



MTIs - shaping the Airmen of the Air Force

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5/26/2009 - **DOVER AIR FORCE BASE, Del.** -- The distinctive clicking of metal plates striking concrete is a familiar sound for Airmen who have been through Air Force Basic Military Training.

The slow click, click, click, could signal the approach of impending doom, as a Military Training Instructor moves to correct a trainee in a directive and forceful manner. Taps, worn by MTIs to make the clicking sound, are part of the training method, as MTIs drill their trainees to obey commands, become disciplined and to perform under stress and pressure.

"The purpose of an MTI is to help shape and mold trainees into professional and motivated Airmen who will not falter and will not fail," said Tech. Sgt. James Thomas, 436th Logistics Readiness Squadron assistant NCO in-charge of vehicle management.

The sergeant is currently assigned as an MTI to the 320th Training Squadron at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, and will be fulfilling six months of temporary duty to change the lives of 200 or more trainees.

Trainees may believe that MTIs are always mad or angry, but that's a misconception, says Sergeant Thomas, who trains with a purpose, though it may seem like he barks out instructions and commands.

"The only reason I yell at a trainee is to help address and correct the problem," he said. "I call out what a trainee has done to let the rest of the flight know what was done wrong and to correct it immediately so they learn the right way to do things."

Time is limited for MTIs, who don't have an ample amount of time to coach and correct each individual privately every time they mess up, said the sergeant.

"I always let my trainees know that I have their best interest in mind and that they will be learning life-saving skills to keep them safe during a wartime environment," said Sergeant Thomas. "I love interacting with trainees, because we spend so much time shaping them into the Air Force culture."

Master Sgt. Juanita Thomas, 436th Operations Support Squadron first sergeant, agrees with her husband about why she enjoyed being an MTI. The sergeants were both MTIs for three years.

"It is about the lives that I have been able to change," she said. Those enlisting in the Air Force come from various backgrounds and we train them, giving them the basic skills toward becoming successful in the Air Force."

MTIs are responsible for everything from teaching trainees to lace boots, wearing uniforms properly, marching and building a regular civilian into a disciplined Airman.

"I'm with my flight day and night. I go in from 4 a.m. and wind up staying until 8 p.m.," said the sergeant.



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Tech. Sgt. James Thomas, 436th Logistics Readiness Squadron assistant NCO in-charge of vehicle management and currently a Military Training Instructor assigned to the 320th Training Squadron at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, corrects a trainee giving a salute. Sergeant Thomas will be fulfilling six months of temporary duty to change the lives of 200 or more trainees. (U.S. Air Force photo/ Alan Boedeker)

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"They're like dependents that require a lot of direction and training."

The MTI's life revolves around the trainees, especially for the first two to three weeks.

"We get individuals from all walks of life who have answered their nation's call during this time of war, and we're responsible for keeping them focused and share with them what to expect," said Sergeant Thomas.

The sergeant said the 366 days he spent deployed to Afghanistan is first-hand experience and knowledge that he can share with new Airmen.

"Every Airman will deploy and will need to support operations, so I like to get them in that mindset, not to scare them, but to show them they need to take their training seriously so they are prepared for what's ahead," he said.

Being an MTI can be challenging since they play many roles and characters, not just doing their job as a drill instructor.

"Sometimes you have to take the hat off and play the different roles - knowing how to be a counselor, motivator and a problem-solver," said Sergeant Thomas. "Though it may be demanding and exhausting at times, this is a very rewarding job."

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