

Fort Bragg's Human Performance Enhancement Center

New Facility, Initiative Toughens Soldiers to

The Core

BY PAUL RAGUSA
Managing Editor

For soldiers participating in the new Human Performance Enhancement pilot program at Fort Bragg, N.C., the excitement and enthusiasm is palpable, just for the simple reason that they are going through training that is unlike anything they have ever experienced before in a Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) facility.

Fort Bragg's new Tucker Performance Enhancement Center, which was completed in May 2009 at a cost of \$600,000, represents a fresh and innovative approach to soldier performance training. For the special operational forces at Fort Bragg, such as the 3rd Operations Group and the 82nd Airborne, this functional combat training facility provides cutting edge tools to better prepare them for the rigors of combat environments they must excel in physically.

"In the Special Ops community they are expected to fight and win when they hit the ground, and are in hostile territory for extended periods of time, which takes a certain level of physical fitness that is not expected of the average American," says Garrison Commander Col. David Fox, USA.

"Physical fitness kind of becomes a way of life. You get called out on notice, you may be gone for months at a time, execute the mission and come back and get prepared again. Physical fitness and your ability to function mentally are tied together. If your body is able to continue functioning you will remain mentally sharp and be able to accomplish your mission."

Because the Army puts fitness centers into the Recreation Category or MWR, most often they have to be able to meet the needs of many on post — soldiers, youth, family members, etc. — but Fox says there should be a facility that is dedicated specifically to a soldier's readiness.

"I view fitness centers as facilities to enhance a soldier's performance," he says. "This new

facility is ideal for this purpose. We have strength coaches, dieticians, folks that can work on bumps and bruises, rehab folks, experts in the field. Before this new performance center we had soldiers walking into a facility and maybe looking for direction from a fellow soldier who may or may not have the skills or expertise. With this new facility soldiers can walk in and talk to a professional, do an analysis of where they are at physically and develop a program that helps them reach their goals."

Fox points out that this facility and program is unlike any other in the Army.

FACILITY PHOTOS BY JEREMY LEVINE

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"I view the soldiers as professional athletes and this is the type of facility that helps to improve performance, and prepares them smartly and better for combat environments."

Concept Takes Shape

The concept for the new combat center was conceived in tandem with the idea for a Soldier Performance Enhancement program. Rachel Quesada, a fitness coordinator at Fort Bragg, was tasked with leading the program and helping to develop a plan for a new functional fitness facility.

Fort Bragg also brought in leaders in the industry to help get the project off the ground. Jeremy Levine, a leading expert in military fitness for the past 13 years, provided the post with his vast knowledge of operational training and the proper use of equipment and techniques to prepare for combat. As a former Marine, many of the military functional performance programs originated with Jeremy's exposure to military communities, where he is often contracted to teach master training classes on functional fitness and equipment as well as guidance in building fitness centers and programs. He also is the founder of Atlantic Performance Training.

"Jeremy Levine had come in because he was contracted by MWR to give a basic equipment orientation course," Quesada explains. "When Jeremy came in I spoke with him a little bit about what we wanted to do with the human performance training and ways and directions we could head in, and he really was great in giving us some guidance on some directions he thought would be useful based on his experience in the military."

Quesada, Levine and Joe Johnson, chief, Recreation Division, talked about all the possibilities for a new functional training facility and the concept for the new facility was born.

"I have been working with Jeremy for 6-7 years, on and off, to do many things," explains Johnson, who is a veteran in MWR. "Rachel, Jeremy and I were talking and Jeremy said if you guys have the money we can take this place and turn it into a real functional gym. So we started figuring what we wanted to do."

They got full backing from Col. Fox, who loved the idea, and started to work the concept from the inside out.

"We combined expertise — my passion for fitness and for performance and a desire to have this kind of facility here — and Jeremy's knowledge and input because he has been in military fitness for almost 15 years; this is what he has been doing," explains Quesada, who worked with Levine to create a state-of-the-art combat training facility. "So he really was great in helping us sort out exactly what was needed for the human performance initiative, from equipment to training."



"We were able to turn this old gym into a true combat athlete center," adds Levine. "This really is the hottest facility in the military right now, from the layout to the equipment to the highly trained instructors who are running it and the program."

He points out that Fort Bragg is now a training hub of excellence — a model for other installations that may be looking to do the same thing. "It really is like an Olympic training facility where soldiers can come in and be coached, educated and taught the right ways to lift, to work out effectively and safely, without putting themselves at risk of injury from improper technique or overtraining," notes Levine.

He points out that in the past soldiers have had the mindset to push themselves at all times, and training regimens usually involved some heavy daily pounding on their bodies.

