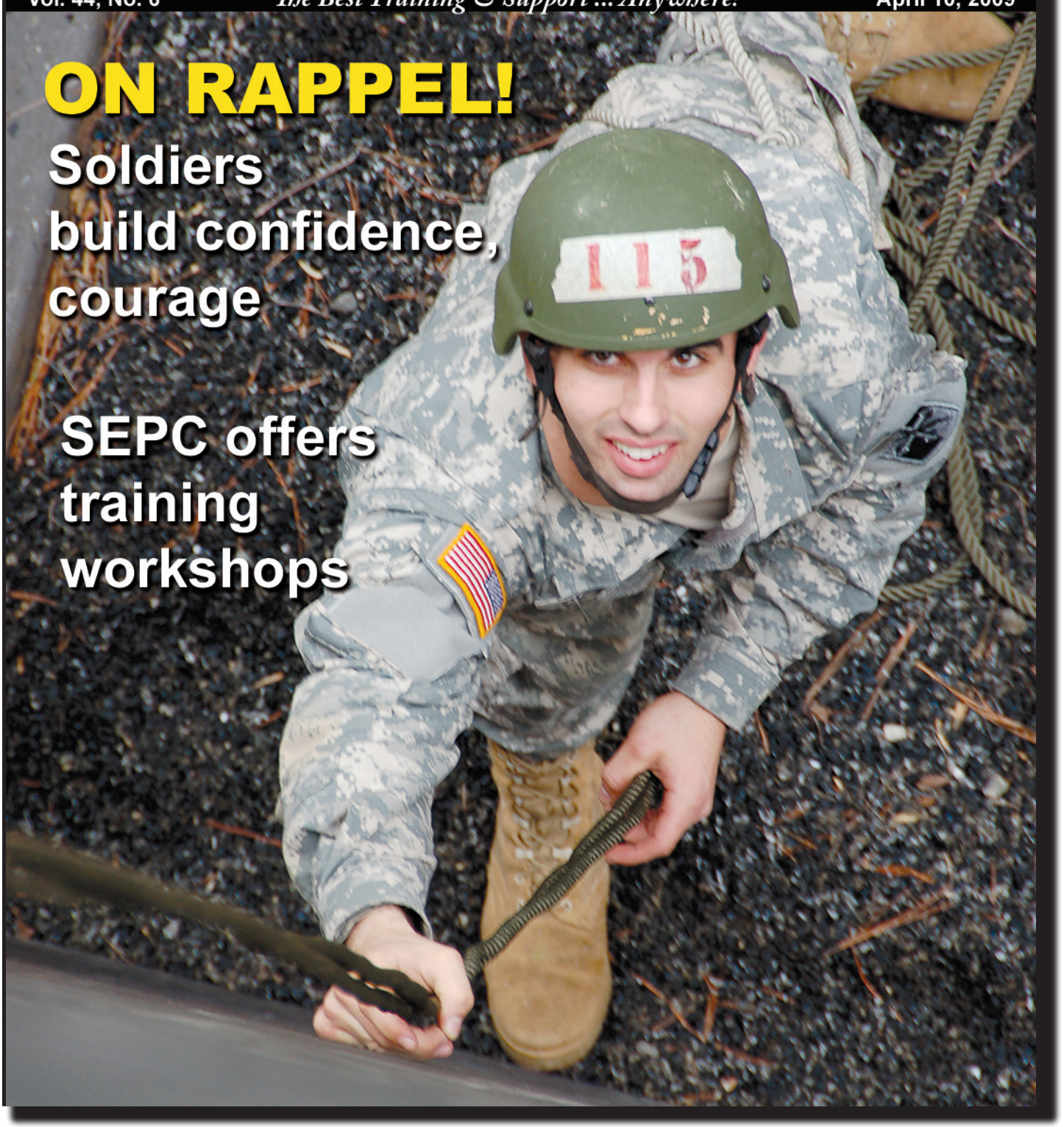
Up and Down the Hill

Vol. 44, No. 6 "The Best Training & Support ... Anywhere!" April 10, 2009

ON RAPPEL!

