

Frequently Asked Questions about Commissioned Officer Training

Disclaimer: This advice is based on one experience from US Air Force Commissioned Officer Training in the Summer of 2008. Your experience may vary. For the most up to date information, see: <http://www.au.af.mil/au/holmcenter/OTS/COT-RCOT/index.asp>

This guide was written by an Air Force medical HPSP student, who attended COT between the first and second years of medical school. I had no prior military experience before this training.

What is COT? US Air Force Commissioned Officer Training (COT) is military basic training for medical students / doctors, nurses, dentists, chaplains, lawyers, and veterinarians, all of whom are commissioned officers. Training is split between physical fitness, leadership development, and academic course work. The training program is 5 weeks in length, although you will get paid for 45 days. The excess time on orders will be spent at home or school, and you're not allowed to leave the country during that time. Additionally, you usually do not have required activities on weekends, meaning that it is usually a 23 training day experience.

How do I arrange my training? You can find most of the information on the AFIT web site (www.afit.edu/cip) but I've excerpted some of the information here for reference. AFIT schedules COT for medical students, either before first year, or between first and second year. AFPC will schedule COT for FAP students and other professions, immediately before your transition to active duty. If you are a medical student, AFIT will contact you to select your preferred dates of COT attendance. They will process your orders and then post them to the AF Reserve Order system (<https://arowsr.afrc.af.mil/arows-r/>), where you can access them and print them out (take at least 7 copies with you to COT). Once you have your orders, if you are flying, you can call **Omega Travel** at 1-800-982-8458 or 1-303-676-5850. Omega will schedule the appropriate flight for you. Do not schedule your own flight, as you will not be reimbursed.

Should I get an ID before I go? You will not need a military ID before attending COT, and if you are not transitioning to active duty soon you will likely not get one at COT (not enough machines/time). If you would like, you can get an IRR ID card at your local military ID office (see RAPIDS site: <http://www.dmdc.osd.mil/rsl>). Take a copy of your appointment orders (ARPC Form 92), your birth certificate, social security card, and a photo ID to the ID station. Be sure to contact them in advance to verify their hours of operation.

What are the first days like? You will arrive at Maxwell AFB, in Montgomery, AL, in the early afternoon (1200-1600) of your report date, by car or plane. If you fly, most of your flight will probably also be going to Maxwell, so if you call the base they can send a bus to pick you all up. Once you arrive on base, you will begin to realize that you're now in the military. The airmen in charge will be yelling and "correcting" you and your classmates for the many things that you will undoubtedly do wrong. Don't take it too personally. Your first two days will

consist of in-processing, where you will fill out many forms, wait in lines, get your uniforms, give blood, and do a urine drug test. You will also find out who is in your flight (8-10 person groups) during this time; you will get to know these colleagues well, as you will be spending most of your waking moments with them for the next five weeks. Make sure you're also drinking plenty of water during this time, as you can very easily get dehydrated if you're not used to the Southern weather.

What kind of physical activity is required? Trainees are in the military now, so you are expected to be in shape. By the end of your training program, you are expected to meet the AF training guidelines (see OTS website). Over the course of your time at COT, you will participate in PT most weekdays, which usually consists of running, and doing pushups and sit ups. There are usually one or two 5K races that you will also run, and some "fun runs" on the weekends. PT starts early, usually before 5AM, but it's nice to be done with the exercise before it gets too hot. In any event, you will want to start training before you get down there, and realize that starting to run one week before you leave doesn't really count.

How's the food? The food is not too bad- typical cafeteria fare. You get three hot meals every day (0700, 1200, and 1700) at the dining hall, and you are required to report to each meal. However, as you advance in the course, weekend meals become optional. A word of warning- learn how to eat quickly, as you sometimes only have 10 minutes to eat lunch before you are expected back in class. You may also want to bring a big box of granola bars, as you can eat them before PT in the morning, or just as a late night snack. You can keep a small amount of non-perishable food in your room in a Tupperware (to prevent bugs), so you should definitely bring some snacks along.

Where will I live? You will be living in a room larger than a typical college dorm, with one other student. The rooms have a bed, desk, dresser, and closet for each student, and there is a bathroom with shower attached to each room. And yes, they do have air conditioning. There's also housekeeping service five days a week, which will clean your room and make your beds.

What are the courses like? The academic courses are split between large auditorium lectures and small (8-10 person) group experiences. If you've graduated from college, these courses should not be too hard for you. There is a moderate volume of material, but all of the test questions come directly from the syllabi learning objectives (termed SOBs), so you can figure out what to focus on. I think you need an 80% average on two exams to pass, and you can take a cumulative final if you need to pull up your final score.

What's with the Operating Instructions? That large, vague document you see online is the Operating Instructions (OIs) for the course. You likely will not understand them before you get down to COT, but it doesn't hurt to read them once before you leave. You will at least want to

learn the reporting instructions before you arrive, as these will come in handy. Either way, you'll receive a pocket sized copy within your first week, and will likely be tested on them by the end of that week.

