

# Over the Top on 'Dead Hang' Pull-Ups

by LtCol Stanley J. Pasieka, Jr., USMC(Ret)

*The following is a reprint of an article from the December 1981 issue of the Gazette. With the release of ALMAR 70-96, which directs male Marines to perform 'dead hang' pull-ups, one reader recommended that we revisit this workout program.*

After 15 years in the Marine Corps I am finally able to "max" the pull-up/chin-up event on the physical fitness test. You can too, if you follow this schedule. Before you know it you will be able to accomplish what the Marine Corps has set for a perfect test score.

Although everybody knows that the only way to increase your ability to do pull-ups is to do them over and over, I was never able to make this sound advice work for me. A few years ago, I received a "guaranteed to work" schedule from one of my former platoon commanders. He assured me that in merely 6 months I would easily be able to complete 20 pull-ups. In just 23 weeks on the "Recon Ron Pull-Up Program," I completed 21 chin-ups. If this program worked for me, there's a good chance it can work for many other Marines, if they are willing to give it a try.

The program is based on performing a manageable number of pull-ups each day, and gradually increasing this number. The total number of pull-ups done each day is completed in five sets. Each step is repeated daily for two weeks before progressing to the next step. The total number of repetitions increases by only two from step to step. Time is not a factor, but each workout can be completed in less than 10 minutes.

As an example, when I started this program, I struggled to reach nine pull-ups.



Thus, I selected what I reasoned to be a manageable number—26 pull-ups in 10 minutes. Surprisingly, I was able to accomplish the workout with little difficulty in 5 1/2 minutes. It seemed to me that this initial success was far better than straining and possibly quitting the program before giving it a proper chance. After doing a set, I would walk around and generally finish all five sets in less than eight minutes, but as I progressed to the steps with 50 and more total repetitions in each workout the time required became secondary, and it was good just to finish.

I can verify, as an experiment of one, that this plan will enable you to max the pull-up event on the physical fitness test. Set your goal and begin by adjusting the schedule to suit your particular fitness level.

USMC

## RECON RON'S PULL-UP/CHIN-UP SCHEDULE

Steps	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Set 1	7	8	8	9	10	10	11	12	12	13	14	14	15	16	16	17	18	18
Set 2	6	6	7	7	7	8	8	8	9	9	10	10	10	11	11	11	12	12
Set 3	5	5	5	6	6	6	7	7	7	8	8	8	9	9	9	10	10	10
Set 4	4	5	5	5	6	6	6	7	7	7	8	8	8	9	9	9	10	10
Set 5	4	4	5	5	5	6	6	6	7	7	7	8	8	8	9	9	9	10
Total Repetitions	26	28	30	32	34	36	38	40	42	44	46	48	50	52	54	56	58	60

- A. Each step is done for 2 weeks before advancing.
- B. A workout consists of approaching the bar five times to do the specified number of repetitions in each set of pull-ups.
- C. Set a comfortable and reasonable time limit to complete the workout.
- D. Select 1 day each week to omit the workout and do 1/3 of the total repetitions for that day.

*>LtCol Pasieka wrote this article while a major on active duty. He now is living in Birmingham, MI.*

# Armstrong Pull-up Program

1. This program was used by Major Charles Lewis Armstrong, USMC to prepare himself to attempt to set a world record in number of pull-ups completed in a single exercise session. The program provides the necessities for successful physical improvement namely, VARIETY, OVERLOAD, and REGULARITY. Users have achieved remarkable results in only 6 to 8 weeks. This means that most, if not all, have been able to meet the performance level they have set out to achieve, a single set of twenty repetitions.

It can not be overemphasized that his program depends upon regularity. Daily performance of the exercises listed in the following paragraphs holds the true key to reaching and to maintaining the twenty repetition level.

## The Morning Routine

Each morning perform three maximum effort sets of normal pushups. The pushup is one of the best, single exercises for strengthening the entire set of muscles that makes up the shoulder girdle. Major Armstrong described his morning routine in the following manner. "After rising, I would drop onto the deck and do my first set of pushups. I would then move into the head (bathroom) and start my morning toilet. I would return after a few minutes and do my second maximum effort set after which, I would go back into the head to shave. After shaving, I would return to the bedroom and complete the third and final set. Having completed all of the pushups, I was awake and ready for a relaxing shower."

