

## Marines facing higher fitness standards

[BY LANCE CPL. M. DANIEL SANCHEZ, SPECIAL TO THE SUN](#)

December 29, 2007 - 9:40PM

A first-class physical fitness test score will no longer excuse Yuma Marines with extra body fat. Currently, Marines can be overweight as long as they have a body fat index no higher than 22 percent for males and 30 percent for females and earn a first-class score on their physical fitness test (PFT).

But under new rules that take effect in June, male Marines who don't achieve a first-class fitness test must not exceed 18 percent, while females must not exceed 26 percent.

Marine Commandant Gen. James T. Conway recently outlined the changes in a letter to all Marine commanders. In the same letter, he also announced the creation of a combat-related fitness test and a military appearance program.

"Our nation has high expectations of her Marines ... Accordingly, our high standards of professional and personal performance, to include our physical fitness and military appearance, must be maintained and adhered to by every Marine," wrote Conway.

According to Conway's directives, the new body fat standards will vary, depending on a Marine's age. The new standards are:

- 18 percent for male Marines and 26 percent for females 17-26 years old.
- 19 percent and 27 percent for Marines 27-30 years old.
- 20 and 28 percent between ages 40-45.
- 21 and 29 percent for Marines over the age of 46.

A small majority of Marines at Marine Corps Air Station Yuma may not meet the new guidelines. In Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron, for example, 34 of the unit's more than 500 Marines - 7 percent - would now be considered overweight despite high PFT scores, said Staff Sgt. Gerald Collins, squadron training chief.

Conway said combat experience in Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrated the need to develop a combat fitness program and evaluation that will better measure the functional elements of combat fitness. The combat fitness test will augment the PFT and consist of events that replicate the physical demands of combat, the commandant wrote.

"The CFT will be a scored event that will influence promotion, retention and assignment," Conway said.

The exact events are in development, but two Iraq veterans stationed in Yuma said there are a few things they would add to the test.

Marines should run in sand with a full combat load on, including body armor, ammunition and a weapon, said Cpl. Ramiro Montemayor, who recently returned from Iraq with Marine Wing Support Squadron 371 in October.

"Just walking in the sand wears you out," said Montemayor, who has a first-class PFT.

Cpl. Juan Ramirez, who has been deployed three times in support of the war on terrorism, said carrying or dragging a casualty, with both Marines in full combat gear, would be a good test.

Conway's proposed appearance program will give commanders the power to do something about Marines who look like Marines on paper but not in uniform. It will give Marines the assistance and guidance they need "to improve their appearance, lifestyle habits and overall wellness," said Conway.

Even though most specifics aren't hashed out, the commandant expects Marines to be ready to comply with the standards when they go into effect in June.

---

Lance Cpl. M. Daniel Sanchez writes for The Desert Warrior, the newspaper of the Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, from which this story is reprinted.