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Army Air Operations Group conducts annual safety day

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Kelly Narowski spoke to 12th Aviation Battalion Soldiers at Wood Theater about the devastating affects driving while under the influence can have on lives. Narowski was involved in a car accident 12 years ago.

Staying safe, being safe and remaining safe is all part of being Army Strong.

That was the message driven home during Fort Belvoir's Safety Day May 24, which kicked off at Davison Army Airfield with static equipment displays from the Fort Belvoir Fire Department, Fort Belvoir Emergency Management, the United Service Organizations and others. Mario Sumter, the installation's emergency manager, discussed the importance of emergency preparedness kits, which should include water, canned food, and medications that you or your Family members must take.

"Your kit should have sufficient supplies to take care of you and your Family for three days," Sumter said.

But, what really drew Soldiers' attention on the airfield were two basketball goals set up inside a hangar. Standing nearby were members of the Fairfax County Police Department, who provided a lesson in what even a relatively small amount of alcohol can do to your perception. One by one, Soldiers lined up to try shooting basketballs into the net. Most easily made the shot - until they put on glasses that simulated what a .07 blood alcohol content does to coordination, balance and dexterity.

"We give them three practice shots and then put on the glasses," explained C. Starkey Jr., of the Fairfax County Police Department Traffic Division. Later in the afternoon, the action shifted to Wood Theater, where Soldiers heard from Kelly Narowski, who was paralyzed after a car accident 12 years ago.

"The theme today throughout the presentation is how a split-second decision can have enormous consequences," she said.

Narowski pulled no punches in telling her story.

"I only had two drinks the day I put myself in this wheelchair," she began.

Twelve years ago, Narowski was 25 years old and a recent college graduate. She had just moved to Santa Barbara, Calif. She and a friend planned to go to a jazz festival one Sunday afternoon. Narowski's friend had already had several drinks before Narowski arrived at her house. Narowski had two drinks before they left. The friend was driving down Highway 1 when she pulled off the road and told Narowski she couldn't drive. They switched places, with Narowski walking around the Jeep to get into the driver's seat.

"That was the last time I ever walked," she said.

Narowski's friend had her seat belt on. Narowski did not. She said she was driving about 75 mph when she lost control and hit a guardrail twice. Narowski was thrown around the vehicle with enough force to break the T6 vertebra in her spine.

"The ability to walk is something you don't think you're ever going to lose," she said. In a wheelchair,

"everything takes longer." Narowski also discussed the dangers of distracted driving, such as driving while talking on the phone or texting, speeding and not wearing a seatbelt.

"The hardest thing for me, 12 years post injury, is being treated differently," she said.