

The Israeli Special Forces TACFIT Challenge

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Background – the problem

The Israeli Special Forces TACFIT® Challenge was first presented to LOTAR, the Israeli Counter-Terrorism School, as a method of training their tactical responders both at home and in the field.

In order to be accepted, our program had to meet the following criteria:

- Portability – operatives must be able to train “anywhere, at any time”
- Efficient – tactical responders are constantly “operational,” and so their conditioning must be time-compressed to fit into their hectic schedule
 - Tactically Relevant – the conditioning program must contribute to (rather than compete with) tactical skills—no “exercise for exercise sake”!

We made this TACFIT Challenge portable by doing away with equipment. The entire workout is bodyweight-only, and can be completed in about the same amount of space you’d need to lie down in.

We made the Challenge efficient by limiting it to 20 minutes, and yet endowing it with a level of intensity and fat melting power most athletes don’t tap in a full hour of training.

Finally, we made the Challenge tactically relevant by not only including movements that enhance an operator’s ability in the field, but by focusing on the energy systems involved in tactical response, and by creating a protocol that will prime the operator to deal with the massive biochemical arousal of high stress situations.

None of the tactical responders we worked with expected that last variable—because they had no idea it was possible to train it as part of their conditioning routine.



Tactical fitness—where the mainstream goes wrong

Most physical training (PT) programs don't meet the needs of tactical responders because they were designed from a sportive or general fitness perspective.

Conventional PT programs involve mono or bi-planar action on individual joints, with long durations of single exercises. Most PT programs also tend to overemphasize aerobic energy through long, slow duration training—think “jogging”—while others overemphasize size and limit strength.

None of these methods carry over to the attribute needs of tactical responders.

“That ability to improvise in the midst of severe biochemical stress is the hallmark trait of the tactical operator”

An effective tactical training program must begin with basic movements that carry through all maximum ranges of motion. It then progresses to “compound” movements which combine two skills, and finally “complex” movements which combine three or more skills. This process then starts over with the basic movements: increasing strength. This translates to tireless stamina, extreme range reactive strength, ballistic speed, and the agility and coordination of a Free Runner. Want to move like Mission Impossible?

TACFIT will teach you how.

The “neurological sophistication” built through such an approach also allows the tactical operator to navigate unexpected obstacles with ease and imagination.

“Tactical” doesn't merely refer to “tactically-specific” skills, though these of course remain relevant. “Tactical” refers to the overall ability to adapt and improvise. Time appears to slow down as you speed up, fine motor skills become more accurate, gross motor skills more efficient, you feel significant less stress in a crisis, and even more so in daily life.

That ability to improvise in the midst of severe biochemical stress is the hallmark trait of the tactical operator—and any good tactical conditioning program must enhance this.

What's so special about TACFIT?

The difference between traditional military calisthenics and TACFIT is comparable to the difference between bootcamp and special ops school.

“Bootcamp” approaches to fitness are an offshoot of Basic Training mental reprogramming, where the Drill Sgt’s job is to convince your body that it can push beyond its healthy limits. That’s fine for a raw recruit fresh off his mamma’s couch, but tactical operations demand the ability to think on your feet rather than simply follow orders.

TACFIT doesn’t just build a shredded action hero body—it also trains the prospective commando to efficiently respond to crisis while remaining level-headed, aware and “in flow,” so you’ll always keep a cool head when everyone around you is losing theirs.

Tactical fitness isn’t a matter of who can do more, but who can do it more often. After all, it’s not the one who can go the longest at an easy pace who survives, but the one who can collide, shake it off, and go again.

We won’t sugarcoat it. TACFIT isn’t for the faint-hearted. It demands a mind-body willingness to tackle what would be difficult tasks for those of lesser training standards—and a morale built of the mental toughness forged through this program.

You’ll learn the truth of this in every sinew and muscle as you go on to complete your first Israeli Special Forces TACFIT Challenge.



The Israeli Special Forces TACFIT Challenge Protocol

The Israeli Special Forces TACFIT Challenge uses the third training protocol of the TACFIT program: every minute on the minute.

“Every minute on the minute” trains speed/tempo by causing the athlete to work as fast as possible in order to get greater quality rest.

