



Photograph by Darrin Zammit Lupi

Do you have what it takes to be a soldier?

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Ask any soldier to identify the most demanding and yet rewarding phase of his career and eight times out of ten the immediate straight answer will be basic training!

Completing basic training is a challenging experience for any determined recruit. Indeed only one out of every six applicants actually makes it to attestation. Aspiring recruits have to pass written examinations, complete physical fitness tests, meet stringent medical standards as well as convince an interviewing board that he or she has what it takes to be a soldier. Soldiering today is fast becoming a job for specialists that requires not only muscle but also brains.

Basic training lasts 18 weeks. It is run by an experienced cadre of instructors trained at such fine academies as those run by the United States Marine Corps or the United States Army. Each group of recruits is assigned a drill sergeant who is a cut above the rest having successfully completed a Drill Instructors' Course at Purbright in the United Kingdom.

The first few weeks are a make or break for any recruit. Forgetting about home may not be easy for any 18 year old who is expected to spend two weeks living in barracks with only the most basic of amenities, sharing rooms with total strangers. Unaccustomed to being worked round the clock, being allowed only a few hours of daily sleep, doubts start entering any recruit's mind during this period.

The instructors pay close attention to how the recruits adapt themselves to this new environment and how they react under pressure. Instructors will shout at recruits, assign them tasks that have to be completed in seemingly impossible deadlines, inspect them many times over a 24 hour period and yes, teach them basic soldiering skills.

A lot of emphasis will be placed on discipline, uniformity and teamwork. This will be worked on during the drill sessions that are held daily on the parade ground. These two weeks give the instructors a good indication of who is really up for the job. It also serves as a time for reflection for the recruits. For the weaker ones, this might not be what they were expecting and they voluntarily decide to hang up their boots.

Once this hurdle is overcome, the real soldier's training takes full swing. Soldiers will be taught to safely handle weapons. Live fire training days are the climax of such training. Any weapons instructor derives great satisfaction from the pride displayed by a recruit when he or she hits the target. Healthy competition quickly develops between the recruits as they all try to achieve the highest number of hits on target.

A recruit's typical day (if such a day exists) starts at 7 a.m. The first hour or so is devoted to physical training. Physical fitness is of

paramount importance to all soldiers. It gives them the confidence and ability to go that extra mile even when physically and mentally tired. The stronger recruits are encouraged to assist the weaker ones during such sessions under the watchful eye of the instructors who start identifying the natural leaders.

Other soldiering skills that are acquired during recruitment include map reading and orienteering, first aid, basic infantry skills, communications and radio messaging and nuclear biological and chemical warfare drills. Sport is also an integral part of any recruit's training syllabus.

As the 18 weeks of basic training draw to a close, recruits are counselled by their supervising officers and made aware of the vacancies available in the force. Those who successfully complete basic training can look ahead to being posted to different units where they learn advanced soldiering skills.

As the recruits march by in slow and quick march at their passing out parade, digging their heels proudly in front of the Prime Minister, senior army officers, family and friends, they realise that their dream has finally come true! They have become soldiers in the Armed Forces of Malta. ●

For further information visit www.afm.gov.mt or call the Recruitment Office on 2182 4212/4.