This routine should be followed during the entire training period. Since it takes most of us at least four weeks to reach our goals, you will probably find that you have inadvertently established a morning routine that is easy enough to keep as a lifetime habit, if not, you will at least appreciate the morning shower a little more.

It has been noted that this pushup routine helps to alleviate any soreness during the first couple of weeks. It is recommended that you use the pushup routine everyday during this period so that you feel more comfortable during your initial adjustment to this regime of exercises.

## Training Routines

The following represents the heart of the training program. I recommend that you do not attempt the pull-ups until 3 or 4 hours after the pushup routine was completed. The program is conveniently divided into five training days. This is easily translated into a Monday through Friday approach to pull-up training. It is important to cease the pull-up routine for two days, Saturday and Sunday. Further, it is necessary to use consecutive days (not to skip days) when on the pull-up routine. Finally, it is more important to do the pull-ups than it is to do the pushups.

The training program was developed to improve performance in a specific exercise, the overhand pull-up. The program can be adapted to doing chin-ups and flexed arm hangs. The program depends upon quality exercises, numbers of repetitions are unimportant. When you are doing these routines you should concentrate on perfect execution of each repetition. The only person that you can fool is yourself.

Day 1

Five maximum effort sets. Rest 90 seconds between each set. Do not concern yourself with numbers. You will find that you will increase the numbers in the last two sets before you see much improvement in the first three. Make sure that each set is a maximum effort set.

#### Day 2

Pyramid Day. Start the pyramid with one repetition, the next set has two repetitions, the next has three. Continue in this fashion until you miss a set. (e.g. your last set was five, your next set would be six, but you could only do four. You missed a set) Do one more set at a maximum effort. Rest 10 seconds for each repetition in the previous set.

#### Day 3

Do three training sets with a normal overhand grip. Rest 60 seconds between each set. Do three training sets gripping the bar so that your palms are toward your face and your little fingers are touching each other. Rest 60 seconds between each set.

#### Day 4

Do the maximum number of training sets that you can accomplish. Rest 60 seconds between each set. You do training sets until you fail to do perfect training set. This day can wind up being the longest training day as you continue with the program because you will find it easy to do lots of training sets.

#### Day 5

Repeat the day that you found to be the hardest in the previous four days. This will change from week to week.

#### Training Sets

Training Sets are easy to define, but require some experimentation to determine for the individual participating in the program. A training set a specified number of repetitions. That means one individual may have 3 repetitions in his training set, but another individual may have more or less. The key to determine the proper number of repetitions in a training set comes on Day 3. You must perform nine training sets that day. If you only do twelve repetitions in your best single set (a PFT set or a maximum effort set), then your training set would probably have one or at most two repetitions. If you were concerned with gross numbers performed, you might try for the higher numbered training set. This is not advised. It is much more important for you to successfully complete the scheduled workout on Day 3, doing one repetition per training set, than it is for you to complete only 6 or 7 sets, trying two or three repetitions in each training set. Day 3 calls for you to do nine training sets. Adjust your training sets so that you can complete this routine properly.

The best gauge for the number of repetitions in the training set comes on Day 4. If you successfully complete Day 3, try to raise the number of repetitions in your training set by one when you do Day 4. If you get a least nine sets done on Day 4, that tells you that your training set ought to be one repetition higher. If you get less than nine sets, you will still have accomplished a good day's work, and confirmed that your training set was correct for this week.

It is important that you do not change the repetitions in a training set in midstream. When you schedule yourself to the day's routine using three repetitions in your training set, do not change it to two when the exercises get hard.

### Modifications

Ladies will find that this program adapts well to the flexed arm hang. Training sets are simply translated into hang times.

Chin-ups may be substituted for those who prefer this technique, however, day 3 must still be completed exactly as described with 6 sets done with the overhand grip.

It is highly recommended that you follow this program using overhand grip as most of the obstacles that you will have to get over at OCS require an overhand grip.

### Maintenance and Final Thoughts

Once you have achieved your goal, you will remain at that plateau by doing at least 50 repetitions each day. Though this may sound like a large number of repetitions at this point in time, it is not, as you will happily discover during your time on the program.

The program will work for anyone who will make a sincere attempt. You cannot expect any physical training program to work for you if you do not practice it regularly. In the first few weeks you may find that you are able to do fewer repetitions. This is a normal physiological reaction called teardown. As you continue, you will improve.

