

# THE NGO JOURNAL

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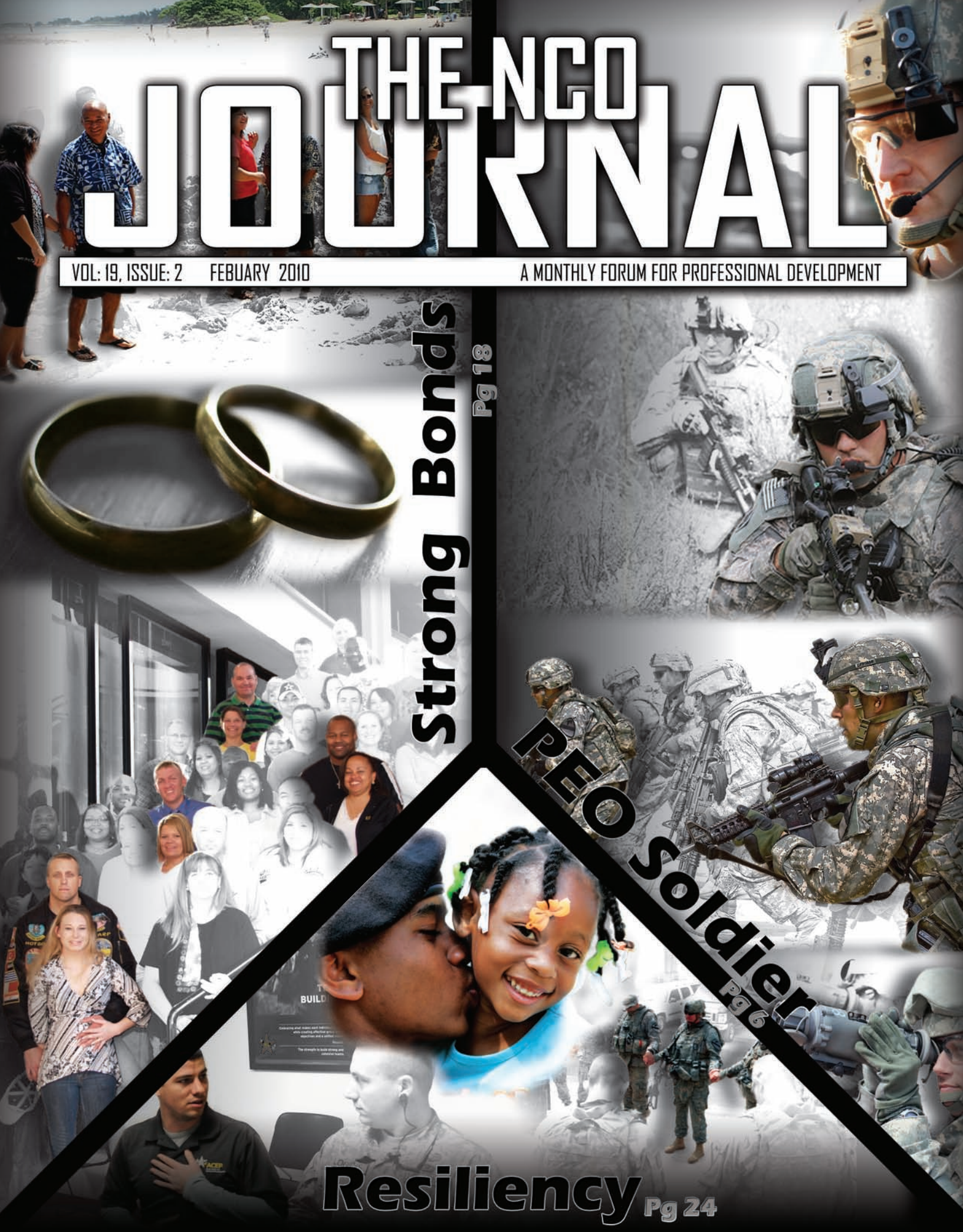
A MONTHLY FORUM FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**Strong Bonds**

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## ON THE COVER

A collage depicting the main stories in this issue - Strong Bonds, PEO Soldier and Resiliency.

Photo illustration by Sgt. Russel Schnaare



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### ROLL CALL

*We honor the men and women who have sacrificed their lives in current operations around the world.*



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From the SMA

# Nominative Sergeants Major Conference: A huge success

The 10th Annual Sergeant Major of the Army's Nominative Sergeants Major Conference was held Feb. 10 - 13 at Fort Bliss, Texas. The nominative sergeants major attending this conference all work for general officers within their commands and organizations in positions we refer to as "nominative assignments." The first conference was held in February 2001 by then-Sgt. Maj. of the Army Jack Tilley. Tilley set out to focus on the top issues of concern for the enlisted force at the time – pay, retirement benefits, quality of life and health care.

Today, the conference includes more than 360 senior command sergeants major, sergeants major and senior enlisted advisors from the sister services and combatant commands. The conference provides an unprecedented opportunity for these senior NCOs to receive command and concept presentations from the strategic view of the Secretary of the Army, the Hon. John McHugh; the Chief of Staff of the Army, Gen. George W. Casey Jr.; and many of the Army staff principals. These presentations provide a forum for the attending audience to learn, discuss and present recommendations on those initiatives needed to sustain, prepare, reset and transform our Army at war.

The overall theme for the Army this year is "America's Army: The Strength of the Nation." The theme of this year's sergeant major of the Army's conference was "Comprehensive Soldier Fitness: Strong Minds – Strong Bodies." My opening message to those in attendance focused on taking the knowledge delivered during each presentation back to their units to share and educate their commanders and Soldiers. As the sign on the north wall of Skidgel Hall at Fort Knox reads: "The knowledge that you gain here is not solely yours to keep, but yours to take and impart onto others in your units and organizations."

Command Sgt. Maj. David Bruner, the command sergeant major for the Army's Training and Doctrine Command, and Dr. Michael Doyle, the dean of academics at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy, started the conference with a presentation on NCO military education transformation. Doyle's discussion included all levels of NCO professional development to include civilian education initiatives focused on awarding bachelor's and graduate-level degrees stemming from lifelong learning throughout a Soldier's Army career. Command Sgt. Maj. Dennis King from

Accessions Command and Command Sgt. Maj. Steven Frennier from Recruiting Command provided a thorough presentation on the Army's vetting process for new recruits which is focused on quality, strong bodies and strong minds.

Command Sgt. Maj. Jeff Mellinger, command sergeant major for the Army Material Command, and Command Sgt. Maj.

Bernard McPherson and the Program Executive Office Soldier team provided an educational presentation on how the Army tests, develops, procures and fields new equipment to Soldiers and their units. Their presentation included many updates on the new fielding initiatives and equipment ranging from uniform items, to personal equipment and weapons, to vehicle mounted systems. The two highlights of the presentation included the lightweight body-armor initiatives centered on the KDH Defense Systems and Modular Body Armor Vest vests and a very comprehensive display of capable weapons lubricants demonstrating the Mil-Spec-approved and issued Cleaner Lubricant Preservative's performance against other competitors. Both presentations provided the attendees a thorough understanding of the testing process and dispelled several myths in the current media.

Gen. Carter Ham, commander, U.S. Army Europe, provided the special-guest presentation on diversity. The opening slide for the presentation, titled "Strength in Diversity," served as the foundation for an excellent presentation and discussion among the attendees. He pointed out to the audience early that he sees diversity as an essential element for every leader's toolkit – an element, if taken advantage of, that enables all leaders to adapt, remain ready, and accomplish every mission. In his own words, "The Army should represent the population we serve; every Soldier should be able to look up and see someone like them; and the value of diversity is absolutely linked to readiness and mission accomplishment. We all realize that the strength of the Army is our people. Diversity will make our Army that much stronger."

Brig. Gen. Richard Thomas provided a presentation on Mild Traumatic Brain Injuries, focusing on the symptoms, health related impacts, new protocols for any Soldier suffering from a concussive event and the ties between those events and possible post traumatic stress disorder. Brig. Gen. Rhonda Cornum followed with a presentation on the Army's Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program, which included overviews of the





Photo by Cindy Ramirez

Command Sgt. Maj. David Bruner, command sergeant major of Training and Doctrine Command, addresses the conference about the NCO Educational System transformation.

Global Assessment Tool, proposed resiliency self-development training modules and a detailed look at the master resiliency trainer program. She then updated the audience on the four pillars of the CSF program and its early impact on Soldiers based on Soldier testimonials.

Command Sgt. Maj. Mike Hall, command sergeant major for the International Security Assistance Force – Afghanistan, provided a presentation focused on the asymmetric fight and mission in Afghanistan. Command Sgt. Maj. Larry Wilson, command sergeant major for United States Forces – Iraq, provided a presentation on the changing mission and responsible drawdown plans for Iraq. Command Sgt. Maj. Art Coleman, command sergeant major for III Corps and Fort Hood, provided a very good assessment of how the installation and the command responded to the shooting tragedy on Nov. 5, 2009. This assessment provided lessons done well and lessons learned in response to a mass-casualty event for attendees to take back to their parent organizations and posts.

Most important was the opportunity for the attendees to hear and speak with the secretary of the Army and the chief of staff of the Army. Open dialogue and discussions among senior NCOs and the Army leadership provided the attendees with a strategic understanding of what the Army needs to accomplish in 2010. The forum allowed Casey to discuss our accomplishments over the past years of transformation and to discuss the six major objectives for the Army over the next year. McHugh praised the role

of NCOs in combat and how “NCOs armed with good intent and common sense” are essential for our future success.

Between briefings and presentations, attendees found the opportunity to share ideas and challenges within their organizations and among each other, which was very helpful in discovering and gaining new ideas. The afternoon of conference day three provided the most-senior command sergeants major an opportunity to meet with all of their subordinate nominative command sergeants major attending the conference. This opportunity provided the senior NCO leaders across large organizations to meet in a separate forum and work organizational objectives in concert with the overall conference themes.

The conference was a huge success thanks to the leadership of USASMA, Fort Bliss and the Centennial Club, the Army Staff and the team working in the Office of the SMA. A special thanks to all the leaders involved in the presentations over the three days of the conference. For everyone reading this article, I look forward to hearing your thoughts and ideas from this conference as they disseminate down into your organizations. I hope this knowledge drives a thirst to learn more in your own research efforts using the AKO and NCO Net.

Army Strong!

*Kenneth O. Preston*

# NCOA commandants discuss immersive learning at Institute for Creative Technologies

By Sgt. Matthew Farwell  
TRADOC

Are we training Soldiers as well as we can? What can we do better? How do people really learn?

On a rainy day in late January 2010 in an unobtrusive office building in Los Angeles, representatives and commandants from throughout the Army's noncommissioned officer academies gathered to listen as experts, ranging from psychologists to computer scientists, discussed technology and education at the NCOA Leadership Immersive Training Workshop. The palm-lined streets of Marina del Rey, Calif., might seem an unlikely venue for a sea of change in NCO education, but the event signaled new ways of thinking about training Soldiers in the U. S. Army.

Executive director of the University of Southern California Institute for Creative Technologies, Randy Hill Jr., Ph.D., a West Point alumnus, was the opening speaker at the workshop and outlined ICT's goal: to create more effective ways of educating and training Soldiers. "We want to have an impact. We're here to help."

The ICT is a unique collaboration of academia and industry, conducting research in support of the Army. The Learning Innovations and Initiatives Division (formerly part of Training and Doctrine Command G-7) of the Institute for Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development has collaborated with ICT for the past seven years in providing workshops and video tele training as a source of expertise in the design and development of instruction.

INCOPD co-sponsored the workshop with ICT, presenting evidence-based learning strategies that foster learning to improve the Noncommissioned Officer Education System and provide the

participants with demonstrations of ICT research projects related to Army training.

John Sparks, a retired command sergeant major and director of INCOPD, urged the assembly to "keep their brain housing groups open," and think of ways to use ICT's developments to

improve training for their Soldiers. Since retiring as TRADOC command sergeant major in 2008, Sparks and his successor, Command Sgt. Major David Bruner, have been overhauling the way the Army develops and trains Soldiers and NCOs through initiatives such as the Army Career Tracker, College of the American Soldier, as well as through transitions of the Basic NCO Course and the Advanced NCO Course to the Advanced Leader Course and Senior Leader Course, respectively.

