

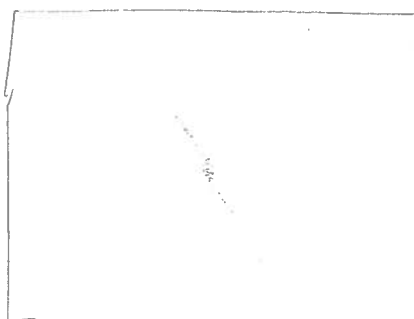
STORY BY STAFF SGT. J. PAUL CROXON • PHOTOS BY STAFF SGT. DESIREE N. PALACIOS

NEVER SAY IT'S IMPOSSIBLE

RETIRED AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATOR COMPETES IN INAUGURAL WARRIOR GAMES

The noise from the cheering crowds and buzz of the starting signal reverberates off the walls of the U. S. Olympic Training Center's pool as swimmers compete in the 50-meter backstroke. For one of them, the cool water during the qualifying round of the first Warrior Games in Colorado Springs, Colo., offers some relief from the permanent pain in his legs caused by a 10-year-old injury.

That he can feel pain in his paralyzed legs should be impossible, but for retired Air Force Staff Sgt. Jason Morgan, the word impossible doesn't hold the same meaning as it does for most people. After all, swimming competitively with legs that provide nothing but ballast might be thought of as impossible.



As the starting signal sounds, Sergeant Morgan and his fellow wounded veterans rush across the pool. Intense training from the previous week has turned the swimmers into water-treading machines.

Flashes from dozens of cameras freeze the practiced movements in time. Right arm up, stroke, left arm up, stroke. The mechanics of good form make the movement look easy. To a spectator, only the wobble of his legs as they are tugged along in the water belies the fact that he is paralyzed.

Paralysis doesn't define this wounded, but not beaten, Airman. Instead, losing the use of his legs taught him to define himself by things that can't be taken away.

"In the Air Force, I was a combat meteorologist," he said. "In the special operations

community, I feel like I based my life on who I was and what I did for the Air Force. When that was taken away I felt like I had nothing left. This wheelchair has been a character-building experience for me."

It was on a mission to South America in 1999 that his character-building lessons began. On the way back from a mission, the vehicle he was riding in rolled down a ravine. Sergeant Morgan was thrown from the vehicle

pulled me up and carried me up the hill to his vehicle. He had a shortwave radio and was able to call the ambulance. The ambulance would be three hours. I was gasping for every breath. Both my lungs were collapsed and full of water. The missionary said, "This guy doesn't have three hours."

Knowing Sergeant Morgan couldn't wait for the ambulance to make the three-hour drive, the missionary decided to meet the ambulance

his life. In addition to his injuries, an infection was growing in his lungs from the stagnant water he'd inhaled.

Sergeant Morgan awoke from the coma six weeks later. His wife and five children were there to greet him. They saw the same person on the outside, but Sergeant Morgan had to redefine who he was on the inside. The reality of his drastically changed life threatened to rob him of his identity. Taking on tough challenges was something he

"THIS EVENT HAS MADE ME FEEL LIKE A PART OF THE AIR FORCE AGAIN."

— Retired Staff Sgt. Jason Morgan

and landed facedown in stagnant water. The vehicle landed on top of him. His back was crushed, his lungs collapsed. Only a chance encounter saved his life.

"Fortunately for me an American missionary was there in Ecuador and, as he drove the road, he noticed the vehicle at the bottom of the ravine. He thought it might be a fresh accident. So, as he was running down there, he just about stumbled over me," he said. "He

halfway. He removed the seats from his van and put Sergeant Morgan and two other injured servicemembers inside as carefully as possible. The missionary arrived at the rendezvous point just as Sergeant Morgan stopped breathing. The medics were able to insert a chest tube in Sergeant Morgan and get him to a hospital.

