practice repeatedly when traveling to and from the academy, their barracks or the dining facility.
- ✓ **More administration skills:** To prepare students for the supervisory paperwork that is a natural part of an NCO's position, practical training in writing NCO Evaluation Reports, memorandums, sworn statements and award recommendations has been added.
- ✓ **Army Physical Readiness Training:** Students are taught the concepts and principles underlying the Army's upcoming replacement for the current PT regimen and how to lead their Soldiers in it. The lesson also delves into other health and fitness topics such as nutrition, diet, preventive medicine, mental health and spiritual well-being.

New school: A sampling of the classes now part of WLC

EFFECTS OF CULTURE

Reviews the concept of culture and shows how it affects the contemporary operational environment. Students review what comprises a culture, what culture shock is and how culture affects military operations.

MILITARY JUSTICE & DISCIPLINE

Focuses on the principles that underlie military discipline – authority, duties, relationships and nonjudicial/nonpunitive measures. Students also practice “What would you do?” scenarios.

SUICIDE PREVENTION FOR JUNIOR LEADERS

Provides instruction in the unique tools first-line supervisors need to identify, support and assist Soldiers who may have suicide- or mental health-related issues.

SUPPLY ACTIONS

Focuses on regulatory guidance in the areas of accountability and serviceability at the squad level. A practical exercise has students perform an inventory and complete the corresponding paperwork.



NCO Stories

A selection of Valor



Private First Class Ross A. McGinnis

Citation to award the Medal of Honor

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty: Private First Class Ross A. McGinnis distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty while serving as an M2 .50-caliber Machine Gunner, 1st Platoon, C Company, 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, in connection with combat operations against an armed enemy in Adhamiyah, Northeast Baghdad, Iraq, on 4 December 2006.

That afternoon his platoon was conducting combat control operations in an effort to reduce and control sectarian violence in the area. While Private McGinnis was manning the M2 .50-caliber Machine Gun, a fragmentation grenade thrown by an insurgent fell through the gunner's hatch into the vehicle. Reacting

quickly, he yelled "grenade," allowing all four members of his crew to prepare for the grenade's blast.

Then, rather than leaping from the gunner's hatch to safety, Private McGinnis made the courageous decision to protect his crew. In a selfless act of bravery, in which he was mortally wounded, Private McGinnis covered the live grenade, pinning it between his body and the vehicle and absorbing most of the explosion. Private McGinnis' gallant action directly saved four men from certain serious injury or death. Private First Class McGinnis' extraordinary heroism and selflessness at the cost of his own life, above and beyond the call of duty, are in keeping with the highest traditions.

Second Operation Iraqi Freedom Soldier receives posthumous Medal of Honor

By Carrie McLeroy
Army News Service

Spc. Ross A. McGinnis, an infantryman with 1st Platoon, C Company, 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor in a White House ceremony June 2, 2008, two weeks shy of what would have been his 21st birthday. He was also posthumously promoted from private first class to specialist.

The second servicemember to receive the medal for actions in Operation Iraqi Freedom, McGinnis began his transformation from a capricious teenager from Knox, Pa., to standout Soldier, enlisting in the Army through the Delayed Entry Program in June 2004.

A Soldier's Soldier

McGinnis arrived in Schweinfurt, Germany, in November 2005, with an influx of Soldiers as the company prepared for its upcoming mission to Iraq.

According to retired Staff Sgt. Ian Newland, he immediately became an instrumental part of the team.

"His personality and humor made him stand out," Newland, then-squad leader with 1st Platoon, said. "You could be having the worst day and Ross would come into a room and everybody would be laughing within three minutes."

"Once, we had been doing a convoy for around eight hours. I was in the vehicle behind him, and he turned around and smiled at my gunner. His teeth were covered in dirt from being up on the gun, but he was still smiling [from] ear to ear," Newland said.

His gifts extended beyond platoon funny man, his leaders said; he was also a top-notch Soldier.

"I had four platoons, roughly 190 Soldiers in my command. There were certain Soldiers that would stand out. McGinnis was definitely one of those Soldiers," said Maj. Michael Baka, the company's commander from June 2005 to March 2007.

The first unit from the battalion on the ground, McGinnis' company arrived in Iraq Aug. 4, 2006. They stayed in Combat Outpost Apache in Adhamiyah, a northeast section of Baghdad steeped in sectarian violence. The area had lacked a U.S. presence for eight months.

