

# Shifting the Paradigm for Investigating Trauma Victimization

[Back to Promising Practices main page](#)



*(Photo by Colby T. Hauser, USACIDC)*

The Forensic Experiential Trauma Interview (FETI) utilizes information about the parts of the brain that experience trauma. This technique not only reduces the inaccuracy of the information obtained but enhances understanding of the experience, increasing the likelihood that judges and juries will also understand the

event. This type of interview technique is being employed by Army CID special agents and other criminal investigators trained by **Russell Strand**, a retired U.S. Army CID special agent and the current chief of the Family Advocacy Law Enforcement Training Division at the U.S. Army Military Police School.

Russell Strand was selected by the End Violence Against Women International Board of Directors to receive their [2012 Visionary Award](#) for his work with the military. Strand emphasized the great job being done in the military to identify sex offenders and hold them accountable. While Strand is proud of the work the military has done he admits much work remains. The Army has been looking at research to find better ways to relate to the victim's experience, and identify sex offenders and hold them accountable. Research also suggests first responders need to re-evaluate their reliance on their instincts when

dealing with trauma victims.

Investigating and prosecuting sexual assaults is very difficult. Victims seldom report and even if they do, they frequently behave in ways that make successful prosecution less

---

## Understanding the Context of the Crime = Forensic Experiential Evidence

likely, for example, they commonly delay reporting, minimize, and

self-blame. Often victims are not believed because they have been seen with their rapists and appear to be willingly involved with them.

Good victims are bad witnesses, according to Strand, who explains: "Offenders are so good at what they do. They're going to use alcohol, drugs and trauma so (the victims) don't remember much." In addition, the trauma itself impacts the brain, effectively shutting down cognition and leaving the more primitive mid-brain and brainstem to experience and record the event. Strand explains, "While the more primitive portions of the brain are generally very good at recording experiential and sensory information, they do not do very well at recording the type of information law enforcement professionals have been trained to obtain, i.e., the 'who, what, when, where, why, and how.'"

## Traumatic responses can alter...

- ❑ **Physiology**
  - ❑ Heart rate, respirations, dilated pupils, dry mouth, knot in the stomach
- ❑ **Affective (mood and emotion) responses**
  - ❑ Fear, helplessness, horror
- ❑ **Cognitive (thought) processing**
  - ❑ Memory – fragmented, out of sequence
  - ❑ Time distortion
  - ❑ Increased confabulation
  - ❑ Trauma memory and recall

Memory largely consists of three basic elements: electrical, chemical and vibrations/frequencies. Stress and trauma routinely interrupt the memory process thereby changing the memory in ways most people do not accurately appreciate. One of the mantras within the criminal justice system is "inconsistent statements equal a lie". Strand contends that nothing could be further from the truth when stress and trauma impact memory.

In fact, when a person is stressed or traumatized, good solid neurobiological science routinely demonstrates that inconsistent statements are not only the norm, they can also be a hallmark of the effects of stress and trauma. What many in the criminal justice field have been educated to believe people do when they lie (changes in body language, affect, ah-filled pauses, lack of eye contact, etc.) actually occur naturally when human beings are highly stressed or

traumatized. Strand feels strongly that the science of memory and trauma must be applied to interview approaches and techniques.

## Trauma differs from stress

---

- **Trauma is a more extreme version of stress, perceived as life threatening and evoking fear, helplessness and even horror.**
- **Physical and emotional responses to trauma last long after the event is over leaving fear and psychological arousal that linger as memories.**
- **Trauma is life changing.**

Law enforcement as well as the general population believes the cognitive (thinking) brain will always capture the facts. However, traumatic events like sexual assault are not perceived or experienced the same way that most of us experience a non-traumatic event. Most interview techniques have been developed to interview the cognitive brain (“Just the facts, ma’am”) and obtain cognitive information, such as the color of shirt, description of the suspect, time frame, and other important information.