If your performance is at the 12-15 repetition level when you begin this program, then it will take about 4 weeks to complete. If you are lower than that it will take longer. Have heart because if you continue with the program, you will reach the 20 repetition level.

**Disclaimer: It is very important to note that these physical training programs should not be started by anyone until you have consulted a licensed physician and you are told you are medically qualified to begin this specific type of physical training.**

## **Marine Corps Crunch Workout**

This workout is based on the same simplistic approach to fitness training as Major Armstrong's pull-up program. This program should be done Monday through Friday directly after the pull-up portion of Major Armstrong's workout.

### **Day 1**

Do three maximum effort sets. Rest 60-90 seconds between each set. As soon as you stop (even for one second), that set is complete.

### **Day 2**

Pyramid day. Begin with 20 repetitions. Each consecutive set should increase by ten until you can not complete the required amount without pausing. Then do a maximum effort set. Rest 1 second per crunch of the previous set.

### **Day 3**

Do five 20-second sets. If you have to pause between repetitions it is ok for this days' workout. However, do as many as you can in each 20-second set as if you were taking the PFT. Rest 25 seconds between each set.

### **Day 4**

Do 50 repetitions as fast as possible (without stopping if you can). Rest for 60 seconds. Do 30 repetitions as fast as possible. Rest for 45 seconds. Do 20 repetitions as fast as possible. Rest for 30 seconds. Do a maximum effort set.

### **Day 5**

Do as many crunches as possible in 2 minutes just like the PFT. Rest for 90 seconds and do a maximum effort set.

**Disclaimer: It is very important to note that none of these physical training programs should be started by anyone until you have consulted a licensed physician and you are told you are medically qualified to begin this specific type of physical training.**

This part of the PFT kills more applicants than anything. People are just intimidated to run. Running can be a lot of fun if people do it the right way. Here are a few steps to getting off on the right foot.

1. Always, always run with a partner. Running by yourself can get very boring.
2. Start at a pace and distance you are comfortable with and build steadily. Having said that, don't be afraid to push yourself outside of your comfort zone relatively soon. The key word is START at a comfortable pace and distance.
3. Every run does not have to be lightning fast. Run at a pace that you can comfortably converse with your running partner.
4. Run slower at the beginning of your run and work into a faster pace. Always finish a run strong instead of starting like fire and sputtering across the finish line.
5. Look where you are going to instead of at your shoe laces or the pavement.
6. Run at least 3 times per week every week. Work up to 4 or 5 days per week even if you only run a mile or two on some days.

Remember that there are many ways to improve your run time. The key to a good run workout is not overall mileage or speed work but consistency. Plan your runs and run your plan. Believe it or not, ANYONE can run below 18:00 minutes if they put forth the effort. If you do put forth the effort now, you will be reaping the benefits at OCS. Here are some of the key elements that I have incorporated into my run workouts to help me. I have not done all of these at once but have done all of them at one time or another.

Medium Distance/Average Pace- This is the backbone of any run program. These runs are anywhere from 3-5 miles at a comfortable pace. This type of run should be done at least 2 times per week in anyone's workout.

Long Slow Distance- These runs are a slow to comfortable pace for 5-10 miles. 10 miles intimidates most. Build 1 mile at a time. These runs are very effective at building endurance and should be done at least once every two weeks for any intermediate or better runner.

Interval Training- Interval training should be done once someone has advanced beyond the very beginner stages of running. There are two main types I have used. One method is where you go for a 3 mile run running at a sprint for a quarter mile and then jogging very slowly for a quarter mile. The variant method would be to run at a track and rest between each interval. The normal interval here would be  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile. The  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile sprints should be run at approximately 20% time of your current mile race pace. In other words, multiply your mile pace by .20 and that will give you your approximate pace for the  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile. Ensure you maintain a consistent pace during each interval and from interval to interval. You should do this once per week and start by doing 4-6 repetitions increasing 1-2 repetitions per week until you get to 12.

Hill Training- Find a hill of medium grade that is anywhere from 20-100 yards long. Sprint to the top, jog slowly to the bottom. Start doing this for 10-15 minutes per training session. Increase five minutes per session until you get to 30, or 45 minutes.