In the introduction to the Army Capstone Concept, TRADOC's commander, Gen. Martin

Dempsey wrote that "we must emphasize the integration of technology into capable formations commanded by innovative leaders." He added, "To maximize the potential of technological developments, we must evolve and adapt capabilities based on changes in threat capabilities."

Mindful of Dempsey's intent and the fact that America's greatest historical strength has been innovation and exportation of ideas, Bruner encouraged the forum and challenged the assembled senior NCOs.

"I want to set a few goals here: Enjoy this training, and take something back to your organization," Bruner said. "This has an impact on Soldiers and noncommissioned officers; this is a great opportunity to get to know each other and share ideas, to think how we can better educate Soldiers today and in the future."

ICT's mission focuses on improving learning through the development of interactive digital media. Their in-house experts in psychology, education and computer science work with the



Sergeant Star is a virtual tour guide at <http://goarmy.com>. He can guide users through the Web site as well as answer questions.

Courtesy graphic by U.S. Army

entertainment industry to produce virtual humans and computer training, which are used to develop immersive simulations that lead to better decision-making, cultural awareness, leadership and health care. The Army isn't the only institution impressed with ICT — some of their breakthroughs were used in the recent blockbuster film *Avatar*.

Within the Army, ICT created the Joint Fires & Effects Training Simulator at Fort Sill, Okla., and the Distribution Management Cognitive Initiative, a game-based software tool for training logisticians. ICT also worked in collaboration with the Army Research Institute to develop junior officers at Fort Leavenworth, Kan.

NCO academy commandants are command sergeants major, responsible for training students in the Warrior Leader Course, Advanced Leader Course and Senior Leader Course. They lead the only organizations in the Army solely staffed with NCOs.

Command Sgt. Maj. John L. Longcor from the Henry Caro NCO Academy, Fort Benning, Ga., put their responsibilities in perspective for the academics at USC. "It's like being the dean of a small college."

Demonstrating that there might be a better way to train Soldiers in the basics was the intent for this conference. Richard E. Clark, Ed.D., professor of educational psychology and technology at the Rossier School of Education at USC and the director of the Center for Cognitive Technology, used the example of teaching medical students surgery. He explained that even when experienced heart surgeons attempt to describe the way they conduct surgeries, they have trouble fully imparting their knowledge to students.

Researchers studied this phenomenon, noting that the surgeon's description can leave out up to 70 percent of the steps they actually take to perform the surgical procedure. However, Cognitive Task Analysis techniques can be used to elicit most of the missing information.

"If this process is being used to teach people how to operate on a human heart, there's got to be something we can gain from looking at it," Bruner said. "We have so many experts in the Army — top-notch infantrymen, aviators, supply sergeants. But, are we really enabling them to teach all they know?"

Conference attendees spent three days listening to briefings on how students learn, the benefits and drawbacks of technology in different learning environments and ways to analyze the value of different training methods. The event culminated in a live demonstration of a virtual infantry simulator called Flatworld at nearby Camp Pendleton, Calif.

"I didn't know what I was getting into," said 1st Sgt. Timothy Metheney, Fort Knox, Ky. "I realize that the way we're supposed to do things isn't necessarily the best way to do them — it's just the way we've always done them. Some of it needs to change. We all do different types of training, but we all face the same issues with teaching," he said.

Command Sgt. Maj. Joseph Lister, from the Judge Advocate General NCO Academy in Charlottesville, Va., agreed. "We learned new approaches here. The JAG school could use this technology for negotiation training, witness interviewing or teaching operational law."

"These are processes that haven't been utilized," remarked Command Sgt. Major Dean Keveles of Fort Sill, Okla. "Different leaders have different methods of training and different knowledge, and this is a way of getting to the best of that." Even attending the workshop was good training, he said. "It allowed my subordinates to exercise more responsibility while I'm gone, and it gets me out of my comfort zone and lets me think differently."

ICT was equally impressed with the Army representatives and commandants. Rich DiNinni, a project manager at ICT, said that working with the Army has "been one of the highlights" of his job. "We've never had a group that was so honest and so engaged as this one."



Photo by Command Sgt. Maj. Dean J. Keveles

Commandants and NCOA representatives tour Camp Pendleton, Calif.'s Flatworld, a virtual infantry simulator.



# THE FUTURE IS NOW

New Army equipment is at the cutting edge of technology, changing the battleground. American Soldiers are ready for the forefront. The enemy has nowhere to hide.

By Angela Simental



Since its establishment in 2001, Program Executive Office Soldier has been dedicated to providing Soldiers the best equipment available. With a total of 12 program branches, PEO Soldier is led by a general officer and a command sergeant major. The different branches of PEO Soldier are constantly developing equipment that incorporates the latest technology to follow through with their mission to maintain a level of superiority in the equipment they develop and preserve their priority: to keep Soldiers safe on the battlefield. “Our mission is to enhance the Soldiers’ combat effectiveness, improve their survivability, while increasing their lethality,” said PEO Soldier’s Command Sgt. Maj. Bernard C. McPherson. “We want to ensure that our Soldiers have great quality of life through the equipment we issue.”

PEO Soldier closely synchronizes with the United States Army Materiel Command and Training Doctrine Command to get equipment through the processes of design, testing, procurement and finally fielding to Soldiers.

“The relationship between AMC and PEO Soldier is both professional and personal because we are taking care of Soldiers,” said AMC Command Sgt. Maj. Jeffrey J. Mellinger. “It is the efforts of PEO Soldier to equip and arm warriors that gives the foundation for the rest of the materiel enterprise.”

In order to continue delivering the best equipment, big changes were made in 2009 with the restructuring of PEO Soldier in its three main areas.

First, several of its project management offices will narrow their focus into a smaller range of products to intensify oversight and maintain quality.

Second, it will integrate the Rapid Fielding Initiative, which also began in 2001, because it “streamlines the process for distributing equipment to deploying units and ensures that all Soldiers are outfitted with the most advanced individual and unit equipment available,” as outlined in the RFI mission statement. “We are continuing to improve the equipment, putting safety at the forefront,” McPherson said.

Third, PEO Soldier is enhancing its emphasis on Soldier as a System concept, which “allows for a direct response to both

Soldier needs and developmental innovation, keeping equipment up with the operational needs and technological advances. The Army has an agency [PEO Soldier] it can rely on to develop safe equipment and get it to the Soldiers as fast as possible,” he added.

“I have spoken to Soldiers who fought maybe two years ago, and they are amazed at the fast changes and improvements we have on the equipment,” he said. “We are doing everything humanly possible to give our Soldiers the best equipment as fast as we can.”



### Challenges and Accomplishments

Constantly improving and developing equipment has also created challenges for PEO Soldier.

“The biggest challenge right now is sustainment,” McPherson said. “We are pushing between 450 and 463 products. We push equipment out so fast that we need to make sure there is a mechanism in place to sustain the equipment and replace the one damaged in theater.”

PEO Soldier has also been focusing on lightening the load Soldiers carry into combat.

“Because of the fight in Afghanistan right now, Soldiers are dismounted, facing higher elevations as opposed to Iraq,” McPherson said. “We have to lighten the Soldier’s load and are

“Our mission is to enhance the Soldiers’ combat effectiveness, improve their survivability, while increasing his or her lethality. We want to ensure that our Soldiers have great quality of life through the equipment we issue.”

PEO Soldier’s Command Sgt. Maj. Bernard C. McPherson



Photo by Angela Simental

Command Sgt. Major Bernard C. McPherson, responsible for overseeing the process of delivering equipment to Soldiers, sits in his office at the PEO Soldier headquarters in Fort Belvoir, Va.

developing lighter equipment without losing capability.”

Reducing load weight is an important factor when developing equipment because lighter equipment not only helps Soldiers feel comfortable and safe in combat, but it also enhances combat effectiveness by providing Soldiers more mobility and a higher chance of survival, McPherson said.

“We are creating equipment right now that gives Soldiers the capability to adjust, while having the same amount of protection,” he added.

### Turning ideas into equipment

McPherson explained that equipment is conceived in theater with the help of Soldiers’ input and ideas. Commanders and leaders in the field initiate needs and requirements and forward them to TRADOC. TRADOC assesses these needs and sends them to the Department of the Army G3. Once the requirements are approved, PEO Soldier starts the materiel development process.

“We look at the parameters, performance, delivery and protection,” he said. “Cost is not a factor.”

PEO Soldier takes an integrated and synchronized approach to developing equipment, McPherson said.

“We have tightened relationships with Research, Development and Engineering Command, the office responsible for life cycle management of equipment, and industry while receiving support and funding from Congress and American taxpayers,” he said.

Equipment prototypes go through a series of rigorous tests. “Armor, ammunition, weaponry – we’ll take that product

and put it through what we call ‘limited-use testing,’ he said. “We’ll go back to the Soldiers, get a unit and have them test the equipment.”

After equipment is purchased from the industry, it goes through the fielding process, which requires, as McPherson said, more testing to make sure it adheres to protocol.

“It is for the safety of our Soldiers and reliability of the equipment. We want to make sure that the equipment is doing what the requirements outline,” he said about the importance of the fielding process.

### Giving feedback

PEO Soldier relies heavily on Soldiers’ feedback to detect problems or make improvements to a product, McPherson said. PEO Soldier, in conjunction with TRADOC, conducts pre-and post-combat surveys, participates in road shows where equipment is displayed and receives immediate and direct feedback from Soldiers and family members.

“[Families] understand we are putting their loved ones in safe equipment that will protect them and bring them back. They know we are taking care of Soldiers, making sure they have the best equipment possible,” McPherson said. “We go where we have to go to educate Soldiers on the equipment we are fielding.”

Another way McPherson receives direct feedback is from his peers, NCOs in Iraq and Afghanistan. Today, any Soldier can send their feedback from anywhere.

“We are especially taking advantage of the social media sites,” he added. PEO Soldier operates a blog and its Web site also provides a forum for feedback. Soldiers can also find PEO Soldier on Facebook, Twitter and Vimeo.


“It is the efforts of PEO Soldier to equip and arm warriors that gives the foundation for the rest of the materiel enterprise.”

AMC Command Sgt. Maj. Jeffrey J. Mellinger

### The role of NCOs in PEO Soldier

McPherson said he understands the importance of NCOs in the realm of Army materiel and described NCOs as the Soldiers’ advocate.

“Most of our NCOs have led Soldiers in the field and most deployed to Iraq and fought in Afghanistan; they bring the Soldiers’ ideas and feedback to materiel development. NCOs deal with Soldier issues as well as materiel issues because they are the eyes and ears in the field,” he said. “In every vehicle that rolls in theater, you have a noncommissioned officer – an NCO is in charge in the right, front seat. They insist on having the highest standards [on equipment] for their Soldiers.”

There are many pieces of equipment being developed, tested and fielded by PEO Soldier and its branches in an effort to deliver and equip Soldiers with the best, and most up-to-date equipment and technology making them more survivable and agile in their missions. 

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Photo courtesy of PEO Soldier



## NOWHERE TO HIDE

The XM25 Counter Defilade Target Engagement System is one of the most revolutionary weapons developed for the dismounted Soldier, said Lt. Col. Chris Lehner, product manager of Individual Weapons.

Although it is still in the research and development stage, *Time* magazine has named it one of the “50 Best Innovations of 2009,” and it has also been featured in CNN and *Popular Science* magazine.

Ranging in weight between 12 and 12.5 pounds, the XM25 is a semiautomatic weapon that fires “smart rounds,” which takes away the ability for the enemy to hide behind cover, whether it be a wall, trench, building or rock. Its target acquisition fire control mechanism programs 25 mm rounds so the Soldier can have better target precision, Lehner said. He also added that when the trigger is pulled, the fire control mechanism tells the round at what distance to explode in the instant before the hammer strikes the firing pin.

The XM25 allows Soldiers to engage the enemy with the fragmentation released from the rounds and even if they hide behind cover, they can still be hit, Lehner said. The weapon can accurately fire an explosive round at distances of up to 700 meters even at night or under harsh weather conditions because of its built-in thermal sight, he added.