---

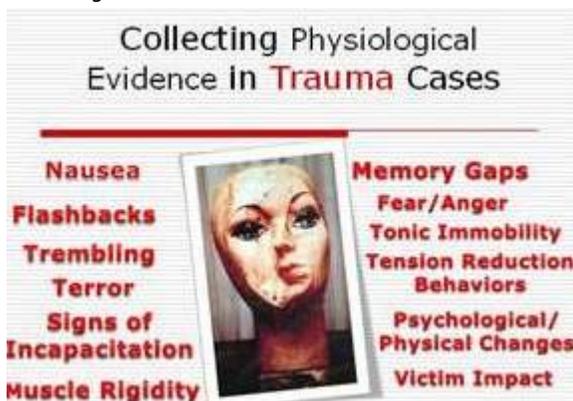
**Traumatic events like sexual assault are not perceived or experienced the same way most of us experience a non-traumatic event**

Many trauma victims are not only unable to accurately provide this type of information, but when asked to do so often inadvertently provide inaccurate information. While past training and experience has focused on the

cognitive brain, research clearly shows the cognitive is not generally involved in experiencing or recording the traumatic incident. What are

needed are methods to properly interview the portions of the brain that actually recorded the experience.

Strand describes the problem in terms of “dimensions”. Professionals within the criminal justice system are often trained to respond to a three-dimensional experience (one that is full of sensory data) but collect and document what “happened” in a one dimensional manner (cold, hard facts). This information is then presented to judges and juries. They are expected to make appropriate judgments by filling in the blanks, but the blanks can’t be filled in and the richness of the experience is lost. Indeed, some victim blaming may be the default reaction of judges and juries who see victim behavior out of its sensory context.



Strand proposes focusing on the three dimensional experience. So, for example, the gut-wrenching fear a victim experienced, her perception of danger, what she smelled perhaps, need to be collected and preserved along with facts. This experiential evidence completes the package presented to judges and juries, allowing them to truly understand and appreciate what the victim experienced– the full three dimensional experience.

Currently, most criminal investigations focus on two major categories of evidence – physical evidence and testimonial evidence. This evidence is found by processing crime scenes, collecting DNA and other valuable physical evidence, and collecting testimonial evidence through interviews and interrogations. Often overlooked and underappreciated, however, is a class of evidence called forensic physiological evidence. This evidence is based on documented psychological and physical reactions to a crime experienced or witnessed by an individual. These reactions can include nausea, flashbacks, muscle rigidity, trembling, terror, memory gaps, sights, sounds, smells, or other psychological or physical responses to the experience.

Sexual assault investigations may produce little or no physical evidence due to the nature of the crime, especially if only “constructive force” (non-violent physical force) is used by the offender. Traditional testimonial evidence can be altered both by poor cognitive memories and impact of stress and trauma on those memories.

Traumatic events diminish and sometimes distort the cognitive or thinking memory. A different more primitive part of the brain collects the physiological impact. This impact is

---

**Physiological evidence is often the only evidence available to distinguish between consent/non-consent and levels of incapacitation**

collected with much greater accuracy and remembered with far more precision. The impact of the physiological experience also continues to produce potential physiological evidence long after the event. Physiological evidence is often the only evidence available to distinguish between consent/non-consent and levels of incapacitation. It is also extremely beneficial in demonstrating the three dimensional experience and subsequent victim reactions and behaviors.

Russell Strand believes the Forensic Experiential Trauma Interview (FETI) is an innovative way to “interview the brainstem”. He describes the technique as built on research and experience surrounding child forensic interviews, critical incident stress debriefing, and neurobiology.

# A Paradigm Shift...

## Forensic Experiential Trauma Interview

- Acknowledge their trauma/pain/difficult situation

- What are you **able** to tell me about your **experience**?

- Tell me more about ... or that...

- What was your thought process during this experience?

