



U.S. Army 1st Sgt. Martaliz Merced-Santana, assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 519th Military Intelligence Battalion, 525th Military Intelligence Brigade, executes the Sprint Drag Carry event during the field testing of the Army Combat Fitness Test at Fort Bragg, N.C., Jan. 9, 2019. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Jeremiah Meaney, 525th Military Intelligence Brigade Public Affairs Office)

Training the Trainers

Preparing to Launch the New ACFT

By Maj. Bradley Cooper
U.S. Army Talent Management Task Force

&

Jeremiah Rozman
Association of the U.S. Army

The Army is built upon the individual Soldier, and the battlefield of the future demands Soldiers who can excel under intense physical and cognitive demands. The new Army Combat Fitness Test (ACFT) breaks with over three decades of the Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT). The Army plans to roll out the test by October 2019 and replace the APFT as the Army's fitness test of record by October 2020 ("Army Combat Fitness Test," n.d.). To succeed, the Army must address new training, evaluation, and equipment requirements (Rempfer, 2019). The Army is taking an

innovative approach to implementing the ACFT by utilizing field tests, practice ACFTs, and qualifying all noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and officers as graders.

What's New

As stated by Maj. Gen. Frost (2018), the new test yields three key advantages: First, it measures strength and conditioning that accurately mimics the movements necessary on the battlefield. Second, it is gender and age neutral with standards corresponding to the



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Gabriel Wright, a signals intelligence analyst with the 780th Military intelligence Brigade, grades the Hand-Release Push-Up event May 17, 2019, as part of Army Combat Fitness Test Level II Grader validation training, held at Fort Meade, Md. A mobile training team from Fort Gordon's Cyber Center of Excellence NCO Academy provided the training by teaching, coaching, and administering the ACFT to 114 NCOs. (U.S. Army Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Osvaldo Equite)

demands of the Soldier's duty. Finally, the test itself promotes an Army-wide culture of physical fitness.

Instead of training to pass an arbitrary strength standard of push-ups and sit-ups, Soldiers must maintain a healthy lifestyle and train for overall strength and conditioning. Research shows this will decrease injuries which will increase the number of deployable Soldiers. The Australian army instituted similar training in 2016 and decreased their trainee injury rate by 40 percent (Fuller & White, 2018). The money saved in decreased injury rates and the increase in deployable Soldiers is worth the cost of purchasing the required equipment (Ham, 2018).

In April 2019, the ACFT Mobile Training Team (MTT) held an ACFT demonstration for more than 100 Army inspectors general at the World Wide Inspector General Conference. During this demonstration, Col. Ray Herrera, command inspector for U.S. Army South, said, "After taking the test, I believe the ACFT is a substantial improvement toward determining readiness, and it better prepares Soldiers than our current annual test" (Ruyle, 2019, para. 12).

Implementation

The ACFT Military Training Teams

In order to implement the ACFT properly, the Army is training a core group of trainers to prepare their own units and administer the test. The MTTs prepare and certify new Army Master Fitness instructors and mid-level supervisors to train Soldiers

to administer the ACFT. This approach *trains the trainers* without negatively impacting active duty readiness, and integrates the new test regime at maximum efficiency before it is officially implemented across the force (Cannon, 2019).

In July 2018, the Army published *Executive Order 219-18: The Implementation of the Army Combat Fitness Test*, which officially established 30 Active Duty, 10 USAR (Reserve), and 10 ARNG (National Guard) NCOs/officers to serve on the ACFT MTTs across the force (Department of the Army, 2018). In May 2019, as part of the Association of the U.S. Army National Security Studies team, Maj. Joseph Flores and Master Sgt. Shelly Horner (ACFT MTT team leads) were interviewed about the Army's effort to train the trainers and the requirements involved

in the certification process. According to Flores and Horner, the MTTs are responsible for training three levels of graders, Levels I-III, each with its own distinct knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Individual level requirements are as follows (J. Flores & S. Horner, personal communication, May 2019):



A U.S. Army Soldier prepares to toss a 10-pound medicine ball over his head as part of the Standing Power Throw event of the Army Combat Fitness Test. (Photo courtesy of Maj. Brad Cooper)



A U.S. Army Advanced Individual Training Soldier runs laps during an Army Combat Fitness Test at Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Va., June 28, 2019. The sixth and final event of the ACFT is a timed 2 mile run meant to test Soldiers' aerobic endurance after five physically demanding events. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Monica Roybal)

Level I — ACFT Grader

The ACFT Grader will complete a 1-day validation training offered by a locally-sourced ACFT Level II or Level III Grader-Instructor.

