

Chapter 1

Forewarned Is Forearmed

In This Chapter

- ▶ Taking a look at the military basic training method
 - ▶ Preparing is half the battle
 - ▶ Detailing basic training
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Mmilitary basic training is all about being prepared for any situation. That preparation includes gathering intelligence about situations you're likely to face in the future. I merely provide a means for smart young folks to gather a little intelligence about what's in store for them. I predict that those who are smart enough to read through this book before attending military basic training will have a higher chance of graduation and success, thereby allowing them to contribute to the most powerful military in the world, and that can't be a bad thing.

Brushing Up on Military Missions

The United States Military branches exist to defend the United States against all enemies and to provide combat capabilities anywhere in the world in support of United States security objectives.

While it's sometimes hard to tell (the Army has aircraft and ships, and the Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard have ground forces), each branch has specific missions.

Army mission

The Army exists to serve the American people, defend the Nation, protect vital national interests, and fulfill national military responsibilities. The Army makes up the nation's largest and most extensive military ground capabilities. Currently, approximately 499,000 active duty Army troops are backed up by 700,000 National Guard and Army reservists. The Army is responsible to

provide necessary forces and capabilities in support of the National Security and Defense Strategies of the United States.

The Army's mission is codified by federal law:

- ✔ Preserve the peace and security and provide for the defense of the United States, the Commonwealths and possessions, and any areas occupied by the United States
- ✔ Support the national policies
- ✔ Implement the national objectives
- ✔ Overcome any nations responsible for aggressive acts that imperil the peace and security of the United States

Air Force mission

The mission statement of the United States Air Force is *“fly, fight, and win in air, space, and cyberspace.”*

Like the other branches, the official mission of the USAF has been established by federal law.

Title 10, Section 8062 of the U.S. Code defines the mission of the USAF as follows:

- ✔ To preserve the peace and security and provide for the defense of the United States, the Territories, Commonwealths, and possessions, and any areas occupied by the United States
- ✔ To support national policy
- ✔ To implement national objectives
- ✔ To overcome any nations responsible for aggressive acts that imperil the peace and security of the United States

Navy mission

The mission of the United States Navy is to protect and defend the right of the United States and its allies to move freely on the oceans and to protect the country against her enemies.

Federal law defines the mission of the United States Navy as follows:

- ✔ To prepare the naval forces necessary for the effective prosecution of war
- ✔ To maintain naval aviation, including land-based naval aviation, air transport essential for naval operations, and all air weapons and air techniques involved in the operations and activities of the Navy.
- ✔ To develop aircraft, weapons, tactics, technique, organization, and equipment of naval combat and service elements

Marine Corps mission

The United States Marine Corps serves as the amphibious forces of the United States. Its mission is detailed in Title 10, Section 5063 of the United States Code (USC):

- ✔ The seizure or defense of advanced naval bases and other land operations to support naval campaigns
- ✔ The development of tactics, technique, and equipment used by amphibious landing forces
- ✔ Such other duties as the President may direct

Coast Guard mission

The Coast Guard is the only U.S. military service not organized under the Department of Defense. Instead, the Coast Guard falls under the Department of Homeland Security.

Even so, the Coast Guard is one of the official branches of the U.S. Military. Title 10, section 101(a)(4) of the U.S.C. says, “The term ‘armed forces’ means the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard.” Additionally, Title 14, Section 1 states, “The Coast Guard as established 28 January 1915, shall be a military service and a branch of the armed forces of the United States at all times.”



In time of war, the President can direct all, or part of, the Coast Guard under the service of the Navy.

Military history

Sir Francis Bacon once said, “History makes men wise.” The Uniform Services certainly subscribe to this idea. In basic training, you study the history of your branch and take a written test about famous military events and famous military people who have come before you. In order to graduate from basic training, you need to pass this test, and if you want a shot at honor graduate or distinguished graduate, you need to score very well on this test.

The U.S. Coast Guard is the only U.S. Military branch that routinely engages in civilian law enforcement during peacetime. Section 2 of 14 U.S.C authorizes the Coast Guard to enforce federal law.

The Coast Guard statutory missions as defined by law are divided into homeland security missions and nonhomeland security missions. Nonhomeland security missions are

- ✓ Marine safety
- ✓ Search and rescue
- ✓ Aids to navigation
- ✓ Living marine resources (fisheries law enforcement)
- ✓ Marine environmental protection
- ✓ Ice operations

Homeland security missions are

- ✓ Ports, waterways, and coastal security (PWCS)
- ✓ Drug interdiction
- ✓ Migrant interdiction
- ✓ Defense readiness
- ✓ Other law enforcement

Building a G.I. from Scratch

When I went to Air Force basic training as a young 18-year-old kid, there was no Internet, and there were no books about military basic training. The only sources of information about what to expect during basic training were your recruiter and family members who probably went through basic about

100 years before you. Your recruiter would simply say, “It’s easy. Don’t worry about it,” and leave it at that. (After all, his job was to get you on a plane, not to scare you to death.)