The XM25 “features an arrangement of sights, sensors and lasers housed in a Target Acquisition Fire Control unit located at the top, an oversized magazine behind the trigger and a short barrel wrapped by a recoil dampening sleeve,” Lehner said.

Once all the approvals are in place, it is expected that in 2012 the Army will begin to purchase 12,500 XM25 systems, enough to issue one per infantry squad and Special Forces teams. The full fielding process for the XM25 is expected to be completed by 2014.

## OWNING THE NIGHT

The Enhanced Night Vision Goggle’s biggest contribution to the battlefield will be giving Soldiers more situational awareness in rural and urban areas.

The ENVG is a two-pound, helmet-mounted device made especially for the individual Soldier. It integrates image-intensification and infrared sensors for night operations under all weather conditions.

It also makes it easier for Soldiers to detect any threats under any lighting condition, including total darkness. For comfort, the eyepiece allows Soldiers to maintain a full view of the battlefield without having to adjust it, even if helmet moves.

The ENVG is easy to use with minimal adjustments. A Soldier can adjust the goggle to fit his or her vision. It presents a computer-like display that enhances vision, showing images in high resolution at short ranges.

The ENVG operates in three modes: Overlay, full thermal and outline.

The image intensification sensor amplifies ambient light, in a manner similar to the current generation of night vision goggles. The thermal sensor shows outlines of heat, highlighting people, vehicles, and even the trails left by targets. Together, these technologies allow Soldiers to see more and accurately identify targets.

In 2009, ENVG was fielded with positive results to units supporting Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.



Photos courtesy of PEO Soldier



Photo courtesy of PEO Soldier

## DIGITIZING SOLDIERS

The Land Warrior system is the first of its kind. Designed for dismounted Soldiers, it provides networked communication and navigation technology to improve a Soldier's situational awareness, lethality and survivability, said Master Sgt. Marcus B. Griffith, senior enlisted advisor for Project Manager Soldier Warrior.

Land Warrior is a Soldier-worn computer system, connected to a digital radio, which transmits and receives data, he added.

The Land Warrior has an eyepiece, called the Helmet Mounted Display, which is like a computer screen.

To interact with the system, Land Warrior has a small, hand-held device called the Soldier Control Unit, which acts the like a computer mouse.

In addition, information can be shared through text messages, pictures and PDF documents.

Land Warrior also incorporates a global positioning system. Through a shared digital map, Soldiers can see their location along with the location of every Soldier using the system. Griffith explained that self-location is an important part of Land Warrior, especially when Soldiers travel through data less terrain. This safety method prevents Soldiers calling fire on their own forces, he said.

Developed in the late 90s, Land Warrior went through major design changes to reach its current configuration.

In 2007, the 4-9 Infantry tested Land Warrior in Iraq. Recently, the 5/2 Stryker brigade is using the Land Warrior system in Afghanistan with exceptional reviews, said Griffith.

## THE WATCHFUL EYE

Incorporating the latest digital technology, Project Manager Soldier Precision Targeting Devices developed the Lightweight Laser Designator Rangefinder with dismounted fire support teams and observers in mind.

This portable rangefinder helps Soldiers accurately locate targets and transmit information digitally to the Department of Defense and NATO to engage the enemy with laser-guided munitions.

The LLDR weighs only 35 pounds compared to its predecessor, the Ground Vehicular Laser Locator Designator, which weighed 140 pounds, and took four or five Soldiers to carry from one location to another.

The LLDR is battery-driven, which makes it perfect for 24-hour missions. It can be used with two different kinds of batteries, which can help the observer to determine its target at certain distances. Using a SINGARS battery instead of the BA-5699 batteries makes it easier to spot targets at a further distance.

The two most important components of the LLDR are the Target Locator Module and the Laser Designator Module.

The TLM includes a thermal imager, day camera, electronic display, digital magnetic compass and a laser rangefinder. These capabilities mean that the TLM can function in nearly any operating environment. The TLM can be used by itself to determine accurate target locations, for the first round hits with precision munitions or with the LDM for laser-guided munitions. The LDM is compatible with all joint forces and NATO targeting systems for laser-guided munitions.

The LLDR also includes global positioning and networked situational awareness systems, helping Soldiers avoid calling fire on their own forces.

Fielding will continue this year with 600 units being delivered to the field.



Photo courtesy of PEO Soldier



Photo by Angela Simental

## TOUGH ARMOR

Introduced in 2007, the Improved Outer Tactical Vest forms the core of the Interceptor Body Armor system, a modular system that consists of the armor vest, ballistic plates and other protective accessories such as throat, groin and upper and under arm protection.

A medium-sized IOTV with front, back, side ceramic plates with added accessories weighs a total of 30.1 pounds, three pounds less than its forerunner.

The IOTV carries the Enhanced Small Arms Protective Inserts plates and the Enhanced Side Ballistic Inserts, which protects against small-arm hits, including armor-piercing rounds.

Most recently, the Army has made 17 improvements to the IOTV, including extending sizes (11 in total), adding the quick release feature, which was added to make it easier for Soldiers to release the vest in an emergency.

It also includes back buckles, which can be used to adjust the vest to a Soldier's specific body shape. Also, depending on the mission, the IOTV can be worn in different configurations, using only the protective accessories necessary.

The Army now has an additional alternative, the Soldier Plate Carrier System, which weighs significantly less than the Interceptor Body Armor system and, like the IOTV, can be adapted to the mission. The SPCS provides less soft-armor coverage of the Soldier's body than the IOTV but carries the same hard-armor ballistic inserts in front, back and on the sides.

The result is that the SPCS weighs 21.8 pounds with front, back and side plates, 9.3 pounds less than the fully-equipped IOTV.

The SPCS also retains less heat. Fielding of the SPCS has begun for select units serving in Operation Enduring Freedom, under a contract the Army awarded in October 2009 to purchase 57,000 plate carriers. Fielding is expected to be complete in March 2010.

## BLENDING IN

The search for a new camouflage pattern for Soldiers deploying to Afghanistan started with 57 combinations, which resulted in six camouflage patterns that covered the three main terrains in Afghanistan: woodland, desert and mountainous regions.

The Army wanted something that was readily available and could be immediately provided to deploying Soldiers, said Lt. Col. Michael Sloane of Product Manager Soldier Clothing and Individual Equipment.

After testing the six selections, two passed the test: The Universal Camouflage Pattern- Delta and the MultiCam patterns, which integrate a fire resistant non-negotiable performance parameter, a capability the Army Combat Uniform also provides.

Furthering its research to provide the best camouflage, the Army conducted surveys and photo simulations to determine how the MultiCam or UCP-Delta camouflages blended into Afghanistan's environments, taking into account that the terrain is diverse and Soldiers often travel through multiple environments in a single mission.

The MultiCam and Delta patterns were fielded in fall 2009 during Operation Enduring Freedom. Two battalions receive one camouflage each along with body armor, helmet covers and rucksacks in addition to their standard Army Combat Uniform in the Universal Camouflage Pattern.

Sloane said feedback from the field indicated that the UCP- Delta, a variant of the currently-fielded Universal Camouflage Pattern, includes the coyote-brown color and was the one the most matched muddy areas in Afghanistan. The MultiCam pattern, on the other hand, which has already been used by Special Forces and operators in the field, worked better in greener areas, he added.

On Feb. 19, the Secretary of the Army, John McHugh, announced that the MultiCam pattern was selected as the camouflage for Afghanistan. Starting in the summer, deploying Soldiers will receive uniforms along with body armor, rucksacks and helmet covers in the MultiCam pattern.



Photo courtesy of PEO Soldier



FORT BENNING, GA.

# MANEUVER

CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

The armor and infantry schools combine to train together like they fight together

BY MICHAEL L. LEWIS



**S**ometime this spring, the first of thousands of pieces of armor equipment will begin a trek down Interstate 65 from Fort Knox, Ky., to Fort Benning, Ga. In the largest move directed by the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Commission, the U.S. Army Armor School at Fort Knox is relocating to Fort Benning, joining with the U.S. Army Infantry School to form the Maneuver Center of Excellence, the Army's new hub for ground maneuver forces training. While establishing a new home is never easy, the transition has some worried that their branch identity will be compromised or eliminated. Others, on the other hand, believe the move is natural and long overdue. The bottom line: Armor and infantry have long fought

alongside each other; now they will train in concert as well.

"Bringing them together here was part of the moves from BRAC," said Command Sgt. Maj. Earl Rice, command sergeant major of the Maneuver Center, which officially stood up Oct. 1, 2009. "They said [the Army] needed to consolidate and cut down on some of our bases so that the money we're spending is more effective, more efficient and getting more bang for the buck than what we were doing. As we drew in, the right mixture for [the Army] was to bring armor and infantry together here."

"The concept is, this is how our forces are organized," explained Command Sgt. Maj. Ricky Young, command sergeant major of the Armor School. "Why aren't



Far left: Soldiers of 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, patrol in their M1A1 Abrams tank in Iraq, April 2004.

File photo by Pvt. Brandi Marshall

Left: Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, seek cover as enemy snipers fire at them during a training exercise at Fort Benning, Ga., May 2009.

File photo by Spc. Ben Hutto

# NER

## ENCE

we doing our training – armor and infantry – side-by-side? And, why *aren't* we doing it all in one place, so when we start talking about doctrinal development, we're not trying to pull information from one center here and one center there? Why not put it all together? That's the question that nobody really wanted to tackle without emotion, [because] it is emotional for the armor force."

Armor's move means leaving Fort Knox, the designated "Home of Armor" since 1940. Yet, it also means returning to the branch's roots, Young said.

"The funny thing is, [Gen. George] Patton actually started maneuver training at Fort Benning, and we moved it to Fort Knox. Granted, for just about anybody who's still living, they understand that

Fort Knox has been the home of armor. But, from a conceptual perspective and from a reality-on-the-ground perspective, [the move] only makes sense."

When complete – which, by congressional mandate, must be no later than September 2011 – the Maneuver Center will train 52 percent of all new Soldiers entering the Army and every infantry and armor NCO. The shift means Fort Benning will gain an influx of about 4,200 new families and build \$3.5 billion worth of new construction, including all-new facilities for armor instruction.

"All the buildings that we have [at Fort Benning] have pretty much been built to our specifications," Young said. "Unlike a lot of other projects, where it's a cookie-cutter model, we've been able to, in a lot

of our training facilities, say we need this; we need that. So, the opportunities I see from the Armor School perspective are almost limitless based on being able to build everything that we want."

"The plan is to give them everything they could possibly want; everything they are receiving at Fort Benning is 'eggs to order,'" said Command Sgt. Maj. Matthew Walker, command sergeant major of the Infantry School. "Everything they did not have at Fort Knox, but over time have developed requirements for, they are receiving here at Fort Benning. The amount of construction over at the Harmony Church area, the amount of build-up for the new barracks and armor training areas, is nothing short of phenomenal – 270,000 cubic yards of concrete for that motor pool! It's just extremely impressive."

Such customized facilities will provide a tremendous opportunity for the armor community, said Command Sgt. Maj. John Wayne Troxell, command sergeant major of the U.S. Army Armor Center.

"We're going to be in state-of-the-art facilities and in state-of-the-art ranges. When you look at what is being built for us down there, in the resource-constrained environment that is the Army today – we're prosecuting two wars and with all the transformational stuff that's going on – it's just phenomenal what they're doing down there. Those are unique benefits that we are reaping as we make the move."

Yet, as the new armor facilities rise out of the Georgian soil, leaders say the hardest part of the move will be continuing to train Soldiers while in the midst of the yearlong relocation tumult.

"The biggest challenge of the move is not that we're leaving our home. It's that we have been told by the Army that we're going to move in a graduated effort over time, but there cannot be any degradation in training; there will be no double slotting

of personnel,” Young said. “We will continue to do our mission, and in the middle of it, we will move pieces of the school in a sequential manner so as to not draw back from the production load that we’re required to train every year. But, it’ll be like trying to build an airplane while it’s flying.”

Still, the human element is the most ambiguous variable in the entire transition, he said.

