

Fitness for field duty and physical working performance of salaried personnel in the Finnish Defence Forces (FDF)

There is unanimity regarding the requirements on the physical fitness of the military, though generally their physical fitness is not put to the test in peacetime. The soldier's physical fitness must be such that he can endure continuous physical and mental strain for several weeks without losing his combat, leadership and operational capability. In peacetime, military persons must cope with their everyday tasks without getting too tired and without lowering their performance level.

Personnel resources

At the end of 2000, the number of regular personnel in the FDF amounted to 16,900. Almost half (47.6%) of the personnel were civilians, and of them 52% were women. Annually about 82% of the age class of approx. 30,000 men perform their compulsory military service as conscripts.

The average age of FDF personnel was 39.8 years. The personnel structure will undergo vital changes within the next few years. By 2010, some 8,000 persons leave work either because of retirement or giving of notice. Because of the retirement decisions concerning FDF personnel, the average age of personnel will increase with several years. For instance, in 1999 there were 54 women aged over 60 in service. After ten years there will be 903 of them!

The growing age structure, the increased pressure of work resulting from intensified conscript training, decreased personnel resources and the various administration reforms in progress have made maintenance of field fitness and physical working performance an important part of personnel administration.

The objective of the management of personnel resources in the FDF is to secure professionally skilled and motivated personnel of adequate number and quality for the peacetime tasks and for the leadership of wartime units consisting of 400,000 troops.

The follow-up system for fitness for field duty and physical working performance

One instrument for the management of personnel resources, efficiency reports and career planning is the follow-up system for field fitness and physical working performance introduced in 1999. The system includes the testing of the physical working performance (fitness), which is part of determining the field fitness of military personnel.

Besides the follow up of performance, there are specific guidelines for the maintenance of field fitness and physical working performance of personnel by arranging exercises during working hours. The prerequisites for physical exercises have been developed to meet the needs of both conscripts and salaried personnel.

Fitness tests

The great challenge in the specification of the tests was to adapt them both to young soldiers in excellent fitness and men and women over 50 years of age. The aim was also to use a small number of testing equipment and to minimize the time needed for the tests.

The fitness tests chosen were the traditional 12-minute running test, with the optional ergometer test for those over 40 years of age, and as muscle power tests the 60-second push-up, pull-up, squats and hand grip power. The BMI has also an effect on the muscle power index.

As a result of the soldiers' increased load in training and combat, and because diseases of the musculoskeletal system have become more general, the importance of muscle power is especially stressed and speaks for the use of muscle power tests. In the FDF, fitness has traditionally been thought of as endurance only, and in this sense the muscle power tests pay a role in changing habits and attitudes towards power training.

Field fitness and its consideration

The personal fitness index measured by the fitness tests has an impact on the field fitness of the military. It also includes marching and orienteering or biathlon, and the results of the service shootings and the level of health determined by a physician. The requirements regarding field fitness are converging in all three services and in the personnel groups.

Field fitness is paid attention to when assigning a military person to a new task or when proposing a promotion/assignment to a higher post and when assigning the person to a wartime task. A person whose field fitness is poor (less than 2.0/5) will not be assigned to physically demanding exercises, advanced training or international tasks. A person whose field fitness is poor can neither be proposed for promotion nor assigned to a higher post.

Field fitness also affects the progress of a person's career. The progress is evaluated of all military personnel and of civilians planned for tasks included in the centralized career planning. When defining its numerical value, the field fitness of military personnel is taken into account and as to civilians, the physical working performance (fitness) is considered.

The physical working performance and fitness for field duty is discussed during the annual development discussions between each superior and his or her subordinate. During these discussions, the subordinate's performance at work and personal qualifications are being assessed.

MILFIT application program

The MILFIT application program is a vital part of the follow-up system. MILFIT is a tool for the physical education officer and used at 64 FDF test laboratories. The program controls the ergometer test, measures the fitness index (HKI) and field fitness class and helps in giving feedback and fitness instructions. A third version of the program is now in use. FDF personnel are divided into three groups: military, civilian men and civilian women. For each personnel group, a classification of the tests has been drawn up with 5-year age groups, ranging from age 20 to 59. The necessary data in MILFIT is transferred to the personnel administration information system (PAIS) for the needs of the development discussion and career planning. The Training Division of the Defence Staff gathers data from the whole country to be reported to the leadership of the FDF and central statistics are included in the FDF Personnel Balance Sheet.

The follow-up program is an outstanding reform in many respects. Generally approved meters have been selected to determine fitness for field duty and physical fitness. More than 300 persons in the units have been trained to carry out reliable tests. The best of them are annually chosen by the brigade commander to supervise the tests and to save the results in the (PAIS) system. Checking connected with the classification of fitness will be carried out in 2002 based on the results of the years 1999, 2000 and 2001.

The new follow-up system of field fitness and physical working performance is part of the production, management and occupational health service of combat efficient troops. On the brigade level, co-operation between the personnel of the training, personnel and health care branches will be further developed.

The lessons learned from the new program have been very positive. The tests have been regarded to be of the right kind and especially civilian personnel have been enthusiastic about them. The deployment of civilian personnel in the FDF wartime organization also obliges and encourages civilian personnel to develop their own working performance. From 2003, the follow-up of fitness tests will concern civilian personnel as well.

Maintenance of physical working performance

Military personnel and civilians who have done the fitness tests may use two hours of their weekly working time to maintain their physical working performance. The encouraging example of the brigade commander is vital for the unit's attitude towards physical exercise. Led and ordered by the commander, the employer enables personnel to participate in physical activities in the workplace and during their free time. To establish premises for physical activities, to promote physical activities during lunch hours, pauses and while commuting to work and to support the employees' independent sport interests are all measures strengthening a permanent interest in physical activities.

Good physical fitness is a prerequisite for the working performance of the whole personnel in the FDF. From the viewpoint of what kind of picture outsiders have of

the FDF, it is also important that brigade-level units, headquarters and military establishments have a positive attitude towards physical activities. This will help everyone to cope with their work both in peacetime and in crisis and it will also have a positive effect on the conscripts' and reservists' attitude towards sports.

In spite of the fact that field fitness and physical working performance are given more consideration than previously during the career, good health and fitness are already valuable as such. The maintenance of physical fitness and field fitness is approached from the individual's viewpoint.

For the FDF, it is a task prescribed by law to encourage activities that improve the physical fitness of citizens. Based on this function and general conscription, high requirements are set on the physical bearing and attitude towards life of FDF personnel. Everyone wearing a military uniform is an example to the conscripts, reservists and subordinates. Similarly, civilian employees are also representatives of the FDF and have an influence on the conscripts.