

Holistic Health and Fitness

An Interview with Members of the US Army Center for Initial Military Training (CIMT) H2F Directorate (Biographies of those interviewed appear at the end)

MSG Half-Mast: Keeping vehicles and equipment fully mission-capable is critical to mission success in the Army. Even more important than vehicles and equipment is the readiness of our Soldiers. The Army cannot successfully fight and win without Soldiers maintaining themselves as mission-capable. So how do we define mission-capable when it comes to an individual Soldier's ability to successfully fight and win?

H2F Team: Mission-capable for the Soldier means being physically fit and mentally ready to deploy, execute all common Soldier and MOS-specific tasks required to complete the mission, and return home safely.

Being mission-capable starts with the individual Soldier being deployable. Soldiers can ensure they remain deployable by developing and maintaining healthy habits and behaviors, preventing injuries and seeking early intervention to address any physical or cognitive limitations or injuries when they do occur. H2F is the enabler to this Soldier performance optimization.

Once deployed, Soldiers must be able to perform the MOS-specific duties to which they are assigned. The Army is reliant on Soldiers who can perform their jobs competently and professionally. Additionally, Soldiers must also be prepared to handle the dynamic nature and hostile conditions of the battlefield. This means each Soldier, regardless of MOS, must be able to effectively respond to unpredictable situations. In other words, every Soldier must be able to "shoot, move, communicate," as well as survive and adapt.

At completion of the mission, the Army wants to see all Soldiers return home safely.

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MSG Half-Mast: In terms of individual readiness, what does H2F accomplish in terms of keeping Soldiers mission-capable that wasn't being accomplished before?

H2F Team: H2F represents a cultural shift in the way the Army trains, develops and cares for Soldiers. H2F doctrine refers to three key principles to ensuring Soldier readiness and keeping our Soldiers mission-capable: Optimization, individualization, and immersion.

- **Optimization:** H2F seeks to elevate each Soldier's personal readiness. The Army wants to provide each Soldier—whatever their starting point—the ability to reach their potential and maintain it throughout their career. This level of performance optimization requires a holistic approach to physical training, nutrition readiness, mental readiness, spiritual readiness, and sleep readiness. H2F will enable this holistic approach by bringing resources forward to where Soldiers live, work and train within the brigade footprint. These resources include equipment and personnel such as: strength and conditioning coaches, athletic trainers, physical therapists, occupational therapists, performance dietitians and cognitive performance specialists. Having these professionals at the brigade level will greatly increase Soldiers' interactions with those uniquely qualified and positioned to improve their readiness and performance.

- Individualization: Each Soldier enters the Army with a varying levels of skill and ability. This variance across the force requires different training programs. H2F doctrine shifts from an industrial-scale approach in the physical training of Soldiers to a tailored approach that focuses on the specific needs of each Soldier. Current science and best practice teach us that improving performance requires assessment of physical strengths and weakness, followed by a training plan targeted at helping the individual meet the goals of the unit. This approach is not limited to physical training, but all aspects that impact Soldier performance. For example, some Soldiers might require assistance with their nutrition and body composition; others with decision-making skills, stress management and emotional control; and still others with sleep hygiene or spiritual wellness. The H2F team has the professionals necessary to help address all of these areas.
- Immersion: H2F creates an environment that reinforces appropriate behavior and decision-making. The H2F System is a program that is owned by the brigade commander and delivered by personnel organic to the unit. This gives brigade commanders an entirely new capability, similar to that of sports teams and elite military units. H2F eliminates or reduces appointments away from the unit and reliance on self-managed training systems. Performance specialists will provide customized education and training to Soldiers based on unit and individual goals and objectives.

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MSG Half-Mast: As H2F rolls out over the coming few years, what can Soldiers do now to prepare themselves for a more holistic approach to fitness?

H2F Team: Soldiers can do quite a lot to improve their overall health and fitness level. The revised FM 7-22, *Holistic Health and Fitness*, is a resource full of information to help Soldiers. Information is provided in a holistic manner with chapters devoted to each domain: physical readiness, nutritional readiness, mental readiness, spiritual readiness, and sleep readiness. The key to improving health, fitness and performance is knowledge and commitment. FM 7-22 and the accompanying ATPs (ATP 7-22.01, *H2F Testing* and ATP 7-22.02, *H2F Drills and Exercises*) provide foundational knowledge, education and tips and techniques. Commitment is Soldiers having the discipline to make deliberate lifestyle choices to achieve success.

