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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

## OCS: Developing future leaders

FORT MEADE, S.D. – Officer candidates at the 196<sup>th</sup> Regional Training Institute's Consolidated Officer Candidate School program are not the only ones undergoing changes to better prepare them for future leadership roles. The program has also undergone changes to better develop these future leaders. The Fort Meade based program has now become the second National Guard operated Consolidated OCS program to offer all three phases of leadership training and evaluation.

“Fort Meade is now the third location in the nation to have this type training and evaluation, but it's the second of its kind as a National Guard run program,” said 1st Sgt. Scott Kostal, the program's operations noncommissioned officer. “The only other National Guard run OCS program that offers all three phases is located at Fort McClellan, Ala.”

The OCS program is designed to train selected enlisted personnel in the fundamentals of leadership and basic military skills. The program also instills a professional and physical fitness ethic, evaluates leadership potential and will commission those who qualify as second lieutenants.

“This program is like basic training on steroids,” said Officer Candidate Deann Cheak from Shakopee, Minn. “All phases of training are challenging mentally and physically – It's a right of passage to complete this course.”

As part of a three phase program, Fort Meade only offered phase one and two of the training curriculum said Kostal. Candidates could only complete the third and final phase of their training and evaluation at Fort Lewis, Wash., which coincided with the Reserve Officer Training Corps program. Now candidates of the program can complete all three phases in one location.

With 120 candidates this year from across the U.S., the program runs an eight-week “fast track” program which begins in early June and runs thru the end of July. Traditionally, the program operates a long course that runs over a 14-month period.

“The program is going really good. We have cadre, staff and candidates from 28 different states, with a variety of backgrounds and experience,” said Kostal. “When you combine these people with their experiences and backgrounds – it makes for a better learning environment.”

Changes in the curriculum and evaluation procedures have also enhanced the program. According to Kostal, a new course management system is being implemented which allows cadre to better evaluate the skills and abilities of the officer candidates.

“The evaluation procedure now uses a number system which provides a more realistic gauge to evaluate the performance of the candidates,” said Kostal.

Another added benefit for the program Kostal noted was the ability to adapt and integrate some of the training with lessons learned overseas or at home.

“We have many cadre and staff who are veterans and their experience adds to the training we provide,” Kostal said. “Many of the candidates we have are junior noncommissioned officers with deployment experience or have served in operations such as the Hurricane Katrina relief effort.”

The Field Training Exercise Lanes, the final test, evaluates candidates on basic tactical skills such as knocking out a bunker, setting up an ambush or clearing a trench line. The training now offers more scenarios similar to situations Soldiers might find themselves in Iraq or Afghanistan, such as searching vehicles, clearing buildings, convoy operations and communicating with foreign nationals.

“The OCS program provides a great baseline on tactics,” said Officer Candidate Don Arnold, of Tenino, Wash. “It also gives you things to work on for a future deployment. The tactics portion gave me great basic skills of what to expect in combat.”

“When the candidates leave here they are prepared and ready to go,” said Kostal. “They will be able to react and adapt to changing environments and that’s what makes good leaders.”

A graduation ceremony for the candidates will be held at 4 p.m. (MDT), Friday, July 27, at the Fort Meade Gazebo, in Sturgis. The ceremony is open to the public.