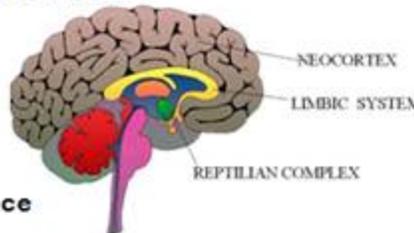
- What were your reactions to this experience

- Physically
    - Emotionally

- What are you **able** to remember about...the 5 senses

- What was the most difficult part of this experience for you?

- Clarify other information and details...after you **facilitate** all you can about the "**experience**"



Use of the FETI technique in domestic violence cases is also emerging as an extremely promising strategy for increasing successful interventions, investigations and prosecutions. Utilizing the FETI enhances the proper collection of forensic physiological evidence. It also increases the amount of evidence that can be collected when

individuals experience stressful and traumatic events. Once victims are allowed the opportunity to share their experience and work through some of the trauma during the interview, they are often much more capable of providing the details surrounding the experience than they were able to using traditional interview techniques. Strand believes this is nothing short of a paradigm shift.

Click [here](#) to read an interview with Russell Strand.

For more information contact Russell Strand  
[Russell.strand@us.army.mil](mailto:Russell.strand@us.army.mil)

Funded by the Office on Violence Against Women, the Department of Justice, and the Department of Health and Human Services  
Copyright © 2009 Battered Women's Justice Project

## SPECIAL REPORTS

- [RSS](#)
- [Mobile](#)
- [Newsletters](#)
- 

### Q&A with Russell Strand, retired criminal investigator

Posted Monday, Aug. 20, 2012 [0 Comments](#) [Print](#) [Reprints](#)

[More Sharing Services](#) [Share](#)

Tags: [defensive tackle](#), [Missouri](#)

BY TIM MADIGAN Fort Worth Star-Telegram [ARTICLE](#)

- [COMMENTS](#)

A

Have more to add? News tip? [Tell us](#)

BY TIM MADIGAN

[tmadigan@star-telegram.com](mailto:tmadigan@star-telegram.com)

Russell Strand is a retired criminal investigator, based in Missouri, who travels 250 days a year teaching investigation seminars for military and civilian detectives on how to tackle acquaintance rape cases. The following are excerpts from a recent interview with the *Star-Telegram*.

**Star-Telegram: A lot of your work seems to center around the nature of the sexual predator? Could you talk about that?**

**Strand:** Sex offenders are more dedicated than most of us who are trying to catch them. They're more dedicated to getting away with it. Sex offenders understand human behavior a lot better than most of us. They do. They exploit that knowledge of human behavior. That's what a good predator does. They learn about their prey. But they also learn the people around the prey. They groom people around them. A lot of police officers are trained to befriend the [suspect], get close to them, get them to trust you. Sex offenders have more of an interest in doing that to us, because it boils down to the credibility of one person against another.

**Experts such as yourself say acquaintance rape perpetrators can seem very convincing, even more so than the victim.**

There are two huge myths. One is that we can actually detect deception. A lot of research says that we can't. We do very poorly at that. The second big lie is that inconsistent statements [of victims] equal a lie. If a victim tells us something that's not true or changes her story along the way, the victim is lying. But if a victim is traumatized, you would expect there to be inconsistencies.

Most of the time the perpetrator feels like they're the victim. The suspect believes they are the victim and are more believable as the victim than the actual victim. Victims often blame themselves, second-guess themselves about what they did or didn't do. They feel bad about what happened, while the suspect doesn't feel bad about it, other than being challenged or being caught. We are trying to train law enforcement not to be fooled into thinking that credibility boils down to likeability.

In interviews, sex offenders are often very likeable and maybe the victim isn't as likeable. It's a trap we can fall into. The victim hasn't made sense of what happened. There are fragmented memories and trauma issues. The suspect knows what happened and makes more sense.

### **Tell us about your theory of the three personas.**

Everyone has three personas. There is the public persona, the uninhibited persona, and the private persona. The public persona is who we are when we are out in public. We work very hard at that. The uninhibited person is who we are with people who have already accepted us, family members and close friends. The private persona is where the skeletons reside, where fantasies reside, where deeds people do or think about doing reside, but you don't want anybody to know.

