

# Impressions of Basic Combat Training

These are short viewpoints or snapshots of life in Basic Combat Training (BCT) designed to be inserted along a linear track between scenarios in order to give the player of *America's Army: Soldiers* the idea that more is going on around them than just what takes place in the video segments. The style of these segments is a first-person statement by the Main Character in soliloquy format (MC – SOLQ), generally as a letter home. The suggested backgrounds should be segued through the scene gradually, fading in and out to form a slide-show presentation, as the MC provides the voiceover. Each impression will require an audio track for each of the four possible main characters of around a minute each. Impressions that are marked with an asterisk (\*) have two sections, one for males and one for females. I recommend 3-4 random impressions per phase of BCT (12-16 total, including reception), so that there will still be a good replayability factor for them if the player wants to go through BCT again.

## Reception (6)

- Dining Facility
- Clothing Issue
- Haircut\*
- Physical Fitness Unit
- Medical Screening
- Fire Guard

## Phase I: Patriot (8)

- Drill Sergeants
- Boots
- Latrine
- Shaving\*
- Flag Detail
- Marching
- Buddy Teams
- Classes

## Reception

The Reception Station is the soldier's first look at the US Army. Soldiers are often homesick, tired, and scared during this phase of BCT and their comments reflect this.

### Dining Facility

“Well, you don't have to worry about me getting enough food while I'm here. We went to the cafeteria for breakfast this morning. It's officially called a Dining Facility but everyone just calls it the 'chow hall.' We weren't allowed to move or talk while we were in line waiting for our food. When I got to the front of the line, I took a tray and they gave me huge piles of food. I couldn't decide what to get, but one of the others said to 'just take whatever they give you.' I wound up with a lot more than I could eat! We didn't have much time anyway; it seemed like they were yelling for us to leave almost as soon as we started eating! Still, the food was a lot better than I thought it would be – definitely filling, but not as nice as homemade. Hopefully lunch will be as good. I am sure they will have us working off all of these extra calories soon enough!”

### Clothing Issue

“You know how you always see soldiers and their uniforms look like they are so carefully pressed, their boots are shined, and everything fits? Well, they didn't start that way! Today we got issued our BDUs. That stands for Battle Dress Uniforms. We got boots, hats, socks, belts – everything we need I guess. The only thing is, the uniforms are all baggy and wrinkled, and the boots are stiff and dull. I asked one of the civilians who was issuing the uniforms if I could get shiny boots, and she laughed and told me they would be shiny before I left Basic Training. Anyway, once I had the whole uniform on, I looked in the mirror and I saw a soldier. I felt proud. I am sure you will be proud of my uniform too, when I graduate from basic in a couple of months. I will try to have it ironed and my boots polished by then.”

### Haircut

(Male) “Do you remember that hair I was so particular about combing all the time? Well, it's gone now! We all went to the barbershop today to get our hair cut 'the Army way.' I saw guys who looked so scared, you would think they were going into combat or something! Some guys had short hair already, but not as short as the barbers there cut it – they just sat us down, shaved us bald, and let us go. I barely even have stubble! Now we all look pretty much the same, even in our civilian clothes. One of the guys asked a sergeant why we had to get our hair cut so short. The sergeant told him it was to keep us from getting head lice and so we could wear our gas masks properly. Whatever the reason, I kinda wish I had my hair back, but I am sure I will be able to grow it longer, a little longer at least, once basic training is over.”

(Female) “Today we went to the barbershop. Notice I didn't say the 'beauty parlor!' The men all had to get their heads shaved bald, but we 'ladies' were allowed to keep our

hair long or get it cut to just above our collars. Lots of the other women got theirs cut, but I left my hair long. They said I would have to keep it pinned up and I couldn't use flashy hair clips when I was in uniform, but I really want to keep it. I guess if it becomes too much trouble, I can always cut it short, but I am just so glad I don't have to get my head shaved!"

### **Physical Fitness Unit**

"I hope I am in good enough shape for this! There are a bunch of people, other recruits, who are always in their physical fitness uniforms, and it seems like they're always doing pushups and running and stuff. I asked one of them what they were doing, and he told me they had all failed to do the minimum number of pushups to get out of the reception station and into basic training, so they are in a special Physical Fitness Unit. He said a lot of them are overweight too. I know that I will have to do a lot of exercising when basic starts, but I hope I don't have to join a group like that. It looks hard! I am going to do my best when it comes time for that test, so I can get to Basic Training and learn what it's like to be a soldier."

