



Women in the Service Coalition, Inc.
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March 12, 2026

UPDATE ON MILITARY PHYSICAL FITNESS TESTS

Preface.

Military physical fitness testing standards have been a focus of Secretary Pete Hegseth and his team. No new evidence has been presented that suggests that either (a) previous fitness testing was inadequate for success in combat; (b) stricter fitness testing would correlate in any way with combat success; or (c) women were failing in combat arms roles. However, steps have been taken or proposed that would tighten standards in these areas. Of note, standards for conduct and technical, tactical, cognitive, or leadership skills have remained the same or been relaxed, [reducing accountability for misconduct](#), [easing mental health standards](#), and [eliminating programs](#) designed to weed out toxic leaders, among others.

The most likely reason for the attempts to change fitness and body standards is Hegseth's intent to push women out of combat arms and combat leadership roles. This is based on his record of making such statements prior to his appointment, as well as his actions to [remove women from leadership roles](#).

This document summarizes actions taken and proposed to change those standards, and potential negative impacts to readiness. It includes new information on proposed updates to Army physical fitness testing.

Executive Summary.

Prior to his nomination, Pete Hegseth made [numerous statements](#) suggesting that women don't belong in combat arms. Following his nomination, he insisted that he meant that service members should meet the same "standards" regardless of gender, referring specifically to physical fitness. As late as March 2025, [he said](#) on social media, "For far too long, we allowed standards to slip, with different standards for men and women in combat arms. That's not acceptable." In fact, men and women in combat arms have been required to meet the same standards for almost a decade.

The Army Fitness test has undergone changes over the years (see Appendix). The 2022 Army Combat Fitness Test was the product of nine years of development and was still flawed. That version grew out of concerns about the impending integration of women into the ground combat arms, and fears that women would negatively impact readiness due to lower average strength than men. Those fears proved unfounded, as women [have proven successful](#) in those roles through years of study. Nevertheless, [myths and bias](#) persist, and new civilian leaders are trying to roll back women's opportunities.



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Upcoming Changes.

Yet another NEW fitness test is rolling out for all Army combat arms soldiers starting sometime between June and October 2026.

This test will be modelled after the current [Expert Physical Fitness Assessment](#) which is taken as part of the testing to earn the [Expert Infantry Badge](#), the [Expert Soldier Badge](#), and the [Expert Field Medical Badge](#). These Expert-level challenges typically have an overall pass rate of around **20%**. No data is available as to how many soldiers pass the PT portion of the event. Importantly, these badges are a sign of accomplishment but have never been scientifically tested or validated as necessary to, or even correlative with, success in combat. This test is also very similar to the current gender neutral fitness test given on the first day of Ranger School, the Army's most rigorous training.

This new test is set to pilot in March 2026 among a select group of infantry soldiers. This is the second iteration of this new "combat fitness test" concept. The test will be taken in Army Combat Uniform with body armor, helmet and boots. It is intended to be age- and gender-neutral. While no time standard has been set, the proposal is 30 minutes to complete. Events¹ include:

- One mile run
- 100 meters (simulating under fire): 3-5 second "rushes" with 18 up-and-down movements, starting and ending in the prone position
- 16 sandbag lifts to a height of 6.5 feet
- 50-meter farmers carry of two 40-lb water cans
- 25-meter SKED drag (casualty litter) with 90-lb load
- 25-meter high crawl
- Another one mile run

All combat arms soldiers would take this test twice per year. The Army is currently working through whether failure would result in a rebranch or even removal from the service.

The Army is now testing the current AFT at the University of Iowa, previously used for such evaluations using their proprietary models using live subjects and AI soldier models. The test seeks to evaluate applicability to combat tasks. The Sergeant Major of the Army (SMA) has also requested that the University evaluate the Expert Physical Fitness Assessment (the SMA is now responsible for physical fitness testing, taking over responsibilities formerly held by TRADOC).

¹ Changes from the first iteration of this concept include removing 30 dead stop pushups and 100 meter sprint; adding a 25 meter SKED drag after water carry; and extending a 3-5 second rush from 25 meters to 100 meters.



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Units across the force were tasked to provide both male and female combat arms soldiers, from Infantry, Artillery, Engineers and Armor branches, for this evaluation. Some were surprised that Engineer soldiers (12 series) were included in the tasking, since the Engineer branch has long been more fully integrated, graduating the first woman SAPPER in 1999. The combat engineer specialties officially opened to women in 2016. The risk here is that these soldiers (men and women) are typically not at the high level of physical fitness found in Infantry soldiers.

More recent reports (as yet unconfirmed) suggest that the Artillery, Engineer, and Armor soldiers have been removed from the study, and it will now only include Army Infantry.

Final Notes on Fitness Testing and Women in Combat Arms.