I do something when I teach classes. I usually dress in a nice suit and tie when I'm talking about this theory. After I explain it I'll take off my jacket and underneath I'll be wearing a shirt that's torn and dirty and has nasty words written on it like 'rapist.' Then I'll ask the class, 'Would any of you know I had this shirt on unless I showed it to you?' We never know who that person is, what's under the jacket. All [the victim] saw was the jacket, and when the jacket came off it was too late. Then the suspect puts the jacket back on.

Sex offenders in my experience are really masters at the first persona, masters at making the second persona seem very appealing, and they are very much masters at hiding the third persona.

### **So how do you get at that third persona with a suspect?**

Most suspects believe they're the victim. What we ought to do is treat them like a victim. Rather than asking, 'Was this consensual? Did you do this or that,' acknowledge that it's a difficult situation. They're not ready for that. 'Tell me more about that,' that makes them uncomfortable. 'What were you thinking before you put your penis in? What did it feel like?' They're not ready for that. 'She was doing it all. Okay, what did it feel like?' It really helps get more of the experiential stuff out of them by acknowledging their pain, asking questions about their thinking and reactions to the experience before, during and after. Ask them about the five senses. 'What was the most difficult part for you?'

By using this technique they admit all kinds of things, not only with this victim but with several others. Often times we won't have to go to a contested trial when we get info from a suspect. Not only are they disclosing what happened, but when you can get to the third persona, the personal stuff, holy cow, we're going to uncover additional crimes and additional victims.

**You've said the victim has the third persona, too, embarrassing things she doesn't want to reveal. As an investigator, you have to get at that. What are your suggestions?**

It's basically a very simple procedure. The first thing for anybody who has undergone trauma is that they have to believe that the person talking to them right now cares. Most cops are not very good at that. They want to be good at it, but police officers and detectives become hardened. They want to protect themselves from the ongoing trauma so they build a wall between themselves and the trauma, and in doing so they build a wall between themselves and the victim. We have to train law enforcement to acknowledge the (victim's) trouble in a sincere manner, to enter into what we call the trauma bubble.

Then the first question is, 'What are you able to tell me about your experience?' There are two key words in that question. One is *able*. Not all victims are able to tell us now. The other is *experience*. There is a world of difference between what happened, and what the victim experienced. Then we shut our mouths. We shut up and listen as the person tells us whatever they want to tell us. We can ask prompting questions, like, 'Tell me more about that? Tell me more about the penis?' Tell me more about how you felt when you woke up?'

Another thing that closes down the third persona is a 'why' question? Frankly, they have already asked themselves that question. Instead you ask, What was your thought process during this experience? What were you thinking at this point in time? You get the most amazing responses. 'I thought he was going to kill me,' or 'I thought my husband might wake up while he was raping me. Then my husband would try to kill him and what would that do to our family?' That makes it much easier to answer the why questions, like 'Why didn't you run or why didn't you scream?'

The other part is: 'What were your reactions to this experience, what physiological and emotional reactions, but not just at the time of the event, but what happened when you got home? What happened the next morning? The next week?' Traditionally, victim impact is only used in the sentencing phase of trials. But the vast majority of evidence created in sexual assault cases, and what makes it more understandable to juries, is impact evidence. What we're doing is asking investigators and prosecutors to use this process with the victim on the witness stand. The first few times it's really been fascinating. The defense didn't know how to react. I object your honor, irrelevant. But what's not relevant about her experience? And the experience doesn't end at the time of the rape. More evidence is created following the rape. That's when the impact is starting to occur. It's what we now call forensic physiological evidence.

In the rest of this interview process, you ask, 'What was the most difficult part of experience for you?' This has produced totally amazing information.