"The idea is to take a smart approach to training, focus on shoring up their weakest areas," he points out. "The mentality in the military is to be the fastest and strongest all the time but it is equally important to build strength using less stressful training methods that protect the spine and build up the core. That is why the concept of periodization is so important to this program."

Equipment Breakdown

Once funding was secured, Bragg began work right away building a facility to a gold standard, highlighted by really state-of-the-art equipment.

Levine says many of the fitness equipment providers, such as Woodway, VersaClimber, Concept2 and Lemond went above and beyond to help make the facility a success, providing training and education.

"Our facility is a complete 180 from anything else on post and from what you would find on most military installations unless it is a special ops environment," says Quesada, who worked with Levine to purchase fitness equipment that really makes this place stand out.

The facility features 10 Woodway Force Treadmills — user-driven treadmills with no motor in them. "The treadmills help in improving your speed, acceleration, power and linear

Military Fitness/Special Ops

velocity development," notes Quesada. The facility also features Concept2 rowers — "the only facility on post that has rowers," she notes.

In addition, the facility has Life Fitness ground based equipment, VersaClimbers, VersaPulleys, Lemond spin bikes, Jacobs Ladders and 10 Olympic lifting platform stations that are equipped with Werksan equipment. The facility also has a Kaiser Force Reduction Pulley System.

Functional training tools include Smart Bells from ThinkFit as well as kettle bells, medicine balls and climbing ropes from Perform Better. Akro wheels from Akro Solutions are also available and equipment from UCS. The post also invested in some Indian clubs, a functional training tool that looks like a bowling pin, and were purchased from Motion RX (Functional Hand Strength).

A Smart Carte, which is a portable functional fitness cart full of equipment, was purchased from Beacon Athletics.

"It is a portable cart that is loaded up with hurdles, jump ropes, medicine balls, agility equipment and it is equipped so you can take it outside and we are able to train up to 60 people at one time," explains Quesada.

The iMet software from Woodway is an integral part of the new approach to fitness in the facility.

"It allows us to do sub-Max VO2 testing," says Quesada. "It is a great piece of equipment because it actually comes with periodization software so when you test a user on it you can give them a program based on what their fitness goals might be.

And it shows them exactly what they have to do over a 6-, 12-, 18-week period to improve their fitness level. It is one of the tools that we think is going to be really good in our testing process with the soldiers who go through our program. We'll have the capability to test quite a few people and see the differences between when they started to when they end, and provide tailored programs along the way."

The facility also has a Polar Heart Rate monitoring system that uses blue tooth technology, which can monitor multiple heart rates within a 150-meter range.

Warthan & Associates provided all the rubber flooring throughout.

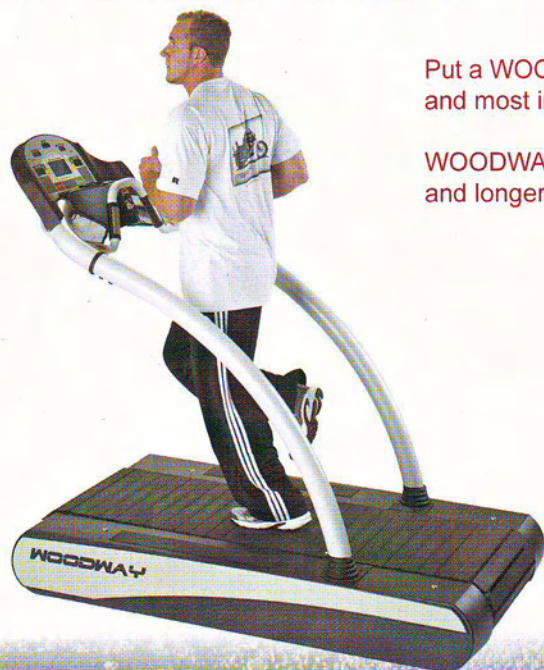
Smart Fitness

The new facility is much more than just a place for soldiers to do functional fitness

"What we are trying to do here is not only run programs but



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offer educational pieces, classes and clinics on how to use the equipment, fitness fundamentals and education courses on how to integrate this type of training into their regular PT," says Quesada. "And how to plan, how to use the facility properly, how to take the things that they learn with them when they go on deployment, so that they can stay fit not only when they are here but when they are gone."

Preventing injuries and teaching soldiers how to train themselves properly is a top priority.

"That is why we have the testing process and professional staff in place doing the program rather than putting out a program that the soldiers follow," explains Quesada. "Everyone on our staff is trained to recognize overtraining and trained to recognize when someone may be compensating for an injury or weakness. We also have other checks in place. All soldiers have to be cleared through a medic before they can do this high intensity training, which can be dangerous if you are not fit."

