



What it takes to be a Drill Sergeant

Is it in you?



By Master Sgt. Lisa Hunter

“This we’ll defend.” It’s more than a patch on your uniform and donning the “brown round.” It’s working long hours every day, including weekends. It’s constantly being on the go. It’s living the “Be, Know, Do.” So, is it in you?

Training and Doctrine Command commander, Gen. Kevin Byrnes, wants tomorrow’s drill sergeants to be the best the Army has to offer. To make sure that happens, he’s hoping more top-notch soldiers will volunteer for the “trail.”

“I would like to see a higher rate of volunteers. It’s not where it ought to be. Unfortunately, too many of our drill sergeants are not volunteers,” said Byrnes. “I would like to see more energy applied by the chain of command to inspire noncommissioned officers to [volunteer] to be drill sergeants.”

Byrnes said he’s looking for NCOs who are confident in their capabilities, competent in their military occupational specialties and have basic leadership skills. “I want them to be physically fit. I want them to be leaders who have a great understanding of self-discipline,” said

Byrnes. “Most importantly, I want them to be solidly grounded in the values this Army stands for. And be able to – by example – show those soldiers under their charge that these are the values that an American soldier holds dear.”

Approximately 2,800 NCOs are currently serving as drill sergeants on active duty. Each year, approximately 1,400 new NCOs are needed to fill drill sergeant positions. Drill sergeant candidates attend a nine-week school at Fort Jackson, S.C.; Fort Benning, Ga.; or Fort Leonard Wood, Mo. The NCOs attend the school in a Temporary Duty and Return status, giving them the opportunity to take leave before reporting for drill duty.

Of course, every NCO knows that becoming a drill sergeant is a large commitment. It’s physically challenging. It means working long hours and lots of weekends for two years.

So what are the perks? Currently, drill sergeants earn \$275 a month proficiency pay and increases to \$375 in October. But there are several other advantages, according to Master Sgt. James Caudill, NCO in Charge of the Drill Sergeant Assignments Branch, U.S. Total Personnel Command.

“It is a lot of long hours, but you know you are going to be home most nights,” said Caudill, who

Where drill sergeant duty can take you

Fort Benning, Ga.	Fort Belvoir, Va.
Fort Knox, Ky.	Fort Meade, Mary.
Fort Jackson, S.C.	Aberdeen Proving Grounds, Mary.
Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.	Panama City, Fla.
Fort Sill, Okla.	Goodfellow Air Force Base, Pensacola, Fla.
Defense Language Institute, Calif.	Lackland Air Force Base, Texas
Fort Huachuca, Ariz.	Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas
Fort Bliss, Texas	Gulfport, Miss.
Fort Sam Houston, Texas	Pensacola, Fla.
Fort Fort Rucker, Ala.	Naval Weapons Station
Fort Gordon, Ga.	Yorktown, Va.
Redstone Arsenal	Naval Amphibious Base Little
Fort Bragg, N.C.	Creek, Va.
Fort Monroe, Va.	
Fort Eustis, Va.	
Fort Lee, Va.	



served as a drill sergeant for two years at Fort Knox, Ky. Caudill, an Infantry soldier, had been assigned to a rapid-deployment unit before going on the trail. "It's nice knowing your schedule eight weeks in advance. Since all of the trainees take Christmas Exodus, you know you're going to be home with your family at Christmas." Drill sergeants usually have a one- or two-week break between training cycles, Caudill said.

"On a personal level, [training soldiers is] one of the most rewarding parts of it," Caudill explained. "You can almost see the changes in these recruits on a daily basis. They come to you as civilians, but you can see them change as they grasp the soldierization process."

Byrnes spoke of his recent visit to Fort Jackson, S.C., where he visited Basic Training soldiers who were at different stages in their training. Byrnes commented on the definitive changes he saw in the new soldiers' confidence and skill levels during the progressive phases of training.

"By the eighth week, I'm very comfortable that these soldiers have the basic fundamentals, and that they would be able to perform if we needed them," Byrnes said. "My thought process in watching all of that was not simply admiring how they come off, but who's making all that happen: Instructors and drill sergeants. It's amazing what they can accomplish in great numbers." Drill sergeants trained more than 66,000 new recruits last year, according to Byrnes.

Of course, serving as a drill sergeant has professional development advantages, as well. One of the most lucrative perks to drill sergeant duty is the future promotion potential, according to Caudill. While the rates varied, the best showing was on the last few years' sergeant first class promotion boards. On those boards, prior and current drill sergeants had a much better selection rate, almost double the Army rate. Drill sergeants and former drill sergeants have enjoyed a higher promotion rate across the board, according to Caudill. Along with promotion advantages, Byrnes pointed out other advantages that will serve NCOs long after they leave the trail.

Drill sergeants are assigned at 27 Army, Navy and Air Force installations (see inset for complete list). While NCOs volunteering for drill status do not get to choose the installation where they will serve, they can specify three assignments they would like when they submit their DA 4187 (Personal Action). Drill sergeants serve for two years and have the option of extending for a third year. When they successfully complete their tours, drill sergeants have preference in their follow-on assignments.

"If you look at the noncommissioned officers we have that wear the drill sergeant patch, they are probably the best trainers, the best communicators – particularly in the area of counseling – in the world," Byrnes said. "They know task, conditions and standards. They know how to get the soldiers to training in the right uniform at the right time with the right equipment. And then, they're not going to let go until those soldiers are trained to standard every time. I really admire how they can transform a young soldier just coming out of civilian life in the short time we give them."

If you think it's in you, check out the list of qualifications in the box on this page for a short list of qualifications. Refer to AR 614-200 for the complete list of qualifications. For more information, check out the PERSCOM Web site at https://www.perscom.army.mil/epinf/drill_serjeant.htm.

- Rank of staff sergeant or sergeant first class
- Minimum GT score of 100 (may be waived to 95 by PERSCOM)
- Basic NCO Course graduate
- Qualified on M16A2 rifle in the last six months
- Minimum of four years continuous active service
- Meets the height and weight criteria outlined in AR 600-9
- Must be able to pass the Army Physical Fitness Test, No alternate events
- Displays good military bearing, had demonstrated capability to perform in positions of increased responsibility
- For a complete list of requirements, go to https://www.perscom.army.mil/epinf/drill_serjeant.htm or AR 614-200.

