

## 402nd CAB takes control in Djibouti

CAMP LEMONNIER, Djibouti — The U.S. Army 402nd Civil Affairs Battalion with home station at Fort Buchanan, Puerto Rico, took over as the battalion headquarters for the Horn of Africa in a transfer of authority flag unfurling ceremony Sept. 14, at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti.

The 418th Civil Affairs Battalion, the outgoing unit, was the first battalion headquarters to stand up on the African continent. The battalion also managed 12 civil affairs teams in seven countries that completed more than 100 projects, including more than a dozen medical and veterinary projects.

"The 402nd Civil Affairs Battalion is comprised of approximately 130 soldiers whose mission it is to support the CJTF-HOA mission by helping local nations come up with African solutions to African problems", said the battalion's Command Sergeant Major Jose Torres. "We cover the whole plethora (of projects) through engagement projects with the host nation governments," said U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey Jurasek, 402nd CA BN Commander.

Civil affairs teams refurbish hospitals, schools and clinics, as well as drill wells and conduct medical and veterinarian exercises and trainings.

"All the projects are planned in coordination with CJTF-HOA, the U.S. Agency for International Development and local embassies," Torres said. The 402nd Civil Affairs Battalion will be deployed in Djibouti for approximately one year, until another unit takes its place. Most of the Battalion headquarters is run by Puerto Rican Soldiers.



Courtesy photos

Left: 402nd Civil Affairs Battalion Colors are unfurled by Lt. Col. Jeffrey Jurasek and Command Sgt. Maj. José Torres during a transfer of authority ceremony at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti Sept. 14. Above: the color guard for the 402nd CAB performs their role during the transfer of authority



## Suicide prevention: we don't have to be experts, we just have to care

Story by Kim Reischling  
Fort Polk Public Affairs

FORT POLK, La. — I've stared at this blank canvas — the open page on my word document program — on and off for hours. I haven't been idle, though. In between frustrated backspacing and vacuous stares, I've responded to e-mails, answered phone calls, arranged coverage of installation events and myriad other duties that compose the majority of my work day.

I know exactly what I want to get across in this commentary. I'm a journalist, so I usually have no trouble putting words together. But today is different, perhaps because what I want to write about is personal and close to my heart; perhaps because it's something many of us would prefer to ignore. It's too painful, too shocking, too grief-invoking, too taboo a topic even in today's progressive society.

Suicide. In 2006, it was the 11th leading cause of death in the U.S., accounting for 33,300 deaths, according to the National Institute of Mental Health. And in the Army population, this year suicide has become the third leading cause of death. But statistics are too sterile. They do little to depict

the tragedy, the ugliness, the shocking brutality of suicide ...

My first exposure to suicide occurred when I was an impressionable 14-year old, when a close family friend committed suicide in a way that shocked even medical authorities. Suffering from depression, bereft at the dissolution of his marriage, my father's friend repeatedly stabbed himself until he bled to death, at first puzzling the investigating police who thought a murder had taken place. His act was beyond my comprehension. For months, I experienced sleepless nights imagining the pain he must have felt to end his life in such a horrible way. How could anyone fail to see that pain? How did his family and friends miss his cries for help? Even now, years later, when I think of him, it haunts me to imagine his final moments.

Almost 30 years later, my mother passed away at the ripe old age of 57 after a years-long battle with bipolar depression, a mental illness that carries with it a high suicide rate. Even the medical examiner suspected that she had committed suicide.

The fact that she actually died of heart failure did nothing to erase the

### Fort Buchanan leaders offer help to those in need



Photo by Luis Delgado

Members of the Fort Buchanan Religious Services office, in conjunction with leaders from the Army Substance Abuse Program work to offer assistance to those in the community contemplating suicide. The static display above, along with information displays could be found during September's suicide prevention week. Despite the week-long focus, leaders at Fort Buchanan continue to cast light on the prevention of suicide throughout the year.

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# Stories of triumph, coping reverberate throughout Army

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weeks of uncertainty my siblings and I spent sick to our souls, wracked with guilt that we didn't do enough for her, that somehow we didn't hear her cries for help, that we should have taken better care of her. And we didn't know how we'd live with the burden.

Five years later, as my brother-in-law lay dying of pancreatic cancer; my sister told me she would kill herself after he died. There was no point, she said, in going on without her husband, the love of her life, the man she had depended on since the age of 17. Her words gnawed at me, and I knew then that we both needed help.

Upon the advice of a Fort Polk chaplain, I took the Army's suicide prevention course — Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training, or ASIST. The training taught me that it was vital to open

a dialogue with my sister, that talking with her honestly about suicide was not going to put her over the edge. What a novel idea that was 10 short years ago. And when I next spoke with her, after a few awkward minutes, our words flowed. There was relief on her part, I think, that I wasn't respond-

ing with a trite phrase like "Don't talk like that," or "You have too much to live for." I listened and I cared.

Through her own perseverance and strength, and with the help of qualified medical professionals, my sister is doing just fine now. I am grateful for that, and I am grateful for having taken ASIST training.

The topic of suicide continues to touch my life — in ways that inspire and move me. Through the years I've worked at Fort Polk's Public Affairs Office, I've met some courageous people who have shared their stories with me. They've spoken openly about their struggles with suicide and suicidal thoughts ...