Quesada and the rest of the staff have set up a movement screen that they use to help identify some areas of weakness

and imbalance that need to be addressed in the program for each individual.

"We are also working on making some links with our Physical Therapy (PT) community here," she points out. "We are working to create a bridge between PT and human performance enhancement."

Overall, she hopes that the program also gives platoon, unit and group leaders the knowledge they need to provide innovative programs that aren't going to cause the soldiers to develop overuse injuries, because that is what she sees a lot of.

"We see a lot of shin splints, and knee problems and when we ask the soldiers they tell us it is from all of the running every day and pounding on the pavement and it is hard on the body," says Quesada. "In the past, it has been a lack of facilities to give these guys a chance to do something different and let the body recover some days of the week. And this facility has that capability."

Quesada points out that 100 of the 110 pieces in the facility get guys off their feet.

"But they are all so challenging that they are still going to provide improvement for our soldiers in their APFT and in their general fitness," she notes. "In whichever way we choose to use the equipment, they are going to see gains because they are being challenged."

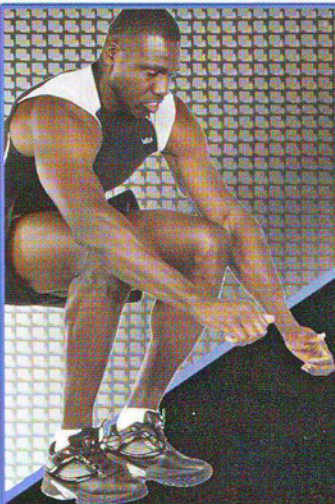
Pilot Group

"The overall consensus of the younger guys was a resounding satisfaction with the program and their ability to be a part of

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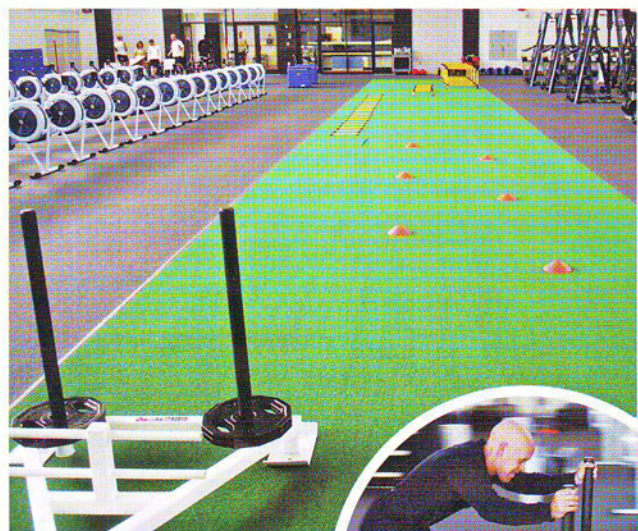
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this pilot program," says Capt. Kyle Stockwell, Fort Bragg executive officer for HQHB, 2nd and 321st Field Artillery regiment, 4th Brigade.

Stockwell and soldiers from the 4th Brigade are currently participating in the first pilot test at the new facility.

"So much of the garrison mindset is the minutia of day in and day out of 3-5 mile runs, push-ups, sit-ups, the main goal of which is the APFT," says Stockwell. "Anything that deviates from that is welcome, regardless of how strenuous it is or not. In my last three years in the Army, from 4th brigade especially, there has been a move away from this APFT-oriented PT and a shift to more 'combat-focus' training."

As an Army Ranger and Airborne qualified, Stockwell says being deployed before has given him a deeper understanding of how much physical demand combat operations put on the body.

"If your not ready for that physically, the first thing to go is your reaction time and then the next thing is your mental state, and then it all goes downhill from there," notes Stockwell.

"In support of OEF, I learned some valuable lessons that helped me to understand what type of training needs to be done to prepare for that environment. This facility offers us a continuous program run by professionals but also the diagnostic tools to chart our progression — very quantifiable goals that aids in morale and gives a paratrooper a better barometer of success of their development through the course. At the end of the program you can see your progress."

The program also teaches soldiers to prevent injury and to know key things about diet, recovery, stretching and warm up periods.

"I really think the possibilities are endless," says Quesada. "We are just trying to scratch the surface of what is needed here. Down the road we'd like to provide more Web support for soldiers so when they are deployed they will still have access to program info. We would like to put together some focus groups with NCOs and lower-ranking enlisted to see what these guys need from us to better develop them physically for combat."

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