

The Development Of Physical Education and Training in the Irish Defence Forces since 1995

Introduction

Although technology has changed the nature of military campaigns over the years, physical fitness remains a vital component of the effectiveness of today's soldier. Modern innovations have turned the battlefield into a virtual 24-hour theatre, which places additional demands on military fitness, endurance and physical training. Military fitness for our purposes can be defined as "a state of readiness for combat, which includes technical, mental and physical readiness". In order to match physical training to current requirements it is necessary for all military organizations to develop quality fitness training programmes that improve readiness and increase the combat effectiveness of all personnel. If I can quote William Nash, a military historian " success and general efficiency of every military establishment, is in a very large degree dependant upon the physical fitness, endurance and condition of the individual units of which it is comprised." It is clear that physical fitness for the modern soldier is now more crucial than ever

Developments

It is in this context that I now propose to look at the development in Physical Education and Training in the Irish Defense Forces since 1995 and how we have tried to align our military fitness programs with our current needs. I will look at the infrastructure that has been put in place that allows us to give physical education and training a higher priority and meet our changing requirements. The presentation will look specifically at: -

- The development in P.E. infrastructure since 1995.
- The establishment of a Defence Forces P.E. Board in 1999.
- The Defence Forces 1999 Study on Health and Fitness
- The adaptations and changes initiated as a result.

Development of PE Infrastructure since 1995

1. The following measures have been introduced:
 - a. The appointment of specialized PE Officers to administer and co-ordinate fitness planning and programming.
 - b. The introduction in 2000 of our first Military Sports Science Students. They qualified from the University of Limerick on conclusion of a 4-year degree programme in Sports Science.
 - c. The incorporation of a National and European qualification for NCO Physical Training Instructors as part of their military physical training qualification.

d. The scheduling of an additional study

- (1) To investigate the current status of health, physical fitness and activity levels of representative samples of Defence Forces Personnel and to compare these to the previous 1991 samples.
- (2) To review the effectiveness and suitability of current Defence Forces structures and practices.
- (3) To review the validity of current Fitness Testing Programmes.
- (4) To provide recommendations based on the study results to The Director Of Defence Forces Training

Defence Forces Physical Education Board

This Board was set up by the Director Of Defence Forces Training. Its primary aim was to review all aspects of Physical Education and Training in the Defence Forces and to make recommendations to the Director thereafter. The Board consisted of both Physical Fitness professionals and non-fitness professionals. It sat for approximately one year and visited all the major Defence Force bases while formulating its report. It also visited the British Army Physical Training School in Aldershot. This facilitated good interaction between the board and all ranks at local level. Incorporated in and linked to the Board was a 1999 Study of Health, Physical Fitness and Physical Activity within the Defence Forces. This Study enabled the Board to compare the results of the Study with those of the previous study, conducted in 1991 and to utilize the results and statistics in the Board Report.

1999 Study;

This survey was conducted by Military Sport Science Students over a period of two months. It consisted of an exact replica of the previous Study in 1991. The Study consisted of a random stratified sample of 561 personnel, accounting for approximately 5% of the Defence Forces strength and thus making it statistically viable. The personnel were selected on the basis of age, rank and geographical location.

Components of Test

The " Eurofit Physical Fitness Test " (Council of Europe 1988) and a physical activity and lifestyle questionnaire were administered. This questionnaire enabled the calculation of a Physical Activity Score.

The following measures were recorded and assessed.

Height: Weight: Body Mass Index: Skin fold: Flexibility: Handgrip: Strength: Sub maximal Bicycle Test: Agility Run: Push-Ups: Sit-Ups: Vertical Jump.

Main Findings From Study

The results of the study show significant improvement in a range of key areas that were targeted in Defence Forces training as a result of the 1991 study. **(A complete copy of the Study including the statistical analysis is attached at Annex 'A')** These include:

- a. A significant improvement in the estimated VO2 maximum.

