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December 31, 2009

Symposium empowers female Soldiers

By Sgt. Mark Miranda
4th Brigade, 1st Armored Division 

COB ADDER – Soldiers of the 121st Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Bde., 1st Armored Division, held a women’s symposium Dec. 20 and 21 at Memorial Hall on Contingency Operating Base Adder.

This year’s theme was “Sustaining Women for a Successful Deployment” and began with a five kilometer “Take Back the Night” walk.

As the sun set, Sgt. 1st Class Charmerley Rogers, unit victim advocate for 121st BSB, began the walk with the battle cry “We run the day!” to which the participants shouted “We own the night!”

The evening walk rallied service members from throughout COB Adder in an effort to raise awareness of sexual assault as a military-wide problem that must be dealt with at all levels.

“You need to know that you can be a victim, whether male or female,” said Lt. Col. Angela Steward-Randle, a sexual assault response coordinator deployed with 34th Infantry Division and guest speaker at the 5K walk.

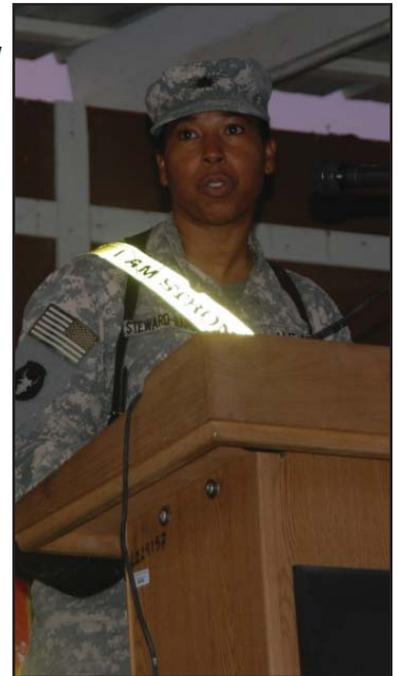
“Five males reported being sexually assaulted in Iraq in the past year,” she said. “We all need to be able to protect each other.”

Prior to deploying to Iraq, the unit conducted a similar conference at Fort Bliss, Texas. Female Soldiers in leadership positions were invited to speak on topics ranging from finance to health to military families.

This year, key leaders were invited to speak on matters relevant to female Soldiers. Senior mentors invited to conduct workshops were Lt. Col. Maurene

“Events like this help the NCO [senior enlisted] and enlisted relationship. It makes it easier for junior Soldiers to understand that they can talk to us. There’s a support base there.”

Sgt. 1st Class Charmerley Rogers, Unit Victim Advocate, 121st BSB



Photos by Sgt. Mark Miranda

Senior mentor Lt. Col. Angela Steward-Randle, a sexual response coordinator with 34th Infantry Division speaks before the “Take Back the Night” 5-K walk.



Brig. Gen. Heidi Brown, Deputy Commanding General for Sustainment, Multi-National Corps-Iraq and keynote speaker for the Women Symposium presents a certificate of recognition to Spc. Ashley Stapleton, a combat medic from Morristown, Tenn.



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Hundreds of participants take to the roads on Contingency Operating Base Adder in support of “Take Back the Night,” a five-kilometer walk in support of efforts to combat sexual assault and the opening event of the 2009 Women Symposium Dec. 20-21, organized by 121st Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Brigade, 1st Armored Division.

Courses equip Soldiers with key commercial concepts

By Spc. Samuel Soza
367th MPAD



COB BASRA – As Soldiers with the 34th Infantry Division prepare to head home from Iraq, some will return to relatively unchanged lives while others will have to cope with changes at work and even job loss.

Courses being held on Contingency Operating Base Basra, Dec. 30 to Jan. 7, seek to aid Soldiers who may face these sorts of changes.

“We’re doing a series of resume writing classes and interviewing classes,” said Staff Sgt. Adam Hoffman, database manager in the Key Leader Engagement cell of the 34th Inf. Div. tactical command post.

The courses also offer Soldiers information on taking advantage of education benefits, said the Avon, Minn. native. One course will help Soldiers with job seeking techniques.

The courses take place in the Sandstorm Conference Room in COB Basra’s Division Main building from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m.

“It’ll definitely be a good outreach to troops,” said Hoffman.

Subject matter experts will teach the classes, like other courses that have been offered intermittently since September.

One instructor is Sgt. 1st Class Aaron Meyers, a recruiter with the Recruiting and Retention Battalion, who teaches the course on interviewing skills

As a recruiter, he conducts many interviews when searching for new recruits.



Photo by Spc. Samuel Soza
Sgt. 1st Class Andrew Peterson from St. Paul, Minn., operations noncommissioned officer in charge with the 34th Inf. Div. Tactical Command Post, answers why he should be the next vice president during a mock interview.

During his class, he told Soldiers that unemployment in Minnesota is currently about ten percent, and of those, fourteen percent are veterans, which he said is “unacceptable”.

He went on to say that military skills give Soldiers something significant to offer potential employers.

One thing he noted was the “trial by fire” – or high stress setting – Soldiers operate in and will return from.

“Not a lot of people have been in this deployed environment,” he said.

