

STRIKE NEWS

RESILIENCY - TO THE SOLDIER AND BEYOND

Pvt. Ashley E. Heckard

Restless nights, tossing and turning, depression, alcoholism and suicide are all symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. The Army wants to replace this with post-traumatic growth which builds character through adversity. The resiliency program continues to train all members of the Army community with the necessary skills to achieve such results.

During the weekend of Jan. 20-22, 2012, a course was held at the Armed Forces Reserve Center in Scranton, PA to train Soldiers to become Resilience Training Assistants. Over 60 people were present, including Soldiers and family readiness civilian contractors. The Soldier's were all from the 55th Brigade, but the family readiness leaders hailed from Pennsylvania and four surrounding states; Delaware, Maryland, New York and West Virginia. The large

draw was due to the fact that this was the first time this course was opened to civilians.



"Several years ago, the Army noticed certain trends", said Staff Sgt. Eric J. Darling, Master Resiliency Trainer for the 55th Heavy Brigade Combat Team. "Some of those trends involved suicide, broken marriages, disciplinary problems and many other situations that we don't want in the military community."

The University of Pennsylvania has been developing concepts to better the military for 13 years, ultimately developing the resiliency training. Scientific research of different study groups was the basis for the development.



On Nov. 2010, the 28th Division Commander, Maj Gen Randall R. Marchi, ordered the Pennsylvania National Guard to be trained in resiliency by the year 2013. The program has been in place nationally for nearly three years and drops in suicide rates are now starting to occur.

"We want to develop a common language between the Soldiers and their families", said Darling. "Resiliency is a new program within the Army, and it is changing the military community in a huge way."

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Strong minds add up to strong bodies. Strong bodies make strong Soldiers. Most aspects in the military career are all mind over matter.

Some enjoy simply being able to help their fellow Soldiers in such a big way.

"Coming to drill on the weekend and seeing how deployments are affecting my fellow Soldiers, my peers, my colleagues, and being able to have the opportunity to actually present the Soldiers on how to be resilient and the families to be resilient, was something I could not pass up", said Staff Sgt. Allison Stanco, Master Resiliency Trainer for the 55th Brigade Special Troops Battalion.

These different seminars and programs will be implemented and taught throughout the state of Pennsylvania, predominantly at Fort Indiantown Gap.

Michael Kacer, who is medically retired from the PA National Guard, was on a deployment to Afghanistan, when a rocket hit the building he was in causing major damage to his entire left side and loss of his arm. He now speaks at resiliency meetings to bring morale and to teach about his personal struggles and how resiliency has assisted in his coping mechanisms.

"Keep an open mind", said Kacer, "suffering something doesn't necessarily mean it's physical."

Stress still remains more prevalent than physical injury to both the war-fighter and their family back home. Over two million military-connected children in the United States have been separated from their mother or father because of a deployment. It is important that these resiliency themes reach down to all levels of the military family.

'Living in the New Normal', was the course presented by the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC), on February 11th, 2012 in Kingston, Pa. The course was open to military parents and deals with 7 key components in a child's life; Character, Contribution, Connections, Competence, Confidence, Coping and Control.

These classes are implemented by the Office of the Secretary of Defense and carried out by Linda Westphal and retired Army Col. Paul J. Callen, trainers for the MCEC.

"We were invited by the Pennsylvania National Guard", said Callen. "We have seven other trainings for Pennsylvania, including Allegheny, Clark Summit and State College. We mainly target areas that have upcoming deployments."

Books and informational material were provided as the history and background of the coalition were explained. The MCEC is a private non-profit organization that has been in

effect for over 14 years. 'It is grounded in research and provides parents, communities, educational and military leaders the tools they need to mitigate risks and amplify positive responses to a challenging military family environment.' (Mission statement)

In addition to training military parents, the MCEC offers training for educators who frequently work with military children. The group also offers the Bernard Brown Scholarship that allows 15 military children per year, a chance to spend a week at space camp in Huntsville, Alabama.

Kelly A. Boyer, wife of 1st Sgt Charles Boyer and treasurer of the Headquarters Battery, 109th Field Artillery Battalion Family Readiness Group, has three children and underwent two deployments. Acting as a single parent during each deployment, this course really hits home with the Boyer family.

"It (MCEC) focuses on the kids," said Boyer, "It gives great guidance and tips. The biggest part of a deployment is the disruption and having to start again. I believe that resiliency plays a big part in this program."

To learn more information about the Military Child Education Coalition you can visit www.MilitaryChild.org



Essential Life Skills for Military Families workshops are being scheduled for several locations throughout the 55th Heavy Brigade Combat Team. These workshops are designed to build strong, healthy and fulfilling relationships and are open to the public. To find out when the next one will be held you can ask your chain of command, family readiness group, or check the brigade Facebook page www.facebook.com/55hbct

A UNIT OF ACTION



Soldiers from the Tactical Unmanned Aerial Systems (TUAS) Platoon, A Company, 55 Brigade Special Troops Battalion, conducted new equipment training on the RQ-7B Shadow at Hagler Field, Camp Shelby, MS, throughout February and March.

