



Sgt. 1st Class Sarah Whatley has created a mobile SHARP application for use by Soldiers in the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division. The app is designed to bring life-saving contacts and information to Soldiers' fingertips in the event of an emergency. Other brigades have been challenged to create something similar, and commanders have hopes of an Armywide app in the near future. (Photo by Meghan Portillo/NCO Journal)

# NCO Creates SHARP App To Aid Soldiers In An Emergency

*By Meghan Portillo — NCO Journal*

**S**gt. 1st Class Sarah Whatley was taught to leave a unit better off than when she came to it, and that is exactly what she did.

Whatley, the brigade sexual assault response coordinator, or SARC, for 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, Texas, has created a Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention application for mobile devices to help Soldiers and their leaders respond to sexual assaults. The app allows users to call the SHARP hotline, locate a hospital or contact brigade SARCs, victim advocates, the Family Advocacy Program, Child Protective Services, the military police or local police departments at the touch of a finger.

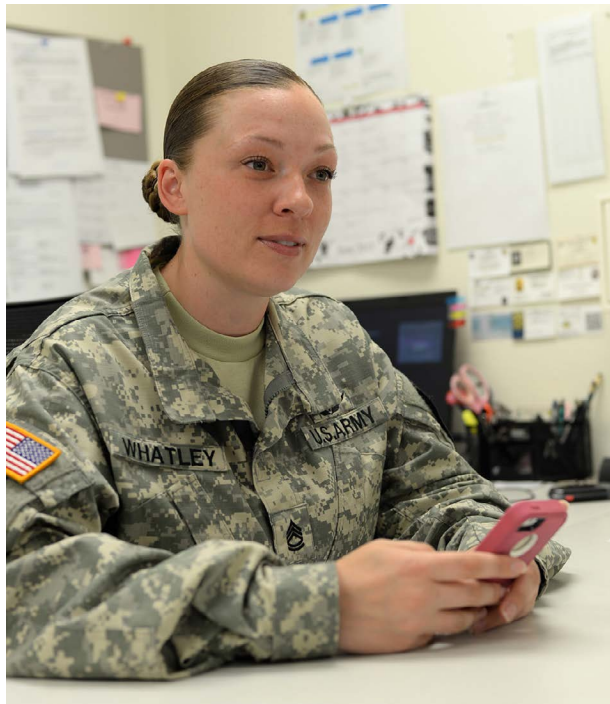
The app — SHARP 1ACB — is a free download in Google Play and in the iTunes App Store, and Whatley

has encouraged every Soldier in her brigade to keep it on their phones.

“I hope this is a new step in bringing resources to Soldiers — especially now,” Whatley said. “Soldiers now are so technologically dependent. They come to us straight from basic training. They are in the reception battalion over there, and they don’t have a TV. They don’t have a car. They have a little duffel bag full of clothes and a few things they were issued in basic training. But they have the newest, latest, greatest phone with all the bells and whistles. And they never leave it behind.”

## **How will this app change things?**

If a Soldier is assaulted and needs help, he or she may need to contact the brigade SARC, the hotline or



Sgt. 1st Class Sarah Whatley created a mobile SHARP application to help the Soldiers of her brigade if they ever find themselves in a time of need. (Photo by Meghan Portillo/NCO Journal)

a victim advocate. Many units have cards printed with SHARP information, but Soldiers often may not have access to them when they need it the most.

“You could tell a Soldier, ‘You have to carry this card,’ and it just goes in the stack of accountable item cards,” Whatley said. “They have the ACE (Ask, Care and Escort) suicide prevention cards, they have the taxi cab don’t-drink-and-drive cards. This is just another card in the stack. So if an assault does happen when they are out at a house party with some friends, at a club or something like that, not very often are they going to be like, ‘Oh, hold on, I have a card for that.’”

Most of the time, victims are upset. They are distraught. Alcohol or drugs may be involved. Yes, they could Google contact information or look on the SHARP Facebook page for guidance, but Whatley says that is not fast enough during an emergency.

Whatley was searching for a way to simplify things, and she and her commanders think this app is the answer. It puts any resource Soldiers may need only three taps away. With all of the numbers hyperlinked, users need only tap once to open the app, tap on the category of resources they need – hospital, police, SARC, etc. – and tap to dial.

The Army has a ton of programs out there to help Soldiers, but many don’t know about them, Whatley said. Advertisements abound on cluttered boards in offices and hallways, but how much are Soldiers really

taking in? And how much of it would they think of in an emergency?

“Maybe we wouldn’t need to print out so much take-away material if we could say, ‘Hey, download this free app.’ It would save the Army a lot of money,” Whatley said.

Because Whatley did the legwork of developing and publishing the app, her brigade only pays \$108 per year to keep it going.

“How much do you think it costs to print off one SHARP booklet?” Whatley asked. “Let alone that whole case of them I’ve got in there. And by the time I get those books passed out, they are going to have new ones made – a newer, updated version.”

With the app, Whatley can employ an unlimited number of live updates. If a SARC or victim advocate’s number is changed, all it takes is an update on Whatley’s computer for every single app user to have continued access to the latest information.

She said she hopes the Army will utilize apps as an avenue to save resources while more effectively helping Soldiers.