At first you’ll feel like you want to coast through the movements, to spread out your reps. Your body will lie to you under severe biochemical stress. It’ll tell you it’s better to set an easy pace, that you’ve got lots of time.

Don’t believe it.

Your strategy should be to keep the fastest pace you can manage while maintaining good form. If you space out your reps, you won’t get any quality rest and you’ll be unable to complete the program.

Remember this performance mantra: *the faster you work, the more you rest.*

If you succeed in maintaining the fastest possible pace you’ll gain more rest seconds per minute, and over the course of 3 to 4 weeks on the TACFIT Challenge your body will get better at recovering from extreme exertion in less and less time.

The end result is that the tactical responder adapts in such a way that he’s not only recovering between bursts of activity, he’s recovering *while moving* and *in anticipation of rest*.

This translates to a seemingly superhuman ability to recover rapidly from exertion, and a shredded, functional commando physique that looks great on the beach, but is also serious “go muscle”—not just “show muscle”



The Workout

Your task is to complete 20 rounds in 20 minutes of the following circuit:

Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced
2 Quad Hops to Flat Foot Squat	4 Quad Hops to Flat Foot Squat	6 Quad Hops to Flat Foot Squat
2 Knee Drop Spinal Rocks to Butterfly	4 Knee Drop Spinal Rocks to Butterfly	6 Knee Drop Spinal Rocks to Butterfly
2/2 Springing Tripods	4/4 Springing Tripods	6/6 Springing Tripods
2/2 Swinging Planks	4/4 Swinging Planks	6/6 Swinging Planks

If you don't finish all your reps in 60 seconds, you don't get credit for that round. Start the next round as soon as the next minute begins, whether you finished the prior round or not.

Your goal during effort phase of each minute is to crank out your reps as quickly as possible while maintaining good form.

Your goal during the remaining rest phase is to shake it off, recover your breathing, and lower your heart rate as quickly as possible in preparation for the next round.

This is how you'll put it into practice. When the minute begins, perform your reps of the Quad Hop to Flat Foot Squat (either 2, 4 or 6, depending on the level of difficulty), then transition immediately into the Knee Drop Spinal Rock, etc, moving down the column in the Program Chart above. When you've finished all your reps of all 4 exercises, rest for the remainder of the minute. When the minute is up, begin another round. Follow this pattern until you've completed 20 rounds of the circuit in 20 minutes.

A Note on Level of Difficulty

Each exercise in the circuit has three levels of difficulty, so the program is always accessible and challenging regardless of whether you're an experienced tactical operator or a new recruit.

The advanced skills will be too difficult to complete unless you've mastered the intermediate level. However, if you're gutting it out you should be able to perform the 4s. The advanced fitness level version of the program is with 6 reps per exercise. The beginning fitness level involves 2 reps each.

Start at the level appropriate to your current ability and experience.

Tactical Applications

Each exercise in the Israeli Special Forces TACFIT Challenge has been carefully programmed to forge the highest level of specific conditioning while building and reinforcing tactically relevant skill sets.

The **quad hop to flat foot squat** trains the "tactical pop-up"—the ability to disengage the ground explosively and efficiently. The pop-up uses the body as one muscle: the tighter (the body), the lighter (and faster you become).

The **spinal rock** trains the entire core “canister,” which translates to stability in mobility, fine motor control, controlled ground engagement, and the ability to keep your arms or your weapon free and steady while engaging the ground to the rear.

The **springing tripod** trains the ability to absorb force with the elbow when knocked down to the rear. This movement series will also be helpful to all crouched and grounded tactical maneuvers.

The **swing plank** trains the firing sequence of core to grip, grip to core, across the shoulder girdle. This is a crucial skill in crisis situations, because we never drive directly perpendicular to force but absorb and retranslate it.



Workout Schedule

If the Israeli TACFIT Challenge is your main exercise modality, we suggest doing 3 sessions per week. Those who are already used to a vigorous training routine can perform the Challenge as often as every other day.

If the Israeli Special Forces TACFIT Challenge is NOT your main exercise modality, you can still schedule the workout into your existing program. Here are some suggestions for doing so:

- Replace your conventional “cardio” session with the Israeli Special Forces TACFIT Challenge
- Use the Israeli Special Forces TACFIT Challenge as a convenient solution for training on business trips, vacations or hectic weeks when you can’t get to the gym
- Do 3-4 repetitions of each exercise, slowly and deeply, as a warm-up for your regular workout routine

Exercise Descriptions

The following photos and descriptions are intended to be a reminder of the detailed coaching guidance presented in the Israeli Special Forces TACFIT Challenge Video. Please study the video carefully before you begin this exercise program.

Quad Hop to Flat Foot Squat

Begin in a kneeling position and bring your butt to your heels. Lean forward until your back is parallel to the floor, with hands on the ground. Knees and elbows should be slightly splayed (at about a 45° angle).

Drop your butt to your heels and your nose towards the floor. The press should be even and your back should remain parallel. As you near the bottom, absorb the momentum, exhale and explode upward with an equal extension of all four limbs. Both hands and feet should leave the ground, while spine remains parallel.

Snap your hips forward to bring your feet beneath you, landing in a flat foot squat. Absorb, then remove structure by allowing your feet to vanish backwards, dropping immediately back into the quad press position. Repeat, using the stored elastic energy of your muscles and connective tissues to drive the movement.

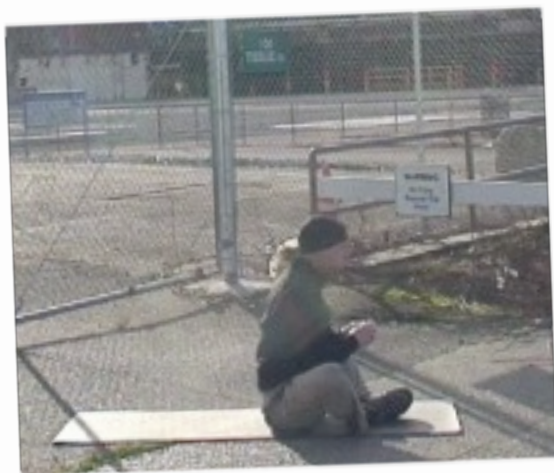


Spinal Rock

Begin lying flat on your back. Exhale hard and come to a sitting position by rolling up one vertebra at a time. Feet are together in “butterfly” position, and hands grasp ankles to lift from the chest.

Reverse the movement by exhaling hard and rolling back to the floor one vertebra at a time. Pull knees to chest, and continue rolling back until your weight is on your shoulder blades. Pike up by straightening your legs and snapping your hips forward to an inverted position.

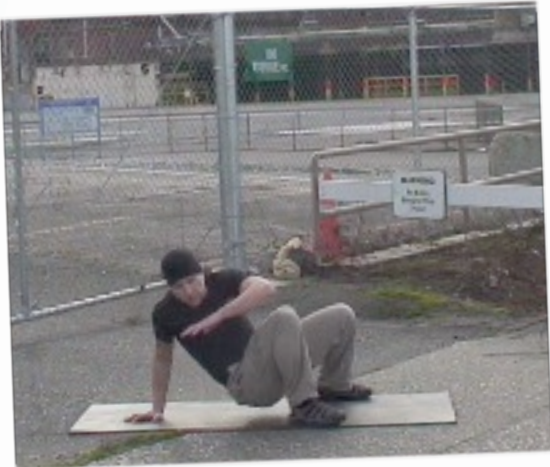
Exhale your navel in and allow the knees to drop—spread your knees apart so they come to either side of your head. Hips extend over your nose, and knees drop (feet do not kick) to touch the floor. Unroll one vertebra at a time and rock back up to sitting “butterfly” position.



Springing Tripod

Begin in flat foot squat. Shift your weight back to the right and place your right hand on the floor behind you. Rotate from the waist (yaw) in order to place your left hand beside it.

Exhale hard and extend your hips high while pushing off with both arms and driving from mid foot. Twist from the waist to change sides while your body is weightless. Absorb on the opposite side with bent elbow, wrists perpendicular, and inward knee drop. Repeat from side to side.