**What kind of reception do your ideas have among law enforcement officers you have trained?**

We do have some pushback but I am amazed, absolutely amazed, by how receptive detectives, investigators and agents are. Most of the really good detectives already understand human behavior. That's what makes them good. But they've never had the information and the research. Every detective that I've talked to who has been honest with me says, 'I really have had a hard time. I believe the victim after I interview the victim, then I believe the suspect after I talk to him.' But we're not getting the depth of the information we need.

The only pushback I generally get when I talk about undetected sex offenders is from those who say, 'Wait a minute. I was that guy in college. I did that. That's not rape.' And I would say, but it is. A lot of them have a hard time. The other main ones that push back are the ones who have been that person, the female victim. They say, 'Well, this isn't really rape.' Some of them have been victims of rape but haven't acknowledged it to themselves yet.

**In many ways, this seems like a watershed moment for investigating and prosecuting acquaintance rape. Is that fair?**

These are exciting times. We're getting so much new research. We're starting to make some huge differences. The only concern I have is that the sex offender will read your article and might exploit it a little bit. But I worry less about that than helping the victim understand and law enforcement understand. The victims need to know they are not going to be revictimized, not traumatized with traditional techniques. It's a very important message to get across. It's an important message to offenders about what is sexual assault and what is not.

*Tim Madigan, (817) 390-7544; Twitter: @tsmadigan*

Read more here: <http://www.star-telegram.com/2012/08/17/4188015/qa-with-russell-strand-retired.html#storylink=cpy>

## Training aims to improve how military sexual assaults are investigated



U.S. Army

Russell W. Strand, chief in the education and training division at the Army's Military Police School, gives a presentation about suspect behavior to a special unit victims course at Ft. Leonard Wood in Missouri.

By Rebecca Ruiz, NBC News contributor

As the military wrestles with an alarming number of sexual assaults — an issue former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta called "an affront to the basic American values we defend" — the Department of Defense has adopted a novel technique that fundamentally changes the way investigations are handled.

Hundreds of investigators and prosecutors across all military branches have participated in a special victims unit course at Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri that

focuses on a unique forensic interviewing technique designed to elicit detailed descriptions of an attack.

With traditional methods, this “psychophysiological” evidence has previously been difficult to obtain from both the victim and suspect, but can often break open an otherwise difficult case in which there is little or no physical evidence.

The technique was developed by Russell W. Strand, a former special agent with the Army’s Criminal Investigation Division and current chief in the education and training division at the Army’s Military Police School. Strand began evaluating sexual assault training in 2004 as numerous reports of rape in combat zones and at home became public.

He soon discovered that law enforcement, both military and civilian, expected victims to recount their trauma blow by blow, with precise details that could convince any skeptical jury or judge.

---

That may seem like conventional wisdom, but Strand frequently found victims rarely had such clarity. He consulted experts, immersed himself in neurobiological research, and found that the expectation doesn’t align with the science of trauma and memory.

In the midst of an assault, the brain does not capture every moment of trauma as if it were recording a film. The pre-frontal cortex can “shut down” or become severely impaired. As a result, many victims can’t provide a contextual or linear account of the event, but fragmentary memories, perhaps the tone of the suspect’s voice or, when a sense of defeat has set in, a recollection of the way a lamp looked as she or he was being assaulted. In interviews with investigators, Strand said, the lack of a victim’s ability to recall specifics quickly sowed doubt.

“We started looking at that (research) and started looking at what kind of evidence we gather in a sexual assault,” Strand said. “We weren’t collecting the right data.”

### **Start with memories, not at the beginning**

Strand’s technique, which he has termed the forensic experiential trauma interview (FETI), begins with an investigator expressing empathy toward the victim in order to establish trust. What comes next is not a set of rapid-fire questions about the assault. Strand believes that approach, long used by law enforcement, pressures and confuses the victim. Instead, investigators are trained to simply ask what the victim is able to remember about the experience.

Asking the victim to “start at the beginning” — another hallmark of traditional police work — forces the victim to try to retrieve memories that may not have been encoded in the first place, which can lead to inaccurate or distorted recollections. Some victims may then doubt the memories they do have while investigators wonder if he or she is making up the assault.

