



HOW TO GET THROUGH BASIC COMBAT TRAINING (BCT) OR ADVANCED INDIVIDUAL TRAINING (AIT)

JEFF STRUECKER

Army Ranger (Ret.)

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I hope it will encourage you to hear that almost everyone goes through physical, mental, or emotional challenges while in their initial entry training.

I warn everyone before they leave for the military that the next couple of months are going to be very difficult for you. The purpose of basic combat training is to help a young man or woman transition from being a civilian to becoming a soldier, sailor, airman, or Marine.

This transition is not supposed to be easy. However, keep this in mind; **Millions of men and women have gone through this process in the past.** Initial entry training in all branches of the military is a thoroughly researched and well-defined process that gives you the tools to be successful in the military.

While serving as a basic training chaplain, I counseled scores of soldiers who were struggling during this phase of their military training. Here are the five most common areas where trainees will struggle during these next several months.



PHYSICAL CHALLENGES

If you did not show up to basic combat training with some degree of physical fitness, this is going to be extremely difficult for you. Life in the military is physically demanding. As a whole, the United States population is becoming less physically active every year. Therefore, the military has the responsibility of making someone physically capable of meeting the challenges on the battlefield.

As you go through the physical challenges of basic training, keep in mind that this training is designed to break you down before it builds you up physically. There is a point during initial entry training when all warriors are at their weakest. This point is designed to help you become both physically and mentally tough.

After bringing you to your low point, the remaining portion of basic combat training is designed to start to make you stronger. Without exception, you will leave basic combat training more physically fit and stronger than when you arrived, but all of us are aware that muscles only get stronger through strenuous activity. You can make it through these physical challenges if you hang in there and don't give up!



MENTAL TOUGHNESS

Often, the physical challenges of basic combat training are designed to help you become mentally tough, as well as physically strong. There are a number of tools the US military uses to address a servicemember's mental toughness. Unfortunately, every one of these tools is going to challenge you.

Take it from a former US Army Ranger Sergeant (me); there is no way to create mental toughness easily. By its very nature, mental toughness can only be cultivated through physical or psychological challenges. Here's what I'm saying... You can't learn this in the classroom. You're going to have to experience it firsthand. It is those firsthand challenges that create mental toughness that will last you the rest of your life. I realize mental toughness training isn't easy and is very unpleasant. Don't let the discomfort overwhelm you. Hang in there! The lessons that you will learn during this mental toughness training will benefit you for the rest of your life.

ACADEMIC STRUGGLES

Depending on your "job" in the military, many people are going to struggle academically during their advanced individual training. There is a common misconception about the military – that only stupid people join. This common misconception has led to the opinion that the intelligence of a servicemember is lower than that of the average US citizen. Nothing could be further than the truth!



Some military occupation specialties are going to be very academically challenging. This is because the US military has become highly technical and has some of the greatest equipment and techniques in the history of warfare. In other words, you can't to be an idiot and survive very long in the military.

Advanced individual training is designed to get the majority of students through the program. Of course, some people are going to do very well during this phase of their training. Others will struggle significantly with the academic load. That's why opportunities in the military are given based on your ASVB test. Keep this in mind: The fact that you scored well enough to be eligible for this job in the military means that you can make it through the advanced individual training. You might have to buckle down and study harder than ever before in your life, but if you will do the hard work, you can meet the challenges.

HOMESICKNESS

This one gets everybody! Some people get homesick earlier than others. Some people get much more homesick than others. But I have yet to meet a servicemember who didn't get homesick to some degree during this phase of military training. What's more, there is really nothing I can tell you that is going to make homesickness any easier. All of us get homesick going through initial entry training. Over time, homesickness becomes a little bit easier to deal with, but it usually never goes away completely.

Homesickness is nothing to be ashamed of. I try to remind servicemen and women to keep the good times at home in mind when you get homesick. The fact that you are experiencing homesickness means that God gave you a good family. You had an upbringing that makes you miss the family or friends you left behind. Homesickness hits all of us. There's no way around it.

My recommendation, if you're really struggling with homesickness right now, is to keep in mind that there is an end to this phase of military training. There will be a point when you are able to call home, to write emails, to see your friends and family again. Keep the end goal in mind. There is a day coming when you will have most of the freedoms that you experienced before joining the military (meaning you will be able to see your friends and family again regularly). Hang in there, and hold on to hope for that day.



SEPARATION FROM MY STUFF

The last, and often the least challenging part of initial entry training, is separation from all of your stuff. Although this is last and often least challenging, it's still hard for some servicemen and women.

I've seen trainees broken over not having access to their cell phone or their game console, or the amenities that they had at home. For some people, this separation can become so intense that they are willing to do anything just to get their old lifestyle back, including separation from the military.

I always try to remind trainees when they're experiencing separation from their stuff, this phase of life is temporary. In fact, it's usually over with in just a few more weeks. If you can hang in there for those few weeks of initial entry training, you will often have access to most of the stuff that you are missing right now.

You will get your phone back one day. You will be able to play video games again in the future. These things are waiting for you when you finish initial entry training.



I will say it one more time: **Don't give up. Hang on, hang in there, and keep the finish line in sight.** When initial entry training is over with, most of the challenges that you experienced will no longer be a problem for you. In addition, you will gain physical strength and mental toughness that you didn't possess before you went to the military.

In other words, don't give up! The pain that you're going through now is worth the reward that you will gain after this training period is over.

Best wishes, and if you need to talk about your struggles, **email me at info@jeffstruecker.com**

"THE LESSONS THAT YOU WILL LEARN DURING THIS TRAINING WILL BENEFIT YOU FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE."