

Training Notes



REAL BATTLE- FOCUSED PT

*Physical Training
Tailored for the Fight*

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Physical Training (PT) has always been a passion of mine. Many years ago as a young NCO I had a wise commander who told me, “Leslie, sometimes the most important training we do in a day is PT.” I have always remembered that quote and often repeated it myself to my peers and subordinates when questioned about why I am so passionate about PT. PT is about training for combat — period — nothing else. It is not about the PT test, running a marathon, or doing a triathlon — it is about preparing the men in your charge for the rigors of combat. To deploy and fight for a year in Iraq is hard business physically, and often, for the men patrolling the sector — there is no regular schedule for PT. They take it when they can get it. I equate an Iraq deployment to a road trip across the Midwest. You want a full tank of gas before you start. Similar to an Iraq deployment — you want to have a full tank of gas, i.e. — be in the best shape you

possibly can. Because during the deployment you will be using that gas, and there will be infrequent stops along the way to fill up.

The current Army PT test is a fairly good measure for gauging general fitness, but not combat readiness. That is exactly what it is meant to be. It was never meant to be a limiter or end all, vanilla, one-size-fits-all for PT.

To prepare for the rigors of combat in Iraq, we must first realize and understand the hazards and tasks that we will perform on a daily basis in Iraq. Endurance events are crucial; activities such as confidence and obstacle courses, grass and guerilla drills, foot marches, combatives, and general strength training are all things that must be considered when putting together a PT program. Many commanders will often think of their PT average when it

Combatives is one activity that units can integrate into PT programs that helps build physically fit, battle-focused warriors.

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comes to these events. They may wonder that if nothing is geared to the APFT, would their company’s average decrease? The answer is maybe, but not likely. Besides, what is more important — a high company APFT average or a company of physically fit, battle-focused warriors who are more likely to survive the rigors of combat? Soldiers that are trained for the rigors of combat through a variety of challenging events are less susceptible to injury, more confident in their abilities, and more likely to correctly use escalation of force. In my opinion and experience, those that are of sound body are more often than not of sound mind and better equipped to endure



the mental strain of combat and the horrors of war.

I have outlined below a sample company PT program that I used as a commander of a rifle company and headquarters company, both of which were deployed to combat. This is an example of “A Way” — there are many great trainers, commanders, and NCOs out there that have similar programs. The most important thing to remember is to think outside the box and try new things and find what works for you and your Soldiers — we owe it to them.

Ø **Monday – Platoon run** – 20-30 minute run followed by upper body exercises and abdominal exercises. Upper body exercises should be a combination of push-up drills, pull-up/chin-up drills, as well as dips. Occasionally throwing in exercises such as log drills, rope climbs, etc., when at the platoon level will help keep the monotony out of the routine. Abdominal exercises should be focused around the “abs 500” concept where a series of abdominal exercises alternating between ab muscle areas reach a total repetition count of 500. Ensure you do proper warm-up and cooldown stretching following the run, focusing a majority of the stretching effort for post run to prevent injuries. End every session with some type of buddy evacuation/buddy carry drills.

Ø **Tuesday – Platoon/Squad speed day** — This day is dedicated to developing speed and agility. It’s a good day for sprints, fartlicks, Indian runs, and confidence course timed runs. A good idea is to start off as a unit, run to get a good warm up, and then initiate the speed drills. Groups should also increase difficulty gradually as the run progresses. Things such as increasing distance of sprints and reducing time and distance in between sprints will help keep the runs challenging. Sprint work, not including warm-up time, should be at least 20 minutes in length. Abdominal exercises are a daily exercise as those muscles recover rather quickly. So go again into the “abs 500” routine that you develop, but over time increase this to “abs 1,000” on days that are upper body rest days. End the session with buddy evacuation/buddy carry drills.

Ø **Wednesday — Platoon PT** — There are a couple of options for this day. One option is to do battle-focused PT in boots and BDUs. Activities may include things such as grass or guerilla drills, followed by a series of push-up chin-up/pull-up/dip exercises and the “abs 500” routine. Another option is to do strictly a combatives day with an intense pre-combatives and post combatives stretching routine. A third option is possibly a platoon run day focused on the “medium fast distance” train of thought (meaning about a three-mile run at the speed of the bulk of the platoon members’ ability) followed by an upper body and abdominal workout. If your unit is relatively new to combatives, this is a good day to start training it. Again, the

session should end with buddy evacuation/buddy carry drills.

Ø **Thursday — Company foot march day.** Describe and lay out a route, mark a turn-around point, and let Soldiers go in platoon, squad, or buddy teams. They will be more challenged this way. Additional consideration must be taken in determining the Soldier’s load and uniform? Are we going in just OTV with plates, Kevlar and weapon or are we taking rucksacks, and what is the weight of the rucksack? There is no cookie cutter answer; it depends on your goal and the ability of the unit. Regardless, the load should resemble what they will be carrying in combat on patrol. Combat lifesaver bags and medic bags are mandatory and should not be a compromise. A progressive program works the best; start out with a four-mile march the first week of the month and add two miles every week, culminating with a 12-mile foot march every month. An assessment will have to be made by the company leadership to see if this is a realistic goal. Every foot march should be followed by a short supervised combatives session with every buddy team. This session should be conducted immediately following the crossing of the finish line of the foot march at the exhausted level in their full gear minus rucksack. Session should be ended with a buddy evacuation/buddy carry drill.

Ø **Friday – Company – 30-40 minute run.** This is basically a long, slow, distance run. Followed by an upper body work out and the abs 500 workout. This is a good day to let the first sergeant or other NCOs come up with alternate events for the upper body workout. Things such as sandbag drills, buddy press exercises, dips, push ups, rope climbs, chin ups, etc., can break up the monotony and make the sessions more fun.



