



# FORT LEE TRAVELLER

## BUILD IT & They Will Train

By T. Anthony Bell

The often repeated adage, “NCOs get the job done” has never rung more true than the work five resourceful noncommissioned officers did in transforming a shell of an unsightly warehouse into a bustling and vibrant center for installation training.

Sgt. 1st Classes Jason McDuffie, Darnyell Parker, Derrick Grant, Gerald Daniel and Staff Sgt. Jonny Shepherd turned a 10,000-square-foot warehouse into what is now called Warrior Training Center.

The center hosts a number of training facilities that is primarily used by Noncommissioned Officer Academy students to enhance tactical and urban warfare skills.

Command Sgt. Maj. Delice Liggon, NCOA commandant, said the facility is the result of a lot of hard work, resourcefulness and dedication.

“These Soldiers were given a mission, and they went above and beyond the call of duty to complete it,” she said. “Their contributions to this project will have a positive and lasting impact on how Soldiers are trained here at Fort Lee.



Noncommissioned Officer Academy instructor Staff Sgt. Kawonis Austin helps students adjust their weapons at the Warrior Training Center's marksmanship shooting range. The range is one of several training areas housed within a facility that was stood up by five noncommissioned officers whose resourcefulness and dedication made all the difference. (Photo by T. Anthony Bell)



The Reflective Fire Lane, located in the facility's parking lot, provides Soldiers like academy student Sgt. Bryan Carpenter the means to practice urban warfare skills. (Photo by T. Anthony Bell)

The project was started when Command Sgt. Maj. José Silva, Quartermaster Center and School command sergeant major, sent the five Soldiers to Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md., to survey a similar facility with the intent to establish such a facility here.

“This is a template of the training that is being conducted at the

Ordnance school,” said Silva. “The warrior training concept originated with Command Sgt. Maj. (Anthony) Aubain and his NCO Academy folks. I decided that it would be a great idea to bring those techniques and way of training to our side of the house.

” When the Soldiers returned after a week at APG, Silva outlined the mission.

“He laid the blueprint of this building down in front of our faces and told us that we’re going to make the same thing happen at Fort Lee,” said Shepherd. “He cut us loose on our own, and everything that’s happened since has been our own creation.”

The NCOs had to literally “create” everything because initially, no money was available to fund the project. Nevertheless, they scrounged, acquired and negotiated their way to much of the furniture and other materials used in the center.

“We used all of the resources we had through the different people we’ve known on this post in the different departments and units, basically taking their trash and making it into our

treasure,” said Shepherd.

The Warrior Training Center “treasure” features an enhanced military operation in urban terrain training area complete with multiple rooms and furniture; a crew-served weapons area; laser marksmanship shooting range; and a 3,000-square-foot mat and observation stand for combatives training.

In addition, it has a 50-yard reflexive fire lane with pop up targets. The facility’s training features help augment the curriculum of NCO Academy students.

“All the training that we do down here at the Warrior Training Center is training that’s required,” said Daniel. “What we’ve done is taken the basic task that the Soldier is required to train on and we’ve enhanced that task and provided more realistic scenarios for that Soldier to go through.

” For example, the Army requires the academy to teach Soldiers how to react under direct fire, said Daniel.

“What we’ve done is created a reflexive fire lane so not only do they react to direct fire, they

are actually able to engage pop up targets and get the instant feedback on their performance with the skills and actions they’ve been taught.”

Sgt. Joe Trull of Fort Polk, La., is a current basic noncommissioned officer course attendee who recently trained at the center. He said the facility’s training programs are impressive.

“I think the training here is just awesome,” he said. “A lot of Soldiers don’t even get exposed to weapons and training that we have here.”



Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Steven Boggess and Staff Sgt. Travis Booker grapple in a 3,000-square-foot combatives training area while instructor Staff Sgt. Jonny Shepherd and students look on from a 10-foot viewing stand. (Photo by T. Anthony Bell)



Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Lesley Smalls disassembles a weapon in the crew-served weapons area. (Photo by T. Anthony Bell)



Students take a break in the classroom area with a poster of Osama Bin Laden on the wall that serves to remind them why they train. (Photo by T. Anthony Bell)

Silva said the facility's training programs allow NCOs to catch-up to their subordinates, the new recruits who are exposed to new training tactics and techniques in basic and advanced individual training.

"If you look at the quality of the new generation of Combat Service Support Soldiers going through basic and AIT," said Silva, "you'll know they are getting trained on all areas in the tactical arena from night vision devices to shooting the carbines, combatives, new first aid kit...all the things the old generation of NCOs weren't trained up on. This facility provides the opportunity for NCOs to get up to snuff on those new skills so that they can go back to their units and train the new generation of CSS Soldiers coming through."

At Fort Lee, everybody has been coming through to train at the new facility, not just NCO Academy students. Daniel, the NCO in-charge, said about 500 Soldiers from various installation elements have undergone some form of training at the facility.

"When we first started the program," he said. "I knew there would be a little bit of interest in it. I understood the NCO Academy students were all going to come through here and receive some training. I had no doubt in my mind that they would receive excellent training, but when word got around and cadre from the 23rd (QM Brigade) and various units throughout Fort Lee started coming down here to visit and schedule Soldiers to train here, that's when I started to understand that this is a good facility."

And the Soldiers are continuously working to make it better. There are plans to install a video recording system so that Soldiers can critique themselves after training and a host of other upgrades that will improve the appearance of the facility, said Daniel.



Instructor Staff Sgt. Kawonis Austin helps to adjust a weapon at the marksmanship facility. (Photo by T. Anthony Bell)

## Training Facility Becomes Labor of Love

The five noncommissioned officers who stood up Fort Lee's Warrior Training Center stumbled upon an endeavor which became a labor of love. They started the work during last year's student exodus and worked 12-14 hour days through the holiday season, with the exception of Christmas and New Year's, right up until the first Soldiers came through for training in February.

"We had a ball despite the 80-hour work week that we put in and the sacrifices our families made for us. We don't regret one minute of it," said Staff Sgt. Jonny Shepherd.

Shepherd and his fellow NCOs continue to work long days at the facility and don't mind the sacrifices because they understand the big picture.

"As long as we're putting out a quality product that could potentially put a Soldier in the position to save somebody's life or save their own life, my hours spent here are small tokens compared to the training we give to Soldiers," said Sgt. 1st Class Gerald Daniel.