Within 24 hours, Sergeant Morgan was back in the United States in an induced coma as doctors fought to save

was used to from his special operations career, and it helped carry him through recovery and retirement.

"When I woke up from the coma, the doctor told me that I suffered a spinal cord injury, that I would never walk again," Sergeant Morgan said. "I remember thinking for a split second, 'There's no way.' So, I immediately replied, 'Yes I will.' The doctor was like, 'I'm sorry. You won't. The extent of the damage was severe.' I said, 'You

know what? I will walk again. See, I'm moving my toes right now.' The doctor replied, 'No, you're not moving your toes.' I said, 'I am. It's just too small for you to see it.'"

Sergeant Morgan said that in the first years of recovery, he had to come to grips with the fact that he would never walk again. He learned to accept it, though it took time.

"I was thoroughly convinced that within 10 years I would be cured," he said. "I wrote in a magazine article that in 10 years I would run a marathon. It's been 10 years since I was hurt and I'm obviously not able to run, but I have found ways to compete."

The scars from 11 back surgeries are visible as Sergeant Morgan hauls himself out of the pool. A slight wince is the only indication of the pain from crushed nerves in his back and legs. He looks at the clock. He qualified. It's a good start

for the day.

With little time to change and eat, he makes his way to another building where his Air Force wheelchair basketball teammates await. For him, the team and the Warrior Games make him part of the Air Force again.

"I miss the Air Force a lot," he said as he made his way to the gym. "I was hurt right before 9/11. Being in special operations after that happened, and knowing that all my friends were deploying to Afghanistan and Iraq, I felt it was what I was trained to do and I needed to be there with my buddies, fighting along beside them. I can't tell you how bad I miss it. That's the nice thing about this. It makes me feel part of the team again, part of the family."

During the opening ceremony, Juan M. Garcia III, the assistant Secretary of the Navy for manpower and Reserve affairs, noted that the

Warrior Games were created by the U.S. Olympics Committee and the Department of Defense to demonstrate the indomitable spirit of wounded veterans. More than 200 wounded servicemembers competed in three days of Paralympic-style competition in nine sports including archery, shooting, track and swimming.

For Sergeant Morgan, rejoining the Air Force family through sports combines who he was with who he has become. It is through sports that he found a way to do what many believe is impossible.

In addition to the backstroke and wheelchair basketball events, he competed in the 400 and 1500-meter wheelchair races. Competing in the Warrior Games was another box to check off of his to-do list because he plans to join the U.S. Paralympics team.

Perhaps it's his innate competitiveness or his refusal to admit something is impossible. Sergeant Morgan used the Warrior Games to prove otherwise.

"Out of anything I've done, this has been the greatest thing for me," he said. "One of the hardest things after I got hurt was receiving the letter saying I was permanently retired from the Air Force. I was hoping that through some miraculous chance I would start walking again one day. Obviously it didn't happen. This event has made me feel like a part of the Air Force again."

Sergeant Morgan's wife, Christina, noticed the increased optimism and excitement the Warrior Games ignited in him.

"Jason was not only excited to be part of a team again, but thrilled to be part of his Air Force team," she said. "The Warrior Games gave him more courage than fears and more gains

than losses. He is looking forward to next year."

In February, Sergeant Morgan raced a half-marathon. In November, he's scheduled for a full marathon. With

each new challenge and each success Sergeant Morgan is proving that though things may seem impossible a change in perspective can prove it otherwise. ♡

SOUTHERN DAKOTA STRONG

STORY BY STAFF SGT. J. PAUL CROXON
PHOTOS BY MASTER SGT. JACK BRADEN

The ring announcer steps awkwardly over the ropes of the Las Vegas ring. Wearing a suit, he parades around the blood-covered mat calling out the next pair of fighters. Behind the crowd, wearing blue headgear and pads, her blonde ponytail sticking up like a Roman centurion's helmet plume, Staff Sgt. Rachel Nelson paces while anticipating the next six minutes.

