

The profession of arms

by Laura Pellegrino
Sunburst staff writer

Without proper training, a person holding a loaded gun is a danger more than a protective force. That's why every year the 49th Security Forces Squadron Combat Arms Training Section teaches more than 3,700 Team Holloman members how to use weapons ranging from M-16s to rocket launchers.

"If Air Force members get deployed, they need to be able to utilize their weapons," said Staff Sgt. Earl Mills, 49th SFS Combat Arms Training instructor. "We train them to operate and maintain weapons so they can use them effectively."

Every day, the combat arms training team teaches a six to eight-hour class covering several aspects of weapon use.

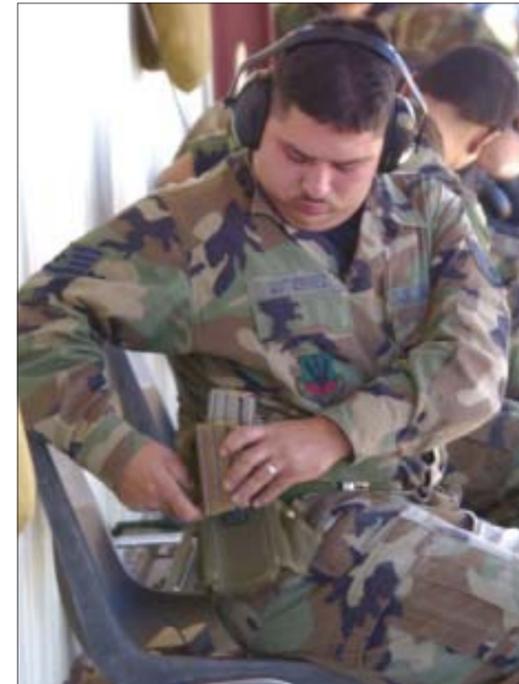
"The day starts with weapons safety," said Staff Sgt. Brian Gates, 49th SFS Combat Arms assistant NCOIC. "It's important to maintain safety on the firing line and in class. But it's also important to maintain safety in real world situations."

Instructors continue to emphasize safety by showing students how to operate their weapons properly and how to clear, load, reload and disassemble them.

Once the basics are covered, instructors show students what to do if a weapon malfunctions or if they are using their weapon in extremely hot or cold climates.

When temperatures drop below minus 10 degrees Fahrenheit, a weapon's normal lubricating oil will freeze, Gates said. If a weapon, heated from use, is dropped in the snow, it will expand and contract, causing condensation, corrosion and possible malfunctions. Students are shown how to handle their weapons anywhere – whether they're in the middle of the desert or on top of a snow-capped mountain.

After learning to use the weapons in the classroom, students are ready to move to the firing line for live-



Staff Sgt. Wayne Gutierrez stores an extra cartridge of ammo in his belt.

fire practice. There they learn different firing positions and engage different sized targets, simulating distances up to 300 meters.

The instructors also use a simulator to assist local law enforcement. The simulator helps students learn marksmanship fundamentals and presents them with real world scenarios.

Along with training students, the six combat arms members also provide maintenance and inspections for the base's 3,500 small arms.

"We make sure each weapon system is ready to go for mobility purposes," Gates said. "Anytime a unit deploys with weapons, we must do a pre-embarkation inspection, sometimes at a moment's notice. We regularly inspect stored weapons annually and in-use weapons semi-annually."

