

‘Strength from Within’ can boost physical fitness

Today’s Army National Guard is currently fighting many different battles on many different fronts, and one of them is for a higher level of physical fitness.

“The very foundation of readiness and deployability is physical fitness,” said outgoing Command Sgt. Maj. of the Army National Guard John Gipe. “You have to be able to physically endure the rigors of combat before you consider the other requirements. That’s why the Army Guard’s Decade of Health Program ties right in with the Army Guard’s Year of the NCO, which fosters an increasing awareness of physical fitness, health

and nutrition.”

campaign, ARNG Dental Bytes, as the most successful and relevant, but said that every one of the four annual campaigns have been good. “Dental readiness brought not only awareness of a huge issue, but partial resolution of the problem.”

What is the most imperative health battle for the Army Guard Soldier in the future? Gipe responded unequivocally, “Smoking! There’s been a huge increase in the number of smokers out there among the young Soldiers,” he said. “I would estimate this number has doubled in the last few years.”

In fact, smoking is such a lethal problem that it will be one of the behavioral health issues the DoH tackles in 2010.

Safety issues with regard to the escalating numbers of accidents involving motorcycles and cars at high rates of speed, and of course, substance abuse is also on Gipe’s mind. Because of the combat situations American Soldiers face, he is afraid that “young Soldiers may have become adrenaline junkies, developing a need to get that ‘rush’ from doing something on the edge.”

Gipe emphasized that health and physical fitness are integral to being successful, not only in the National Guard, but in life. “Physical fitness is not just a readiness or deployability issue – it’s a national issue and a lifelong quest. If you are physically fit, your whole body works better. You think better; your awareness of every aspect of your life is clarified; it can change the mindset of the Soldier and the Family.”

Gipe cites another reason why he is a firm believer in the value of the DoH Program. “It is one of the best programs we have available—but I’d like to see it brought to a much higher level. I’d like to see it take a bigger role in all the states. The campaigns are known in the Washington D.C.-area, but maybe not as much in the 54 states and territories. I plan to make my replacement aware of the importance of the program.”

The unique motto on Gipe’s official coin reads “Strength from within”—perhaps this motto will be helpful to Soldiers in enhancing their physical fitness and fitness for duty.

-Pat Messer, DoH

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Gipe is concerned about the overall declining state of physical fitness that is affecting the Guard, and salutes the DoH for being a proven asset to help Soldiers raise and maintain their level of fitness for duty – and for life.

“The fact that some Soldiers are having difficulty meeting the Army Guard physical fitness standards is a problem,” says Gipe.

This affects morale, esprit, camaraderie and even promotions. “When a Soldier fails to meet APFT or height/weight standards at a leadership course, they think it’s no big deal because they’ll graduate anyway. But the fact is they carry a certificate that reads ‘marginally achieved course standards.’ That will affect a Soldier’s promotion potential for the rest of their career. It’s a problem that has to be addressed,” and DoH is doing that.

Gipe went on to explain that, by regulation, the Guard Soldier must meet the same physical fitness standards as those of the regular Army. “The guy who drives a truck for a living, while simultaneously serving as an ARNG Soldier, usually doesn’t have the time, the means or the equipment to maintain the required levels of fitness and weight standards. He goes from truck driver to Soldier overnight, which requires him to carry up to 80 additional pounds on his body, depending on his MOS. If he is not in good physical condition, this can result in physical problems like back and knee injuries. This situation is a major cause of non-battle injuries,” warns Gipe.

Gipe applauded the DoH dental readiness