One concept towards understanding the holistic approach is awareness of how choices and actions in any one area (for example, sleep) can impact other areas (mood, energy, physical performance, focus, hunger, etc). Achieving gains in strength and power is more than just lifting heavy weights and drinking protein shakes. Sleep, and lots of it, is critical toward recovery and repairing muscle and tissue damaged through strenuous physical exertion. And, maintaining high-intensity throughout workouts is hard if not properly fueled and Soldiers aren't adequately rested and mentally focused.

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MSG Half-Mast: Historically, physical and non-physical training have been in the “other duties” category. How is the H2F System different?

LTC Durbin (physical training): Over the course of my career, I've experienced varying levels of emphasis on physical training. Nearly every unit upholds physical fitness as an important Soldier and leader quality, but the degree of attention or support towards conducting physical training has ranged widely.

At some units, it's a mandatory and standardized program; at others, it's "fit it in" on your own time. When units do schedule physical training consistently, there's no guarantee that the training is properly balanced and aligned with the unit mission-essential task list (METL) and training schedule. Some training is random, haphazard and without specific intent or focus. This combination of imbalanced training, inconsistent training or no training has created an environment with an overwhelming number of injuries across the force. H2F will help address physical training challenges in at least two critical ways:

- 1) H2F doctrine. FM 7-22 (1 Oct 2020) provides key information on how to properly program physical training, along with sample physical training schedules. Program design is a mix of art and science. While it takes years of experience to achieve expertise in this area, nearly all Soldiers can benefit from a basic understanding of this foundational material.

The principle of periodization is not new. However, when applied properly, it can help ensure continual progression of physical performance, while avoiding undertraining, overtraining, excessive fatigue, illness, injury and physical plateau.

H2F also emphasizes the importance of properly balanced training programs that address all the components of physical fitness required of Soldiers: muscular strength, muscular endurance, aerobic endurance, anaerobic endurance and power. Not only are these components critical to successful performance on the ACFT, they are necessary for execution of common Soldier tasks.

- 2) Strength and conditioning specialists (SCC). H2F-resourced brigades will receive a number of certified strength and conditioning specialists. These personnel have the requisite knowledge and experience to greatly assist leaders in the development and execution of well-balanced physical training programs focused on the units' training goals and objectives. SCCs can provide semi-individualized programs for Soldiers based on assessments and needs. This model of physical training is consistent with elite professional and collegiate sports teams and the special forces community.

LTC Merkle (non-physical training): Our nation faces significant current and emerging threats. To combat these threats, the Army is investing heavily in modernization efforts and undergoing significant organizational and cultural changes. H2F is an important part of the Army's organizational change efforts and is a significant investment in what the chief of staff of the Army refers to as the Army's greatest strength and most important weapons system – Soldiers.

One of the most readily observable changes that H2F brings to our formations is a holistic approach to Soldiers' well-being. It's not just physical training anymore. H2F provides brigade commanders with personnel, equipment, facilities and doctrine to help holistically address the unique needs of their formations. Further, for the first time in Army history, doctrine specifically addresses the importance of, and provides strategies for, incorporating the non-physical domains of spirituality, performance nutrition, mental readiness and sleep into Soldiers' routines. It's long been recognized that optimal physical performance is most readily achieved and sustained if these crucial, non-physical performance domains are integrated into the training program. H2F provides the platform, expertise and resources to integrate the non-physical and physical domains that enable Soldiers to reach their optimal performance. Further, while H2F emphasizes a cultural change in the way the Army trains Soldiers, it goes beyond just an Army training platform. It also empowers Soldiers with the resources and expertise to adopt healthy, performance behaviors that can serve a Soldier throughout his/her lifetime.

MAJ DeMay (nutrition) – The importance of food choices on health and performance can't be understated or ignored. Professional and collegiate athletic teams now have registered dietitians on staff to properly fuel their athletes, enabling them to meet their fullest athletic potential. The H2F System will bring that same model to the brigade level, optimizing Soldiers' nutrition by enhancing their physical and cognitive function to meet the unique and challenging demands of training, combat and contingency operations. With registered dietitians assigned to brigades, Soldiers will have improved access to evidence-based nutrition advice. Furthermore, H2F brigade dietitians will better understand the unique needs of their respective unit, enabling them to better advise Soldiers on performance nutrition based on their specific mission-related tasks.