Fartlek Training- Find a good 2-5 mile course. Jog at your medium comfortable pace. Stop every  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile and do 10-30 repetitions of some exercise (i.e. push-ups, pull-ups, sit-ups, mountain climbers, lunges, dips, jumping jacks, 8 count body builders, flutter kicks, etc, etc.) If you want to emphasize upper body conditioning, cut the run down to 1-2 miles and stop every 50-100 yards.

### Training Sets and Final thoughts

A maximum effort set is the most crunches you can do without pausing. Once you stop, that set is complete. Sets on days 1 and 2 should be done in this manner, as well as, day 4 if you can. Days 3 and 5 focus on the maximum number you can do in a given time period instead of the maximum number you can do without stopping.

If you will do this program consistently with the pull-up workout you will see fast and effective improvement in your PFT score. The key is consistency. The workout does not take much time, so stick to it.

## PHYSICAL FITNESS TEST (PFT)

Your PFT score is extremely important for your selection. As the saying goes, "Use the pull-ups and crunches to get a good score; have a good run time to get selected." Following your inventory PFT, you will have up to three months (determined by your selection board date) to score 225 or higher for our office to submit your application.

EVENTS:            Male:            Pull-ups, crunches, 3-mile run  
                      Female:          Flexed-arm hang, crunches, 3-mile run

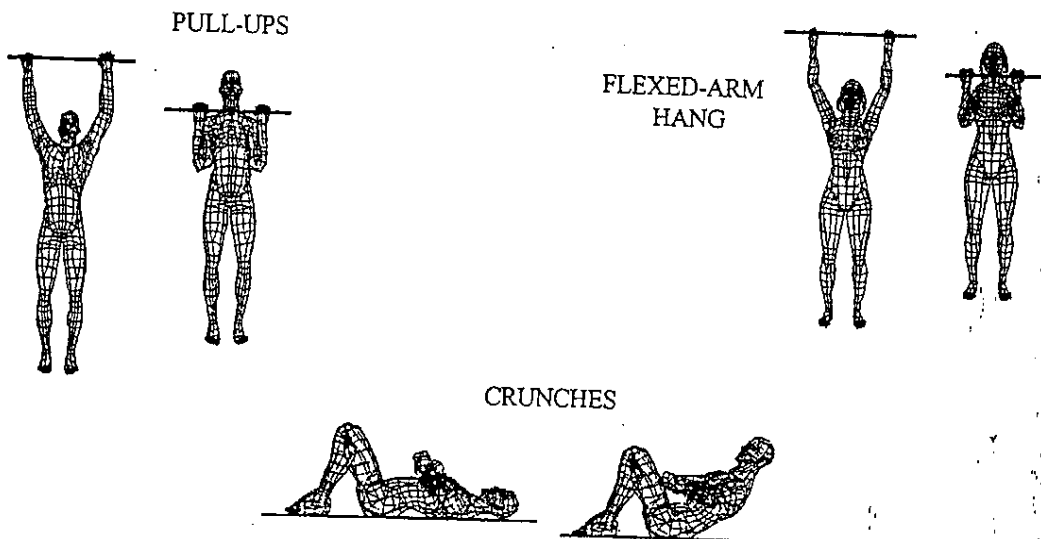
SCORING:          PFT maximum possible score, 300.

Pull-ups:           Males only. Maximum score, 100. 5 points per pull-up.  
Crunches:           Maximum score, 100. 1 point per crunch, 2 minute time limit.  
3-mile run:        Maximum score, 100. Males subtract 1 point for every 10 seconds slower than 18 minutes. Must run faster than 24:00. Females subtract 1 point for every 10 seconds slower than 21 minutes. Must run faster than 27 minutes.  
Flexed-arm:        Females only. Maximum score, 100 (70 seconds). 1 point per second for first 40 seconds, 2 points per second thereafter.

**PULL-UPS:** The force of a jump may not be used for the first pull-up. Palms will face one direction, inboard or outboard. The arms are fully extended and the feet are free from the ground. One repetition consists of raising the body with the arms until the chin is above the bar then lowering until the arms are fully extended again. Repeat as many times as possible. Note: any kicking or rocking motion is not permitted. Hand position may be changed during the exercise provided the individual does not dismount the bar or receive assistance. Resting with the chin on the bar is not permitted. Correct pull-ups are counted.

