



“WRAIR Forward”

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COMMANDER’S CORNER

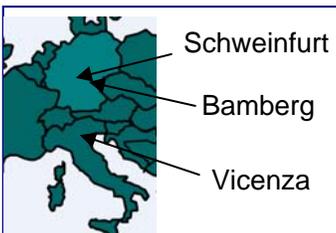
Battlemind is currently defined as a “Soldier’s inner strength to face fear and adversity in combat with courage.” In addition to combat, however, there are other mental challenges that Soldiers face. Some of these challenges take place when Soldiers transition home from a combat deployment and adjust to life with their family and friends. To address this post-deployment issue, Dr. Wright led a USAMRU-E/ Department of Military Psychiatry team that conducted a mental health assessment of Soldiers recently returned from a deployment to Afghanistan. Mental challenges also take place throughout a Soldier’s military career, beginning with Basic Training. To increase mental skills in managing the challenges of Basic Training, Dr. Adler is leading an effort to develop Battlemind for Basic Training and assess its efficacy while also assessing the efficacy of interventions from the Army Center for Enhanced Performance. Whether tracking indicators of mental health or developing mental health training interventions, our research program continues to support Soldiers in confronting the mental challenges of military service.

-MAJ Dennis McGurk

USAMRU-E TRACKS POST-DEPLOYMENT HEALTH INDICATORS IN EUROPE

USAMRU-E conducted repeated assessments of mental health indicators in the 173rd ABCT this quarter as part of a comprehensive response to a request from the Europe Regional Medical Command (ERMC). The 173rd ABCT returned from a fifteen-month deployment to Afghanistan in August 2008, and the intent of the assessment was to track changes in mental health indicators over time, and identify specific needs and optimal timing for interventions. USAMRU-E conducted the assessment using surveys, focus groups, and interviewing behavioral health providers. Data collected were used to inform the chain of command and guide recommendations to improve Soldier and Family well-being.

The assessments were conducted by a combined USAMRU-E and Department of Military Psychiatry, WRAIR, team led by USAMRU-E scientist Dr. Wright. The team included two research psychologists from the Department of Military Psychiatry, CPT Wood and CPT Edens, and three USAMRU-E research associates, Ms. Eckford, Ms. Salvi, and Mr. Terry.



DATA COLLECTION DATES:

The team conducted three data collections at each of the three brigade locations. The assessments occurred at two, three and four months post-deployment.

- 22-24 SEP in Vicenza;
- 29 SEP-1 OCT in Bamberg/Schweinfurt;
- 14-17 OCT in Vicenza;
- 27-29 OCT in Bamberg/Schweinfurt;
- 4-7 NOV in Vicenza;
- 17-21 NOV in Bamberg/Schweinfurt.

INDICATORS OF POST-DEPLOYMENT HEALTH

A random sample of 3,259 Soldiers, approximately 30% of Soldiers who deployed to Afghanistan with the 173rd ABCT, completed a survey that assessed mental health status (e.g., PTSD, depression, anxiety), alcohol and drug use, aggressive behaviors, marital concerns, and perceptions of mental health stigma and barriers to care.

173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team



In order to identify specific recommendations for command, thirty focus groups were conducted by the assessment team. Each focus group consisted of approximately 5-8 Soldiers and a total of 85 junior-enlisted Soldiers and 84 NCOs participated in the groups. In addition, behavioral health providers were interviewed at all three locations. Those interviewed included psychiatrists, physician assistants, and Alcohol and Substance Abuse Program (ASAP), and Family Advocacy Program (FAP) representatives. In addition to surveys and interviews, the USAMRU-E team was provided de-identified archival data on risk factors by ERMC Soldier and Family Support Services (SFSS).

The team was able to process data on-site, resulting in an Interim Report on the 173rd ABCT assessment that was provided to ERMC (22 OCT 08). The report was then briefed by Dr. Wright to COL Johnson, the 173rd ABCT Commander, on 3 NOV in Vicenza. Dr. Wright briefed the full report covering all three time periods to BG Keith W. Gallagher, Commander, ERMC, on 2 DEC 08 and LTG Hunzeker, Commander, 5th CORPS on 8 DEC 08.



BASIC TRAINING STUDY ON MENTAL FITNESS TARGETS MENTAL HEALTH AND PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

Previous Army research has demonstrated that mental health problems are one of the most common reasons for attrition from Basic Combat Training and place service members at greater health risk when they deploy and when they return from combat. Providing Soldiers with the skills they need to meet real-world challenges of military service can potentially increase their mental fitness.

