



Paratroopers sleep before an early morning combat equipment jump. NCOs who practice good sleep habits and prioritize their rest effectively communicate the importance of sleep. Their leadership will develop well-rested Soldiers in excellent physical and mental condition and ready for demanding military tasks. (U.S. Army photo by Lt. Col. John Hall)

# Needs-Based Approach to Holistic Health and Fitness

*By Singapore Warrant Officer 1 Cheng Qiao Feng*

Sergeants Major Course, Class 74

**A**s of February 2019, more than 56,000 Soldiers, equivalent to 13 brigade combat teams, were nondeployable, with more than 21,000 on temporary profiles (Brading, 2020).

To efficiently improve Soldier readiness, which includes their physical and mental well-being, the Army set up a complete holistic health and fitness (H2F) system (Department of the Army [DA], 2020). The system requires a robust governance framework and prioritizes proactive health to fulfill operational requirements (DA, 2020).

The Army plans to distribute its H2F implementation plan by 2030, but leaders must address more immediate needs through effective governance (South, 2023). Non-commissioned officers (NCOs) are vital in managing the H2F program and advocating for proactive health. They continually find ways to bridge resource allocation gaps and strive to achieve positive outcomes in units lacking H2F resources.

Is that enough, though, or can they do better?

The Army must prioritize H2F fielding initiatives



for units with immediate resource needs to continue realizing H2F benefits.

## Program Governance

According to DA (2020), governance is one of five essential elements of the H2F system. NCOs must understand the governance structure and exercise science to embrace the system's mission to improve Soldiers' readiness (Payne, 2020). They should use regulations, policies, and doctrine to enhance unit training programs by integrating physical fitness and aligning it with fundamental health principles, including nutrition, mental well-being, spiritual wellness, and sleep readiness (DA, 2020).

Hibbard (2020) suggests that the system empowers NCOs to improve Soldiers' health and fitness by customizing training to individual needs. Army leaders use their experience and ability to advise commanders on protected periods for physical activity, meal consumption, and rest while adhering to operational constraints.

They must also find creative ways to incorporate H2F framework principles despite limited resources. NCOs enforce standards and supply feedback to higher headquarters, acting as a bridge between Soldiers and commanders. They can then inform higher-ups about assigning requisite resources (DA, 2020).

## Proactive Health

The Army's H2F field manual emphasizes that proactive health actively oversees and safeguards individuals' physical, mental, and spiritual well-being to reduce and prevent health hazards (DA, 2020). NCOs must be able to effectively lead through example and serve as H2F program advocates.

[Project Maximo](#), a four-week 3rd Infantry Brigade



Paratroopers assigned with the 82nd Airborne Division train on October 18, 2021, at Fort Liberty, North Carolina. The Army's field manual for H2F emphasizes that proactive health actively oversees and safeguards one's physical, mental, and spiritual well-being to reduce and prevent health hazards. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Andrew Mallett)

Combat Team program, is aimed at helping senior NCOs prioritize their health to fulfill the rigorous requirements of warfighting readiness (Curry & Colson, 2023). The program illustrates how military leaders can adjust their approach to prioritize their overall health and that of their Soldiers, and it includes emphasizing physical exercise, nutrition, and the need for recharge.

By employing this approach, leaders can experience the positive effects of these practices and effectively guide their Soldiers in understanding the significance of physical exercise and nutrition.

## Significance of Physical Exercise and Nutrition

Regular exercise decreases health issues and becomes crucial for performance when coupled with a foundational diet (DA, 2020). Physical training's primary goal is movement lethality, regardless of Soldiers' military occupational specialty (DA, 2020).

Balanced H2F nutrition programs must incorporate proactive strategies to reduce nutritional deficiencies, supply operational nutrition to fuel Soldiers during events and recovery, and address any dietary interventions required to restore them to readiness (DA, 2020).

NCOs, such as the unit dietitian, enhance Soldiers' access to H2F resources by providing effective coaching and sharing unit resources and tools. While physical exercise and nutrition are crucial, recharging is another vital part of proactive health.

## Recharge

Recharge is vital for troops to support well-regulated sleep-wake cycles. Ideally, they should sleep for seven to nine hours to maintain their overall health (DA, 2020). It entails setting aside time for recreational pursuits to restore energy levels (DA, 2020).

Holl (2022) reports that at least 10 percent of adults get less than four hours of sleep, leading to detrimental health impacts. Sleep deprivation is a causal factor in vehicle crashes and machinery-related injuries (Holl, 2022).

NCOs can coach individuals by evaluating their well-being using the personal health inventory, setting goals, and promoting work-life balance (DA, 2020). By encouraging the use of H2F resources like the chaplain and medical providers, NCOs can help Soldiers recognize and cope with stress and other pressure-related issues.

NCOs who practice good sleep habits and prioritize their rest effectively communicate the importance of sleep. Their leadership will develop well-rested Soldiers in excellent physical and mental condition, ready for demanding military tasks. Therefore, the Army must reassess

its prioritization in fielding the units that require immediate attention to obtain the favorable outcomes.

## The Way Forward

The Army must realign H2F fielding efforts to prioritize units with degraded readiness ratings. The benefits of the H2F system are undeniable. Engaged leaders can help set individual and organizational goals, distribute or gather resources, and implement steps to ensure performance readiness (DA, 2020).

According to Brading (2020), the H2F's design aims to diminish injuries and equip Soldiers for contemporary warfare. Furthermore, South (2023) emphasizes that troops in H2F-resourced units saw 52 percent fewer musculoskeletal injuries than those in non-H2F units. Additionally, among 28 brigades, 5,214 more Soldiers successfully passed the ACFT (South, 2023).

This data unequivocally proves the disparity between H2F and non-H2F resourced units. Leaders should prioritize units with degraded readiness metrics if improving readiness is the goal.

## Conclusion

For the Army to continue to realize H2F benefits, it must find units with the immediate need for its resources and re-prioritize fielding initiatives. The Army can



Command Sgt. Maj. Robert Cobb, the senior enlisted advisor for 1st Armored Division, asks for vegetables. Balanced nutrition programs must incorporate proactive strategies to reduce nutritional deficiencies, supply operational nutrition to fuel Soldiers during events and recovery, and address any dietary interventions required to restore Soldiers to readiness. (U.S. Army photo illustration by Pfc. Matthew Marcellus) (This image was captured from video.)

improve readiness faster by fielding units with lower readiness ratings and placing higher priorities on those most in need of H2F.

H2F governance provides direction and resources to help NCOs enhance Soldier performance and lethality through tailored coaching on the significance of proactive health. NCOs play a vital role in upholding H2F governance by leading by example, supplying effective coaching, and advocating for higher echelons to reallocate H2F resources to units requiring greater focus. ■

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**Singapore Warrant Officer 1 Cheng Qiao Feng** is currently a student in Class 74 at the Sergeants Major Academy. He holds a mechanical engineering degree from Singapore Polytechnic and an advanced certificate in training, assessment, and written communication. Cheng's most recent duty assignment was serving as Command Sergeant Major of the 3rd Battalion Singapore Guards.

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