



WEAPON, EQUIPMENT FEEDBACK NEEDED

Surveys a Forum for Soldiers to Share Thoughts, Suggestions

PEO SOLDIER STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

The U.S. Army's Program Executive Office (PEO) Soldier has launched an Internet-based survey system to support its mission to aggressively incorporate Soldier feedback into everything it does.

More than 30 surveys, announced on AKO and available to Soldiers through a link on the PEO Soldier Web site — peosoldier.army.mil — are designed to give Soldiers a forum to communicate their thoughts and suggestions up the chain of command. The surveys cover everything from clothing and individual equipment — gloves, goggles, and battering rams — to individual and crew served weapons such as the M4

carbine and the M110 sniper system.

As the Army continues its efforts to employ the Soldier-as-a-System concept, Soldier feedback is critical. Soldier-as-a-System calls for everything a Soldier wears and carries to be streamlined, integrated, and effective. While the Army's skilled laboratories, research centers, and contractors develop and modernize the next generation of equipment for the battlefield, everything comes down to what the men and women on the ground actually need, use, and accept as beneficial. Web-based surveys have already proven to be a direct and effective way to shine a spotlight on that essential point of view.

An earlier version of the online survey system was used to gather comments regarding the new Army Service Uniform. PEO Soldier received more than 80,000 responses to this survey alone. Converting such extensive feedback into actionable changes is no simple task. As BG Mark

Brown, PEO Soldier, noted, "We had experts from Operational Forces Interface Group (OFIG) do the mathematical and statistical analyses of the responses so that we could categorize the feedback that we received to support good decisions."

"In meeting battlefield requirements, we find that there is rarely a silver bullet that will take care of all existing uniform or equipment requirements," said Brown. "It is an integrated process, and we manage the Soldier as a system to get there." As long as technology improves to create more lightweight, efficient, unobtrusive solutions to the challenges every Soldier faces, PEO Soldier will find ways to integrate these products to improve Soldier capabilities, save Soldiers' lives, and improve Soldiers' quality of life.

Soldier surveys are just one of many methods PEO Soldier employs to consistently and innovatively provide the best for the best.

NATIONAL INFANTRY MUSEUM PREPARES TO OPEN 19 JUNE

The grand opening of the new National Infantry Museum and Soldier Center at Patriot Park is set for 19 June. The festivities will begin at 9:30 a.m. with a graduation ceremony and follow with a ribbon-cutting ceremony at 11 a.m.

The museum is located off of Fort Benning Road at 1775 Legacy Way, approximately two miles south of Victory Drive and outside the access control points of Fort Benning. The museum is open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday. The World War II Street, Imax Theater, Soldier Store gift shop and Fife and Drum restaurant are already open to the public. Admission to the museum is free.

For more information, check out www.nationalinfantrymuseum.com.



Kristin Molinaro

SUICIDE PREVENTION:

The Challenge and the Way

CHAPLAIN (MAJ) TAMMIE CREWS

Considerable media attention is being given to the latest reports of the number of suicides within the Army. This article is the first of a series of articles on suicide awareness and suicide prevention education.

