



# With a Little Help From an NCO

*Guard Initial Entry Training Liaisons can Make a Difference*

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**AT** some point during basic training – around the time an Army drill sergeant screams in a recruit's face at the top of his lungs, or about the 1,000th pushup, or after 10 seconds into rolling around in sawdust – almost every recruit asks themselves the same question: Did I make the wrong decision to join the Army?

Some Guardmembers push the thought away quickly – others don't. They think more and more about quitting after receiving letters from home detailing how they're missed or when problems with their civilian jobs mount from their leave of absence.

Luckily, seasoned Guardmembers stationed at Initial Entry Training (IET) bases are there to catch these wayward recruits before they make a snap, emotional decision that may have life-changing consequences.

The Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Guard and Reserve Liaison program helps Army Guard and Reserve recruits navigate problems at home and at IET. The senior enlisted Guardmembers who staff the liaison offices teach, coach and mentor the recruits – a core function of an NCO.

There are currently 51 Guard liaisons covering 16 TRADOC installations where basic combat training and advance individual training takes place, according to Sgt. Maj. John Mayo, the TRADOC senior Army National Guard enlisted advisor. He added that the program dates back to at least 1993.

"We get more contact with (the recruits) than anyone up to this point," said Sgt. Maj. Greg Galloway, a North Carolina Guard member who is the liaison sergeant major for Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

Some of the prospective Soldiers have family or relationship pressures. Others want to pass school, but are struck down by medical problems. Some, liaisons say, are numb to the tactics of the drill sergeant. Where a drill sergeant motivates through physical training and verbal berating, the liaison motivates young Soldiers to tough it out, using their years of counseling experience.

"Sometimes a little pep talk goes a long way," said Galloway. "We generally go back to the reason they came to the 'dance'."

Once they establish what the problem is, the office goes to work. Galloway recalled a story about a recruit who was diagnosed with testicular cancer and had to withdraw from training. Galloway arranged for a transfer to Walter Reed Army Medical Center, and after a successful treatment the recruit went back to training and graduated as an honor graduate.

Others had different, but just as complicated, experiences.

Master Sgt. Cynthia Lockridge, a liaison at Fort Jackson, recalled a recruit who walked into her office and declared he didn't want to go to war.

"I said 'that's like going to medical school and not wanting to operate on patients,'" Lockridge said. She told him to ride it out for three weeks, and if he couldn't handle it, she would help him transition out.

True to her promise, she arrived at the unit's training site at the appointed time and asked the drill sergeant the whereabouts of the recruit, who yelled for him.

"He stood up," said Lockridge of the recruit, "And he had the squad leader patch on." With a big smile, the recruit started to thank her for helping him reconsider his decision, and she told him the best way to show his gratitude.

"Reach back and get someone else," she said simply, imparting the NCO mentality.

Where mentoring for some may involve a pep talk, some need more tangible encouragement. Sgt. Maj. Tom Sznura, the TRADOC liaison sergeant major at Fort Leonard Wood from the Florida National Guard, likes to use the "carrot" of schools when a recruit has problems at IET.

"(In) late '05 I had a Soldier who was causing some problems. They brought him to me," Sznura said. "(I told him) 'You give me a 270 or better on the (Army Physical Fitness Test), and I will put a recommendation in that you will go to Airborne school,'" Sznura said.

The recruit shaped up, and scored more than 290 to pass his class. During a deployment to Afghanistan a year later, he heard a voice and turned around to see that same Soldier standing in front of him, now a hard-charging specialist on the fast track to promotion.

"He said 'this is the best thing I've ever done,'" Sznura said. "I've been put in for E-5 for doing good things," said the specialist. "It's the best thing, and I owe it all to you. If you hadn't straightened me out, I probably would have quit."

These are the more immediate rewards for the hours of hard work and sacrifice that involve mentoring young Guardmembers. Sznura, however, takes these short-term thanks and combines them with a long view, to bolster the Army he loves.

"It's the future of our Army," said Sznura of the recruits. "I've got 27 years in. I've got three years until retirement and then I'm hanging it up. One of those kids, and I use the term loosely, is going to be a sergeant major. And he's got to take my position. He doesn't know it yet." 