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"When work is finished!"

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Learning the ropes. Brig. Gen. Robert Brown, deputy commanding general, 25th Infantry Division (right forefront) and Team Molokai Kanunu representative, completes a blindfolded journey across the difficult Odyssey III High Challenge Course at YMCA Camp H.R. Erdman, Mokuleia, Aug. 30.

Building the team

"Together each achieves more"

Story and Photos by

PVT. 2 JESUS J. ARANDA

25th Infantry Division Public Affairs

SCHOFIELD BARRACKS — Moving with decisive, but carefully placed steps, daring and determined Soldiers made their way across cables and ropes suspended far above Hawaiian soil — some were even blindfolded.

Leadership from the 25th Infantry Division (ID), along with brigades joining the division on its upcoming deployment, participated in physical, mental and ethical challenges during the two-day team-building and development exercise at YMCA Camp H.R. Erdman, Mokuleia, Aug. 30-31.

"We wanted to do team-building because in today's fight, cooperation, collaboration and fighting as a team is more important than it's ever been," said Brig. Gen. Robert Brown, deputy commanding general for support, 25th ID.

The event was organized by several leaders, including retired Army Col. Dr. Louis Csoka, a former professor at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, and Maj. William Epolito, 25th ID deputy division chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear officer.

Csoka, at the request of Brown, began organizing the training event that coincided with the break in the division's mission readiness exercise (MRX), to prepare the departing command staff for its upcoming deployment.

"Our intent with the confidence and team-building exercise was to take time away from the heavy MRX process," said Csoka, "to stop focusing on the mechanics, equipment and the tactics of the operation, and focus more on working together."

YMCA Camp H.R. Erdman was chosen as the venue for training because of its relaxing setting and the Odyssey III High Challenge Course.

"There are six events in the Odyssey with low and high ropes," said Epolito. "Each individual event has a set of rules that must be complied with. You might not be able to touch a wire, or sometimes you must have so many people on the block to proceed."

The Odyssey creates dilemmas and obstacles for participants, making the adventure from start to finish additionally demanding.

"One event, halfway through, we had to change our idea, right in the middle of it," said Brown.

"The focus is on improving their physical and mental toughness and agility," said Csoka. "It was once just hoped that we'd learn to be adaptive in our training; now we train

them with that intention."

Participants were divided into four teams for the Odyssey challenge and each team competed for points in separate categories. Though no overall winner was declared, each team strived for the top spot in each event.

Members of each team were chosen randomly for each of the three separate events. Each team, however, maintained one representative for the duration of the weekend.

Team Maui Alema na, meaning warrior, was represented by Brig. Gen. James C. Nixon, deputy commanding general, operations, 25th ID; Team Molokai Kanunu, meaning strong one, by Brown; Team Kauai Lalama, meaning daring or fearless, by Col. Thomas Guthrie, chief of staff, 25th ID; and Team Oahu Ikaika, meaning powerful, by Maj. Gen. Robert Caslen Jr., commanding general, 25th ID.

"Building trust is the biggest part of the exercise," said Caslen. "When you have tremendous trust you can build a good team."

Each team traversed the overlapping cables, pushing through swinging poles while carefully attempting to maintain balance. Csoka emphasized the importance of problem solving and communication in all of the weekend's challenges.

"The biggest process is not what they produce but the process of going through it and the discussions they have about the subject," said Csoka. "Different brigade commanders and staff, division staff, have to work together even though they are physically separated in Iraq. It's important for them to learn how to communicate, collaborate and create trust amongst themselves."

Brown used the leadership training he accumulated in his military career to help shape the event. His experience at West Point with legendary men's basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski taught him an anagram that he related to the event.

Krzyzewski played basketball and coached at West Point and later became famous for coaching Duke University to several NCAA men's basketball championships.

"We were taught at West Point by Coach Krzyzewski that 'together each achieves more.' T-E-A-M," said Brown.

Conversely, the ethical exercises challenged participants to think individually and cast aside preconceived notions.

Right — Maj. Gen. Robert Caslen Jr., commanding general, 25th Infantry Division, completes the Odyssey III High Course Challenge.



Lt. Col. Joseph Doty, Army Center of Excellence for Professional Military Ethics (right), from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, explains the rules for a mental team challenge to Team Kauai Lalama.

"Our goal is to get them to think about things differently. Things might seem black and white when you look at them one way but if you look at them at a different angle, they might not seem so black and white," said Lt. Col. Joseph Doty, Army Center of Excellence for Professional Military Ethics, U.S. Military Academy at West Point, who organized the weekend's ethics activities.

"Leaders have to set the example in how they act and what they talk about. They have to set standards and enforce those standards," said Doty. "A lot of that is easier said than done. You set an ethical command climate like a broken record repeats. You have to say the same thing over and over because as soon as you step off of that you've ruined the ethical command climate."

Looking beyond the weekend's activities,

the primary goal in everybody's mind was establishing continuous trust and teamwork.

Though no finalized plans have been made, according to Epolito, the division plans to continue to take the team-building exercises beyond the weekend.

"There will be additional team-building events to keep the team together, because even when we deploy with our team, people will change out at different times, and we'll get new members of the team," Epolito said. "We want to build a vision for Task Force Lightning," said Caslen.

As the last participant sailed triumphantly down the cable of the Odyssey challenge, cheers and high fives filled the air.

"I'd rather do fifteen months in Iraq than have to do that again," 25th ID Special Troops Battalion Command Sgt. Maj. Valerie Greene said, jokingly.