At 115 pounds, Sergeant Nelson doesn't necessarily look like a mixed martial artist in her security forces

uniform. When her shift is done, the beret and weapon are exchanged for grappling gloves and Muay Thai shorts. Scrapes and bruises that decorate her legs, arms and knuckles testify to her training regimen, which often includes sparring with men easily twice her size.

"We're all fighters here," Sergeant Nelson said, referring to the South Dakota gym where she trains with other Airmen. "I'm not afraid to train with dudes. It's a different level of intensity, and if I can hold my own against a 200-pound guy I'll be fine

when I fight a chick in my weight class."

Her tenacity makes her more like one of the guys in a sport dominated by men. This disregard for her gender is evident from the way her trainers treat her in the ring.

"She's got as much fire in her as anyone here," said 1st Lt. Jason Carter, a medical readiness officer who also trains with Sergeant Nelson. "No one takes it easy on her because she's a woman. She can hold her own, and taking it easier on her would probably just [make her more angry]."

None of her training partners want to see her when she's mad. Sergeant Nelson is a lightweight only on the scale.

Fighting is a progressive part of Sergeant Nelson's life. She worked through the ranks of Taekwondo in her teen years, but when it wasn't enough of a challenge, she looked elsewhere, eventually joining the Air Force.

"After graduating high school, I waited tables for a year," Sergeant Nelson said. "I knew I wanted more of a challenge, so I joined the Air Force. I became a cop because I wanted to be in the thick of the fight."

After basic training and technical school Sergeant Nelson eventually moved to Ellsworth Air Force Base, S.D. It was there that she was invited by another security forces Airman to visit the Dynamic Martial Arts gym where a few Airmen trained to fight at both amateur and pro levels. In the ring she's competing for a title.

"Fighting out of the blue corner, from Rapid City, South Dakota, Rachel," the announcer barks into the microphone. He says her name in a rolling voice, holding the last syllable for a second or two before Sergeant Nelson crosses to her corner.

She meets her opponent in the center of the ring and bumps gloves to signal the beginning of the fight. Sergeant Nelson and her opponent each take a step back before unleashing a violent volley.

I BECAME A COP BECAUSE I WANTED TO BE IN THE THICK OF THE FIGHT.

— Staff Sgt. Rachel Nelson

Sergeant Nelson's quick right jab and right front kick combination land, but her opponent lands a kick of her own to Sergeant Nelson's thigh. The next minute follows that pattern: punch, kick, punch, kick. The thwack of blows and the women's abrupt exhalations while throwing punches and kicks punctuate the noise of the crowd.

As if tiring of the steady kicks to her thigh, Sergeant Nelson catches her opponent's leg and with a quick open-palmed blow to the chest drops

her adversary to the mat.

The referee resets the women, and the exchange of blows resumes. With her opponent keeping her distance, Sergeant Nelson delivers kick after kick while receiving only an occasional strike from her adversary. Like a patient predator, Sergeant Nelson looks for another mistake. When her foe ventures too close in an attempt to kick back, Sergeant Nelson sweeps out her supporting leg. Her opponent hits the mat for the second time; the intended roundhouse kick is useless from the flat-on-her-back position.



Before the first of three, two-minute rounds ends, Sergeant Nelson throws her enemy to the mat. Though her opponent lands punches of her own, they only seem to antagonize Sergeant Nelson.

At just 5-foot-4, Sergeant Nelson still looms over her opponent, who resorts to grabbing her and "locking up." Sergeant Nelson sends a knee to her opponent's ribs for the trouble.

The bell rings, signaling the end of round one. Sergeant Nelson returns to her corner but she isn't done and she hasn't lost her energy.

Working in a career field that deploys often, MMA offers many advantages and creates its own set of difficulties. Perhaps the biggest benefit is the level of physical fitness the training provides.

