

Running Head: ARMY WEIGHT CONTROL

Army Weight Control Program

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15 November 2006

Class 57

Abstract

The Army Weight Control Program has caused some ethical problems. I have witnessed the army's inconsistency of kicking Soldiers out of one unit because they were overweight, then letting them get picked up by another in which their weight was no problem. For many Soldiers, bordering on being overweight causes stress. Some Soldiers even have to take some form of medication to make weight. I believe it's time to do away with the old weigh-in and tape test and modernize to a device called the Body Composition Analyzer. This device can give a person's weight, a true body fat percentage, and could eliminate an ethical problem. An even better option would be to allow a person to stay in if they can pass their PT test and do their job well.

The Army Weight Control Program

Did you know that about 30% of the adult population in the U.S. is obese? But, being obese and being big-boned is not the same thing. The Army puts all of these people in the same category, making no allowances on weight for the stocky person, or the person with a slow metabolism. Some soldiers pass the PT test with flying colors and are knowledgeable at their jobs, yet still get penalized for not making weight. The Army Weight Control Program is terribly wrong in my opinion. It discriminates against those stockier Soldiers who can pass PT tests and do their military job just fine.

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Army Regulation 600-9 says personnel who are overweight are unable to be promoted, cannot attend professional military schools, and will not be assigned to command positions. All Army personnel are subject to separation if their weight doesn't meet standards in one year or they are barred from reenlisting. Page one, paragraph five of AR 600-9 sums up what the Army wants in a Soldier. The Army traditionally has fostered a military appearance which is neat and trim. Further, an essential function of day to day effectiveness and combat readiness of the Army is that all personnel are healthy and physically fit. Self discipline to maintain proper weight distribution and a high standard of appearance are essential to every individual in the Army. I agree that a Soldier should be neat and trim in appearance, but maintaining proper weight distribution means different things for different people.

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One thing that makes our bodies different is metabolism, which works at various rates in various people. Some people can eat or drink anything they want and not gain weight. For example, Randy Marsh is a 50-year-old man whom I work with at the State Highway Department in Wisconsin. He eats all day long. He packs a lunch like everyone

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else, but runs out of food by noon. Often he'll stop at a store at noon break to buy junk food. Sometimes Randy will get a box of Ho-Ho's and have it polished off by the end of his shift. This is a man who doesn't have any spare fat on his body. If I ate like Randy does, I would weigh 300 pounds, even if I ran five miles a day. Tom Teeples and Mike Shanky are a couple more friends of mine. They are both Vietnam veterans, making them around 60 years old. Both Tom and Mike can drink and eat more than guys twice their size and have no ill-effects such as the weight gain. These three friends have the metabolism that most people would like. Many of us spend money on diet pills to speed up our metabolism, to hopefully gain a trimmer body, especially many military personnel.

Today's Army Weight Control Program can cause Soldiers stress and also causes abuse of over-the-counter drugs. A few years ago, I worked in a federal job at Ft. McCoy as a military technician. To have this job, concurrent enrollment in the National Guard was mandatory. A co-worker, an SFC at the time, wasn't overweight, but was on the edge; he always stressed over weigh-in. To ensure making weight, he would take an excess of water pills a day ahead of time. Back then, we were given three hours a week for PT. He used his time mainly for running to help keep his weight under control. I don't know all the side effects to water pills, besides making you go to the bathroom often, but I would think that during the PT test a person would have a good chance of getting muscle cramps caused by dehydration. He knew if he had to get taped for the weigh-in, it would be the first step toward being kicked out of the National Guard, and therefore, losing his job. This SFC did not get along with his commander at all. Once a Soldier is on the weight control program, their commander can make life pretty hard if he/she wants to.

The Army Weight Control Program is also very inconsistent. In my first unit, 106th Supply and Service, Wisconsin National Guard, I was a PFC in the maintenance section. My squad leader was an SSG with about 20 years under his belt and a lot of knowledge about maintenance. He was kicked out of the unit for being overweight. About a month later, he joined the Army Reserve and was soon promoted to SFC. The 106th S&S had a unit strength about 120%, there wasn't much room for advancement. I believe my squad leader's main reason for getting kicked out was to make room for one of the first sergeants' pets.

Another person, SPC Perry, was the big strong country boy type. He always had a problem making weight, but could pass the tape test each time. He worked hard at passing the tape test, dieting and exercise, and lost a lot of weight. However, his neck size had dropped with all of the weight loss, so he failed the tape test again. He got his walking papers. Most of the unit was upset seeing a good Soldier and a good friend lost. But, Perry joined a brand new unit, C Co 1/128 INF. How is it possible to have paperwork to kick someone out of the Army National Guard, then that someone joins the Army Reserve?

Finally, the Army Weight Control Program does not take into account how well a Soldier does on his PT test or how well their job is done. During OIF one, I was an MSG, mobilized with my old unit, the 998th QM Company. During mobilization, our unit received about 15 fillers from Kentucky. One of them, SPC Danner, was about 30 years old and looked like he could play professional football. In his civilian job, he was a mechanic and machinist. His background knowledge helped out many times with the problems we faced during our deployment. He helped with analyzing many different

problems, but I think he'll be remember most by the fact he was the best Soldier at changing tires. When it comes to changing tires size matters, skinny people just can't bust loose lug nuts as good stocky person. ♪ SPC Danner did really well on his PT test and motivated others to try harder. He was at a non-promotable status because he did not meet the Army Height/Weight Standards. Even after a year in Iraq in extreme heat conditions with no air conditioning, he couldn't pass the tape test. I know he would have made a great NCO, but that will never happen. During demobilization, he told me he was going to become a full-time civilian, and that he just didn't fit in with Army regulations.

There are many other ways of checking up on a Soldier's "proper weight distribution" other than the weigh-in and tape test. ^{The current} This system is out dated and should be replaced with a more effective modern one. The Body Composition Analyzer is one of these systems. It is used like a weight scale, except you step on it with bare feet. A painless electrical current is sent throughout your body. Once the machine computes your body fat percentage, it shows up on a digital display along with your body weight. This fast and easy system would be an improvement over the current method of checking weight distribution. It would be fairer for the big-boned or stocky person and the low metabolism person, plus it would save time.

In conclusion, I believe if a Soldier can do his job and pass the PT test, then that person should have a place in today's Army. A body's metabolism works well for some and not so well for others. A person's bone structure is another way people are different. To say a big boned person should weigh the same as a small boned person is absurd. I believe there should be some changes to the ways Soldiers are viewed. Remember, not all

Soldiers are created equally. But that is what is written in AR 600-9. In my opinion, the military should adopt a new slogan, Stocky Soldiers for the Tough Fight.

References

Headquarters Department of the Army, 4 March 1996, Army Regulation 600-9,

The Army Weight Control Program, Page one, Paragraph 5.