

# Maintaining Holistic Army Warriors

Sgt. Luke Price, 626th Support Maintenance Company, executes a hand release push-up during the Army Combat Fitness Test (ACFT) as part of the Blackjack Challenge hosted by the 1st Theater Sustainment Command operational command post at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, March 10. (Photo by Spc. Dakota Vanidestine)

■ By Gen. Paul E. Funk II

The Army has a culture of maintenance that begins in basic combat training when trainees devote hours to cleaning their weapons. This culture of maintenance continues at the Soldiers' duty stations when command maintenance day means a Soldier's place of duty is the motor pool. When in the field, we plan time to conduct weapons and vehicle maintenance, because these pieces of equipment are essential to our survival in combat. One of the most important statistics quoted in meetings is the operational readiness rate. Anything

less than 100% requires an explanation of why the equipment is down, the parts needed to repair it, and an estimated date when the equipment will return to operational condition.

Now, let us think about our Soldiers. People are our number one priority. We need to add people to our list of things we attend to every day. At any given moment, the Army averages a 6% nondeployable rate. Of that 6%, the majority of Soldiers are nondeployable for medical reasons, which does not include short-term temporary injuries. This number also

does not include Soldiers who fail to meet Army body composition standards or those who fail to meet the minimum Army physical fitness test (APFT) standards. How many of our leaders know the exact status of each and every one of our Soldiers? According to Army Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville, they are our "greatest strength and our most important

weapon system." It is my firm belief that we all know the status of the pack for our non-mission capable M1 series Abrams tank and its estimated completion date, but do we know the same level of detail for the Soldier who sprained his or her ankle on the platoon foot march last week?

## Holistic Health and Fitness

Through the Holistic Health and Fitness (H2F) System, we apply our conceptual framework of equipment maintenance to people maintenance by focusing on optimizing, not just maintaining, our Soldiers. H2F is the Army's primary investment in Soldier readiness and lethality, optimized physical and nonphysical performance, and injury reduction and rehabilitation to enhance overall effectiveness of the Total Army.

## Creating a Culture of Fitness

U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) is leading the Army's effort to change the culture of fitness. But what exactly does this mean? One could argue the Army has an outstanding culture of fitness—most units start each day with physical training; we have height/weight and body fat standards; we have physical fitness tests and standards; and we conduct unit physical readiness training (PT). However, a culture of fitness should consist of more than an hour-long PT session with the same 'daily dozen' and a four-mile run.



Command Sgt. Maj. Bernard P. Smalls, senior enlisted advisor, 1st Theater Sustainment Command, speaks to a group of senior non-commissioned officers after an Army Combat Fitness Test training session July 14 in Fort Knox, Ky. (Photo by Spc. Zoran Raduka)

At TRADOC, we strive to create a culture of holistic health and fitness by focusing on each Soldier's physical and non-physical well-being with the goal of optimizing each Soldier's overall performance and reducing musculoskeletal injuries.

The H2F culture change begins with changing the way we view fitness. The most obvious way to stimulate that transition is to change the Army's physical fitness test. The Army Combat Fitness Test (ACFT) is a better predictor of overall fitness than the legacy Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT). The ACFT is closely aligned with the skills required of our Soldiers in combat.

While it does require more effort to administer, more equipment, increased time to train, and greater specificity in the exercises involved these should be viewed as positives, not negatives, because of the added benefits the ACFT brings.

Can you imagine a world where collegiate or professional athletes limited themselves to push-ups, sit-ups, and running as the only mandatory part of their workout? Would that workout prepare them to perform at the highest level? Of course not. This is why professional athletes have specialized, tailored fitness and conditioning programs that are correlated to their sport and their skill position. Why, then,

should we as Soldiers—professional Soldiers—settle for less? We should not.

The ACFT is a better predictor of operational fitness than the APFT. The ACFT is scientifically aligned with the most critical, high-demand common Soldier tasks required for multi-domain operations. Additionally, the ACFT drives balanced and appropriate physical training that will hopefully reduce overuse injuries and unplanned attrition as a result.

### Holistic Fitness

The ACFT is not the sole solution to the H2F problem. This is why the H2F program includes

dietitians, physical therapists, occupational therapists, certified athletic trainers, and strength and conditioning coaches as part of the H2F Human Performance Team. Just as professional athletes tailor their workout regimens, nutrition, sleep, and mental preparation to their sport, body type, and specific needs, we are also striving to take similar steps.

In order to achieve optimal performance, our Soldiers need to know how to modify their diets to ensure they receive the appropriate quantity and quality of nutrients for their bodies. They need to understand the importance of sleep for performance optimization. They need to know the proper exercises and how to perform them in order to prevent injuries. These and many other considerations will be addressed by the brigade Human Performance Teams. Certified professionals will provide specialized programming to ensure all units optimize health and fitness. These uniform programs will transcend units so when Soldiers PCS, they will fall-in on a program they recognize that is designed for them.

The physical component of performance is only one aspect of the culture change, though. Equally as important—if not more so—are the nonphysical components of H2F. Just like maintenance of the physical self, maintenance of the cognitive, spiritual, and emotional self are critical to Soldiers' performance under the duress of combat. To that end, we are placing significant

focus on resilience, spiritual health, and mental health aspects of fitness by incorporating evidence-based practices, such as mindfulness and yoga into PT. The focus on the nonphysical domains prepares our Soldiers before the problem manifests.

Through targeted education and training, we will improve mental and spiritual skills—such as emotion management, character development, mental toughness, and spiritual enlightenment—to enhance performance. Like daily physical training, we will embed the nonphysical components of fitness into our fitness culture.

