



# “WRAIR Forward”

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## COMMANDER’S CORNER

The OPTEMPO at USAMRU-E continues to be very high. We are in the midst of an “all-hands-on-deck” study evaluating Enhanced Battlemind with Soldiers from the newly reflagged 172d Infantry Brigade. The entire unit has been involved in this effort with nearly everyone “moving” to Schweinfurt for six weeks. It is one of the joys of this command to lead the Soldiers and civilians of this unit while conducting field research. We were fortunate to have additional research support from WRAIR’s Department of Military Psychiatry. The team has done an exceptional job. We have received positive feedback about the training from the 172d Soldiers and leaders. It is enlightening, heart warming, and sometimes heart wrenching to read what Soldiers write as part of the study. The writings provide insight into how Soldiers transition home from a 15-month deployment to Iraq and some of the struggles they face.

In support of another study, USAMRU-E helped in getting the MHAT V report briefed to the highest levels of DoD leadership, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I would like to thank LTC Paul Bliese for championing the OEF Soldiers’ concerns along with the concerns of the Soldiers in OIF.

Finally, this month I attended the Europe Regional Medical Command (ERMC) Commander’s Conference and learned about the continuing transformation of the US Army forces in Europe. This is a dynamic and exciting time to be in Germany.

-MAJ Dennis McGurk

## PAPER IDENTIFIES IMPORTANCE OF PTSD SYMPTOMS IN UNDERSTANDING MTBI

COL Hoge, Director, Division of Psychiatry and Neurosciences, WRAIR, MAJ McGurk, Commander, USAMRU-E, and colleagues published an article on mild Traumatic Brain Injury (mTBI) in *The New England Journal of Medicine* (31 JAN 08).

As the paper states, little is known about the epidemiology of the long-term effect of mTBI (i.e. concussion) associated with the war in Iraq. Results from a survey of more than 2,500 Soldiers conducted 3 to 4 months after they returned from Iraq found that posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression are important mediators of the relationship between mTBI and physical health problems.

## MHAT V REPORT RELEASED

The Army released the findings from the fifth Mental Health Advisory Team (MHAT V) on 6 MAR 08. The report detailed the results from 2,279 surveys collected in Iraq and 889 surveys collected in Afghanistan in the fall of 2007. The Afghanistan portion of the report was written by team leader LTC McBride, Division of Psychiatry and Neurosciences, and USAMRU-E Commander MAJ McGurk.

### MAJOR FINDINGS:

- Soldiers in Afghanistan reported higher rates of depression than Soldiers deployed to Iraq; other mental health rates were similar.
- Soldiers in Afghanistan reported more combat experiences relative to a 2005 MHAT survey in Afghanistan.
- Comparisons with Brigade Combat Team (BCT) Soldiers in Iraq showed that BCT Soldiers in Afghanistan reported a similar or higher number of combat experiences.
- Significant barriers to mental health care and problems with behavioral health personnel reaching Soldiers were also reported in Afghanistan.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendations in the MHAT report for Afghanistan included the appointment of a behavioral health care consultant to the Command Surgeon, redistribution of behavioral health assets and an aggressive outreach program. Battlemind psychological debriefing (a USAMRU-E and Department of Military Psychiatry, WRAIR, initiative) was also recommended for use in Afghanistan.

The report provides a great deal of additional detail and addresses findings pertaining to Iraq. The full report can be found at: [www.armymedicine.army.mil/news/mhat/mhat\\_v/mhat-v.cfm](http://www.armymedicine.army.mil/news/mhat/mhat_v/mhat-v.cfm)

### BRIEFINGS:

MAJ McGurk worked with co-authors at the WRAIR to finalize the MHAT report (Silver Spring, MD, 27JAN – 10 FEB 08). Together with LTC Bliese, Lead of MHAT V in Iraq, MAJ Thomas, Department of Military Psychiatry, and LTC McBride, Division of Psychiatry and Neurosciences, MAJ McGurk briefed LTG Cody, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Army (5 FEB 08). Other briefs included the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Congress.

The MHAT V findings were featured in numerous news reports including the AP wire, Stars and Stripes, USA Today, and the New York Times.

### NEW PUBLICATION

#### COVERING CLINICAL DOMAINS IN SCREENING SOLDIERS

Wright, K.M., Bliese, P.D., Thomas, J.L., Adler, A.B., Eckford, R.D., & Hoge, C.W. (2007). Contrasting approaches to psychological screening with U.S. combat soldiers. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 20, 965-975.



Hoge, C.W., McGurk, D., Thomas, J.L., Cox, A.L., Engel, C.C., & Castro, C.A. (2008). Mild traumatic brain injury in U.S. soldiers returning from Iraq. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 358, 453-463.

