

Spc. Dunagan, Michael

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Narrative Human Interest

FITNESS

FORT GEORGE G. MEADE, Md. -- For some soldiers, Army physical readiness training in the morning is nothing more than an hour when they go through the motions until they hear the overhead arm pull being yelled from the front.

“I’ve been playing sports and working out since I was a kid,” said Tanner, “It’s all I’ve known.”

“I’ve always been interested in health and fitness,” Said Ruiz. “I attended the master fitness trainer course in 2017, and became interested in pursuing nutrition while I was in college.”

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For Staff Sgt. Sarah Ruiz and Staff Sgt. William Tanner, instructors at the Defense Information School here, fitness is a significant part of their lives on and off the clock. Finding time to get to the gym after being cooped up in the office or job site all day, plus the other day to day tasks can be a challenge for many.

“One of the best parts about the Army is that they make time during the workday, and going to the gym isn’t viewed as a bad thing.” Ruiz said, “The Army understands that people need to make time to exercise, and they make the time for it every day.”

While life can get in the way for many, Tanner doesn’t let his daily roles as a teacher, father, husband, and soldier get in the way of fitness goals.

“I have a family, work 10 to 12 hours per day, and still have to go home to take care of my wife and kids,” Tanner said. “I understand that finding the time is hard for most people, but if people want it bad enough, they’ll find a way to work it into their schedule.”

While the Army may be one of the few organizations in the United States that encourages and promotes physical activity during the workday in the workplace, there are a few things the organization as a whole could improve on to make soldiers more effective in combat.

“Look at the new Army combat fitness test: it was the most fun I’ve ever had while taking a fitness test,” Said Tanner. “The new test put my abilities to the test.”

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The new ACFT is a five-event test consisting of the three-repetition maximum deadlift, standing power throw, hand-release push-up, sprint drag and carry, leg tuck, and a timed two-mile run to finish it off. The new test aims to recreate various scenarios soldiers may find themselves in while in combat. The ACFT is replacing the Army physical fitness test, which has been the Army standard since 1980. The APFT consists of two-minutes of push-ups, two-minutes of sit-ups, and a timed two-mile run.

“I think the new test will make us all much more combat-ready,” Ruiz said. “What good is a male soldier who can run five miles fast, but can’t carry his equipment or drag one of his buddies to safety if they get shot?”

With the rise of the ACFT comes a significant amount of stress for soldiers. The new ACFT will require soldiers to work year-round to build and maintain good results across the board.

“Anyone worried about the new test or is struggling needs to work out more,” Said Tanner. “Soldiers need to start focusing more on hitting the weight room now more than strictly cardio.”

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“Don’t be nervous, educate yourself, and seek help from an external professional like a personal trainer,” Ruiz said. “If you plan and set yourself up for success, you will succeed.”

It is true. The new test focuses on the overall total-body strength of a soldier rather than the endurance of a few muscle groups. With those areas to cover and new exercises to learn comes the increased rate of risk and injury. There are many fitness-related injuries every year.

“There’ll have to be a greater emphasis on technique,” Said Tanner. “There will be those who let their ego dictate their strength, and those too afraid to lift the minimum because they don’t know what they’re doing and get hurt.”

For the ACFT, soldiers will have to learn many new complex movements that even the most experienced fitness professionals spend years mastering.

“People need to understand their bodies better,” Ruiz said. “Know your limits and be safe, but don’t let yourself get comfortable and complacent.”

Given that the new test focuses on strength in addition to cardio, soldiers will have to find a good balance between cardio and strength training.

“The overall goal of everyone should be fit,” Said Tanner. “Some of us are built differently and are stronger in certain areas than others, but every person should strive to be their best physically.”

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Soldiers will have to become physically strong and put forth additional effort on their own time if they hope to conquer the new ACFT and excel.

“Both strength and cardio play important roles,” said Ruiz. “Doing cardio won’t help if you’re in a combat zone and have to carry someone, and only lifting weights won’t help you if you have to sprint from one place to another quickly. Strength and cardio work hand in hand.”

The term fitness itself will always be subjective from one person to the next. A standard or a test can’t perfectly define it across the board.

“Fitness, to me, means being your best physically and mentally,” said Tanner. “It’s a matter of finding longevity for myself and my family, and making sure the mission gets completed.”

Every person has different strengths and weaknesses, but that does not mean someone is unfit if they’re better at squatting or deadlifting than they are running, or vice-versa.

“Fitness affects your day to day life and how you feel,” said Ruiz. “If you feel better, you’ll perform better in both your job and the areas in your life.”

