

FUNCTIONAL FITNESS

As It Pertains To

Obtaining and Sustaining Pararescue Qualification

There are two perspectives of functional fitness to be considered. The first is the overreaching concerns of Occupational Health and Safety and the second is the specific level of human of body's structure and functioning that reduces risks of injury while performing in-the-line-of-duty training and mission activities of a military occupation or specialty. Having adequate functional fitness is a critical element to performing USAF Pararescue duties as it is expected individuals performing such duties will perform and accomplish in the worse case scenario, versus the best.

The pertinence of functional fitness to occupational health and safety is it focuses less on exercising to provide wellness of healthy living and more on specific human factors being present to reduce risks of mission failure, mission impairing injuries, and line-of-duty deaths.

Basically functional fitness is the measurement and assessment criteria that assure as far as reasonably possible the presence of body's structure and functioning that result in fewer injuries and illnesses while performing in the line of duty. Effectively functional fitness is a human factors element of Occupational Safety and Health that encompass psychomotor ability, physiological capacity, aerobic power, muscular strength need to perform typical on-the-job tasks and duties. An individual not meeting the minimum medically and physically qualified to perform duties standard impairs the accomplishing the mission safety of themselves and all others participating in getting a physically and/or psychologically demanding task completed.

Required and desired functional fitness is directly connected to typical conditions of work environment and level of human performance that must be present in the person to perform the duties of the job or to accomplish the mission.

Whether voluntary or involuntary the processing into serving a military obligation involves measuring and assessing functional fitness to place the individual into a military occupation their body's structure, functioning and cognitive aptitude gives them the ability to do.

The Military Entrance Processing Station, known as MEPS, administers: (1) tests to determine aptitude eligibility and (2) gives a physical examination to determine a physical demands rating that determines physical capacity of body's structure and functioning to perform general military service and eligibility qualifications for initial military occupation/specialty/rate classifications. The physical demands profile is known as PULHES (P-physical capacity; U-upper extremities; L-lower extremities; H - hearing and ears; E - eyes; S- Psychiatric). Numbers 1 through 4 are used to reflect levels of functional capability. Specifically, 1 indicates a high level of medical fitness for the system being rated, 2 indicates some medical condition or physical defect that may require some activity limitations, 3 signifies one or more medical conditions or physical defects that may require significant limitations, and 4 signifies one or more medical conditions or physical defects of such severity that performance of military duty must be drastically limited. There are few military jobs that permit a 3 or 4. Thus, for those applying for military service, a 3 or 4 on any factor usually means a medical disqualification. For classification into specialty/occupational purposes the PULHES S-1 (Psychiatric) rating is ambiguous as there is no diagnostic mental/emotional fitness exam done to result in a lower rating unless the person self discloses a medical treatment history for or having symptoms of anxiety, depression, developmental and pervasive disorders, adjustment disorder or other psychiatric disorder.

Specific definitions of each number for each body system can be found in Army Regulation 40-501 and AFI 48-123.

In essence ASVAB testing (classification MAGE aptitude criteria validated against job performance) and MEPS medical examinations can be considered a human factors element of Occupational Safety and Health that aim for best safety and health placement, if possible, of persons found to have limited body system capabilities or physical defects that cause activity limitations. The disadvantage of ASVAB testing and MEPS medical examination is neither allows the Air Force to find out whether the match of the recruit to a Air Force Specialty is suitable until the BMT and vocational/occupational training commitment is made.

Each military department has the responsibility to screen aspects of a person's behaviorism (personality characteristics) for those duties and responsibilities needing more than dependence on voluntary self reporting. The most often behaviorism screening is done to determine honesty, reliability and trustworthiness pertinent to DoD security clearances and DoD Nuclear Weapons Personnel Reliability Program (PRP). Background checks and polygraph don't measure the unconscious aspects of achieve 'x' level of performance with 'y' level of behavior quality and 'z' level of being there contribution to team efforts personality or temperament that is an important component of performance for duties requiring multi-dimensional operators who are experts in specialized tactical skills who work in physically demanding and dangerous environments.