Soldiers build confidence, courage

SEPC offers training workshops



NCOs worth to Army cannot be overstated

By Maj. John W. Lubas
Command and General Staff College Student

Guest Commentary

"In the current operating environment, NCOs commonly execute missions outside of their traditional skill sets and have proven remarkably flexible and adaptable."

The noncommissioned officer is often referred to as the "backbone" of the U.S. Army, and this description and honor of 2009 being designated the Year of the NCO are well-deserved.

NCOs are critically important to the Army and their impact cannot be overstated.

The duties and responsibilities of the NCO are broad and complex. NCOs serve as primary trainers, caretakers, advisers and executors of the most critical missions.

NCOs train and care for their Soldiers, instill values and discipline, and develop our Army's future leaders. NCOs are the experts in their craft and train their subordinates to exacting standards.

Through constant interaction, mentoring and teaching, NCOs instill the Army Values and mold young men and women into proficient, disciplined and reliable Soldiers. NCOs serve as the caretakers of the lower enlisted ranks.

They help solve their Soldiers' problems and help them care for their families.

Most importantly, NCOs develop future leaders. A single NCO influences and develops scores of Soldiers during his or her career and passes knowledge to the next generation of leaders.

In addition to training and developing enlisted personnel, NCOs also train, mentor, and advise their officer counterparts.

Although a second lieutenant studies small unit tactics and leadership at the Infantry Officer Basic Course and Ranger School, he often learns true leadership and how to serve as an effective rifle platoon leader from his platoon sergeant.

Similarly, commanders at all levels rely on the experience and insight of their first sergeants and command sergeants major for decisions ranging from care of the men, to tactical planning, to developing their personnel and organizations for future requirements and challenges.

For this reason most officers routinely acknowledge that any personnel or organizational successes are a result of the hard work and leadership of their NCOs.

NCOs provide stability and continuity in ever-changing organizations. Although officers may make significant impacts on their organizations, their influence is often of short duration because of their rapid turnover.

In contrast, NCOs often remain in the same organizations for extended periods of time, allowing units to build upon success and retain lessons learned. In certain units, including the 75th Ranger Regiment, it is not uncommon for a first sergeant to spend his entire career in the same Ranger Battalion.

These leaders have experienced years of innovation and change in their unit's missions, tactics, techniques and procedures, and witnessed the evolution of the operating environment and enemy.

The benefits of this long-term experience cannot be overemphasized and have proven instrumental in the continuous evolution and success of the 75th Ranger Regiment.

In addition to training and developing Soldiers and officers and providing stability within units, NCOs execute plans. This responsibility has become increasingly complex since the start of the Global War on Terror.

In the current operating environment, NCOs commonly execute missions outside of their traditional skill sets and have proven remarkably flexible and adaptable.

For example, in Iraq and Afghanistan many field artillery units conduct tasks and missions historically executed by infantrymen. Field artillery NCOs trained in indirect fire planning and execution are currently executing raids, executing convoy operations, working with the local leaders to improve security and address the needs of the population and mediating disputes between rival groups.

Despite their inexperience, they have not only mastered these complex tasks but have also trained their artillerymen to perform to the highest standard.

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Up and Down the Hill

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The Fort A.P. Hill *Up and Down the Hill* newspaper is an authorized publication produced on a bi-monthly basis by the Public Affairs Office staff in accordance with AR 360-1 to provide the installation community with information on people, policies, operations, technical developments, trends and ideas of and about the Department of Defense, the Department of the Army and Fort A.P. Hill.

The views and opinions expressed in this publication are not necessarily the official views of, or endorsed by, the U.S. Government, the Department of the Army or this command.

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Special Emphasis Program Committee to focus on training

Workshops designed to boast employee job prospects

By David San Miguel
Editor

Ask anyone around post what they think the Special Emphasis Program Committee (SEPC) does and they'll probably tell you that its members are responsible for the various cultural awareness activities hosted throughout the year.

In part, that's what they do, but there's so much more.