"I've never been in such good shape," Sergeant Nelson said. "Nothing compares to grappling in terms of fitness. When you get done grappling with a dude that outweighs you by 100 pounds you're totally exhausted. Running during unit PT is nothing now since I've been training."

The biggest difficulty Sergeant Nelson said she faces is finding the time to fight and train while balancing her duties as a security forces NCO. She says fights, like the recent one in Las Vegas, are usually paid out-of-pocket and she is on leave status for them. Even local fights can prove difficult if they fall during deployment or scheduled training.

"It's more likely that a fight comes up and I have three weeks' notice," she said. "If we're training or getting ready to deploy I can't fight. The Air Force comes first, but it's frustrating when it happens."

This tournament is a good example of the schedule for amateur fighters. Sergeant Nelson found out she

was selected to compete in the Tuff Girls competition. About 25 female fighters were selected a few weeks before the fight. While the chance to compete is all that was needed to get Sergeant Nelson on a plane to Las Vegas, this fight has added complications for a warrior Airman.

"If I win this fight it improves my amateur record, but after the tournament a few fighters will be selected to train in Thailand with Muay Thai masters," she said.

If selected, Sergeant Nelson would spend about 45 days training in Thailand and culminating in a fight against a Thai champion. The entire journey will be recorded as part of a reality television show.

It's an opportunity Sergeant Nelson has been looking forward to for a long time but it isn't the top thing on her mind. Her training regimen is a little more intense since she found out she has an upcoming deployment.

"It looks like the deployment won't fall on the same dates as Tuff Girls but if it does I know the decision I'll make," she said. "I'm an Air Force cop first and the reason I joined security forces is to deploy. It's an easy choice to make."

The bell sounds and round two starts out with both women rushing to the middle of the ring. Sergeant Nelson's right jab stops her foe in her tracks. Kicking her opponent around like a practice dummy, she

lands kick after kick to the midsection and head, taking only a few punches during the exchange.

At minute two of the second round Sergeant Nelson unleashes a right jab, left cross, kick combination. Her coach yells out instructions to string combinations together. Conditioning is starting to play its part. After three minutes, both fighters are visibly winded, breathing with open mouths and showing less aggression. They lock up more, but Rachel's MMA skills come into play and she strikes her opponent's legs and abdomen.

"I'VE NEVER BEEN IN SUCH GOOD SHAPE, NOTHING COMPARES TO GRAPPLING IN TERMS OF FITNESS"

— Staff Sgt. Rachel Nelson

The bell rings and both fighters exchange fist bumps before returning to their corners to await the judges' decision. Sergeant Nelson's corner man, Master Sgt. Sean Concepcion, a Reservist aerial porter, tells her what she did right and what she did wrong. Meanwhile, the crowd is silent with anticipation. She takes it in. Sergeant Nelson appears to be the picture of martial calm though new bruises are beginning to show among her already impressive collection.

Advancing an Air Force career and working her way up the ranks as an amateur MMA fighter is difficult, to say the least. Her fellow Airmen fighters recognize it's her drive to be the best that keeps her at the top.

"She's incredibly focused to be able to do this," Lieutenant Carter said. "Working through the amateur ranks of MMA is like trying to go pro in basketball or another major sport. There's so much competition. To be the best you have to put in long hours at the gym. When she's not doing the cop thing she's in the gym. She's going to be one of the best."

The boisterous ring announcer makes his way back to the ring to give his announcement. "In a unanimous decision, fighting out of the blue corner, Rachel...Nelson," he echoes.

In a calm manner she bows, says a few words of thanks to God in the offered microphone and leaves the ring silently as abruptly as she filled it with violence. ✎

STORY BY STAFF SGT. J. PAUL CROXON ♦ PHOTOS BY LANCE CHEUNG

TAKING THE PUNCH

If Airman magazine were a reality TV show, the view behind the set would show the Airman team brainstorming ideas for the next social media post. Things always sound better in the planning stages of these unofficial sessions. Ideas like “let’s eat whale blubber” or “let’s get zapped by the laser” sound like legitimate crowd pleasers. Then there’s the time I thought it would be funny to film me getting punched by a Mixed Martial Arts fighter. Things don’t always turn out the way we expect, because even female MMA fighters don’t hit like girls.

