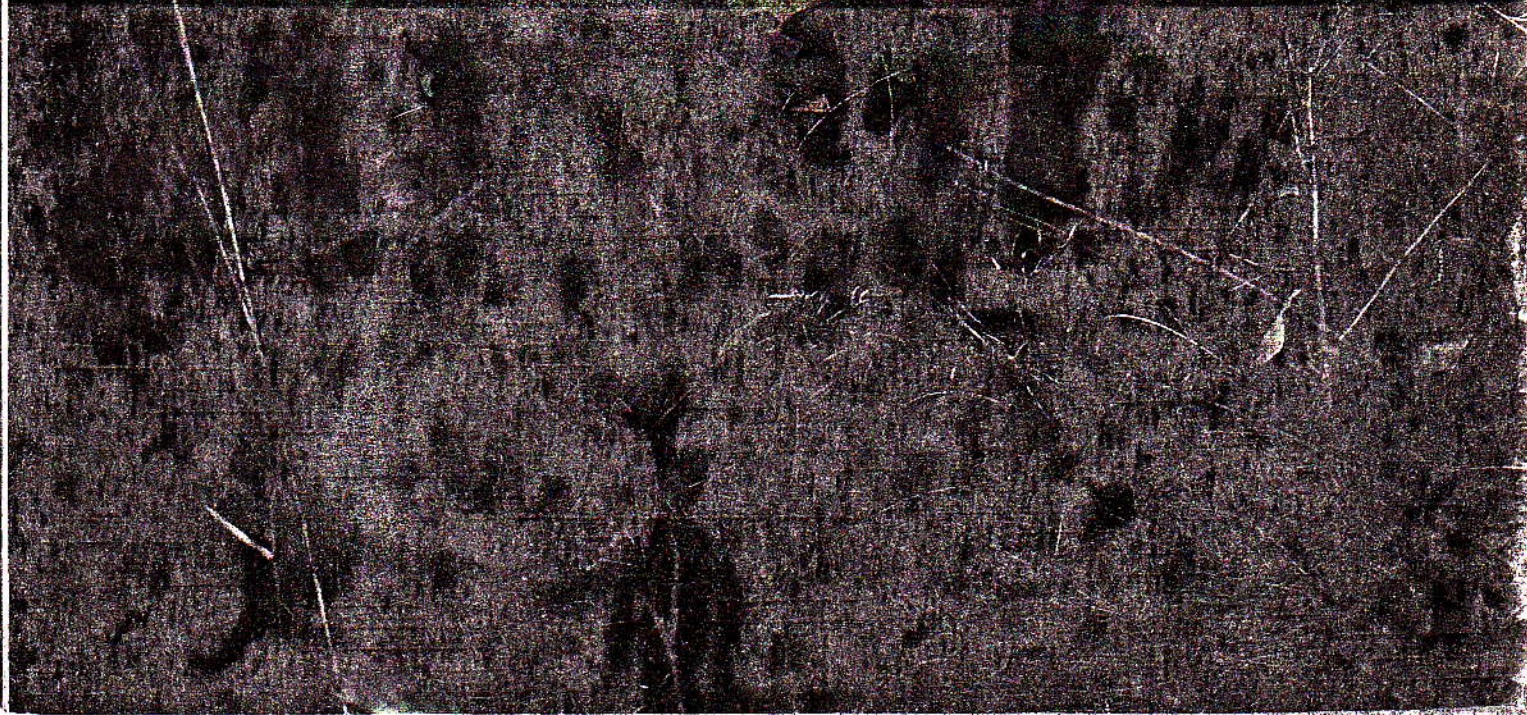


IN COMBAT S H A P E

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A U H - 6 0 Blackhawk helicopter hovers low above the ground while a combat control team quickly slides down a 4-inch thick rope.

Team members hit the ground running and head for their objective, several kilometers away, through a forest and swamps.

Periodically slowing down to a crawl, the team maneuvers through thick brush carrying packs, some weighing more than 85 pounds. Not exactly a "walk in the woods." The team's mission: Establish a drop or landing zone for aircraft. Set up navigational aids. Ensure communication links with aircraft.

Just a "normal" day's work for combat controllers who are heavily involved in the special operations arena. They work closely with their counterparts in the Army and Navy.

It's a job that requires strength and stamina. Combat controllers know the importance of physical fitness and mental toughness.

"It takes a lot of heart . . . when the body tells you to stop but the mind tells you to keep going," said SMSgt. Don East, commandant of the Combat Control School at Pope AFB, N.C.

There are strict academics, but strenuous physical demands, for the most part, take their toll on trainees.

For example, in fiscal '91, 193 basic trainees volunteered for the career field. However 152, or 79 percent, did not complete the entry level Pararescue/Combat Control Indoctrination Course at Lackland AFB, Texas.

To help trainees, physical conditioning programs are emphasized during all eight schools that combat controllers attend.

At Pope AFB's Combat Control School, which culminates the one-year of training for controllers, the daily program includes a warm-up and stretching session, and then calisthenics. For seven weeks, progressive systematic conditioning is instilled into trainees to prepare them for the field portion of their schooling.

"Our fitness program is based on variety, balance,



Combat controllers "fast rope" into an insertion point and head for their objective.