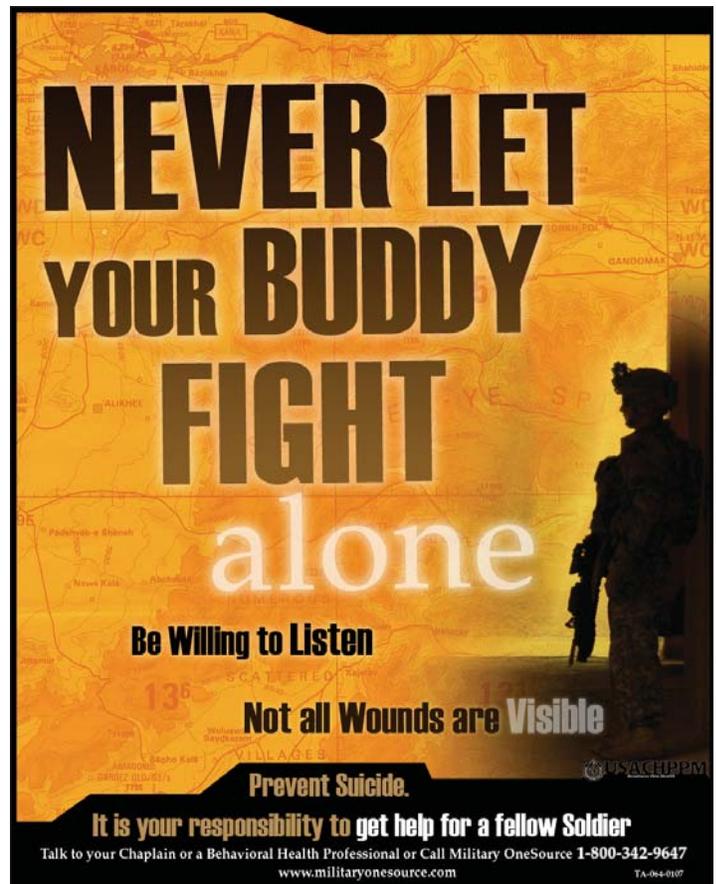
The statistics for the number of confirmed suicides of active duty Soldiers for 2008 are staggering. The media is full of stories; an *Army Times* headline stated “The Army is Killing Itself.” The Army reported a record 128 confirmed suicides and 15 additional cases under investigation for 2008. Early reports for January 2009 suggest that more Soldiers committed suicide than died in combat. In 2007 the number of confirmed suicides was 115. Ten years ago, the number of confirmed suicides in the Army was 58. Approximately five Soldiers made some form of suicide gesture every day within 2008. The number of suicides in the Army has generally followed the average numbers within the civilian population, but the 2008 figures for the Army have risen above the national average for the first time since the Vietnam War. One Soldier lost to suicide is tragic and is one too many.

Suicide occurs among all groups of people — not just among Soldiers, not just among the unsuccessful or troubled, not just among those who consider themselves to have been marginalized. The thought of suicide can occur to any one of us or to any one of those whom we care about or to anyone with whom we work, given a set of conditions conducive to thoughts of desperate action.

What causes an individual to commit suicide? What leads an individual to think that the only answer is to end his/her life? The reasons are likely as varied as the individuals who have committed suicide. Completed suicides do not occur just among overstressed deployed Soldiers or those who have a deployment history. Suicides are occurring among Soldiers who have no deployment history. Suicides also occur among those whom we think would never consider ending their own lives. Generally speaking, relationship issues are high on the list of contributing factors. Loss of employment, finances, unusual stress, medications, and alcohol may also be factors. You may be thinking — and rightly so — that people deal with these things all the time and do not attempt or complete suicide. This is true. There is no exact and predictable formula that indicates who will and who will not attempt to commit suicide in any given situation.

What about the families and friends who are left behind? Suicide deeply affects those who are left behind on many levels. There is the emotional trauma as well as practical issues of daily living that we must address. And, significantly, there are ongoing issues that may never find resolution.

Soldiers and civilian employees have probably already taken part in a suicide awareness/intervention class as part of a program to begin to address the issue of rising suicide rates. The period of 15 February through 15 March was designated as an Armywide “stand down” for suicide-prevention training. From 15 March through 15 July, there will be a chain teaching effort for ongoing



sustainment training, services, and support in order to address the issues of suicide at all levels of our organization. The training will focus on three areas: suicide prevention awareness, suicide intervention actions, and post grief bereavement support. The emphasis will be on training to recognize signs of potentially suicidal behavior, understand the risks of suicide, intervention strategies, and knowing how to refer individuals for follow-on support and care. The training will also focus on building resiliency in our work force in the face of the increased demands placed on it in light of the prolonged global war on terrorism. We must remind our workforce at all levels that it is okay to ask for help during times of distress and personal crisis, and leadership must be committed to decreasing any stigma associated with seeking such help.

The Army takes suicide prevention seriously and will do everything possible to minimize potential risks, not only during this current emphasis, but on a daily basis in the way we conduct business. Suicide prevention is a leadership responsibility, and can easily be built into procedures such as those dealing with discipline, deployment, and training.

Avenues of assistance: The counseling center (chaplain and employee assistance program services), National Suicide Prevention Lifeline — (800) 273-TALK (8255), or www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/Veterans/Default.aspx; National Suicide Hotline — (800) SUICIDE (784-2433); Military One Source — (800) 342-9647 or www.militaryonesource.com; Wounded Soldier and Family Hotline — (800) 984-8532.

(Chaplain [MAJ] Tammie Crews is the post chaplain at Tobyhanna Army Depot, Pa.)