



Release #02-002
PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE
4th BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM
82nd AIRBORNE DIVISION
Fort Bragg, NC 28310-5000
Phone (910) 432-3239/907-2826

February 27, 2009

Release # 02-002
For Immediate Release

Airborne couples train as a team

4th Brigade chaplains lead marriage retreat

By Sgt. Stephen Decatur
4th Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs Office 82nd Airborne Division

Fort Bragg, N.C- Staff Sgt. George Rouska of Company A, 782nd Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division will celebrate his 14th wedding anniversary with his wife, Kenya, in April. In those 14 years, they've had four children and been through six deployments. So you'd think if anyone is the expert on surviving a deployment together, it'd be them.

"You'd think," George said. "But a lot of things change. Every time is different."

So George and Kenya decided that they would spend this Valentine's Day going to a married couples retreat sponsored by the Army and led by the brigade's chaplains.

The retreat, which was held Feb. 13 to Feb. 15 in Myrtle Beach, S.C., and attended by 100 couples, was part of the Army's "Stronger Bonds" program to help married Soldiers keep their relationships together through deployments and settle family issues before deploying.

The Army spends millions of dollars on marriage programs every year, said Chaplain (Maj.) Scott Kennedy. The brigade holds a retreat quarterly, while the battalions hold smaller events at regular intervals.

The retreat covered a wide range of marital issues from "relations" to techniques for better communication and understanding.

Sgt. Zachary Murdock of 4th Squadron, 73rd Cavalry Regiment and his wife, Becky, had been to marriage retreats before. They've been married three years and have a newborn son.

“Every time we’ve gone we’ve learned about a couple things,” Zachary said. “Especially now that we have a child, we’ve got new problems.”

“We have no time for each other,” Becky said

For Zachary, having a child will make deploying a little bit harder, missing his son’s first birthday or the first time he walks, but in a way it will be easier for his wife, he said.

“I’ll have a piece of him with me,” Becky agreed, holding up their boy.

Private Octavia Santos of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 508th Special Troops Battalion and her husband Ray were first timers to the retreat. In fact, they’re newly weds. As a male Army spouse, Ray is a rare breed.

“I don’t see myself in the enlisted wives club,” Ray said.

Ray spent 15 years in the Army and encouraged his wife to join, and to go airborne. The Army is something they share as a couple, they said.

Although Ray resisted going to the retreat at first, the couple was impressed by what they learned, they said.

“Stay strong,” Octavia said. “All those ‘what if’s, those negative thoughts, need to be crushed; focus on the positive.”

Stronger Bonds is just one example of how the Army has shifted focus onto the family, Kennedy said. Other initiatives include the construction of new housing, the signing of the Army family covenant, and the hiring of permanent family readiness group assistants down to the battalion level of organization, a position that used to be a strictly volunteer job.

Ultimately, being free from the stress of pressing issues at home will help Paratroopers focus on their mission so that they can safely return, Kennedy said.

“The Army realizes we’re more than machines,” Kennedy said. “Family readiness is an integral aspect of unit readiness.”

For Paratroopers like George Rouska, family readiness means being able to look forward to that moment when he returns once again to the loving arms of his wife and children. Each time he comes home from deployment it keeps getting better, Rouska said.

“It *never* gets old,” he said.