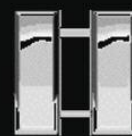




CompanyCommand

Building Combat-Ready Teams



To: Company Commanders
From: Company Commanders

Designing Your World-Class Physical Fitness Program

If you were starting from scratch and had total control with no constraints, what would your company physical training (PT) program look like? Members of the CompanyCommand forum have been energetically discussing this question. Listen in to the conversation with a vision for growing an exceptional, combat-ready unit.

Field Manual 7-22 Army Physical Readiness Training

"Full spectrum operations place a premium on the Soldier's strength, stamina, agility, resiliency, and coordination. Victory—and even the Soldier's life—so often depend upon these factors. To march long distances in fighting load through rugged country and to fight effectively upon arriving at the area of combat; to drive fast-

moving tanks and motor vehicles over rough terrain; to assault; to run and crawl for long distances; to jump in and out of craters and trenches; to jump over obstacles; to lift and carry heavy objects; to keep going for many hours without sleep or rest—all these activities of warfare and many others require superb physical conditioning."

James Bithorn

A/1-506 IN

My program would start off with instruction. This would focus on body types, nutrition, how to prepare the body for exercise, exercise form and goal setting. From there, we would establish what we want the PT program to do for us—for example, support individual-to-collective tasks and help the company reach certain goals. We would build both short- and long-range PT calendars to reflect said goals. I believe in providing guidance and solid intent and then holding subordinate leaders accountable to build and execute their plans. I'm a big believer in two-a-day sessions at least three times a week. I would alternate morning sessions between cardiorespiratory endurance one day—a mix of medium-distance running (no more than three to five miles and not in a formation) and high-intensity sprint workouts (like Hal Higdon)—and functional fitness (like CrossFit) with a strict focus on good form on the alternate days. For the afternoon sessions, there would be instruction on strength training and Olympic-style lifts. The workouts need to be progressive and logically sequenced (e.g., no squats the afternoon preceding a morning five-mile run). I believe combatives and "combat" PT have a place here as well—these can easily be integrated into one of the morning sessions.

George Hernandez

A/187 OD and B/4-10 IN

First, everyone would get a functional movement screen to assess fundamental movement patterns. In my experience, most Soldiers can't stand straight-legged and touch

their toes, and most can't hold a full heels-on-the-ground squat for more than a minute (that's if they could get into that position in the first place). Movement first, then strength. If you can't move well, you're eventually going to get hurt. Then, like the periodization model in the Army's PRT and in accordance with the ARFORGEN cycle, I would use my first cycle for strength training, focusing on the squat, deadlift and shoulder press and their Olympic lift variations (push presses, cleans, power cleans). This cycle would be three days of lifting and two days of mobility work to recover from heavy lifting. I would keep track of my guys' numbers and ensure they increase their training load at every session (or deload them if they hit a peak). Toward the end of that cycle, I would add some short, 5–12-minute CrossFit-type exercises focusing on good form and intensity. The final cycle would be more combat-focused. This is the cycle where I would add boots and kit, but only if the boots were the softer-soled types and my guys understood good running mechanics and assuming that the strength phase adequately prepared them for training with that load.

Ronald Henderson

B/71 Transportation BN (Past CDR)

I would use the National Academy of Sports Medicine's integrated training model. It's similar to PRT except you remove the idiocy of formation. This is the best way to address the "every Soldier" approach if you are doing company PT. Building from this model, you would transition (12 weeks later) into CrossFit principles in your PT. It's all about functional fitness, not beach bodies.



Noncommissioned officers conduct Climbing Drill 1 in accordance with Army physical readiness training standards.

Jonathan Holm

A/3-16 FA & HHC/2-8 IN

We are not training for marathons, Mr. Universe or the CrossFit Games; we are training for combat. We know what combat looks like, so why wouldn't our physical training program mirror it? Train as we fight! First, our uniform would be the combat uniform: ACUs, quality boots, body armor. All running would be done in kit. We don't expect to run five miles at an eight-minute-mile pace in PT uniforms while in combat, so why do we spend so much time in garrison doing just that? We do sprint in combat—often while carrying stuff—so let's do shuttle runs with five-gallon water or ammunition cans, buddy carries, etc. I would include climbing drills in kit and ruck marches. The only in-formation runs I would do would be for morale and unit identity building before block leave, after a successful mission or training exercise, or the morning before a dining in or patron saint ball. Periodic unit runs like that can be useful for building upon good morale.