According to Yvonne L. Smith, Management Services Specialist with the Directorate of Emergency Services and SEPC vice-chairperson, the committee also monitors and implements the Garrison Commander's Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) program to ensure employee-related career development actions for the "protected classes" (minorities, women and persons with disabilities) are fair and balanced.

"In the past, the SEPC was primarily responsible for coordinating the installation's various cultural awareness programs and events," she said. "But with recent budget costs, the SEPC realized it could not support these monthly observances and today has branched out to include training that will help employees get the job they want."

Smith said the SEPC wanted to be responsive in meeting employees' needs and to provide the training that would be of benefit to them.

"We surveyed the workforce," she explained, "and we found that a lot of the employees felt they were missing out on internal job opportunities … and they wanted to know why."

It was under this premise that SEPC developed a series of training workshops, first to educate the workforce on the hiring processes and second, to provide the "tools" individuals can use to build a resume that would increase their chances of selection.

We began by giving the employees an idea of what's available to them as far as professional development, Smith said. We instructed them on how to sign up for ATARRS, Army eLearning and other Web sites that afforded them with "formal training" opportunities to better qualify them for advancement.

"I'm really familiar with the Army's eLearning Program, so I showed them how it works, the college credit courses they could take and how those credits are identified and put into their transcripts," she said.

A workshop defining the Individual Development Plan or IDP followed.

"Many employees didn't understand the importance of having an IDP," Smith said.

"The idea behind the plan is to have the employee to sit down with his/her supervisor and to discuss where he/she sees himself/herself (career-wise) in the next five years," she said.

She added that the second part of an IDP is to have it recorded.

"This assists the employee in keeping to that career path," Smith said. "We also want to make sure both parties understand that this plan is not set in stone. It's a living document and it can be changed if it's agreeable with the supervisor and it is beneficial to the mission and the agency."

Smith explained that IDPs aren't just pieces of paper stuffed in an office desk and forgotten; instead, they're documents which must be submitted in a prescribed format through the Fort A.P. Hill training coordinator to our Installation Management Command (IMCOM) EEO representative at Fort Belvoir, Va.

"Their (IMCOM) staff works with our training coordinator here to help keep track of employees' progress," she said. These extra measures help to ensure that nothing is being overlooked in helping employees achieve their goals.

With this career path identified, another big part of the picture is the resume, Smith said. And the SEPC has designed a workshop to address this as well.

Scheduled later in May, the resume workshop will help employees put "it all down on paper and define those magic words to make the referral list," she said.

This workshop will be followed by training in August on the interviewing process (the importance of researching the prospective employer's organization, dressing for the interview and developing a list of questions the employee needs to ask).

To sign up for the next workshop or for more information, employees should contact their directorate's SEPC representative or Yvonne Smith at 633-8288.

(Photo by David San Miguel)

The SEPC was once primarily responsible for hosting the monthly cultural recognition observances but today, largely a result of budget constraints has refocused its mission to include training services and workshops to help employees.

Oldest WWII Vet embodies 'Year of the NCO' spirit

By Andy Entwistle
Public Affairs Office
Albany Recruiting Battalion

Army Secretary Pete Geren commemorated the Army's Year of the NCO and Women's History Month by visiting a 110-year-old World War II Veteran and enlisting seven future Soldiers by her side in Milford, Conn., on March 31.

"Miss Noone left the Army as a NCO. She has lived a life as part of the history of our country and the history of the Army, and we wanted to present her a token of our appreciation from our Army today," said Geren as he handed her ceremonial coins and a framed letter signed by himself, the Army Chief of Staff and the Sergeant Major of the Army.

Gertrude Noone, the nation's oldest woman Veteran, received the visitors at Carriage Green, the assisted living facility where she lives.

Noone enlisted in the Women's Army Corps (WAC) in 1943 at age 45, leaving a 17-year career with Travelers Insurance to serve the nation in a time of war. She rose to the rank of tech sergeant before leaving the service in 1949. Her final post was Fort Myer, Va., where she served as chief clerk of the Army's largest dispensary and where she counted among her clientele Gen. Omar Bradley, Gen. George Patton and First Lady Bess Truman.

