

Senior enlisted leaders take on Army's latest fitness test at Fort Carson

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Command Sgt. Maj. Demetrius Brown, command sergeant major of the 4th Sustainment Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, performs a deadlift during a training event to familiarize senior enlisted leaders with the new OPAT. The event took place Feb. 15 at Waller Physical Fitness Center at Fort Carson, Colorado. (Army photo by Scott Prater)

Fort Carson's senior enlisted leaders are well accustomed to early-morning workouts, but just after 6 a.m. one day earlier this month, a few gathered at the Colorado post's Waller Physical Fitness Center to try something new.

This year, the U.S. Army introduced a new fitness test for fresh recruits and Soldiers seeking to change career fields — the Occupational Physical Assessment Test, or OPAT.

"We wanted to gain some knowledge about this new test," Command Sgt. Maj. Michael A. Crosby, the 4th Infantry Division and Fort Carson command sergeant major, said after completing the rigorous exam. "This was a leader development (exercise) for our command sergeants major, select NCOs and career counselors. There was a lot of learning that took place this morning, and I wanted to start with the CSMs just so they could understand what our recruits and current Soldiers who reclassify will have to go through."

Ten senior enlisted leaders donned PT uniforms and prepared themselves for the test. Sgt. 1st Class Rene Ramos, 4th Infantry Division retention officer, put them through the OPAT's paces, starting with the standing long jump, then moving to the seated power throw, deadlift and aerobic interval run.

Before each event, Ramos and staff relayed the exact standard that future test-takers must meet. They also explained directions, instructed on proper form and warned participants of possible pitfalls.





Ultimately, the veteran Soldiers made the test seem easy, but most said it was harder than it looked. Participants started with the long jump, then moved on to the power throw, where they sat against a wall and heaved a weighted ball as far as they could throw. Next up came the deadlift. Then everyone ended his test with a 20-meter shuttle run.

The four physical fitness tests together measure a future Soldier's muscular strength, cardiorespiratory endurance, and lower body and upper body explosive power.

- The "Standing Long Jump" is designed to assess lower-body power. Recruits stand behind a take-off line with their feet parallel and shoulder-width apart. They will jump as far as possible with a two-foot take-off and landing. Results of the test are measured in centimeters.
- The "Seated Power Throw" is designed to assess upper-body power. Recruits sit on the floor with their lower back against a yoga block and upper back against a wall. They hold a 4.4 pound (2 kg) medicine ball with both hands, bring the medicine ball to their chest and then push or throw the medicine ball upward and outward at an approximate 45 degree angle. The throw is scored from the wall to the nearest 10 centimeters from where the ball first contacts the ground.
- The "Strength Deadlift" is designed to assess lower-body strength. Recruits stand inside a hex-bar and perform practice lifts to assure good technique. Then they begin a sequence of lifts starting with 120 pounds and working up to 220 pounds. Recruits are scored by the largest amount of weight they can properly deadlift.
- The "Interval Aerobic Run," always performed last, is designed to assess aerobic capacity. The test is similar to what is commonly referred to as the "Beep Test." The evaluation involves running "shuttles" or laps between two designated points that are spaced 20 meters apart. The running pace is synchronized with "beeps," produced by a loud speaker, at specific intervals. As the test progresses, the time between beeps gets shorter, requiring recruits to run faster to complete the shuttle. Recruits are scored by the level they reach and the number of shuttles they complete.

"I believe this is a game-changer, especially for the young civilian who is showing an interest in the U.S. Army," Crosby said of the Army's newest fitness assessing exam. "They now have to pass the Armed Forces Vocational Aptitude Battery and the physical, but they must also select a military occupational specialty and meet the standards on the OPAT to qualify for the MOS they selected."

Some MOSs in the Army require greater strength and stamina than others, and the OPAT, combined with the current requirements for enlistment, will help the Army assess individuals to determine to which occupations they are best suited, both physically and mentally.

"This is absolutely an adequate test," Crosby said. "I think it serves two purposes — one, it's going to increase readiness of the Army, and two, it's going to reduce injuries for our Soldiers as they join."

It's important for senior enlisted leaders to become familiar with the new test because the Army plans to add upward of 6,000 active-duty Soldiers and 1,500 Army Reservists to its ranks by September.

Recruiters on the Front Range will be responsible for administering the new test, and they'll be busy in the coming year. U.S. Army Recruiting Command will see the largest in-year mission increase in the command's history, bringing the original mission of 62,500 Soldiers to 68,500. The Army has also added \$200 million in incentive bonuses, fully opened enlistment to those who have previously served and increased the number of two-year enlistment opportunities to assist with the planned increase.