Eric Williams

B/3-11 IN

I am an advocate of Army PRT. In my experience, it provides consistent results and takes into account the physical readiness of a large demographic of people. Currently, I'm a company commander at the Federal Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning, Ga. My company receives both in-service enlisted Soldiers and college-option Soldiers directly from BCT. The candidates that we receive from BCT are often in better physical shape and score higher on the initial Army PFT than the in-service Soldiers we receive from the operational force. The current class that I have going through had an initial Army PFT average of 271, and after six weeks of doing PRT, we raised the company average to 283. We do not do anything extreme; we just execute the BOLC-A toughening-phase activities outlined in FM 7-22 *Army Physical Readiness Training* during PT every morning (with Tuesday set aside for combatives and Sunday off). A great place to view information on PRT is www.armyprt.com. This website helps lay out a PRT plan that will fit any type of unit at any phase in the ARFORGEN process.

tions I train now would survive a week, which is why we have doctrine to set limits and direct physical training. Therefore, from my perspective, it's great to hear about the positive effects of the Army's PRT as outlined in FM 7-22. PRT has been approved by the Army because it has been repeatedly validated in peer review and practice to improve Soldier physical performance while controlling for injury. No other program does that. If people want to roll the dice and take their chances with other commercial or nonstandardized programs, good luck. They'll need it. Most company commanders are not experts in physical training. PRT provides the risk mitigation strategy to get your formations ready for any event. So far, not many can do everything in the book—it's too hard.

Jason Wayne

A & HHC/1-503 IN

The drills and exercises in FM 7-22 may be especially effective for initial military training. They are also boring. FM

CompanyCommand Glossary

ACU- Army combat uniform
AIT- advanced individual training
ARFORGEN- Army force generation
BCT- basic combat training
BOLC- Basic Officer Leaders Course
FM- field manual
METL- mission essential task list
MFT- master fitness trainer
MOS- military occupational specialty
NATA- National Athletic Trainers' Association
OSUT- one station unit training
PFT- physical fitness test
PRD- physical readiness division
PRT- physical readiness training
RAW- Ranger, Athlete, Warrior

7-22 tells us that “an essential quality of the PRT leader is enthusiasm.” Frankly, I don’t get inspired doing Conditioning Circuit 3 or the Guerilla Drill. I’m not sure many of my Soldiers do either. Army Regulation 350-1 *Army Training and Leader Development* directs us “to decentralize responsibilities for determining unit training requirements to the unit commander, who is best postured to analyze the unit’s mission.” The same regulation tells us that we should follow the principles of exercise in FM 7-22, but that unit METL should be the driving force as we design and tailor physical training programs.

With that in mind, there are a lot of proven functional movements out there beyond what is in FM 7-22. George Hernandez brings up a great point about CrossFit. Imagine if every one of your team leaders had a workout log for their Soldiers that recorded their CrossFit Total (or something like it) and benchmarks for specific functional fitness workouts. Add standardized, combat-focused benchmarks, too: sprints in full kit, carrying heavy weight over a long distance, climbing walls/ropes, etc. Then evaluate your Soldiers on the benchmarks every couple of months, and work with your team to develop goals for improvement and a plan to progress. Imagine looking at a team leader’s counseling packet and having a conversation about PFC Snuffy, who has really weak upper-body strength but can run like a jackrabbit. You could actually look at what the team leader was doing for PT, how well his Soldiers were performing, then provide some coaching on how to improve Soldier performance based on examining the actual plan the leader was executing.

James Mirando

B/71 Transportation BN (Current CDR)

I would get onto the Rogue Fitness website and order everything possible for a CrossFit/high-intensity workout gym. Each platoon would get at least four rigs with bumper

plates, kettle bells, TRX, rings, wall balls, slam balls, push sleds, rowers, Schwinn Airdynes, box jumps, etc. I would cut out long-distance running. Everything would be high intensity. I would base my workouts around CrossFit/Ignite 360/Military Athlete.