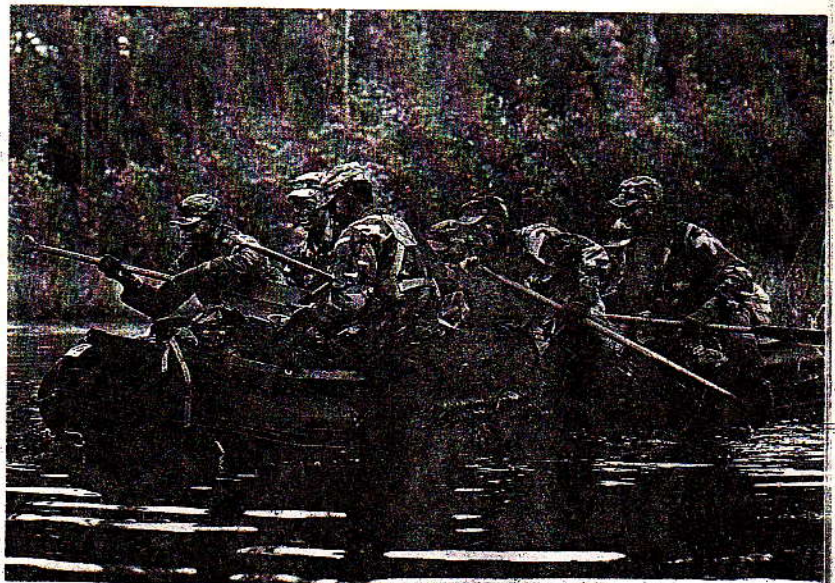
overload, recovery, progression and specificity, or knowing how to achieve what you're going to be tasked to do in the future," said TSgt. Mike Williams, director of operations and physical training. "Factors we learned at the Master Fitness Training School at Ft. Benjamin Harrison, Ind."

The fitness program builds up strength, stamina and confidence. A variety of physical taskings are balanced for positive results. Progression is achieved through balance or not favoring one muscle group over another.

"You can't solely work on the arms or chest and neglect the leg muscles," said Williams. "We don't necessarily want barrel-chested guys with thin, undeveloped legs."

A trainee has to be well-rounded physically.

"People aren't stagnant when there's variety in the training program," continued the physical training director. "It's always fresh and they approach it with a positive attitude."



As fatigue takes its toll during an amphibious operation, controllers draw on strength and stamina to keep going.



Weapons replace weights (above) in the woods as Amn. John Rodgers does improvised strength building exercises. Capt. Dave Horwitz and Amn. Christopher Zachary (below) do "log" curls. Amn. Richard Lundy (right), straining with a pack and web gear, pauses to catch his breath.



Fitness in the past was simply doing "the dirty dozen [exercises] and then running 10 miles," said Williams. "If the instructor in charge was a strong runner, then there would be more running."

Now, selected instructors attend a five-week fitness training school. They learn the basics of sports physiology, nutrition and kinesiology, the study of human muscular movements, as applied in physical education.

And they apply what they learn.

In the first two weeks at Pope AFB's school, trainees do their daily push-ups, chin-ups, sit-ups and flutter kicks; run three miles; and swim 500 meters. Weightlifting is done twice a week. They complete a weekly 3-mile march with a 40-pound rucksack. And, students must finish weekly 400-meter interval runs.

During week three, the rucksack weight increases to 50 pounds and trainees swim 800 meters. By week five, it's 60 pounds and 1,000 meters.

"We tried to come up with the ultimate physical fitness program that incorporates everything the individual needs to exist in the field," said East.

It's no different for a 29-year-old cross-trainee.



"I've always stayed in good shape," said Capt. Dave Horwitz, formerly a combat communications air traffic controller. "But this program can beat your butt to the ground."

Although it may take him a few seconds more than the average 18-year-old controller to finish a 3-mile jaunt, he said, "My age doesn't keep my mind from pushing my body to the limit."

"When an individual is physically fit, he's also confident," said Williams. "He understands his limitations and can better handle problems [in the field]."

Confidence also develops through age and maturity.

These could be two reasons that cross-trainees fared better in completing the indoctrination course: In fiscal '91, six out of 12 candidates went through the pipeline.

"They have leadership abilities and are more goal-oriented," said TSgt. Joseph Kahovec, director of student affairs at Lackland AFB's course. "Cross-trainees know

what the end of the tunnel has to offer.

"They can normally pull four or five more basic trainees along with them through the program," said Kahovec.

But to start the program, recruits and cross-trainees are tested for physical ability and stamina. They do push-ups, sit-ups, chin-ups and flutter kicks. Further, they run one-and-a-half miles and must swim 1,000 meters.

Each event is graded. A student who scores more than 100 out of 160 points will usually make it through the program. It's a test that breaks down trainees.

"But, we don't break them down so far that we can't build them up," said Kahovec.

It doesn't take a muscle-bound, bench-pressing physique to pass this rigorous test — just strength, mental determination and stamina. However, having a high endurance for pain doesn't hurt.

They have a "never-say-die attitude," said Kahovec.


At Lackland, students train for two days and are off one day. They train for the next three days and are off one more day. Their training encompasses running, calisthenics, weight training, water confidence events and swimming.

Trainees begin swimming to build their endurance before starting classes.

"We put them in a casual status and let them get to know what will be expected of them when they start the program," said Kahovec. "We no longer trash them out the first week."

Smart training has made some gradual gains. In fiscal '89, only nine out of 68 recruits, or 13 percent, made the grade. In '90, it was 17 percent and last year 21 percent.

But out of this small percentage, "Those who stay are the ones who want to stay and will not give up," said Kahovec. "It's physically tough."

"Once you're in shape, it's rewarding to know you can do this job," he added. It's *definitely* a job that's fit for a challenge. 

[Publisher's note: To volunteer for combat controller duty, or for more information, call DSN 473-2246/2247 or commercial (512) 671-2246/2247.]