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### The Making of the United States Military

That first night, there were fifty-nine young men standing at attention beside their bed with a mix of terror and excitement. Technical Sergeant (TSgt.) Basel paced the bays, and barked out orders to us, which we promptly followed without question. We were all moving like we had hot coals under our feet. After getting torn up by TSgt. Basel for the last four hours, we didn't want to give him any other reason to continue yelling.

Finally, at around 2:00 in the morning we were told we had five minutes for everyone to be showered and back at their wall lockers at attention. That was definitely the fastest shower I'd taken up to that point. It was time for lights out. We would learn to relish this time out of our long days because lights out was the only time the military training instructors (MTI) were gone. We then started to loosen up some, cracked a few jokes, and had some good laughs before trying to fall asleep and not think about what tomorrow could bring.

At 0545 I woke up to the sound of reveille blaring! Over the loudspeakers, we then heard, "Get up get up get up, open the dayroom doors!" as Master Sergeant (MSgt.) Nadolny would bust into the bays hollering. This all abruptly told you it was time for another day at "paradise," called Lackland Air Force Base (AFB). During zero week we got our bald haircuts, our uniforms issued, medical and finance processing completed (mostly administrative stuff), of course with constant marching and yelling. Everything we did had a timeline that was made to be practically

impossible, which would lead to MTIs yelling and motivational tools ordered – “a nice way of saying get on your face and kiss the dirt!” We did a lot of push-ups.

Weeks one and two were when we really started getting into the thick of learning how to be airmen. We learned how to fold, roll, and display our clothes, how to clean and prep the dorm - including the renowned hospital corners on beds. We started having classes, which were boring and also a relief. We weren't being yelled at by an MTI during class, so that was a nice respite. The first time we came back to the dorm from classes, the MTIs had completely trashed the dorm and ripped into us; this happened a lot, especially early on in training. These first few weeks were the most difficult, because everything was thrown at you with never enough time. We eventually started to get into a rhythm, including physical training (PT), weapons training, classes, and drill.

By week four our flight was starting to work like a well-oiled machine, so MSgt. Nadolny and TSgt. Basel would ease up a little. Then suddenly, they would come down on us like a hammer! During weeks four and five, there were a lot of classes preparing for our end of course exam (EOC). About this time, I really started to miss family and friends back home. Week six was a *big* week! It included our final PT test; EOC; training for chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear exposure (CBRN) with a trip to the gas chamber; and preparing for Beast Week (field training exercises). We found out we won the Commanders Excellence Award for the 320<sup>th</sup> Training Squadron (TRS) which had four flights.

We were now competing for the Commanders Excellence Award on the 737 Training Group (TRG) level - which was awesome, but it added to our stress going into the final weeks of training. The seventh week, also called Beast Week, was the culmination of our training. We deployed out into the Texas bush and practiced our combat training. Even during the eighth

week, also called graduation week, our flight (airmen training group) was still on full-go - right up until the Airman's coin ceremony, because of the CEP competition at the 737 TRG level. On Wednesday, I found out I was an Honor Graduate - something which I had been going after throughout BMT.

On Wednesday night all I could think about was finally seeing my parents in less than twenty-four hours. Right before the Airman's Run, we were told our flight had won the Commanders Excellence Award at the 737 Group level. Over the last eight and a half weeks, we went from fifty-nine individuals to Flight 021 - the best flight in BMT. Being handed the Airman's Coin by TSgt. Basel on November twenty-ninth meant more to me than I could say. Those next four days of being able to see my parents and enjoy freedom again were incredible. Graduation was the prize – the Commanders Excellence Award and being an Honor Graduate were just icing on the cake.

Basic training has been a rite of passage for all members of the United States military since WWI. Basic training has been used to instill discipline, military customs and courtesies, drill, combat training, and the character qualities that make us the best fighting force on the planet. My friend, Dillon Evans, also just recently got back from the United States Army military police one station unit training (OSUT). OSUT included both basic combat training (BCT) and advanced individual training (AIT), which was job specialty training.

His reception story was the classic “calm before the storm.” He had a 20-minute ride on the bus from the airport to Fort Leonard Wood. He had time to think about what was coming. Even though he expected what was coming next, nothing could've prepared him for the “shark attack.” The bus stopped, and then an Army drill sergeant came onto the bus hollering at all the privates to get off. They had to all run to the pit of rubber mulch, with their head buried in their

bag. If a drill sergeant caught anyone looking, up they would tear into that private. The drill sergeants played an assortment of games with the privates making them look stupid and taking every opportunity to make them “feel like maggots” for about 15 minutes before taking them to the barracks.

He had about a week of in-processing (finance, medical, etc.) before training really began. The Army basic training is split up into three phases, red, white, and blue, with each approximately three weeks. Red phase was the worst phase for Dillon because of the close drill sergeant supervision, which pretty much meant constantly being torn up and given some extra PT for every little mistake they made. They had to wear red safety vests during this phase which made it easy for the drill sergeants to know who needed to be yelled at.