Geren likened Noone's enlistment during WWII to that of seven future Soldiers who accompanied him on the visit.

He quoted Oveta Culp Hobby, the first director of the WAC, saying that by enlisting during wartime they had accepted "a debt to democracy, [and] a date with destiny."

"These young people have made the decision to join the Army in the middle of a war," he said. "They have made a similar commitment to selfless service for this nation."

With Noone looking on, the Secretary conducted a ceremonial swearing-in of the future soldiers, all of whom will ship out for training in the next 90 days.

Following the ceremony, Noone met with the new inductees and showed them her original dog tags and a carefully preserved note from her final commander, who praised her devotion to duty and efficient service.

Although the seven future Soldiers are joining the Army for different reasons and will serve in different specialties, they share a common thread: all had been considering military service and approached their recruiters ready to commit, despite the war.

"A friend of mine told me it's the best thing he's ever done," said Thomas Greene, 19, of Wallingford, Conn., who will serve as a petroleum supply specialist. "So I had him take me to his recruiter."

Laura Salinas, 19, of Hamden, Conn., said, "I liked the way the Air Force changed my sister, so I knew I would join the military, but I got the best vibes from the Army recruiters."

She leaves in April to train as a power generation mechanic.

Salinas was one of three female enlistees present, and they paid special homage to Noone following the ceremony.

"She's an inspiration," Salinas said, "She's everything a woman in the Army should be."

Marina Gunther, 22, of New Haven, Conn., agreed. "It was emotional for me to be able to thank her for what she accomplished because that made it possible for me to be where I am today."

Gunther will graduate this spring from the University of New Haven with a degree in criminal justice and will serve as a human intelligence collector.

In remarks after the ceremony the Secretary compared the future Soldiers favorably to Noone's "greatest generation".

"Fewer than three out of ten young people in the U.S. today meet the standards to join the Army, "he said. "The young men and women here today are already part of an elite group. They have answered the same call to duty that Miss Noone did over 60 years ago."

(Photo by Staff Sgt. Matthew Clifton)

Gertrude Noone, the oldest surviving World War II Veteran at 110 years of age, is greeted by Army Secretary Pete Geren, during a ceremony in honor of Women's History Month and the Year of the NCO.

Soldiers with the 54th QM Company conduct PT while waiting for their bus ride home.

Soldiers maintain spirits, prepare for deployment

By David San Miguel
Editor

Not ones to stay idle, Soldiers with the 54th Quartermaster Company (Mortuary Affairs), 49th Special Troops Battalion, 49th Quartermaster Group, gathered for a little physical training before returning to their home station at Fort Lee, Va.

The Soldiers are slated for deployment to Iraq later this year and were at Fort A.P. Hill conducting marksmanship qualification and other required Soldiers skill training in preparation for their pending deployment.

In Iraq, the unit will serve at various collection points throughout the region to help recover, identify and prepare the remains of fallen Soldiers and civilians in the combat zone. It is the only active unit of its type in the Army.

The Soldiers commented that despite the intensity of their mission, they were motivated and anxious to carry out their duties.

(Photos by David San Miguel)

Private 2 Douglas A. Sanborn, Mortuary Specialist, leads the group through rifle PT.

Spc. Christopher L. Byars, Mortuary Specialist, runs a few laps.

Spc. Summer L. Bennett, Mortuary Specialist, works on her abdominals.

(Photos by David San Miguel)

Soldiers with Maryland's Army National Guard build confidence rappelling down the 35-foot tower.

ON RAPPEL!

Soldiers build confidence, courage

By David San Miguel
Editor

"ON RAPPEL," the Soldier calls out.

"ON BELAY," responds his team standing ready just a few feet away from the base of the tower.

Without much fanfare, the rappel master signals the rappeller to "Get Ready," "Position" and "Go".

The rappeller hesitates, then gradually descends the tower in a smooth, controlled manner.

For Soldiers with the Maryland Army National Guard's Military Police (MP) Platoon, Detachment 1, 58th Special Troops Battalion, rappelling isn't something they often get a chance to practice back at their home station or on the job.