"There were a lot of kidnappings, killings and a lot of enemy activity in our sector," Baka said. Insurgent attacks, sniper fire, grenade contact and improvised explosive devices were all part of daily life in Adhamiyah.

In October, just two months into the deployment, C Company had already lost two of its Soldiers – Staff Sgt. Garth Sizemore to a sniper's bullet, and Sgt. Willsun Mock in an IED explosion. In November, after Saddam Hussein was found guilty of crimes against humanity, the battalion fought a five-hour battle against enemy insurgents who attacked the outpost.

By December, the men of 1-26 were battle hardened, but McGinnis had a way of taking the focus off the tragedies.

"He was constantly motivating and positive, and that really helped the platoon," Newland said. "Right after we lost Sgt. Sizemore and then Sgt. Mock, we were getting pretty depressed. But, Ross knew how to take our attention off of that. He knew how to respond."

That fateful day

On Dec. 4, 2006, 1st Platoon was gearing up to patrol the streets of the area and deliver a 250-kilowatt generator to provide increased electricity to its citizens.

The youngest member of his platoon at 19, McGinnis manned the .50-caliber machine gun on the last Humvee in the six-vehicle patrol. He sat on the gunner's strap facing the rear to provide security for the patrol.

An insurgent on a nearby rooftop lobbed a fragmentation grenade into the vehicle. Sgt. 1st Class Cedric Thomas, a platoon sergeant and truck commander; Staff Sgt. Ian Newland, squad leader; Sgt. Lyle Buehler, the driver; and Spc. Sean Lawson, a medic, were combat-locked inside the vehicle.

McGinnis yelled, "Grenade!" to allow his crew to prepare for the grenade's blast, rather than leap out the gunner's hatch to safety as he was trained to do.

"[A machine gunner is] supposed to announce the grenade, give a fair amount of time for people in the vehicle to react, and then he's supposed to save himself," Baka said.

Instead, McGinnis saw the grenade sitting on the radio mount behind him and realized the others weren't aware of its location.

Because they were combat-locked in the Humvee, they would not have time to escape. He pushed the gunner strap out from under him and laid his back on top of the grenade. It detonated, killing him instantly.

Buehler and Thomas received minor shrapnel injuries, and Lawson suffered a perforated eardrum and concussion. Newland was severely wounded, but survived. "The driver and truck commander, I am certain, would have been killed if that blast had taken full effect," Baka said.

Magnitude of sacrifice

"I should have died that day. He gave me a life that he can't have," Newland said. "There isn't a day that goes by that I don't take everything in. The smell of my daughter's hair, my son's smile, the touch of my wife's hand just driving in the car. These are things people might take for granted. I'm able to appreciate and have these things every day because of what Ross did."

Samaroo awarded Silver Star

By Susanne Kappler
Fort Jackson Leader

Staff Sgt. Sean Samaroo, 4th Battalion, 10th Infantry Regiment, was awarded the Silver Star for his actions in Afghanistan in a ceremony at Fort Jackson, S.C., June 11.

The ceremony took place at the newly designated Wanat Range, formerly known as Camden Range.

Samaroo received the award, the nation's third-highest military decoration, for his part in the Battle of Wanat, which took place in 2008 in the eastern province of Nuristan, Afghanistan. Samaroo is also a Purple Heart and Bronze Star recipient.

"There were a lot of heroes out there," Samaroo said. "Some maybe didn't get recognized as much. I'm pretty thankful and honored."

On the morning of July 13, 2008, 14 months into Samaroo's deployment, an estimated 200 enemy fighters launched a coordinated assault on a small vehicle patrol base manned by approximately 50 American and coalition troops.

As the battle began, Samaroo – then with Company C, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade – and his squad were manning a traffic control point near the base. Samaroo's squad successfully defended the traffic control point before reinforcing an observation point, which was under threat to be overrun by the attackers.

On his way to the observation point – an uphill climb through exposed terrain – Samaroo encountered three wounded Soldiers whom he and his squad brought to safety. Samaroo himself was wounded by shrapnel and was bleeding from the head and legs, but he refused to leave his position until reinforcements arrived. Nine American Soldiers were killed in the attack; 27 Americans and four Afghan soldiers were wounded.

Samaroo credited his training and instinct with helping him through the situation.

"There was a time that I did not want to go up that hill," he admitted. "I thought that it was too early. There's such a thing as tactical patience. You have to let the battle evolve. Because of that, I believe we saved a (few) more lives that way."

After he was wounded, Samaroo said goodbye to his wife and son aloud, according to a first-person account read during the ceremony by Lt. Col. Richard McDermott, 4th Battalion, 10th Infantry Regiment commander.