He cited adherence to Army values as something employers find admirable and that, for leaders, evaluation reports have much to offer.

“They use a lot of buzzwords and action words. Those work great in interviews,” he said.

In an early class, Meyers asked a

Soldier to pretend he was trying to get the Ultimate Fighting Championship shown on an imaginary network the other classmates owned.

It was a subject he was well-versed in and the other attendees said he was effective.

Next, Meyers asked the same Soldier to promote “Girls Behaving Badly”, a reality comedy show on the female-focused Oxygen network, on his classmates’ network.

This was a subject he was not as informed about, and the students examined the difference between the two presentations.

Meyers stressed the importance of preparation on a subject beforehand.

Also, Meyers highlighted the value of mock interviews and conducted one during class.

Soldiers can schedule to conduct such practice interviews during the series.

Hoffman said he thinks that the theory and practical exercises presented by Meyers and other instructors will greatly benefit Soldiers.

“I think it’s definitely a positive experience,” Hoffman said, “It’s a small-level class at a basic learning level, definitely a good thing to come out and learn a little more. If you need any information its right here at your fingertips, versus when you go back to the states, you might not know who to talk to.”

For more of Spc. Soza’s stories, visit:
www.TheRedBulls.org/Soza

THE RED BULL REPORT

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A working relationship

By Sgt. Neil Gussman
Task Force Diablo



COB ADDER – Words will never serve as well to tell the story of any couple, of what makes them work, as a few moments of them together.

Staff Sgt. Mike and Sgt. 1st Class Melanie McCracken never use the words “best friend” or even “friend” to describe their marriage. Yet, it is difficult to miss what those words fail to define.

For most of the 2009 deployment of Task Force Diablo, Melanie was the maintenance platoon sergeant for “D” Company, 2nd Regiment, 104th General Support Aviation Battalion.

Mike is the sergeant in charge of quality control for the same company. Their offices are 30 feet apart in a row of containers outside the maintenance hangar she supervised from May to October.

On a 120-degree afternoon on Tallil Ali Air Base, the two sat together in her office. The small space was cluttered with a half-dozen foam-filled cases housing sensitive, calibrated test equipment.

The tagged and color-coded wires and instruments were in the wrong spaces, some even the wrong cases.

“The mechanics use them then put them back screwed up. Then I have to unscrew them up,” said Melanie. “Sometimes I go and unscrew the mechanic.”

Mike and Melanie are helicopter maintenance professionals. Sloppy work habits drive them crazy. While they put away the equipment, they made jokes



Sgt. 1st Class Melanie McCracken, “D” Co., 2nd Regt., 104th General Support Aviation Bn.

about who last used the instruments and if there was any hope that the Soldier would ever develop good work habits.

Like any two other sergeants, the McCrackens live in a two-person room in a Containerized Housing Unit (CHU). The big difference in the McCracken CHU is the set of single beds pushed together in the middle of the room.

Other than that, they each have a beige metal locker and matching end table. They work together from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. and eat dinner together in the chow hall. They go back to the CHU, tramp over gravel to their respective shower trailers, and spend the evening together watching TV and going online. They have one computer they pass back and forth in the bed for e-mail and Skype.

The McCrackens, from **Jonestown, Pa.**, both have full-time technician jobs. Their two children are staying with Melanie’s older sister, Valery Fuhrman, on her farm in Iowa.

This is their second deployment together. In 2004, the couple went to Afghanistan. Valery also cared for Anthony and Emalee during that deployment.

“They like being on Valery’s farm,” Melanie said. “But my daughter is having some trouble with this deployment.”

Melanie struggles with whether she and Mike have made the right choice, but is resolute about their reasons.

“I decided I want to be there if something happens to Mike and he feels the same way,” she said.

Ask other deployed Soldiers, and many say, they would like to have their spouse in country; however, those same soldiers cannot imagine sharing a 180-square-foot space with their spouse, especially if they have to see their spouse all day at work.

“It works for us,” Melanie said. “We



Photos by Sgt. Neil Gussman

Staff Sgt. Mike McCracken, “D” Co., 2nd Regt., 104th General Support Aviation Bn.

are more fortunate than most Soldiers. During both deployments we had each other.”

Can lovers be friends? CS Lewis in his book “The Four Loves” wrote, “Shared activity is the soil in which friendship grows. When there is no shared activity, there can be no real friendship.”

In some circles, it is almost required for a couple to say they are best friends, even when they spend almost no time together, share no interests and disagree on money, kids, jobs, and in-laws.

Mike said their relationship is “nothing special.” Melanie agreed, saying she and Mike are just an ordinary couple.

If the definition of ordinary includes working together in heat and sandstorms in an open-ended hangar on combat aircraft, leading troops in months of combat training, carrying an assault rifle to every meal and living in a 180-square-foot space together while their kids and home are 7,000 miles and eight time zones away, then yes the McCrackens are just like everybody else.

For more of Sgt. Gussman’s stories, visit:
www.TheRedBulls.org/Gussman

HOMETOWN HIGHLIGHT

Jonestown was laid out as a town in 1761 and incorporated as a borough on August 20, 1870 from Swatara Township.

