

He kisses mom good-bye and then all hell breaks loose—a “doolie’s” first day at the U.S. Air Force Academy

“You are nobody here,” an upperclassman barks at the new arrivals. It’s rude shock. They come to the academy’s manly, modern campus in Colorado Springs feeling big. Most were high-school heroes; each beat out a dozen or more men for his appointment. But a moment after they take the oath of allegiance the buzz saw of military life starts cutting them down to size. “On the double!” yells an upperclassman. “That means *run!*” “Say ‘sir’ when you speak to me,” snaps another. “Do twenty pushups to help you remember.” And so it goes, down a gantlet of harsh upperclassmen each new boy must confront.

For the “doolie” (first-year man) this is a brutal baptism, a day which keeps him on the edge of exhaustion, even tears. This is his crash introduction to the relentless concept of total obedience. “Chin down mister—chin *down!* Let

us see some wrinkles in that chin. On the double to the wall and back, and then we will try for some wrinkles. Move!” During meals the doolie takes more rat-a-tat. “Eat slowly,” says the table commandant. “Small bites. Don’t look bored. This is the military; it is *not possible* that you can be bored.”

There are briefings, drill and, at nine-o’clock shower formation, more pushups. “Sir,” the doolie says to the upperclassman in charge, “Basic Cadet Smith, J.J., serial number 3822 K, reporting as ordered. I have had a shower. I have dried myself. I have had a bowel movement within the last twenty-four hours. . . .” At 10:30 the cast-down, bone-sore doolie collapses into bed. “Lord, I ask true humility,” reads the *Cadet Prayer* each doolie eventually learns. By the end of his first day, the prayer has been answered.