### The Importance of Leadership

The key to success of the H2F program, however, is changing the culture of fitness to make holistic health and fitness an integral part of everyday Army life. This takes leadership. Leadership that is educated. Leadership that is dedicated. Leadership that understands that people are our number one priority. It is necessary for our leaders to embrace the tenets of H2F by modeling, participating in, and managing the H2F system. Only through complete and engaged involvement from leaders can we change the culture to optimize physical and nonphysical fitness. So how do leaders do this? What are the actions our leaders need to take?

First and foremost, our leaders must believe in the system in order to be the agents of change. Let us take the ACFT as an example. If

leaders at every level fail to embrace the ACFT, then the H2F program will fail to produce healthy and fit Soldiers. During ACFT pilot testing, TRADOC repeatedly fielded negative questions and comments from leaders in the force about the ACFT: it is too hard; it requires too much equipment; the leg tuck is discriminatory; it takes too long to administer the list goes on and on. I am not implying that anyone should stop asking questions or making comments. On the contrary, we need feedback so that we can address the issues and make improvements. But we need leaders to be part of the solution.

In the words of a great friend, "Don't freak out, work out!" Yes, the ACFT is tough. We purposely made it tough because we need tough Soldiers to do tough jobs. However, it seems more challenging now because it is new and because it stresses a different kind of fitness—one that cannot be gained over a couple of weeks doing push-ups and sit-ups prior to an APFT. In addition to aerobic endurance training, the ACFT requires us to go to the gym and lift weights or lift and move heavy objects (sandbags and ammunition cans come to mind). The ACFT requires us to transform our bodies in a way that only calisthenics and running—both former staples of most Army PT programs—cannot. It is impossible to believe anyone would argue that gaining strength, power, coordination, balance, and agility in addition to aerobic endurance is bad for Soldiers.

As leaders, we must set the example. The ACFT is an example of the Army's commitment to its people. It will strengthen our fitness culture, reduce injuries, and increase individual readiness. We have an obligation to our Soldiers to provide them with an immersive, integrative, and comprehensive training system to ensure their success on the ACFT.

Secondly in order to change the culture, our leaders will have to know more about fitness—holistic fitness—than we have in the past. H2F is a system that pulls from the cutting edge of multiple disciplines to optimize Soldier performance. What we are not doing is taking fitness training out of the hands of leaders. On the contrary, we expect leaders to be decisively engaged in the program in order

to ensure its viability. This requires education of our leaders on a variety of topics—fitness programs, nutrition, sleep, resilience, and mindfulness—so that those leaders, and their Soldiers and units, can truly benefit. The H2F Human Performance Team is intended to be a combat multiplier—a source of knowledge and expertise—not a replacement for leadership within the fitness domain. Our leaders will have to learn more, retain more, and promote holistic fitness more in order for H2F to provide more.

Finally in order to change the Army's culture of fitness, our leaders will be required to reorganize and reallocate something very precious: time. Fitness takes dedicated time. Physical fitness time should be sacrosanct in units, but

it is not. We routinely start meetings at 8 a.m. or earlier; we plan rehearsals during physical training time because it is convenient. We should avoid these actions. In order to change the culture of fitness in the Army, holistic fitness has to be a priority. We need our leaders to ruthlessly protect physical training time and to plan effective physical training, even in the field. By doing so, we will signal to our entire formations that physical training is a priority.

Gone are the days when Soldiers go to the field for three or four weeks and return out of shape. The new culture of fitness does not support “quick fix” physical training plans to pass the push-up and sit-up events. We, as leaders, will need to provide time for our Soldiers to avail themselves of



Sgt. 1st Class Lamar Shephard, 401st Army Field Support Brigade, gives the initial block of instruction to all participants of the Blackjack Challenge hosted by the 1st Theater Sustainment Command operational command post at Camp Arijjan, Kuwait, March 10. (Photo by Spc. Dakota Vanidestine)



Master Sgt. Amy Prince of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) Resolute Support Sustainment Brigade attempts to lift 280 pounds during the deadlift event of the Army Combat Fitness Test, Aug 14, 2018, on Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. (Photo by 1st Lt. Verniccia Ford)

the nonphysical portions of the H2F program, as well. Once again, I realize this may require you to reorganize your work day. You may be in the motor pool at 6:30 a.m. and in the Soldier Performance Readiness Center at 1 p.m., but that is the cost of changing the culture. If we are serious about making holistic health and fitness a priority in our formations, then our actions must reflect that.

### There is No Such Thing as a Coincidence

We are a professional Army charged with the mission of supporting and defending the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic. This is an awesome responsibility. To be

successful requires that we be ready to fight and win on any battlefield, at any time, against any adversary. As Col. Lewis A. Walsh, commanding officer of 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team, said in 1944 in a letter to his Soldiers, “Success in battle goes to the troops ‘who can take one more step and fire one more shot’ than the enemy.”

We will not accomplish this by happenstance or luck to our entire formations—there is no such thing as a coincidence. Just as we have emphasized weapon and equipment readiness in the past, our success in the future hinges on people readiness. H2F is the system through which we will achieve Soldier optimization

to meet the challenges ahead. It is incumbent upon each of us to our entire formations—from me as the TRADOC Commander all the way to the team leader in a rifle squad to our entire formations—to be agents of change and influencers in the culture of fitness within our great Army. It will be difficult and it will be uncomfortable, but it will be worth it.

*Gen. Paul E. Funk II currently serves as the 17th Commanding General, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command. He is responsible for 32 Army schools organized under eight Centers of Excellence that recruit, train, and educate more than 500,000 Soldiers and service members annually. Funk is a graduate of Armor Basic and Advanced Officer Leader Courses, Command and General Staff College, and has completed his Senior Service College as a fellow at the Institute of Advanced Technology, University of Texas at Austin.*

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