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SYMPOSIUM

Schafer, 28th Combat Support Hospital nurse practitioner, on the topic of sexually transmitted diseases, and Steward-Randle, who held a workshop on sexual harassment and sexual assault. Air Force Maj. Rosanne Visco, psychiatric nurse, held a group workshop on combat stress, and Chief Warrant Officer Chris Velez, 4th Bde., 1st Armd. Div. aviation tactical operations officer, held sessions on career progression.

To break the ice before breaking down into the female warrior sustainment workshops, Soldiers from 121st BSB performed the skit, "On the Air with the 'CHARM' Talk Show," where female Soldiers played roles of individuals who've faced such difficulties as contracting sexually transmitted disease, combat stress, and sexual assault. Both funny and somber, the skit set the tone for the day's proceedings.

"To see Soldiers take something away from this is the most rewarding aspect of putting an event like this together," said Sgt. 1st Class Charmerley Rogers, one of the program coordinators and host of the talk show.

"This is my baby in a way, and we can proudly say that we haven't had a case of sexual assault in the battalion in eight months," she said. "We check on our female warriors out at the outlying areas like [Contingency Operating Stations] Hunter and Garryowen as often as we can."

"Events like this help the NCO [senior enlisted] and enlisted relationship," Rogers said. "It makes it easier for junior Soldiers to understand that they can talk to us. There's a support base there."

Keynote speaker Brig. Gen. Heidi V. Brown, deputy commanding general for sustainment, Multi-National Corps Iraq, was on hand at the sym-

posium grand finale to speak to all the participants about empowerment.

"Going to West Point was about dealing with a hostile environment at the time; it helped me become a better combat arms officer," said Brown on becoming an air defense artillery officer, and the highest ranking female officer in that branch.

"While people are telling you it's never been done before, why should that stop you? Let your character and competence speak for itself," Brown said. "There's only a glass ceiling if you believe there's one. Boundaries are self-created."

"I learned not to compare myself to others," she said. "You're focused on the wrong things when you're doing that."

For more of Sgt. Miranda stories, visit: www.TheRedBulls.org/Miranda

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Around the world in 34 seconds



SEOUL - North Korea has been taking equipment left at a nuclear reactor site that was mothballed when an international consortium halted work on grounds the communist state was breaking an agreement, a news report said on Wednesday. If the report is true, the looting would be in defiance of a deal the North reached in the 1990s with regional powers and could cloud a recent push to restart international disarmament-for-aid discussions. Billions of dollars were poured into the project to build two relatively proliferation-resistant light water reactors for the North in return for a promise to freeze its nuclear plant that produces arms-grade plutonium. The deal was halted in 2002 with a third of the work finished.



CLEARWATER, Fla. - An 11-year-old Florida girl and her 15-year-old boyfriend are accused of plotting to kill the girl's mother by setting her bedroom on fire while the woman slept Tuesday, police said. Samantha Broadhead and Jack Ault have been charged with attempted murder and arson after the fire in Clearwater, about 20 miles west of Tampa on Florida's Gulf Coast. Clearwater Police Department detectives say the young couple poured gasoline on Nancy Broadhead's bedroom floor and bed, and then set the room aflame. Police say the pair escaped in the mother's 2007 Ford Focus. It was unclear if either suspect had an attorney. The girl's mother was awakened by a smoke alarm and managed to escape. Authorities say Nancy Broadhead, 47, sustained serious burns and smoke inhalation. Her injuries were not considered life threatening. Samantha Broadhead later returned to the scene and agreed to go to police headquarters for questioning. Jack Ault was located at a friend's house and taken into custody.



LOS ANGELES - Kobe Bryant made 16 free throws without a miss despite a broken finger on his shooting hand. He played nearly 43 minutes against the run-and-gun Warriors in his fourth game in five nights. And in a feat of strength to match those marvels of skill and endurance, he put the Los Angeles Lakers on his back and carried them past Golden State. Bryant had a season-high 44 points and 11 assists amid perfection from the foul line, and Los Angeles survived Golden State's 55-percent shooting for a 124-118 victory Tuesday night. "By his effort alone, I think we owe this game to him in the win column," said Phil Jackson, who gave in to Bryant's request to get back in the game even when his exhaustion was obvious.



RENTON, Wash. - A Tacoma man called 911 to report the truck he had just stolen had run out of gas. But not only was he arrested, he learned not all vehicles run on the same type of fuel. The Washington State Patrol says at about 12:30 p.m. Monday, a City Transfer employee headed south on State Route 167 spotted the silver 1985 Chevy truck that was stolen from their yard earlier that day. Someone was seen in the truck as it sat, disabled, on the shoulder in Renton. Minutes later, and before troopers arrived, the suspect called 911 to report the vehicle had run out of gas. When troopers got there, they say the suspect tried to disguise himself as a City Transfer worker by wearing a fluorescent green reflector vest he found in the truck. A City transfer worker identified the suspect as the person who stole the truck. The suspect was arrested and booked into the King County Jail. As it turns out, the truck did not run out of gas. The suspect apparently didn't realize that the truck took diesel. He filled it up with unleaded instead and it became disabled.