



CompanyCommand

Building Combat-Ready Teams



To: Company Commanders
From: Company Commanders

Expeditionary Fitness

Special thanks to the leaders of TF White Falcon (2nd Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division) currently operating in Tal Afar, Iraq, for contributing to this critical conversation. They use the term "expeditionary fitness" to describe their approach to being physically combat-ready.

When company commanders talk with each other about how to win in combat, one subject always comes up: Physical fitness, both in preparation for combat and during the combat deployment. Given the reality of 24-hour operations in harsh environmental conditions, a non-secure environment, and the length of our combat

deployment cycles, this is no small task! In an effort to learn from experienced leaders and to advance the profession, this month we ask:

How can we best prepare Soldiers for the physical rigors of battle and maintain that physical edge over time?

CPT Joe Blanton and 1SG Greg Nowak
D/2-325th AIR, 82nd ABN DIV



Prep for Combat

One thing we did to prepare for combat was conduct a company biathlon—run and swim. It's an area not everyone is comfortable with and it's a great cardiovascular workout and team builder. We ran three miles as a company to the pool, swam about 200 meters, and then finished with a one-mile release run back to the company area.

We also did a lot of combat-focused PT events while wearing the Interceptor Body Armor (IBA)—one event was a combination of a foot march, a Skedco litter drag, a pole-less litter carry, and a stress shoot. For the stress shoot we had the Soldiers use different firing positions—standing, kneeling, and prone. We also worked on alternate firing po-

sitions, shooting around vehicles and from vehicles, both dominant and off-handed firing positions, stationary and moving. The stress shoot incorporated rapid magazine changes, multiple firing positions and a longer-range shot (150-200 meters). We try to conduct this training at a shoot house or range facility that has buildings constructed that we can shoot from. The stress shoot is a timed event—overall time with costly penalties for missing, so it pays to take a well-aimed shot versus rushing to make a quick time. The focus is on elevating the heart rate versus an all-out smoker where the Soldier gets little marksmanship training. We'd also park a vehicle at the range and have them shoot out of the left and right side of the vehicle.

In preparation for the stress shoot, we conducted reflexive fire training IAW Army M4 marksmanship manual from distances of 3-20 meters. This training consisted of: walking left, turn right and shoot; walking right, turn left to shoot; run, stop and shoot; facing away, turn towards target and shoot; and shooting standing at 3, 5, 7, 10, 15 and 20 meters. The NCOIC gives a "ready" command and then on a whistle blast Soldiers raise their weapons, identify targets, switch their selector levers to "SEMI," engage, switch their selector levers to "SAFE," and then lower their weapons.

Also, ropes are always a great cardio workout.

During the Deployment

We brought a set of dumbbells with us and built a bench. With that, resistance training is there. Cardio is the part that we struggle with. You can't just go for a run unless you go back to the Brigade Forward Operating Base (FOB). When we send a platoon back to the Brigade FOB to refit

CMD Quiz

PT that had the most impact on preparing your Soldiers for the physical/mental challenges of combat?

Warfighter PT (MOS-related battle drills, CL V carries, flak-vest runs, NBC PT, litter relays, etc.)	64.0%
APFT/FM 21-20 style standard PT (push-up, sit-up, running)	16.0%
Combatives (hand-to-hand)	9.0%
Other (may include new PT doctrine, agility drills, etc.)	7.0%
Team contact sports	2.0%
Obstacle courses	2.0%

Total Votes: 100

for 48 hours, they conduct two mandatory PT sessions; so twice a week they get cardio and they can do weight training here at our combat outpost (COP). With 24-hour operations going, it's difficult. We push it down to squad level and they manage it.

CPT Matt Adamczyk and 1SG Jack Love A/2-325th AIR, 82nd ABN DIV



Prep for Combat

The individual Soldier has to be comfortable in the IBA in all kinds of weather and terrain. We did a lot of work on movement with full kit. In this urban environment here in Iraq we are constantly negotiating tight terrain and pulling ourselves up and around things. Agility, upper body strength, and mental toughness are essentials. We worked hard at putting a mixture of strength, endurance, and speed in our program. Bottom line: you need a well-rounded program. We don't move much here in Iraq with rucks—mostly IBA, combat packs, weapons, NODs (night observation devices), and ammunition.