The Shadow provides an extra 'eye in the sky' to help ground troops and commanders conduct their missions safely and effectively.

(Photos by: Col. George Schwartz)

PREPARING FAMILIES FOR DEPLOYMENT

Spec Leo Russo

More than 150 people gathered for a first-of-its-kind, Pre-Deployment Summit at the new Scranton Reserve Center. Family Readiness Group representatives from the 30 companies that make up the 55th Brigade, took part in a forum on January 7th, 2012, to help prepare military families for deployment.

Army leaders, as well as civilian volunteers, spoke about the difficulties within the deployment cycle. The members of the 55th brigade have already seen their plans change. Not long before this summit the scheduled January 2012 deployment got pushed back to late summer.

The re-scheduling of the deployment fit the afternoon's buzz word of resiliency. Resiliency refers to the ability to handle and overcome challenges. The Army has stepped up its efforts to make soldiers and their families more resilient in the face of the high tempo deployment pattern the Army has been in for a decade.

Dr. Kami Merrifield from Penn State University studies dynamics within the family life. She says, there are four essential skills military families need to work on before the soldier is shipped overseas.

"First you need to prepare for the unexpected", Merrifield explained. "Have an emergency fund ready for unexpected expenses, back up babysitters, things of that nature."

The next two skills, within the program, are soldiers and their families getting their legal and financial situations in order before the soldier deploys. The fourth skill is building family resiliency.



"In order to get through a deployment, families need to be resilient. Challenges will happen. Developing and practicing the four life skills will help families overcome them", said Merrifield.

The crowd also heard from the 55TH Brigade's commander, Col. George M. Schwartz. He echoed the resiliency theme, calling it an "invaluable tool for families."

Schwartz stressed that families need to stay connected through the deployment process. He said, these days, that's actually pretty easy.

"Most places we go have computers," said Schwartz, "Soldiers can stay in regular contact with their families through email and social media like Facebook and Twitter."

Along those lines, the 55th Brigade set up a Facebook page of its own. The primary goal of the page is to keep soldiers and families informed on happenings within the brigade. The page continues to list many workshop opportunities like this summit available for soldiers and families. You can find the page at www.facebook.com/55hbct.

ENGINEERS AWARDED MERITORIOUS UNIT

A National Guard Engineer Company, from Philadelphia, was awarded the Meritorious Unit Citation during a 1:00pm ceremony at Old Historic Fort Mifflin on March 11, 2012.

Charlie Company, 103rd Engineer Battalion was presented the award in recognition of their soldiers' actions during their Jan. 2005- Oct. 2005 combat tour in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. During their tour, the unit was part of Task Force Dragoon and their primary mission was clearing IEDs along military routes in Bayji Iraq.

The 103rd Engineer Battalion was reorganized over the past five years and the soldiers became part of 103rd Regional Support Group and Charlie Company 55th Special Troops Battalion. Both of the new units will attend the ceremony and the original members of Charlie Company 103rd Engineers will be recognized.

Charlie Company 103rd Engineer Battalion also deployed to Bosnia in 2003 and deployed to Afghanistan in 2008 after reorganizing into their current unit structure.



COMMANDER'S COLUMN



"For the times, they are a-changin"

Col. George Schwartz

As I thought about what to write for this edition of the newsletter, these old Bob Dylan lyrics came to mind. I know that I do not have to remind you of what a roller coaster ride this mobilization has been with all of the changes!

Since the initial notification of sourcing in March 2010, we have experienced four major changes. We started with a requirement for 2,375 Soldiers: in the fall of 2010, we added the requirement for 200 more Soldiers to go to Qatar six months ahead of the main body. In early 2011, we dropped the Qatar mission when the mission to Kuwait increased to more than 3,700.

So throughout 2011, we focused intensely on meeting and exceeding the new mission requirements, and at the end of a busy October, when every unit in the BCT conducted another Annual Training, we found out that we were delayed eight months. We were 99 days away from the first unit mobilizing when I made the announcement.

After struggling through the Tricare and DESP issues the delay created, we went to yet another mobilization coordination meeting this past January, only to find out there that the mission was going to be reduced to two battalions and two Military Advisory Teams (about 1,600 Soldiers total).

That is where we are now, but with six more months remaining, I know that everything could still change. As the saying goes: the only constant is change.

I am proud of the significant efforts we have made to strengthen Soldier and family resiliency. The accompanying articles describe some of our excellent efforts. I could not be more convinced of the value of resiliency and these programs.

During these crazy times, it is natural to feel anxious about these changes that will impact you, your job and your family. I admit that I feel uneasy sometimes too! Just remember that there are resources out there when you need help to cope with these abrupt changes and the anxiety it produces.

And never forget that "it is OK to say that you are not OK." Please confide in a battle buddy or a trusted leader when you recognize that stress is affecting how you function. It is an integral part of our Warrior Ethos that we will never leave a comrade behind.