**FLEXED-ARM HANG:** The bar must be grasped with both palms facing inboard or outboard. Start with the elbows bent so the chin is above or level with the bar. Hang there for as long as possible without letting the chin rest on the bar.

**CRUNCHES:** The starting position: participants lie on their backs (supine position) with legs bent at the knees and both feet flat on the ground. Arms are crossed over the lower rib. Arms must not separate from the chest during the exercise. Raise the upper body from the supine position until the forearms touch both legs. Return to the supine position. Repeat as many times possible within two minutes. The feet and buttocks must remain in constant contact with the ground. Upon return to the supine position the shoulder blades must touch the ground. The head does not need to touch the ground. An assistant will kneel or sit on the individual's feet. resting is permitted in the up or down position.



# POINTS SYSTEM

The table below will be used to assign a point value to each of the three events. Maximum attainable score for any one event is 100 points, while 300 points represents a perfect score.

## USMC MALE PHYSICAL FITNESS TEST (PFT)

Points	Pullups	Crunches (2 MIN.)	3 Mile Run	Points	Pullups	Crunches	3 Mile Run	Points	Pullups	Crunches	3 Mile Run	Points	Pullups	Crunches	3 Mile Run
100	20	100	18:00	75	15	75	22:10	50	10	50	26:20	25	5	25	30:30
99		99	18:10	74		74	22:20	49		49	26:30	24		24	30:40
98		98	18:20	73		73	22:30	48		48	26:40	23		23	30:50
97		97	18:30	72		72	22:40	47		47	26:50	22		22	31:00
96		96	18:40	71		71	22:50	46		46	27:00	21		21	31:10
95	19	95	18:50	70	14	70	23:00	45	9	45	27:10	20	4	20	31:20
94		94	19:00	69		69	23:10	44		44	27:20	19		19	31:30
93		93	19:10	68		68	23:20	43		43	27:30	18		18	31:40
92		92	19:20	67		67	23:30	42		42	27:40	17		17	31:50
91		91	19:30	66		66	23:40	41		41	27:50	16		16	32:00
90	18	90	19:40	65	13	65	23:50	40	8	40	28:00	15	3	15	32:10
89		89	19:50	64		64	24:00	39		39	28:10	14		14	32:20
88		88	20:00	63		63	24:10	38		38	28:20	13		13	32:30
87		87	20:10	62		62	24:20	37		37	28:30	12		12	32:40
86		86	20:20	61		61	24:30	36		36	28:40	11		11	32:50
85	17	85	20:30	60	12	60	24:40	35	7	35	28:50	10	2	10	31:00
84		84	20:40	59		59	24:50	34		34	29:00	9		9	33:10
83		83	20:50	58		58	25:00	33		33	29:10	8		8	33:20
82		82	21:00	57		57	25:10	32		32	29:20	7		7	33:30
81		81	21:10	56		56	25:20	31		31	29:30	6		6	33:40
80	16	80	21:20	55	11	55	25:30	30	6	30	29:40	5	1	5	33:50
79		79	21:30	54		54	25:40	29		29	29:50	4		4	34:00
78		78	21:40	53		53	25:50	28		28	30:00	3		3	34:30
77		77	21:50	52		52	26:00	27		27	30:10	2		2	35:00
76		76	22:00	51		51	26:10	26		26	30:20	1		1	36:00

Run times which fall between the increments of time indicated on the preceding chart will receive the score of the next longer time increment; ie: a time of 21:11 will receive 80 points.

# POINTS SYSTEM

The table below will be used to assign a point value to each of the three events. Maximum attainable score for any one event is 100 points, while 300 points represents a perfect score.