Kenneth Ward

HHC/2-82 AV

My program would include a long-term plan, clearly defined goals and orderly progression. Too often, PT devolves into just “cramming” for a short-notice PT test or just showing up and doing what the leadership feels like that day. Progression and building allow you to grow Soldiers beyond

Thoughts on Designing Unit PT Programs

1. Based upon the unit METL, set specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely (SMART) goals.
2. Assess a Soldier’s current status and design a comprehensive periodized training plan to achieve METL tasks.
3. Execute the base (initial conditioning) phase. Some Soldiers—even those coming directly from AIT/OSUT—may be past this phase already. Provide appropriate and timely instruction; ensure exercise regularity; reassess status.
4. Execute the build (toughening) phase. Provide systematic progression with appropriate rest/recovery until you achieve your goals; reassess status.
5. Execute the maintenance/sustain phase. Generally increase intensity and recovery while reducing volume; reassess status.

— Dr. Whitfield East, U.S. Military Academy
Department of Physical Education

Soldiers taking the master fitness trainer course learn the proper execution of physical readiness training (PRT) exercise “the Forward Lunge.” Eric Williams believes PRT “provides consistent results and takes into account the physical readiness of a large demographic of people.”





Soldiers at Fort Irwin, Calif., perform “the lateral,” which is part of Military Movement Drill 1. The drill also includes verticals and the shuttle sprint, with the exercises performed at 25-yard intervals.

what they can currently achieve. Most Soldiers never run farther than four miles in 36 minutes, but with a long-term plan and a little inspired leadership, they can achieve more than they ever thought possible. One technique to galvanize commitment—for example, with running—is to find a local half-marathon a few months away, or field an Army Ten-Miler team, and train for it through a progressive training program that builds over time. I’m sure similar programs could be developed around other strength training or MOS-related goals.

Nathan Wike
HHC/210 BSB

Without a doubt, I would incorporate functional fitness programs such as CrossFit, Insanity and P90X. Such programs are easily executed with materials on hand, can be as long or short as the leaders desire, and share a common goal and mind-set of preparing Soldiers for any eventuality—they specialize in not specializing. In the real world, Soldiers should be able to run, sprint, climb, jump, swim and lift twice their body weight while wearing full armor. Such tasks will never be easy, and there is no silver-bullet program to prepare for them. Regardless, it is our responsibility as leaders to implement programs that are efficient, effective and able to exploit Soldiers’ potential.

David Rolen
F/705 MP

I would start by getting rid of traditional PT, like the straight push-up, sit-up and run combination. No formations. How many of us survived a year at a time deployed with only two to three formations the whole year? Why can’t we do that in garrison? Formation times begat the “15 minutes prior to the 15 minutes prior” debacle, and PT formations give the 1SG the chance to pull people for details. Lots of coffee and standing around prior to formation is Soldier time wasted. I would define a baseline goal for the unit in

terms of PT—something I can measure, like the benchmarks others mentioned. I would focus on team- and squad-level tasks, which are as close as possible to the types of things that teams or squads will need to do in combat (and which will be different based on MOS). Some tasks are the same, such as litter carry, but some vary, such as running a quarter of a mile of wire or changing track pads. Figure that out in a collaborative fashion with a lot of input from the unit and focus on the lowest levels. Give the unit a month to practice and then test the unit.

David Feltwell

If it were my unit, I would still do PRT for all the effects desired in the conversation so far: sprints, sustained runs, hill repeats (up and down), kettle bells, climbing drills, in gear and under load, light on equipment and geared to all abilities, and supplemental drills such as dumbbells and medicine balls. Then there are all the climbing drills in full kit, the soldier carry, shoulder rolls and all those other combat-specific moves. Just to be clear, the PRT system includes com-

Physical Fitness Principles

Exceptional commanders design their PT programs with proven principles in mind. The Army has long applied seven principles of fitness, the “PROVRBS,” which are consistent with guidance from the National Strength and Conditioning Association:

Progression; Regularity; Overload; Variety; Recovery; Balance; Specificity.

