

FIT TO DEPLOY

By SGT David Stanley

Physical fitness levels drop rapidly when regular PT stops. These changes can occur within two to four weeks of reduced physical activity and affect muscular strength and endurance (MSE), cardiorespiratory endurance (CR), and flexibility. Performing assigned duties are more difficult and fatigue occurs earlier when fitness levels drop. Soldiers and commanders should understand the effects of deconditioning and make PT an important part of the training plan when in garrison and while deployed.

Preparing to meet the physical demands of combat or peace support operations must begin long before deployment. Waiting until mobilization to begin a rigorous PT program is short sighted and does not provide enough time to prepare the body for the demands ahead.

Ideally, PT should be conducted five days per week for a minimum of 90 minutes per session to ensure the program addresses all components of fitness (muscular strength, muscular endurance, cardiorespiratory endurance, flexibility and body composition) and follows all principles of exercise (PROVRBS); Progression, Regularity, Overload, Variety, Recovery, Balance and Specificity).

Use the FITT Factors (Frequency, Intensity, Time and Type) to make sure the PT sessions are providing a training effect. At a minimum, conduct PT three days per week for a minimum of 60 minutes per session.

The purpose of PT is to enhance combat readiness. To ensure that PT is planned and conducted to meet these requirements, Battle-Focused PT (BFPT) must be an integral part of the total fitness program. Provided (next column) are the steps to develop BFPT:

- Review the unit's mission essential task list (METL) and identify physically demanding tasks.

- Determine exercises which enhance the soldier's ability to perform those physically demanding tasks.

- Develop mission-based, unit evaluation criteria. Guidelines for the standards may come from ARTEPs, FMs, CTT manuals, etc.

Battle-Focused fitness levels must be achieved and maintained during and after extended operations. When the unit is in garrison, PT must take a high prior-

ity in the daily training schedule. Maintain a proper mix between cardiorespiratory, muscle strength and endurance, and flexibility.

Some level of deconditioning will occur during extended operations. The primary purpose for conducting PT during these operations is to maintain fitness levels as much as security and available resources permit. Maintaining flexibility and MSE fitness levels will be easier to accomplish than maintaining CR fitness levels until soldiers can resume normal PT.

During deployment, physical training is conducted in accordance with METT-T (Mission, Enemy, Troops, Terrain, Time). Force protection must be maintained. Commanders should develop a program of standard isometric and partner-resisted exercises. Perform sand bag circuits and rifle or log drills within the limits of the operational environment. Leaders should establish personal goals for self-improvement, both mental and physical, while on deployment. Encourage your subordinates to do the same.

Units often find themselves in less than desirable condition after deployment. Because unit fitness levels normally drop during deployment, it is impossible to resume the PT program at pre-deployment intensity. PT planners must incorporate:

- The "hard day/easy day" principle,
- Low intensity circuits,
- Road marching (w/o or w/reduced loads, and
- Recovery periods.

Extended operations may disrupt normal PT, but they provide soldiers and commanders challenging opportunities to develop and conduct innovative PT. It is each soldier's responsibility and duty to ensure proper fitness levels are maintained. Well-designed PT programs address the components of fitness, adhere to the principles of exercise, apply the FITT factors, and include Battle-Focused Physical Training activities.

Reference: **Physical Training Guidelines for Deployment**; FM 21-20, Chapters 1-4 and 7-10, September 1992. ■

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