

I tend to use a lot of Army acronyms when discussing my daily activities. To save space here, all of the acronyms I use are on the acronym page.

6/10/2016

Flew into San Antonio today. Got a cab from the airport to the base. Keep the receipt. On this first day, we didn't do much. Just picked up our room keys and some general info. My room is incredible. It is in the suites. It has a full kitchenette. Some of the rooms are not as nice, but no one can really complain. There is a pool! There are so many stores: a sporting goods/outdoors store, a uniform store, a liquor store, a grocery store and a mall with a target-like selection (clothes, electronics, food, etc). I probably could have not packed at all and still have been fine. Again, I can not stress enough how important it is to have your CAC BEFORE YOU GET TO BOLC. It will make EVERYTHING easier. We are due to report at 7am tomorrow morning.

6/11/2016

Just more orientation and lectures. I was amazed at how many people did not have most of their equipment prior to arriving. It was really a hassle for everyone involved: the commanding officers, the HPSP students and the people at the Exchange clothing store who were working frantically to clothe several hundred officers. If you did not bring everything, it is fine, but you should try to get most of your gear before BOLC. I CAN NOT STRESS THIS ENOUGH: GET YOUR CAC BEFORE ARRIVING AT BOLC. YOU CAN NOT DO ANYTHING WITHOUT IT AND IT WILL HOLD UP EVERY STEP OF YOUR PROCESS IF YOU DON'T HAVE IT. If you can't make your way to a RAPIDS station between your commissioning and BOLC to get your CAC, I highly recommend calling the HPSP office to make sure you are cleared for a CAC card (NOT a "green card") and that you arrive to BOLC on the early side and make it your priority to get your CAC ASAP.

6/12/2016

Today was the first day we wore our ACUs. It was a bit awkward for students who did not have all parts of their ACUs as they had to wear the physical fitness uniform instead (you are not authorized to wear an incomplete ACU - you need a hat, boots, patches, the whole 9 yards). I am amazed by how unprepared a lot of people were. This training, while not as intense as a Marines' bootcamp, is still in preparation for your career in the military. The unofficial golden rule of BOLC: "Do NOT draw attention to yourself." Missing parts of your uniform, or wearing an APFT when everyone else is wearing ACUs is an easy way to break that rule.

Also, if you wear glasses and need them to get through everyday life, you will be issued a pair of Army approved glasses (BCGs as they are commonly called - look that one up for yourself). You must wear these glasses in the field training. While it is not stated prior to BOLC, you need to bring your civilian glasses and a copy of your prescription to receive BCGs.

6/13/2016

Day of the PT test! Check out my PT prep page for the details. I had been preparing for this test for a few months, so it wasn't too difficult for me. I am a bit disappointed on my sit-ups score. My partner didn't do the best job of holding my feet, so I lost a few reps there. If you fail any portion of the PT test, you have to do remedial PRT. Normally, we do PRT Monday, Wednesday and Friday. If you failed the test, you have to do the normal PRT plus extra PRT on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Another highlight of the day is that we had a funny consent session with some actors who put on an entertaining-enough interactive presentation on sexual consent. As far as these kinds of things go from high school, this wasn't too bad!

6/14/2016

After an entire morning of signing papers again, we finally broke up into our platoons! In our platoons (roughly 45 students), we are assigned 4 platoon advisors (2 captains and 2 retired military personnel) who are our instructors for the remainder of the classroom portion of BOLC. This is the time at which students started picking up leadership roles. There is the Platoon Leader, Platoon Sergeant, S1, S4, and the squad leaders. The PL is supposed to organize the platoon's activities. The PS maintains overall accountability and directly orders the platoon to initiate movement. The S1 manages "personnel." For our needs, they are a like a secretary - organizing forms. The S4 manages "logistics." For us, it is the equipment and food manager. The platoon of 45 is broken up into 4 squads. Each SL is responsible for the accountability of their squad.

6/15/2016

Just class and more class...

6/16/2016

A LOT of videos on unsafe driving.

6/17/2016

Aside from PRT and all of the classes, today, we were issued our FTX gear. We don't go to the field for another 2 weeks, but we will get used to using the gear beforehand. One bit of advice here is that because you are issued 2 canteens that an unknown number of people have used before you, people generally buy their own. They only cost \$5 and change, so it's not a big deal.