### **Medical Screening**

"I didn't know there were so many ways I could be poked, prodded, and stuck! Today we had a long medical screening – a lot like the one I had at the MEPS station before I left, but this time they were ready to get us taken care of! We got lots of shots. My arms are both sore – I think I had three shots in each arm! I saw some people who looked like they were going to pass out after their first shot, but we all sat on the floor and they watched us carefully to make sure everyone was doing OK. The people who wear glasses got new ones. Ugly Army-issue glasses with big brown frames. Dentists checked our teeth and I think some of the others had to go back for fillings, but I made it through there without a hitch. I'm glad they checked us so thoroughly – now we have no excuses not to be able to make it through basic training!"

### **Fire Guard**

"I am writing you this letter while I am on guard duty, my first in the Army! I bet it won't be my last either. There is a shift schedule, called a duty roster, to make sure that everyone gets turns on guard duty. They call it 'fire guard,' and the sergeant told us where to go and what to do if there is a fire. I think they do it just to keep us from getting enough sleep, but at least I can use this time to write letters home. We pull this duty in pairs – they call it 'buddy teams.' That way if one of us dozes off, the other one can keep them awake. Pretty soon I will go wake up our relief, so they can get dressed before they come take our spots. Then I will fall asleep, only to wake up again in about two hours, at the crack of dawn! By the end of basic training, I'll probably be able to sleep standing up!"

## **Phase I: Patriot**

Phase I of BCT introduces the new soldier to the training environment, testing procedures, and best of all... Drill Sergeants. The soldier is often uncertain, edgy, and excited during this phase of BCT and their statements show this.

### **Drill Sergeants**

“You know those Drill Sergeants you see in the movies? The ones that are always bigger than Mike Tyson and tougher than John Wayne? Well, that’s not the way it is... it’s worse! Yesterday, we left the reception station at about 2 in the afternoon, I guess I should say 1400 by military time. There were about 50 of us and all of our gear, which was packed into a dufflebag each, crammed into the back of a truck. There were benches and small windows, but it was basically the kind of truck you would haul animals around in! Boy, we got nervous fast! When we got off the truck there were Drill Sergeants all over the place, in their brown ‘Smokey the Bear’ hats and spit-shined boots. They were all yelling, telling us where to go and how to get there and what to do. I was so confused, I just followed the mob. They lined us all up and made us dump our gear, then took away stuff that people thought they were going to be able to smuggle in – mostly cigarettes. They had us repack, so fast it made my head spin, then showed us to our barracks and gave us white sheets and green wool blankets and told us how to make our bunks. They were actually pretty patient with us, considering how many dumb questions we had. They seem pretty knowledgeable about the Army, but I guess that’s why they’re here, turning civilians into soldiers. I will be one of those soldiers in just nine more weeks!”

### **Boots**

“You always hear about soldiers shining their boots, but I thought it would be easy! In the Army, you don’t just slap some wax on them and brush them off, or use some liquid shine in a bottle – it’s actually hard work! The Drill Sergeants’ boots look like black mirrors, they are so highly shined. I have enough trouble keeping mine clean, much less getting a shine on them! When we first got them, we had to wash them and strip them with soap and scrub brushes. Then we used black paste wax and put it on our boots with a brush or rag, then buffed them with a soft brush or another piece of cloth. We have to polish them like that every day now. Some people use cotton balls, maybe with a little bit of water, for a final shine. I have tried that with mine and they didn’t look any better, but I am hoping that after a few weeks of this, my boots will shine enough to see my face in them!”

### **Latrines**

“One of the strangest things about the Army is their fascination with bathrooms! They call them ‘latrines,’ don’t ask me why, and they must ALWAYS be spotless. Showering is just like at the gym in school – all together – except that we barely have time to rinse before the next batch wants to get in. There’s no time for anything here, and showers are on the same list as boot polishing, making bunks, and memorizing marching commands.

We all crowd in the latrine in the morning to wash up, brush our teeth, and use the toilets. Once we're all through, we have to clean it up. Even though we're only in there for a few minutes each, the place gets dirty; maybe not what you and I would call dirty, but Drill Sergeants seem to have higher standards than civilians. All of the chrome must be spotless and shine like a mirror. The mirrors must be cleaned, the toilets scrubbed, the floor mopped, and the showers cleaned, all in about ten minutes, while we make our bunks and tidy the barracks. Then, we do it all again the next morning!"

