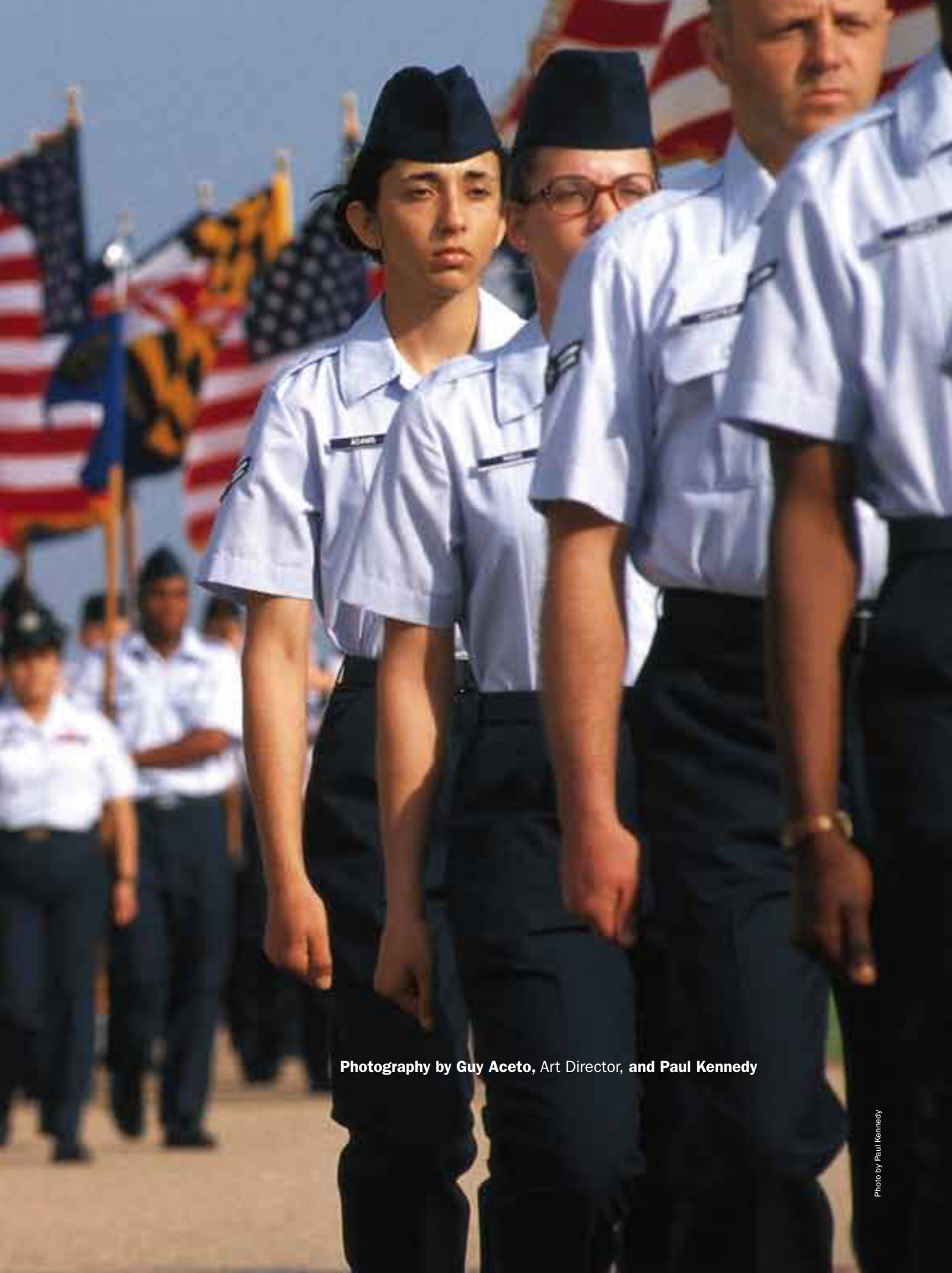


At the “Gateway to the Air Force” young people prepare to become a part of USAF’s Expeditionary Aerospace Force.

BASIC 2000

For these newly minted airmen, the graduation parade on the huge parade field at Lackland AFB, Texas, marks not only the end of Basic Military Training but also the beginning of an Air Force career.



Photography by Guy Aceto, Art Director, and Paul Kennedy

Military Training Instructors from the 737th Training Group guide recruits—and test their limits—through six weeks of intensive military training.