His wake up was 0430 with PT until 0530; then they would clean up and “rig up” for whatever the day’s training would be. Dillon’s experience at Army BCT had a lot more weapons training, PT, obstacle courses, and rucks (forced marches) than I had at Air Force BMT. At one point in training, one of the guys in his platoon was suicidal. Two other privates would always be with him this was called suicide watch. Near the end of the white phase, his drill sergeants were easing up on the platoon a little. Dillon and some of the guys in his platoon were playing hockey in the barracks with brooms and rolled socks. When the drill sergeant came in and just said, “What the fuck!” there was a moment of silence. He then hollered at everyone to get out to the pit where they got motivated the “military way” with some good PT.

At the end of the blue phase, his platoon had a three-day field training exercise (FTX). It was called FTX 3, and it was the most demanding part of his training. It consisted of digging foxholes, battle missions, ruck marches, and the Night Infiltration Course (NIC), NIC was an obstacle course ran at night while live rounds were fired over them. FTX 3 was his final step

before graduating basic training, but for Dillon, he had his drill sergeant for another ten weeks at AIT. After his platoon graduated BCT, they were given the warriors' dinner that was an amazing buffet of most of the food they had been missing while at basic, like ribs, fried chicken, steak, and shrimp. Immediately following the feast, his entire platoon, stuffed full were all ordered out to the pit for PT until they all threw up. The hardest part of basic training for Dillon was also being away from family and friends, with almost no communication with the outside world.

Trace Evans gives a great account of the first 36 hours of the infamous Marine Corps boot camp. Soon to be recruit Evans was staged at the USO, United Service Organizations, in the airport with all the other soon-to-be Marine recruits.

Trace Evans said, "There will be people there who pretend to act calm and collected, that's fake. Everyone is terrified and waiting for that minute to get there. They told you the time, I assume to mess with your head! 7:25 p.m." At 7:25 p.m. on the dot he heard, "Everyone going to MCRD get on your feet and get outside!"

All, the recruits were ordered into a single file line with their SRB, service record book, out. As Trace stood in line something caught his attention to the right; he quickly looked over to see what it was, and then forward again, but not before he heard, "HEAD AND EYEBALLS TO THE FRONT!"

Trace did not respond and did not know if he was yelling at him, and then heard, "YOU, OPEN YOUR MOUTH!" Trace stated that "This was about to be my first, to put it into Marine jargon, ass-chewing of my new career."

The drill instructor (DI) was in front of him, slightly at a 45-degree angle and yelled, "I GUESS I DON'T RATE A RESPONSE, IS THAT RIGHT RECRUIT?!" Then he looked up and answered, "nyes sir" with a no and yes combined gracefully into recruit vocabulary. "I GUESS I

SAID LOOK AT ME RIGHT, KEEP YOUR HEAD AND EYEBALLS TO THE FRONT, AYE AYE SIR!" The DIs would sometimes give the recruits the correct response at the end of their ass-chewing, so Trace shouted back, "Aye aye, sir!"

On the bus, all the recruits were ordered to put their heads in their laps. When they arrived at Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego, they were ordered off the bus and learned the position of attention before immediately starting the recruit receiving process. Trace stated that "From this point on I was recruit Evans, the lowest of the low. There wasn't one thing on the planet that I was above. Trash was more important than me, or so this is what they make you believe."

The first 36 hours was the worst part of in-processing; they don't sleep and were herded from line to line, and room to room. Finally, when he did see a bed and could go to sleep, Evans thought tomorrow will be better. The next day the recruits awoke to the sounds of drill instructors banging anything and everything that made noise and "screaming things I wouldn't say to my worst enemy." "Basically, it is hell, and anyone who says it isn't or wasn't is lying," Evans shared.

The overall purpose of basic training remains the same between the branches represented here. The goal of the Air Force, Army, and Marines is to break down the civilians that came to basic training and build airmen, soldiers, and marines that will be trusted to defend the US with the most powerful weapons on planet earth. They will be instilled with the character qualities and core values that they will need to keep close for the rest of their career in the military. The Air Force's core values are: "Integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do." The Army's seven core values include loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity,

personal courage. Honor, courage, and commitment continue to be the core values of the Marine Corps.

The reason basic training still involves constant PT, drill, yelling, loud noise, speed, perfection in everything, and just generally an extremely stressful environment – to be competent under fire. The military does not want service members who will, for example, cut corners on an aircraft inspection leading to an entire crew dying, or somebody who will not be able to handle the stress of ground combat letting their platoon down in a firefight. The military puts extreme effort into building hardworking service members who exemplify the core values on and off the clock. Cool, calm, efficient individuals working as a team to finish the objective are formed from the crucible of basic training.

#### Works Cited

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