“If it was just about equipment, then it would be easy: you pack it up, you move it, it has no feelings, it doesn’t matter, you’re not disrupting anything. But, the toughest thing for me is the human aspect of it – making sure that we not only have the very best, but have Soldiers producing the very best they can produce because they’re not distracted,” Young said.

Perhaps the largest distraction is the sense of loss many armor Soldiers feel in

losing their exclusive home for the last six decades; they’ll now share Fort Benning, which has been known as the “Home of Infantry” since 1918. But, the synergies the new center will provide more than offset any emotional loss, Troxell said.

“When you take an installation that was known as the ‘Home of Armor’ for years and years and years, and you try to move it, there’s always going to be some pushback. But, we understand that we fight as a combined arms team; infantry and armor Soldiers have fought together since the beginning of warfare. It makes sense that we train together and that we have one headquarters, especially as we move forward with the type of threats that we face in the future – the hybrid threats which could cause us as armor Soldiers and armor forces to fight anything from counterinsurgency to a near-peer enemy in major combat operations. Becoming

the Maneuver Center of Excellence allows us to better train the skills needed to fight a hybrid enemy in full-spectrum operations.”

Fears that either branch will lose their identity or be absorbed by the other are unfounded, Rice said.

“You’re still going to keep the infantry things here. You’re not going to take away from the history of the infantry – they still own the last hundred yards. And, you’re not going to take away anything from the armor guys and what they bring to the fight. But, what we can do is bring that knowledge and experience together to make us understand one another more and make us warriors and leaders on the battlefield.”

“Our cultures – the infantry culture and the armor culture – are going to stay the same and stay distinct,” Walker emphasized. “We’re not trying to do away with anybody nor are we trying to make anybody more important than anybody else. But, it’s for the best interests of everybody if we all just work together and find the common ground. I honestly don’t think it will amount to what some of my brethren tell me from the field that it will. Obviously, some out there say, ‘I can’t believe you’re letting this happen on your watch.’ But, since I’m not a congressman, I didn’t have a vote.”



Left: Command Sgt. Maj. Matthew Walker points out the Harmony Church area of Fort Benning, where construction is underway to house the U.S. Army Armor School, December 2009.

Photo by Michael L. Lewis

Below: This area at Harmony Church was completed in late 2009. The water tower in the distance already has been painted, “Home of Armor and Cavalry.”

Photo by Bridgett Siter





Armor leaders also say there are far more positives associated with the move than negatives.

“Some people say, ‘It’s about time. We’ve been fighting together, so it makes sense we train together,’” Troxell said. “Others like to believe in conspiracy theories, that either of the branches will try to take over the other one. But, one thing I’ve learned is that if somebody’s uncomfortable with change, they’re going to be miserable being irrelevant.”

“The bottom line is, we’ve accepted it,” he added. “We’re pushing forward, and I think it’s going to be a good thing. Merging with the Infantry School is what the Army has said we’re going to do, and we’re going to do it in a professional manner and make the Armor School that much better at Fort Benning.”

Indeed, the combining of armor and infantry training is not a novel concept. More than a year ago, the infantry and armor Senior Leader Courses were merged into one Maneuver SLC program of instruction that trains senior NCOs in both armor and infantry together. A similar fusion occurred to produce the Maneuver Captains Career Course. With identical courses held at both Fort Knox and Fort Benning, armor and infantry Soldiers have already begun shared training.

“Having the armor and infantry NCOs train together in the Senior Leader Course, it has opened up so many opportunities,” Rice said. “You’re learning from your armor brothers and your infantry brothers and bringing that experience together. For the last eight-plus years, we’ve been fighting together – the combined arms fight – as a team. And, you see on the battlefield that it’s not just your unit; it takes the entire team to make it happen. In the Maneuver SLC, our NCOs are getting different perspectives – from the light to the heavy force – and are understanding why each do certain things and what it takes for each to move on the battlefield. What’s complex for one is simple for the other. Our NCOs, as they operate more and more together, the better we’re going to be in the future.”

“When you combine your major muscles in your maneuver force and they learn side-by-side, then there’s a real-time information sharing that allows growth at a much faster rate,” Young said. “That makes leaders with a much broader range



Above: Staff Sgt. Benjamin Thurman, a student in the Maneuver Senior Leader Course, acts as the company commander in a Bradley fighting vehicle simulator at Fort Benning, December 2009.

Right: Maneuver SLC instructors observe students practicing firing mortars at one of Fort Benning’s ranges, December 2009. The infantry and armor SLC programs of instruction were combined more than a year ago.

Photos by Michael L. Lewis



of knowledge and a much broader understanding of how the decisions they make on or off the battlefield affect the organizations that they’re in and the organizations that they’re operating around.”

Ultimately, senior leaders say, the transition is a done deal, prompting them to tell naysayers: Get over it.

“We’ve already been doing this, so it should not be a big deal for folks,” Troxell said. “There are some parochial people on both sides who are just going to have to get over [their anxiety] and understand that we’re going to work together – and we have to work together for the benefit of our force and the benefit of our country.”

“Our young Soldiers and young leaders, they’re embracing it,” Rice said. “They’ve accepted the fact that we’re one team, one fight. The majority of our young sergeants first class, they’ve come into the Army since 9/11, and they’ve been doing this stuff [downrange] as one team. What they care about is, if I’m a tanker, I want to be proficient at my tanker skills. If I’m an infantryman, I want to be proficient at my infantry skills. We can’t help but get better the more and more we train together.”

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## *Building Bonds,* **Army Strong**

By Cassandra Yardeni

**F**or the ninth consecutive year, divorce rates among military couples continue to rise. In fact, last year marked an all-time high for divorces, bringing the number to 27,312 throughout the armed forces, according to a November 2009 report from the Department of Defense Manpower Data Center. The statistics suggest that not only are American Soldiers fighting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but they also continue to struggle on the homefront.

With rates up a full percentage point since 9/11, the rising number of divorces has commonly been attributed to more frequent deployments, post-traumatic stress disorder and an inability for couples to cope with the pressures of serving in the military — issues that affect not just couples, but entire families.

In an Army battlefield survey taken in Iraq in spring 2009, nearly 22 percent of Soldiers questioned said they planned to get a divorce or separation, compared to 12.4 percent in 2003. In addition, approximately 30 percent of first-year enlisted Soldiers are dropping out of the Army, a figure Army officials link to instability at home and a lack of familial support.

“We’ve been at war for [nine] years now, and we’re finding that marriages and relationships are simply falling apart,” said Chaplain (Maj.) Paul Rodgers, chaplain for the Warrior Transition Battalion, Fort Bliss, Texas. “Some are finding that it’s easier to deal with

conflicts in war than the emotional aspects of a relationship after it.”

“Every marriage has controllable and uncontrollable factors,” said Joe Davis, spokesman for the Veterans of Foreign Wars organization. “But, when you interject eight years of war, preparing for war, being at war, coming home and having to think about going back to war again — and when you have children — it just has a tremendous impact on the family unit.”

In an effort to quell mounting statistics, military services have implemented a variety of programs to strengthen Soldiers’ relationships and create stronger bonds between military couples. The Army introduced the Strong Bonds program, “a preventative skills-based relationship building program, led by Army chaplains, designed to assist commanders in building, strengthening, preserving and restoring Army families,” a May 2009 memorandum from the Department of Defense states.

### **Strong Bonds, Stronger Leaders**

Originally conceived in 1997 as “Building Strong and Ready Families,” a skill-building workshop for Army

couples, the program was revamped and renamed Strong Bonds in 2005 to serve as a more comprehensive approach to relationship training. The program is now accessible to Soldiers, their families and single Soldiers throughout both active and reserve components of the Army.

“[Strong Bonds] is a fun, skill-building program that’s constructed in a safe environment, out of the normal training area location, where Soldiers and family members can learn skills to improve their more important relationships,” said Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Carleton Birch, director of strategic communications at the Office of the Chief of Chaplains. “It’s not a chapel program,” he explained. “It’s a unit program that’s brigade-centric. Leaders within the units create the demand for the program. At the [Department of the Army] level, we provide training, resources and support for the demand created in the field.”

Participants from a unit attend an off-site, weekend seminar administered by an Army chaplain and chaplain assistant certified to teach the program. All Soldiers, from junior enlisted to senior NCOs, are encouraged to attend Strong Bonds programming. The retreats are available on a first-come, first-served basis, with up to 20 couples (or 40 singles) per trip, based upon the destination and program focus.

Past retreats have taken place at ski resorts, beachfront cabins and horse ranches, depending on the location of the unit and nearby resources. Off-site retreats offer participants a respite from daily responsibilities as well as the opportunity to reconnect with their spouses and absorb the material being taught.

“We try to do things at a distance so that [participants] are not tempted to go back home. There are no distractions, so they can concentrate on what’s happening here,” said Sgt. Maj. Lorrie Nichols, chaplain assistant at the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas.

Funded by the Chief of Chaplains, there are 10 approved curricula from which chaplains can pick and choose, Birch said. However, chaplains are not limited to the outlined curricula, and

have the freedom to tailor the seminars to the needs of their unit. Programming is often modeled after popular self-help literature, including the *Eight Habits of Highly Successful Marriages* workshop series, The Arbinger Institute’s *The Anatomy of Peace* and *Laugh Your Way to a Better Marriage* by Mark Gungor. The retreat can also include workshops, group activities, discussions and guest speakers, as decided upon by the chaplain.

The workshop material is chosen to appeal to both partners and can be used as a resource throughout the course of the relationship. “The goal is to help the [participants] take something that they normally wouldn’t pick off the bookshelf and actually apply [the material] themselves,” said Chaplain (Maj.) Anthony Horton, chaplain at USASMA.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Dave Conklin

Chaplain (Col.) Mark Larson (right), the 9th Regional Readiness Command chaplain, leads couples in a marriage vows renewal ceremony at the Oahu Strong Bonds Marriage Skills Workshop, Aug. 15 to 17, 2008, in Laie, Hawaii.

### A Beacon of Hope

While divorce rates throughout the Army have risen steadily in recent years, couples who have taken advantage of Strong Bonds have found themselves beating this statistic, according to a recent unpublished study by the National Institute of Mental Health. In a random trial of more than 500 couples who participated in Strong Bonds retreats, divorce rates among the couples were one-third of those in the control group — a statistic which translates to 2,000 to 3,000 marriages saved in a single year.

Nichols’ experience echoes these findings. “I believe that we have saved some families [through the retreats]. I believe that because [couples] tell me that,” she said. Nichols herself has attended two family retreats with her husband and two daughters, experiences she considers

“important” to each family member.

After a difficult year chock-full of transitions — including a cross-country move and gaining custody of two children — one couple said they left a September 2009 Strong Bonds family retreat in Ruidoso, N.M., feeling “refreshed.” Master Sgt. John Wade, a USASMA student, and his wife, Christy, attended their second Strong Bonds retreat in Cloudcroft, N.M., in January, hoping to start the new year off with a positive mindset, Christy



Photo by Cassandra Yardeni

Beverly Wayne reviews the Primary Colors Personality Test, a personality assessment distributed at a USASMA-sponsored Strong Bonds family retreat, in Cloudcroft, N.M., in January.

Wade said. “We wanted to come [again] because we learned a lot before. We’ve had to deal with a lot of adjustments this year, and at the last [Strong Bonds retreat] we attended, we learned ways to handle it all.”

## A Sense of Community

At the retreat, Horton stressed the importance of peace in one’s life and the significance of prioritizing what’s most important. Aside from the skill-building activities, the group of 20 couples was split into smaller groups based on a personality questionnaire to discuss their own communication strengths and pitfalls. Married for 20 years, Master Sgt. Terry Easter and his wife, Robin, attended the Cloudcroft retreat with their 6-year-old daughter, Julia. Robin Easter said what resonated with her most were the feelings of mutual understanding and community during the workshops. Speaking with and relating to other military families was a cathartic experience in and of itself, she said.

“It’s great to see that other families go through the exact same things we do. What I’m seeing is that there’s so much similarity — we’re not the only parents who have wild teenagers; we’re not the only ones with problems. You spend so much time trying to keep everything private; it’s nice to [know] that other families aren’t so perfect either,” she said.



