



**18th Engineer Brigade
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PRESS RELEASE

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18th Eng. Bde. Soldiers build stronger bonds

Story by Pfc. David Huddleston, 18th Eng. Bde. Public Affairs

GARMISCH, Germany – Soldiers seeking a weekend getaway and a chance to enrich their marriages and families, as well as their own lives, are being provided just that when they attend “Strong Bonds” retreats held by the 18th Engineer Brigade Chaplain’s Office here.

Each month, retreats are held at the Edelweiss Lodge and Resort, either for single Soldiers, families or married couples.

Staff Sgt. Shairese Smith-Banks, the 18th Eng. Bde. chaplain’s assistant who is from Chicago, said that each retreat has a different purpose, noting that the marriage and family retreats “focus on communication and issues families may have, while the single Soldier retreats focus on finding somebody that is right for them.”

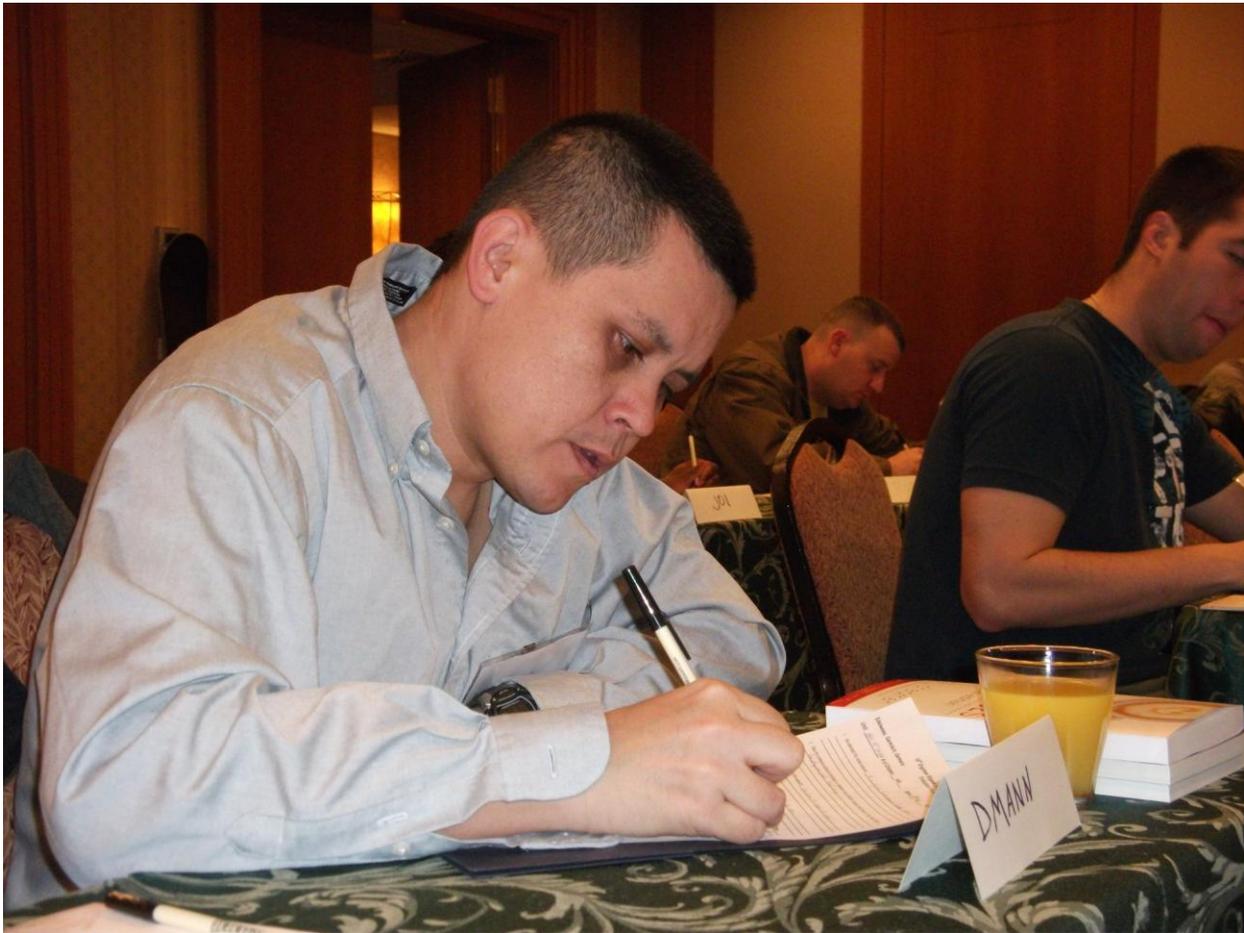
An additional retreat offered for families of deployed servicemembers is designed to help the families cope with their loved ones being deployed and focus them on staying connected.

“In preparing for deployment, time with the family becomes a premium,” said Capt. Orlando Fraser, 18th Eng. Bde. intelligence officer. “Learning ways to appreciate each other helps to enrich the limited time before deployment.”

Each retreat offers six hours of mandated training that is introduced through group discussions, videos and personality tests. The training is typically conducted on the first and last day of the retreat, giving Soldiers optimum time to explore the town of Garmisch or relax at the lodge on the other days.

Soldiers like Staff Sgt. Larry Soto, an 18th Eng. Bde. information assurance manager who is from Los Angeles, are able to see many interesting sites while attending the retreats. Soto and his family visited the Zugspitze, the highest point in Germany, and the Linderhof Palace.

Food, travel and lodging are provided with each retreat, and though it is ran by the chaplain’s office, there is no religious affiliation with the event.



Staff Sgt. David Manning, 18th Eng. Bde. Headquarters and Headquarters Company supply sergeant who is a native of Killeen, Texas, fills out a course evaluation sheet during an 18th Eng. Bde. single Soldier retreat in Garmisch, Germany, Jan. 7. (Photo by Spc. Aislinn M. Amig, 18th Eng. Bde. Public Affairs)



18th Eng. Bde. Soldiers take a group photo while participating in a single Soldier retreat at the Edelweiss Lodge and Resort in Garmisch, Germany, Jan. 5-7. The retreat focused on the five love languages, taught by Chaplain Ronald Webb, the family life chaplain for U.S. Army Germany Schweinfurt. (U.S. Army photo)