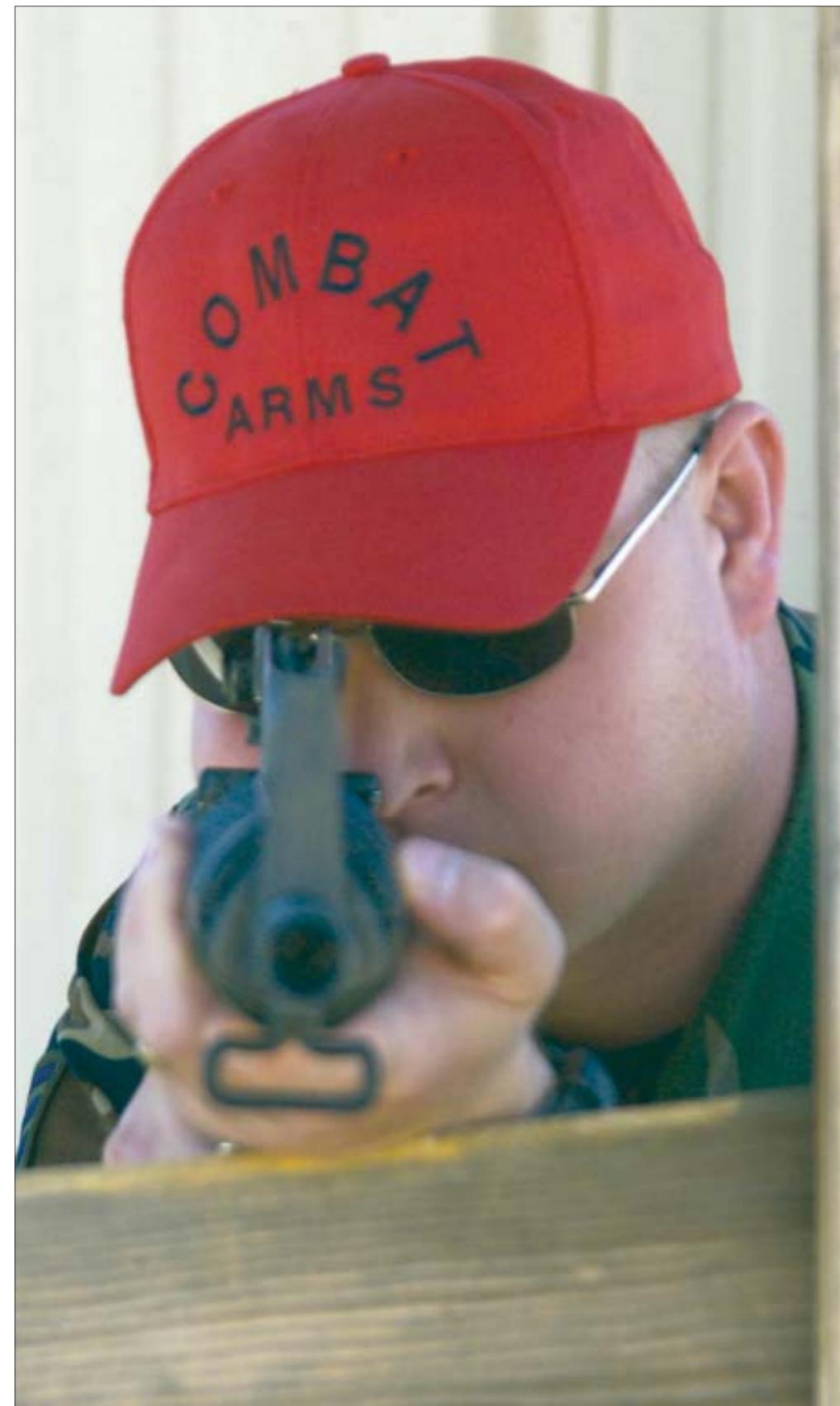
To become a member of the combat arms team, security forces troops must earn their five level and then complete nine weeks of technical school. They must be qualified on each weapons system and course of fire they teach, and continue on the job training as weapons systems evolve.

According to Gates, trust is important among the combat arms training instructors.

"We have to be close and trust each other because what we're doing could be dangerous," he said. "We're training people who may have never held a weapon before."

After the training day is through, a new group of students are better prepared to protect themselves in a deployed environment," Mills said.

"They come out of training prepared to protect personnel and resources that are essential to the mission of the United States Air Force," he said.



Staff Sgt. Brian Gates, assistant NCOIC of CATM, demonstrates the correct way to fire an M-16. The combat arms training team trains students to use more than 10 types of weapons.

Photos by Laura Pellegrino



Staff Sgt. Tom Marcum, combat arms instructor, checks over a student's target for accuracy.



Staff Sgt. Brandon Adkins, combat arms instructor, uses an M-16 to demonstrate the kneeling position during a class.



Chief Master Sgt. Jon Saiers practices disassembling and cleaning his M-16.