

Combat controllers are sometimes described as . . .



The Quick-Action Force

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Graduates of the Combat Control School at Little Rock AFB, Ark., earn scarlet berets. Their training includes live firing on the "pop-up" target range.

The job isn't for everyone, and it's not meant to be. It's packed with risks, and heavy demands, but it also offers numerous rewards—overseas travel, extra pay, and getting into the action as an instrument of the United States' foreign policy.

The right to wear the scarlet beret of an Air Force combat controller doesn't come easy. It takes 34 weeks of intensive training designed to tax brain and muscle to the fullest.

Combat controllers—all men, the career field is not open to women—undergo 20 weeks of radio maintenance or air traffic control school, three weeks of jump school, eight grueling weeks at the Combat Control School at Little Rock AFB, Ark., and finally attend water and basic survival courses. At any step along the way, one small slip can wash them out of the program.

Combat controllers are all volunteers. During wartime, controllers are used to directly support combat operations. In peacetime, they train to support tactical airpower, especially airlift support required during national and international disasters.

When an earthquake hit Nicaragua and Guatemala a few years ago, the first Americans on the scene were combat controllers, who provided approach and landing assistance to the first Air Force relief planes arriving with disaster relief materials.

Combat controllers also deployed to Israel during the massive airlift of military aid to United Nations forces stationed there. They also were in Zaire when Air Force C-141 *Starlifters* carried French Foreign Legion peacekeeping forces into that country.

There are 12 combat control teams in the Air Force—10 in the Military Airlift Command, and one each in Tactical Air Command and the United States Air Forces in Europe. Each team has 24 members,

including two officers, and competition to fill the relatively few positions is stiff. Only about 40 percent of the applicants for the career field become combat controllers.

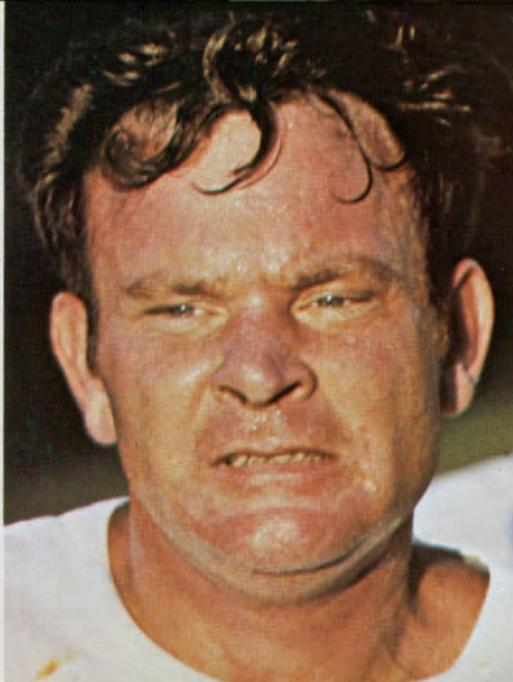
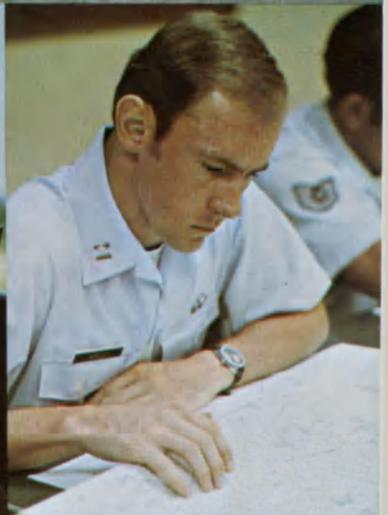
The scarlet beret, received after completing the Little Rock combat controller school, symbolizes the pride, excellence, and esprit de corps gained by members of the elite group. No one gets to wear the beret without a great deal of self-discipline while training. Classes are nonstop, and each day includes inspections and seven hours of academics, followed by two hours of rigorous physical training.

The academic portion seems to be the hardest part of the training, according to most of the successful graduates. It takes a lot of concentration, they say, to learn everything that's presented. Course study includes map reading, aerial photo interpretation, demolition, radio operation and repair, first aid, escape and evasion, use of weapons, and survival.

In a different sense, the physical training is just as tough. For example, one of the many requirements is a 10-mile run, over mountainous terrain, that must be done within 90 minutes while wearing a field uniform and jungle boots.

The school's last 12 days are spent at Camp Robinson, Ark., where students learn to cope under field conditions. There, they sleep in tents made from ponchos, wade through swampy waters, practice parachute insertions and reconnaissance missions over unfamiliar terrain, and learn how to avoid being ambushed.

But when graduation day arrives the airmen are awarded their scarlet berets. It's their ticket to future adventures that will challenge minds and bodies, and test knowledge and skills to successfully complete their mission, wherever and whenever that mission may be.



TOP: Rigorous physical training includes a 10-mile run over mountainous terrain.
CENTER (left to right): A student tries on the combat controller's gear. Sgt. Tim Acadi sights a compass heading. Capt. James F. Aubele plots a course.
LEFT: TSgt. William A. Andrews endures the strain of physical training.



Students learn and practice the techniques necessary to support tactical airpower as combat controllers. Sgt. John D. Holder (below) is graphic proof of the benefits of camouflage.