"That's when I said, 'Man, this is it. You're gone,'" Samaroo said. "I really thought I was, but I just clicked and started focusing back on what I had to do."

Samaroo said the incident changed his life.

"Any time you have a near-death experience ... it changes you. It does. You think about the small things in life," he said.

Samaroo, who has been in the Army for nine years, came to Fort Jackson in January as a cadre instructor at Camden Range. The range, which has been undergo-

ing extensive upgrades, was renamed "Wanat Mounted Convoy Live Fire Range" in honor of the Soldiers who died during the Battle of Wanat.

Brig. Gen. Bradley May, Fort Jackson commanding general, called the renaming a fitting tribute as the range will be used to train "skills that will allow [Soldiers] to thrive in combat, just as Staff Sgt. Samaroo did."

Samaroo said he hopes to pass on those skills and ultimately intends to become a drill sergeant.

"That's always been a dream of mine, being a drill sergeant," he said. "I want to be able to share what I learned as a combat Soldier."



Photo by Susanne Kappler

Brig. Gen. Bradley May, Fort Jackson commanding general, salutes Staff Sgt. Sean Samaroo, 4th Battalion, 10th Infantry Regiment, during the Silver Star presentation as Samaroo's wife, Natasha, looks on with pride.



Vietnam veteran receives Bronze Star for Valor for actions in 1967

By Dave Melancon
U.S. Army Europe

A Vietnam veteran was honored for his valor in combat with a Bronze Star medal at the U.S. Army Garrison Heidelberg, Germany, Retiree Appreciation Day on Patrick Henry Village, Oct. 17.

Retired Staff Sgt. Alfred Pankey Jr., a former cavalry scout, was formally recognized for the courage and leadership he displayed during a four-hour firefight against superior North Vietnamese forces in a battle with the 3rd Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, June 19, 1967.

The 9th Infantry Division originally cut orders in August 1967 for a Bronze Star for Valor recognizing Pankey for his bravery, but he did not receive the decoration until July 2009.

Brig. Gen. Allen W. Batschelet, USAREUR deputy chief of staff for operations, presented the award.

“Even though it was a long time in coming, I feel like I have earned it,” Pankey said. The 3/11th ACR annual historical summary reported that the 1st and 2nd battalions of the 274th Viet Cong Regiment, reinforced by their regimental heavy weapons company and the 5th Viet Cong Division anti-aircraft weapons company, attacked 3rd Squadron’s perimeter along Highway 2 near the Cambodian border.

According to the 3/11th’s report, the squadron “was attacked from three sides and subjected to an intense volume of fire. Team K and Headquarters Troop, who were manning the perimeter, reacted quickly and laid down a heavy volume of suppressive fire.”

The 9th Infantry Division’s award citation, published Aug. 24, 1967, said the enemy attacked furiously and without warning.

“Sergeant Pankey and his fellow Soldiers were subjected to



Photo by Dave Melancon

U.S. Army Garrison Baden-Württemberg Command Sgt. Maj. Annette R. Weber congratulates retired Staff Sgt. Alfred Pankey Jr. during the annual U.S. Army Europe and USAG Heidelberg (Germany) Retiree Appreciation Day Oct. 17.

mortars, rockets, recoilless rifles, automatic weapons and small-arms fires from an estimated battalion of Viet Cong,” the orders read. Exposing himself to the enemy, Pankey directed his platoon’s fire and helped evacuate wounded Soldiers from the firefight.

Pankey’s platoon leader and sergeant were mortally wounded during the onslaught. Realizing the situation had become critical, Pankey rallied his men and maneuvered them to strengthen a vital sector of the perimeter, the award orders said.

“Charlie was following us for 28 days,”

Pankey remembered. “All of a sudden, he started opening up from all directions.”

Manning a .50-caliber machine gun, Pankey fired in the direction of the incoming attack.

“I thank God,” Pankey said. “Bullets were flying and not one hit me.”

The next morning, Pankey and a team patrolled the battle site. He was one of the first to see the devastation.

“A sweep of the battlefield at first light revealed 56 Viet Cong bodies,” the squadron reported.

In addition, two wounded prisoners were taken, nine troopers in the squadron were killed and 32 were wounded. This battle was known as the “Battle of Slope 30.”

The former cavalry scout worked his way through the ranks and voluntarily served two more 12-month tours of duty in Vietnam.

