

# There is only one way a doolie can survive – he must want to badly

Like novices in a monastery, Air Force Academy doolies either take to the discipline or remain miserable. The miserable drop out. Of the 803 fourth-classmen (“doolies”) who reported for basic training in July, thirty-one have already left. By next June an estimated fifty-five others will leave. Academy officers flinch at each departure, do their best to dissuade the faltering. (No argument with bad health, scholastic failure, rule breaking or sudden matrimonial obligation.) But many who qualify can’t wait to get away. “From the first day,” one dropout said, “I realized I’d made a great mistake. I wish I’d been briefed about how tough it is here.”

Why is it so tough? The answer lies in the academy’s formula for leadership, a training philosophy any Prussian or Spartan soldier would have found familiar. Take an able boy, the theory goes, strip away the slothful habits and twisted attitudes of civilian life, and rebuild him the Air Force way. Snarl at him, scorn him, make him feel so unworthy that he burns for the chance to succeed by Air Force standards. Shoot commands at him incessantly until he is incapable of making an excuse, until “instant obedience,” as one manual puts it, “is a fact.”

New men at the older service academies, West Point and Annapolis, get a rough initiation too, but the ordeal of the Air Force Academy doolies is extraordinary. Outdoors they run; indoors they walk at attention. Superiors constantly inspect them, correct them and prescribe punishment. From the first day—an agony of calisthenics and sprinting, climaxed by a climb at top speed to the fifth floor of the dormitory with a fifty-pound duffel bag in each hand—they undergo a physical-education program which becomes steadily more arduous. Their academic burden is heavy too. Telephone and visitor privileges are tightly restricted. Upperclassmen, except those on the training detail, may not speak to them. From July to the following June they are treated as a breed apart—a lowly, contemptible breed.

Consolation for harassed doolies is the knowledge that the road grows progressively smoother. Through the upper-class years, rules are relaxed and privileges extended. By his second-class (junior) year, the former doolie may be breaking in doolies.

Superficially, the fourth-class year resembles a fraternity “hell week” of hazing, spread over eleven long months. But to upperclassmen, training doolies is not a game—it is a holy mission to be performed with machinelike impersonality. Should a doolie apologize for “clanking up” (flubbing), the upperclassman tells him, “This is the military, mister. No one here feels *sorry*.” If the naïve doolie thanks the upperclassman for setting him straight, the reply is, “Don’t thank me—I am not your friend.” “Don’t sulk, mister,” a pouting doolie is told. “Don’t get personal, hear? This is no place to get personal.” This is, in short, not torment for torment’s sake, but the working of a system whose benefits the upperclassman has already begun to detect in himself—endurance, attention to detail, lightning response and unshakable self-mastery.

“The Eternal Man” is what the academy calls its product, the man who will stay in the Air Force for a thirty- or forty-year career. Training at the academy is designed to anticipate—and block—any circumstance which might someday

drive a capable officer into civilian life. All too often, for example, unhappy wives have nagged men out of the Air Force into higher-paying civilian jobs. So the academy encourages upperclassmen to date girls from nearby Denver and Colorado Springs, girls who presumably have been exposed to the way of life and like it. To this end a Cadet Wing Hostess arranges blind dates on a vast scale.

“It’s amazing to see the kind of home-town farm-girl types who came to the academy balls that first Christmas,” says one faculty member. “But as the years go by they come no more. The cadets switch over to slicker types from this area.”

“All second-classmen take a course called Psychology of Family Relations. Object: to help cadets avoid the marital mishaps which might later disrupt their military as well as personal lives. If all goes as planned, the cadet upon graduation takes his commission as a second lieutenant in one hand and a suitable wife in the other and settles into a stable career.

Academy training also teaches cadets a mild contempt for civilian employment. “We of the Air Force,” says *Contrails*, the cadet handbook, “are not involved with the success or failure of a commercial-type business venture. We are dedicated to the security of our nation.” The academy insists on an all-military faculty. “Students taught by civilians tend to gravitate toward civilian life, want to make money and so on,” says Brig. Gen. Robert McDermott, dean of the faculty and, at forty-one, one of the youngest officers of his rank in the Armed Forces. “Our purpose is to train future military leaders with dedication and motivation.”

At the academy, “motivation” is the magic word. Motivation—the jet-age successor to old-fashioned terms like “guts” and “stick-to-itiveness”—spells the difference between a doolie who drops out and one who lasts it out. The “motivated” career officer, the Air Force hopes, will bear up manfully during peacetime, when promotion is slow, bring zeal to tedious paperwork and training assignments, fight an enemy unstintingly and, if captured, withstand brainwashing. “The Eternal Man” must want military life and want it badly.

In exchange for his commitment to the Air Force the cadet gets an education which costs the taxpayers \$13,000 a year. Half the curriculum is devoted to sciences; the other half, to humanities. “Military skill,” says *Contrails*, “requires a background of general culture.” Good students may sign up for the Enrichment Program—intensified study in certain fields. Dean McDermott’s dream is that within two or three years, the academy can offer master’s degrees in astronautics and in public policy.

The doolie, however, doesn’t bother much about enrichment or culture. He is too busy coping with the system. In many ways the system protects the doolie. Corporal punishment is out—upperclassmen must ask a doolie’s permission to touch him, if only to adjust his salute. Dining-hall discipline must not interfere with the doolie’s getting a full meal, nor may discipline ever get in the way of his studies.

Yet being a doolie takes stamina. “Fellows all around are flaking out under the strain,” one doolie confessed. “During grace before each meal, I ask for strength to last just till the next meal. So far it has worked fine.” THE END

**“Chin down, Mister—chin down!” Still no let-up at day’s end.**