There was the Fort Polk Family member who took an overdose of

sleeping medication, seeking relief from her mental anguish. She never expected to wake up, but she did.

She got the help she needed and was eager to share her story. She wanted to let others know that there is hope, there is relief from pain, there is help for those who feel they are facing insurmountable challenges all alone ...

There was the Fort Polk Soldier, thriving now, who survived a suicide attempt because his battle buddy removed the firing pin from his rifle. His message: Speak up, speak out, get help and care for your buddy as he was cared for by his ...

Most recently, there is Jamie Flowers, an Army spouse who also works at Army Community Service. Jamie's father passed away when she was 16. Two years later, in June, 1997, Jamie's mother died. Jamie sought comfort with her younger sister.

"We would lie in bed together and hold hands, but we never really talked about it."

**“**  
*I got married in 2004 to a Soldier, and that has been the best thing that's happened. He's allowed me to talk and to cry and he's been willing to listen. But every deployment, and there have been four, brings back my feelings of loss. Every time he leaves I feel that emptiness inside.*

— Jamie Flowers, Army Spouse

In August, Jamie left for college. But without her mother, without her sister's comfort, Jamie felt she had lost her anchor and emotional support. Jamie went to college feeling frightened and alone.

"I had no one to depend on. I felt I had lost everything in my

life that I loved and I didn't know where to go for help," she said. Soon the depression set in.

"I just wanted to be with my mom and dad. I wanted to go to sleep and never wake up."

Jamie used her faith to keep herself alive. "I'd tell myself that suicide is a sin, and if I did it, I would never again see my mom and dad. And, I think the thought of leaving my younger sister alone stopped me. She is my strength." Still, Jamie had a plan ready.

"I always had the means to commit suicide nearby (pills). I had a note ready for my roommate. I wanted her to tell my siblings that I died of a sickness, not suicide."

After professional counseling, Ja-

mie worked through her anguish, but some hurts can linger a lifetime.

"I got married in 2004 to a Soldier, and that has been the best thing that's happened. He's allowed me to talk and to cry and he's been willing to listen. But every deployment, and there have been four, brings back my feelings of loss. Every time he leaves I feel that emptiness inside," she said.

But Jamie is one determined woman. Now working on a degree in psychology, she says that the "best is yet to come." She also felt strongly about using her name for this commentary in the hopes that she can be a source of strength to other military spouses.

Jamie, too, has taken ASIST training, and it's been of huge help, she said. "I don't ever want to go back to that place, that river of suicide. If I do, I'll never get the chance to be a mom, a sister, a Dr. Flowers. I feel now that I know what steps to take to get the help I need. There are no guarantees that I won't get depressed again or suffer from anxiety, but I am never going to contemplate suicide. I have too much to live for."

Jamie said that she often gets called "a hooah Army wife. But really, I am just a human being. I never want anyone to feel as if they are treading water or on the edge."

And from someone who's been there, Jamie offers this advice to other spouses who may be suffering from depression, anxiety or have had suicidal thoughts: "Find someone to listen to you. Don't be afraid to talk to someone. Talk to your spouses, close friend, a chaplain — just find someone! And don't let anyone dictate to


you how you should feel. Reach out to other people," she said ...

I will never forget these people. I keep them close to me, for in many ways they've changed my life. I'm obligated to them now for the trust they have placed in me. They've shared with me — with us — the most intimate details of their lives in the hopes that they can offer help and hope to someone else. They have shown me that courage wears many faces and the most tragic, the most trying of times can be overcome.

Most of all they have taught me that all of us have a responsibility to our neighbors, coworkers and friends. We can all be advocates for suicide prevention. We can all help to reduce the number of suicides in our Army Family by watching, caring and acting.

We have to — it's our responsibility. We don't have to be experts, we just have to care. Remember the acronym ACE: Ask, Care, Escort. If you suspect someone is contemplating suicide, ask that person about it. Care for that individual by taking away the means to commit suicide — car keys, weapons or medication. Escort the person to behavioral health, the chaplain, or a supervisor. Get that person to qualified, professional help as quickly as possible.

For more information please contact Fort Buchanan: Mrs. Myrna Llanos and Mr. Alberto Orellana, (787) 707-3125, 707-3897. Mr. Ricardo Villalba, who completed the ASIST workshop in Suicide first aid. Ricardo is available at (787) 707-3068. Chaplain Office: (787) 707-3904.



### CSM's Leader Development


All personnel (civilian and military) must adhere to the rules and regulations regarding safety while on Fort Buchanan, especially when it comes to Physical Training.

All runners/walkers are **required** to run or walk facing **oncoming** traffic (left side of the road). This is not an option. The runner/walker's back should never be to the traffic. This allows the runner/walker to maintain eye-to-eye contact with the vehicle operator and gives the runner/walker a chance to react should the vehicle come too close. Vehicle operators should not have to guess what a runner/walker is going to do. This rule ensures the safety of both the vehicle operator and the runner/walker.

Reflective belts are mandatory. Absolutely no headphones, IPODS, MP3s, etc., when running — this goes for everybody — military and civilians.

Bicyclists **must** wear helmets, reflective belts or vests, and obey all posted traffic signs just as a vehicle operator is required to do.

Please think safety in all that you do. And, as always, thanks for your continued support.



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