ACFT Level I Grader has the knowledge, skills, and ability (KSA) to:

- Validate a testing location
- Validate the testing equipment to standard
- Grade the 6 ACFT test events to standard
- ACFT Level I Grader may be used to familiarize their unit with the ACFT and prepare Soldiers to take the test and/or receive training from Level II Graders.

Level II — ACFT Grader

The ACFT Level II Grader will complete the 2-day validation training offered by the U.S. Army Physical Fitness School or U.S. Army Center for Initial Military Training (IMT). Or by a locally-sourced ACFT Level III Grader-Instructor. **The ACFT Level II Grader**

may not train/validate other Level II Graders.

ACFT Level II Grader has the KSA to:

- Serve as a testing officer in charge (OIC) / noncommissioned officer in charge (NCOIC) to administer a unit ACFT
- Validate a testing location
- Validate the testing equipment to standard
- Grade the 6 ACFT test events to standard
- Administer a 90-day record ACFT
- Train ACFT Level I Grader by providing the 3-hour validation

Level III — ACFT (Master Fitness Trainer Personnel)

The ACFT Level III Grader-Instructor must hold the Master Fitness Trainer certification and will complete the 3-day validation training offered by the MTT or U.S. Army IMT. ACFT Level III Grader-Instructor has the KSA to:

- Serve as a testing OIC/NCOIC to administer a unit ACFT
- Validate a testing location
- Validate the testing equipment to standard
- Grade the 6 ACFT test events to standard
- Administer a 90-day record ACFT
- Train ACFT Grader (Level I) by providing the 3-hour certification course.
- Train ACFT Master Grader (Level II) by providing the 2-day certification training.

Currently, more than 6,000 Soldiers have received formal ACFT Level II-III Grader Validation training from one of the ACFT teams. Since Level II and III graders are allowed to train others at a lower level, it's hard to document how many other graders have been trained to the Level I standard. The Army's plan is that all NCOs and officers receive an ACFT Grader Level Validation before implementation of the ACFT (J. Flores & S. Horner, personal communication, May 2019).

Preparation

The *Army Combat Fitness Test Training Guide* has multiple examples of the movements and exercises involved in the ACFT and has equipment substitutions (like an ammo can, water can, or sandbag in place of kettlebells or medicine balls) for those deployed or without access to the ACFT lane equipment (U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 2018). For additional information on exercises and movements, consult the Army doctrine on exercise: *FM 7-22: Army Physical Readiness Training* (Department of the Army, 2012).

For injured Soldiers, and those on permanent profile, the U.S. Army IMT is developing alternate events, to be officially approved on October 1, 2019. These events may include the stationary bike, swimming events, or rowing (Cox, 2019).

For more information on the ACFT, go to the official Army website: www.army.mil/acft. It includes instructions, photos, and videos for each of the events. It also contains instructions, photos, and videos for three different preparatory exercises per event to help Soldiers train for the October 2020 implementation date.

***If NCOs and officers are interested in obtaining their ACFT certification from one of the MTTs, they can contact their unit's first sergeant. ■**

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Maj. Bradley Cooper is currently serving on the Army Talent Management Task Force. His previous assignment was as the Army Fellow at the Association of the United States Army (AUSA). He has over 17 years of experience as an Army Logistician and holds a Master's in Business from the University of Phoenix.

Jeremiah Rozman is a National Security Analyst at the Association of the U.S. Army (AUSA). He holds dual citizenship with Israel and the U.S. and served as an infantryman in the Israel Defense Forces. He is a doctoral candidate at the University of Virginia studying international relations.



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For additional information on the ACFT, check out our legacy podcast:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7dvD-lJ8nc>

