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# **FUTURE WAR PAPER**

## ***TITLE:***

Physical Training Instructors: The Key to Combat Conditioning

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## **INTRODUCTION**

“The number one modernization and product improvement program will continue to be the individual Marine.”<sup>1</sup> In fact, Marines who are not physically fit can be a detriment to the readiness and combat efficiency of their unit.<sup>2</sup> However, the Marine Corps is failing to provide its elite warfighters with a physical conditioning program that prepares them for the physical demands of combat. With a nominal investment in time, Marines could benefit from a program that assesses their units’ fitness in terms of their future operating environment and that provides a progressive plan to ensure their units are capable of performing at the highest levels in combat. Such a program requires competent instructors. Consequently, the creation of a physical training instructor secondary military occupational specialty (MOS) will improve the Marine Corps’ ability to prepare for and conduct war.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Marine Corps relies on Marine Corps Order P6100.12 Marine Corps Physical Fitness Test and Body Composition Program Manual (PFT/BCP) for guidance on physical conditioning programs. The order states, “Commanders should strive to achieve the primary objective of combat readiness by emphasizing combat conditioning at the unit level.”<sup>3</sup> The order goes on to state “this objective is reflected in training plans and schedules,”<sup>4</sup> thereby providing the commander and Marine a means to improve physical

performance. The order also tasks the commander to assign a staff non-commissioned officer (SNCO) as the command physical training representative. Finally, the order provides broad guidance on how a physical conditioning training plan should be constructed and executed. In addition, the Marine Corps relies on the Unit Training Management (UTM) Program to ensure combat effectiveness. UTM utilizes a systems approach to training (SAT) that “maximizes results and focuses unit training priorities on the wartime mission.”<sup>5</sup> Utilizing Marine Corps Order P6100.12 PFT/BCP Manual, UTM, and the experience and knowledge of the commander, the Marine Corps hopes to ensure a physical conditioning program that has the highest possible quality.

However, units seldom achieve training plans of the highest quality because commanders lack the knowledge and time to provide a high quality physical conditioning program. Moreover, the Marine Corps provides commanders with little formal instruction on physical training. Officers are introduced to a quality physical training program at Officer Candidate School (developed and supervised by a Royal Marine physical training instructor) as candidates, but this experience does not prepare them to develop individual plans for others. Similarly, the Staff Non-Commissioned Officer (SNCO) Academy provides some preparation; however, it consists primarily of participation in a quality physical conditioning plan (learn by doing v. training the trainer). Even the physical training instructors at the SNCO Academy are provided no formal preparation to instruct and must draw from their own background, including off-duty experience.

Fortunately, the Marine Corps does not have to look far to find a successful example of a quality physical training program. The United Kingdom's Royal Marines and the Royal Netherlands Marine Corps, realizing the demands on the commander and the importance of physical training, established a physical training instructor (PTI) secondary military occupational specialty (MOS). The mission of the PTI is to "prepare men for the physical demands of commando service."<sup>6</sup> The Royal Marine PTIs receive seventeen weeks of schooling, consisting of all aspects of fitness: physical training theory, conducting individual and unit fitness assessments, anatomy and physiology, and coaching techniques. Upon graduation from formal school, the PTIs receive an equivalent qualification in the civilian sector. This civilian qualification strengthens the PTI program by encouraging the PTIs to maintain currency in their skills. The PTI is assigned to a unit and serves as the unit commander's primary advisor on physical conditioning. With the commander's guidance, the PTI draws upon his formal training and experience to develop a physical training program to ensure all Marines are prepared for the rigors of combat, consistent with the unit's upcoming deployment

## **PREPARING FOR WAR**

According to MCDP-1, "all peacetime activities should focus on combat readiness."<sup>7</sup> The Marine PTI would ensure this goal is met by constructing a progressive, challenging physical conditioning program based on the commander's guidance and an assessment of the upcoming mission. As an integral part of his/her unit, the PTI would

understand the demands of the primary military occupational specialty and, therefore, have a better understanding of the requirements of the upcoming mission. A trained expert in his field, the PTI would not only develop the physical conditioning plan but would be able to adjust the plan during execution as dictated by failures to meet certain goals, changes in guidance from the commander, or changes in the mission.