What does class status mean? Your class status, as described in the OIs, dictate what your class is allowed to do while in training. You will start as Fourth class, which means you can not leave the OTS campus, even to go to other parts of Maxwell AFB. You will also not be allowed to talk at any meals while in fourth class. As you advance in class, you get more privileges. Third class students can talk at dinner, and move around the base on weekends, while second class students can talk at all meals and go off base on weekends. Expect to advance to third class around the second or third week, and second class a week after that. Some COT classes never get to first class status, but if you do it likely will not be until the last week.

Am I allowed to communicate with my friends/family? There are no restrictions on cell phone use during your off time, so if it doesn't bother your room mate, you could be up on the phone as late as you want. Mail will begin arriving the second week (check the OTS site for address info). Computer access is a little more confusing, however. You can use the issued laptops to get online in your room, but many sites (including most commercial email services) are blocked. You can access most school webmail sites, as well as your AF.edu account, so those are options to consider. Do NOT connect your personal laptop to your room outlet, however, as it will lock it down and get you in trouble. You can use your personal laptops at the library, however, which you can access on the weekends once you reach third class status. As an aside, if you can get internet on your cell phone, that may be a good option to stay connected to the world for the month you're at COT.

Should I buy uniforms before I go? All COT classes now wear the new Airman Battle Uniform (ABU) as well as the Service Dress (with coat) during their time at COT. Any class not held during the summer is also required to buy a mess dress (similar to a tuxedo). The summer classes are too large, and thus do not wear that uniform, although all officers are supposed to have a mess dress as part of their ensemble while on active duty. If you can get the chance, buying your uniforms before you go will save you a good amount of time on your first day there. There is a uniform checklist at the end of the welcome package (available on the OTS website) for your reference. Most students will just get the uniform on their first day, however, and you will not be out of the loop if you don't have your uniforms ahead of time.

What is the "Leadership Training" portion like? There are several outdoor exercises that will get you prepared to lead others, now that you are an officer in our nation's armed forces. You will learn how to low crawl, wall climb, and rappel, among other things. You will also take part in a high ropes confidence course. These are the fun parts of training, and you will likely enjoy these "boot camp" type activities. There is also the Leadership Reaction Course (LRC) which

will test your ability to plan, organize, and lead your flight through a physical challenge. There are many different stations, and each student will have the opportunity to lead the flight at least once. You are graded/critiqued on your performance here, although I'm not sure how it plays into your final "grade" in the course.

What's an AEF? AEF, or Air Expeditionary Force, is designed as a simulated deployment. You will be shuttled from the OTS campus to a camp site for two days. While there, the students live in tents (Korean War era) and work through a massive casualty hospital exercise. The tents do have A/C, although it's not great during the summer. However, there is a modern shower/bathroom facility, so don't worry about having to use a portable toilet. Food during this time consists of MREs (Meals Ready to Eat) which are standard issue for deploying troops. They consist of an entrée, sides, desert, and drink. All you do is add water, and you can even heat the entrée. The food is a little bland, but high calorie and very filling.

How much money do I need? Many students were not prepared for the amount of cash that was required during our time at training. First off, you need to pay for every meal in the mess hall (around \$2/meal based on what you eat) with cash. On top of that, there are many little things, like dining out, flight dinners, pictures, uniform alterations, and other odds and ends that quickly add up. I would estimate that \$400 would be enough, as you can pay for your uniforms and other supplies with a credit card. If you don't have cash on you, there is an ATM at the shop on base, but you will likely pay bank fees to get money from there, and you also will not be able to get to the shop until a couple of days after arrival.

Random thoughts:

1. Although the uniform checklist says you only need 2 PT shirts, buy 3 so you have less laundry to do (you wear your PT uniform to exercise and to wear after the duty day is over).
2. For people who work out often, the mandatory PT is likely not enough. There is a nice gym on the OTS campus you can use during your down time, however.
3. Laundry is free, which is nice, but there are not nearly enough machines for everyone to do laundry all the time.
4. There are televisions in each lounge, although I don't know the class status required to use them. Most students never watched TV.
5. Regarding sleep, I was able to get around 6 hours by sleeping 2200-0400 most days. Some students, however, did work up until 0000, and thus didn't get more than 4 hours some nights.
6. Enjoy Montgomery, as you may not get there again. There are many interesting museums, especially regarding the civil rights movement. The base golf course is also pretty good, and you can play for a cheap rate. Lastly, there is a pool on base, and a bar at the golf course where you could also go for some relaxation.

7. The first week is definitely the worst. Your commanders will push you mentally, physically, and emotionally, and some people will break down during that time. After that week, things improve dramatically, and you might even enjoy what you're learning.
8. Good luck and welcome to the Blue!