## What does this mean for NCOs?

The app is also an invaluable tool in the hands of NCOs, as they are often the ones a Soldier turns to after an assault, Whatley said. They need to know the information contained in the app and how to handle any given situation appropriately.

“Even if all of the Soldiers don’t have it, if their NCOs do, then that is one step forward,” Whatley said. “As an NCO, Soldiers are our business. We have to know them, be able to train them and look out for them. The Soldiers look to us to do that. And when it comes to a topic like sexual harassment or sexual assault, a whole other level of trust is put into play. That Soldier may trust that NCO wholeheartedly and [prefer to come to him or her instead of a SARC they don’t know.] It is vital that that NCO, one, knows how to handle that situation appropriately, and, two, knows how to get that Soldier to assistance. It may be hospital care, or they may need protection from the individual who assaulted them. They may want to be removed from the situation – temporarily reassigned out of the unit. NCOs need to react appropriately and get those Soldiers where they need to be.”

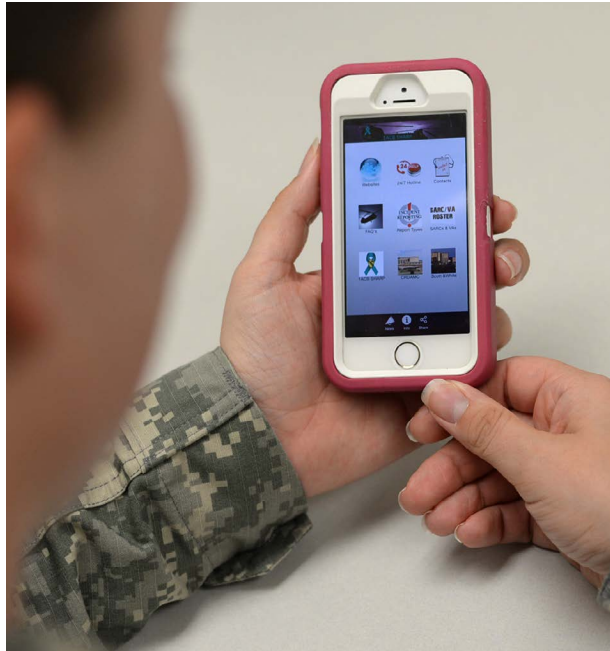
Sgt. 1st Class Yvonne Desfasses, a SARC currently assigned as the first sergeant for 615th Aviation Support Battalion, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, presented the app to her battalion during a safety brief.

“I think it will be useful to our NCOs who have to come through and check the barracks, because if they come upon a situation, they may need those resources,” Desfasses said. “This way, they don’t have to hunt down a number. It’s just always there.”

## Creating the app

Whatley has learned that, as an NCO, there is more than one way to reach out and help Soldiers. Creating this app was her way of being there for every Soldier in her brigade, even though she can't give them individual attention.

"When I got into this position and was asked to be the brigade SARC," Whatley said, "I thought, 'This is my opportunity to really try to leave not just a company or a battalion, but a whole brigade better off and have an impact on that many Soldiers.'"



Sgt. 1st Class Sarah Whatley created a mobile SHARP application for 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division. (Photo by Meghan Portillo/NCO Journal)

The idea for the app came to Whatley while she was on 24-hour hotline duty, discussing modern solutions to Soldiers' needs with a victim advocate. As Whatley had never created an app before, her colleague pointed her to several websites that would guide her through the process. She decided to use appmakr.com, and found the process easier than she had anticipated.

"Instead of me having to build codes to have a function, they had preset codes, and I pulled and manipulated everything the way I wanted it," she said. "They reviewed it for appropriate pixel resolution, data, made sure there were no copy-right issues, made sure everything functioned like it was supposed to, that everything was legitimate.

"Then, once I had my command's approval, I had to go through a long legal process to justify funds so that the unit paid for the app. The unit and the unit command ensured we did everything appropriately, legally. I may have had the idea, I may have put it together, but it's not mine. It's the unit's. I wanted it that way; I wanted it to belong to the unit instead of to me."

When Whatley got the green light, she had to tackle the publishing process. It was important for her to publish the app in both Google Play and in the iTunes App Store so that all Soldiers would have access to the app, no matter what kind of phone they may have.

She submitted a coded file containing the finished app to Google, along with a one-time publishing fee, and the app was available to android users before the end of April, SHARP awareness month. The process to publish the app through the iTunes App Store was more complicated, she said, as Apple has different requirements and screens every app before publication. If an app does not have a clean, refined and user-friendly interface, for example, or has broken links or incomplete information, it will probably not make the cut.

"Apple doesn't take apps from just anyone. But they took the app and it was published by the 18th of June," Whatley said.

After Whatley created the app for the brigade, her commander, Col. Jeffery Thompson, had her brief her work to the 1st Cavalry Division commander, Brig. Gen. Michael Bills. Bills then had her present her work to the III Corps commander, Lt. Gen. Sean MacFarland, and every brigade commander on Fort Hood.

Whatley said success is hard to measure, but she will be tracking downloads.

"It's a simple question of – is it being used? Did it help you?" Whatley said. "If I'm getting people telling me, 'Yes, I am using it,' and 'Yes, it helped me,' then this is something we need to sustain. I always said if the app helps even one person in a time of need, then it did its job." ■

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