

United States Division - South



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Basra Soldiers talk about sexual assault

Story and photos by Sgt. Raymond Quintanilla, USD-S PAO

BASRA, Iraq – The Big Red One Society Against Sexual Assault, 1st Infantry Division, United States Division-South held a day-long “BRO-SASA” conference at the post Chapel in Basra Dec. 8, to candidly discuss sexual assault in the military.

“If a Soldier was injured from combat wounds and pulled out of the (front) line, everybody else has to pick up the slack,” said Master Sgt. Michael Dempster.

“It’s the same concept. Sexual assault affects all Soldiers,” said Dempster, the noncommissioned officer in charge for the Division Equal Opportunity Office, 1st Infantry Division.

Sgt. 1st Class Tracy Jordan, the division sexual assault response coordinator said the number one goal of BRO-SASA is ‘prevention before reaction’ by educating Soldiers and leadership, through conferences and seminars.

Jordan, also a unit victim advocate, said BRO-SASA branched off from the official conference of United States Forces-Iraq.

“The official conference was started by the Sisterhood Against Sexual Assault,” said Jordan, a native of St. Louis, Mo. “So what we did was just made it all inclusive, a society. We did that because we do know there are men who have been sexually assaulted.”

Jordan, said that statistically sexual assault happens more to women and the majority of those who come forward are female victims.

“People don’t think it could happen to them,” said Jordan. “It doesn’t just happen to females, but males are going to be very reluctant to report any type of sexual assault because they don’t want to be labeled as gay ... or a punk.”

Dempster said sexual assault is one of the most unreported crimes in America and even one assault is enough to warrant the training because of the severe impact it has on people’s lives.

“It affects the unit. If the victim and perpetrator are both in the same unit, it could cause the unit to divide,” Dempster said. “Some people believe the perpetrator and you have other Soldiers who may side with the victim.”

The responsibility to prevent sexual assault is everyone’s, said Jordan.

“Every individual is responsible to ensure that it doesn’t happen,” Jordan said. “However the command is responsible to ensure their Soldiers and their leadership understand there is zero tolerance for sexual assault.”

“If that’s not emphasized from the top level to the lowest level, Soldiers are not going to take it serious until it happens to them or until they are accused of sexual assault.”

Dempster said the ‘prevention before reaction’ campaign places a high importance in educating and broadening the Soldiers’ knowledge on sexual assault, and expects the program to grow.

“I think it’s a good program, it allows Soldiers to see ways they can protect themselves,” Dempster said. “When we redeploy back to Fort Riley, (Kan.), this is a program we’re going to take back with us. We will get more involved and get more people participating in the training.”

Jordan said part of her responsibility is to act as the eyes and ears for the command group.

“We deal with sexual harassment, sexual assault, unfair treatment, and unequal treatment,” Jordan said. “We are here to identify if there are any problems in the command, unit or at the lowest level. Bring it to the surface and ensure the command is aware.”

The EO office is only one avenue made available to Soldiers, depending on the type of report (restricted and unrestricted) an individual desires to file.

The Inspector General, Criminal Investigation Department, Staff Judge Advocate, medical personnel, Chaplain, unit victim advocate, and the chain of

command are other routes Soldiers could seek assistance on sexual assault.

Jordan said she felt the program would have a greater impact on Soldier's actions through the "I A.M. (intervene, act, motivate) Strong" campaigns.

"If we can heighten the awareness about sexual assault across the U.S. armed forces," said Jordan. "To take that one step to intervene, act and motivate. I think people will be more motivated to do the right thing, that's what BRO-SASA is about."

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Private 1st Class Canaan Potter, from McAlester, Okla., responds to a question from Maj. Gen. Vincent K. Brooks, the commanding general for the United States Division-South and 1st Inf. Div., during a Big Red One-Society Against Sexual Assault conference Dec. 8. BRO-SASA branched from the United States Forces-Iraq Sisterhood Against Sexual Assault. (Sgt. Raymond Quintanilla, 305th MPAD)



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Lt. Col. Christine Pacheco, the 1st Infantry Division's division equal opportunity program manager listens to a Soldier's view during a Big Red One -Society Against Sexual Assault conference Dec. 8. BRO-SASA branched from the United States Forces-Iraq Sisterhood Against Sexual Assault. (Sgt. Raymond Quintanilla, 305th MPAD)