According to Master Sgt. Thomas N. Thompson, Battalion Operations Sergeant, the unit arrived at Fort A.P. Hill to conduct its annual marksmanship qualifications and other basic Soldier skills to include land navigation and conducting combat field operations.

The rappelling exercise was designed to help motivate the Soldiers and to give them a chance to build up their confidence and courage, he said. "It was a break from routine training."

"Most of the Soldiers had little if any experience rappelling," added Staff Sgt. Michael A. Simmons, Rappel Master. "For them, I'm sure it'll be an experience they won't readily forget."

Spc. Brent J. Ransom, MP, commented that it wasn't likely that he'd get an opportunity to rappel while on the job as a Federal Police Officer.

"But still it is a confidence builder," he said.

Maj. George L. Downey, Battalion Operations Officer, added that it's training opportunities like this that helps young Soldiers mature as an NCO.

"This was a chance for that young Soldier to step up as that team leader … to be that go to guy in the unit," he said. "I want that Soldier to be a little gutsy … to be aggressive and to take charge, and this was just one of those opportunities."

Staff Sgt. Michael A. Simmons, Rappel Master, inspects Spc. Anthony S.M. Clayton's helmet to ensure his safety while rappelling.

Staff Sgt. Simmons briefs Soldiers on the various components of rappelling.

Soldiers were taught how to make their "Swiss seat".

ON RAPPEL! ... and down he goes.

Spc. Clayton went down the tower first to demonstrate how it's done.

Commentary

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Additionally, because decentralized operations at the small unit level are inherent to counterinsurgency operations, NCOs have assumed increased responsibility on the battlefield and make difficult decisions traditionally made by superior officers.

Regardless of the challenges posed by the complex operating environment and requirement to execute non-traditional tasks, the adaptability, competence and exceptional leadership of the NCO Corps has enabled success in combat.

Despite the flexibility and competence of the NCO Corps, the Army's leadership must focus on the continued academic and professional development of the NCO Corps to ensure continued success.

The Army must better prepare its NCOs to execute their combat tasks and reward them for their continued service and sacrifice.

With ongoing combat deployments in support of the GWOT, the contributions and achievements of the NCO Corps will remain vital to our Army's success.

Although NCOs are commonly referred to as the "backbone" of the Army, one may also argue they serve as the heart pumping life blood in the form of innovative ideas, advice, proficient Soldiers, and a no-fail attitude through the body of the Army.

Editor's note: *Maj. John W. Lubas is a student in the Intermediate Level Education course at the Command and General Staff College.*

(Photo by David San Miguel)

NCOs today are often called upon to execute non-traditional tasks on the battlefield.

Viewpoints ...

What makes a good NCO?

Soldiers from the 58th Special Troops Battalion Army National Guard, Md. comment.

Master Sgt. Thomas N. Thompson
Bn. Operations NCO
HHC, 58th STB
Army National Guard, Md.

"I look for NCOs who can follow instructions well and who are confident of their ability to make sound decisions in the absence of other leaders."

Spc. Brent J. Ransom
Military Police
Det. 1, 58th STB
Army National Guard, Md.

"I look for NCOs who can tell you to do something that they themselves know how to do and are willing to do themselves. Our unit NCOs are top notch."

Staff Sgt. Troy M. Smith
Squad Leader
Det. 1, 58th STB
Army National Guard, Md.

"What I admire most about our senior NCOs is their vast knowledge and experience. They're motivated, take initiative and always look for other challenges."

Maj. George L. Downey
Bn. Operations Officer
HHC, 58th STB
Army National Guard, Md.

"I look for that young Soldier or junior NCO to step up as that team leader ... to be that go to guy in the unit ... with that under their belt ... they'll move up."

Army launches 2nd Sexual Assault Prevention Summit

By J.D. Liepold
Army News Service

Secretary of the Army Pete Geren launched the second "I. A.M. Strong" Sexual Harassment/Sexual Assault Prevention Summit in Arlington, Va., Monday morning, telling the audience of Soldiers and civilians that the Army would become the nation's "gold standard when it comes to sexual assault investigation and prosecution."