- b. A significant improvement in local muscular endurance scores
- c. A significant decrease in the agility run times.
- d. A significant reduction in the numbers of personnel smoking.
- e. A marked increase in the number of personnel who lead pre-dominantly active lifestyles.

Recommendations based on Study and Review Board.

Based on the findings of the study and the work undertaken by the Review Board, a series of recommendations were made.

These recommendations can be divided into three broad areas.

1. PT Testing

The existing Lifestyles and Fitness Evaluation (LIFE) test was to be revised and replaced by a new document called the Defence Force Fitness Tests. These would include fitness tests for all stages of ones military career from induction onwards. They would be corp and job specific, reflecting the unique demands placed on the soldier in his/her specific role in the Defence forces. They would also include for the first time a range of specific and more demanding fitness tests for the Defence Forces elite Army Ranger Wing.

Furthermore, in a move designed to ensure the continuation of fitness training, it was recommended that random testing, of fitness levels in units, be undertaken throughout the year on top of the annual test. The incorporation of testing, on a twice-yearly basis, though recommended is not yet feasible in the current organization.

2. PT Structures.

The following recommendations were made:

a. To increase the number of formal appointments for PT qualified personnel in the establishment of the Defence Forces. This was to ensure increased, permanent staffing levels for all Defence Force PT facilities.

b. To review the syllabi of all Physical Training courses in the Defence Forces, to ensure that all students were instructed in the most relevant and up to date subject matter. This would include the linkage of Defence Forces courses with nationally and internationally recognized qualifying authorities.

c. A review of the syllabi of all career courses to ensure the inclusion of an appropriate P.E. module on all courses. The content on each course would be relevant to the career stage of the students. Content would include a combination of theory and practical material. This would enable, for example company commanders to understand better the PT requirements placed upon his troops, the PT resources at their disposal and make them aware of the options open to them to ensure optimum use of time, resources and ideas to best train and educate their troops.

d. Liaison with other armies and CISM partners on all aspects of Physical Education and Training. This was initiated with a very successful exchange programme with the Danish Armed Forces in 2000.

3. **PT Facilities.**

The introduction of:

- a. The standardization of PT facilities throughout all Defence Forces installations. This will be based on a three-tier classification system determined by the number of personnel serving in the installation.
- b. A development programme for a full range of facilities for military sports in order to develop these sports in line with the ideals of the Defence Forces and CISM.
- c. The rebuilding of the Defence Forces Physical Culture School to an international standard. This work will be completed in late 2001.

Conclusion:

- a. It has been shown throughout the presentation that significant progress has been made in the area of physical fitness and physical education in the Defence Forces since 1995. The appointment of specialized PE officers, the linkage with National Qualification Authorities for our PT courses and the on-going indepth studies into our physical and training systems has helped this area advance in line with other military and best international practices.
- b. Given the greater military demands placed upon the Defence Forces, both at home and abroad, including our pending involvement in PFP more military specific training needs to be undertaken. As we have outlined steps are being taken to ensure that these demands are met.
- c. All Defence Forces Career Courses will in future include Physical Education and Physical Training modules. This will mean that personnel at all stages of career development from the rank of Private to Colonel will receive an appropriate level of formal Physical Education.
- d. The Defence Forces will seek to continue to formalize the developing linkage of our PT qualifications to National and International bodies. In particular, the Defence Forces will be seeking to further develop our links with other CISM members and draw on their expertise.
- e. A special postgraduate level study will be undertaken to examine the particular physical education and training needs of the Naval Service. This study will be undertaken in conjunction with the University of Limerick.

- f. The link between the Defence Forces and the University of Limerick, which is the leading Third Level Institution in the country for the study of Physical Education and Sport Science, will continue to be fostered and will ensure that our teaching and training are in line with best international practices.
- g. A further Study in Health and Fitness will be undertaken in 5 years to ensure that the Defence Forces continue to meet its challenges and goals in this rapidly changing environment.

Future Goals for the Defence Forces Beyond 2000.

