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## Trainees slew the BEAST in new basic training program

by Staff Sgt. Desiree Palacios  
Defense Media Activity-San Antonio

12/18/2008 - **SAN ANTONIO (AFNS)** -- The first group of Airman Basic trainees in the newly extended 8.5-week Basic Military Training program conquered the BEAST Dec. 15 at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas.

The BEAST, which stands for Basic Expeditionary Airman Skills and Training, is the centerpiece of the new two-week expansion that gives Air Force trainees a more realistic forward-operating base environment to practice wartime skills.

Air Force leaders expressed a need for deployment and field training about 10 years ago, but no additional time or funding was available, said retired Chief Master Sgt. J.R. Williams, the BMT superintendent from 1998 to 2000.

"The talented and dedicated men and women of the 737th Training Group began developing curriculum and constructing field training sites in 1998," Chief Williams said. "During the 1999 Air Force Basic Military Training Triennial Review, Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force Eric W. Benken and major command command chiefs validated the curriculum and need to add up to two weeks to BMT for deployment and field training. Chief Benken gained funding for a civil engineer RED HORSE team to complete a field training site and Warrior Week was incorporated into the 6.5 weeks schedule in 2000. I was very pleased to hear planning continued and funding was approved to increase BMT to 8.5 weeks. BEAST will provide operational commanders properly prepared Airmen for their deployed missions, save lives, and ensure we remain the most formidable Air Force in the world."

"This would have benefited anyone coming in 10 to 11 years ago significantly," said Staff Sgt. James Dillon, a military training instructor about the BEAST complex. "Training has increased by a week as far as field conditions. When I came in, I spent one day out in the field and six months later I was deployed to Bosnia to a combat situation. So the training they are receiving now would have helped me out greatly."

Sergeant Dillon said Airmen coming out after an additional two weeks later of training are a lot more mature. The skills they have learned have been fostered for several more weeks at their training squadrons. So when they come out to the BEAST in their sixth week of training, they will basically be able to run the camp themselves whereas before the MTIs had to guide them along step by step. Now they just get them in the camp and get them set up. Their hands off approach makes the trainees feel a sense of ownership and pride of the skills they have learned.

Col. Edward Westermann, the commander for the 737th Training Group, was very pleased with the BEAST complex opening this week.



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Airmen Basic trainees in body armor wait their turn to go through an unexploded ordnance disposal training lesson during the five-day deployment exercise called the Basic Expeditionary Airman Skills and Training, or BEAST, which kicked off Dec. 15 at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. The BEAST is the newly built complex added into the extended, 8.5-week Basic Military Training curriculum that began Nov. 5. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Desiree N. Palacios)

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Some of the additional training allows MTIs to spend some more time on key training, Colonel Westermann said. For example, self-aid and buddy care has increased from four hours to 16 hours in the current curriculum, which means trainees have more time to learn the combat lifesaving skills so they'll be able to take care of wingmen downrange. In addition, the program has added integrated defense training. This enhanced integrated defense training provides trainees more time with skills such as defense of their base positions and defense of their areas so they'll be able to go downrange and employ these skills. Also included is the enhanced training of chemical, biological, radiological and high yield explosive effects, called CBRNE, which allows trainees to go downrange and to be prepared for threats they might face in a deployed environment.

"We've increased the toughness of training in terms of physiological, physical and mental stressors," Colonel Westermann said. "For example, the BEAST site has increased from a two-hour culmination exercise under the previous flight training program to a five-day exercise. So, we have indeed increased a lot of the stressors on these young men and women. However, what we do know is by increasing stress at this end, we're going to save lives down range, and that is the purpose of this program.

As for the trainees coming in right now during the extended BMT program, they are taking the new changes in strides.

Airman Basic trainee David Sledge in his sixth week of training said even though he would be graduating this week during the old BMT program, he is proud to be a part of this new extended program. He is happy to have more hands-on training and said it will help him out a lot for future deployments.

"We most definitely will feel a bit safer than the previous basic trainees of the six-week program," said the 20-year-old trainee from Fayetteville, N.C. "They didn't get the opportunity to have this kind of training. I think we will be better prepared."

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