After retiring in Germany in 1982, Pankey began a mail and telephone quest for his medal that ended with a surprise note in his Bamberg post office box in July.

Pankey, who lives in Erlangen, Germany, with his family, said the award he received is not for him but for those he served with in Vietnam.



PHOTO JOURNAL

Welcome to another edition of Photo Journal, the place where everyone has the opportunity to put their favorite photos on display. The guidelines for submitting pictures are as follows: The picture should depict NCOs in action, whether they're leading Soldiers in the field, conducting training or just plain taking care of business. You don't have to be a professional photographer to enter. When submitting photos, please include the names of individuals in the photo, a brief description of the action, location, the photographer's name and unit.

Photos may be submitted as a hard copy or digitally. If you e-mail a digital photo, make sure it is at least 300 dpi. Mail photos to The NCO Journal, Commandant, USASMA, ATTN: ATSS-SJ, Editor, 11291 SGT E. Churchill St., Fort Bliss, TX 79918-8002 or e-mail the electronic version to ATSS-SJ-NCOJOURNAL@conus.army.mil.

Photo courtesy IMCOM Korea



A week-long training exercise culminates in a furious Multiple Launch Rocket System live fire as Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 38th Field Artillery Regiment, 210th Fires Brigade test their capabilities near Rodriguez Range, South Korea.

Photo by Staff Sgt. Bennie Corbett



Staff Sgt. Nick Crosby helps an Iraqi woman cross a water-filled street during a cordon and search mission in Al Risalah, Iraq. Crosby is assigned to Alpha Company, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Infantry Regiment.

Photo by Staff Sgt. Nic Raven



Command Sgt. Maj. Daniel Ciarrochi, left, and Sgt. 1st Class James Breakfield, of United Nations Command, secure a helicopter landing zone for a Korean army Chinook helicopter as part of an air movement exercise .

Photo by Air Force Staff Sgt. Stacy L. Pearsall



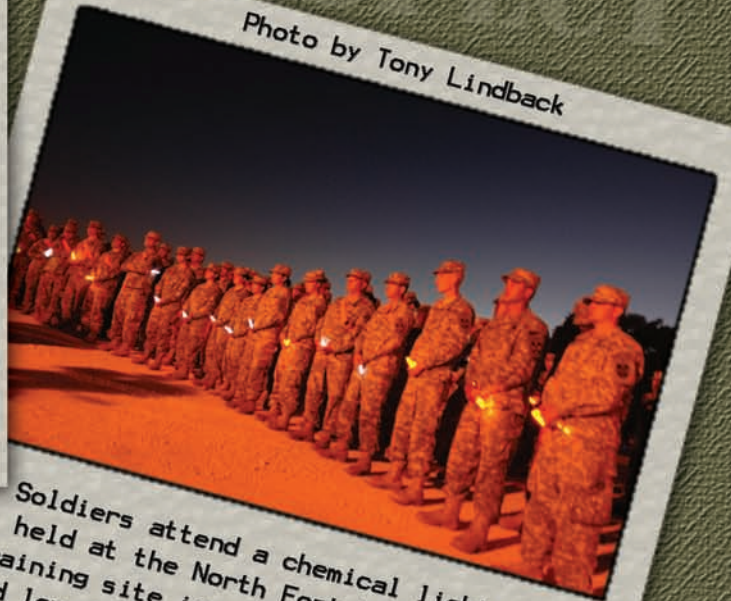
Staff Sgt. Kevin Reese, of the 2nd Infantry Division, and his military working dog, Grek, wait at a safe house before conducting an assault against insurgents in Buhriz, Iraq.

Photo by Staff Sgt. Michael J. Carden



10th Mountain Division Soldiers experience the effects of a tazer during non-lethal weapons training at Fort Drum, N.Y.

Photo by Tony Lindback



Soldiers attend a chemical light vigil held at the North Fort Hood, Texas, training site in remembrance of comrades and loved ones killed and wounded in the shooting at Fort Hood Nov. 5.