6/22/2016

We spent today at the Brooke Army Medical Center (BAMC). This was absolutely incredible! We heard presentations from representatives from different specialties in the Army, learned about the hospitals at which we can rotate and/or go to for residency, and we also got some time to talk with physicians from a good number of specialties in a casual setting. I was able to get all of my questions about residency answered (see the "Residency" page for more on this) and learn a lot about the specialties I am interested in: what a day in the life is like, how military compares with civilian, how deployments work, the whole shebang. Come prepared with questions!

6/23/2016

The highlight of today was the M16 certification simulation.

We started out with a lesson on M16 rifles. We learned all about the various parts, functions and how to hold it in various situations. We then got to use them:

This was incredibly cool. On base, there is a training center equipped with several simulated firing ranges - remember duck hunt on NES (I may be getting old) - it is a lot like that. It had a massive projector screen that could accommodate 10 people at once. The rifles are all attached via a tube to an air-regulator so that when you fire the weapon, you experience realistic kick-back. On top of all that, the rifle is equipped with a number of sensors that tell the person running the simulation everything about your weapon - if it is loaded, charged, locked, on safe, etc. This really helped beginners, like myself, find my way around the rifle.

We first zero'd the rifle - meaning we adjusted the sights to fit our bodies. On a real rifle, you physically turn the knobs on the sides of the sights to adjust them. You take a few shots, see where they land, adjust the sights, take a few more shots, rinse and repeat. For the simulation, the computer automatically adjusted our sights within the simulation, which is pretty incredible.

We then got to attempt rifle certification. For this, targets would pop up at various distances and we would attempt to shoot them in a certain amount of time and with a certain amount of bullets.

Since my group was the last one of the day, and the instructors were bored, we got to have a little fun with the simulation that no other group did (for time constraints) - terrorist simulation. The graphics were nothing to brag about; it was like arcade-quality, but no arcade gives you a real M16 with simulated kick-back and a 30 foot screen to kill simulated attackers. It was so much fun - if you end up in the last group of the day, be sure to ask if you can try this out!

6/24/2016

As a part of PRT today, we had a battalion run. It is where all 442 of us run together for 3 miles. It was a lot of fun mainly because we were singing running cadences the whole time. PROTIP: if you want to look really cool in front of your platoon, learn some marching/running cadences

before you get to BOLC. I didn't have time to memorize one before the run, so I made a little cheat sheet.

Today, we also had our midterm exam. I am unsure if the exam had changed from previous years, but I was told by the second years at my school (and many of my comrades heard similar advice) that it is the easiest test ever and I shouldn't study until the night before. Being a med student, the idea of just studying something the night before was terrifying, so I started 3 days out - I am so happy I did! The exam was not difficult by medical school standards, it simply contained a large amount of information. We get innumerable powerpoints given to us every day. The questions were a simple reflection of those - no tricks. I would highly recommend to start studying at least 3 days before the exam simply due to the size of the information you need to straight up memorize.

We went over the exam immediately after taking it so we could know what we got wrong (I love this concept). You need a 70 to pass. I'm pretty happy with my 88.

7/3/2016

I haven't made one of these entries in a few days. I was caught up in studying for the final exam that was 6 days after the midterm and there wasn't much to report on - just classroom work. We are now in the middle of a 4-day break until the field; 4th of July weekend. We got Friday-Monday off! This was a much-needed break for me. Sitting in a classroom being lectured to for 6-8 hours a day is not my cup of tea (the exact reason I chose to go to a problem-based learning med school). After the final on Thursday, we did classroom land navigation training. This stuff is pretty cool. It is essentially how to read a military topographical map, how to use the Army compass and how to use a protractor. At some point during our field training, we will have to use a map, compass and protractor to find various landmarks during the day and night. This was a 3 and a half hour lecture that I probably could have taught in 30 minutes. Oh well...

