

# New challenges await those headed for PLDC

By Spc. Jimmy Norris

A pilot program currently underway at Forts Bliss and Hood, Texas, and Grafenwoehr, Germany, may soon validate an entirely new version of the Primary Leadership Development Course for the entire Army. The program is scheduled to be implemented Army-wide Oct. 1. Schools participating in the program will teach the new course through three cycles and provide feedback to the NCO Education System Proponent at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy.

“We’re teaching it in a different way, which should result in a more hands-on course with less hours. We’re also stressing more of the warfighting skills,” said Sgt. Maj. Victor LeGloahec. He heads the USASMA office that oversees PLDC training worldwide. LeGloahec also headed the team responsible for the development of the pilot program.

He said the increased emphasis on warfighting skills was an improvement for a number of reasons.

“The world is evolving and the Army has to evolve with it,” he said. “The Army is a lot smaller than it used to be. Before, an artillery unit, for example, could set up in the field

and then have an infantry unit come guard them. We can’t do that now. Another reason for the emphasis on warfighting skills is [that] only 10 percent of the Army is combat arms; the other 90 percent [of the soldiers] may not get to experience that. It’s good training for the units to expand on.”

“PLDC needed updating with a focus on new tasks. We’re using a crawl-walk-run approach to training as it applies to the adult learning process,” explained Billy Williams, a retired sergeant major and training specialist at the USASMA NCOES proponent. “We’ve developed these lessons to be progressive and sequential.”

Williams said tasks which were tested in a field training exercise (FTX), but never addressed in the classroom before – combat orders, troop-leading procedures, tactical movements, occupying an assembly area, combat operations, map reading and night land navigation – the students will learn during a 25-hour block of instruction and hands-on practical exercises. Students will then practice the tasks during a 48-hour situational training exercise (STX). The 48-hour STX will replace the course’s 91-hour FTX.

According to Master Sgt. Jimmie Nelson, chief of PLDC at the Fort Bliss NCO Academy – one of the three



Photos by Spc. Jimmy Norris

*Spc. Javier Gonzalez, Battery E, 1st Battalion, 7th Air Defense Artillery, plots his course on the map on Fort Bliss' MacGregor Range.*

schools implementing the pilot – the change from the FTX to the STX was one of the most noticeable changes to the program.

“The STX is a lot more realistic and it provides a lot more lane training than the FTX,” he said. The former FTX included two days of land navigation, a subject addressed separately under the pilot program. During the FTX, the students then participated in two days of force-on-force missions, which Nelson said didn’t provide as much room for evaluating the students as the pilot program does.

“The new STX really helps us test the soldiers’ ability to lead in combat,” Nelson said.

According to LeGloahec, the entrance requirements for PLDC will remain the same. Graduation requirements will also remain unchanged but some of the tasks will be streamlined.

The new course incorporates 106 tasks and clusters them into 31 lessons. These lessons are further consolidated into three areas: leadership, training and warfighting skills. The current PLDC program is composed of six areas: leadership, communication, warfighting skills, training and maintaining, professional skills and military skills.

The regimen should lead to more effective junior NCOs, said Larry Evans, a training specialist at USASMA’s NCOES proponent and one of the pilot program’s creators.

“The training is going to put them at a different maturity level,” said Evans. “This gets them away from the Playstation™ weekend mentality and into a mature role. They’re transitioning from followers to leaders.”

The program has had good feedback.

“We love the pilot, and we want to do more of it. It’s more hands-on, and it focuses on NCO skills instead of soldier skills,” said Nelson. “It also gives us a chance to see if the soldiers learned anything, because we get to see them do it.”

Nelson said under the current PLDC curriculum, once a soldier passed land navigation, they had met most the requirements for graduation, but the pilot program’s 48-hour STX gives instructors a chance to assess soldiers’ leadership abilities in the field.

According to Frank Berta, a training specialist on the pilot program team, the new training allows the NCO academies more flexibility than before in how they assess their students.

The pilot program team surveyed soldiers of all ranks throughout the Army. They also solicited input from NCOES academy commandants, according to Berta.

“Your main mission could be a [simulated] river crossing,” he explained. “But the instructors could add NBC (nuclear, biological and chemical) attack, an ambush or



*Spc. Christopher Taylor, Battery A, 2nd Battalion, 1st Air Defense Artillery double checks his azimuth reading.*

anything they want. The main thing is to test the soldiers’ ability to lead troops.”

“We gave the academies a specific list of missions to conduct during the STX,” Berta said. “However, academies have the flexibility to substitute or add based on contemporary operating environmental constraints.”

According to Nelson, this kind of latitude is a major part of what makes the pilot program such an improvement.

“This is better because we have more of an opportunity to assess a soldier’s leadership abilities with hands-on testing,” he said. “We used to just talk about these things. Now we do them.”