Photo by Sgt. Nathaniel Smith

Chaplain (Lt. Col.) David Waters, the 1st Infantry Division chaplain, shows off his catch at the Ringneck Ranch in Tipton, Kan., Oct. 13, 2008, during a Strong Bonds Singles retreat.

Because the seminars are conducted in open-discussion forums, Soldiers and their spouses are able and welcome to interject their own thoughts and experiences. Sharing personal anecdotes about relationships, telling war stories and venting about work- and family-related issues foster a sense of community among attendants, who, under other circumstances, may feel guarded or embarrassed by their struggles. Horton said enrolling for a retreat should be viewed not as an admission of a troubled marriage, but as a proactive choice to improve communication, intimacy and happiness.

While Strong Bonds is beneficial for seasoned couples, the program is just as helpful for newlyweds, Rodgers emphasized. “It’s intended to be marital training that can be learned, re-learned and re-applied over the lifetime of a relationship.”

“The program is useful for all ages, because as your perception changes, you’re able to extract different things from what’s being taught,” Horton said. “Couples who have been married for 30 years come with all kinds of issues that can be redirected, and newly married couples can gain the tools to avoid and maneuver around those same issues.”

Rodgers explained that couples are encouraged to attend as many retreats as they can, because the message and curriculum are always evolving.

“People who have come again always tell me, ‘I caught something this time that I didn’t catch last time,’” he said.

## Something for Everyone

Aimed at building better relationships, Strong Bonds does not focus only on marriages. Single Soldiers from a unit can attend retreats that offer training on identifying and choosing a compatible mate. These retreats are also offered for single parents, who learn how to establish their needs in a relationship, as well as to identify which relationships work and don’t work.

The Strong Bonds Single Soldier program utilizes a nationally recognized curriculum called Premarital Interpersonal Choice and Knowledge to “learn the importance of building safe relationships, while knowing what to look for in a partner,” program literature states. Combining matters of the head and heart, the PICK approach explores five key areas when considering a long-term relationship.

Similarly, family retreats offer activities for each member of the family to enjoy — from newborns to teens to parents. “We work on family interactions. Sometimes families watch other families and coach each other,” Rodgers said. Childcare is provided on-location while parents participate in couples seminars.

Depending on the retreat, some even offer separate work-

# Children & DEPLOYMENT

It's no coincidence that the rate of military divorces has increased with the number of multiple deployments over the past decade. Among the most affected are Soldiers' children, according to a recent study by the Strategic Studies Institute. Public opinion of the war was also shown to greatly influence children's confidence in their deployed parent and their ability to cope with deployment. The study also revealed the factors that best lower stress levels in adolescents with a deployed parent:


- high participation levels in activities, like sports
- belief that America supports the war
- belief that the Soldier is making a difference
- strong familial support

shops for teens while parents attend their own workshop. "I've had sessions with the teenagers alone, where we talk about schools, their friends and how it is with their parents being in the military," Nichols said.

In addition, Strong Bonds offers re-deployment seminars and programs for families of deployed Soldiers. These workshops are created to "provide the tools to enable families to not just survive, but thrive in the midst of the Soldier's deployment," according to the May 2009 memo by the DoD. Meanwhile, retreats aimed at reintegration provide tools to assist Soldiers and their families with "issues pertaining to the transition from the battlefield to the homefront," and are designed to facilitate a more comfortable reconnection among military families.

Because it is designed and funded by the Chaplains Corps, Strong Bonds does not favor any particular faith. Rather, "most Strong Bonds classes are intended to provide tools to help in relationships despite faith or beliefs," Rodgers said.

Though Strong Bonds is an optional program, its success is only as certain as the effort Soldiers and families put into it.

"Not everyone takes advantage of it, but if you look at divorce statistics just within our community, it's clear that we can all benefit," Nichols said. "If you have a loving family to go home to at night, it just makes life easier. The last [retreat] filled up in 12 hours. That tells me that it's working for people; people are finding out about it, and people want it." 

*Editor's note: For more information on Strong Bonds or to sign-up for a retreat in your unit, visit [www.strongbonds.org](http://www.strongbonds.org).*

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Photo courtesy 3rd Sustainment Command Public Affairs

Above: A group from the 3rd Sustainment Command attend a Strong Bonds retreat at the Galt House Hotel and Suites in Louisville, Ky., in November 2009.



Photo by Cassandra Yardeni  
Left: Participants attend a marriage strengthening workshop at a USASMA-sponsored Strong Bonds family retreat in Cloudcroft, N.M., in January.

# *the* ONE NUMBER *that* MATTERS

*A record 238 suicides among Soldiers was reported in 2009. But when it comes to the lives of the defenders of our nation, only one number matters: One.*

BY CINDY RAMIREZ



Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Stacy L. Pearsall

Rifle at hand, an unidentified Soldier smokes while guarding an Iraqi police station. A record number of Army suicides were reported in 2009, though officials say about 30 percent of them occur among those who have never deployed. While there is no single or simple answer to preventing suicide, officials say the Army is working vigorously to streamline and improve its numerous suicide awareness, prevention and intervention programs.

**After** an intense two days of Applied

Suicide Intervention Skills Training, a group of strangers share a common bond: They've been empowered with the skills to help a suicidal person seek help, and awakened to the stark reality that those skills may not be enough to save everyone they might encounter.

They are skills they hope they'll never have to employ. But the participants — some military, some civilian, men and women of varying ages and professional backgrounds — know all too well they've come to the training because of a crucial problem: Suicides among Soldiers.

In 2009, there was a record 238 reported suicides among active-duty Soldiers and reservists not on active duty, according to the Department of Defense. That compares to 197 in 2008, though the statistics include both confirmed and potential suicides, as many remain under investigation. In fact, suicide rates among Soldiers are higher than among the general U.S. population for the first time since the Vietnam War, Army officials said.

And 2010 is not off to a better start: In January, 27 potential suicides were reported among active-duty Soldiers and reservists not on active duty.

For the ASIST participants, however, only one number matters: One.

"If we can save one life, one Soldier, any one person, then these two days are worth every minute and more," said Master Sgt. Justin Young of the 204th Military Intelligence Battalion, Fort Bliss, Texas, who participated in an ASIST workshop in January.

## OVERWHELMING OPTIONS

Overall, ASIST is one of several suicide intervention programs Armywide aimed to keep Soldiers, family members and care providers from killing themselves. To keep members of the Army family from reaching that point, however, the force counts on numerous other resiliency and coping programs.

Overall, the force has an estimated 400 programs and initiatives — headquarters- or installation-driven — created to alleviate stressors on Soldiers, family members and civilians. The problem, officials said in a message to the field, is that often they are “overwhelmed with options and information.”

As part of the Campaign Plan for Health Promotion, Risk Reduction and Suicide Prevention, the Army is analyzing and assessing each of its current suicide prevention

programs to determine which are most effective. The data collected will lead to recommendations to support “decisions made by the senior leadership of the Army on the way-ahead for these programs and initiatives,” the message states.

Although it is often believed repeated deployments are to blame, about 30 percent of Army suicides occur among those who have never deployed, and many others are among those who have deployed only once, statistics show.

“What we have learned is that there is no single or simple answer to preventing suicide,” Brig. Gen. Colleen McGuire, director of the Suicide Prevention Task

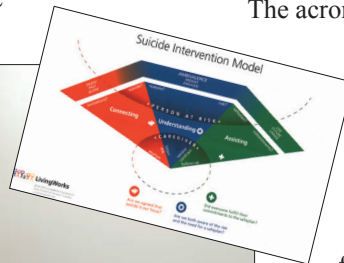
Force, stated in a defense department news release in December 2009. “This tells us that we must continue to take a holistic approach to identifying and helping Soldiers and families with issues such as behavioral health problems, substance abuse and relationship failures.”



Left: Retired Staff Sgt. Debra Wiggins, a consulting trainer with the Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training program, plays the role of a suicidal person in an intervention scenario during a workshop at Fort Bliss, Texas.



Right: Chaplain Rubin Crespo, standing, an ASIST counselor, pretends to be threatening to jump off a bridge while Master Sgt. Dustin Young, forefront, refers to his intervention tip card during the workshop. Inset: The ASIST tip card reminds holders of the Suicide Intervention Model: Connect, understand, assist.



Photos by Cindy Ramirez



Gen. Peter W. Chiarelli

“I am asking the backbone of our Army, our NCO Corps, and other green-tab leaders and supervisors, to troop the line, walk through the motor-pool, stop by the barracks, eat a meal in the dining facility, and visit the guard post at midnight. Look each and every Soldier in the eye. Convey the message that each one is valued by our Army, their families and friends, and our Nation. Remind Soldiers that their Army remains committed to help, support, and assist them to meet hardships head-on, no matter the struggle, stressor, or challenge.”

Numerous awareness campaigns have brought discussion about the issue to the forefront, but many challenges lay ahead in improving behavioral and mental health, and, in the end, preventing suicides, McGuire said.

In a January letter to Army leaders, Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Peter W. Chiarelli asked the NCO Corps and other leaders to support and assist Soldiers who may be dealing with hardships “head-on,” and to convey the message that each one is valued by the Army and the nation.

When it comes to suicide prevention and intervention, two programs stand out: ACE and ASIST.

## ASK, CARE, ESCORT

The Army’s approved “Ask, Care, Escort,” or ACE Suicide Prevention Training, aims to create awareness — and encourage action.

The acronym:

**A:** Ask your buddy. Have the courage to ask the question, but remain calm.

**C:** Care for your buddy.

Remove any means that could be used to injure themselves, calmly control the situation and listen to the person.

**E:** Escort your buddy. Never leave your buddy alone, and escort them to a chaplain, chain of command or health care professional.

But how does one put ACE into action?

## ASK THE [DARN] QUESTION

In December 2009, the Army approved the use of a suicide intervention training program to help *teach* leaders and Soldiers how to intervene.

The intense “how-to” teaching comes in the form of two- and five-day ASIST workshops produced by Living Works Education, Inc., a private for-profit suicide intervention training company. ASIST is intended to complement and expand on the ACE training.

The five-day ASIST workshop is a “train-the-trainers” course that certifies Army personnel to conduct the workshop Armywide.

The two-day workshops train Army leaders, chaplains, chaplain assistants, substance abuse counselors, family advocacy program workers and medical professionals, among others.

Through videos, discussions and role playing, the program walks participants through scenarios to conduct a suicide intervention. Recognizing that anyone is susceptible to suicide, everyone must be aware that suicidal thoughts often stem from any type of loss, which often leads to uncharacteristic behavior, ASIST trainers said.

ASIST consulting trainer Debra Wiggins, who joined the Army in 1988 and retired as a staff sergeant in 2008, said she's seen positive results.

"I've seen its effectiveness in the change of attitudes in the participants and in the people who come back to tell me their stories after they've used the ASIST intervention," she said.

The key steps under the Suicide Intervention Model: Connect (listen), understand (why they want to die and what they have to live for) and assist (get help). And don't beat around the bush. "Ask the [dam] question!" is heard throughout the training.

"You have to ask it straight out," Wiggins said. "Are you contemplating suicide? Are you having suicidal thoughts? Are you thinking of or planning to kill yourself?" Asking if they intend to "hurt" themselves may be ineffective, Wiggins explained, because suicidal persons are already hurting emotionally and believe killing themselves will end the pain.

Wiggins reminds participants that in an intervention, they are merely first responders who are keeping suicidal people alive long enough to get them to longer-term help.

And somberly, she reminds them that not everyone can or will be saved.



"This gets you interacting and addressing how to deal with the situation, not just to be aware of it."

Young said ASIST goes far beyond offering participants a list of resources and referrals. "They're turning me into a resource," he said, adding that the course "is a program that every NCO should attend."

## POINT OF NO RETURN

Both ACE and ASIST teach how to prevent a suicidal person from killing themselves. The bigger task at hand, however, is how to keep Soldiers from getting to that point of desperation, Army officials said.

To stress the importance of this focus, the Army has updated and improved regulations, including the Health Promotion regulation (AR-600-63), the Suicide Prevention pamphlet (PAM 600-24); and the Combat and Operational Stress Control Manual for Leaders and Soldiers (FM6-22.5).