Jorge Gomez

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Notes on combatives and other events:

Ø The U.S. Army Combatives School is an excellent school that conducts yearlong classes. The benefits of combatives training are unlimited. Not only does it instill the warrior ethos and technical fighting skills, but it also gives the Soldier confidence in his abilities and a viable, realistic option other than deadly force in the escalation of force ladder — a skill that is paramount in our current counterinsurgency fight. Unfortunately, not all units get the opportunity to attend this school or send trainers. That does not mean the end to your combatives program. It is guaranteed there are Soldiers in your unit with martial arts, boxing, or wrestling skills and experience. Use those internal assets and develop a combatives program suited for the needs of combat. Even if you have certified Army combatives instructors and

train modern Army combatives on a regular basis, there is nothing wrong with increasing the repertoire of your Soldiers' combatives skills by introducing a different set of techniques that are easy to learn and maintain. Guest instructors from your local area or Soldiers in your unit add variety and more "tools in the rucksack" that your Soldiers can call upon in the time of need. A good rule of thumb is to limit the techniques to those that can be performed in their combat equipment, and those that are easy to train and sustain. Additionally, a clear set of established limits, safety considerations, such as medics on site and a good risk assessment are crucial to a good combatives program. No program should regularly produce injuries or ever seriously hurt a Soldier.

Ø Foot marches and combatives training should be conducted in duty uniform. That means BDUs or ACUs. That is what they will be patrolling in and fighting in so they should train in this uniform. Foot marches should regularly be increased in difficulty and increased gradually as well as the load. Initial combatives training should be in BDUs, and then as Soldier proficiency increases, increase the conditions. Do combatives after foot marches at the reduced ability level, do combatives in combat equipment, multiple attackers etc.

Ø The Army quit running in boots years ago after prolonged, career Soldier were sustaining injuries caused by this. This is a measure in force protection and Soldier sustainability. That does not mean that once a month or once a quarter that with a proper risk assessment a unit cannot safely do a battle-focused PT session in full combat equipment involving a short run, guerilla or grass drills. After all — is that not the uniform they will be fighting in?

Ø Not every installation has confidence and obstacle courses, but that does not have to prevent leaders from conducting them. Initially, Soldiers could complete these courses in boots and BDUs, but as they increase in ability, leaders could increase the conditions by including combat equipment. Develop alternate "confidence course" events while wearing combat equipment. Be creative; develop circuit training based on confidence courses.

Ø Often when I bring the subject of bayonet training up, it gets guffaws and sly grins from those I am speaking to. The bayonet is a dead weapon they say; they are only used to open MREs. Maybe so, but the benefits of bayonet training are many. One — it is battle-focused training. It trains the full range of upper and lower body muscles and instills the warrior spirit. Additionally, the bayonet is not a dead weapon. Many times in Iraq I had my Soldiers fix bayonets when dealing with hostile crowds, guarding prisoners, or on regular patrols. Not only does it present an aggressive posture, but it also gives the individual Soldier another level of force to use on the escalation of force ladder before transitioning to deadly force.

Ø Develop a commander's challenge program based on combat! Create a total fitness challenge based on the physical challenges and threats in combat and reward those that perform to a set standard. Some suggestions may be to get a score of 270 or above on the APFT with a minimum of 6 chin-ups, complete a 12-mile foot

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Platoon 3-mile run, medium speed, upper body, abs, buddy carry drills	Medium fast distance run, abs, buddy evac drills	Combatives training, abs, buddy carry drills, chin ups, dips	4-mile foot march, combatives, buddy evac drills	CO PT – Long slow distance, log drills, abs, dips, push up drills, buddy carry drills

Figure 1 — Sample Company Weekly PT Program

march within three hours, pass the Cold Weather Survival Test (CWST) or Special Forces Assessment and Selection (SFAS) swim test, complete a five-mile run in 40 minutes or less, and pass some type of combatives certification where the Soldier is not only required to perform but teach a certain move. This does not have to be done all in the same day; do one event a week quarterly and give the task to your company master fitness trainer to develop and track. Create a special award for those that meet this standard.

Ø Ditch the sports! No enemy in any of the four conflicts I have been in has the enemy ever asked me to play basketball or football. These are not good strength or endurance builders. I have never been in any unit, no matter how high speed, where every man was so fit that no one had any room for improvement in running, foot marching, swimming, or fighting. If you want to do sports, do it in the afternoon or as secondary PT. PT is training time for war — not athletic events.

Ø Finally, last but not least — encourage off-duty physical fitness! Soldiers who are involved in combat-related sports such as boxing, wrestling, martial arts, etc., should be afforded the opportunity to attend whenever possible. When there is no mission critical training going on and a Soldier has a practice for these events, either on or off post — do all you can to support him. Don't forget those who train for triathlons, bike races, marathons etc. Although not our focus, they can be an inspiration to others in the unit. We have done it for years with unit softball, basketball, and flag football teams — let's support those that will enhance our training and be trainers for our Soldiers.

Physical fitness training is the cornerstone of success for any disciplined, combat ready, battle-focused unit. Our approach to it should not be one of making events up the day of execution. The same care and approach should be taken as planning major training exercises. There should be a clear end state and definition of success. The goal, although never fully achieved, is constantly sought after — a never-ending quest. We are constantly conducting operations in the global war on terrorism; it is going to be a long road ahead. We owe it to our Soldiers to ensure they are starting this trip with a full tank of gas. They deserve to be prepared for the rigors of combat not just the APFT.

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