- 1 To ensure that all members of the Defence Forces receive the physical training and education necessary to enable the Irish Defence Forces them to meet the demands placed upon them.
- 2 To ensure that the Defence Forces have the physical education and physical training facilities and infrastructure necessary, to enable it to meet its future military requirements and to participate fully as a member of the CISM community.



The Development Of Physical Education and Training in the Irish Defence Forces since 1995

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AIM OF PRESENTATION

To Chart The Development Of Physical Education And Training In The Irish Defence Forces, From The Time Of The Warsaw Symposium In 1995, Through To The Present Day

HISTORY OF KEY DEVELOPMENTS

✓1991

- First Defence Forces Health And Fitness Survey
- Identified weakness in DF PT Structure
- New Defence Forces Fitness Test Introduced

HISTORY OF KEY DEVELOPMENTS

✓1995

- Physical Education Graduates Appointed To Formal Military Command Structure
- First Defence Forces Personnel Commence Sports Science Degree Programmes
- National And International Qualification For NCO Physical Training Instructors

HISTORY OF KEY DEVELOPMENTS

✓1999

- Review Of PE In The Defence Forces Initiated By DDFT
 - Board Consisted Of Fitness And Non Fitness Personnel
 - Terms Of Reference- " To Assess Existing Structures, Practices And Levels Of Fitness And Make Appropriate Recommendations On All Aspects Of Physical Education And Training In The Defence Forces "
 - Included New Study Of Fitness Levels Based On 1991 Model

A STUDY OF HEALTH PHYSICAL FITNESS AND ACTIVITY WITHIN THE DEFENCE FORCES

✓Study Team

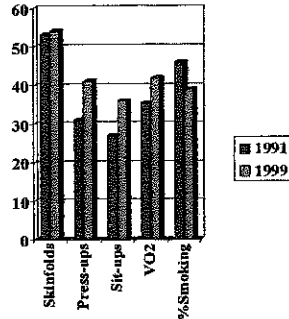
- Military And Civilian Sports Science Students From The University Of Limerick

✓Methodology

- Random Stratified Sample
- Five (5) % Of Defence Forces Strength
- Test As Per Eurofit Physical Fitness Tests 1988
- (Complete Study Report Contained In Written Submission)

RESULTS OF STUDY

- A significant improvement in the estimated VO2 maximum.
- A significant improvement in local muscular endurance scores
- A significant decrease in the agility run times.
- A significant reduction in the numbers of personnel smoking.
- A marked increase in the number of personnel who lead predominantly active lifestyles.



HISTORY OF KEY DEVELOPMENTS

✓2000

– Recommendations Based On Review Board And Study Are Being Implemented In Three Main Areas

- 1 Testing Of Fitness Levels
- 2 Physical Training Structures
- 3 Physical Training Facilities

2000

✓ 1. Fitness Testing

- New DF Fitness Tests
- Tests For All Stages In Military Career
- Corps And Job Specific Tests
- Annual Testing For all Personnel
- Random Testing For Units
- Tests Administered Independently

2000

✓2. PHYSICAL TRAINING STRUCTURES

- More Formal PT Appointments
- Detailed Review Of Syllabi Of All PT Courses
- All DF Career Courses To Include PE Module on Syllabi
- Increased Liaison With Other Armies And CISM Partners

2000 AND BEYOND

✓ 3. PHYSICAL FITNESS TRAINING FACILITIES

- Standardisation And Upgrading of All PT Facilities In All DF Bases
- Priority To Development Of Military Facilities
- Rebuilding Of DF Physical Culture School

CONCLUSION

The Irish Defence Forces have made significant progress in the field of physical education and training over the past 10 years.

In the process we have learned the value of the following;

CONCLUSION

- The importance of continuous self-assessment
- The importance of having suitably qualified personnel in key areas
- The necessity of periodical surveys to assess progress
- The need to develop long term plans based on survey findings
- The importance of regular interaction with other armies

FINAL THOUGHT

✓ CHINESE PROVERB

- " He who asks is a fool for five minutes. He who does not ask remains a fool forever "