



Maintaining your most important piece of gear, your body!

OPERATIONAL FITNESS (OPFIT)

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When looking at Operational Fitness (OPFIT), we must first determine exactly what we are referring to. Simply defined, Operational Fitness is physical fitness training that is specifically designed to provide officers and soldiers with task specific dynamic flexibility, agility and strength that is needed to perform the countless duties that law enforcement officers and service members face on a daily basis. Being properly conditioned for dynamic confrontations will significantly reduce the chances of you becoming injured and greatly increase the chances of you winning the fight! Not to mention that proper conditioning increases mental awareness and aids in quick decision making skills, which I am sure we will all agree is one of the most valuable tools in our line of work. As a rule, law enforcement officers and soldiers have limited time to spend in the gym working out to achieve their fitness goals due to working overtime, off duty details, family commitments, etc... Some people have no interest in working out because they may be naturally lean and don't feel the need, whereas others are just plain LAZY and would rather spend their time on





the couch or surfing the internet. Try this – set a timer for three minutes and go to work punching on a heavy bag. I don't mean dance around tapping it, go to town punching on it for three solid minutes or go three minutes with someone that actually hits back. This is just a simple test to show you what kind of cardiovascular conditioning you possess. Then you can decide for yourself what kind of shape you are really in. Most of the bad guys we run into are young and in relatively good shape. Many of them may be gang members and have no reservations about fighting with a cop or anyone else for that matter. Let's face it whether we are patrolling in a squad car or a

Humvee we never know what kind of confrontation awaits us around the next corner. This is why we need to keep our mind, body and tactical skills sharp. The only way to accomplish this goal is to constantly challenge ourselves through our training. But more importantly we must train in a manner that will significantly help us achieve our goals of being faster, more agile and much stronger than the bad guy.

Now that we have looked at some of the pertinent issues that arise while officers are put into tactical conditions in the field, we must target and specify how to train for whatever may be thrown at them. First of all, one must realize that soldiers and

officers are in fact athletes. They are athletes in the way that they have a specific goal in mind, an opposing force (many times in the field both animate and inanimate), and a guideline of rules that must be adhered to for proper execution. Instead of a ball or bat, they have a gun, and instead of an opposing team, they are fighting against a possibly armed enemy or assailant. Soldiers and officers need to realize that they ARE ATHLETES, and need to train accordingly. How do athletes train? They take in to account the facets that make up an athlete: speed, reaction time, power, balance, agility, and endurance. This is different training than most of your typical

local fitness gym offers, or heaven forbid “body building” workouts. We are not interested in puffy, “all show and no go” muscles found on your average meathead gym dude; we are talking functional, get it done, take no prisoners infrastructure of connective tissue allowing our warrior to rule his or her domain. We mean back, abs, and glutes, not biceps, triceps and pecs! Those pretty “mirror muscles” are great to have for looking good in your BDU’s, but what’s going to get you home safely is the stuff you can’t see. We are talking engine, not upholstery! The average commercial gym member is not being asked to do what today’s soldier or officer carry’s out in the field...so why are you training like the average gym member? That sounds like being unprepared to me. The first part of any training regimen incorporates a warm up phase. At S.O.R.D. we use a combination of Athletics Performance Guru, Mark Verstegan’s “Dynamic Flexibility”, and tactical drills to prepare the athlete for the meat of the training. Dynamic Flexibility is a

series of basic movements with one or two specific stretching motions coupled with a strengthening antagonist action. They are done in succession and in many different planes of motion, in order to teach the body proper movement patterns, but



also to train individual muscles that are historically problem areas of the population. For example, one exercise might be stepping forward into a lunge position with your left leg, leaning forward to touch your left elbow to your left foot instep, stand up and repeat with the right side. An athlete might walk 15-30 yards doing these exercises. This is stark contrast to static stretching

of yesteryear, where people stood stationary or even worse, sat on the ground, pulled back an arm or leg and held the stretch for 15-30 seconds. WRONG!!! Static stretching has been found to potentially increase muscle injuries due to small tears to cold muscles, decreased blood flow prior to exercise, and elasticity reduction of muscle fiber. It should be also said that Ballistic Stretching or “bouncing” the bottom of the stretched position is detrimental to the body as well. Proper stretching incorporates multiple repetitions with and antagonist muscle supplying the initial stretch to the target muscle, then to be aided briefly (2 seconds) by another part of the body. (Active Isolation Stretching, made popular by Aaron Mattes). The Tactical portion of the warm up could range from squatting under hurdles with weighted rods, to practicing kicking and punching drills. The main focus of the training is functional strength and movement training. What good is it to bench press 400lb. if after sitting down for 3 hours you cannot spring out of a

squad car, perform and 60 yard sprint chase, hurdling various obstacles, and engage in quite possibly the fight for your life while toting an extra 20lb. of clunky gear? A big fat guy who can bench press 400lb. is still a big fat guy! How many officers do you know that could do this at the drop of a hat, and still have a good chance of making it home unscathed at the end of the shift? We train the athletes to be powerful but agile enough to be able to use it effectively in the field, not just to show off in the gym. With specific training comes specific equipment needs. The typical Universal Gym or Leg Extension Machine is not going to cut it here. You need to get down to the essence of athleticism and train the body as a whole, not parts! Isolation of muscles in strength training, unless for specific injury prevention or rehabilitation is useless in the field. It would be the equivalent of having high-end sport racing tires on a car with a low horse power, non-maintained engine. How fast are you REALLY going to go? We work the engine, tires, and chassis all as one. Some of the equipment that we use are Medicine Balls, Agility Ladders, Hurdles,