We also conducted combatives training before deploying. Here in Iraq, when we are in physical contact with the

Anti-Iraqi Forces (AIF) it's usually not one-on-one. It's often three-on-one—a fire team getting one guy into zip-ties or pulling people out of vehicles. So we worked on that during our combatives sessions.

Another way we prepared for combat was through a forced-march live fire. We usually gave the Soldiers some advance notice—they would come in at 0500, draw weapons, and move on a route that took them in varied terrain through roads and woodland areas. Along the route they would demonstrate EIB-type tasks (basic military skills), and once at the range we would take them through different firing stations: reflexive fire, firing from on top of a roof or through a window. Throughout the event we recorded times and scores. We did this as a squad competition.

Another event we did was a 10 km foot march—we had to pull casualties, move ammunition, do buddy carries, and conduct battle drills. We were smoked by the time we got out to the range.

During the Deployment

We brought a couple of weight sets and pull-up bars so Soldiers could work out here in our company combat outpost—which is a house in the middle of Tal Afar, Iraq. While at our COP, every Soldier does at least eight pull-ups before moving through the chow line. Each platoon conducts refit back at the Brigade FOB for two days per week, during which they are expected to conduct PT at the squad level.

The foot patrols our Soldiers conduct while operating in the city are intensive workouts—when they complete a patrol they are smoked.

CPT Ken Burgess HHC/2-325th AIR, 82nd ABN DIV



Prep for Combat

We conducted forced marches with IBA and kit and got away from standard foot marches with rucksacks. We do a lot of movement with IBA here in Iraq. Every time we went to the range, whether one mile or six, we carried full combat gear—to include spare barrels and all the gear we take on patrol.

We also set up an obstacle course in the MOUT site and had Soldiers negotiate it with full combat gear. I'm big on ob-

stacle courses because moving around with a weapon and the bulkiness of the IBA changes everything. Start slow with this and build up—first just have the IBA vest on, then add one plate, then two plates, then add the helmet and weapon.

During the Deployment

How do you make PT work in a combat environment? Squad-level execution with platoon-level planning.

In my company COP during OIF I, we were in a compound with a large field. I brought in a bulldozer and we dozed out a field that was about half the size of a regular football field. We then made a running track that went around the field. The platoons were then able to play softball, flag football and soccer. A couple of times during our deployment we stood down the company just pulling guard on our COP and did platoon-on-platoon competitions.

I'm a big fan of maintaining fitness over here—it's a leader issue. All the companies have weight sets, and you need your own because even if there is a weight set at the Brigade FOB, you more than likely won't be staying there.

We've been deployed to OIF I, II and III, and maintaining fitness has been different for each deployment. During OIF II we mandated PT three times a week with some type of upper-body workout incorporating a towel or partner resistance exercises (PREs). When we had access to any type area we could run on, we worked cardio three times a week. But we adjusted that based on what we were doing at the time.

CPT Ryan Howell

Grim Troop/Sabre Squadron, 3rd ACR



Prep for Combat

In preparation for combat, we did marches and practiced patrolling with full kit: IBA, combat load, blank rounds, and so forth. We also just did normal PT and some combatives.

While Deployed

While deployed, weight lifting is a big thing—it is something a guy can do on his own. We are trying right now to get stair-steppers and treadmills down here at our COP. If you have equipment available, Soldiers will use it. The big thing is getting it down at the troop/company level. We

bought some weight sets and bowflex-type equipment before we deployed and it has paid off big time. So it doesn't matter where we go, we always set up a little gym. We also get a lot of cardio on our patrols. We try to fit in some sports also—it's worked out that we have a basketball goal here in the courtyard of this building we are occupying, and it gives guys a chance to compete and have fun.

CPT Cynthia Moore

501st STB, TAC CP, 101st ABN DIV (AASLT)

I would focus on running, endurance activities, and lifting weights. I have found that the standard push-ups, sit-ups, two-mile run do not prepare a Soldier for the types of exhaustion that come from drawn-out sustainment activities. Lifting weights keep your muscles challenged, and during OIF many Soldiers lost 20 pounds or more due to the heat and lack of muscle training. The running keeps endorphins in the system, which helps combat fatigue from pulling long shifts or doing missions that last weeks on end without a break. All in all, I attribute the success our unit had in Iraq to the effective PT our leaders conducted.

