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**Face of Defense: Passion for Teaching Drives Instructor**

By Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Trish Freeland  
Special to American Forces Press Service

TAJI AIR BASE, Iraq, Oct. 20, 2008 – When he graduated from Air Force basic training six years ago, he knew he'd be back one day, "pushing" his own flight of fledgling airmen through their first military paces.



*Air Force Staff Sgt. Matthew Coltrin, left, watches Iraqi air force Lt. Ali explain the importance of military bearing to a warrant officer during parade practice Sept. 28, 2008, at Taji Air Base, Iraq. U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Paul Villanueva II (Click photo for screen-resolution image); [high-resolution image](#) available.*

But Air Force Staff Sgt. Matthew Coltrin didn't know he not only would push Air Force basic trainees as a military training instructor, but also would go to Iraq and help Iraqi basic training instructors push their recruits.

Two years into his MTI tour at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, Coltrin is deployed to the 370th Expeditionary Training Squadron here as an air advisor to Iraqi basic military training instructors.

"I love discipline. I love drill. I love the extreme passion for being the best you can possibly be," the native of Lake Charles, La., said. "I knew it would be tough to come back, but I always knew I'd end up back at Lackland.

Coltrin said his work in Iraq doesn't differ much from his work at his home station.

"We interact with our Iraqi instructor teams here the same as we would young MTIs back at Lackland," he said. "We advise them of the best way to operate, and then let them do things their way.

Then if things don't go right, we help them make fixes."

Coltrin has taken advising the Iraqis full throttle by learning not only the Queen's drill movements, the British-style that Iraqi airmen use, but also Arabic drill commands.

"I messed up a few times while calling commands, but they covered for me," he said.

Teaching is Coltrin's passion. One could even say it's a family affair. His mother, Tama Ray, is an assistant principal at J.I. Watson Middle School in Iowa, La. His sister is a teacher, and his wife, Renee, also teaches.

"For me, teaching and being able to work with people is about being able to mentor and influence someone's life," he said. "It's about making them better than they were before you met them. That's what I get out of this job more than anything."

Before becoming an MTI, Coltrin spent four years as an F-15 Eagle avionics technician. But since earning his distinctive MTI hat, which is adorned with a coveted "blue rope," an honor bestowed on the top 10 percent of the MTI corps.

"When you put that blue rope on your hat, you are the walking example of the MTI. You have to be on your best behavior at all times," Coltrin said. "You've got to lead by example, and you become more focused on the betterment of the corps itself, not just the trainees.

"I always set my standards extremely high," he continued, but any way the Air Force wants to use me would be outstanding. I just really love the Air Force."

(Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Trish Freeland serves at U.S. Air Forces Central.)

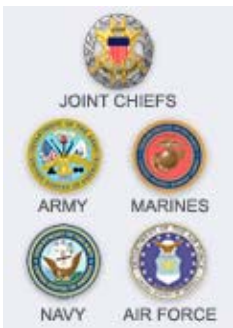
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