7/5/2016

This was the beginning of our 3 days of field training! I'm not gonna lie, today sucked, hard. The day started with arriving at the pick-up location at 04:00. We were driven the 45 minutes to the camp site. When we arrived, we lined up, and promptly began our 3 mile practice ruck march. This is the classic Army event where you traverse a certain distance wearing your full uniform, FLCK, canteens, ACH (helmet), and of course, your assault pack filled with a smattering of bulky items. The pace for a ruck march is 15 mins/mile. This didn't seem like much to me being someone who runs 6-minute miles without breaking a sweat, but it was a whole different world wearing boots and carrying all of that gear. We are doing our real, 4-mile ruck march sometime next week. A true ruck march in the Army is 12 miles, however, that is for a full BOLC. The

AMEDD BOLC is a bit of an abbreviated version and therefore, we do not have enough time to prepare for such an event.

The rest of the day was a whole lot of hurry up and wait. We were instructed on various Army procedures, received introductory training to MEDEVAC and had introductory training on how to carry a patient on a stretcher, or "litter." We also received our new closest friends - our M16, which was to remain within 5 feet of us at all times for the remainder of the week. We received instruction on how to disassemble and reassemble the rifle. Finally, we ended the day with a fun rifle-cleaning session. Needless to say, we were all a bit tired and somewhat frustrated by the end of the day.

The shower situation was better than I expected. There are 3 shipping containers converted into showers, each of which has 6 shower units within it. The plan is that the shower units will vary by sex with every other day having two showers for men/1 for women, and vice-versa. My shower was a measly dribble of water, but it felt great after one of the longest days of my life!

7/6/2016

We spent the entirety of today at the shooting range. This was real shooting with real bullets with our real M16s. I gotta give credit to that simulation from 2 weeks ago - they were not far off! The kick of a real rifle is a bit sharper than the simulation and incredibly louder, but hey, you can't have it all! I'm no gun enthusiast, but it was cool to get to use a rifle and to understand the various intricacies involved in making a good shot. As a physician, you will most likely never touch one of these in the field, but it is still important to understand how the rifle works and to always be ready to use one if a need arises!

7/7/2016

Today, we went for a hike! Our morning was spent preparing for our land navigation test. This two-part test has you navigate to various points on the land navigation course using only a map, a protractor, and a compass. Our training included a tour of the course, through which we had practice navigating and eventually marched to the top of the small mountain on the course. The two parts of the test include a day and a night portion, which we will complete next week.

We also received training in the M9 pistol. Much like we learned for the M16, we now know how to clear, disassemble/reassemble, check and clean the weapon. We will be firing this next week as well.

7/8/2016

Today was the litter obstacle course. No, we did not go running through a trash-filled field. A litter, as I mentioned in an earlier entry, is a stretcher. The obstacle course challenged 4-person teams to carry a litter, with a patient (a human-weighted dummy), across various obstacles. We

had been practicing this for a few days, but it was still a serious effort! It really was a balanced trifecta of strength, coordination/teamwork, and drive to complete the task. The purpose of this exercise (which you will never do as a physician in real life), was to gain perspective and respect for the work that the field medics and teams do to get patients from the site of injury, to the hospital or station where you work.

7/11/2016-7/15/2016

I may have gotten lazy and forgot to write down each day's events as they happened, so it may all be a big blur in my head. That said, here is this week's events, not necessarily in the correct order.

M9

Our first day back in the field, we went to the firing range to both practice and qualify with the M9 pistol. Prior to BOLC, I had never fired a weapon of any kind. Apparently, my innate M16 skills are superior to my innate M9 skills and that is all I will say about that.

Night land nav practice

This may have been my favorite part of BOLC. After the sun set, we went out on the land navigation course, in pairs, without an instructor to find 3 points on the navigation course. We of course only had a compass, map, protractor and a red light flashlight. In the Army, you may only use a non-white light to see at night. Red is the color chosen for BOLC. We were not permitted to use the red light to walk around with - only when stopped to get a view of our maps. The night mostly consisted of trudging through the brush with the glow of the moon for illumination. It was a lot of fun!

Day land nav

On this day, we performed our daytime land navigation test. This one was a little more complex than the night practice. They also opened up the course so we had a larger area to cover. It was still a great time, albeit it was a bit hotter and sweatier than the night course.