1. Women and men in combat arms already complete several gender-neutral tests before they are awarded a combat arms specialty:
 - OPAT** (the Army Occupational Physical Assessment): taken pre-enlistment to ensure candidate can meet the demands of chosen career field
 - HPDT** (High Physical Demands Test) – this is career field specific and must be passed by all soldiers, male or female, in order to be designated an infantry or armor soldier. It is required of both enlisted and officers at their first career field training school in the military. This test is a better read of lethality than the ACFT and is administered only once in a soldier's career.
2. Badge and tab awarding events – such as the Expert Infantry Badge, the Expert Soldier Badge, Ranger school and Special Forces Qualification – are all currently gender-neutral. Ranger School has always been gender-neutral, since the integration of women in 2015.
3. To quote GEN Eisenhower, “It’s not the size of the dog in the fight, it’s the size of the fight in the dog.” One could look at Sergeant Audie Murphy, the Army’s most decorated enlisted soldier, with a history of bravery under fire. At 5’5” and 110 pounds, he was rejected by the Air Force and Marine Corps as underweight. One could also note the remarkable fact that not a single woman has voluntarily quit under the hardships and rigor of Ranger school in the ten years since integration.
4. Physical fitness is but one measure of a soldier’s capability and readiness for combat. Other measures include intelligence, understanding of tactics and weapon systems, ability to solve complex problems, the ability to earn and retain the trust of their fellow soldiers and the personal grit they possess.
5. Army physical fitness testing has NOT been proven to have a direct correlation to “lethality,” mission performance, or effectiveness on the battlefield. In fact, Army physical fitness



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testing, always male-focused, isn't a particularly good test of overall fitness. For example, in a test designed to measure flexibility, balance, and long-term (multi-day) endurance, women would routinely outperform men.

Recommendations.

1. While due deference should be afforded to military leaders, the chaotic and frequent changes in physical fitness testing cry out for oversight. New requirements should be accompanied by some evidence that the requirements are directly relevant to job performance and capability.
2. "Standards" should include all elements of job performance, not just physical. As the Best Ranger competition has noted, technical, tactical, and cognitive skills are just as critical to winning in combat. Programs like the highly successful Battalion Commanders Assessment Program (recently discontinued) that objectively evaluate tactical, cognitive, and leadership skills are equally important, and should be retained and improved, not eliminated.
3. Just this year, [senior enlisted](#) and [officer leaders](#) have testified that women in combat arms roles have not weakened the military in any way. No one has asked if they have, in fact, strengthened it. Commander evaluations WiSCI has seen, and a number of anecdotes, suggests that they do in fact make their combat arms units better and more effective. These commanders should be heard and heeded, regardless of whether those opinions upset the ideology of the current leadership.

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APPENDIX

Timeline of Army Fitness Testing.

- 2013 Development of new Army Combat Fitness Test started
- 2018 Adjusted requirements down (deadlift was too high for many male soldiers)
- 2019 Initial roll out as gender- and age- neutral test
- 2018-2020 Used BLACK/GRAY/GOLD bands to require higher scores for more demanding career fields
- 2020 Test paused for COVID
- 2021 Soldiers given choice between leg tuck and plank as an alternate event
- Mar 2022 Version 3 of the ACFT rolled out. Plank officially replaced leg tucks (RAND reported leg tuck did not accurately measure core strength in all soldiers). Gender and age scale implemented.
- Oct 2022 [ACFT](#) became official test of record for the Army

March 2025

[Hegseth orders a 60-day review](#) of physical fitness standards for combat arms roles, saying, “For far too long, we allowed standards to slip, with different standards for men and women in combat arms. That’s not acceptable.” As noted by the Military Times, “military leaders have testified that standards have not been lowered for entry into those combat posts.”

April 2025

Army announced the new Army Fitness Test (AFT) to replace the Army Combat Fitness Test and become the service’s “test of record” starting June 1, 2025. The test, which is semi-annual for active duty and annual for National Guard and Reserve soldiers, will carry over five events: the three-repetition maximum deadlift, hand-release push-ups, the sprint-drag-carry, plank, and a two-mile run.

Standards in each event would be gender-normed for soldiers in non-combat MOSes, meaning separate scales for men and women.

Starting Jan. 1, 2026, the “male” standard will be the same for men and women assigned to any of 21 combat-focused military occupational specialties. Specifically, the new “sex neutral” fitness requirements will apply to soldiers and officers in the infantry, special forces, artillery, armor, cavalry, mortarmen, and combat engineers.

Sep 2025



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At a gathering of senior military leaders at Quantico, Secretary Hegseth [announced initiatives](#) to tighten standards for physical fitness and body composition, along with [other initiatives](#) that could potentially impact readiness.

Dec 2025 – Jan 2026

The Navy announced revised standards in December 2025, followed by the Air Force in January 2026. Both services now require a PT test twice per year. In the Navy, designated combat billets must take an additional fitness test in addition to the standard Navy PT test which includes an 800-meter swim with fins, as well as push-ups, pull-ups and a 1-mile run weighted with 20 pounds.