

Army's new fitness tests add taste of battlefield

March 1 2011, By SUSANNE M. SCHAFER , Associated Press



U.S. Army Sgt. Cornelius Trammell, clears a hurdle as he demonstrates one of the elements of the Army's new Combat Readiness Test, at Fort Jackson, in Columbia, S.C., Tuesday, March 1, 2011. The Army plans to toughen its fitness tests for the first time in 30 years to make sure all soldiers have the strength, endurance and mobility for battle. (AP Photo/Brett Flashnick)

(AP) -- Sit-ups don't make a soldier, the Army has decided. So its 30-year-old fitness requirements are getting a battlefield-inspired makeover.

Soon every soldier will have to run on a balance beam with two 30-pound canisters of ammunition, drag a sled weighted with 180 pounds of sandbags and vault over obstacles while carrying a rifle. Those were just some of the tests the Army unveiled Tuesday as it moves toward making its physical training look more like combat.

Right now [soldiers](#) have to complete sit-ups, push-ups and a two-mile run twice a year within times that vary by age and gender. Lt. Gen. Mark Hertling, the general in charge of the Army's initial military training, said he has been working to change that test for years.

Hertling said the current test "does not adequately measure components of strength, endurance, or mobility," or predict how well a soldier would do under fire.

A new annual "combat readiness" test includes running 400 meters - about a quarter of a mile - with a rifle, moving through an obstacle course in full combat gear, and crawling and vaulting over obstacles while aiming a rifle. Soldiers also will have to run on a balance beam while carrying 30-pound ammo boxes and do an agility sprint around a course field of cones.

Soldiers also will have to drag sleds weighted with sandbags to test their ability to pull a fallen comrade from the battlefield. The combat test might be given before deployments as well as annually, but that has not been decided.

The Army will keep elements of its old assessment in a "physical readiness" test, which adds such things as a 60-yard shuttle run and a standing long jump to one minute of push-ups and a 1.5-mile timed run. This might be given every six months, said Frank Palkoska, head of the Army's Fitness School at Fort Jackson.

Hertling said trials of the new program are starting this month at eight bases and the plan could be adopted Army-wide after reviews later this year.

Soldiers who ran the proposed "combat readiness" portion of the test Tuesday told reporters the exercises were tough, even for combat

veterans.

Wearing a battle helmet and carrying a rifle, Staff Sgt. Timothy Shoenfelt teetered as he trod the balance beam, holding ammo tins in each hand. His pace slowed a bit as he dragged the green sled behind him, then held his M-4 steady as he strode sideways through the "point-move-aim" portion of the test.

"My quads are on fire!" the 31-year-old from Indiana, Pa., said afterward. "It really made me breathe hard and challenged a lot of muscle groups."

Wheeled vehicle mechanic and Sgt. 1st Class Cornelius Trammell, 33, of Eufaula, Ala., said it will be important for all soldiers to go through tests, even if their jobs are behind desks. He laughed when reporters commented on his sweaty face.

"You never know when you might need it, whether you are in the infantry or if you're a mechanic," said Trammell, who's been deployed three times.

The tests will be given to all soldiers and officers, including Army Reserves and National Guard, even those recalled soldiers who are now over 60, officials said. Specific gender and age standards are still being worked out, Palkoska said.

The shift follows other Army efforts to overhaul training, improve diets and help older soldiers keep fit. Hertling said the Army is trying to better prepare soldiers for the 40 to 70 pounds of weapons and body armor many of them need to carry in Afghanistan and Iraq.

"Soldiers like to be challenged. This will definitely challenge them," Hertling said.

The Army also is hoping to reduce injuries - both in the field and from repetitive exercises.

"This is about training smarter, not just training more," Hertling said.

Staff Sgt. Danica Foster, 28, of Brooklyn, N.Y., who pumped through a shuttle run and did push-ups for the "physical readiness" section, said the new tests will require soldiers to work on their upper body strength. Female soldiers will have to work to get them done, she said.

"I honestly believe, though, that if I can do this, anybody can," she said with a laugh.

Besides Fort Jackson, the program will be tested at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.; Fort Benning, Ga.; Fort Sill, Okla.; Fort Bliss, Texas; Fort Bragg, N.C.; Fort Lewis, Wash.; and at the Army's military academy at West Point.

©2010 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Citation: Army's new fitness tests add taste of battlefield (2011, March 1) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-03-army-battlefield.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.