- AR 600-63 tells commanders they are responsible to ensure that Soldiers identified for suicide risk or

related behaviors are managed in a consistent manner. It also requires commanders establish a policy that prevents Soldiers from being belittled for seeking or receiving behavioral health assistance.

- PAM 600-24 promotes community health promotion councils and suicide prevention task forces and provides standard responsibilities for these programs.

- FM 6-22.5 reminds leaders they must set conditions to allow Soldiers to talk about their combat experiences; and that they must integrate Combat and Operational Stress Control teams, behavioral health and medical personnel into their training and pre-deployment exercises.

## Take the GAT

In its efforts to support Soldiers in all areas of life – physical, emotional and spiritual – the Army is requesting that all Soldiers complete the Global Assessment Tool, a brief, self-paced survey under the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program by April 2010. Soldiers will take the GAT every two years or 120 days following contingency operation deployments.

To take the GAT: <http://www.army.mil/csfi>

"That's the reality of it," Wiggins said. "It's harsh, but we have to realize not everyone will make it through, and it's not our fault if our intervention was not successful."

A 17-year Army veteran, Young enrolled in the ASIST course in anticipation of becoming a first sergeant. Under new Army regulations, installations, non-commissioned officers and other senior leaders have more defined responsibilities in suicide prevention, including that each barrack, unit and/or formation have ASIST-certified staff.

"I'm glad to see that we've got a program like this," Young said.



To help combat the stigma associated with seeking psychological health care and treatment, the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury established the Real Warriors Campaign.

The campaign features a series of stories of real service members who have sought treatment and are maintaining successful military or civilian careers.



## REAL WARRIORS

The Real Warriors Campaign promotes resilience, facilitates recovery and supports reintegration of returning service members.

The campaign combats the stigma associated with seeking psychological health care and treatment and features stories of real service members who have sought treatment and are continuing to maintain successful military or civilian careers.

“A spiritual Soldier is more resilient than a non-spiritual Soldier,” Marrero said. “They find strength through faith, and sometimes Soldiers need to include faith, no matter which faith it may be, in their daily health routines to become resilient to all the challenges they face in and outside the field.”

Among the programs the chaplain’s office has spearheaded is Strong Bonds, a unit-based, chaplain-led program that helps

## BUILDING RESILIENCY

Beyond creating awareness and updating regulations, the Army has implemented Comprehensive Soldier Fitness, a program that seeks to strengthen Soldiers’ psychological, emotional and mental well-being. The program focuses on five dimensions: emotional, social, spiritual, family and physical.

CSF components include: the Global Assessment Tool, an online program that evaluates a Soldiers’ strength in those dimensions; Comprehensive Resilience Modules, an online tool that develops those strengths; and Sustainment Resilience Training, designed to build Soldiers’ inner strength throughout their careers.

Army Brig. Gen. Richard W. Thomas, Office of the Surgeon General, spoke about Comprehensive Soldier Fitness during the 2010 Nominative Sergeants Major and Senior Enlisted Advisors Conference at Fort Bliss in January.

Comparing it to physical training, Thomas said CSF “prepares, sustains and enriches the force.”

“PT is the reason the Army is in better shape than the general population,” he said. “Comprehensive Soldier Fitness strengthens our minds, our resiliency to the tough situations we face every day.”

To that end, Thomas encouraged NCOs and other senior leaders to become more aware and less afraid to get involved, and called on their leadership to curb the stigma often associated with seeking help.

“If you are a better listener — if you are a better counselor — then you’re a better leader,” he said.



Photo courtesy U.S. Army by D. Myles Cullen

## MASTER RESILIENCE

Above, Soldiers review the curriculum of the Master Resilience Trainer course at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia in November 2009. Tailored for military use, the 10-day program trains Soldiers in critical thinking and aims to increase their optimism, self-awareness and mental agility.

Fort Jackson, S.C., will house the Army’s Master Resilience Training School, with a pilot class in April and the first official class in May. Some 1,800 Soldiers and civilians a year are expected to take the course.

Eventually, every One Station Unit Training drill sergeant and Advanced Individual Training platoon sergeant will participate. Additionally, one NCO per brigade and battalion will also attend the school.

## AGENTS OF HOPE

One of the less talked about components of CSF is spirituality.

Chief of Chaplains Sgt. Maj. Tommy L. Marrero said he believes far too many leaders and Soldiers don’t regularly include spirituality in their lives.

build individual resiliency by strengthening the Army family. Through offsite retreats, the program helps single Soldiers, couples and families build and maintain strong relationships. Additionally, pre- and re-deployment components help Army families remain close through a deployment and to reintegrate after it.

## STRONG BONDS

Read more in Cassandra Yardeni’s story on pg. 18.

Several installations are developing spiritual centers, Marrero said, that aim to help Soldiers and families find, rediscover or strengthen their spirituality.

The Spiritual Fitness Center at Fort Hood is but one component of its Resiliency Campus, a one-stop shop for resiliency programs that mirror the CSF goals. The Spiritual Fitness Center offers counseling areas, an Internet café and library, meditation areas, and a meeting/worship room.

“It’s a place of individual spirituality where anyone can come in and rejuvenate their spirit,” said Col. William Rabena, commander of the Resiliency Campus, about the Spiritual Fitness Center. “We always have a chaplain available for anybody who walks in at any time. It’s an important part of building resiliency, and we’ve worked to provide an outlet where people can find tranquility.”

Calling chaplains “agents of hope,” Marrero said they serve in a “completely pastoral” role.

“We serve the Soldier in a spiritual manner, and we help them find and maintain their spiritual strength, their resiliency,” he said.



Photo courtesy U.S. Army by Hylie Jan Pressey

## TELE-HEALTH & TECHNOLOGY

The Department of Defense National Center for Tele-health and Technology is studying the effectiveness of virtual reality exposure therapy on active-duty Soldiers returning from Iraq or Afghanistan who are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

The technology allows health providers to use interactive computer-generated environments to take Soldiers back to where their trauma occurred to reduce anxiety. Soldiers use head-mounted video glasses, a dummy with a mounted game controller or other technologies while talking to a therapist. Repeated sessions help the patient gradually face and deal with the trauma.

“Individual self-regulation training helps so that on demand, a person can stop, think, breathe, do their mental gymnastics, talk sense to themselves and bring themselves down,” said clinical psychologist Jerry E. Wesch, Ph.D., assistant officer in charge of the reset program.

“They bring themselves down so they begin to re-establish self-regulation and stand down their hyper arousal,” he said.

The intensive three-week program, funded by the Darnall center, accommodates a dozen warriors at a time and has served about 200 Soldiers since its inception.

“Our goal is to restore people to continue service,” Wesch said. “Not everyone can or will, but our favorite target is a Soldier who has been through it, is leaking oil, but wants to continue to serve.”

The reset program was modeled after Fort Bliss’ renowned R&R center, a specialized treatment facility for Soldiers with PTSD who want to remain in the Army.

Run by clinical psychologist John Fortunato, Ph.D., the center opened in July 2007 and features 12 therapy rooms, three alternative medicine rooms, a mediation room, warrior lounge and a recreation room.

## RESTORE, RESET, RESILIENCE

Resiliency is defined as the ability to bounce back after adversity or trauma, to recover from setbacks. It is strengthened through coping skills derived from education, training and treatment — components already present in numerous programs and initiatives across the force.

Among them is the Human Performance Lab at Fort Hood’s Resiliency Campus.

Modeled after the Army Center for Enhanced Performance founded at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, ACEP uses state-of-the-art technologies and sports psychology techniques to teach Soldiers to master mental and emotional skills to strengthen their minds.

Classes include attention and focus control, confidence building, energy management and imagery.

Other examples of installation-based programs aimed to help warriors “bounce back” are the Restoration and Resilience Center at Fort Bliss and the Warrior Combat Stress Reset Program at the Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center, Fort Hood, Texas.

The Warrior Combat Stress Reset Program, established in August 2008, targets Soldiers with PTSD and is designed to help address common reactions to war experiences by calming the mind, body and spirit. Soldiers “reset” their psyche through relaxation techniques, including breathing exercises, yoga and journaling.



Photo by Cindy Ramirez

The Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center at Fort Hood, Texas, is home to the Warrior Combat Stress Reset Program.



Photo by Cindy Ramirez

Sgt. 1st Class William E. Loggins, right, demonstrates a computer program that helps Soldiers control their breathing and heartbeat. At left is David Bellinger, performance enhancement specialist, of the Human Performance Lab at Fort Hood’s Resiliency Campus.

The intense six-month program includes several tracks that treat the “whole” Soldier with psychiatric care, psychotherapy, biofeedback, alternative medicine, recreational therapies, meditative and spiritual interventions, among others.

Participating Soldiers in either program are assigned to the Warrior Transition Units of their respective installations.

## RESILIENT COMMUNITIES


Other programs target not only the warrior, but families and communities, as well as the care givers themselves. The Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program includes “family” as one of its most important dimensions of resiliency and strength.

The Army Family Covenant is the force’s promise to take care of not only Soldiers, but also their families. As part of the covenant, established in 2007, the Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation Command has established a number of initiatives. Across the board, installations are also working to help build resiliency among its health care providers and other support staff.

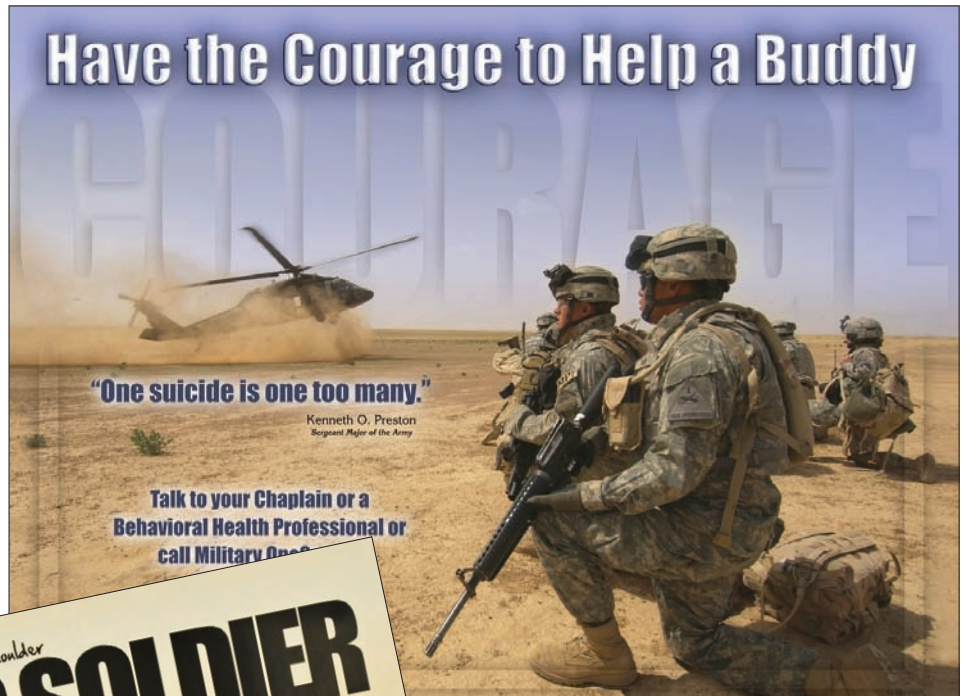
The Fort Hood Resiliency Campus and the Warrior and Family Support Center at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, are two models that other installations across the nation are looking to replicate for their success.

“In my opinion, the Army has finally realized that we must treat the whole Soldier,” Wesch said.

