

# THE ORANGE COUNTY BETA REGISTER

## Real boots at fitness bootcamps

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2010-06-08 13:47:47



Once in a while, Christian Cianfrani says, "the Army in me comes out."

One such moment during his hourlong fitness class comes when he fills two red buckets about two-thirds full of Laguna Beach sand. One of his four pupils carries the heavy buckets about 80 feet, then around a beach umbrella. While she does this, the other three must hold a push-up position. They can't relax until the bucket-carrier returns.

"Just like in the Army, you run faster when your buddies are under pain," Cianfrani says.

An officer and helicopter pilot in the Army Reserves, Cianfrani is now an instructor with Code Pink Boot Camp. Like many boot camps in Orange County, Code Pink deploys military imagery, couture (Pink dog tags adorn their olive-colored T-shirts) and even jargon to evoke the discipline of the armed forces. But Cianfrani is among a rare few with the real-life experience to back it up.

Boot-camp clients are not like boot-camp (or basic training) recruits, however, and instructors who come from that life have to make some big adjustments: They can't call their clients maggots, for instance. They must moderate their voices and, often, their personalities for paying customers who require a more nurturing environment.

"There's no cursing or yelling or screaming," says Matt Mendez, a former Marine sergeant who served in Iraq and now works for Extreme Boot Camp. "It's positive encouragement. Our goal is not to scare you, not to break you down, but to get you to do more than you think you're capable of."

And yet the campers aren't wimps. They want results and are willing to work hard to get them. For many, the structure and accountability of a boot camp are just what they need. Angela Davidson has lost 55 pounds since joining the Code Pink camp in January of 2009, the same time Cianfrani came on board. The wife and mother of three had the added motivation of turning 40 in August of this year. She says the fact that Cianfrani is ex-military doesn't matter much to her; what's more important is that the workout is challenging. It helps that Cianfrani "makes the whole hour fun. We've never had the same workout twice, ever, so it doesn't get boring."

Cianfrani, 30, says the Army has been stuck in a rut for decades with its outmoded physical-fitness routines. There's too much "static stretching," he says. Soldiers will stay in a bent position for several seconds, for example, which doesn't get them ready for a full workout. That can lead to muscle pulls, he says. He puts his clients through "dynamic stretching," lunging forward to elongate muscles. He also says the Army focuses too much on distance running. What a soldier needs in a combat situation, after all, is strength and explosive speed. You might have to knock an enemy down, or run a city block under fire and jump over a wall.

Cianfrani succeeded in bringing some Army fitness guidelines up to date, first at flight school at Fort Rucker, Ala., where he learned how to fly an OH-58D Kiowa Warrior and the C-12 Huron turboprop. Some cadets were so out of shape they couldn't pass the fitness test to get into an aircraft, and they were sent off to "fat camp," where Cianfrani says he helped many get into shape. Later, as a first lieutenant at the 228th Aviation

Regiment in Horsham, Pa., he submitted a 14-page memo on how to improve performance levels among the soldiers there.

He's due to leave the Reserves in the next year, but the Army is as much a part of his workouts as the knowledge of fitness science he's accumulated. His campers go through a lot of exercises that emphasize teamwork. One partner will try to do push-ups while the other pushes against the shoulder blades, so both get something out of it. Lynn Eldstrom, lean and fit at 60 and wearing a white track suit, struggles to keep Sarah Leigon from extending her arms. Wearing his camouflage hat, Cianfrani kneels down next to them. "Push her down! Down! Down!" Cianfrani intones, one of the few times he'll raise his voice.

"In the Army, I care about them doing things together more than having a nice butt," he says. "Here I want them to work together. And I'm trying to get them a nice butt."

Mendez, 26, did mostly administrative and supply-chain work in Iraq's Sunni Triangle when he served in the Marine Corps from 2001-05. But his work ethic has served him well at Extreme Boot Camp. He started as an instructor last year and now supervises the 5:30 a.m. class, overseeing other instructors and up to 75 campers. They must show up on time or everyone does push-ups. The workout is divided among first and second "platoons," depending on ability level. But there's very much a "no man left behind" attitude to build up the confidence of those who are just starting.

Mendez's brother Mike, 28, also served in the Marine Corps for four years, fighting in Afghanistan. He joined Extreme as an instructor a month ago. Tracy Zimmerman, owner of Extreme's Tustin Ranch franchise, says ex-military make the best employees because they're punctual, they're natural leaders and they understand the accountability part.

"People who come out of the military have a slightly different outlook, because they come from a place where decisions have pretty serious consequences," Matt Mendez says. "My brother and I carry ourselves a certain kind of way. When boot campers meet us, they know that we're not just wearing camo pants because we got them at the surplus store. They know we earned these."

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