## USMC FEMALE PHYSICAL FITNESS TEST (PFT)

Points	Flexed Arm Hang			Points	Flexed Arm Hang			Points	Flexed Arm Hang			Points	Flexed Arm Hang		
	Points	Crunches (2 MIN.)	3 Mile Run		Points	Crunches	3 Mile Run		Points	Crunches	3 Mile Run		Points	Crunches	3 Mile Run
100	70	100	21:00	75		75	25:10	50	45	50	29:20	25	25	25	33:30
99		99	21:10	74	57	74	25:20	49		49	29:30	24	24	24	33:40
98	69	98	21:20	73		73	25:30	48	44	48	29:40	23	23	23	33:50
97		97	21:30	72	56	72	25:40	47		47	29:50	22	22	22	34:00
96	68	96	21:40	71		71	25:50	46	43	46	30:00	21	21	21	34:10
95		95	21:50	70	55	70	26:00	45		45	30:10	20	20	20	34:20
94	67	94	22:00	69		69	26:10	44	42	44	30:20	19	19	19	34:30
93		93	22:10	68	54	68	26:20	43		43	30:30	18	18	18	34:40
92	66	92	22:20	67		67	26:30	42	41	42	30:40	17	17	17	34:50
91		91	22:30	66	53	66	26:40	41		41	30:50	16	16	16	35:00
90	65	90	22:40	65		65	26:50	40	40	40	31:00	15	15	15	35:10
89		89	22:50	64	52	64	27:00	39	39	39	31:10	14	14	14	35:20
88	64	88	23:00	63		63	27:10	38	38	38	31:20	13	13	13	35:30
87		87	23:10	62	51	62	27:20	37	37	37	31:30	12	12	12	35:40
86	63	86	23:20	61		61	27:30	36	36	36	31:40	11	11	11	35:50
85		85	23:30	60	50	60	27:40	35	35	35	31:50	10	10	10	36:00
84	62	84	23:40	59		59	27:50	34	34	34	32:00	9	9	9	36:10
83		83	23:50	58	49	58	28:00	33	33	33	32:10	8	8	8	36:20
82	61	82	24:00	57		57	28:10	32	32	32	32:20	7	7	7	36:30
81		81	24:10	56	48	56	28:20	31	31	31	32:30	6	6	6	36:40
80	60	80	24:20	55		55	28:30	30	30	30	32:40	5	5	5	36:50
79		79	24:30	54	47	54	28:40	29	29	29	32:50	4	4	4	37:00
78	59	78	24:40	53		53	28:50	28	28	28	33:00	3	3	3	37:10
77		77	24:50	52	46	52	29:00	27	27	27	33:10	2	2	2	37:20
76	58	76	25:00	51		51	29:10	26	26	26	33:20	1	1	1	37:30

Run times which fall between the increments of time indicated on the preceding chart will receive the score of the next longer time increment; ie: a time of 21:11 will receive 98 points.

## APPLICATION/PROCESSING TIMELINE

The application process takes no longer than three weeks. Processing events happen concurrently within each week.

### WEEK I:

1. Application, Statement of understanding, and DD680 completed on site  
Any application blanks will be called in to Debbie.
2. Personally deliver Reference Questionnaires  
Office must receive via mail by end of week II.
3. Personally obtain Academic Advisor Letter  
Academic Advisor designates projected graduation date. Office must receive via mail by end of week II.
4. Personally obtain Academic Certification Form  
Completed by current school Registrar. Office must receive via mail by end of week II.
5. Personally obtain transcripts from ALL colleges attended.  
Official transcripts. Office must receive via mail by end of week II.
6. Official SAT/ACT/ASVAB scores  
Fax.
7. Proof of Degree (graduates)  
Original final transcript. Office must receive via mail by end of week II.
8. Birth Certificate and SSN Card  
Fax.
9. Copy of Spouse and children's Birth Certificate and SSN Card  
Fax.
10. Marriage License and Statement of Understanding  
If applicable. Fax.
11. Divorce Decree  
If applicable. Fax.
12. Name Change Documents  
If applicable. Fax.
13. Reservists  
Have your unit admin fax your : NAVMC118 page 3, 8, 9, 11, 12; DD form 4 page 1 and 2; and DD Form 214 to our office.

- ① DEAN OF STUDENTS
- ② PROFESSOR
- ③ EMPLOYEE
- ④ OTHER
- ⑤ OTHER

### WEEK II:

1. Physical examination and EKG at MEPS  
If you wear glasses, bring them to MEPS. Do not wear contact lenses for three days prior to MEPS. RESERVISTS MUST RETURN TO MEPS WITH ALL MED RECORDS FOR AN ELECTROCARDIOGRAM (EKG).
2. All faxable documents received by office
3. Reference Questionnaires received via mail by office

### WEEK III:

1. Inventory physical Fitness Test (PFT) with OSO  
You will have 3 months from initial PFT to score 225 or better.
2. Contract with OSO  
Dress in coat/tie for application photograph. Last chance to deliver documents from weeks I and II. DELIVER ESSAY IN BLACK INK, WRITTEN.