## **Shaving**

(Male) "Have you ever seen a soldier with a beard? I haven't, and I guess I never will! We have to shave every day, which wouldn't be any problem if we had half of the time we needed to get everything else done in the morning. No moustaches are allowed, although I think we can grow them after basic training, since I have seen a few officers and soldiers walking around with them. When we have our daily inspection, every morning, the Drill Sergeant looks us all up and down and one of the things he checks carefully is our shave. Like everything else we do, the Drill Sergeant expects perfection – you never see one of them with a whisker on their face, and they demand no less of us! Some of the older guys who have fast-growing beards even shave twice a day. Luckily, I haven't been in trouble for poor shaving yet, and I don't intend to be!"

(Female) "Some days I am so glad to be female! Sure, we take a little longer in the bathroom – oops, I mean latrine! - than the guys, but at least we don't have to shave! There's really no reason to shave our legs here, but the men are checked to make sure they have shaved their faces properly every day. When they miss a spot, they get to do pushups, then they have to go back up to their latrine right after breakfast and shave again. Some of the guys are shaving twice a day. One of them shaved his entire head; I think he did it to impress the Drill Sergeant. Boy, did he get in trouble! I am so glad I don't have to shave my face, and I don't think I could ever shave my head!"

## **Flag Detail**

"Last night I had guard duty during the time when everyone else was getting up and ready to go for the day, so I had to get up and dressed even earlier. I wasn't too happy about losing more than an hour of sleep, especially since I get little enough as it is, just to be available to run errands for the Drill Sergeant who was on duty for the night in the company offices. But I got to do something really cool while I was on duty! The Drill Sergeant and I took the American flag out of the closet in the commander's office, and we put it on the flagpole and raised it. We had to wait for the music, which was played all over post, called Reveille. We unfolded the flag and attached it to the rope, then waited for the music to start. I pulled the rope as fast as I could to raise the flag, while the Drill Sergeant saluted. When I looked at him, I could swear he had tears in his eyes. I was so proud and happy to be reminded of one of the many reasons I volunteered to come here. I wish I could get guard duty every night, just so I could raise the flag!"

## **Marching**

“Did you know that the Army sings wherever it goes? One of our Drill Sergeants told us that the first day we were here, and it’s true! The songs are called ‘cadences,’ and they’re not really sung, for the most part. The Drill Sergeant calls out a cadence, and we repeat it. It seems to me that we’re very loud, sometimes as many as 200 or more of us in a single formation, but the Drill Sergeants always tell us we sound weak. I am so hoarse by the end of the day from all of the yelling; I can’t believe the Drill Sergeants still have any voice left at all, yet they can be heard over all of us! There are some simple cadences, like counting off and ‘left, right, left,’ but most of them rhyme, and they’re all motivating. They keep us from being bored when we march I guess. Some of them are even funny. When I come home after basic training, I’ll tell you some of the good ones.”

## **Buddy Teams**

“I didn’t expect too much privacy in basic training, but we are actually required to go everywhere with our assigned ‘buddies.’ When my buddy gets dropped for pushups, I have to do them too. When my buddy gets to take a break, I do too. We do everything together. They told us there are a bunch of reasons for this – we can help each other, keep an eye on each other, and when you have a buddy, you always know there is somebody who is looking for you! My buddy doesn’t run quite as fast as I do, but we stick together in formation when we run during physical training. When I have a question about one of the many tasks we have to memorize, I always check with my buddy for the answer first. It seems to be a pretty good system, and I think it’s a good way to make a friend, fast!”

## **Classes**

“Every day we sit in classrooms learning about the Army. Some of it is interesting, but some of it is, well, dull. It’s especially hard to stay awake when the Drill Sergeant is talking about something I’m not interested in, like how to balance my checkbook, but I try very hard. If I fall asleep in class, I will have to do pushups, then stand near the wall for the rest of the class. That’s no fun – it’s even more tiring! Luckily, most of the classes are pretty good. We have learned about our rights under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, the Army Core Values, pay and finance, the history of the Army, the Code of Conduct, Chain-of-Command, and all kinds of things like that. Some of our classes are held outside, which is a nice change. By the end of basic training, I imagine we’ll all know a whole lot more about the Army than we ever wanted to know!”