The APG Forum

Commentary – A civilian in 'PT land'

Photo by DIANE PARKS, *RDECOM*

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I am an intern in the RDECOM PAO office. As part of my first year of training as a public affairs specialist I had to complete a laundry list of tasks. The list include everything from learning how to build an office budget to participating in a Soldier event with the purpose of writing an article for publication.

It was the quest to satisfy the latter that started a fateful conversation with Capt. Brian Hoffman, commander, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 20th Support Command.

"Can I shoot some guns?" I asked.

I've always imagined that I could possess a little of Annie Oakley's spirit if given the chance.

"Our next Range is not until early October and it's at Fort Indian Town Gap, Pennsylvania," Hoffman e-mailed. "You are more than welcome to come then and hopefully it will be cold, really cold so you can experience realistic Army training."

Pretty sure that Oakley was a warm-climate sort of gal, I passed on the range idea.

"What about physical training? Can I do PT with the Soldiers one day and write about it?" I wrote back.

While waiting for his reply, I decided to dine on a donut of questionable shelf life. Just thinking about PT was already burning calories. Enjoying my meal of sugar and grease, I was already warming up to the PT idea.

"Just get ready to run." Hoffman replied. "We're training for the Army 10-Miler."

Don't you just hate it when you get donut caught in your throat?

As if training for a "10-miler" wasn't daunting enough, Hoffman then decided that one day wouldn't do if I wanted the true flavor of PT.

At one point the plan ballooned to six days of participation. When all was said and done (and with some late-breaking travel orders in hand) we settled on four days.

And so the story of chlorine, sweat and newfound respect began.

Day one: Jumping in the deep end

Swim PT with Company A, 22nd Command Battalion

I rolled into the Knight Diver Pool building around 6 a.m. I'm pretty sure I still had pillow lines on my face. The task ahead—the Navy Second Class swim test.

The Soldiers I swam with were working toward acceptance into advanced water survival training, or Dunker Training. There they'll learn what to do should the helicopter they're riding in need to make a watery landing.

"We must be able to conduct mission support requirements in a wide variety of locations and conditions," said Capt. Ron Mussone, Company A, 22nd Command Battalion. "One of these conditions is the ability to survive in the event of an 'over the water' aircraft accident or other instance where water survival skills are a matter of life and death."

The first part of the Navy Second Class swim test – a pre-requisite for Dunker Training - is 25 meters each of freestyle, sidestroke, breaststroke and backstroke.

At 6:30 in the morning it's quite enough to get your blood moving. The workout felt great, but didn't turn out to be the optimum way to start the next step of the test.

The next task, which had to be done immediately after the laps, was a five-minute prone float. That is floating on your stomach, only coming up for air when you need to, one agonizing breath at a time.

Now keep in mind my heart was really pumping. This is not a great time to tell your body to make do with less oxygen. The prone float was nothing short of torture, and perhaps ranks among the five longest minutes of my life.

Finally, the prone float ended and I finished the test with a five-minute back float.

Leaving the swim test, I was struck with how many areas of physical proficiency Soldiers must conquer. I think when most folks picture Soldier PT, they picture troops running in formation.

My first day of research for this article, I had to jump in the deep end to get a glimpse of the bigger physical training picture.

Day two: No Soldier left behind

Army 10-miler training with 20th Support Command team

I'm not sure, but I don't think I drive 10 miles to work every morning. But on my second day of PT, I trained with a team of Soldiers working toward running ten miles in an annual competition in Washington, D.C.

The aforementioned Hoffman (the man behind the PT plan) runs in this pack. He assured me right off that we'd be completing the easiest ever PT in his 10-miler training plan, a four-mile, easy paced jaunt.

Of course the term, 'easy,' is completely relative. Suffice it to say, I finished the four miles. It was rough going. With about a mile left, severely lagging, I noticed that the 10-miler team started looking closer. Only for a moment deluded by the thought that I was catching up, I soon realized that they were running toward me.

"It's our policy, Ma'am. No Soldier left behind," one only slightly sweaty runner enlightened me.

We wrapped up the hour and a half PT with some time on the free weights. Originally, there were no weights in the room that I could actually lift. After retrieving some ten and fifteen pounders from storage, I was able to hobble through.

Although my muscles were sore, it was really my pride that took a beating at this PT. By no means do I see myself as an Olympic athlete, but I was hoping to get through this article without embarrassing myself. Day two, realization two - Soldiers start their day the hard way - pushing their physical limits. Discipline for breakfast.

Day three: Feel the burn

Endurance training with 1st Sgt. Boozier

I woke up the morning of my third day of PT feeling sore. My poor muscles were starting to complain already, and I was only half done with my PT tour. Still I forged ahead to meet 1st Sgt. Montonya Boozier, Headquarters and Headquarters Company and 20th Support Command, for some one-on-one instruction.

The first thing I noticed about Boozier is that she wears the Physical Fitness Badge for physical fitness excellence on her PT uniform. Boozier is just over five feet tall, and is built of solid muscle.

She shared with me that on top of her five days of morning work-outs, she exercises on her own time.

Her plan for my continued physical training enlightenment was an hour of strength and endurance training. Slow, deliberate repetitions - sometimes with weights, sometimes just using your body's own weight - with one goal: to fill your muscles with red hot lactic acid.

"You're going to feel the burn," Boozier told me as I climbed onto one especially odd looking machine.

She was right. Simple enough to do, but pulling weights in one continuous motion from over your head to your waist works muscles I didn't realize I had.

Boozier was especially nice

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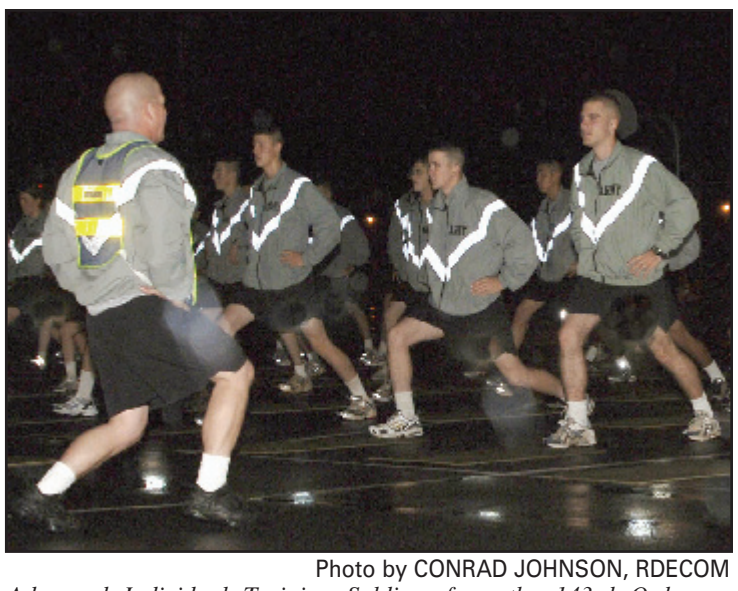

Photo by CONRAD JOHNSON, RDECOM

Advanced Individual Training Soldiers from the 143rd Ordnance Battalion stretch for their morning run.

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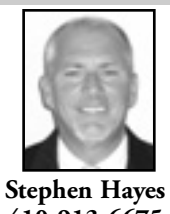

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