Moreover, the PTI within a unit could access other functional experts. For example, the senior PTI (possibly a first sergeant) within an infantry battalion would provide the battalion commander with advice on the battalion physical conditioning program. After receiving the commander's guidance, the first sergeant, could then prepare a conditioning program for distribution by the operations officer. The company commanders would then construct their company physical conditioning program with advice from the senior PTI within their company. The PTIs throughout the battalion would participate in the program as small unit leaders, sharing knowledge and experience. Moreover, the senior PTIs in the unit would provide assistance and supervision to the less experienced PTIs. This structure would reinforce the importance of the combat conditioning plan

Furthermore, because of his education and training, the PTI would interact with and reinforce the battalion medical officer and company corpsman. For example, as a small unit leader and PTI his daily contact with the Marines and his participation in the development of progressive physical conditioning plans, he/she is well positioned to assist in the prevention of injuries. The PTI would be able to assist in the rehabilitation of light-duty Marines as well and could identify Marines who might have small injuries

or who are hiding more substantial injuries. This group of experts would provide the commander with a combined arms team of physical conditioning professionals who could ensure more Marines are prepared for the demands of combat.

## **CONDUCTING WAR**

During war, a Marine PTI would be expected to develop a program to maintain the level of conditioning established prior to deployment. However, the PTI (operating with the CO's guidance) could adjust the program to fit the battlefield environment, thereby alleviating the frequent injuries and strains caused by operations. The PTI, as an integral part of the unit, would understand the demands of the unit and, therefore, have a better understanding of how to maintain a level of fitness and health consistent with the operational environment. For example, the PTIs could assess and develop stretching exercises for pre- and post-operations and could tailor these to fit the specific environment. If bodies are responding negatively to the increased weight of equipment and other physical demands, the PTIs could develop exercises to strengthen specific muscles in order to prevent injury and to ensure operational momentum. In fact, this information could be stored on a database and used to refine physical conditioning programs in units still preparing for deployment. Also, the PTI would be able to evaluate and train combat replacements to ensure they were raised to the standards of the unit (instead of being a burden on their new unit).



However, PTIs have a potentially greater role with respect to prevention and rehabilitation. Just as in the preparation for war, proper rehabilitation during and after war is essential. The PTI would be sought out by Marines not only to assist them in the physical performance of their duties, but also to ensure that small aches and pains were prevented and rehabilitated so that the Marine could return to full duty quickly. In fact, the Medical Service Corps' of the United States Navy and United States Army are taking a much more aggressive approach to the treatment and rehabilitation of Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines. The Navy, comparing the treatment of Marines to the treatment of professional athletes, created Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation Therapy (SMART) centers<sup>8</sup> through which a team of athletic trainers, physical therapists, and physicians work together to expedite the Marines' return to full duty. The Army experimented with assigning physical therapists at the regimental level and was able to reduce the amount of lost training days.<sup>9</sup> With the Marine Corps' introduction of PTIs, the medical professionals would still focus on the treatment and rehabilitation of the injured, while the PTI could focus on prevention through a professional pre-/post- combat conditioning program.