When I got off the plane in San Antonio, Texas, and that guy in the Smokey-the-Bear hat immediately started yelling at me for (what seemed to me) no reason, I remember thinking, “Oh, my. I signed up for four years to this?!”

I had no way of knowing that basic training and military training instructors were only a very small part of military life, and those MTIs at the airport certainly weren’t about to tell me. I didn’t know that they weren’t allowed to hit me. I thought anyone of them could pick me up and throw me across the airport. I wondered if I had time to write out a quick last will and testament before one of them got their mitts on me.

When I first started writing about military basic training on my website (<http://usmilitary.about.com>), I got a lot of hate e-mail from military basic training instructors. According to many of them, by letting the cat out of the bag and letting out all of their secrets, I was diluting the basic training experience, taking away their ability to “shock and awe,” and therefore making their jobs harder. I disagree.

I can describe the military basic training experience in one sentence. It’s all about breaking a person down and rebuilding him from the bottom up. The breaking down process begins immediately upon arrival. Basic training instructors don’t want you to think things through — they want you to automatically react, but react in the right way. That’s why there’s so much repetition in basic training. You don’t think; you just do” But, you have to *do* it the military way.



In basic training, there’s an old saying: “There’s the right way to do something, the wrong way to do something, and the military way.” It really should read, “The right way, the wrong way, and *the basic training way*,” because innovation and better ways to do something are encouraged in the military — just not while you’re in basic training. Save your “better ideas” for after you graduate and join the “real” military.

The first few weeks of military basic training is dedicated to breaking you down. During this period, you’ll find that you can’t do anything right. Even if you do it right, it’ll be wrong. Nobody’s perfect, and military drill instructors are trained to ferret out those imperfections and make sure that you know about them.

After you’ve been completely ripped apart, the real training begins — teaching you to do things the “basic training way,” without even having to think about it — you just react. If a military basic training instructor can make this reaction happen, then he has done his job.

Making the Basic Training Experience a Little Bit Easier

A lot of memorization goes on during basic training. Maybe you're the type of person who can easily concentrate while some mean, large person is screaming in your face 24 hours per day, or maybe you're more like me — you'd rather do your learning in a nice, quiet, relaxing environment. Unfortunately, you're not going to find any nice, quiet, relaxing areas during basic training, so your only other option is to try to memorize this required knowledge before you depart. Part II should be able to help you with your memorization work.

One of the first things you'll be required to know is the military rank/insignia system, especially for the branch you've decided to join. In addition, if you're in the Marines, you will be required to have a basic understanding of the Navy rank structure because the Marine Corps was derived from and falls under the Department of the Navy.

Everyone in the military wears insignia, which are often called *stripes* for enlisted folks, and you should know what those stripes mean. If you call a sergeant major a private, I can guarantee you won't like the results. Chapter 5 can help you out with military ranks.

Along those lines, you should commit to memory the proper way to address drill instructors in your particular branch. Just to add to the confusion, each branch does it differently. Don't worry; I give you the straight dope in Part IV.

If you're joining the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard, it's important that you memorize the rules for a sentry. Instructors in these branches like to keep you on your toes by popping out of nowhere, and asking you something like, "What's the third rule of a sentry?" Responding with the correct answer is *always* preferable to not knowing. If the Air Force is your choice of service, you don't have to worry about this memorization. As an Air Force basic training sentry, you'll carry a book with you at all times during sentry (dorm guard) duty, and you can quickly look up the information, if needed.



Many new basic training recruits make the mistake of thinking, "I don't need to get in shape in advance. Basic training will get me into shape." Big mistake. By far the biggest reason for getting "set back" in military basic training and not graduating on time is failing to meet the physical fitness graduation standards. You have only a few short weeks in basic to meet very high physical fitness standards for graduation, and — if you show up out of shape — you can't do it. You won't fail military basic training for being out of shape (the instructors won't let you), but they'll keep you in basic training as long as it takes for you to pass the standards. You can read more about required fitness standards in Chapter 8.

If you have a little extra time, make sure that you look over Chapter 7 on military law and what constitutes a crime in the military in Appendix A. You don't have to memorize this information, but you should know basic facts, such as if you disobey an order, you can go to military prison for more than five years.

You'll do a lot of marching during military basic training. While I explain the basics of marching and the standard drill commands in Chapter 9, it certainly wouldn't hurt to practice them or even join your school's marching band or Junior ROTC program for a little advance practice.

Getting There Is Half the Fun

Going to military basic training isn't like leaving home to go to college. You can't just pack whatever you want to bring — there are rules about what you must have, and more rules about what you can't have. Fortunately, if your recruiter forgets to give you the official list of bring and don't-bring items, I give you a little advice in Chapter 10.

Traveling to your basic training location usually involves a plane ride, but you can't simply buy a plane ticket and show up. You have to process first through your local Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS), which will arrange (and pay for) your travel. You can find out details about this process in Chapter 11.

Basic training doesn't officially begin until several days after you arrive (although from your point of view, it may seem to begin earlier!). The first few days are spent *in-processing* — that is, doing all the paperwork to tell the massive government information system that you're now part of the U.S. Military. The term *in-processing* means more than just giving you a uniform and issuing you a military ID card, though. Part III gives you an idea of what to expect during your first few days of basic.

