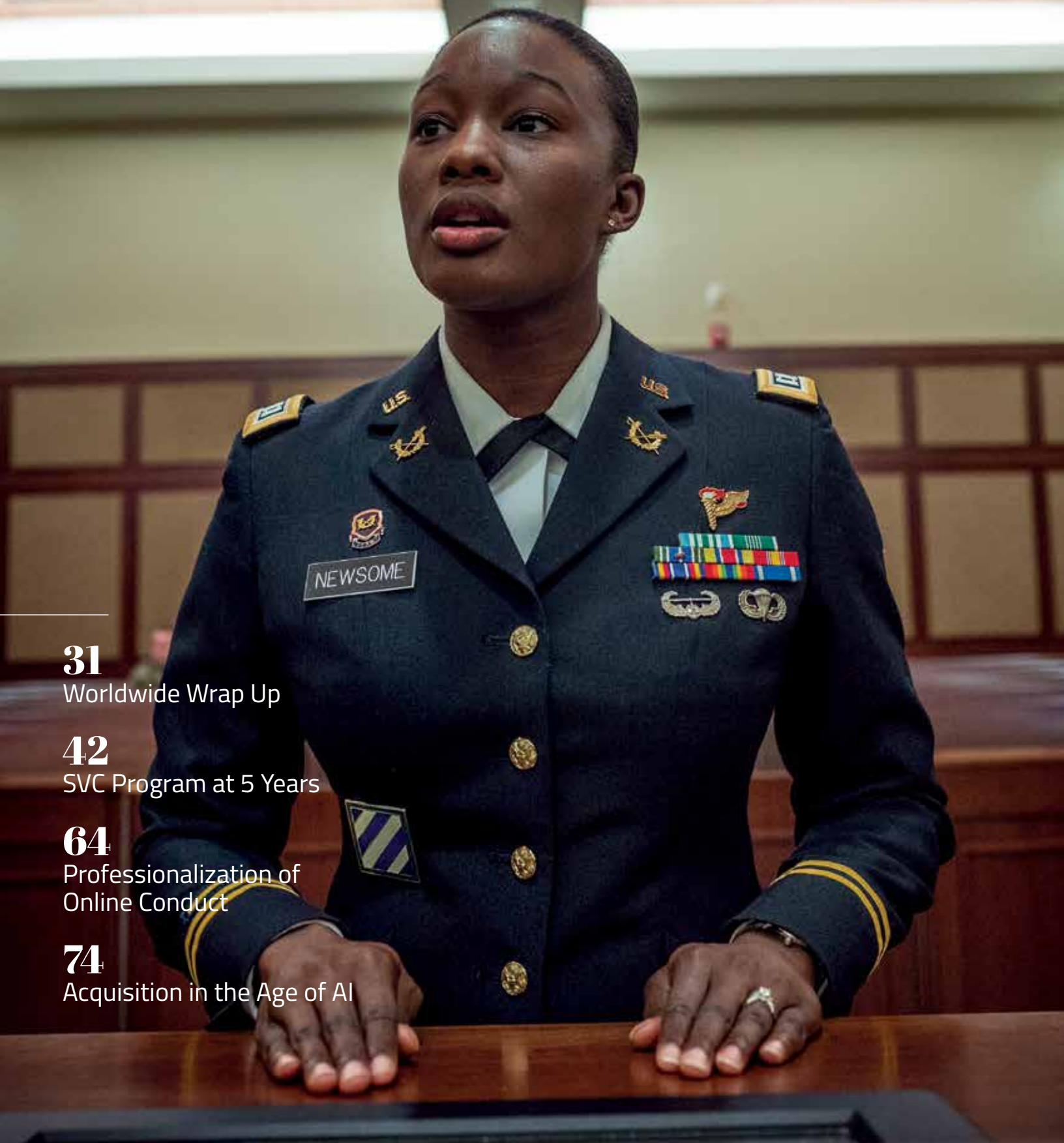


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The Army's new PT test includes tossing a 10-pound medicine ball backwards. (Credit: Jason Wilkerson)

Closing Argument

One Army, One Standard

The New Fitness Test Should Have a Single Scoring System

By Major Sam Gabremariam

The Army Physical Fitness Test is changing after nearly four decades. The new Army Combat Fitness Test (ACFT) is a seismic change to the way we measure fitness and readiness in the Army. It's comprised of six events that must be completed within fifty minutes, culminating with the infamous, but steadfast, two mile run. It would be an understatement to say that the new test is merely difficult—it is a game changer.

Aside from the sheer physical challenge that the test presents, the other notable change introduced by the ACFT is a gender

and age neutral scoring paradigm. Where the current test is a health based assessment, taking into account gender and age to score fitness, the ACFT is indifferent to these distinctions. The ACFT is focused more on combat readiness, and its varying exercises and movements are designed to better indicate how effective a Soldier will be in a combat environment.

In fact, a major reason for the Army's transition to the gender and age neutral ACFT is to ensure that all Soldiers are ready for combat operations. The argument is

simple enough. First, all Soldiers will be expected to do the same basic tasks in combat so they should all have to pass the same test. Second, the test should be a more realistic measure of a Soldier's physical ability to withstand the rigors of a combat environment.

That is why it is profoundly confusing that the Army, after moving away from gender and age based scoring, is still considering the possibility of another bifurcated scoring model. The option would set one minimum passing standard for those in combat-arms units or with a Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) designation of combat-arms, and another, less challenging, standard for all others. It is perplexing because the option is the antithesis of why we did away with gender and age based scoring. The confusion is compounded when one realizes that the difference between these "minimum" standards are themselves slight. For instance, the difference in repetition between the combat-arms and non-combat arms for leg-tucks is four additional tucks. Such minor differences will nevertheless have a tremendous impact on our Army. It would arguably create a profound dichotomy between Soldiers and units, undermining the very readiness we seek while subverting the cohesion we need as an Army.

While other services like the Marine Corps laud that every Marine is a rifleman, we would undermine our Soldiers by quietly pronouncing that not all Soldiers are expected to soldier. How else would Soldiers perceive entire segments of the Army population that are held to a lower standard—it will cause adverse cultural reverberations that will overtly split Soldiers into distinct tiers. As a result of lowered expectations, represented by an insignificant number of fewer repetitions, we subordinate the value of an entire sector of our Army. I believe we are better than that as an Army, and hopefully this bifurcated scoring option will not spring to fruition in 2020. **TAL**

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