

FIRST THERE: COMBAT CONTROL SCHOOL TEACHES AIRMEN TO LEAD THE WAY by Staff Sgt Zachary Hassay, 43rd AG PAO

April 7, 2011- Pope Army Airfield, NC - As we continue to move forward in the conflicts in the Middle East, the demand for individuals who can come face-to-face with our enemy on the battlefield is only increasing. Less than one percent of the U.S. Air Force can say they stand to meet that challenge to join the ranks of those who are "First There."

Combat controllers are an integral part of Air Force special operations and certified Federal Aviation Administration air traffic controllers who carry out dangerous missions in hostile environments leading



the way for other forces to follow. Their mission is to establish assault zones or airfields, while simultaneously conducting air traffic control, fire support, command and control, counter-terrorism and special reconnaissance providing expert air support coordination to the battlefield.

Combat Control candidates undergo various in depth training while at Pope Field. The Combat Control mission is to establish assault zones or airfields, while simultaneously conducting air traffic control, fire support, command and control, counter-terrorism and special reconnaissance providing expert air support coordination to the battlefield. (Courtesy photo)

Combat control is one of the most mentally challenging and physically demanding, unique specialties in the Air Force today. Preparing those who step up to the challenge, the Combat Control School provides mission ready controllers to the front lines.

"Our primary mission at Pope is the combat controller apprentice course," said Senior Master Sgt. Charles McHarney, 342nd Training Squadron commandant.

The school provides the building blocks for all combat controllers. They receive the fundamentals that they will carry with them throughout their careers and conduct advanced skills upgrade training to produce the highest quality of air to ground combat warriors.

After Basic Military Training, candidates undergo an extensive selection course at Lackland Air Force Base and are sent to Army Airborne School at Fort Benning, Ga., and the Air Force Basic Survival School at Fairchild Air Force Base, Wash. While there, candidates are instructed on the basic parachuting skills required to infiltrate an objective area and learn techniques that enable individuals to survive, regardless of climatic conditions or unfriendly environments in remote areas across the globe.

All candidates who successfully complete the airborne and survival schools are sent over to Keesler Air Force Base, Miss., to undergo the Combat Control Operator Course and Combat Control Apprentice Tower Course.

During attendance, candidates are educated on combat control fundamentals and later qualified on aircraft recognition and performance, air navigation aids, weather, airport traffic control, flight assistance service, communication procedures, conventional approach control, radar procedures, and air traffic rules and regulations. These are the core skill sets combat controllers utilize throughout their careers.



After acquiring their core skills, candidates attend the Combat Control School at Pope Field. Throughout the course, candidates undergo physical training, small unit tactics, land navigation, communication skills, assault zones, demolition, fire support and field operations including parachuting.

According to Tech. Sgt. Scott Seamone, 342nd Training Squadron instructor flight chief, some of the training candidates undergo at Pope include programming numerous different kinds of radios, calculating the correct size for demolition charges, practicing small unit tactics and immediate action drills, setting up a runway in an austere location and rigging for combat equipment static line jumps.

“The trainees only learn the basics while they are here,” said Seamone. “We try and construct a solid foundation that they can build on,”

Candidates conclude their training at Pope with a field exercise, which requires students to set up drop zones and landing zones, establish a runway and direct aircraft. All of the blocks of instruction the candidates have undergone are taken and applied through full mission profile over and over for eight days.



Students put their classroom training to practical use as instructors test them to ensure everything they learned in the class room is satisfactorily demonstrated in real-world scenarios. (File Photo)

During the field training exercise, candidates are rotated through the different positions with different levels of responsibility, testing them to ensure everything they

learned in the classroom and in the field can be put together and applied in the exercise.

“Out there, they show us they can take everything they have learned and put it to use in a field environment with minimal sleep and minimal food in field conditions,” said McHarney. “Once they are done and complete the field training exercise, candidates don their rucksacks, loaded with all of their equipment and run 15 miles from the field to the front door here. That basically culminates their time here at the Combat Control School.”



Upon completion of the course, each graduate acquires the coveted scarlet beret and CCT flash. After graduation, candidates are sent to Hurlburt Field, Fla. where they spend about another year of training.

“All in all, it takes approximately two years for a combat controller to become operationally ready,” said McHarney.

During the additional year of training, candidates attend Special Tactics Advanced Skills Training, Army Military Free Fall Parachutist School and the Air Force Combat Diver School. While there, they learn the more advanced skills needed to fulfill their upgrade training requirements. Having produced mission ready operators, candidates are then sent to their designated squadrons and ready to go.

“To go through this pipeline ... it’s an arduous course,” said McHarney. “It’s long, intense and there are a lot of challenges along the way.”

McHarney added that the only way to prepare is to be physically ready by conducting high intensity physical and endurance training and to be mentally ready by doing research and asking the right questions to the recruiters and CCT assistants.

“The worst thing is for a candidate to come in with false expectations, not knowing what this job is all about,” said McHarney. “I believe failure comes from a lack of motivation and drive, not the ability to perform. You can’t enter into this program with any false assumptions or unrealistic expectations.

“Anyone is capable of anything they want to do, but when you take an individual that not only volunteers to join the military, who knows the situation we are in ... that’s amazing,” said McHarney. “However, to volunteer for a special career field like this, trying to do the best they can in a very demanding job ... that’s special.”

That sentiment was echoed by every member who volunteered to serve as an instructor. “I take a lot of pride knowing that these candidates are the future of combat control,” said Seamone. “A year after they leave here, they will be making pivotal decisions that will positively shape U.S. Air Force battle space.”

Their motto “First There,” reiterates the combat controller’s commitment to undertaking the most dangerous missions behind enemy lines by leading the way for other forces to follow.

(Credits Ft. Bragg’s *Paraglide* article and page 1 photograph. Page 2 photo and images from file)