



New airmen for a new world: Air Force Basic Military Training adds two-and-a-half weeks of training designed to help Airmen meet the challenges of an evolving joint combat environment

by Staff Sgt. Matthew Bates

12/31/2008 - **Airman January/February** -- The Cold War is over, but a new war has emerged to take its place. In this war, temperature is not a factor, terrorism is.

Missiles have been replaced by improvised explosive devices, and the enemy, once easily identifiable, is now hard to find. Combat has evolved, and today's Airmen need to evolve with it.

Recognizing this, Air Force leaders are changing the way Airmen are developed, starting at Basic Military Training at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas.

"Today's Airmen are fighting a new style of warfare," said Col. Edward Westermann, commander of Air Force Basic Military Training. "We need to train them so they can meet these new challenges, and this training needs to start from day one."

And now it will.

Basic Military Training was extended from six weeks to eight-and-a-half weeks in November 2008. The additional time allows for the incorporation of new "warrior" skills, which take Airmen out of the classroom and into the field.

UNLEASHING 'THE BEAST'

The most notable addition to BMT is the BEAST. The Basic Expeditionary Airman Skills Training course introduces Airmen to the joint expeditionary concept and immerses them in deployment scenarios.

"The course is a culmination of the training they receive in BMT," said Colonel Westermann. "It allows trainees to apply the training they've received in the first few weeks and use it in a real-world environment."

The new \$28 million expeditionary skills training course replaces "Warrior Week" at BMT and comprises four encampment areas, known as "tent cities." The site can host an entire class of 600 to 900 trainees, who "deploy" to the training area for a week to face a series of escalating challenges.

These challenges include providing field security, using integrated fighting positions to protect the camp, knowing entry control procedures and performing tasks while undergoing simulated attacks.

"I think this is as realistic as we can get here at BMT," said Colonel Westermann.

This realism means trainees are placed in field situations where the knowledge they receive in the classroom is put to the test. These warriors-in-training will face convoy duties and are introduced to what deployed Airmen endure in a deployed environment on a routine basis -- mortar rounds, base attacks, IEDs and unexploded ordnance.

"They're taught how to identify potential threats and how to react to them," said Master Sgt. Magdalena Cortez, a training instructor with the 737th Training Support Squadron.



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Basic trainees march through an "improvised explosive device lane" during field training. This training is done during Basic Military Training at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Desiree N. Palacios)

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The BEAST introduces trainees to basic combat skills as well as how to take care of themselves and each other. The course also offers more hands-on instruction in self aid and buddy care -- 16 hours now compared to the couple of hours previously taught.

The BEAST culminates in a final day challenge. Here, trainees experience the sounds, sights and smells of combat. The event prepares them for the intricacies of modern warfare. In today's expeditionary Air Force, non-traditional combat and an unconventional enemy warrants warfare training different from the tactics of the past.

This is important, because many trainees will find themselves deployed shortly after graduating from their technical training schools and arriving at their first duty stations. Air Force officials estimate 85 percent of all Airmen will deploy at least once during their careers, and these deployments are mainly to hostile areas.

"Our Airmen are warriors," said Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Rodney McKinley. "There are many Airmen in joint missions who are helping to win today's fight 'outside the wire' and from stand-off locations within the U.S. and around the globe."

At the same time, Airmen are taking on more and more varied operations than ever before. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates noted that more than 6,000 Airmen are performing nontraditional missions on the ground, from detainee operations to explosive ordnance disposal as well as convoy security and provincial reconstruction teams participation.

"Put simply, without the Air Force's contributions in the skies and in many cases, on the ground, America's war effort would simply grind to a halt," said Secretary Gates.

The secretary also reminded Airmen that basic training is just the first step on a path where they will be big players in defending the United States and its interests, both at home and overseas.

"It is no easy task, but it is a vital one if the United States is to remain safe, prosperous and strong," he said.

Basic Military Training officials point out that, this is another reason the new version of Air Force BMT is so important.

"This means Airmen need to have basic combat skills," said Chief Master Sgt. Kevin Ludwig, BMT superintendent. "The new training in BMT will do this . . . give trainees skills now they can use throughout their careers."

WARRIORS IN THE MAKING

The BEAST isn't the only part of BMT dedicated to "warrior" training. The extra two-and-a-half weeks of BMT are packed full of expeditionary skills training. Previous courses have been expanded to meet the demands of a changing combat landscape.

I think going from six weeks to eight-and-a-half is a lot better because of the applications and the thoroughness of the classes we will be able to provide for the trainees, said Sergeant Cortez.

Trainees now learn to use, clean and fire the M-16 rifle and the M-9 pistol. There is a new joint warfare module and increased emphasis on Air Force heritage. Basic self defense training also has expanded and trainees even learn how cultural sensitivity and human relations are applicable to the military.

"Learning how to fold t-shirts and socks are still important parts of BMT, but this new training is on another level," said Chief Ludwig. "This is training that will teach Airmen how to be warriors and survive in a joint service environment."

TRAINING THEIR OWN

These changes don't only affect trainees. The BMT staff is also feeling the impact of this new, improved BMT. More training means more instructors are needed, and before the instructors can teach the new training schedule, they have to be familiar with it themselves.

"What people often overlook is the fact that everything a training instructor teaches trainees, he or she has to go through first," said Chief Ludwig. "So, we've been putting our instructors through the paces here,

getting them up to speed with the new changes and making sure they're ready to teach the trainees."

This also means BMT officials are constantly on the lookout for individuals who would like to become training instructors.

"Because the training schedule is now a few weeks longer, this means we actually need more instructors," said Colonel Westermann. "If anyone's been thinking of becoming a TI, now's a great time to look into it."

A TIME FOR CHANGE

These new changes to BMT weren't made simply for the sake of change. They were necessary and a long time in coming, according to leaders at the 737th Training Group.

"I call this the most historic change in the history of BMT," said Colonel Westermann. "It's an important time for the Air Force, and it's a worthwhile, needed change."

Air Force officials first started looking at how to best change BMT several years ago, when then-Chief of Staff Gen. John Jumper realized Airmen needed to develop warrior skills early on in their careers. Then, after a tri-annual review of Air Force basic military training, the current changes were designed. The review, which brought together chief master sergeants from around the Air Force, used an analysis of lessons learned from such places as Iraq, Afghanistan, the Philippines and the Horn of Africa to develop and propose the changes.

"The goal was to determine how we could best prepare young men and women to meet the challenges of today's Air Force," said Colonel Westermann. "The answer was to start right at the beginning of their training -- right here at BMT."

So, as today's combat continues to evolve, tomorrow's Airmen already are being trained to be capable, ready and willing to meet the challenges of this new joint combat environment.

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