



ATF News

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For New Agent Training, All Roads Lead to FLETC

So you want to be an agent? You've passed the Treasury Enforcement Agent exam, the panel interview, a background investigation, a drug screening, a polygraph and the medical exam.

Now, you've got to get trained. And to do that, you've got to go through basic training for special agents at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center or FLETC (pronounced FLET-see).

Law enforcement personnel have been training at FLETC in Glynco, Ga., since the mid-1970s, with the center serving as a training facility for more than 80 federal agencies, including state, local and international law enforcement.

The new agent training, according to Dave Harper, then-chief, ATF National Academy, is still basically the same program consisting of two components. "We go through criminal investigator training, which has evolved into a 12-week course, followed by Special Agent Basic Training (SABT), which is a special agent specific 14-week course."

Harper said they have always offered the follow-on training, but it's come in a variety of forms. He remembers when he came through the academy it was called "New Agent Training." Then it was reengineered for a joint training between special agents and inspectors where a portion was called new professional training. "Now," says Harper, "It's evolved again toward new professional training and it is now Special Agent Basic Training, and conversely Industry Operations Investigator Basic Training.

"The training and skills we are trying to teach are so different that we found it was difficult to combine the very main portions of the two-in-one joint training and that was why it was split off several years ago," he explained.

In the past when a new agent was hired he or she was immediately issued a badge and credentials, but several weeks or several months could go by before they went to criminal investigator training at FLETC. Then, they would return to their field office and it might be months before they came back for new agent training or new professional training. If some had prior law enforcement experience they would be authorized to carry firearms under certain circumstances. All that changed about 18 months ago, according to Harper.

"The decision was made at the executive level that they were no longer going to issue special agent badges and credentials or firearms to special agents who had not completed all aspects of

basic training,” Harper said. “To adopt that type of policy, it was incumbent upon us to restructure the way we scheduled the training.”

Under the new policy, new special agents go to the Criminal Investigator Training Program (CITP) within two weeks of being brought onboard, with no more than two weeks between graduation from CITP and beginning the SABT. “Sometimes we have to be a bit flexible because of FLETC’s schedule,” Harper said, “but our target date is within two weeks. Therefore, the training is much more compacted as far as scheduling is concerned. They go straight there after they are hired. They go straight to CITP, and after CITP with a very short break, they go right to SABT. Upon graduation, badges and credentials are issued by the director of ATF to the new graduating special agents.”

Harper stressed that the purpose of the policy change was to standardize training and make sure that all special agents were adequately trained before assuming their law enforcement duties. “In the past, some new agents coming from other (law enforcement) agencies may have had different levels of training, and under the old policy it was possible for them to carry a firearm and assume law enforcement duties,” Harper explained.

A Day in the Life...

Typically a new agent’s day starts at 7:30 a.m. and winds up around 5:30 or 6:30 p.m. “They are extremely busy,” Harper said. “The SABT curriculum covers all of the ATF specific aspects of criminal investigation, including legal, investigative techniques unique to ATF’s jurisdiction, firearms trafficking, explosives, arson, with the opportunity to do hands-on exercises in all areas of the curriculum from post blast investigations, arson, firearms trafficking to violent crime investigations. It’s a much more dynamic program than it was in the past; less academic lecture and more comprehensive. It’s gone from eight weeks to 14 weeks.

“All classrooms have computer access on the ATF network, and access to all ATF training online. Students are learning how to conduct criminal investigations and document them in N-Force. The major blocks of instruction are legal and general investigative techniques in firearms, arson and explosives,” Harper continued. “Even the physical fitness portion is much more demanding than it was in the past.”

Special Agent Scott Boshek was among the first students to go through ATF’s newly revamped basic training. He remembers being forewarned about the rigorous physical challenges he was about to face.

“They gave us a heads-up on what to expect,” Boshek said. “They told us there were new physical requirements, and to be in shape before we got there. During the first week of training we lost four students because they couldn’t pass the physical requirements.

“The training places a lot of emphasis on teamwork,” Boshek continued. “We did a lot in teams, whether we were doing search warrants, entries or interviewing. You learn that you always have somebody with you, that you don’t do anything alone.”

One aspect of the training that Boshek praised was using agents who were currently on the job working the streets to teach blocks of the training.

“The academy gives you a good foundation to start your career,” said Brandon Garcia, who left the Albuquerque Police Department in order to enroll in ATF’s Special Agent Basic Training. He graduated from the program in September 2005.

“I really believe that the tactical training at the academy, both firearms and Close Quarter Counter Measures training, are among the best that any law enforcement agency has to offer,” Garcia said. “I was very impressed with ATF’s tactical instructors. I truly believe that strong tactics combined with a good head on your shoulders is what will keep someone alive in a tough situation.”

One thing Garcia was not terribly impressed with: the Georgia heat.

“Being in Georgia for six months was definitely a change for me because I grew up in the mountains of Colorado,” said the special agent. “My basic training took place during the summer months, so the humidity and the sand gnats were something that I wasn’t really prepared for.”

Pesky little insects notwithstanding, Garcia said the most valuable part of his experience may have been the friendships he forged during his time at the academy.

“It was nice making friends with people from all over the country,” he said. “Going through the type of training that we did in such a secluded environment, away from family and friends, you really develop strong relationships with your fellow trainees. I now have several friends across the United States who are like brothers to me.”

When the new agent finishes his or her training at FLETC, they will return to their respective field divisions and begin on-the-job training where they will have a field training manager.

Looking Ahead...

The ATF academy will soon have its own building at FLETC. In the past ATF had always been housed in building 67. In November 2001, ATF moved its operations into a modular building while building 67 was being renovated. In 2002, FLETC entered into negotiations to purchase two large industrial structures on several acres of land on the northeast side of the training center. “One which is roughly 105,000 square feet is being renovated into office spaces. The ATF academy will occupy approximately 25,000 square feet,” said Harper. “It will contain 59 offices and three conference rooms; it will also have a room that contains a student use facility with computer access. It will house the academy’s administrative offices and classrooms.”

The academy will not be the only tenant sharing the newly renovated space, according to Project Manager Winfred Pressley.

“We’ll have plenty of company,” Pressley said. “In addition to us, there will be an Educational Aides Office, a TV studio, and a Chief Information Officer Staff.”

Other building occupants will include staff members from the following divisions: Inspection and Compliance, Student Services, Law Enforcement Leadership Institute, International Training and Technical Assistance, and Environmental and Safety. The non-ATF tenants will not have uncontrolled access to the ATF space.

“The new building is commensurate with the high standards we continue to set here at the ATF National Academy. We are looking forward to the move. For some of the staff it has been a long awaited process,” said Pressley.

FLETC Director Connie Patrick is looking forward to the ATF National Academy moving into its new building this fall. “ATF is a vital partner to the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center. Not only do the agents attend the basic criminal investigator training program, but ATF conducts the follow-on basic program at the academy as well. Numerous advanced programs for both ATF agents and investigators are also scheduled throughout the year. The FLETC looks forward to our continued partnership, one built on fast, focused and flexible principles.”

The new ATF academy is scheduled to open its doors in November 2006.



Students engage in close quarter combat training at FLETC in Glynco, Ga. Photo courtesy of ATF National Academy



The new ATF National Academy in Glynco, Ga. Photo courtesy of ATF National Academy