and Plyometric Boxes (both vertical and lateral). Medicine Balls should be the most familiar to most folks out there, as they have been around since the dawn of time, but are have not been utilized nearly enough in the non-athletic setting in the last 20 years. They are great for developing hand-eye coordination and motion tracking; very important traits in shooting, driving, punching and kicking. Med Balls also train stabilizing strength of the "core", and cliché term for the muscles of the trunk and hips, the engine of the body. Lastly the Med Balls work the fingers and forearms when catching and throwing. Remember, the hands are the terminating body part, they do all of the manipulation, controlling, climbing, shooting etc...this is where the rubber meets the road, people! We throw the balls over head, behind the back, chest pass, from each side, just about every way to apply force to the ball, remember danger does not always come from head on! Agility Ladders are a more recent invention, originally used in track and field settings to increase foot quickness and regulate stride length. Since then they have been used for

just about everything under the sun. One and two leg hops, lateral jumping, quick feet and rhythm drills fit the bill. We are working on foot-eye coordination, reaction time and "kinesthetic" or body awareness. Picture a Game Warden having to run across a creek and jump from rock to rock, placing each foot precisely, but quickly while balancing his body in the air as well as on the ground. Hurdles are similar to ladders, from a stand point of foot quickness and placement, but if the height of the hurdle is increased, it turns into an explosive exercise. Low hurdles, such as 6-12" in height are good for direction training, 12-42" are used for maximum explosiveness and incorporate a plyometric effect. Hurdles 30-42" high can also be used for squatting under, which aid in hip and back flexibility. We generally use hurdles in lines of 3-10, and have our athletes bounce over or negotiate under them quickly and cleanly. Plyometric or "Plyo" Boxes are another training modality taken from track and field and Olympic weightlifters. Boxes are usually of steel and wood construction, with a

rubber, non-slip top. They range in size from 6" to 42" in height. Many exercises can be performed on these boxes, such as jumps on

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to and off of, with one leg or two. Think of a soldier carrying 50lb. of gear, and a rifle. He is under fire and has to run, leap with one leg extended to hit the skid of a helicopter, absorb the force of his body onto that one leg, and redirect it to catapult him into the chopper. That is pure plyometric, the absorption and redirection of force using momentary stored energy of the muscles and tendons. We use not only vertical box drills, but lateral ones as well, with the movement being side to side and pushing off of an angled surface.

Lastly in the functional conditioning phase of the training, we develop cardiovascular fitness. Now, if the other facets of this training protocol were properly adhered to, and general PT is kept up to snuff, this should be a moot point. We are not looking for regular old, "walk 30 minutes on the treadmill at level 3" crap.

When are you going to run for cover or chase an assailant at a fast walk for 30 minutes? NEVER! You have to be able to pour on the juice at max effort, walk it off, or possibly be still for a few minutes, and be able to repeat it all day long if needed. That is where we enter the world of "Applied Cardio". When the correct amount of time under tension (duration of activity under load) coupled with predetermined rest periods, the target heart rate can be sustained for long periods of time while working muscles anaerobically (explosively). This is a form of interval training used with many runners and football players. For those looking to



calculate target heart rate, take 220 minus your age = max heart rate. For most applications, Target Heart rate will be 60-80% of the max heart rate.

Example: for a 30 year old man: $220-30=190$ max heart rate. $60-80\% \times 190 = 114-152$ target heart rate. As long as you have your heart rate in that zone, you are acquiring a cardiovascular training effect.

The question will always come up, "So what would a program look like?"

Sample Program for Basic Functional Strength, Movement and Applied Cardio:

Warm Up: (6 minutes)

- Front Kicks x10 each side*
- Punches x 10 each side*
- Stiff Leg March Skip 15yds*
- Elbow to Instep w/ Rotation 15yds*
- Lateral Lunge 15yds*
- Inverted Toe Touch 15yd.*
- Backward Lunge w/ Twist 15yd.*

Workout: (repeat twice) (28 total minutes)

- Med Ball Chest Pass x 8*
- Med Ball Side Throw x 8 (each side)*
- 60 second rest*

- Ladder Quick Hop x 12*
- Ladder Mini Step x 12*
- Ladder Two Foot Hop Zig Zag x 12*
- 60 second rest*

- Mini 6" Hurdles Side hops x 8*
- Medium 12" Hurdle High Knees x 8*
- High 18" Hurdle Two Leg Jumps x 8*



120 second rest

High 36" Hurdle Squat Unders x 6

High 36" Hurdle Step Overs x 6

Box Jumps 24" x 10

60 second rest

Depth Drops 24" x 10

Lateral Plyo Box x 20

There are countless methods for conducting physical training as well as several variations to the OPFIT program itself. No matter what type of physical training you participate in, either individually or as a team, it should be specifically designed to focus on the

challenges that you meet as a law enforcement officer or armed forces member.

These challenges may include things such as climbing, jumping, running, fighting, etc... Therefore, the drills can include boxing, obstacle courses, fence climbs, etc... Sometimes in our line of work after we get to a certain level of experience in our careers, some people we feel that they do not need to train as hard because they can handle anything that they are confronted with because they have on previous occasions. This is kind of an "I am special"

mindset. This type of mentality can easily prove fatal at anytime during the course of your duties. We encourage everyone to read various after action reports where officers and soldiers have been injured or killed in action. Then ask yourself, what could you as an individual do to train yourself and/or your team so that if faced with a similar confrontation you may be able to avoid a negative outcome in that same type of incident.

Train hard, stay fit and eat well! ■

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