Our team was sent to cover Airmen training to be MMA fighters in Rapid City, S.D. We covered two fighters, Staff Sgt. Rachel Nelson and 1st Lt. Jason Carter. We visited their dojo to see them train and that’s when we got the idea for one of us to get beat up. It was my turn to be on the Web.

I’m not a fighter. I don’t know how to make another man submit with a rear naked chokehold. I do know that when you have the choice of taking a punch from a 115-pound woman or a 215-pound man, you do the math and take the punch from the woman. I was wrong.

My interviews with the fighters should have tipped me off. When I asked Sergeant Nelson why she wanted to be a

fighter and why she chose to be a cop, she said she just wanted to hurt people. What I thought was bravado was actually her honest answer. This woman has a fighter inside that wanted to get into the ring and make people hurt.

Lieutenant Carter, on the other hand, was a little different. He still wanted to win and he trains hard for it. But for him, MMA is a challenge, a way of testing his strength, a hobby. He doesn’t want to go pro whereas Sergeant Nelson dreams about it.

At the dojo, during the planning phase of “operation get punched in the head,” I quickly eliminated the huge dude in favor of the petite woman. Mistake number one.

The plan was for me to do an intro for the camera and then take a hit. I explained it to Sergeant Nelson before we started.

“When we’re on assignment, we try to find ways of plugging the story for social media,” I said.

“OK.”

“So, for this one, I’m going to need you to punch me in the face,” I said. Mistake number two.

“Oh, heck yeah,” she said with a little too much enthusiasm.

“This is just for the video,” I said. “You don’t have to hit me as hard as you can. Just enough to look real.”

“Whatever,” was the reply.

How do I explain what it was like to get hit by Sergeant Nelson? The strike was a lot like the fighter: small, compact, the equivalent of replacing a tennis racket with a hammer. And it hurt. It hurt a lot. It made the edges of my vision go dark and come back in time to catch a punch in the stomach. I didn’t know MMA fighters train to do combinations almost constantly. Mistake number three.

Now, it’s been said that I took the punch poorly because my momma wasn’t hard enough on me or because I wrote poetry in high school. The truth is, Sergeant Nelson is a well-trained MMA fighter and I’m a writer. I never had a chance.

That’s the best part about writing for Airman magazine. I get to meet Airmen who are doing so much more in and out of uniform. They’re fighters, artists or students studying to be doctors. If there’s one thing I’ve learned during my time at the magazine, it’s that Airmen throughout the total force have amazing stories to tell.

Another thing I’ve learned is not to take a punch from an MMA fighter who clearly doesn’t know the meaning of taking it easy.





Puerto Rico ANG operationally ready

by Staff Sgt. J. Paul Croxon
Defense Media Activity-San Antonio

1/18/2010 - **SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AFNS)** – Whether providence or coincidence, the Airmen in the Puerto Rico Air National Guard are proving their readiness and relevance in support of Operation Unified Response while preparing for a major readiness inspection.

For the past year, Airmen from the 156th Airlift Wing have been training for an operational readiness inspection, but with little more than a week before their first operational readiness exercise the Haitian earthquake changed the wing's priorities.

"The wing's number one priority for the past year has been to prepare for the ORE," said Maj. Kenneth Lozano, 156th AW executive support officer. "The moment any real-world event or contingency operation happens, the (Airmen of the) 156th AW raise their hand to support."

According to Major Lozano, not only did the wing stand united to support operations in Haiti but the wing commander, Col. Carlos Quiñones, called the Air National Guard Readiness Center, the governor and his superiors to volunteer to support Haitian relief operations.