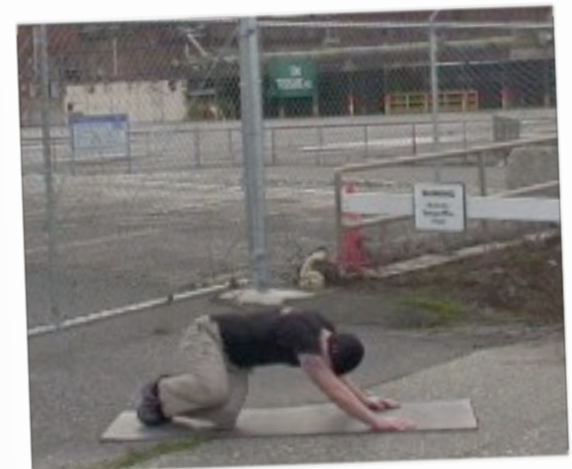
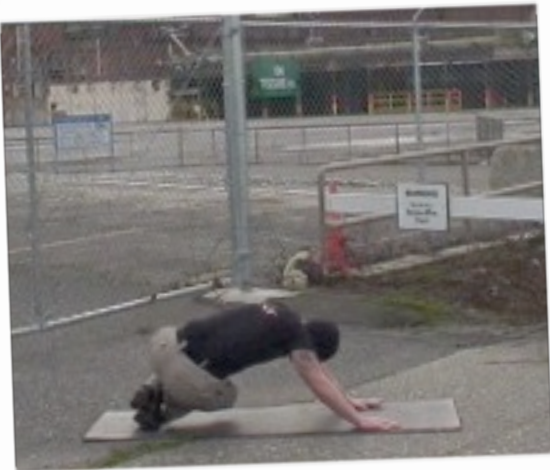


Swinging Plank

Squat with heels to butt and place your hands on the floor. Twist knees to the left so outside thigh is parallel to the floor. This is your start position.

Keep elbows bent and shoulders pulled down (no scapular flare). Exhale and drive from ball of foot to extend your body forward over your hands. Your back and hips should remain in one plane.

When you've reached the forward limit, twist from the waist to bring your knees to the opposite side, and then drive with palm heels to return to start position, butt to heels. Repeat, changing sides each time.



Scott Sonnon, TACFIT Founder

TACFIT was created by RMAX International co-founder Scott Sonnon, former USA National Police Team Coach for Sambo submission fighting—part of the Police and Fire Fighter Olympics.

Sonnon trained for six years with the former USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and Special Operations Unit (Spetsnaz) Physical Conditioning and Performance Enhancement Specialists at the RETAL (Physical Skill Consultant Scientific & Practical Training) Center, and became the first American to be licensed by the Russian government in these studies. He is also one of a handful of individuals outside the former USSR to earn the coveted “Honourable Master of Sport” —the highest athletic distinction recognized in the former Soviet Union.

Sonnon capitalized upon advances in biomechanics, stress physiology, athletic biochemistry and sports/combat psychology to become an international champion martial artist in both Russian Sambo and Chinese Sanshou kickboxing.

He discovered that it wasn't merely being bigger, faster or stronger than your opponents, but being better that counted most. Through his studies of motor development technologies, he evolved the Delta-Alpha motor sophistication approach of TACFIT, which allows rapid advancement of skill and fitness for all populations.

Sonnon's peak performance enhancement methods are on the scientific cutting-edge, proving themselves again and again where it counts: in the real world, on and off the field of athletics.



Ryan Murdock, TACFIT Faculty Director

My work as a writer has taken me to some of the world's most unforgiving places. I've walked across vast grizzly-infested stretches of Canada's remote Northwest Territories. I've led jeep expeditions through central Mongolia and its south Gobi regions. I've ventured by camel into the sandy wastes of the Taklamakan Desert, a place whose name means "those who go in don't come out." And I've learned that when things go wrong out there, help is at best several days or weeks away.



TACFIT earned my trust because I've bet my life on it more than once. Every exercise in the TACFIT circuits carries over directly to the sort of strength, endurance, explosiveness and sophisticated movement ability I need in the field. Linear training with barbells and dumbbells never cut it. Neither did so-called "functional training." Only TACFIT adequately approximates real-world skill. I also love the unique waving energy system approach to TACFIT programming. My body adapted incredibly quickly to increasing loads of work, and it got faster at doing so. Training my body to recover more quickly between bursts translates to not getting winded in the field—a major benefit when I have to respond with fine motor skills in the midst of intense effort.

TACFIT is also the only program that specifically builds mental toughness training into the progression. I need to know I've built the sheer stubbornness and wherewithal to keep going even when I'm too exhausted to see straight—and I need to be confident of that before I go out the door.