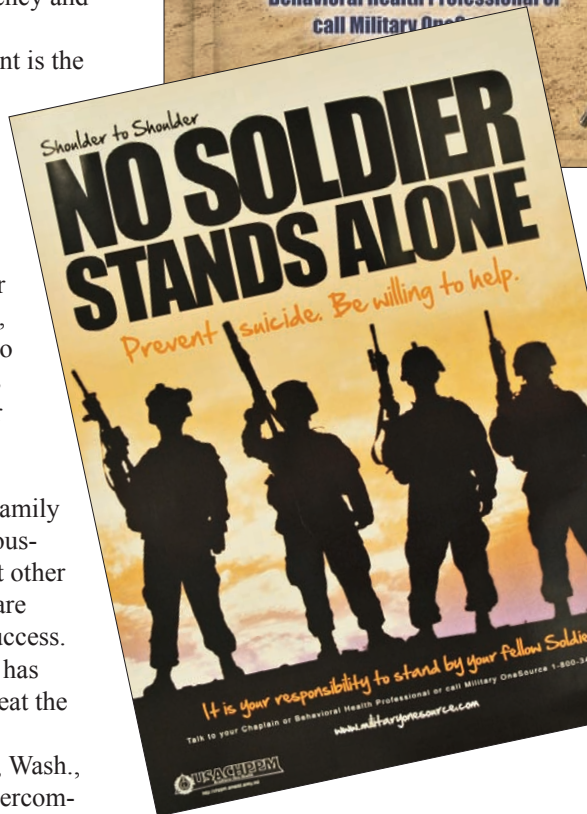
Most recently, Fort Lewis, Wash., opened FOCUS – Families Overcoming Under Stress, a program that aims to enhance the psychological health and resiliency of highly stressed children and families facing multiple deployments.

To take care of the Army’s most precious resource – its Soldiers – the entire community needs to be taken care of, Rabena said: “All of those tenants are built in to Comprehensive Soldier Fitness, and you can’t have strong, resilient Soldiers without any one of those components. They’re paramount, and at the end of the day, they not only keep our Soldiers mentally strong, they keep them alive.” 

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Posters courtesy U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine



## HELP

### Military OneSource

1-800-342-9647

[www.militaryonesource.com](http://www.militaryonesource.com)

### Defense Center of Excellence Outreach Center

1-866-966-1020

[www.dcoe.health.mil](http://www.dcoe.health.mil)

### Army Suicide Prevention

[www.armyg1.army.mil/hr/suicide/default.asp](http://www.armyg1.army.mil/hr/suicide/default.asp)

## COMING NEXT ISSUE

### Family, Community Resiliency

Several programs focus not only on the warriors’ resiliency, but on that of Army families and communities.

In the next issue of the *NCO Journal*, writer/editor Cindy Ramirez takes a closer look at family, community and provider care programs, including:

- **The Fort Hood Resiliency Campus**, a one-stop shop for resiliency programs that mirror the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness goals for Soldiers and families
- **The Fort Hood Behavioral Health Campaign**, a plan aimed at aiding community members heal in the aftermath of the Nov. 5, 2009, shooting spree that left 13 dead and dozens more injured
- **The Fort Sam Houston Warrior and Family Support Center**, a donation-run facility where wounded warriors and their families find solace

# Developmental Counseling

**A** crucial component of effective leadership, developmental counseling is the most direct way NCOs can stimulate growth and improvement in Soldiers under their care. Through a collaborative effort, Soldiers can discover what they are doing right, what they are doing wrong and the areas they should focus for continued advancement.

While counseling is viewed by some as only a negative consequence, its intended purpose is to provide a constructive, two-way consultation regarding a Soldier's past performance and his or her potential for growth.

According to FM 6-22, *Army Leadership*, counseling should be a positive and continuous process that is focused not only on today's problem or issue, but also looks ahead to finding solutions and devising plans for a Soldier's professional development. Yet, without active participation from and dialogue with the subordinate, counseling becomes a one-way lecture that produces limited results.

Army counseling focuses on a particular event, one's performance or one's professional growth. Event-based counseling can result from an instance of superior or substandard performance, a crisis, reception into a unit or one's departure. Performance-based counseling is centered on reviewing past accomplishments and establishing future objectives. The purpose of professional growth counseling is to assist a subordinate in achieving organizational and individual goals.

For leaders to be successful counselors, they must view the counseling process as a shared endeavor that honors the roles, functions and limitations of both the counselor and the subor-



Sgt. Christopher Bucci counsels Sgt. Joseph Biggs during a role-playing exercise at the Fort Bliss NCO Academy in February.

dinate. Likewise, subordinates must be committed to improving themselves and be candid in their assessments. Five key characteristics for effective counselors to keep in mind:

**PURPOSE:** The reason for a counseling session must be well-defined up front. Leaders should not confuse a subordinate's issues with their own. Approach the process in an objective manner.

**FLEXIBILITY:** A counselor should tailor his or her approach to the needs of the subordinate and the relationship that needs to develop. A generic or one-

size-fits-all method will not work well.

**RESPECT:** Similarly, it is important to remember that subordinates are unique, complex individuals, each with a distinct set of values, beliefs and attitudes. These must all be taken into account for a counseling conversation to be productive.

**COMMUNICATION:** Ultimately, the goal of counseling is to establish open, two-way communication using spoken language, non-verbal actions, gestures and body language. Sometimes, a leader's non-verbal actions alone may be enough to convince a subordinate of support in a particular matter.

**SUPPORT:** Actions do speak louder than words. A leader's supportive measures during and after a session will help guide a Soldier through his or her issue.

Most important to remember is that counseling is a continual process, directed as much toward identifying and cultivating the potential within a counselee as it is toward reviewing performance. With the proper approach, it can be a powerful tool to achieve the leader's perennial goal of developing subordinates to one day fill the leader's shoes.



## How to counsel: The 4-stage process

### 1 IDENTIFY THE NEED

Counseling is appropriate any time the need arises for a **focused, two-way communication** aimed at Soldier development. However, it may also be a requirement if the command deems it necessary.

### 2 PREPARE

Select a suitable **place and time** that will be free of distractions. **Notify the Soldier** well in advance to allow him or her to adequately prepare. **Organize and review** all pertinent information, and **plan** how you will conduct the counseling session.

### 3 CONDUCT

**Open the session** by explaining its purpose. **Discuss the issues** at hand, allowing the Soldier to do most of the talking. **Practice the counseling skills** noted in the box at right while attempting to build in the Soldier **an understanding** of the issue, its impact and opportunities for improvement. Together, develop a **plan of action** to achieve the desired results. Finally, **close and record the session**, summarizing its key points on DA Form 4856.

### 4 FOLLOW UP

The counseling process shouldn't end with the counseling session. Continue to support the Soldier via **teaching, mentoring** or by scheduling **additional sessions**.

## EFFECTIVE COUNSELING SKILLS

*To counsel effectively, NCOs must employ techniques that match the situation, their own capabilities and the expectations of their subordinate. As a counselor, you must consistently develop and improve your own counseling abilities by studying human behavior, learning the kinds of problems that affect your followers and developing your interpersonal skills.*

### What to do:

- ✓ **Eye contact:** Maintaining eye contact without staring helps show sincere interest. Occasional breaks are normal and acceptable; but, paper shuffling or clock-watching may display a lack of interest or concern.
- ✓ **Body posture:** A relaxed and comfortable posture helps put the individual at ease. However, a too-relaxed position implies a lack of interest.
- ✓ **Head nods:** Occasional head nodding indicates you are paying attention and encourages the individual to continue or elaborate.
- ✓ **Facial expressions:** Natural and relaxed expressions can put the Soldier at ease and enable him or her to speak in greater detail.
- ✓ **Verbal expressions:** Let the Soldier do the talking, while keeping the discussion on the subject at hand.

- ✓ **Non-verbal cues:** By watching an individual's actions, you can identify the emotions behind his or her words. Drumming on the table may indicate boredom; standing tall indicates self-confidence; making sarcastic comments indicates defensiveness.
- ✓ **Questioning:** Use this skill carefully. Too many questions can make a Soldier passive or defensive. Ask questions to obtain information or to get the Soldier to think deeper.

### What not to do:

- ✗ **Dominate the conversation:** Talking too much and constantly interrupting indicates that you aren't actively listening and are uninterested in what the counselee has to say.
- ✗ **Make rash judgments:** Avoid stereotypes and prejudices; draw conclusions that are based on more factors than the subordinate's statement.
- ✗ **Lose emotional control:** Remain objective. Try to understand what the subordinate is saying and feeling while displaying empathy.
- ✗ **Ignore your limitations:** Army leaders cannot help everyone in every situation. Recognize your personal limitations and refer the Soldier to other resources when required.



# NCO Stories

*A selection of Valor*



## First Lieutenant Robert L. Howard

### *Citation to award the Medal of Honor*

*For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. 1st Lt. Howard (then sergeant first class), distinguished himself while serving as platoon sergeant of an American-Vietnamese platoon which was on a mission to rescue a missing American Soldier in enemy controlled territory in the Republic of Vietnam. The platoon had left its helicopter landing zone and was moving out on its mission when it was attacked by an estimated two-company force. During the initial engagement, 1st Lt. Howard was wounded and his weapon destroyed by a grenade explosion. 1st Lt. Howard saw his platoon leader had been wounded seriously and was exposed to fire. Although unable to walk, and weaponless, 1st Lt. Howard unhesitatingly crawled through a hail of fire to retrieve his wounded leader. As 1st Lt. Howard was administering first aid and removing the officer's equipment, an enemy bullet struck one of the ammunition pouches on the lieutenant's belt, detonating several magazines of ammunition. 1st Lt. Howard momentarily sought cover and then realizing that he must rejoin the platoon, which had been disorganized by the enemy attack, he again began dragging the seriously wounded officer toward the platoon area. Through his outstanding example of indomitable courage and bravery, 1st Lt. Howard was able to rally the platoon into an organized defense force. With complete disregard for his safety, 1st Lt. Howard crawled from position to position, administering first aid to the wounded, giving encouragement to the defenders and directing their fire on the encircling enemy. For 3 1/2 hours 1st Lt. Howard's small force and supporting aircraft successfully repulsed enemy attacks and finally were in sufficient control to permit the landing of rescue helicopters. 1st Lt. Howard personally supervised the loading of his men and did not leave the bullet-swept landing zone until all were aboard safely. 1st Lt. Howard's gallantry in action, his complete devotion to the welfare of his men at the risk of his life were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit on himself, his unit, and the U.S. Army.*



# A true American hero

By **Spc. Samuel J. Phillips**

In the last days of 2009, the United States lost one of its true heroes, though many might not even know his name.

Robert Lewis Howard was born on July 11, 1939, in Opelika, Ala. He enlisted in the Army in 1956 at the age of 17 and joined the 101st Airborne Division, following in the footsteps of his father and four uncles who served as paratroopers during World War II.

During Howard's first tour of duty in Vietnam in 1965, he was wounded by a ricochet bullet that struck him in the face. In the hospital while recovering from his wound, he was recruited by a special forces Soldier to join the Green Berets. Little did he know that this would lead him down the path to becoming an American hero.

Howard served four more tours in Vietnam and became one of the most decorated Soldiers in U.S. history, and the only Soldier in the nation's history to be nominated for the Medal of Honor three times for three separate actions that took place between 1967 and 1968.

Howard's first nomination was for his actions on Nov. 16, 1967, when he led a covert platoon-sized element on a mission in southeastern Laos. While the main body of the force was destroying an enemy cache, Howard's team engaged a small enemy force and was then pinned down by heavy machine gun fire. After eliminating an enemy sniper, Howard charged and destroyed the two machine gun positions under a hail of enemy fire.

His next nomination for the Medal of Honor came from his actions on Nov. 19, 1968, while on another mission in Laos. The force that Howard was accompanying was ambushed by enemy troops, including a Soviet-built PT-76 tank. Ignoring the intense enemy fire, Howard was able to bear down on and take out the PT-76 with an anti-tank rocket. Howard also braved enemy fire to save two pilots and a door gunner when a medevac helicopter was shot down. The next morning he was able to silence a 37 mm anti-aircraft gun, allowing his unit to be evacuated.

Both awards were downgraded to the Distinguished Service Cross, the nation's second highest award. In 1969, Howard received a direct appointment from master sergeant to first lieutenant, and in 1971 finally received a citation for the Medal of Honor by President Richard M. Nixon for his actions on Dec. 30, 1968, during a rescue mission. Then a sergeant first class acting

as a platoon sergeant for an American-Vietnamese force, Howard proved himself once again through gallantry in action and complete devotion to the welfare of his men at the risk of his own life.

At the onset of the mission, Howard's platoon was engaged by an estimated two-company enemy force, and a grenade blast wounded him and destroyed his weapon. Unable to walk and

weaponless, Howard unhesitatingly crawled to the aid of his platoon leader who was seriously wounded and exposed to enemy fire.

