



# Drill Sergeants work on their soldier skills to become more effective leaders

By Maj. Michelle Lunato, 98th Training Division public affairs officer

**T**he U.S. Army drill sergeant hat symbolizes excellence, making the wearer of the iconic Brown Round an image to emulate. However, drill sergeants don't just leave the Drill Sergeant Academy infused with a career's worth of knowledge. Like every other Soldier in the Army, they must continually train to stay proficient.

So with that goal in mind, U.S. Army Reserve drill sergeants and support staff with 2nd Battalion, 389th Regiment (Basic Combat Training), 3rd Brigade, 98th Training Division (Initial Entry Training), gathered together for their annual field training exercise on May 17-19.

However, this was not a standard field training exercise, said Lt. Col. Nathaniel Stobert, the 2nd Battalion Commander. "When we came up with the vision for this, we really wanted to break the mold of going to a field training exercise and doing stand-alone situational training lanes, and then waiting until the next iteration of training. This one was really focused on a battalion mission order, with each company having a piece of that mission, and all that going towards the common battalion mission."

To accomplish a battalion-level mission with more than 100 U.S. Army Reserve Soldiers from six companies stationed across two states, Stobert knew he needed a dynamic location that could offer the soldiers combined, valuable and realistic training. Pulling from his civilian experiences as a New York State Special Operations Response Team member, Stobert decided to hold his battalion's field training exercise at the New York State Preparedness Training Center.

## Adaptive training

The state-of-the-art facility offered the U.S. Army Reserve drill sergeants and support staff not only enough space to tactically train outside, but it offered them an unparalleled opportunity to train in a simulated city that was complete with buildings, furniture and décor.

The elements of furniture and décor in the buildings may seem trivial at first, but they add a sense of vital realism to the training, said Staff Sgt. Andrew J. Miller, a U.S. Army Reserve drill sergeant with Bravo Company. "When it comes down to

clearing a room, not every room is cookie cutter. It's not just a door in the center, with five foot on each side. It's not 10 feet on each side, with nothing in the middle. There could be beds in there. There could be multiple doors. There could be a hallway. There could be windows. We want to make sure we cover everything," explained the drill sergeant. "So coming in here and having that experience, of coming into this room thinking it was just square, and now there is a hallway and we have to determine what we are going to do from there. So we adapt. We overcome. And then, we learn from it so we can later pass that on to our Initial Entry Training Soldiers."

## Skill level tasks

The lifelike environment just added to the value of the training that is critical for all Soldiers to readily know, said Sgt. 1st Class Brian Shields, a U.S. Army Reserve drill sergeant with Alpha Company. "The training is awesome. It supports the battalion and brigade Mission Essential Task List and reinforces our Skill Level One tasks. It refreshes every Soldier, at all levels on how to do those skill level tasks, and these are the tasks that are going to keep you alive in combat."

The fact of being able to really immerse into the scenario just made the training more effective, said Sgt. 1st Class Kenneth Anthony Watson II, a U.S. Army Reserve drill sergeant with Foxtrot Company. "We have the drawings and sand tables that we can make to give us an idea on how we want to perform a task, but when we actually get to the location and fulfill the mission, so to speak, the sense of realism comes into play. Then we can play off of each other and coordinate, or improvise as necessary."

The challenge of communicating on the move and feeling the impact of the simulation rounds, added a level of invaluable reality to the training, said Miller. "It adds a little bit of a realism to it, where you can actually feel yourself getting hit and feel a little bit of pain with it." That pain, made the Soldiers get down further when taking cover, identify the risks of window quicker and realize the importance of avoiding fatal funnels, explained the drill sergeant with prior deployments as a combat engineer.



A U.S. Army Reserve drill sergeant from 2nd Battalion, 389th Regiment (Basic Combat Training), 3rd Brigade, 98th Training Division (Initial Entry Training), scans the area for "threats" after a simulated attack on a city, which was part of the battalion field training exercise at the New York State Preparedness Center in Oriskany, N.Y., May 17-19, 2019. (Photo Credit: U.S. Army Reserve photo by Maj. Michelle Lunato)

Enhancing the drill sergeants' and support staff's basic Soldier survival skills was the main goal, but the multiple elements of the field training exercises allowed for additional training benefits, said the U.S. Army Reserve battalion commander. "All the collective and individual tasks that they are being evaluated on are all things that every Soldier needs to be able to do to survive when, and if, they deploy to a combat environment. So even though this doesn't have to do with our drill sergeant mission per say. It has everything to do with being a Soldier. And in addition, the most valuable part of this is that it gave our young leaders an opportunity to lead under stress and uncomfortable situations, in environments they were not used to, and work together with other young leaders in a way that they don't normally get a chance to during battle assembly weekends."

### Improving communication

Communicating outside the company level certainly had its challenges since it is not an everyday occurrence for the six Reserve companies spread across two states. However, with those challenges came benefits, said Watson. "It gave the companies a chance to work collectively as individual units, but brought us into an environment where we had to communicate with multiple companies with multiple missions at the same time."

Of course there were issues—little things to tweak, but that comes with all training events, said Sgt. 1st Class Pamela Renee Shriver, a U.S. Army Reserve drill sergeant with Delta Company out of Horseheads, New York. "It was a big benefit to work with the whole battalion, being able to communicate and work with each other, because we just don't see each other every weekend."

The large-scale communication and coordination may have caused some stress but it was just what Stobert wanted for his Soldiers. "Perfection was never the goal, but leadership, challenge and physical effort were the goals, and we accomplished it," said the U.S. Army Reserve battalion commander.

Collaborating with various Soldiers from across the battalion who all had different experiences and job skills was an eye-opening experience, said Sgt. Chad Griffith, a U.S. Army Reserve drill sergeant candidate with Foxtrot Company, who was on his first weekend training with the battalion. "The first thing that stuck out to me was the people ... it's definitely a melting pot. We drew on a lot of previous experiences since everyone comes from different backgrounds, different MOSs [military occupational specialties]. So everybody brings something different to the table that we can all draw from each other. It's unlike anything I've ever encountered anywhere else I've been in the Army."

### Drill sergeants as soldiers first

By the end of the weekend and a number of iterations of training, the drill sergeants said they felt more confident about not only their personal Soldier skills, but also their ability to instruct future trainees with more confidence.

"As a drill sergeant this [training] is really important because it allows us to practice how we would give a course, how we would give training to standard, Army standard," said Staff Sgt. Stephanie Bodough, a U.S. Army Reserve drill sergeant with Charlie Company. "It put us in the position of how we felt when we were taught, so that when we are working with trainees, we have a better perspective on how to give them instruction so they all understand."

The unique field training exercise led to developing the drill sergeants as Soldiers first, which naturally led to making them more confident and knowledgeable leaders, and even the newest Soldier in the battalion recognized the comprehensive value in the weekend.

"It was a lot more than I was expecting," said Griffith. "I was expecting to come out and basically get a hands-on approach to instructing from a drill sergeant's perspective, but it was a lot more than that. I certainly did that, but we also incorporated a lot of tactical training and hands-on field training as well. So again, the entire Soldier concept wrapped up into one weekend was definitely what happened here." ■