CPT Jeff Sargent

B/501st MI, 1st AD

I've found it's tough, but by no means impossible to conduct a rigorous PT program while working continuous 12-hour shifts. If possible, give your Soldiers a block of time away to conduct PT during their normal shifts (assuming they are working 12-hour shifts). Rotate Soldiers to conduct PT like you would rotate them to go eat chow. Don't let PT become optional. It's frustrating when I see leaders treat PT like it's an extracurricular activity akin to an elective in school. PT is a basic Soldier duty, and leaders need to enforce the standard and set an example.

CPT Keith Kramer

A/3-69th AR, 3rd ID (M)

Our PT program prior to deploying focused on three things: mental toughness, physical toughness, and reinforcing the junior leadership's initiative. It is as important for a Soldier to know he is tough and be confident that he can do something as for him to be able to do it.

PT was focused at the squad level because in Iraq now we are conducting individual fire team and squad ambushes, and this reinforced the leader's position and decision making. We conducted several competitions that developed the toughness and teamwork needed for success in combat. We conducted stress shoots at non-standard ranges to raise their heart rates and stress their marksmanship under tough situations. We footmarched under loads to stress the Soldiers' mental toughness and desire not to quit or fall out from their squads. We conducted weekly combatives to build both confidence and aggression, as well as a tactical skill they may need in the deployment. Our PT program was successful because we worked to bring junior leader involvement into its planning and make it challenging for them.

Here are a few deployed PT tips from CC's Fitness Topic Lead, Matt Michaelson, who commanded B/4-5th ADA & D/4-5th ADA, 1st CAV DIV:

Finding any time during actual combat deployments for doctrinal PT is extremely limited, and certainly the physical tasks of combat ops are tremendously exhausting, especially when coupled with sleep/water/chow limitations on the move or in contact. Any time that can be cut out for PT while deployed could include a variety of gravity-based calisthenics, PREs, and combatives. But, in addition to these, here are a few more ideas to try out when you're trying to fit in some kind of fitness in the craziness and exhaustion that is combat ops:

Dynamic tension: Muscle tone can be maintained to some degree by simply "flexing," then relaxing, the muscle—flexing and holding the flex as hard as you can for about 6 seconds is all it takes with about 3 to 6 flexes per muscle. Very much like what bodybuilders do in "hitting a pose." Ever try it (without the troops watching, of course)? It's hard! Try it out—place palms together in front of chest and flex the chest hard, imagine a 30-pound dumbbell in the hand with elbow at 90 degrees and flex the bicep, squeeze those frontal abs, then left, then right obliques even while sitting as a TC on a convoy. DT can be done with no partner, no equipment, no movement, and very little sweat (if limited DCUs prevent drenching a uniform in sweat with no laundry services available) unless you get into a whole routine. Very simple to do, looks a little funny, but works.

Stretching: 9 out of 10 personnel are as tight as can be. Use the deployment to improve your flexibility. Instead of the quick, bouncing, before-the-unit-run stretches, stretch all the major muscle groups, from top down, coordinating inhalation and exhalation with

stretches being held anywhere from 15 seconds to one minute. Improve range-of-motion, tone, pliability, and circulation all at the same time. Start with easy joint rotations, then relax and stretch. Again, easy to do, no/little sweat, no equipment, and tremendously relaxing and invigorating at the same time.

Meditation/breathing/relaxation: Not gonna get all swampy on you now, but hear me out: combat is about stress, and stress requires release to maintain harmony and peace of mind = optimum performance. Taking just 5-10 minutes a day to breathe and relax can provide a leader/Soldier with a healthy outlet to relieve stress and recharge for what's next. A few recommendations:

1) Breathing exercises: close your eyes, sit easy, and take 10 or so very deep breaths in/out the nose. Breathe into the pit of the belly, not the chest (we do that enough all day). After the first 5, try breathing in and holding the breath for as long as possible, then controlled exhale.

2) Body part relaxation: sit comfortably, close your eyes, and then systematically relax portions of the body. Scalp, forehead, eyes, face, jaw, ears, neck, traps, shoulders, upper arm, forearm, hand, fingers ... all the way down to the feet. Soldiers can also just focus the relaxation on the body part where they feel the most tension (usually neck, back, trapezius). Done well, also very relaxing.

Perhaps these few ideas, coupled with other Field PT initiatives, can help some leaders and troops stay focused on the mission while taking some care of ourselves personally and physically along the way. Go get 'em!

Company commanders: You are invited to visit the "Fitness" topic within the CC forum—to share your ideas,

to tap into the ideas of others, and to advance the profession in the realm of physical fitness.

Connecting leaders

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