After dragging the wounded officer through a hail of fire to safety, Howard continued crawling from position to position, rendering aid to the wounded, encouragement to his men and directing their fire on the enemy encircling them. Howard's actions led to his force successfully repulsing the enemy attacks enough for rescue helicopters to land, then he personally ensured that all of his men had been loaded before he left the battlefield.

Throughout Howard's 36-year Army career, he was wounded 14 times and received eight Purple Hearts. Among his other awards are the Silver Star, the Defense Superior Service Medal, multiple Legions of Merit, multiple Bronze Stars, and two Meritorious Service Medals, to name a few.

Howard retired as a full colonel on Sept. 29, 1992, and took up residence in San Antonio, Texas. He worked at the Department of Veterans Affairs as a liai-

son to other veterans, frequently making trips to battle zones such as Iraq and Afghanistan to share his experiences with Soldiers. He was also the president of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society from 2007 to 2009.

Pancreatic cancer took Howard's life at the age of 70 on Dec. 23, 2009, doing what no enemy force could. Despite Howard's passing, his story will live on and can be found in John L. Plaster's book, *SOG: The Secret Wars of America's Commandos in Vietnam*.

Texas Gov. Rick Perry issued a statement on the day of Howard's death in which he said Howard "was the bravest soldier I ever met. His unshakeable commitment to freedom, displayed in countless episodes of battlefield gallantry, lives on in the actions of our military men and women who continue to serve in hostile conditions overseas."

**SJ**



**Robert L. Howard**

# Four NCOs honored for bravery

By Tiffany Nabors  
The Bayonet

Four former 503rd Infantry Regiment Soldiers were honored for their bravery in combat at the Benning Conference Center in Fort Benning, Ga., Dec. 18, 2009.

Staff Sgt. Justin Grimm received the Silver Star for gallantry, Staff Sgt. Clifton Anderson and Sgt. Michael Lawrence received the Bronze Star with V device, and Staff Sgt. Zachari Rushing received the Army Commendation Medal with V device.

Before pinning the medals, Maj. Gen. Michael Ferriter, Fort Benning commander, talked about how these Soldiers never wavered during their 15-month deployment in Afghanistan's Hindu Kush Mountains near the Pakistan border.

"You find the fight and you don't give up an inch, that kind of endurance and courage only comes through training and discipline that starts long before the fight. That's the kind of dedication to duty that we see in our great NCOs," Ferriter said.

Col. William Ostlund, the 75th Ranger Regiment's deputy commander, led the 2nd Battalion (Airborne), 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team during the deployment. He said Grimm, Anderson and Lawrence, all part of the 503rd's 2nd Battalion, performed with valor through one hostile engagement after another, including what has become known as the Battle of Wanat, in during which nine American Soldiers were killed and 27 were wounded.

"(They) had a simple task — to deploy with honor and redeploy with honor. They did so like no others," Ostlund said of the 2nd Battalion, which earned three Medal of Honor nominations, one Distinguished Service Cross, 27 Silver Stars, 93 Bronze Stars and more than 300 Commendation Medals.

While deployed with the 2nd Battalion's C Company, Grimm's team was attacked by approximately 200 insurgents at Vehicle Patrol Base Wanat on July 13, 2008.

According to the Silver Star citation, Grimm ran forward to prevent the enemy from overrunning the outpost. He manned a squad automatic weapon to suppress the enemy and bring relief to the beleaguered defenders. Many times, he left his covered position to render first aid to wounded Soldiers and help move them to safety. Despite heavy enemy fire around his position, he refused to abandon his post, detonating a mine and lobbing grenades into the enemy ranks, thwarting their advance and forcing them to retreat. Grimm acted with complete disregard for his own personal safety, leaving his defensive position to emplace a claymore mine and deny the enemy a critical avenue of approach.

He said the biggest honor was being in the company of those who fought the Battle of Wanat.

"I would say the greater honor was being able to be out there with chosen company," said Grimm, who is currently with the



Photo by Tiffany Nabors

Four Soldiers who served with the 503rd Infantry Regiment in Afghanistan are honored for their bravery.

198th Infantry Brigade.

Anderson and Lawrence led the defense of Seray Vehicle Patrol Base in Chowkay Valley June 23, 2008, during multiple enemy attacks.

According to Anderson's citation, his tactical acumen enabled his team to lay effective suppressive fire on concealed enemy positions, causing the enemy to break contact and preventing friendly casualties. Disregarding his own safety, he sprinted across open terrain through enemy fire on multiple occasions to coordinate his element's return fires.

Anderson, now an instructor with 6th Ranger Training Battalion, said the award is significant because the team didn't allow the shortage of manpower to prevent a proficient reaction.

"We handled that situation pretty well," Anderson said. "I'm glad that our events there got acknowledged."

According to Lawrence's citation, he sprinted across open terrain through enemy fire to coordinate the indirect fires, which ultimately stymied the final and most concerted attack on the vehicle patrol base.

Lawrence, now with Headquarters Company, 197th Infantry Brigade, said recognized the cumulative effort.

"It's due to the platoon that was out there fighting alongside one another that we had little to no casualties. They deserve it just as much as I do," he said.

Rushing earned his commendation while serving with the 503rd's 1st Battalion. According to his citation, following a catastrophic improvised explosive device strike in Charbaran District, the senior line medic's leadership and decision-making were instrumental in saving the lives of three of his fellow Soldiers.

"I'm thankful we saved some lives," said Rushing, now with 6th Ranger Training Battalion.

The Soldiers are now serving in training units at Fort Benning, where their knowledge will inspire the Army's newest combatants, Ferriter said.





# NCO earns Soldier's Medal

By Sgt. Linsey Branford  
Multi-National Corps-Iraq Public Affairs

After an improvised explosive device ripped through his vehicle in Baghdad, Staff Sgt. James Rivera needed medical attention, and he needed it quick. It was 1st Sgt. Joshua Pentz who saved his life that day in Afghanistan in 2004 by using his combat lifesaver skills and calling for a medevac. Nearly five years later, Rivera was the one saving the life of another – an action that earned him the Soldier's Medal Dec. 22, 2009.

In the first 12 hours after arriving to Baghdad's Victory Base Complex in May 2009, Rivera and his friend noticed a vehicle veering toward a lake.

"I kept telling my buddy, 'it looks like he's going to go in the water' and then he did," said Rivera, a Woodberry Heights, N.J., native serving as the VBC convoy support team noncommissioned officer with the 81st Quartermaster Company, 593rd Sustainment Brigade, from Fort Lewis, Wash.

Rivera immediately dove in after the sinking vehicle, disregarding his own safety. He was able to drag the driver out of a window of the submerged vehicle and get him to safety until a medical team arrived.

"Staff Sgt. Rivera saved (the driver's) life at great risk to his own. That is exactly what we expect of our noncommissioned officers, placing someone above himself," said Lt. Gen. Charles H. Jacoby, Jr., commanding general of Multi-National Corps-Iraq.

Before pinning on the medal, Jacoby took a moment to tell the story of the Soldier's Medal, awarded to any person of the Armed Forces of the United States or of a friendly foreign nation who, while serving in any capacity with the U.S. Army, distinguished himself or herself by heroism not involving actual conflict with an enemy.

"This really is an honor," Jacoby said, as he prepared to place the medal on Rivera's lapel.

Rivera joined the Army in February 2002, after serving as a

life support technician in the Air National Guard.

"I always wanted to be a Soldier. At first, I joined the Air Force for the education, but I just really wanted to be in the fight," he said.

He had his chance when he deployed to Afghanistan with the 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade, 25th Infantry Division (Light) in 2004. It was there that he provided support to safeguard coalition forces and destroyed the enemy during a

conflict on Aug. 12, 2004. He was awarded a Bronze Star Medal for Valor. Rivera, serving as a machine gunner, was struck by an IED that caused severe shrapnel wounds to his face and leg; he received a Purple Heart.

Pentz, the first sergeant who saved his life after the blast, will always be one of his heroes, he said.

"He's one of the first NCOs I ever looked up to. He taught me everything I know, and he represents everything the Army stands for," Rivera said.

Taking a cue from Pentz, Rivera strives to provide his junior Soldiers with the same knowledge and mentorship he received.

"As an NCO, you have to care not just about Soldiers, but also about how you look and how you carry yourself," he said. "I always tell my guys to do their best no matter what. If you can't be trusted to do the small things, how can they trust you to do anything else?"

In 2005, the 25th Infantry Division (Light) recognized Rivera's achievements during Operation Enduring Freedom and selected him to be the statue model for a memorial honoring the fallen at Schofield Barracks in Hawaii.

Rivera's likeness represents a modern-day Global War on Terrorism Soldier, and in the memorial, is standing and paying homage and final honors to a fallen comrade at

the site of a Soldier's cross.

"They call me a hero, but I'm a patriot. The true heroes are the ones who did not make it back home," Rivera said.



Photo by Master Sgt. Mark Woelzlein

Lt. Gen. Charles H. Jacoby, Jr. (left), commanding general of Multi-National Force-Iraq, awards Staff Sgt. James Rivera the Soldier's Medal Dec. 22, 2009, at Camp Victory's Al Faw Palace in Baghdad, Iraq.



Photo courtesy 25th Infantry Division

Staff Sgt. James Rivera served as the model for the modern-day Global War on Terrorism Soldier (in bronze) seen in the memorial statue at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.

# Roll call

o f t h e f a l l e n

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## Operation Iraqi Freedom

*Pfc. Scott G. Barnett, 24, Concord, Calif., Jan. 28, 2010*



*Pfc. Gifford E. Hurt, 19, Yonkers, N.Y., Jan. 20, 2010*

## Operation Enduring Freedom

*Staff Sgt. Rusty H. Christian, 24, Greenville, Tenn., Jan. 28, 2010 ◆ Spc. Marc P. Decoteau, 19, Waterville Valley, N.H., Jan. 29, 2010*  
*Sgt. Dillon B. Fox, 22, Traverse City, Mich., Feb. 5, 2010 ◆ Sgt. Carlos E. Gill, 25, Fayetteville, N.C., Jan. 26, 2010*  
*Sgt. 1st Class David J. Hartman, 27, Okinawa, Japan, Feb. 3, 2010 ◆ Capt. Paul Pena, 27, San Marcos, Texas, Jan. 19, 2010*  
*◆ Sgt. 1st Class Michael P. Shannon, 52, Canadensis, Pa., Jan. 17, 2010 ◆*  
*Sgt. 1st Class Matthew S. Sluss-Tiller, 35, Calllettsburg, Ky., Feb. 3, 2010 ◆ Staff Sgt. Mark A. Stets, 39, El Cajon, Calif., Feb. 3, 2010*  
*Capt. David J. Thompson, 39, Hooker, Okla., Jan. 29, 2010 ◆ Capt. Daniel Whitten, 28, Grimes, Iowa, Feb. 2, 2010*

*You are not forgotten*

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*Editors note: This is a continuation of a list that was started in the October 2003 issue of the NCO Journal and contains those names released by the Department of Defense between Jan. 21 and Feb. 10, 2010.*

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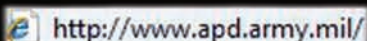


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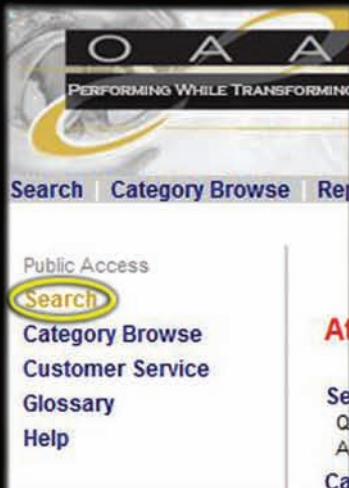
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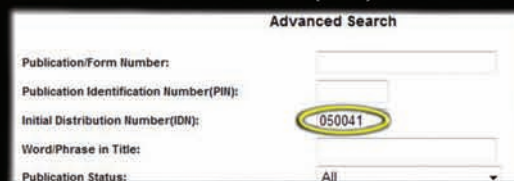
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