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MSG Half-Mast: Vehicles and equipment tend to have technical manuals to maintain them that include tables of before, during and after preventive maintenance checks and services. Will H2F have something equivalent?

H2F Team: Currently, because H2F is still in its infancy, it's more doctrinally-driven. The following manuals provide foundational concepts, principles and practices.

- US Army Holistic Health and Fitness Operating Concept
- FM 7-22 – Holistic Health and Fitness
- ATP 7-22.01-Holistic Health and Fitness Testing
- ATP 7-22.02 –Holistic Health and Fitness Drills and Exercises

The Army Technique Publications (ATPs), in particular, provide routinized programs, drills and examples of exercises that are similar in scope to what technical manuals provide when it comes to caring for vehicles and equipment. As the H2F System matures, it will likely create additional checklists and aides to assist Soldiers, leaders and units optimize their involvement in and execution of this program.

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MSG Half-Mast: How will the H2F program monitor execution such that performance issues discovered at Fort Bragg, for example, are shared across the force in a timely manner?

LTC Merkle: Measuring the effectiveness of any program is important, and the same is true of the H2F System. The H2F enterprise will employ a variety of outcome measures—that look at multiple aspects of performance—to monitor the effectiveness of H2F. Additionally, the military, civilian, and contracted personnel at each of the brigade-level facilitates will internally document and then share lessons learned across the H2F enterprise and incorporate best practices into their daily operations. Further, units can leverage Army resources, such as the Center for Army Lessons Learned, to glean insights from others' efforts and more effectively meet their unit's needs.

Mr. Linderman: Information gathered from training and medical databases will be used to establish a baseline to measure Soldier performance and medical readiness. The Army will continue to collect this information as the H2F System is implemented and will look for trends that indicate where H2F has improved Soldier performance and readiness over time. Lessons learned will help Army leadership

refine and develop future H2F initiatives to continually improve processes that optimize Soldier performance and overall readiness across the total force.

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The H2F Team

LTC Jose Durbin joined the Center for Initial Military Training (CIMT) H2F Directorate in September 2020 as the Physical Performance Lead. He received a commission in 1999 as a military intelligence officer, before attending the Army-Baylor University Doctoral Program in Physical Therapy in 2004. He has served in numerous physical therapy roles, both in clinical settings and operational units. He is a graduate of the Orthopaedic Manual Physical Therapy Doctoral Fellowship and board certified in orthopedic physical therapy (Orthopedic Certified Specialist) , as well as a fellow of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Manual Physical Therapists (FAAOMPT).

LTC Shannon Merkle joined the US Army Center for Initial Military Training (CIMT) H2F Directorate in September 2020 as the Non-Physical Performance Lead. She enlisted in the Army in 1999 before commissioning as an Army Occupational Therapist in 2002. LTC Merkle has served in a variety of occupational therapy roles in clinical, operational and research settings. She has a Ph.D. from the University of Iowa in Rehabilitation Sciences, a Master of Science in Occupational Therapy from Washington University, St. Louis, and is a board certified hand therapist (CHT).

Major Jordan DeMay is a Registered Dietitian (RD) from Hubbard, Ohio. He completed his undergraduate education at Ohio University. In 2009, he direct-commissioned and entered the US Military-Baylor Graduate Program in Nutrition, earning a Master of Science in nutrition. After completing numerous nutrition roles and company command, he attended the US Army-Baylor Master of Healthcare and Business Administration Program. Major DeMay is a Certified Specialist in Sports Dietetics (CSSD) and has several publications relating motivation for eating in the active-duty population.

Mr. Karl Linderman is a native of western New York and resides in Virginia Beach, VA, following his retirement from the Army in September 2019 after 24 years as a logistics officer. He joined the CIMT H2F directorate in October 2019 as a doctrine writer working on FM 7-22. In May of 2020, he transitioned to his current position in H2F Plans and Operations, where he is working several Training and Doctrine Command and CIMT initiatives to facilitate implementation of the H2F System.