55th HBCT Winners

Soldier of the Year

Pvt. 1st Class
Alexander Burger
A Battery, 1/109 Field Artillery

NCO of the Year

Staff Sgt. Walter Barnes
A Company, 1/109 Infantry

CSM JAY FIELD LEADERSHIP AWARD

Staff Sgt. Joshua Berwanger
B Company, 3/103 Armor

ASK A JOE

What does 'Resilience' mean to you?



Pvt. 1st Class

Najm

A Co 1-109 Infantry Battalion

"It helps me to overcome the obstacles in both my military life and civilian life."

109th Infantry Regiment hosts Inaugural Alumni Dinner

Pvt. Ashley E. Heckard

On Saturday, March 24, the 109th Infantry Regiment, hosted an Inaugural Alumni Dinner at Via Appia in Taylor, PA. Over 300 former, retired and current members of the battalion were in attendance.

The guests arrive through the double doors, the regiment's colors of blue and yellow are adorning the entrance. As everyone walks up the steps, the welcoming party is there to greet them.

The guests begin mingling. Some people that are in attendance most have not seen in years. An immediate air of camaraderie has taken place as smiles emerge on faces. Hugs and laughs are shared as stories are recanted.

When the ceremony begins, the distinguished guests are recognized

and honored, including the families of fallen soldiers.

"I believe this event was well-received and a huge success," said CSM John P. Murphy. "Hopefully it was good enough to continue for a 'next-time' and the event will be even bigger."

The evening featured several special ceremonies including the Colmar Sword Ceremony, which represents the capture of Colmar, France during WWII, as well as recognition for the fallen soldiers of the regiment.

Guest speaker, retired 1st Sgt Francis Ross, 95, a native of Carbondale, Pa. was the distinguished alumnus of the event. He served in WWII with the 70th Tank Battalion, one of the most decorated units of that war, under General Patton's III Army.

The Association meets at the Watres Armory, located at 900 Adams Avenue, Scranton.

"The association exists to organize the veterans of the 109th Infantry

Regiment, in order to encourage and perpetuate the memory of the officers and men who distinguished themselves by their services and sacrifices to this



nation; to perpetuate the memory of the achievements of the 109th Infantry and its members; to aid, comfort and support the current active members and their families; to promote the National Defense, American Patriotism and American citizenship; to acquire and preserve records of the services of the members of the 109th Infantry Regiment as well as documents and relics; to mark the scenes of the activities of the 109th Infantry Regiment with appropriate memorials; to maintain and extend the institution of American freedom; and at all times to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America." (Mission Statement)



Get your Unit and your Soldiers recognized!

UPARS

Unit Public Affairs
Representatives.

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BRIGADE RUNNING CLUB

A brigade running club, promoting PT and community involvement, will be starting in the next few weeks.

The 55th Brigade Facebook page will be used to organize each individual race.

Here is how it will work:

1. Someone identifies a local, community 5K or 10K race that they would like to get a group together for.
2. They post, on the brigade Facebook page, all necessary information about the race. That person becomes the '55th Brigade' group leader for that event.

3. Soldiers *and family members* can state their interest in joining the race group on the Facebook feed.

4. On the day of the race, individuals will register themselves under the '55th Brigade' team name and pay fee (most races are fundraisers). If race requires groups to register together, the group leader may have to coordinate.

5. Registration discounts and awards for fastest collective time are often offered for registered teams.

6. Uniforms not required but if worn, must be to standard.

See facebook.com/55HBCT for more details.

STRIKE SPORTS

Brigade HQ take on 109th Infantry

Capt Keith Hickox

It was self-billed as 'Goliath' verses the 'Smurfs' as the confident 55th Brigade Headquarters took on the 1st Battalion 109th Infantry in a soccer game on February 1st at the Riverside Sports Complex in Scranton.

The infantry, who remained quiet up until game day, took the field in stunning blue jerseys sporting their unit crest on the front, and names and numbers on the back. The brigade team dawned red shirts and had significantly fewer players than the infantry team.

It didn't take long for the infantry to start stacking the score board with the first three goals, two of which were scored by Sgt. 1st Class David Zadzura. He would go on to be the game's MVP, scoring a total of 3 goals throughout the game.

The contest went on more like a hockey game with three 40 minute periods, rather than 2 halves. The extended time took its toll on the brigade team as they did not have as many players to substitute.

The brigade rotated through four goal keepers throughout the game as part of their substitution plan. Each keeper made several notable saves, however the onslaught of the infantry's offense broke scores on each one of them.

On goal throughout the entire game for the infantry was Sgt. Major Travis Sterner, whose quick hands gave up only four goals to the brigade.

In the end, true to the parable, 'Goliath' took a devastating defeat as the infantry won 11-4. However, players are excited and ready for the next match up, whatever sport it may be. Sources close to the infantry camp tell us dodgeball may be the next battlefield....



THE INFANTRY TEAM



THE BRIGADE TEAM

