



“WRAIR Forward”

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COMMANDER’S CORNER



Since its inception in September of 1977, the commander of the U.S. Army Medical Research Unit-Europe (USAMRU-E) has written quarterly reports. The format of the reports varies from year to year as a function of each commander’s style, higher-headquarter input, and (not surprisingly) the technology available to make the report. For instance, later reports take on a more polished air made capable by color laser printers and word processors while early reports were clearly wrestled from typewriters. In reviewing these reports, however, I’m struck by the fact that the section we now refer to as “commander’s corner” only came into existence in the October-December 1990 issue. In that 1990 issue, LTC(P) James Martin broke with over 13 years of tradition and began the report with a “Commander’s Note”. I was curious why this change occurred, and I think the first sentence provides the answer. The sentence reads, “In response to Operation Desert Shield, a number of research activities are on hold.” The note goes on to specify new efforts underway in response to Desert Shield. This was LTC(P) Martin’s way of letting his readers know combat was leading to a re-prioritization of efforts with a renewed focus on enhancing the well-being of the deployed soldier. Coincidentally, 13 years later the Army is back in South West Asia, and as the new commander I find our team here at USAMRU-E asking much the same question – “how should we prioritize our work?” In answer to that, I’m proud to say we have three key efforts supporting deploying, deployed, and returning soldiers (a) psychological screening validation, (b) an examination of the efficacy of critical incident debriefing, and (c) evaluations of tools to help enhance leader cognitive performance under stress. These programs will help promote the well-being and performance of deployed soldiers and leaders in USAREUR.

-MAJ Paul D. Bliese

Suicide Project Draws to a Close

USAMRU-E’s role as a member of the USAREUR Suicide Prevention Task Force (SPTF) ended in July 2002 with the final data collection and analysis of suicide events occurring in USAREUR covering the period from May 1999 – June 2002. The combined efforts of the SPTF, ERMC, and the clinical providers who participated in the surveillance program resulted in a suicide investigation form (AMEDD ASER) that was delivered to the OTSG and implemented Army-wide. A review of the USAREUR Suicide Event Surveillance Program was presented at the Behavioral Sciences Conference in Heidelberg, Germany in September. Schroeder, E.D., Dolan, C.A., & Wright, K.M. (2003, September). *USAREUR suicide event surveillance program: Data summary and program evaluation*. Presented at the Behavioral Sciences Conference, Heidelberg, Germany.

Operation Iraqi Freedom

Recent implementation of USAMRU-E’s psychological screening program with soldiers re-deploying from Iraq provides an opportunity to conduct a validation study of the screening program while identifying soldiers in need of mental health follow-up. In July 2003, V Corps Artillery contacted USAMRU-E requesting support for psychological screening as soldiers redeployed from Operation Iraqi Freedom. After an initial screen of those unit members who had already returned to Germany, USAMRU-E began weekly screens of soldiers returning in small groups. Screening of additional V Corps Artillery units is projected to occur in Spring 2004. The latest screening efforts use traditional screening scales that tap levels of psychological symptoms including depression, post-traumatic stress, anger, and relationship problems. Unlike previous screening procedures, however, in which soldiers were interviewed if they exceeded established cut-off scores, all soldiers in this validation study are being interviewed using a new structured and standardized interview form (Fig. 1). This study continues the program of systematic research assessing the validity of the screening instruments and will further the comprehensive development of a psychological screening program for U.S. Forces (WRAIR Protocol #889). Other updates:

- Deployed units continue to request information on the screening program: 44th MEDCOM, Operation Enduring Freedom, Afghanistan (JUL), and the CSC team in Kosovo supporting rotation 5A (AUG).
- “Psychological Screening Pre and Post Deployment Research Program” was presented to the Armed Services Biomedical Research, Evaluation and Management Committee (ASBREM) by COL Hoge, the STO Program Manager (11 SEP 03).

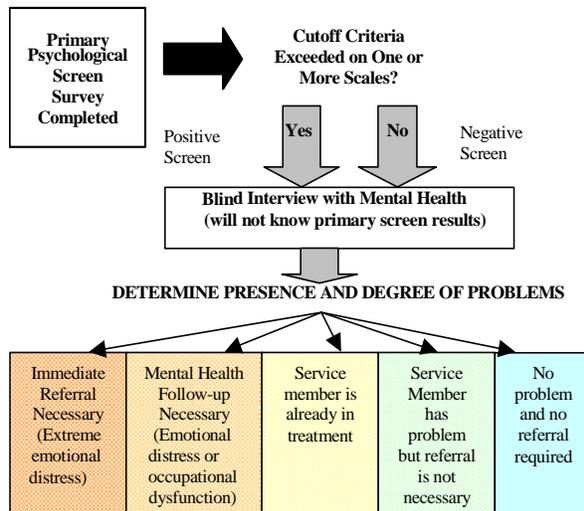


Figure 1. Flow chart of Procedure for Upcoming Psychological Screening Study

Enhancing Leadership Skills

As part of a new research effort under the STO-W program, a new study is being planned to examine the role of providing individualized feedback in leadership and cognitive functioning (based on a sleep algorithm) on soldier health and unit outcomes. To this end, MAJ Bliese, CPT Thomas, and other USAMRU-E scientists met with Dr. Sinclair and Ms. Jennifer Sommers of Portland State University (20-24 Sep) to discuss adapting an earlier proposal to fit this new study which focuses on deployed units. Aston University (UK) professor and MAJ (ret.) Michael Grojean also participated in the meeting.

