

Army revises PT test

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March 14, 2011 - For over 30 years Soldiers have been secure in the knowledge that twice a year they would be tested on their ability to do as many push-ups and sit-ups that they could do in two minutes, and how fast they could run two miles. That security is about to go away.

The Army is finalizing a revolutionary new physical training test and adding a combat readiness test to determine a Soldier's readiness for combat and general physical fitness. This will be the first major overhaul of the Army's PT test since 1980, and is part of a larger revamping of the Army Physical Fitness program.

"Today's PT test does not adequately measure components of strength, endurance, or mobility. The events have a low correlation to the performance of warrior tasks and battle drills and are not strong predictors of successful physical performance on the battlefield or in full spectrum operations," said Lt. Gen. Mark P. Hertling, TRADOC's deputy commanding general for Initial Military Training.

Carlisle Barracks Soldiers and staff speak about the new PRT

"From doing PT for over 20 years by using the old methods, it was time for a change," said Sgt. 1stClass Curtis Lane, the operations NCO at the Center for Strategic Leadership.

"Soldiers need to be able to respond to the challenging terrain, or techniques used by enemy combatants," said Robert Stanley, an exercise physiologist at the Army Physical Fitness Research Institute, who was one of the 16 panel members who helped develop the new test. "These challenges rely more on power, strength, anaerobic capacity and speed, then aerobic and muscular endurance."

"The Army has become a younger, faster, smarter institution," said Lane. "This program is geared more towards our younger Soldiers who are coming into the service much physically weaker than before. This Xbox and Play Station era Soldiers needs this program to build up more stamina, strength and muscular endurance."

Revising the PT test is the third part of a three phase plan to correlate physical readiness training with

the demands of today's Army. The tests are currently being fielded at eight different sites throughout the Army, where they will determine scoring standards, resource requirements, and gender and age norming requirements. The testing will continue through the summer. Full implementation throughout the Army is expected in the fall.

During the last 10 years of combat it was determined that Soldiers needed to be able to jump, bound, crawl, stop, start, lift and carry to be successful in a combat environment. The new PRT, as well as the CRT, is designed to be a better assessment of a Soldier's fitness than the old PT test because it will better assess the anaerobic capacity that drives high-intensity bursts of energy.

The new physical readiness test will consist of five events:

- 1 minute rower
- Standing long jump
- 1 minute push-up
- 1 ½ mile run
- 60 yard shuttle run

Right now the new PRT test is scheduled to be taken once a year.

However, just because the events are shorter doesn't mean it is easier.

Unlike the push-up and sit-up event of the current PT test, which allows resting in between events, the new one-minute rower and push-up events will better assess muscular strength because the event requires non-stop muscle movement that will demonstrate immediate muscle fatigue and failure.

"People look at events and say, 'That's easier!' OK, go ahead and try it," said Hertling.

"You literally have to be cranking the entire one minute," said Hertling. "What we found through research is the second minute of the 2-minute test is just kind of struggling through, and doesn't give a true measure of muscle failure."

The reason for shorting the distance run from 2 miles down to 1.5, was because it is the "gold standard" that will test not just a Soldier's endurance but also anaerobic capacity. "1.5 miles is long enough to test Soldiers aerobic fitness and endurance capability without as many injuries as the 2 mile test had," said Stanley.

Combat Readiness Test

Along with the new PRT, the Army is adding a combat readiness test to determine Soldier's readiness for combat and general physical fitness. Right now the CRT will be taken once a year.

“We have found that a Soldier might be able to do 1,000 push-ups but be unable to traverse a mountain. Another may be able to run like a gazelle but can’t carry an injured Soldier out of harm’s way,” said Hertling. “That is why the Army is looking into requiring Soldiers to take a combat readiness test as well as the PRT.”

The combat readiness test will incorporate warrior tasks and drills, and will provide a more accurate assessment of the unit’s physical readiness training program as well as the individual Soldier’s capability. The ACRT will be executed in the Army combat Uniform while wearing the Army Combat Helmet and carrying the Soldier’s assigned weapon. The test will incorporate several exercises and drills from the physical readiness training circular and will provide a testing environment similar to that on the battlefield. It will include a 400-meter run, hurdles, a high crawl, casualty drag, sprints, and other movement drills.

“This test has been conducted in many forms over the years,” said Lane. As an infantry Soldier I have been putting together programs like this for Sergeant's Time Training for years. I can stand by it.”

Another change to the APFT is that new age groups have been established. Currently the program, which is being piloted at eight different sites throughout the Army, has proposed that the new age categories align with those at the Cooper Institute and the American College of Sports Medicine which establish the age groups as: under 30, 30-39, 40 to 49, 50 to 59 and over 60.

“However, nothing is complete until the results of the pilot test are finished,” said Stanley. “After the review of the results, the broadening of the age brackets may require adjustments.”