Echoing the words of Lt. Gen. Michael D. Rochelle, the Army G-1, to "absolutely eradicate" sexual assault and sexual harassment in the Army, Geren said that since 9/11 nearly 2,000 American Soldiers had been punished for sexually assaulting a fellow Soldier. He also said that sexual assault is one of the country's most under-reported crimes.

"Experts estimate that only one in five sexual assaults are even reported and that's not just within the Army, that's on the outside, but we assume that to be true in the Army," he said. "And, if that is true, those 2,000 reports mean since 9/11 that 10,000 American Soldiers have been assaulted by a fellow Soldier, blue-on-blue ... 10,000 American Soldiers."

As part of Sexual Assault Awareness Month, the second annual summit kicked off phase two of a four-phase strategy to wipe out sexual harassment and sexual assault and mount a campaign of Army-wide conviction whereby all Soldiers and members of the Army community take direct ownership of sexual harassment and assault prevention by proactively engaging as role models who personally take action and address any behavior which can lead to sexual assault.

Phase one began Sept. 9, 2008 at the first Sexual Assault Prevention and Risk Reduction Summit in which leaders dedicated their efforts to implement the cornerstone of the "I. A.M." Strong campaign with senior leader condemnation of sexual harassment and assault.

"I A.M." stands for intervene, act and motivate, the cornerstones of the campaign.

"Last year with the launch of the 'I. A.M. Strong' campaign, we committed to the same sort of historic change within our Army with regard to sexual assault that you accomplished in regard to the ugly stains of racism that lingered for way too long in our values-based organization," Geren told the audience.

"Sexual assault is an assault on the core values of every American Soldier and is repugnant to everything a Soldier stands for," he said.

Geren said the Army Criminal Investigation Command and the Judge Advocate General have taken new measures to support victims and hold offenders accountable.

The measures includes hiring experts in the field of prosecution and investigations.

Additionally, 30 special investigators and 15 prosecutors have been placed at installations with the highest occurrences of sexual assault.

He also said the Army has brought on board 35 examiners at the Criminal Investigation Laboratory and funded specialized training with the National Advocacy Center for prosecutors. The Army has also established a mobilized investigation training team to train all CID battalions.

Post to observe Sexual Assault Awareness Month

In a memo dated April 7, 2009, Lt. Col. Michael S. Graese, Garrison Commander, states that sexual assault will not be tolerated at Fort A.P. Hill.

Highlighting the theme of this year's observance "Prevent Sexual Violence ... in our Workplace. Respect Works!" the post is using this platform to inform the workforce of the severity of sexual assault and what employees can do to protect themselves.

For more information, call Tim Southard at 633-8745 or Christine Coates at 633-8366.

BASIC SELF DEFENSE TECHNIQUES

Is there really a way you can learn to defend yourself in virtually any situation, quickly and easily?

On 22 April 2009
1130-1300
Location: CAC Gym
LT Ron Henson will conduct a class on basic self-defense.
If you would like to attend, please fill out the attached registration request and return to Christine Coates in Bldg 112, HQ. For additional information call Chris at X8205.

Please pre-register for this event by 15 April. Wear comfortable clothing and soft sole shoes.

Registration for Self-defense class 22 April
Register by 15 April

NAME: _____
Directorate: _____
Email address: _____
Work Phone #: _____

Veterans Affairs Secretary sends open letter, looks forward to transforming department

WASHINGTON – The following is an open letter to Veterans from Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki:

"My name is Ric Shinseki, and I am a Veteran. For me, serving as Secretary of Veterans Affairs is a noble calling. It provides me the opportunity to give back to those who served with and for me during my 38 years in uniform and those on whose shoulders we all stood as we grew up in the profession of arms.

"The Department of Veterans Affairs has a solemn responsibility to all of you, today and in the future, as more Veterans join our ranks and enroll to secure the benefits and services they have earned. I am fully committed to fulfilling President Obama's vision for transforming our department so that it will be well-positioned to perform this duty even better during the 21st Century.