USAMRU-E Distinguished Guests

- SGM Sherry Lex, WRAIR Sergeant Major, visited the unit (13 - 17 JUL).
- CSM Domingo Costa, MRMC Command Sergeant Major, visited the unit (16 JUL).
- COL McQueen, Commander of WRAIR, visited the unit and met with leaders at ERMC and USAMSAA (19 - 24 JUL).
- Dr. Morten Ender, professor of sociology at the U.S. Military Academy, visited the unit and presented on portrayals of military children in the film (9 JUL).
- Dr. David Burmedi, lecturer at the University of Heidelberg, presented a talk to the unit on the role of personality in elder's responses to caregiving (22 SEP).

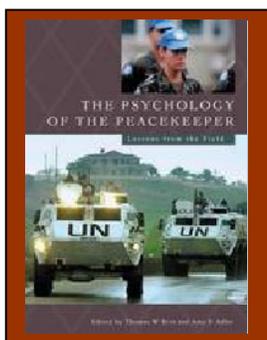
EXPO 2003

The unit participated in the USAREUR Land Combat Expo by displaying research plans, products and assessment tools (9 - 11 SEP).

Ms. Kelley and MAJ Bliese



WRAIR Peacekeeping Research Showcased in New Book



In a newly published volume entitled "*The Psychology of the Peacekeeper: Lessons from the Field*" (Praeger Press, 2003), authors from 7 nations apply theory from a wide range of disciplines in psychology to the issues of peacekeeping. Dr. Thomas Britt, Clemson University, and Dr. Amy Adler, USAMRU-E, serve as the volume's editors. Chapters include several present and former USAMRU-E staff:

- Britt, T.W. & Adler, A.B. The Psychology of the Peacekeeper: An Introductory Framework
- Castro, C.A. Considerations when Conducting Psychological Research During Peacekeeping Missions: The Scientist and the Commander
- Thomas, J.L. & Castro, C.A. Organizational Behavior and the U.S. Peacekeeper
- Bliese, P.D. & Castro, C.A. The Soldier Adaptation Model (SAM): Applications to Peacekeeping Research
- Adler, A.B., Bartone, P.T., & Litz, B.T. The nature of peacekeeping stressors.
- Adler, A. B. & Britt, T.W. The Psychology of the Peacekeeper: Common Themes and Future Directions

Change of Command at USAMRU-E

On 22 July 2003, MAJ Paul D. Bliese took command of USAMRU-E (photo below). COL McQueen, Commander of Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, presided over the ceremony (photo right) in the "Clock Tower" building on Nachrichten Kaserne in Heidelberg. Outgoing commander MAJ James Ness is assuming a post in the



Behavioral Science and Leadership Department at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Incoming commander MAJ Bliese is the unit's 9th commander since its inception in 1977. Prior to assuming command, MAJ Bliese was assigned to the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Science, Division of Neuropsychiatry, Walter Reed Army Institute of Research.

Final Follow-up for Debriefing Study

Is psychological debriefing helpful to soldiers following exposure to potentially traumatic events?

- This question is being addressed by the Debriefing Effectiveness Study in which units deployed to Kosovo were randomly assigned to debriefing, traditional stress management, or assessment only conditions. The final follow-up survey for this study is currently underway. In September 2003, final surveys were administered to about half of the units in the study. Data collection will be concluded in November. (protocol #862).
- Plans are for the study to be replicated with troops returning from Iraq but another intervention group will be added: self-disclosure through writing about meaningful experiences on the deployment. Similar interventions have been linked with improved health in civilian populations but the intervention has not yet been applied to military personnel returning from deployment. The protocol outlining this study was approved on 18 SEP 03: Adler, A.B., & Castro, C.A. (2003). *The impact of self-disclosure on soldier health following deployment.* (#1057)

Personnel Updates

- Dr. Carol Dolan, University of Maryland University College, was awarded a contract in support of the unit's suicide surveillance research and qualitative analysis of interview data (5 Sep).
- Dr. Robert Sinclair, Portland State University, was awarded a non-personal services contract to produce several manuscripts on the interface between personality and occupational stress (26 Sep).

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Editor

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