



cadre's
challenge

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Preparing future officers through Basic Cadet Training

C1C Mitch Young stands beneath the rush of water pouring from the oversized outdoor shower stationed near the obstacle course in Jacks Valley. He raises his hands to the sky as the freezing cascade blasts away the black mud which covers him from head to toe. The water is a refreshing jolt from the 90 plus degree days the cadre and their basic cadets face during the rigors of BCT amid the harsh Colorado Summer. Young steps aside to let his fellow cadre—C1Cs Dakota Newton and Catherine Stuart—have a turn at the shower. The three firsties have just completed the assault course, running, crawling and splashing their way through the gauntlet of barbed wire and unforgiving swamp obstacles. They set the example that the cadre are not afraid to get dirty, and that they are serious about turning the Class of 2015 into the next generation of Air Force warriors.

Jump back two weeks to Doolittle Hall and Inprocessing day at the Association of Graduates. Wave after wave of naïve young appointees pour into the building to begin their journey at the Academy. Their shirts are un-tucked and their hair is long and unkempt. They smile happily at one another, trading stories of where they live and why they want to join the Air Force. Few are aware of the challenges that await them after they hug their parents goodbye, board the bus and leave their old lives behind. All around, cadet cadre are busy directing traffic and coordinating luggage delivery. Occasionally, amid the chaos of freshly minted high school graduates, the upper class cadets take a moment to trade knowing glances: *these basics have no idea what they're in for ...*

For anyone who may be unfamiliar with Basic Cadet Training at the Air Force Academy, the lion's share of instructing and preparation of the incoming class is the responsibility of the upper classmen. The cadet cadre is charged with training the new freshmen from day one. ▷

Mastering fear and overcoming mental fatigue are critical to a basic cadet's training.

Molding an Air Force officer from scratch is a big responsibility, one that the cadre take on with willing enthusiasm. The appointees move through Doolittle Hall. They fill out paper work, collect their things and cross the Class of 1959 Challenge Bridge. C1C Michael Cousins instructs the new arrivals to form up in a straight line as they await the bus to the terrazzo. “One of the greatest challenges these basic cadets will face is teamwork,” Cousins explains. “They will learn that they are not all that special, that they are in fact part of something bigger than themselves. In high school, they may have been at the top of their class, but here, that’s the norm, and they will have to learn to work with people who are just as good as they are if not better. They will have to learn to lead others, not just themselves.”

C1C Tyler Weissinger illustrates that there is a common thread that many of the new arrivals will face during their initial weeks at the Academy. “Another one of the big challenges these basics will have to overcome is acclimation to the new military climate,” he says. “Most of these kids have come from civilian families and the Academy can be a big climate shock that they will have to get used to very quickly.”

For the basic cadets, that climate shock explodes like a mortar shell as soon as they step off the bus at the base of the Core Values Ramp. The new arrivals are greeted by a team of cadre who have perfected their ear-splitting diatribes of intimidation to epic proportions. It takes mere seconds for the new basics to learn that un-tucked shirts and imperfect posture will not be accepted at the Air Force Academy. The cadre pick apart every detail, and in a few short minutes, the

basics are whisked up the ramp as the next group of fresh meat steps off the bus.

“The challenges these basics face are widespread,” says C2C Chris Warner. “There are mental and physical challenges and there are challenges of character. I’d have to say 90 percent of it is entirely mental. We try to push these basics to a new breaking point, so that when they get up the next day they discover that they can in fact keep going.”

As Basic Cadet Training progresses, the new arrivals learn how to march, how to dress and how to conduct themselves as cadets at the Academy. Under the cadre’s watchful eyes, they learn the military fundamentals of rank, respect and discipline. All the while, the upper classmen assert the laborious process of shaping these young individuals into a collective unit. Steadily, they learn the true meaning of teamwork.

C1C Zachary Crippen cannot help but feel proud of the way the new basics are shaping up. The progress they make in such a short time is a testament to their dedication to becoming officers. “To begin,” Crippen says, “the bonds that you make here at the Academy with your brothers and sisters in arms are so much more powerful than anything you could have ever experienced in high school. That’s one thing the cadre try to instill into the basics from day one—we fly, fight and win as one team. We just finished a morale boosting competition and the teamwork I’ve seen here today is incredible.”

First BCT is winding down and the march to Jacks Valley is only a few days away; yet the cadre’s mission has only just begun. The challenges ahead will be many and the terrazzo is only the start. The

Left: Cadre C1C Zachary Crippen runs alongside his basic cadets shouting encouragement during a physical challenge. Right, from the left: C1Cs Dakota Newton, Mitch Young and Catherine Stuart cool off after completing the assault course with their basic cadets.



physical and mental training persists, for there are still valuable lessons to be passed on. C2C Carl Morgan explains, “One of the most important lessons we can teach these basics is that they can push themselves farther than they ever thought possible regardless of what stands in their way. Another thing we focus on is teamwork; the basic cadets can achieve so much more as a team than any of them ever could as individuals. That’s the way it is in the Air Force. There will always be people with different strengths and weaknesses and it’s very important that members of a good team are able to balance one another out.”

Over the next two weeks, the basics transition to life in Jacks Valley where they are indeed pushed beyond their limits. The cadre is unrelenting and the newcomers become intimately acquainted with the snail’s-eye-view of the world as they crawl through the weeds and mud each day. C1C Mitch Young and his fellow cadre have just completed the assault course along with the basics. Their actions provide a valuable lesson in leadership: *never send your subordinates to do something you are not willing to do yourself.*

Young exclaims through his mud-streaked face, “One of the toughest challenges everyone faces—both cadre and basic cadets—is being able to mentally overcome the anxiety and fear that are inherent to this place.”

C1C Dakota Newton, a sheen of black mud covering his entire body, chimes in. “The value of friendship in Jacks Valley is extremely important. If the basics were not able to come together and get to know each other that would be a failure of the mission. They’re becoming warriors and this is something they need to do together.”

As the basics continue their training, evidence of their newly forged camaraderie becomes apparent in everything they do. From the confidence and obstacle courses to the dreaded assault course, the new cadets help carry one another to surpass every challenge that faces them. Shouts of encouragement ring out in the woods as they claw their way over the towering log ladders and inverted rope bridges. They pull one another from their hands and knees, rise up and take on each new task the cadre throws at them with unquestioning loyalty.

As the procession of exhausted, mud stained basics slowly ambles away from the outdoor shower, C1C Catherine Stuart compares her experiences as a cadre against her own memories of being a basic cadet. “Jacks Valley changed me by helping me to realize the mental challenges that I could overcome,” she recounts. “This place pushed me harder than I’ve ever been pushed and gave me challenges that I couldn’t necessarily meet physically—so I had to overcome my failures mentally to make up for my weaknesses in other places, to be the strongest in knowledge if



Basic Cadets face character building obstacles, along with physical challenges, in the Jacks Valley confidence course.

I couldn’t be the strongest in physical fitness. It really showed me how I could pull my weight when I wasn’t as capable as others in some areas.”

The cadre continue to bring to light the strengths and weaknesses of each individual basic cadet. As the young future officers face new challenges, they learn things about themselves they never knew before. They begin to understand that excellence in service is not without sacrifice, and that those who came before are there to lift them up by making them stronger. They learn that pain and suffering sharpen the body and mind, and that in order to evolve, one must first commit herself to the idea that she is contributing to something that is greater than herself. Yet if there is one lesson above all else which every cadre member is committed to passing along, it is this: *though we may sometimes falter as individuals, as a team, we are unstoppable.* ✓