BOISE - Early in the morning at 5:30 a.m., Soldiers wake up to begin their daily journey to a renewed state of physical and mental wellness. These Soldiers are here to participate in the Idaho Army National Guard’s Comprehensive Fitness Program (CFP). The IDARNG’s 3rd CFP cycle kicked off on April 27, 2017 at Gowen Field, Boise, Idaho. Its curriculum centers on mentoring Soldiers who have failed their record Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT) and/or HT/WT to improve themselves, overall unit readiness, and support state retention efforts.

Soldiers come from all over the state to participate in the 15-day program. The intent of the course is not to further exacerbate a Soldier’s injuries due to lack of fitness preparedness, but rather to identify where they are physically and mentally and build them up from there. The Soldiers who make it through medical screening are placed on four teams of 10 to 12 along with three Instructor/Mentors assigned to each team.

The road to building a resilient mind and attitude for these Soldiers is not easy. Each individual that attends CFP has had a different contributing factor and circumstance in their lives that lead to them not meeting the standard for the APFT and/or HT/WT. Each person’s issues presented a unique challenge that needed to be conquered and overcome. Within a few days of arriving at Gowen Field, the motivation level of each Soldier starts to increase as they make new friends, build team camaraderie, and begin to make new fitness gains.

On day one of physical training at Camp Rhino, the Soldiers are introduced to CrossFit training that is tailored to help promote proper technique in exercise movements as well as building the strength and stamina needed to complete an APFT. As they progress throughout the two weeks of intense physical training, they are introduced to obstacles and increasingly technical physical exercises.

One Soldier from the 116th Brigade recounts the following. “When I first arrived at CFP, I was pretty discouraged due to...”
my physical shape. But as time went on and I could see what I was able to accomplish physically, I started to change my mind again about what was possible and what I capable of. Before you knew it, me and my buddies were experiencing the same mental uplift, all of the sudden we were upbeat and had a different outlook on life and our careers.”

The nutrition program at Camp Rhino provides critical information needed for each Soldier to begin building the knowledge base they need in order to start a lifestyle change. In order to supplement and sustain their physical progression and nutritional academics throughout this two-week course, the students are learning how to develop their own plan for success. This plan begins with establishing a 30-day meal plan and a 30-60-90-day workout plan, which is tailored for each student’s need to meet or exceed Army physical fitness standards.

No training program would be a success without the strength of the NCO Corps. The Instructor/Mentors (IM) that execute the CFP for the Commander are not only stellar leaders within their units, they were chosen to mentor each Soldier because of their unique ability to help an individual work through what seems insurmountable to be challenges.

“I want you guys to leave here remembering everything you have learned, do not go home forgetting what you have accomplished,” Sgt. Sara Kerby from Alpha Company, 145TH BSB tells the CFP students during a mass formation, “The best thing you can do is to believe in yourself and put in the hard work, and things will start changing for the better.”

Whether it is coaching each Soldier through team building exercises at the Leadership Reaction Course (LRC), helping them through life challenges, or helping them refine their physical readiness, each IM contributes an incredible amount of time and energy to ensure each person’s success.

It is no secret or coincidence why the CFP has seen such amazing success during its first three cycles. This program boasts a strong success rate of an average 40 percent rate in taking Soldiers from failing APFT and HT/WT to meeting or exceeding the standards. The metrics range in at two to four minutes shaved off a two-mile run, and increases of 10 to 30 reps in push-ups and sit-ups.

Not only do these statistics equate to Soldiers not being discharged, but this program is making the Idaho Army National Guard a stronger organization. As we fight to defend what matter the most, we must ensure that every Soldier matters as a valuable factor in the equation that helps accomplish the mission of the Guard. The CFP continues to be a powerful variable in that equation.