Improved physical fitness also contributes to improved mental health, improved energy levels, and increased confidence. As Lieutenant General Arthur S. Collins Jr. stated in his book *Common Sense Training*, "The development of greater endurance, improved agility, and coordination results in a better state of health and a better mental attitude."<sup>10</sup> The improvement in the Marines mental health, combined with physical fitness would increase his/her performance within the human dimension of war. The

ability to resist or limit the affects of the extreme physical and moral demands of combat would provide commanders at all levels with one more tool in order to impose their will on the enemy.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES**

The role of the PTI would be to increase the commander's ability to accomplish the mission. PTIs will receive formal schooling and a secondary MOS, which would be offered only to enlisted Marines who have already completed their first four-year enlistment. This requirement for second-term Marines will help ensure that the PTI has the personal maturity and professional experience to advise his unit's commander on physical conditioning. Marine officers would receive a reduced course covering physical fitness theory and assessment fundamentals to increase their awareness of the skills their PTIs bring to their units. With the emphasis the Marine Corps gives to physical fitness and its direct correlation to leadership, there should be no shortage of both officer and enlisted Marines willing to attend the training.

Because physical conditioning is important throughout the Marine Corps and improves the ability of all units to accomplish the mission, PTIs could serve in any unit or primary military occupational specialty. Since the PTI designation would be a secondary MOS, table of organization changes for PTI billets would not be necessary (except to ensure that PTIs were available to all commanders). However, the physical training instructor program would encourage PTIs to specialize in related areas, such as

martial arts (MCMAP), water safety survival, and possibly mountain leadership. Due to the demanding nature of these programs, PTIs would serve on staff at these schools to assist in the specialized physical conditioning instruction.

## **COUNTER-ARGUMENTS**

Opponents might argue that the Marine Corps already has thorough and detailed guidance on physical fitness (Marine Corps Order P6100.12) and needs only to enforce the guidance. This argument is not valid. The Marine Corps' order addresses only the physical fitness test (PFT) and body composition program (BCP) and is insufficient in terms of providing a comprehensive framework for physical conditioning. Reading the document will no more provide competency than advising someone to read about boot camp in order to become a Marine. The ability to develop a comprehensive, progressive, and sustained physical conditioning program comes only with experience and through formal instruction by professionals.

Others might argue that the fitness professionals in the Semper Fit Program can help train units. Again, this argument is not valid. The Semper Fit Program order is focused on "encouraging and supporting healthy lifestyles,"<sup>11</sup> not on assessing unit fitness levels or on creating a progressive plan to prepare individuals and units physically for the challenges of combat. Moreover, while the Semper Fit professionals are experienced and knowledgeable, they have almost no experience with the requirements of military occupational specialties in a combat environment and are not in the unit with the

Marines on a daily basis. Consequently, they are not able to provide the constant feedback and awareness that a professional physical conditioning program requires.

Marines that are martial arts instructors (MAI) or martial arts instructor trainers (MAIT) might argue that MCMAP already has identified the shortfall and has a working solution. While the Martial Arts Center of Excellence (MACE), sacrificing their own time, has created combat conditioning specialists (CCS) within their MAI and MAIT instruction, MCMAP is not a viable substitute. CCS instruction is limited (one week), MAI and MAIT instruction rightfully focuses its course on martial arts, and within Marine Corps Order 1500.54A MCMAP there exists no requirement or billet description requiring CCS training.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, the CCS can provide only an introduction to the requirements necessary for developing, managing, and supervising a combat conditioning program, but does not possess the depth of knowledge to advise the commander on a unit combat conditioning program.

Still others may contend that the Marine Corps cannot afford the time to train Marines to this degree. Unfortunately, the Corps pays a high price in lost training days with Marines who are injured, which in turn reduces their units' effectiveness in combat. No professional athlete advances to the highest level without having a progressive and detailed training plan. Marines deserve the same level of focus. The "Nation needs to treat its premier warfighters"<sup>13</sup> as premier athletes.

Finally, the argument may be made that the Marine Corps cannot find Marines who want to attend this type of school. This argument is barely worth the refuting. Marines love physical training and frequently use their own time and money to further

their knowledge and build their skills. It would be relatively easy to channel this energy and formalize their training.

