

Photo by Jim Anderson

Training NCOs:

Libby Noncommissioned Officers Academy

By Staff Sergeant Edgar A. Stitt

The U.S. Army has undergone many changes during the past few years. The Army's mission, equipment, and doctrine are changing to ensure that we will be prepared to meet tomorrow's challenges—and those of the 21st century. However, the bedrock principles that guide noncommissioned officer (NCO) development and training have not changed. Course content may change to reflect a changing Army; the philosophy that shapes preparation of NCOs to train and lead soldiers remains the same.

Libby Noncommissioned Officers Academy (Libby NCOA), located in Fort Leonard Wood, is responsible for training NCOs at primary, basic, and advanced levels. Established in 1954 as Fort Leonard Wood NCOA under 5th Army, the academy was redesignated in July 1973 as Libby NCOA and Drill Sergeant School under the Army Training and Doctrine Command. Since 1986 it has been subordinate to the U.S. Army Engineer Center.



Photo by E. Stitt

PLDC students practice leader reconnaissance skills during a collective training evaluation.

Libby NCOA is named after Sergeant George D. Libby, a Medal of Honor winner in the Korean Conflict whose valor and resourceful leadership under fire exemplified the highest standards of professionalism expected of NCOs. (See article, page 55)

The academy's headquarters staff consists of its commandant, assistant commandant, chief of training, an administrative center, operations center, and supply office. The commandant is Command Sergeant Major (CSM) Julius B. Nutter.

"Our mission is to provide Noncommissioned Officers Education System training to qualified soldiers, to train selected NCOs in the fundamentals of recruit training in the Initial Entry Training environment, to provide leadership training to company-grade officers and senior NCOs, and to advise and assist selected U.S. Army Reserve Training Divisions," Nutter says. He adds that 15 courses are taught at the academy, which has 90 assigned permanent party instructors and trains approximately 3,000 soldiers each year. Courses are presented in the Primary Leadership Development Course (PLDC), Basic Noncommissioned Officers Course (BNCOC), Advanced Noncommissioned Officers Course (ANCOC), and the Drill Sergeant School (DSS).

PLDC. The PLDC trains soldiers selected to enter the Noncommissioned Officer Corps in their responsibilities and authority as NCOs. It is organized to give junior level NCOs the basic leadership skills they will need to be effective team and crew leaders. First Sergeant Israel Y. Mendoza, chief of PLDC, states that the PLDC is presented in three phases in an NCOA live-in environment. Students receive 397 hours of training. The program ends with an extensive field training exercise that allows students to apply lessons learned. Graduates must be able to train soldiers on individual tasks.

BNCOC. The BNCOC trains sergeants to assume squad-leader responsibilities after they return to their units. The majority of BNCOC students are selected by their career branch. BNCOC students from Forts Leonard Wood, Riley, Carson, and Bliss who are combat engineers are selected by their units. The course trains NCOs from many engineer-related career management fields (CMF). Courses last from 3 to 12 weeks depending on the CMF. First Sergeant Randal W. Willis, Chief of BNCOC, points out that NCOs from 15 military occupational specialties (MOS) are trained at BNCOC. "We are responsible for ensuring that BNCOC students are trained to the current doctrine on all critical tasks in their MOS. We also build on the leadership skills learned in PLDC," Willis says.

ANCOC. The ANCOC trains staff sergeants selected by Department of the Army (DA) as platoon sergeants for CMFs in combat engineering, combat construction, and topographic engineering. Courses vary from 3 to 8 weeks depending on the CMF. First Sergeant Kenneth Merrill, Chief of ANCOC, notes that in addition to training NCOs to lead and train the soldiers who will work and fight under their supervision, ANCOC provides technical and tactical job training. The course increases unit proficiency by improving the individual competence of its graduates.

DSS. The DSS is one of only three drill sergeant schools in the Army. Candidates for DSS are selected by DA or volunteer for drill sergeant duty. "DSS trains drill sergeant candidates using the insist-assist



Photo by E. Stitt

PLDC student SPC McCoy instructs squad members during a collective training evaluation.

leadership strategy. Candidates must demonstrate competence in all areas taught at DSS and maintain high standards of military courtesy and bearing, fitness and leadership. Drill sergeant leaders provide candidates with a tough, positive learning environment and serve as role models and mentors," says First Sergeant Charles Burke, Chief of DSS.

All candidates receive the basic training program of instruction regardless of their future drill sergeant assignment. New graduates are assigned to initial entry training, one-station unit training, or advanced individual training units for 2-year tours as drill sergeants.

Instructor Training

Libby NCOA needs the best qualified NCOs as instructors and drill sergeant leaders because they are responsible for training our Noncommissioned Officer Corps, the "backbone" of the U.S. Army. Soldiers selected as PLDC, BNCOC, and ANCOC instructors are among the top NCOs in their CMFs. In addition to being technically and tactically proficient, instructors must be effective communicators. Instructors at Libby NCOA use the small-group leader (SGL) process, which ensures that students get personal attention from their instructors. CSM Nutter believes the SGL process is effective because it allows students to input their personal experience into the learning process. The NCOs selected to become instructors must undergo a rigorous training program before they receive instructor certification and an additional skill identifier of "H." To qualify, instructor candidates must first attend the Instructor Training Course at the Engineer Center. They must pass all examinations and performance evaluations required of students and achieve final examination grades of 80 percent or higher. Next, instructor candidates practice teaching until they are comfortable with the course lessons. Then, they teach a lesson in front of a "murder board" consisting of the ANCOC, BNCOC, or PLDC first sergeant, the senior instructor, and another instructor. The murder board evaluates instructor candidates on their teaching ability, poise, and knowledge. Candidates must successfully complete the board before they are certified to teach at any level within the NCOES.

Drill sergeant leader candidates undergo a similar training program. These drill sergeants are the cream of the crop at the end of their 2-year tours. Drill sergeant leaders are the top 2 to 5 percent of the Army. It's harder to become a drill sergeant leader than a drill sergeant. "Not all drill sergeants can be drill sergeant leaders," says Staff Sergeant Stanley Porter, DSS Drill Sergeant Leader. Drill sergeant leader candidates must extend their tour as drill sergeants for one extra year and repeat the entire DSS training program. Certification as a drill sergeant leader follows successful completion of a 90-day self-paced training program. Candidates must demonstrate competence in all tasks required of a drill sergeant and give one or two presentations in each major area taught at DSS. They are graded on squad drill and the seven steps of marching. To graduate, candidates must pass all written examinations.

Today, the Army is changing rapidly and its future structure and missions are still unclear. But at Libby NCOA it's nice to know that when it comes to professionalism, technical and tactical competence, and the standards of excellence that have made our NCO Corps the world's best...some things never change!

Staff Sergeant Stitt is a PLDC instructor at Libby NCOA. A combat engineer, he has completed tours in U.S., Germany, and Southwest Asia.