Volunteering to support operations and demonstrate the capabilities of the Puerto Rico ANG has been Colonel Quiñones' vision and he has developed a robust plan that puts Puerto Rico at the hub for United States Southern Command operations. He was scheduled to brief his vision to Lt. Gen. Harry M. Wyatt, director of the Air National Guard, long before the earthquake put the 156th AW on center stage as one of the first units in and flying non-stop missions with only a handful of aircraft.

The earthquake in Haiti has given the colonel an impressive set of facts to show how ready the unit really is. According to Senior Airman Andrew Layton, a command post controller for the 35th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron, a USSOUTHCOM coronet unit the 156th AW is tasked to support, Airmen from the wing have flown more than 50 sorties, unloaded more than 117 tons of cargo, carried more than 294 passengers and evacuated more than 70 U.S. citizens.

The desire to support operation continues for the wing but with an ORE scheduled to start in only a few days, the unit will only be able to execute one. As Colonel Quiñones asks his chain of command to postpone the exercise so the wing can continue to support its Caribbean neighbor, wing Airmen continue to prepare for the ORE while supporting relief efforts.

"It's ironic that at the same time we're preparing to deploy to Volk Field (Wisc), the wing is given the chance to prove its readiness in the real world and give relief to those suffering from the earthquake," Major Lozano said.



Airmen from the Puerto Rico Air National Guard's 156th Airlift Wing load one of the unit's C-130E Hercules aircraft with search and rescue equipment that was bound for Haiti along with a team of Puerto Rican search and rescue workers Jan. 16 at Munoz Air National Guard Base, P.R. In the first week after the earthquake devastated the island nation of Haiti, the 156 AW transported more than 117 tons of cargo and 294 passengers and evacuated 70 United States citizens. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. J. Paul Croxon)



Footsteps of the Ghostwalkers

STORY BY STAFF SGT. J. PAUL CROXON ✪ PHOTOS BY STAFF SGT. BENNIE J. DAVIS III

Huddled together against a cinder-block building, a stack of 12 Airmen awaits the command to enter. The Airman on point looks around the corner, attempting to determine what the next few minutes hold for those behind her. The stack presses into itself, telling the Airmen by touch that their "six" is protected. Tensing like a viper they strike, funneling into the building, into the chaos that is the modern asymmetrical battlefield. Like ghosts, the Airmen systematically check each room without the need for commands. Minutes later, after the smoke disperses and the calls of "clear" ring out, the stack funnels out, 12 Airmen plus one.

This scenario was tailor-made from start to finish to hone the skills of Airmen newly assigned to the 824th Security Forces Squadron. Known as the Ghostwalkers, they are one of three operational squadrons that make up the 820th Security Forces Group. The group is unique among the Air Force security forces community in that it has no law enforcement mission, allowing its Airmen to train constantly for a very specific mission, two actually.

The unit's primary mission is to provide the Air Force with its only worldwide deployable, first-in, self-sustaining, force-protection capability. They can go anywhere, take over a newly captured airfield and secure it so Air Force support units can prepare it for aircraft bed-down. The second mission is to provide continuous support of current operations and it keeps at least one squadron deployed at all times. This second mission is known as the

steady-state mission and, according to the group's commander, Col. Don Derry, it is manned entirely by the 820th SFG.

"We have a specific mission to go someplace and do something," he said. "With three operational squadrons, we relieve each other every six months." He added that the most recent steady-state mission was at Camp Buca, Iraq, where group members provided installation security and undertook outside-the-wire combat operations over the past three years.

Though it provides predictable timelines for deployment and involves a squadron-sized mobilization, the steady-state mission is not the reason the 820th SFG stood up in 1997.