Roll call

o f t h e f a l l e n

Operation Iraqi Freedom

Spc. Adrian L. Avila, 19, Opelika, Ala., Oct. 29, 2009 ◆ *Spc. Tony Carrasco Jr., 25, Berino, N.M., Nov. 4, 2009* ◆ *Spc. Christopher M. Cooper, 28, Oceanside, Calif., Oct. 30, 2009* ◆ *Spc. Joseph L. Gallegos, 39, Questa, N.M., Oct. 28, 2009* ◆ *Pfc. Lukas C. Hopper, 20, Merced, Calif., Oct. 30, 2009* ◆ *Spc. Jonathon M. Sylvestre, 21, Colorado Springs, Colo., Nov. 2, 2009* ◆ *Staff Sgt. Amy C. Tirador, 29, Albany, N.Y., Nov. 4, 2009* ◆ *Chief Warrant Officer Mathew C. Heffelfinger, 29, Kimberly, Idaho, Nov. 8, 2009* ◆ *Chief Warrant Officer Earl R. Scott III, 24, Jacksonville, Fla., Nov. 8, 2009*

Operation Enduring Freedom

Pfc. Brian R. Bates Jr., 20, Gretna, La., Oct. 27, 2009 ◆ *Spc. Aaron S. Aamot, 22, Custer, Wash., Nov. 5, 2009* ◆ *Spc. Julian L. Berisford, 25, Benwood, W.V., Nov. 4, 2009* ◆ *Staff Sgt. Keith R. Bishop, 28, Medford, N.Y., Oct. 26, 2009* ◆ *Spc. Robert K. Charlton, 22, Malden, Mo., Oct. 27, 2009* ◆ *Sgt. Josue E. Hernandez Chavez, 23, Reno, Nev., Oct. 26, 2009* ◆ *Spc. Christopher J. Coffland, 43, Baltimore, Md., Nov. 13, 2009* ◆ *Sgt. Fernando Delarosa, 24, Alamo, Texas, Oct. 26, 2009* ◆ *Staff Sgt. Luis M. Gonzalez, 27, South Ozone Park, N.Y., Oct. 26, 2009* ◆ *Spc. Gary L. Gooch Jr., 22, Ocala, Fla., Nov. 5, 2009* ◆ *Sgt. Dale R. Griffin, 29, Terre Haute, Ind., Oct. 26, 2009* ◆ *Sgt. Issac B. Jackson, 27, Plattsburg, Mo., Oct. 26, 2009* ◆ *Chief Warrant Officer Niall Lyons, 40, Spokane, Wash., Oct. 26, 2009* ◆ *Staff Sgt. Shawn H. McNabb, 24, Terrell, Texas, Oct. 26, 2009* ◆ *Sgt. 1st Class David E. Metzger, 32, San Diego, Calif., Oct. 26, 2009* ◆ *Chief Warrant Officer Michael P. Montgomery, 36, Savannah, Ga., Oct. 26, 2009* ◆ *Sgt. Nikolas A. Mueller, 26, Little Chute, Wis., Oct. 26, 2009* ◆ *Spc. Jared D. Stankger, 22, Evergreen Park, Ill., Oct. 26, 2009* ◆ *Spc. Brandon K. Steffey, 23, Sault Sainte Marie, Mich., Oct. 25, 2009* ◆ *Pfc. Christopher I. Walz, 25, Vancouver, Wash., Oct. 26, 2009* ◆ *Sgt. Patrick O. Williamson, 24, Broussard, La., Oct. 26, 2009* ◆ *Spc. Aaron S. Aamot, 22, Custer, Wash., Nov. 5, 2009* ◆ *Spc. Gary L. Gooch Jr., 22, Ocala, Fla., Nov. 5, 2009*

You are not forgotten

Editors note: This is a continuation of the list that was started with the October 2003 issue of the NCO Journal and contains those names released by the Department of Defense between Oct. 29 and Nov. 17, 2009.

GEAR UP! FOR COLD WEATHER



GETTIN' COLD FEET

Cold Weather clothing:

- Keep it Clean
- Avoid Overheating
- Wear it Loose and in Layers
- Keep it Dry

WATCH FOR EFFECTS TO THE SKIN,
SUCH AS:

- SWOLLEN RED OR DARKENED
- PAIN, TENDERNESS, HOT OR ITCHY
- NUMBNESS OR TINGLING
- BLEEDING OR BLISTERED
- GRAY, WAXY FEELING OR "WOODEN"
TO THE TOUCH
- DIZZINESS, WEAKNESS OR BLURRED VISION
- VIGOROUS SHIVERING
- LACK OF COORDINATION AND IMPAIRED
JUDGMENT
- PAINFUL, RED, WATERY OR GRITTY FEELING
IN THE EYES (SNOW BLINDNESS)



ARMY SAFE
FALLWINTER
NO TIME TO CHILL



ARMY SAFE
IS ARMY STRONG



OFFICIAL BUSINESS



2009 - THE YEAR OF THE NCO

IT'S YOUR YEAR TO TELL YOUR STORY



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