

# Army Lawyer

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A photograph of a soldier in camouflage uniform climbing a rope. The soldier is wearing a green and brown camouflage uniform and a matching cap. They are looking upwards and to the right, with their hands firmly gripping the rope. The background is a clear, bright sky.

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Judge advocate CPT Jeri D'Aurelio during one of her Ninja Warrior competitions. (Courtesy: Jeri D'Aurelio)



# Functional Fitness Can Be Fun

*By Captain Jeri L. D'Aurelio*

Most people would probably imagine functional fitness as CrossFit, slamming a sledge hammer on a tire or throwing barbells around a gym, but I have learned to take a far more abstract approach to fitness. I have never been one to follow a traditional training regimen—I develop creative workouts that are fun and have yielded great results for me. Without any formal education in fitness, I can only speak from my experience and the impact fitness has had throughout my life.

Many skills from Ninja Warrior are directly transferrable to military applications, which have opened doors to new opportunities in my military career, such as Airborne and Air Assault School. For example, I do a core workout geared toward Ninja Warrior that involves tossing a medicine ball while balancing on a large exercise ball. That core strength significantly helped me successfully perform parachute landing falls repeatedly throughout Airborne School. The constant laché-ing (swinging across a gap between obstacles), rope climbing, and upper body demands of Ninja Warrior training had a direct impact on my ability to climb ropes and pull risers on a T-11 parachute during Air Assault and Airborne Schools, respectively.

In the fall of 2018, I deployed to Afghanistan with an amazing legal team from 4ID. As with most deployed Soldiers, we all had fitness goals to strive for during our time in Afghanistan. One of the female JAG captain's fitness goal was to do an unassisted, static pull-up. Even though everyone had different goals, fitness became our office-wide bonding mechanism. The time and location to work out was discussed daily, so even if we worked out separately we still held each other accountable to complete a daily workout. In the main Office of the Staff Judge Advocate, they would play a song every hour, on the hour, prompting everyone to do an exercise for the entirety of the song before returning to work. These exercises

included things like push-ups on our helmets, overhead presses with body armor, and tricep dips on the office chairs. As the Chief of Client Services, I was in a separate building where we had our own unique daily challenges. I encourage anyone reading this to try some of the challenges:

1. Fold a piece of paper in half, put it on the ground, and stand on one foot while you bend down and pick up the paper with your mouth (no part of the non-weight-bearing leg can touch the ground).
2. Put your nose and toes against the wall and do a squat until your legs bend to at least a ninety-degree angle (nose and toes must stay against the wall at all times).
3. Lie on top of a sturdy table and climb around the bottom of the table to get back to the top position (no part of your body can touch the ground).

These hourly workouts and daily physical challenges not only gave our brains short breaks throughout the day, they also had an undeniable team-building effect. Our main office started making a schedule for daily workouts over the lunch hour. Before you knew it, the impact of fitness was obvious across the formation! It is a stress reliever, boosts energy, builds confidence, brings people together, and can lead to so many opportunities both within and outside of the Army.

Starting a consistent workout schedule can be very difficult, especially if you are someone who exercises infrequently. It is essential to make time during your busy schedule to do something that is uncomfortable and challenges you mentally and physically. In the beginning, progress can feel like a moving goal post. You may not see





CPT D'Aurelio on one of the obstacles competing on American Ninja Warrior. (Courtesy: CPT D'Aurelio)

results right away, but with a little patience, improvements will increase exponentially and create a wave of motivation. This is where the supportive community comes into play—sometimes it takes someone else pointing out small improvements to make you realize you are achieving success. I remember during our first month in Afghanistan, when that same female JAG captain completed her first dead-hang pull-up, I jumped in excitement! That is such a huge accomplishment and something that was out of reach only one month earlier. After she got one, I could see a seismic shift in her confidence at the gym. By the fourth month, she was doing *sets of five* dead-hang pull-ups throughout her daily workout and now consistently scores the maximum on the Army Physical Fitness Test.

Functional fitness is not only a stress reliever and energy booster, it opens opportunities both inside and outside of the Army. There is no need to invest in special equipment or supplements that promise to boost your success—a simple exercise each day is the first step toward success. Before you know it, you will run past that goal and continue on to the next! **TAL**

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## The JAG Corps's Ninja Warrior

An Interview with Captain Jeri D'Aurelio by Sean P. Lyons

*Captain D'Aurelio is currently a Trial Defense Service attorney in Alaska. She has competed in multiple seasons of Ninja Warrior. Below is a recent interview The Army Lawyer conducted with her about her path to being five-time selection to the show.*

### How did you get into Ninja Warrior competition?:

I grew up climbing on everything. I built a very simple treehouse that could only be reached by rope. You had to sit on this horizontal stick and hoist yourself up with just your arms by pulling down on the other end of the rope. It was quite a climb. I was a competitive gymnast from about age 2 until I was 12. My parents saw it as something that would teach us what it means to be dedicated at a very young age and would also help us in developing full body coordination. They got us all into it for that aspect, but then my sister and I sort of took off and ran with it. We probably trained about five hours a day. We homeschooled and "co-opted" with other gymnasts so we could train on a schedule that worked.

**What other sports did you do?:** In high school, I played soccer, ran track and cross-country, and competed in wrestling, among numerous other Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) sports. In college, I competed in triathlons and did a few half marathons and 100-mile bike races. Right after college, I took a year off to get licensed in skydiving. Now, I mainly rock climb and snowboard.

**Are you an adrenaline junky?:** People say that, but I don't think so. I am careful by making sure I'm aware of the risk involved and then taking the smartest approach. Sometimes that means more training, more research, or even just better gear. I just want to experience what life has to offer.

**When did you decide to join the Judge Advocate General's (JAG) Corps?:** In high school, I did Army JROTC and loved it. I went to the University of Texas at Dallas and studied criminology, and decided afterward to go to law school. While I was in school (at Southern Methodist University), I saw that someone from

the JAG Corps was coming for field screening interviews. Still not knowing what I wanted to do with my life, my career counselor told me to sign up and just ask questions. Major Patrick Crocker interviewed me, and that interview was eye-opening. I mean, I was hooked. I knew coming out of the interview that this is what I wanted to do with my law degree.

**You have been on Ninja Warrior for five seasons. Do people treat you like a celebrity?:** I try to keep them separate as much as possible, doing the Ninja competitions versus my work in the Army. At first, I told my leaders that I was just doing obstacle competitions when I'd take leave, and they were like, "Uh, OK. Whatever." But then the more seasons I competed in, the harder it was to keep it quiet. Just within the last year or so, people have started recognizing me. But, I did a pretty good job at not bringing it up. When I was deployed to Afghanistan, the gate guards from the Bosnian Army recognized me. I guess Ninja is really popular over there. That's the first time a lot of the 4th Infantry Division (4ID) Soldiers I worked with even learned about it; the foreign soldiers outed me.

**Are you going to compete again in any more Ninja competitions?:** I will be applying for a sixth season. Last season, when I fell on the eighth obstacle, it was the farthest I'd made it on a course. In the Cincinnati region, I was thirteenth all-around (men and women), out of roughly 120 competitors. Applications for the new season are due early December, but we only find out if we have been chosen to compete a few weeks before the competition. They only take thirty percent of return competitors, so we will see. There are so many awesome competitors out there. But if I am accepted, I will start really gearing my training towards Ninja-like movement.