

# Running Shoes in PRT

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The objectives of Initial Entry Training (IET) are to produce soldiers who are well-disciplined, highly motivated, physically and mentally fit, and adept at the combat skills they will need on the modern battlefield. IET programs of instruction are designed to accomplish these objectives and to get the new soldiers to their assigned units with as little delay as possible. But when some of the soldiers have to miss training because of injuries, it is difficult for them to make up that training so they can graduate on schedule.

Because foot and leg injuries were the root cause of missed training among its soldiers, the Third Basic Training Brigade at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, conducted a number of experiments to determine what, if any, advantages might come from having its soldiers wear running shoes instead of combat boots during

their physical readiness training (PRT).

First, the brigade conducted a series of seminars that were open to anyone who wanted to discuss PRT policies or training. After each seminar the ideas presented were compiled in draft form, together with the most current guidance from higher headquarters. This draft of policies was revised after each seminar and eventually was formulated and implemented as the Brigade PRT Program (Test).

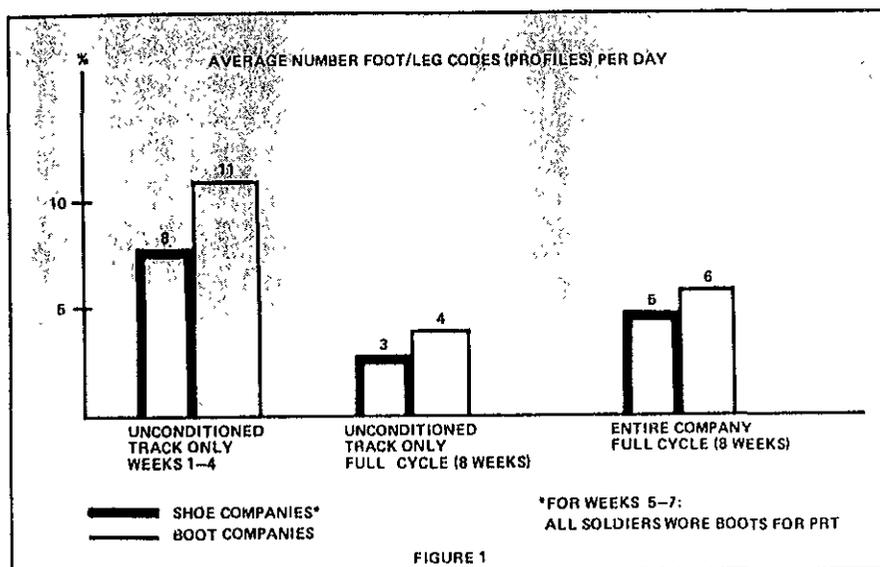
The program was primarily aimed at the "unconditioned" soldiers — those who, by definition, could "take in no more than 25 milliliters of oxygen per kilogram of body weight per minute." This definition was translated to mean soldiers who could not complete a one-mile run in ten minutes or less.

Each battalion in the brigade

designated three companies to take part in the program. One company would follow the brigade's test program with its unconditioned soldiers wearing running shoes; a second company would follow the test program with the whole company in boots; and the control company would follow the normal PRT program with all of its soldiers in boots. (It should be noted here that basic training at Fort Leonard Wood includes female soldiers.)

The soldiers in these three companies were given a diagnostic PRT test within one week of their arrival. All of the soldiers who could not complete the one-mile run in ten minutes were put in one group or track within their companies for the subsequent PRT periods. This unconditioned group was then required to take PRT at least four times a week, and the soldiers could not be moved out of the group until they took a second diagnostic test in their fourth week of training. (After the second test, all the soldiers in the three companies wore combat boots for the rest of the cycle.)

Statistics were kept on the soldiers who went on sick call and on those who received medical profiles (codes) for foot or leg problems. When this information had been consolidated, foot and leg injuries among the unconditioned soldiers who started out wearing running shoes could be compared with such injuries among the unconditioned soldiers who wore boots from the beginning. Then these unconditioned soldiers were also compared with the rest of the soldiers



in their respective companies

Figure 1 shows these comparisons for the first four weeks (unconditioned track only), for the next four weeks (unconditioned track only), and for the entire eight-week cycle (companies as a whole) Figure 2 is a comparison of the two kinds of test companies in terms of the average number of codes per week for the entire cycle.