The new FM 7-22 *Army Physical Readiness Training* simplifies these fitness principles into three: Precision, Progression and Integration. Many commanders also apply the FITT principles: Frequency (how often?), Intensity (how hard?), Time (how long?) and Type (what type of exercises?).

batives. The fact is that we, as Army leaders, operate with constraints and to standards. Try telling senior NCOs that there are no standards to a program! Try training Soldiers to do physical activities that build readiness without a guide on how to do that throughout their careers. If you want to know how to do that, I recommend sending as many of your leaders as possible to the Army's new MFT course.

Carla Getchell

138th Signal Company, KY Army National Guard

As a National Guard commander, I have the special challenge of seeing my Soldiers, on average, only two days a month. In order to promote fitness as a lifestyle and incentivize regular compliance with a physical fitness program, I would issue digital devices that passively track and record their physical activity. Devices such as Jawbone's UP wristband or the Fitbit One clip-on coupled with a smartphone or computer allow Soldiers to do just that, and they have the added option of manually adding their caloric intake. Incentives could come in the form of contests. Moreover, as a commander, I have the authority to dock them a half-day's drill pay for unsatisfactory participation—*independent of duty day*—without negatively affecting their benefits. This would give me the ability to enforce a physical fitness program with better tracking ability throughout the month.

Michael Pachucki

E (FSC)/2-8 IN

First, I would invest in the right equipment: Olympic bars, bumper plates, kettle bells, bands, sandbags and ply-boxes. I would conduct a functional movement screen on every Soldier in the unit. If you don't have a degree in exercise physiology or sports medicine, sit down with a physical therapist and/or NATA board-certified athletic trainer and group the Soldiers with similar deficiencies. (My belief is that every battalion should have a certified athletic trainer as part of the battalion aid station.) This information allows you to create a different plan for each group depending on areas of muscle weakness and tightness.

Next, I would conduct a one-to-two-week teaching phase of basic body movement and mechanics and teach the fundamentals of the squat, deadlift, kettle bell swing, overhead squat and overhead press. The program would be periodized and incorporate muscular endurance and strength. I agree that the focus of PT sessions should be geared toward combat; however, in order to prevent injury, you need to work up to wearing full kit and combat boots. Once that level of fitness has been achieved (preferably a minimum of two to three months prior to deployment), then combat PT should be the norm.

All PT sessions should incorporate a warm-up (draw upon parts of PRT, RAW, Military Athlete, CrossFit, etc.). The bottom line is that the warm-up should prepare your body to move, especially the muscle groups and movements that you will be doing in the workout. Start broad and get more specific toward the end. Following the warm-up, there should be a teaching portion in which the movements

of the workout are explained and demonstrated with proper technique. Each Soldier performs a few repetitions to ensure proper movement. Then comes the workout. Following the workout, there should be a cool-down phase to help reduce heart rate and body temperature and improve flexibility (foam roller, active/passive stretching, etc.).

Finally, I would have nutritional training as an integral part of the program. A favorite quote of mine is, "You can't out-snatch a donut." Without proper nutrition, you will never reach your full potential.

Eric Gust

B/2-82 FA

If I had total control in designing my PT program, the first thing I would do is focus on my leaders. I would establish a higher standard for them. I would challenge, equip and inspire them to lead by example in all areas, and most certainly in PT. With higher rank comes more responsibility, and that should include physical fitness, especially in green-tab positions.

* * *

Thanks to everyone who has contributed so far to this conversation about world-class physical fitness. We invite company commanders to visit the "Fitness" topic area in the CompanyCommand forum, where they can share their experiences, tap into the ideas of others and advance the profession. If you are a currently commissioned officer, please jump online and contribute your thoughts and stories at <http://CC.army.mil>. Together, we are becoming more effective leaders, and we are building more effective units!

Company commanders: Please join us in the new-and-improved version of our online professional forum to continue the conversation: <http://CC.army.mil>.



**Connecting in conversation...
...becoming more effective.**



Art by Jody Harmon

Have you joined your forum?