



Operation Fit to Fight

New Program Prepares Soldiers for Deployment

Operation Fit to Fight (F2F), an intense pre-deployment fitness program created by Army Staff Sgt. Ken Weichert, is having great success in physically preparing soldiers for deployment. As the health and fitness director for the Tennessee Army National Guard Recruit Sustainment Program (RSP), Weichert says Operation Fit to Fight offers extensive Health and Fitness training and evaluations in order to form the ideal fitness trainer for current military needs.

“My two tours of duty in Iraq helped me to understand the strength and stamina needed to sustain long-term tactical operations,” explains Weichert. “I noticed that many of my colleagues were not physically or mentally prepared for combat. Our physical fitness program included strategies to help us prepare for an annual fitness test with push-ups, sit-ups and a two-mile run. However, the program did not prepare us for the physical and mental

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PHOTOS BY ARMY SPECIALIST 1ST CLASS CLINT WOOD



Military Fitness



strain for combat while wearing 65 extra pounds in extreme environments. Operation Fit to Fight provides soldiers with effective combat physical readiness training and certifies instructors to lead F2F programs and to effectively manage other soldiers on their team.”

An Army Master Fitness Trainer, Weichert used his experiences to create Fitness Field Kits (FITKIT), which include plastic postcard-size exercise cards and rubber resistance tubing — perfect lightweight exercise tools to be used anywhere, regardless of space and time.

“Since the Master Fitness Trainer course ended over 10 years ago, there has not been a program to train soldiers to lead regulatory fitness programs,” he explains. “F2F also serves as the remedy to the obesity epidemic in America, using soldiers as the leaders to provide the cure!”

Weichert and his F2F Master Fitness team have trained the 1/155th Infantry, Mississippi Army National Guard (during pre-mobilization); the Recruiting and Retention Non-commissioned Officers of the Mississippi Army National Guard; the Recruit Sustainment Program (RSP) Cadre of the Mississippi Army National Guard; the 81st Brigade Combat Team (BCT), Washington Army National Guard; the Recruiting and Retention Non-commissioned Officers of the Washington Army National Guard; the Recruit Sustainment Program (RSP) Cadre of the Washington Army National Guard; the Army and Air National Guard senior enlisted leaders (conference workshops); and the Recruit Sustainment Program (RSP) Cadre of the Tennessee

Army National Guard (in progress).

The pre-deployment program is so successful because it is customized to meet unit operational needs and mission requirements.

“For example, RSP Cadre needs a version of F2F that will motivate newly recruited soldiers to participate in fitness activities during the 28 days that they are not at drill,” explains Weichert. “While the RSP Cadre grows concerned over pipeline losses at Basic Combat Training caused by Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT) failures, F2F becomes the turnkey answer to fight personnel attrition. Another example is the commander who needs a program to reduce combat stress and injuries caused by poor physical readiness. We provide a version of F2F that meets operational needs in a short period of time and helps raise morale! Whether it is at the pre-deployment training base or at the local unit, F2F is the cutting-edge of physical readiness programming to help form the fit soldier!”

Train the Trainers

As part of the Operation Fit to Fight program, the Train the Trainer (TTT) program is vitally important because it is tasked with teaching the fitness leaders of tomorrow, who must lead large groups and get them ready physically for deployment.

The TTT program is a two-day course with lecture and practical exercises covering diet and exercise fundamentals; exercise basics; nutrition; group training; exercises guidelines; use of Fitness Field Kits; lesson plans; teaching techniques; safety; fitness assessments; fitness tests; and program implementation.



"This training has been awesome," says Pfc. Chelsea Mack, whose unit was at the Yakima Training Center, Wash. for training in preparation for deployment to Iraq. "I value physical fitness as an important soldier skill. I have tried to implement a PT program within my National Guard unit, but since we only drill for one weekend a month, it has been pretty difficult. However, with the impending deployment on the horizon, this class has given me the skills and foundation to bring a higher level of physical fitness to my fellow soldiers, which is critical, especially with the mission we will be facing in Iraq."