## USAMRU-E STUDIES ROLE OF WRITING IN COMBAT-TO-HOME TRANSITION



USAMRU-E led a study to assess the efficacy of enhanced Battlemind Training at the 3-6 month post-deployment phase. Soldiers from a Brigade (BDE) returning from a 15-month deployment to Iraq were randomly assigned to one of three post-deployment training conditions: Battlemind Training only, Emotional writing about the combat-to-home transition experience, and

neutral writing about health-related behaviors. In all, more than 1,400 Soldiers were provided the training and surveyed. The information provided will be used to shape future iterations of Battlemind Training (Protocol #1171).

The data collection dates ranged from 18 FEB 08 to 29 MAR 08. Study personnel covered varying time periods and included a combined USAMRU-E and Department of Military Psychiatry, WRAIR, team.



MAJ McGurk briefs Soldiers as part of a post-deployment transition study

- From USAMRU-E: MAJ McGurk (On-Site Lead), CPT Cabrera, Dr. Wright, Dr. Adler (co-Principal Investigator), SSG Abrahamson (NCOIC), SGT Williams, Ms. Salvi (Data Base Manager), Ms. Eckford.
- From the Department of Military Psychiatry, WRAIR: SPC McGinnis, Ms. Whitt, Mr. Kim and Mr. Klocko.

The study was conducted with support from Army Community Services, the Schweinfurt Health Clinic, and BDE staff members, including CPT Cahill, BDE Surgeon.

Preliminary coordination included a meeting with the BDE Surgeon in Schweinfurt on 22 JAN 08 (Dr. Adler and Ms. Salvi) and training ombudsmen and conducting a site visit on 29 JAN 08 (Dr. Adler, Dr. Wright, SSG Abrahamson, SGT Williams, SPC Terry). Brigade leadership received two in-briefs (29 JAN 08 and 19 FEB 08).

## BATTELMIND TRAINING SYSTEM UPDATE

- The PDHRA Battlemind Training with embedded videos was revamped from experience in the field and provided to the WRAIR's Battlemind Transition Office (17 MAR 08).
- USAMRU-E was invited to conduct a Battlemind Training Overview for the US Air Force, Europe, in Ramstein on 24 JAN 08 (MAJ McGurk & Dr. Adler).
- MAJ McGurk was invited to the USAREUR Reintegration Conference to present on post-deployment assessment, Battlemind Training, and innovative ideas on policy (Bad Kreuznach, 14 & 15 JAN 08).

## MEDCOM LEADERSHIP BRIEFED

- MAJ McGurk and SSG Abrahamson participated in the ERMIC Change of Command on 9 JAN 08 in which incoming Commander COL(P) Gallagher took command of ERMIC from outgoing Commander BG Rubenstein.
- MAJ McGurk briefed LTG Schoemaker, the Army Surgeon General, about the unit's activities (Heidelberg, 9 JAN 08).
- MAJ McGurk provided BG Gallagher, CG, ERMIC, with an in-brief on the unit (17 JAN 08).

## DEPLOYMENT-RELATED RESEARCH PRESENTED AT NATIONAL MEETING

Presentations highlighted USAMRU-E and Department of Military Psychiatry, WRAIR, work at the 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Occupational Stress & Health, Washington, D.C. sponsored by the National Institutes for Occupational Safety and Health and American Psychological Association (6-8 MAR 08).



Symposium: T.W. Britt & J.L. Thomas (Chairs), Deriving Benefits from Stressful Work: The Case of Combat Veterans:

- Adler, A.B., Bliese, P.D., McGurk, D., & Castro, C.A. (2008, March). Transitioning Home: The Role of Combat Experiences and Leadership. (presented by LTC Bliese).
- Britt, T.W., Castro, C.A., Hoge, C.W., & McGurk, D., (2008, March). Benefit finding predicts dysfunctional and functional deployment outcomes.
- Riviere, L. A., Clark, J.C., Bliese, P.D., McGurk, D. & Hoge, C.W. (2008, March). National Guard Soldiers' Post-Deployment Benefit Finding.

Symposium: R. R. Sinclair (Chair), Mental Health Effects of Combat Deployments: Intervention-Focused Military Research:

- Adler, A.B., Bliese, P.D., McGurk, D., Hoge, C.W., & Castro, C.A. (November 2008). The Efficacy of Psychological Debriefing with Soldiers Returning From Combat. (presented by COL Castro)
- Castro, C.A., Adler, A.B., McGurk, D., Hoge, C.W., Milliken, C., & Bliese, P.D. (November 2008). Battlemind Training: Building Soldier Resiliency.

## USAMRU-E SUPPORTS RESEARCH

- Dr. Adler consulted on protocol file management to the Land Combat Study Team at the Division of Psychiatry and Neurosciences, WRAIR (Silver Spring, MD, 5-18 JAN 08).
- COL Wood, Deputy State Surgeon for Medical Readiness, Montana National Guard, and student at the Army War College, visited the unit to discuss medical research and psychological screening. The meeting in Heidelberg included CPT Cabrera, Dr. Wright, and Dr. Adler (9 JAN 08).

## PERSONNEL UPDATES

- SPC Terry left the unit and active service on 9 MAR 08.
- MAJ McGurk participated in the ERMIC Commander's Conference in Weinheim (25-26 MAR 08).

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