Getting Specific about Each Branch's Training

Several years ago, there was talk of creating a purple basic training — one basic training program for all of the branches, kind of like what the Naval Academy does with Navy and Marine Corps officers. This idea never got past the “what if” stage. While similar processes are involved in turning young men and women into disciplined military members, the specific subject areas, disciplines, rules, and processes vary too widely among the military

branches to ever create a viable joint basic training program. The meat of military basic training is in the details, and Part IV of this book is where I take you through the day-to-day activities of each branch in separate chapters.

This is the only book I know of that details the basic training programs of all the branches, under one cover, and I think it can help with your basic training experience to find out what the new members of the other branches go through in order to go from recruit to trained military member.

However, while many aspects of military basic training are different, many are similar, or even exactly the same. I devote Chapter 2 to those similarities, explaining those aspects of military basic training that are the same (or nearly the same) for all of the branches.

Juggling Basic Training Jobs

You may think that military basic training is run by the drill instructors, and, in some ways, that's correct. Instructors are the gods of military basic training and are there to ensure that everything goes according to their divine plan. However, almost everything else that goes on during basic training is accomplished, planned, and supervised by the basic training recruits themselves.

As with life itself, there are good jobs in basic training and jobs that suck. The trick is getting chosen for one of the good jobs while leaving the sucky jobs for others. The problem is, it's usually not a matter of volunteering for any specific basic training duties. The drill instructors hand out the jobs, and there are few (if any) rules. The drill instructors pretty much get to assign the jobs as they see fit.

However, you can do a few things to increase your chances of getting one of the good basic training jobs. Chapter 3 includes all you need to know.

Taking a Shot at Weapons Training

It wouldn't be a book about military basic training if I didn't talk a bit about firing guns. Excuse me, I mean "weapons."



In the military, especially during basic training, never, ever refer to your rifle or pistol as a gun. *Guns* are those very big shooting things used on combat ships. Guns you carry in the military are called rifles or pistols or sometimes your "weapon."

Most drill instructors believe they can teach a monkey to shoot. But they'd much rather teach a monkey than try to teach a farm boy who's grown up with weapons his entire life. Teaching someone the correct (military) way from scratch is much easier than trying to eliminate bad habits that have likely arisen from several years of doing it wrong.

The U.S. Military has more than 200 years of experience in firing weapons and hitting what is aimed at. It's best to remember this history, even if you were the original Wyatt Earp prior to basic training. If you know nothing more about shooting than what I explain in Chapter 4 when you first arrive at basic training, you'll probably do much better on the firing line than if you've spent your entire life on a farm shooting pistols and rifles.

If you have significant experience with weapons, I know you won't believe me. For some unknown reason, nobody ever does on this particular point. However, it's been proven time and time again. You're much more likely to earn a qualification or even win a weapons award (see Chapter 4) in basic training if you've never seen a gun than if you grew up your entire life hunting.

Gearing Up for Graduation

No matter which of the services you decide to join, your ultimate goal is to graduate from military basic training and begin your new life as a valued member of America's armed forces.

Military basic training graduation is no small thing. The event rivals anything you may have gone through during your high school, or even college, graduation ceremony. As a very minimum, the event will include a formal military parade, where your family and loved ones can gape at you in your new military dress uniform as you march by in all your military splendor.

In some branches, you get a day or two on the town, while in other branches, you go immediately on leave (vacation time). For those who get leave immediately following basic training, you're usually allowed only a week or two before you have to proceed to your first duty assignment. In any event, graduation day is a day you'll remember and cherish for the rest of your life.

Basic Training Does Not a Career Make

Assuming that you graduate, basic training is just the beginning of your military experience. Many recruits will leave basic training and proceed immediately to their military job school. A few may get a little time off after

basic to go home and visit family and friends. Some may proceed directly from basic training to their first military duty station, getting their job training on the job, or delaying specific military job training for a future date.

Each military branch has different policies, and within those policies, there is room for specific individual career paths. Chapter 3 gives you an idea of what you can expect after you complete military basic training.

Basic Training Can Be a Rewarding Experience

I get e-mail all the time from readers of my military information website (<http://usmilitary.about.com>) who want to know what they can do to win an award in basic training. I usually respond by telling them that those who try for an award rarely win one. Usually, those who win the awards are those who do their very best without even thinking about it.

However, depending on the branch, you can earn several awards during your basic training experience. Did you know that you can earn a military medal just for graduating from basic training? It's true. It's called the National Defense Service Medal, and it's awarded to those who volunteer to serve in the military during times of conflict. I explain all about this medal in Chapter 20.

Other basic training awards are based on doing specific things better than anyone else. All the branches have an honor graduate or distinguished graduate program, which recognizes the recruits who had the best overall performance during basic training. Some branches even make a competition out of almost every single aspect of basic training. The Army rewards the top soldier during each training cycle with the Soldier of the Cycle award for each basic training company. Others offer only a few rewards and reserve those for the basic training graduation ceremony.