Army Staff Sgt. Daniel Yoest, II, adds: "Through my six years in the Washington National Guard, I have seen a depreciation in unit fitness. I am excited to see that the National Guard is making a 'real' effort to increase the fitness and overall health levels of our soldiers. I look forward to more training sessions and ideas from Sgt. Ken."

Victory Fitness

Over the past few years the Army, and the military as a whole, has taken a more "functional" approach to fitness, and the Army and Marine Corps are currently implementing Combat Fitness Tests and more functional training.

"The military medical research institute conducted a thorough assessment and implemented the Victory Fitness Program, a response to the health and fitness shortcomings in the Army," Weichert explains. "That program encouraged changes in Army Regulations and Manuals in weight control and physical readiness. In fact, the soon-to-be-released Army Physical Readiness Manual includes a Combat Water Survival Test in Chapter 15 (still in draft). In short, the new training methods include combat physical conditioning, aerobic fitness and power performance training."

The Department of Defense (DoD) is also promoting a Comprehensive Fitness Program, which focuses on emotional and physical wellness.

"I am in discussions with the Decade of Health and the leaders of the Comprehensive Fitness Program in order to help provide leadership training and fitness programming," notes Weichert. Additional materials covering our support of DoD health and fitness policies will be published in the National Guard magazine (GX)."

For servicemembers preparing for deployment, mental toughness is a vital aspect of training.

"Vince Lombardi once said, 'Fatigue makes cowards of us all.' It's true," says Weichert. "With Operation Fit to Fight, we stand to create courageous warriors on every front through highly effective and motivational health and fitness training."

Fighting Obesity

Operation Fit to Fight is also making an impact on overweight and obesity in the military.

"Statistics show that 18 percent of men and 43 percent of women of recruiting age are too fat to be eligible for military service of any type, in any branch," notes Weichert. "A study by the Army published by USA Today in 2005 showed that the share of applicants who were obese doubled to 6 percent and that almost one-third of 18-year-olds who applied for service in all branches of the military in 2005 were overweight. According to an Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine study, 58.4 percent of Army soldiers over the age of



21 are overweight by federal standards."

He points out that with at least half of Army tasks requiring moderate to heavy physical strength, injuries are on the rise due to obesity and low strength levels.

"I see this every day," says Weichert. "When I served as a Recruiter, six out of every 10 young adults that I talked to were overweight. Now while serving as a Master Fitness Trainer and Health Director for the Recruit Sustainment Program (RSP) for the state of Tennessee, I see that 50 percent of the soldiers that I work with are overweight and can barely pass the APFT."

Many soldiers are now benefiting greatly from the F2F program.

"The hard part about losing weight is getting started and figuring out what to do," notes Pfc. Mark Morgan, Arizona Army National Guard. "With Sgt. Ken's Operation Fit to Fight program, it tells you exactly what to do and for how long. The only thing left to do is to go out and do it. I joined the Guard, and I knew I was overweight. I contacted Sgt. Ken, and he sent me his Fit to Fight workout routines and nutrition program. Within the first two weeks, I lost 10 pounds and could feel that I was getting stronger. Within a month of doing his program, I could do a pull-up for the first time in my life. I have done a lot better on my APFT scores and have had nothing but success from Sgt. Ken's workout routine."

Weichert and his wife also run STARTfitness.com, a highly successful Boot Camp fitness program that has been running with no break for more than 12 years. Although the program caters mostly to the civilian world, about 10 percent of clientele is military.

"We conduct indoor upper-body strength-training classes every Monday and Wednesday, as well as running and lower-body strength-training classes every Tuesday and Thursday," Weichert explains. "On Fridays, we perform whole body exercises, 30 minutes indoor and 30 minutes outdoors. Our three-part fitness DVD series and our downloadable workouts help with members that travel a great deal. We also have a great hiking season every year, and some expeditions go on peaks over 14,000 feet!"

As part of the Boot Camp program, fitness tests are administered every six months to evaluate progress and set goals.

"I certify all our instructors, and one is on our military F2F Master Instructor team and has led classes at Camp Shelby and at the Yakima Army Training Center," notes Weichert. "Our civilian program includes the same lessons as what is included in the military program. People trust that Boot Camps will serve as aggressive and motivating fitness programs where they can get in the best shape of their lives in a short period of time."

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