Role 1, 2, 3

Roles refer to the levels of medical care stations between the front lines and the US, with Role 1 being the closest to the action, and Role 3 being the furthest. BOLC had a full version of each of these set up and we had a tour through all of them. It was very impressive. Next week, our final week, we will spend the entire time actually running each of these stations, with "actual" patients (our peers with some sort of injury scenario).

Ruck march/Gas chamber/Night land navigation

All 3 of these were set to be done in a single day. I was mentally prepped for this to be the hardest day of BOLC and I was really excited!

The day started out with the 4 mile ruck march. Much like the 3 mile march of my first day, this was set to a 15 minute/mile pace with all of the same gear as before. It was a bit rough - it was one of the hottest days we have had in the field and the humidity shot up tremendously during the course of the march. This turned out to be too much for some, as more than a dozen people collapsed and 1 even went to the hospital for heat stroke. I have two things I want to say about this. The first being our class did an amazing job of taking care of our wounded. There were ice dunk stations set up and ice blankets to help people cool down. Almost every person was tended to by a fellow classmate - it was incredibly inspiring! My next point is a bit of a rant. This is a bit of an extension of my physical fitness test rant. Much like the physical fitness test, we all knew that this march was coming a long way out. A lot of people did not prepare in advance, physically, nor did they work to maintain themselves in the short term, i.e., they did not drink enough water the night before or the morning of the march. Some people did not even drink water during the march! It would be one thing if we were just thrown into this situation, but the BOLC leadership told us again and again to drink water before, during and after the event. Some people thought they knew better.

The next part of this day of fun was the gas chamber. This is kind of like a rite of passage for the Army. This point of this exercise is to learn to trust your equipment. We went into the gas chamber in small groups and performed various exercises to show that our promasks (gas masks) would hold up in the event of physical activity during a chemical attack. So here is what I have to say about tear gas - it sucks! Within 5 seconds of entering the chamber, despite the fact I was wearing a mask, the exposed skin on my neck was immediately on fire. It felt like I had the worst sunburn of my life and then someone was slapping me on the neck. After the instructor gave their talk, we had to take off the masks for several seconds before being allowed to exit the chamber. Some people smarter than myself held their breath, but I figured I would go for the full experience. Boy, was that something. It felt like inhaling fire. Aside from that, the skin on my face was burning and my eyes teared so much that I couldn't see (I now fully appreciate the name of this gas). Within 5 minutes of being outside, all of the sensations wore off. That was definitely an experience I will not soon forget.

Thirdly, we were set to go out and complete our night land navigation test. However, at one point during the day, our commanding officer called everyone together and said that because everyone did well on the night land navigation practice and given the events of that morning, the night test was cancelled. A lot of people were excited. I suppose I was, too, but I had been looking forward to another night on the course.

AWT Testing

Friday was essentially our final exam day - Army Warrior Tasks (AWT) testing. We had testing on M9 and M16 clearing, disassembly/reassembly and functions check, how to assemble and operate a field radio, and how to order a MEDEVAC request. Given that the land navigation the night before had been cancelled, we were able to get plenty of sleep and it was a pretty relaxed day!

7/19/2016 - 7/20/2016

Going into my final week of field training and of BOLC, the first three days consisted of Role 1, 2, 3 exercises. Not to spoil the fun, this consisted of plenty of gunfire with blanks, gas attacks, active shooter attacks and mortar strikes. It was a lot of fun, work, and a good amount of the time, both! In terms of scheduling, we had a lot of free time this past week, which was much needed. We are all looking forward to going home soon.

7/21/2016

Today's agenda had two items: D+C competition, and clean-up of the entire camp area. The latter task is self-explanatory. The former stands for Drill and Ceremony. This is the impressive looking procedure in which soldiers march to various calls in-step. Since our first week of BOLC, we have been practicing D+C and today started off with a competition between all of our platoons. It was cool to see how far a lot of the groups had come from the beginning. Today was also our last day in the field! We are back in the hotel rooms to pack and to clean our gear to prepare to turn it in tomorrow before our graduation ceremony.

7/22/2016

It is finally here! The last day of BOLC. The morning started off returning all of our gear that was lent to us, completing the end-of-course survey, and graduating! We had a nice ceremony and everyone went their separate ways. It was a bit sad leaving my first battle buddies, but it is a small Army, so they say - I am sure our paths will cross again.