The 737th TG at Lackland provides Basic Military Training for all enlisted recruits entering the Air Force, Air National Guard, or Air Force Reserve. Each year about 35,000 young men and women report to the 737th, which is part of the 37th Training Wing, USAF's largest training wing.



Staff photos by Guy Aceto



At left, new recruits just arriving at what is called "shipping and receiving" are wearing typically colorful civilian attire—for which the MTIs dub them "rainbows." Below, TSgt. Michael Zuniga confronts a rainbow, quickly demonstrating that the training will focus on discipline and attention to detail.



Photo by Paul Kennedy

Gone are the civilian clothes. At right, the trainees are issued everything from socks and running shoes to Battle Dress Uniforms and combat boots—and a duffle bag to hold it all. Even this process becomes an exercise in precision and in following instructions to the letter. Here, the trainees do not remove the tag from their BDU caps until ordered to do so.



Photo by Paul Kennedy



Nothing points out attention to detail—or the lack of it—like a locker inspection. TSgt. Kevin Planck is exceptionally thorough on his rounds. The trainee at left, above, holds on to an out-of-place thread. In the photo at right, other trainees await their turn as MTIs conduct an inspection.



Above, SSgt. Xavier King explains his findings to a trainee. At right, Planck makes notes on his clipboard. The MTIs must themselves meet stringent qualifications and focus on standardized training to produce a uniform product—a motivated and disciplined airman. They also use teamwork to mold that product and will admonish any trainee with a clean inspection to share the secret of his or her success.





"The more fit you are when you arrive," according to the 737th's pre-basic instructions, "the better your chances are for avoiding injury and graduating from BMT." Physical conditioning takes place at least six times a week. At left, trainees work on sit-ups.



Physical training involves running and stretching and strengthening exercises. Above right and here, trainees do chin-ups. Minimum physical requirements for males include 30 push-ups and 45 sit-ups in two minutes and a two-mile run in 18 minutes. For females, the requirements include 38 sit-ups and 14 push-ups, both in two minutes, and a two-mile run in 21.



Staff photo by Guy Acero



With an MTI making notes, trainees turn the straightforward action of walking into a precision drill. They are also learning to function as a unit and to rely on each other.

On the academic side, trainees attend classes to gain knowledge of the Air Force and its history; military laws, customs, and courtesy; and human relations, among other topics. Each trainee receives the Airman's Manual. It imparts basic information on everything from host nation sensitivities to chemical decontamination procedures. Also known as Air Force Manual 10-100, the thick booklet lets every trainee know from p. 1 that USAF is an Expeditionary Aerospace Force.



About two years ago, the Air Force added a field training experience to basic training. That evolved into Warrior Week, which helps prepare trainees for on-going deployments, often to austere locations. During the week, trainees set up at a camp on the edge of Lackland. Later, they march to another site that provides more of a combat-oriented setting.



Photo by Paul Kennedy

Toward the end of the week the trainees make a 5.8 mile hike. The environment, for some, can be dangerous. In a tragic turn of events last Sept. 12, 18-year-old trainee Micah J. Schindler died two days after collapsing near the end of the hike. He was the first USAF recruit to die at Lackland in five years.

Since then, the service has made changes to the Warrior Week program.



One of those changes is the presence of medical personnel—like the medic in the blue vest (above)—who accompany each group on its hike.

Above and far left, trainees set up modular, metal-frame tents. At left, others set up defensive positions to protect the base. Erecting tents, small arms training, and use of chemical protection gear are just some of the skills practiced during Warrior Week.



Mud at the field site doesn't excuse a trainee from looking as sharp as possible. At left, a female trainee works to put some shine back on her boots after a march.



It's not all Meals, Ready to Eat, but food served during Warrior Week sticks to the basics. It's just one more way to prepare trainees for conditions they will likely face in the field during real-world Air Force deployments.



Since surviving Warrior Week marks the successful completion of a milestone in the basic training cycle, the week culminates in a ceremony. At the ceremony, trainees receive US collar insignia to wear on their Class A uniforms and a special coin, shown here. From this moment, they are no longer trainees. They are airmen.



The final week of Basic Military Training is filled with inspections, picking up orders, and preparing to move on to technical training.

The graduation parade gives the new airmen a chance to display for family and friends the polish they have acquired in a mere six weeks.



After the graduation ceremony, Airman Basic Tom Lucas, in photos above, poses for pictures with his family.



At Basic Military Training, a disparate group of young civilians undergoes a transformation. From there they embark on an Air Force career as part of an enlisted force—the backbone of the service—that is recognized for its professionalism among militaries around the world. ■