When all the data had been analyzed, there were few statistically significant differences between the "shoe" companies and the "boot" companies, or between the test companies and the control companies. Nevertheless, several general conclusions could be drawn from the statistical data and from the test observations made by the chain of command and the unit cadre.

- The test conclusions supported earlier findings that females have more problems with wearing boots than males have. (Females generally made up about 85 percent of the unconditioned tracks.) And whether they wore running shoes or boots, the unconditioned soldiers had considerably more injury problems than those in the conditioned tracks.

- There appeared to be more codes and sick calls during the first two or three weeks, and then a large drop in them during the fourth week. This finding seemed to correspond with earlier studies that indicated the third week should include a period of rest or of relatively easy PRT to allow leg bones to heal and toughen in preparation for the stress of the rest of the training.

- The average number of weekly sick calls in the running shoe companies was equal to or less than the number in the boot companies.

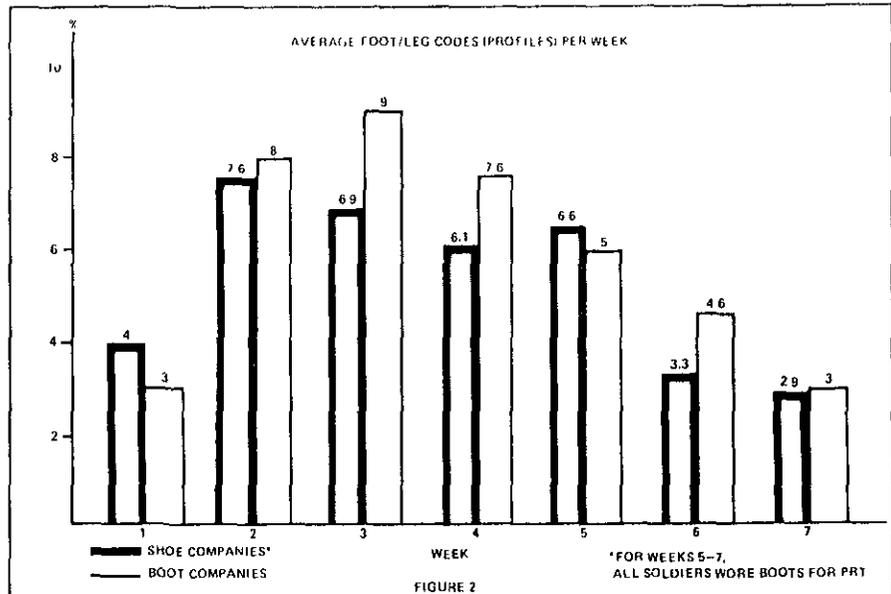
- The scores on the end-of-cycle APRT (in which all the soldiers wore combat boots) showed no significant differences between the running shoe companies and the boot companies.

The chief benefit derived from the test was that it served to make the entire chain of command more aware of PRT performance and of PRT-related injuries. For example, the im-

portance of using stretching exercises became apparent. Commanders and drill sergeants felt that such exercises helped decrease the number of leg injuries.

In addition to the three companies per battalion that participated in the test, two other companies followed the brigade's test program with all their soldiers in running shoes for the first four weeks. These units showed certain significant results that the other test companies did not. First, there were fewer codes in the conditioned tracks of these companies than in the test companies whose conditioned soldiers wore boots. In two such test companies, nearly 15 percent of the soldiers who were initially placed in conditioned, boot-wearing tracks had to be moved to the unconditioned track because of injuries. In addition, the companies in which running shoes were worn initially had shorter run times on the APRT (even though they wore combat boots for the test). Finally, the use of running shoes for all the soldiers in a company seemed to help build unit spirit and a desire to run, because it prevented morale problems associated with being "different." (Some of the soldiers in the unconditioned tracks in the other test companies said they felt like second-class citizens because they were "not allowed" to wear boots.)

In the final analysis, the program



showed that some soldiers will be injured no matter what kind of program is used, because there are many variables over which the trainers have no control. Some of these are congenital defects (such as flat feet), variances in the conditioning of the soldiers when they enter the Army, and training accidents.

But careful consideration of the ways in which injuries can be prevented — such as the use of running shoes — and a concerned chain of command can help reduce injuries. Fewer injuries lead in turn to better morale and fewer training management problems with those soldiers who have had to miss some phase of their training because of injury.

The use of running shoes in basic training is, if nothing else, another training management tool that commanders can use when they believe it will help them turn out properly trained soldiers on schedule — soldiers who are ready to take their places in units around the world.



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