

## **Army trainers 'bullied recruits'**

*Young recruits at Britain's biggest army base have been bullied during their training, the BBC has found.*

BBC News UK

An undercover reporter who spent months at Catterick Garrison in North Yorks uncovered evidence of physical abuse.

Five training instructors have been suspended. The head of the Army said "robust training" was fine, but bullying was unacceptable.

The incidents came despite promised changes after four recruits died after bullying at Deepcut Barracks in Surrey.

### **'Punched me'**

BBC reporter Russell Sharp spent six months as an infantry recruit at Catterick. He secretly filmed life at the infantry training centre on his mobile phone and recorded his thoughts.

He discovered that five instructors, all corporals, were involved in bullying and physically abusing young recruits.

One recruit said of an instructor: "Yeah he beat me up... Kicked me around. Punched me."

Despite examples of good practice, two recruits claimed they were forced to the ground, one with a rifle loaded and ready to fire.

One corporal urinated on a recruit's boot, and more than one young soldier said he was punched in the face by his instructor.

Another recruit said his hand was so badly injured in a beating he could not salute properly.

The head of the army, Gen Sir Richard Dannatt, said if any recruits felt they were being harassed, then they needed to speak up.

He said: "Robust training is what we're after - bullying is not acceptable. It's not a perfect organisation and if some people get it wrong, then after investigation, they will be subject to sanction."

### **Already investigating**

A military source said three instructors had been suspended before the authorities were made aware of the BBC programme.

Another two were suspended after the Ministry of Defence received further evidence from the BBC.

The MoD could not confirm details of the suspensions.

In a statement the MoD said it had already been in the process of investigating several of the cases brought to them by the BBC documentary team and launched further investigations into the new allegations.

It said: "We are, however, unable to comment on the details of specific cases so that we do not prejudice ongoing legal processes."

It added: "Bullying is absolutely unacceptable and fundamentally at odds with the Army's core values.

"All soldiers are made aware that if they are a victim of bullying then they can complain either through their chain of command or to the independent Service Complaints Commissioner.

"We keep the standards of training across all Army facilities under constant review to ensure that the core values are being observed, and our training establishments are also the subject of continuous scrutiny by external, independent authorities."



Russell Sharp signed up and spent six months training

### **Independent inquiry**

Other allegations of bullying at Catterick Garrison have emerged in the past.

In 2003, the families of soldiers who died in non-combat incidents at the site called for a public inquiry amid allegations of bullying and harassment of young recruits.



Joke comes close to uncovering truth about reporter

In 2006, a new course for instructors was introduced after footage of recruits apparently being humiliated surfaced. But no criminal charges were brought over the incident and Army chiefs stressed an inquiry had not found any evidence of abuse.

The Catterick incidents in the BBC programme were of a different nature to those highlighted by the investigations into Deepcut, where four recruits died between 1995 and 2002.

A review found some soldiers at Deepcut during the period were being beaten and sexually abused by their instructors.

As a result, the Army introduced a new two-week training course aimed at all instructors.

The government refused to order a public inquiry into Deepcut despite repeated calls for one from the families of the four recruits who died. Instead a review was held which investigated the way recruits are treated and trained.

But Geoff Gray, 45, whose son - also called Geoff - died at Deepcut, said the Army had "failed to learn their lessons".

"The Army says there is zero tolerance on bullying, but that clearly is not the case, even after a duty of care investigation," he said.

"Our boys deserve the very best - they must feel extremely let down. I only hope these latest allegations really shake them up."

Army guidelines say the use of physical strength or abuse of authority in order to intimidate is unacceptable.

***The Undercover Soldier will be shown on BBC One (except Northern Ireland) on Thursday 18 September at 2100 BST.***