"We were formed for the first-in capability," Colonel Derry said. "For instance, the 823rd SFS is the next squadron that is scheduled to deploy for a steady-state mission in June. But from now until June they are the on-call squadron. If something happens anywhere in the world, those folks, within 24 hours, will have wheels in the wells, traveling to do that particular mission and that mission takes precedence over the steady-state mission."

The term, wheels in the wells, refers to the point when an aircraft is airborne and hints at the training these Airmen undergo. Some unit members train at the Army's jump school at Fort Benning Ga. Though the entire unit is trained in fire-team tactics, numerous different weapons and other special skills, many are qualified in skills that make them more like Air Force infantry than police.

Airmen from the 820th SFG are trained at several Army schools like Airborne School, Pathfinder, Special Reaction Team, the Close Precision Engagement Course, Ranger, Air Assault, Raven, an Army Sniper course and others. This advanced training gives them the ability to go in after the initial forces take over an airfield and secure it before any other Air Force units touch down.

According to Colonel Derry, the unit is not only able to secure and hold ground around the installation, they also can undertake limited offensive operations outside the wire, including the ability to clear an urban site. This first-in capability is what the Ghostwalkers train for at Moody. Though the training seems different in its scope and execution, the real difference between this training and that of other security forces units is that the Ghostwalkers know they will be deploying within a year and that they will be deploying with each other.

"When I went on my first deployment in 2004, I went to a regional training center with 36 other guys, four of them I worked with," said Staff Sgt. Eric Hammons, a squad leader. "Of those four, two were from a different flight. Here I have 13 guys under me and every single day I work with the same 13 guys. As we clear the building, we're only going to get better. They're going to know that when I go into a room I'm going to the right. And, they know that since I'm going right they go left."

Sergeant Hammons and his 13 Ghostwalkers have been together for only a few months. Many of his Airmen arrived from technical school in August. For them, Sergeant Hammons is more than an NCO. He's a leader and mentor who teaches them combat from first-hand experience.

"In tech school we learned the basics: law enforcement and security," said Airman 1st Class Perla Rendon, who possesses a friendly demeanor but is all business when she's clearing a building or ordering a suspect to drop his weapon. "Here we're able to focus on one aspect and really hone our skills and we learn from guys who have been there. It makes a huge difference when it's first-hand experience."

Her fellow Airmen echoed her opinion. During an exercise in clearing a building, a fire team of four Airmen needed to extract a wounded Airman. Taking instruction from Sergeant Hammons, they had to decide on the best course of action for this situation. Drills like this are a part of daily life and the Airmen are

encouraged to ask questions, come up with their own scenarios and work through them. Most of the time those scenarios are things the senior cops have experienced already.

"It's like operational Air Force every day," said Airman 1st Class Melissa Gonzalez, who graduated from technical school earlier this year. "In tech school we learn the basics, but here everyone thinks combat. I feel like I'm part of a big family."

Though the Ghostwalkers are able to concentrate on battlefield tactics, they must set time aside to retain proficiency on Air Force core competencies and professional military education. In this respect the Ghostwalkers are unique in the career field.

"I talk to my friends from tech school all the time," said Airman Rendon. "They'll tell me they're about to work the night shift somewhere or a weekend shift. Our schedule is pretty much set at Monday through Friday."

The set schedule gives the Airmen time to complete some of

their training but they never get the hands-on practice with the non-combat aspects of the career field.

"Since we don't have a law enforcement mission there is potential for us to be at a disadvantage testing against our peers," said Sergeant Hammons. "We make an effort to provide as much training on those aspects of the job as possible since most of the Airmen in the unit will leave one day and could very well have a law enforcement job."

Though law enforcement is in the future for the Ghostwalkers, the present is their focus. Sergeant Hammons drills his Airmen daily, going over tactics and procedures, answering questions about his past deployments and what they can expect on their upcoming deployments. Until that day comes, many of them will go to Airborne school, train with the Army and hone their skills. After all, it's those skills that make them something different than most security forces, something special; a Ghostwalker. 