Although military service regardless of the military occupation, brings with it the expectation the member will have the ability to cope successfully with a wide range of demands occurring in a military situation--such as exposure to danger, hardship, emotional distress, harsh environments, and the handling or operation of dangerous equipment; there is a demarcation between ordinary typical military duties and performing complex specialized duties having unusual above average levels of physical exertion, physical unpleasantness, risk taking, and responsibility of entering into harms way and doing frequently what the average person cannot do and more importantly is not expected to do. For these types of military duties (jobs) a screening process needs to determine who is least predisposed to psychological breakdown or is better able to psychologically hold it together and to discover if body's structure and functioning is at sufficient ability/capability to perform the tasks and skills needed to accomplish the typical mission.

Paper and pencil selection tests, screening interviews and medical examinations are ineffective predictive measures of future performance and ability in a physically demanding often hazardous duty environment with a concurrent high extent of immediate required decision making. Only performance simulation has the design capability to determine abilities and willingness related to the needed level of trained, qualified, and mission ready job performance. Such screening performance simulations are not direct performance part of the job, but are typically controlled repetitive environment simulations requiring applicants to demonstrating ability and willingness to perform in simulated situations relevant to the physically demanding nature of the tasks performed in the mission environment. During such training screening courses there is a series of progress checks that are pass-fail. Trainees who fail a progress check and a subsequent recheck are for nonacademic reasons eliminated from further training.

A purpose of selection is to improve the proportion of successfully trained chosen at the least cost, especially when failure to complete training is often lacking an unable to perform cause (self eliminate from training). As a result the Pararescue Indoctrination Course is a screening process having purpose to prepare applicants whose non-psychomotor performance predictors indicate potential of having needed quality of performance and level of abilities to continue on in getting trained. The Indoctrination course training experience involves actually doing simulated controlled situations of the physical and emotional demands involved that are directly related to core skill job performance in the typical training and mission environment. The process of preparing applicants to continue-on-in-training in effect measures their level of resiliency. Resilient people are hardy. Hardiness describes those who are actively engaged, who believe they can influence the course of events in their lives, and who accept change as part of life; as a challenge rather than a threat, and know that it can be beneficial. Evidence suggests that hardiness buffers the negative impact of stress and promotes active coping (PTSD research/studies).

Serving a military obligation performing USAF Pararescue duties is voluntary. All student candidates entering the Pararescue Indoctrination Course passed required prerequisite ASVAB, medical requirements of PULHES (111111) and Flyer Class III plus diver medical examination, PAST, and eligibility for a SECRET clearance IAW DOD policies and AFI 31-501 - Personnel Security Program Management screening prior to attending the Pararescue Indoctrination Course.

The Pararescue Indoctrination course is the preparatory gateway to the most expensive and many months in training enlisted vocational/occupational training the Air Force provides. The goal and objective of the Pararescue Indoctrination Course and subsequent courses is to have a trained and qualified entry level apprentice having the abilities, functional fitness and willingness to perform pararescue duties for the remainder of the entry 4-year or 6-year enlistment. This means the apprentice pararescueman is expected to bring to his operational duty assignment both commitment and conviction to be available for worldwide duty 24 hours a day without restriction or delay for duties that may be performed in remote areas devoid of normal outside support.

Functional fitness for Pararescue is the total spectrum of doing with reasonable expectation to cope with extraordinary situations and uncommon conditions. The duties all pararescumen are expected to perform is get as rapidly as possible to an incident on the ground by parachute or helicopter insertion with ability if needed to survive on the ground for several days and occasionally longer to gain control of injured and isolated personnel and then to proceed to provide emergency medical treatments, security and other survival assistance to include ground movement to an extraction location when immediate extraction by helicopter is not available. The events causing the mission are often unexpected happenings typically located in remote isolated areas or behind enemy lines. These high risk missions become achievable with reasonable expectations for success because functional fitness gives mastery of human performance of speed, accuracy, coordination, and situational awareness needed to cope, adapt, and multi-task while under duress.

Functional Fitness is not a harassment to make individuals quit training because more people want to do the job than there are training quotas and unit vacancies to fill.

Functional Fitness doesn't exist to make members of a specialty elite or part of an elite part of the military.

Functional Fitness is focused on readiness in an emergency, trainability, survivability, fatigue tolerance, accident prevention, stress management, increased response repertoire, endurance and other risk management and mission accomplishing benefits.