"We welcome the assistance and advice of our Veterans Service Organizations, other government departments and agencies, Congress, and all VA stakeholders as we move forward, ethically and transparently, so that Veterans and citizens can understand our efforts.

"Creating that vision for transforming the VA into a 21st Century organization requires a comprehensive review of our department.

"Veterans are our clients, and delivering the highest quality care and services in a timely, consistent ... fair manner is a VA responsibility."

We approach that review understanding that Veterans are central to everything VA does. We know that results count, that the department will be measured by what we do, not what we promise, and that our best days as an organization supporting Veterans are ahead of us.

"We will fulfill President Lincoln's charge to care for "... him, who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan ..." by redesigning and reengineering ourselves for the future.

"Transforming any institution is supremely challenging; I know this from my own experience in leading large, proud, complex, and high-performing organizations through change. But the best organizations must be prepared to meet the challenging times, evolving technology and, most importantly, evolving needs of clients.

"Historically, organizations that are unwilling or unable to change soon find themselves irrelevant. You and your needs are not irrelevant.

"Veterans are our clients, and delivering the highest quality care and services in a timely, consistent and fair manner is a VA responsibility. I take that responsibility seriously and have charged all of the department's employees for their best efforts and support every day to meet our obligations to you.

"Our path forward is challenging, but the President and Congress support us. They have asked us to do this well — for you. Veterans are our sole reason for existence and our number one priority — bar none.

"I look forward to working together with all VA employees to transform our department into an organization that reflects the change and commitment our country expects and our Veterans deserve.

"Thank you, and God bless our military, our Veterans, and our Nation."

Eric K. Shinseki

New Law authorizes Veterans' salutes during playing of National Anthem

WASHINGTON -- Veterans and active-duty military not in uniform can now render the military-style hand salute during the playing of the national anthem, thanks to changes in federal law that took effect this month.

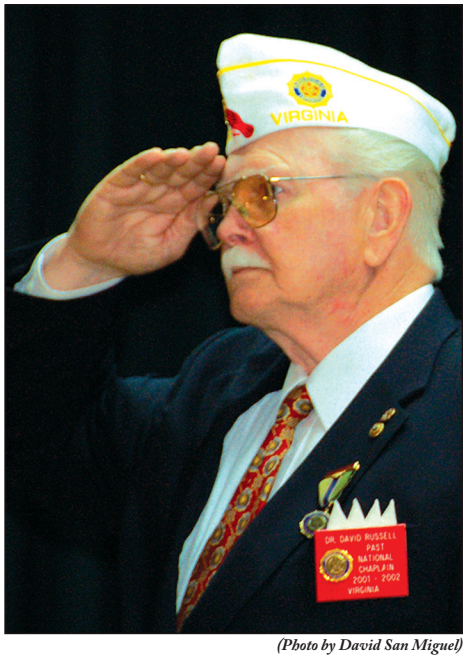
"The military salute is a unique gesture of respect that marks those who have served in our nation's armed forces," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. "This provision allows the application of that honor in all events involving our nation's flag."

The new provision improves upon a little known change in federal law last year that authorized Veterans to render the military-style hand salute during the raising, lowering or passing of the flag, but it did not address salutes during the national anthem. Last year's provision also applied to members of the armed forces while not in uniform.

Traditionally, members of the nation's Veterans service organizations have rendered the hand salute during the national anthem and at events involving the national flag while wearing their organization's official headgear.

The most recent change, authorizing hand salutes during the national anthem by Veterans and out-of-uniform military personnel, was sponsored by Sen. Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma, an Army Veteran. It was included in the Defense Authorization Act of 2009, which President Bush signed on Oct. 14.

The earlier provision authorizing hand salutes for Veterans and out-of-uniform military personnel during the raising, lowering or passing of the flag, was contained in the National Defense Authorization Act of 2008, which took effect Jan. 28, 2008.



(Photo by David San Miguel)

Dr. David Russell, past national chaplain for the Virginia Veterans of Foreign War salutes during the playing of the national anthem.