

Trip Report: (b)(6) Company, 21-27 September 2008

SUMMARY

I arrived in (b)(6), Texas on the afternoon of 21 September. My concerns were two-fold: 1) care and comfort for the family, and 2) the health and well-being of (b)(6) Company. In coordination with (b)(6) (b)(6) (through (b)(6)), we made an immediate visit with the family members of SFC Henderson in the (b)(6) area. Meetings with his (b)(6), and his (b)(6) (b)(6), assured me that they both had a very supportive network of family and friends. However, since neither had any active church affiliation or local clergy support, I assumed the role of providing frequent pastoral support throughout the week. This took shape especially as we engaged in the planning of the funeral service.

Three scheduled events determined the flow of the week:

- Memorial Ceremony—Wednesday, 1400
- Visitation—Thursday, 1800
- Funeral—Friday, 1400

All events proceeded well. The family was very pleased with the support that Army community provided. (b)(6), Company Trainer, took the lead on coordinating the setup of the memorial ceremony which nearly the entire (b)(6) Company attended. The funeral capped the week with great support from a team out of Fort Hood plus a large entourage of patriotic bikers holding U.S. flags in front of the funeral home and later around the gravesite.

During the first couple days I spent considerable time with (b)(6) as he familiarized me with the (b)(6) Company area. I was close to some of the interaction between him and (b)(6) and realized that all was not healthy. Visits with recruiters ((b)(6) RS) provided a lot of comments and emotion about the issues and events surrounding the suicides of SSG Flores and SFC Henderson. My sense is that they appreciated my in-depth conversations with them (group and individual) but some remained skeptical that things would improve. I did meet with one distressed Recruiter about whom I had been alerted. Within a day he was to be evaluated at BAMC for behavioral health concerns.

FAMILY CONCERNS

(b)(6)

RECRUITER CONCERNS

- A handful (3 or 4) were visibly hard hit by the successive deaths.
Some mentioned fear of reprisal for speaking out. One referred to a off-the-record gathering of Station Commanders which was secretly recorded and played back in the presence of the (b)(6)
- There is a widespread distrust of Battalion leadership.
- Nearly all comments about (b)(6) were negative, many passionately so.

(b)(7)b

- Many held antipathy for (b)(6) (Houston Chronicle) and her attempts to pry information and comments from them. Some are convinced there is mole at Battalion, divulging to her facts known only in house.
- Some resent slow response or non-response to pay or other issues on the part of the (b)(6).

MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS

- (b)(6) seems to have hit the max stress level dealing with the two deaths under his watch, along with his not-so-friendly working relationship with (b)(6)
- (b)(6) did a magnificent job in working behind the scenes to bring together all the pieces of the memorial ceremony and other issues of coordination with family and CAOs.
- The CAOs from Fort Hood were (and continue to be) top-notch in their support of the families.
- (b)(6) brought strengths and insight to this mission that I believe were helpful – especially to the family, but also to others that have been tragically affected by the recent events in (b)(6) Company.

Submitted by Chaplain (b)(6), USAREC
28 September 2008

USAREC SUICIDE PREVENTION – Chaplain Section

I. Suicide Prevention – routine initiatives

A. Annual Training Conferences.

1. A chaplain or a chaplain's assistant trains all members of the command in suicide prevention as Battalion ATCs are held throughout 1st Quarter. As necessary we bring in chaplains from outside the command to ensure that we cover 100% of the ATCs.

2. A Unit Ministry Team (UMT) member circulates throughout the ATC for availability to address individual concerns.

3. A UMT member may at the option of the unit engage in spouses' programs, extending our reach and availability.

B. Station Commander Course. Members of the USAREC UMT train all incoming Station Commanders in Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) at the Station Commander Courses at Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

C. Site visits. Brigade Chaplains systematically circulate to Battalions, Companies, Stations, and Military Entrance Processing Stations (MEPS) in their area of operations. These site visits afford them the opportunity to assess morale and to address individual issues face to face. Companies have the option of inviting the chaplain to perform supplemental training in stress management or engage with the Family Readiness Group.

D. Counseling. All members of the command have access to the chaplain 24/7. Much of the counseling occurs telephonically. As necessary the chaplain will coordinate special site visits. Chaplains will refer as necessary to local assets.

E. Chaplain Crisis Support Network. Each Brigade Chaplain is establishing a crisis support network of chaplains (AC and RC) and civilian clergy throughout the Brigade area. These local assets agree to be available and respond in the event of a crisis of a member of the command in their area. Some of these elements actually establish an active relationship with a Recruiting Station which provides the benefit of immediate pastoral support.

F. Soldier and Family Programs. Singles', Marrieds' and Family Wellness retreats provide tools and encouragement to enhance the resiliency of the members of USAREC. These initiatives address the complexity of relationship issues and equip our Soldiers and Families to better handle the particular stresses of the recruiting mission.

1. Marriage Enrichment events – one per Battalion per year

2. Singles' Retreats – two per Brigade per year

3. Family Wellness – two per Brigade per year

G. Serious Incident Report tracking. The USAREC Command Chaplain reviews each Serious Incident Report (SIR) from across the command. Those of urgent nature prompt the USAREC Chaplain to ensure the awareness and attention of the Brigade Chaplain.

H. USAREC Command Chaplain availability. The USAREC Chaplain is available for immediate insertion as Brigade and USAREC Commands deem necessary.

I. The Suicide Prevention Board. All chaplains support the total USAREC suicide prevention effort by assisting in the analysis of trends and pockets of stress factors across the command.

J. Suicide Prevention Training support. The USAREC Chaplain maintains awareness and familiarity with established and developing suicide prevention training programs and training aids. The chaplain provides resources and ensures the equipping of the Brigade UMTs with the most current and suitable training material.

II. Suicide Postvention – after a suicide occurs

A. Pastoral ministry to the family. This involves extensive time on the part of the chaplain with the Next of Kin to include the coordination and conduct of a funeral if the family resides in the area and lacks local pastoral support.

B. Pastoral ministry to the unit. The Chaplain immediately locates to the affected Company area. Visits to Recruiting Stations and close associates of the deceased will provide ripe opportunities for the chaplain to assess unit and individual morale and to address particular concerns. The Chaplain is alert to suicide ideations which may be triggered by the accomplished suicide. The Command may elect to request supplemental Chaplain support from USAREC. The chaplain briefs the command and makes recommendations regarding specialized courses of action. The chaplain advises the command on the planning and conduct of a memorial ceremony.

The Role of Marriage Enrichment Events in the USAREC Suicide Prevention Program

BLUF: As goes the home, so goes the Recruiter. A Soldier with a strong marriage will generally be a more stable, consistent and effective Recruiter. Marriage enrichment programs in USAREC as preventive measures have multiple payoffs for the command—not the least of which is suicide prevention.

The majority of USAREC suicides occur in the context of severe marital issues. Marriages and families are key components to a successful recruiting mission. Any effort to sustain this most important asset will reward, not only in production success but also in the emotional stability of the Recruiter.

Marriage enrichment programs serve to encourage and equip our Recruiters with the tools to better handle the complexities of the marriage relationship and draw strength from the foundation of their domestic life into their recruiting functions.

Marriage enrichment programs also serve as a tangible demonstration to the spouse that the Army does indeed care for the total Soldier, not just his or her work performance.

The current USAREC standard is one marriage enrichment event per battalion per year.

Recommend at least doubling that number in order to accommodate a larger part of our USAREC population. It would also extend our suicide effort in the area in which our Recruiters are most vulnerable.

Chaplain (b)(6)