

High Adrenaline Team Building Offered at No Cost to Army Units

By Antonietta Rico, Directorate of Prevention, Resilience and Readiness

Some Soldiers may notice a dissatisfied or listless feeling after returning from a deployment, which can be a sign that the high stress and adrenaline levels they experienced during combat are not subsiding. In some cases, the feeling, which could be a form of PTSD, fuels risky behavior, including driving under the influence, accidents and relationship conflict.

“It manifests itself in numbness, invincibility, inevitability—attitudes which then can roll out into destructive behaviors,” said John O’Sullivan, Program Manager, Army Outdoor Recreation and Warrior Adventure Quest.

Recognizing that the post-deployment phase poses unique risks to Soldiers, the Army launched [Warrior Adventure Quest](#) in 2009, a program that provides Soldiers opportunities for an adrenaline rush similar to the adrenaline state Soldiers experience in combat situations, but in a safe environment.

Accidental motor vehicle deaths peak for Soldiers right after returning from a deployment, according to a recent Boston University study, but Army data for FY 2010 and FY 2011 showed Soldiers who had participated in a Warrior Adventure Quest event had a 44% lower rate of off-duty accidents that were fatal or near-fatal, or resulted in permanent, partial or total disability, compared with the general Army population, O’Sullivan said.

They also had a 52% lower rate of being involved in negative legal or administrative incidents resulting in a deduction in pay, according to Defense Finance and Accounting Services data from 2010–2011 obtained by WAQ, and a 34% lower rate based on data from 2015 and 2016.

All Warrior Adventure Quest activities incorporate a key communication component called the Leader-Led After-Action Debriefing, or L-LAAD, a technique developed by the U.S. Army Medical Department. The L-LAAD is an alternative to the typical After-Action Review, as it focuses on processing events and on group and individual strengths rather than on what went right or wrong, said O’Sullivan.

“The L-LAAD was developed as a communication technique response for traumatic events, while WAQ provides L-LAAD practice in response to a dramatic event,” he said.

Leaders get to practice the L-LAAD format during the high-adrenaline “dramatic” WAQ events, which prepare them for using the same technique to help their Soldiers process a traumatic event in combat or a traumatic event that may happen in garrison.

Although originally intended for use by post-deployment units, Warrior Adventure Quest has been open to all units since 2014.

“The need for unit cohesion, deterrence and mitigation of dangerous behaviors still exists whether (a unit) is deploying or not,” O’Sullivan said.

Besides helping to reduce off-duty accidents and behavioral problems for Soldiers, Warrior Adventure Quest is also a unit training opportunity and team-building event, which comes in handy prior to deployment and while in garrison.

For Sgt. 1st Class Charlie Mills, a platoon sergeant with the 362nd Combat Engineer Company (Airborne), out of Fort Bragg, North Carolina, Warrior Adventure Quest is an important training tool.

“I go with my platoon to get them away from the feel of the Army but also still get the training value,” said Mills.

Throughout his time as a platoon sergeant, Mills has used Warrior Adventure Quest for his Soldiers several times, including participating in paintball, laser tag and a high ropes course.

He said the paintball event allowed his Soldiers to have fun while learning to move, shoot and communicate.

“We do movement drills without people firing back at us, but with paintball it allows you to get the real-time experience ... of someone shooting (back),” he said.

That experience helped his squad and team leaders understand what it takes to manage their Soldiers in high-adrenaline situations, like combat.

“It was a realization for the team leaders—they didn't know how hard it would be to have command and control of their Soldiers under stress and fear,” Mills said.

Putting them through that realistic situation helped him coach his team leaders because he was able to relate the reactions of the Soldiers and team leaders back to combat, he said.

Other [Fort Bragg Warrior Adventure Quest program](#) activities include an Alpine Tower, broomball and a high ropes course, said James Day, a Supervisory Program Analyst with FMWR Outdoor Recreation. Day said that WAQ is not just another “mandatory fun, glorified organizational day.”

Most Soldiers who go through a WAQ activity end up loving it and saying it’s “the most fun day I've had being in the Army,” he said.

WAQ activities available for units depend on the location of the installation and are offered at no cost, said Bryan Thomas, the [Warrior Adventure Quest coordinator for Joint Base Lewis-McChord](#). Thomas is a professional outdoor recreation guide and has taken Soldiers from JBLM kayaking, white water rafting and climbing on Mount Rainier. He said that activities are open to National Guard and Reserve Component units as well, and that units can now use Warrior Adventure Quest once a year, so those that have previously participated can sign up again.

Most recently, Mills took his platoon to the Odyssey Ropes Course at the Fort Bragg WAQ, which helped his Soldiers eliminate self-doubt, build confidence and realize what they are capable of.

During that event, one of his Soldiers was terrified of heights, yet with the support of his team, he was able to complete the three levels of the high ropes course. Mills was able to see that his team wasn't yelling at the Soldier or putting him down, but instead communicating well and working together to encourage him, which helped the Soldier overcome his fear of heights and complete the course.

“There are a lot of things that happen in these courses that you need—things that challenge you mentally, physically and emotionally,” Mills said. “You have fun while still getting the training value of team building.”

To schedule an activity for your unit or team, go to [your installation's MWR website](#) and search for [Warrior Adventure Quest](#) to download the WAQ Activity Request Form.