

SHARP Summit Focuses On Awareness, Changing Army Culture

By Sachel Harris - United States Army Alaska

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Command Sgt. Maj. Terry Gardner speaks to U.S. Army Alaska noncommissioned officers during the SHARP NCO Summit Jan. 11 at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska. The summit was the first of its kind held here for USARAK NCOs.

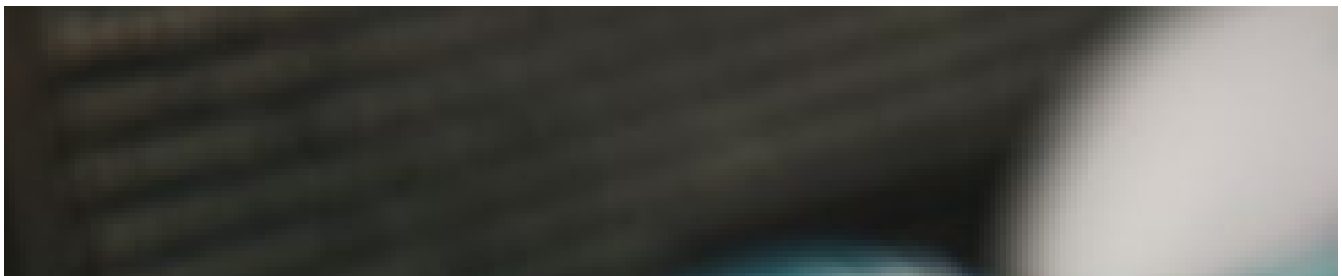
From beginning to end, the inaugural U.S. Army Alaska NCO SHARP (Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention) Summit on Jan. 11 at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, was unfiltered, honest and provided a harsh look at sexual misconduct in the military.

The summit offered a forum for noncommissioned officers in a variety of leadership positions to discuss victim services, address offender accountability and share best practices in combating sexual harassment and sexual assault.

"It is my hope that these NCOs are really inspired to change the culture," USARAK Command Sgt. Maj. Terry Gardner said. "I hope our NCOs will be able to affect our lower enlisted Soldiers and be the sounding board and advocate they need."

Sexual assault response coordinators, victim advocates and unit leaders from throughout USARAK joined guest speakers for presentations and open mic sessions. The open mic sessions focused on raising awareness and understanding victim support services, the investigative and legal process, a survivor's perspective, prevention and ways NCOs can play a role in effecting change.

"We have so many Soldiers who want to do the right thing, but they don't know what right looks like," said Sgt. Maj. Stephen Bowens, Department of the Army's Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention sergeant major. "I'm hoping our NCOs walk away from this today more educated and more empowered to hold people accountable no matter what their rank is."





SAPR gifts are displayed on a table outside the SHARP Summit at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska. The SHARP program reinforces the Army's commitment to eliminate incidents of sexual harassment and sexual assault through awareness and prevention, training, victim advocacy, reporting and accountability. (Photos by Sachel Harris)

Among the guest speakers at the summit was Monique Ferrell, Director of the Army's Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention Office. She, too, emphasized the need for a change in culture to eliminate sex crimes in the military.

"How can we consider ourselves the greatest fighting force on Earth when there are incidents of sexual offenses going on in our ranks?" she asked. "We must view sexual predators and perpetrators as insider threats that bring great damage to the Army team. They destroy our professional image and take away the trust of American families who send us their sons, daughters and loved ones."

The SHARP director said new Soldiers come into the Army with varied sets of values, including a sometimes skewed view of what is considered acceptable social behavior. Longtime troops have past practices of "hazing, horseplay and locker-room antics" that disregard human dignity and proper conduct, she noted. She said in both of these situations, leader intervention is vital.

"That is why we rely on you as NCOs to know what right looks like and set the example," Ferrell told the crowd.

Ferrell also spoke briefly about the Not in My Squad initiative promoted by Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel A. Dailey. It's all about taking responsibility in one's "realm of authority," she said. It pushes the prevention of sexual harassment and assault down to the junior levels, where even lower-enlisted personnel can feel empowered to correct the behavior of those around them.