Functional fitness is focused on psychological adaptation when exposed to extreme emotional and mental stress of actually participating in intense combat and being first responder to other catastrophic stressful events such as plane crashes, natural disaster, and acts of terrorism. The more often duties exposes individual's to extreme emotional and physical stress the higher incidence of psychological breakdown.

Functional Fitness is focused on the emotional mental duties of making the right decision to save life and often being in position when employed accomplishing a mission often finds even the 3-skill level pararescueman having to make decisions that are normally made by persons much higher up the line of authority.

Functional Fitness is the whole requirement of what is the minimum athletic, physiological, psychological, biological health needed to do the tasks and mission that is typically expected to be done.

- Athletic - the mind cannot convince the body to do anything it lacks the ability and capability to do. It is the component of the mind being conditioned or efficiently connected to the body with the ability to tell the body how to react and perform.
- Physiological - counters the stressful effects of sudden change of environment or intensity of activity, or injury and allows the body to recover peak fitness and athletic potential quicker. An effective means to prevent fatigue and promote the endurance required for high intensity work.
- Biological - enhances productivity, mental alertness, coordination, muscle endurance, muscle strength, and flexibility. It increases ability of the body to adapt to altitude, cold, and heat. Functional fitness allows the body to recover peak fitness and athletic potential quicker. Prevents failure resulting from excessive body fat (overweight), inadequate body weight (underweight), and includes having the optimal range of body weight to carry the typical load (often more than 70 pounds) for a considerable distance for a sustained period of time (i.e., combat load, fighting load).
- Psychological - promotes team cohesion and combat survivability. Gives confidence and strengthens ability to concentrate on what needs to be learned or what needs to be done rather than can I do this when situation and conditions become physically demanding. The remote battlefield or disaster/incident site is not the time or place to find conviction to do is as lacking as the strength and endurance to do. There is a component of the mind being conditioned or efficiently connected to the body with the ability to tell the body how to react and perform. This reduces probability of panic, fear, anxiety and loss of situational awareness.

The Physical Aptitude and Stamina Test (PAST) and the indoctrination course phases exist for the simple purpose to ensure people possess the ability to make it through training with the best potential to avoid injury. Measuring fitness performance before job qualification training is begun identifies who has the fitness that allows being better able to concentrate on what is needed to be learned. It reduces frustration hindrances to learning during required pass or fail simulated mass practice based learning scenarios.

Pararescue PAST and indoc/selection performance requirements exist because loss of life, injury, and failure to train statistics show individuals demonstrating certain abilities and capabilities are successful in getting through the training and more importantly sustain and improve upon their personal readiness to do the job after they finish the training required to do the duties after they complete all required training and are assigned to their first and subsequent duty station.

The intent and purpose of SELECTION is to ensure individuals obtain and sustain functional fitness needed to successfully complete a very expensive and lengthy entry-level qualification for award of AFSC process. Functional Fitness also includes mental fitness. Components of functional fitness are Cognitive (thinking-knowledge, comprehension, application), Affective (awareness-how you respond), and Psychomotor (doing-athletic agility, coordination, strength, endurance). The desired result is to put into the training pipeline individuals having the least risk of injuring themselves and others in training and possessing confidence to avoid discouragement resulting in self-initiated-elimination at some point in the training process after the Air Force has invested lots of training dollars and time in them.

The intent and purpose of PAST is to ensure individuals possess the physical ability to obtain the physical fitness to do the mandatory job entry-qualification-training and more importantly do it with the least amount of risk for injury and self-initiated-elimination (SIE) because they find the training too physically demanding.

The intent and purpose of “The USAF Pararescue School” is to award AFSC to individuals demonstrating they possess personal readiness to do the job and to provide these qualified ready to-do-the-job individuals to units where they are available to combatant commanders to utilize as needed to accomplish the combat (War) and other-than-war missions.

USAF Pararescuemen must possess ability to do independently with minimal supervision and also be able to interact with others as part of the team. The remote battlefield or disaster/incident site is not the place to put an individual to make a difference who is lacking the functional fitness to do the job. Once the PJ leaves the aircraft the success depends upon the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor ability he brings with him. Functional fitness is the assistance that is counted on when the unexpected happens and it is pure guts and instinctive reaction that is providing the succeed difference. In this aspect, functional fitness is the mandatory first proactive deliberate decision concerning the management of risk for every mission USAF Pararescue is asked to accomplish.