

## U.S. Army Europe and 7th Army

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RELEASE #2007-09-18-01

Sept. 18, 2007

### CONFERENCE FOCUSES ON STRATEGIES FOR HELPING VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

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**GARMISCH-PARTENKIRCHEN, Germany** -- U.S. Army Europe sexual assault response coordinators met here Sept. 6-7 to develop and share plans and goals for providing advocacy programs for victims of sexual assault.

The two-day gathering brought SARCs and unit victim advocates together to share experiences, develop new ideas and fine-tune approaches to sex crimes and their victims.

Experts in the fields of psychology, military lifestyles, and criminal investigation and profiling discussed the prevalence of sexual assault crimes, those who commit them, and the people those crimes affect.

“You never know...who the victim will be. You never know who the attacker will be,” said Veraunda Jackson, a Florida sexual assault prosecutor who spoke at the conference.

Jackson, who is also a victim and survivor of sexual assault, opened the event at the Edelweiss Lodge and Resort opened with a powerful life story. As she presented her account in intricate and graphic detail, listeners were clearly moved and tears rolled down many faces in the audience.

“I want people to understand how traumatic it is for the victims and why they don’t tell,” Jackson said.

But, she added, she has found a kind of healing strength in sharing in sharing her tale.

“Every time I tell my story I take a little bit of the power back that he took from me on that day,” Jackson said.

“I wouldn’t push talking about being a victim to anyone, but I can tell you from personal experience: you don’t start healing on your own.”

The conference's focus later shifted from the personal to the procedural, with a discussion of the Army Criminal Investigation Division's role in investigating sexual assault crimes.

Special Agent James Byrum of the 202nd Military Police Group (CID) spoke about the importance of compiling evidence and getting statements from victims, suspects and witnesses of sex crimes.

"We are not supposed to interrogate the victim, but it is important that we get as much information as quickly as possible, so that we ... know what to look for and who (to look for)," Byrum said.

"Usually (the suspect is) someone the victim knows," he added.

Sgt. Maj. Brad Weber of the USAREUR personnel directorate spoke about how sexual assault affects Army units.

"I am not going to say that one person carrying around a terrible secret like sexual assault is going to make the Army fall to pieces, but it does affect the team, which affects the squad, and then the platoon, and so on..." Weber said. "It is a ripple effect that is crippling to the mission."

A keystone of the conference was presenting a variety of topics to instruct new SARCs and UVAs about their roles assisting assault victims.

Each presenter brought a new piece of information to an ongoing puzzle, said Rosalind Dennis, USAREUR Sexual Assault Response Program manager. She stressed that the conference is not focused on catching criminals, but a gathering of the minds that is an important part of the process of making those who work directly with victims more aware and more prepared.

"It may take weeks or years to develop huge amounts of guilt or shame, but it affects everyone who is a victim," said Chief Warrant Officer Joanne Smith, a SARC from Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo. "Our job is to be there when they are ready to start healing, and help them with whatever we can."

The final speaker of the conference was Russ Strand, chief of the family advocacy law enforcement training branch at the U.S. Army Military Police School. While there are no statistics on numbers of sexual assaults in the Army, Strand said, it is prevalent, and impossible to predict.

"Let's call it what it is. It's not sexual misconduct. It is rape..." Strand said. "We don't see it coming. If we did, we wouldn't let it happen."

Strand stressed that by seeking help, assault victims seeking can help others to avoid the same suffering.

“If you are a victim of sexual assault, chances are you aren’t the first, but if you are, you won’t be the last,” he said.

Strand concluded by outlining the system that the Army uses to investigate and prosecute sex offenders, and delivered a message to those who commit sex crimes.

“We are exceptionally good at what we do, and we will catch you,” he said.



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