Ideally, mental fitness interventions should be taught initially during Basic Combat Training and then reinforced throughout the military life cycle; however there are no techniques for enhancing mental fitness that have been validated with Basic Combat Training Soldiers. Two Army mental fitness programs have been directed for use in Basic Combat Training: Battlemind Training and the Army Center for Enhanced Performance (ACEP) education.

Battlemind Training was:

- Developed by USAMRU-E and Department of Military Psychiatry scientists at WRAIR
- Designed to increase mental health and cognitive-related coping skills

ACEP education was:

- Developed by performance psychologists at the US Military Academy at West Point
- Designed to increase performance-related mental skills and performance

The goal of the proposed study is to assess the degree to which these two programs are effective in Basic Combat Training. This study has been tasked under the auspices of BG Cornum's office of Mental Fitness. Dr. Adler serves as the principal investigator on the two mental fitness studies.

Progress this quarter includes:

- A site visit to Basic Combat Training at Fort Jackson, Columbia, SC, to observe training, conduct a focus group with Drill Sergeants, and meet with the Training and Doctrine Command's Experimentation and Analysis Element (20 - 24 OCT 08; Dr. Adler, LTC Bliese, & ACEP Research Team).
- A meeting to draft the research proposal for the Military Operational Medicine program at West Point (11 - 14 NOV 08; Dr. Adler & ACEP Research Team led by LTC Ohlson & MAJ Bredlow).
- The full proposal was submitted to the Military Operational Medicine program on 20 NOV 08.
- BG Cornum was briefed on the study in Crystal City, VA (4 DEC 08; by Dr. Adler, LTC Bliese, & COL Castro).

The next steps are to submit a research protocol for IRB approval, to continue working closely with Fort Jackson personnel, and to pilot the study procedures with Basic Combat Training companies in the Spring of 2009.

WRAIR SCIENTISTS WORKING TOGETHER

- CPT Edens and CPT Wood from the Department of Military Psychiatry analyzed data with Dr. Wright (Heidelberg; 8-13 DEC 08).
- LTC Bliese, Chair, Department of Military Psychiatry, continued a writing project with Dr. Adler for the American Psychological Association (Heidelberg; 8-10 DEC 08).
- Dr. Adler worked with COL Hoge on Advanced Battlemind (Silver Spring, MD; 19 NOV 08).

NATO LECTURE SERIES ON LEADERS AND OPERATIONAL STRESS CONTINUES



The NATO lecture series (LS 167), entitled "Leadership and Psychological Support across the Deployment Cycle," was provided to the Spanish and Estonian military this quarter. The lecture series serves to disseminate the work conducted by the NATO Task Group on Leadership and Operational support (HFM 081/RTG). The brief was conducted at:

- The Defense Medical Center, Madrid, Spain (with Dr. Adler and LTC Bliese; 13-15 OCT 08).
- The Estonian Defence College, Tartu, Estonia (with Dr. Adler; 29 OCT-1 NOV 08).

Although not officially part of the NATO lecture series, the



brief was also adapted as a model for mental health training and provided to the Kansas National Guard, in Topeka, KS. The Kansas National Guard will use the brief to establish a prototype mental health training to be provided to all the National Guard units (LTC Bliese and Dr. Adler; 30 NOV – 3 DEC 08). NATO Lecture Series leader Cdt Van den Berge (Belgium) participated as part of the briefing team.

RESILIENCE CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS USAMRU-E'S INTERNATIONAL WORK

The Defense Center for Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury sponsored a Warrior Resilience Conference in Fairfax, VA (18-20 NOV 08) and invited Technical Panel 13 of The Technical Cooperation Program to present a symposium on their work. The panel talks included:

- Adler, A.B., & Steele, N. (2008, November). Military Resilience: Perspectives from an International Technical Panel.
- Adler, A.B., Castro, C.A., Bliese, P.D., & McGurk, D. (2008, November). Building Resilience through Battlemind Training: A Research Overview.

COMMANDERS/NCOIC CONFERENCE

SFC Abrahamson, NCOIC, USAMRU-E, attended the ERMIC Commanders/NCOIC conference in Heidelberg (15-16 OCT 09).

PERSONNEL UPDATES

- SFC Abrahamson reenlisted for 4 years (Heidelberg; 2 OCT 08).
- Dr. Adler was promoted to GS-15 (26 OCT 08) and Dr. Wright was promoted to DB-04 (23 NOV 08).
- Dr. Britt was added to the CACI contract (28 OCT 08).
- SPC Martinez, 68X, joined USAMRU-E on 11 NOV 08.
- MAJ McGurk completed the 15-week Intermediate Level Education course at Ft. Lee, VA (10 DEC 08).

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