An argument may also be waged that the Marine Corps of the future may have the ability to increase physical performance without increasing physical activity. The United States Navy is doing extensive research in warfighter performance at the Naval Health Research Center in San Diego, California. Research that can benefit the Marine Corps includes technology to reduce body heat storage, which would reduce heat injuries, and decreasing mental awareness of muscle fatigue, thereby enabling increased physical performance. Finally, the military is developing supplements to maintain physical performance at high altitude.<sup>14</sup> Hence, with future medical and technological advancements, there may be no need for PTIs. However, the majority of this research focuses on increasing the physical performance of the Marine once in the combat zone. If the Marine Corps fails at the outset to provide a Marine in the best possible physical condition, the technology or supplements will have little effect. The idea is the same as filling a 1972 Pinto with premium gasoline: While there might be a small increase in performance, the engine still sets the overall limits.

## **CONCLUSION**

MCDP-1 states that “in order to maximize combat power, we must use all the available resources to best advantage.”<sup>15</sup> However, the Marine Corps continues to develop elite warfighters with an outdated, dangerous, and haphazard system. As the

nation's premier warfighting institution, the United States Marine Corps has the ability to provide a focused physical conditioning program that is designed for combat performance. With minor organizational changes, the Marine Corps can better prepare for war and improve its conduct of war. Using the Royal Marine Program as an example, the United States Marine Corps can create a physical training instructor secondary military occupational specialty to give the Marine the combat conditioning needed to impose his will. After all, "the object in war is to impose our will on our enemy."<sup>16</sup>

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Marine Corps Order (MCO) P1700.29, *Marine Corps Semper Fit Program Manual* (Washington, D.C: Headquarters, United States Marine Corps. 8 November 1999), v.

<sup>2</sup> Marine Corps Order (MCO) P6100.12, *Marine Corps Physical Fitness Test and Body Composition Program (MCPFTBCP)* (Washington, D.C: Headquarters, United States Marine Corps. 10 May 2002), 1-3.

<sup>3</sup> MCO P6100.12, 1-3.

<sup>4</sup> MCO P6100.12, 1-3.

<sup>5</sup> United States Marine Corps Training and Education Command, “UTM Overview,” URL: [http://restricted.mcu.usmc.mil/utm/UTM\\_Overview.htm](http://restricted.mcu.usmc.mil/utm/UTM_Overview.htm), accessed on 10 December 2005.

<sup>6</sup> United Kingdom, Royal Marines Commando, (London: Directorate of Naval Recruiting, 2001), 17.

<sup>7</sup> Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) – 1, *Warfighting*, (Washington, D.C: Department of the Navy. 20 June 1997), 53.

<sup>8</sup> “Pearl Harbor’s SMART Center Returns the Fleet to Readiness,” brief presented to Joint Council on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, provided to author during interview of Cdr Michele Weinstein on 26 September 2005, 1.

<sup>9</sup> “Operational Physical Therapy: Maximizing Readiness in Deployable Marine Units,” information paper, n.p., n.d, provided on 26 September 2005 by John J. Fraser, LTJG, MSC, USNR, Physical Therapist, 2.

<sup>10</sup> Collins Jr., Arthur S, *Common Sense Training*, (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1978), quoted in Peter G Tsouras, *Warriors’ Words: A Dictionary of Military Quotations* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1992), 446.

<sup>11</sup> MCO P1700.29, v.

<sup>12</sup> Marine Corps Order (MCO) P1500.54A, *Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (MCMAP)*(Washington, D.C: Headquarters, United States Marine Corps. 16 December 2002), 12.

<sup>13</sup> MCO P1700.29, v.

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<sup>14</sup> “Warfighter Performance,” *United States Navy, Naval Health Research Center*, URL: <http://www.nhrc.navy.mil/rsch/code21/program1>, accessed on 28 November 2005.

<sup>15</sup> MCDP-1, “Warfighting,” 94.

<sup>16</sup> MCDP-1, “Warfighting,” 4.



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