What’s more important, according to Strand, is eliciting the victim’s sensory memories, which helps to create a three-dimensional picture of the attack. It also allows the victim to relate the experience in a way that makes sense and yields vital information that can be presented to a jury.

Dr. Jim Hopper, a clinical instructor of psychology at Harvard Medical School, says Strand is teaching good clinical skills for interviewing traumatized people, adapted for an investigative context. Hopper is a guest lecturer for the course, and teaches the effects of sexual assault on the brain.

Lori Jones, a civilian special agent stationed at Fort Leonard Wood, said that once she was trained in the interviewing technique, she was able to collect much better evidence. If a victim describes feeling “frozen” during an attack, for example, Jones is able to understand that as tonic immobility, a physiological response to terror or trauma that often leaves a person numb, staring in a fixed or unfocused manner and unable to move or cry out.

The interview technique can also lead to unwitting admissions of guilt by attackers. When asked to describe a victim's behavior, suspects and victims have recounted the same details, Jones said.

“One of the biggest blessings in FETI has been being able to take forward an investigation with no tangible evidence,” said Jones. “I have the ability to take this to my supervisor and say, ‘This is what the victim is articulating, these were the things she felt her body doing ... and he saw her doing what she was doing.’”

This critical information has helped Jones educate commanders and prosecutors who falsely assume that a victim’s lack of resistance or inability to immediately call the police, for example, is evidence of lying.

Joanne Archambault, a former investigator and executive director of the nonprofit training, education and policy organization [End Violence Against Women International](#) (EVAWI), said that evidence gathered by techniques like FETI are essential in conducting a thorough investigation. The interview is a “big piece of the puzzle” that helps an agent corroborate a victim's account.

“Victims are much more likely to talk to us when they’re being given an opportunity to provide a narrative in their own terms,” Archambault said. “You can’t get to prosecution and conviction without that.”

## **'Visionary' technique**

There are other investigation techniques that attempt to obtain sensory details from victims, but integrating scientific research on how a victim's brain responds to trauma is a unique element that has won Strand accolades. Last year, EVAWI gave Strand its Visionary Award.

Archambault, who investigated or supervised 10,000 sexual assault cases at the San Diego Police Department before retiring in 2002, said that law enforcement often has little or no training in interviewing victims of traumatic crimes. As a result, the experience can feel like an interrogation. She has observed a FETI training class, which Strand also teaches to civilian police departments, and says the focus on about trauma and its effect on memory is novel.

"In a nutshell," she said, "he's been dedicated to making improvements in a culture."

The struggle to understand and address sexual assaults in the military has been very public. Last week, members of the Senate Armed Services Committee excoriated military leaders for permitting an environment that enables sexual assault.

In 2011, 3,192 sexual assault reports were filed, but the Department of Defense says the number is closer to 19,000 based on anonymous surveys of active-duty service members conducted in 2010. Of the 3,192 reports, only cases on 1,518 subjects were brought forward for disciplinary review.

The Army tracks the number of cases brought forward by prosecutors; anecdotally, Jones said it appears FETI has helped increase this number, but the Army's Criminal Investigation Command did not have those statistics readily available. Those familiar with the technique are hopeful that it is changing pervasive attitudes and assumptions about victim behavior.

In a statement to NBC News, Rep. Niki Tsongas, D-Mass., who chairs a caucus on military sexual assault, called FETI a "step toward more successful investigations and prosecutions."

The Department of Defense has incorporated the course as part of its multi-pronged approach to prevent sexual assault in the military. "When one does occur, effective processes and trained professionals must be in place to support victims and ensure delivery of justice," Cynthia O. Smith, a spokeswoman for the DoD, told NBC News.

Since 2009, 721 special agents and prosecutors from every branch of the military have attended the training. Another 315 are scheduled to complete the course by the end of this September, and DoD has funded more than 400 seats at the course through fiscal year 2017.

Strand says he and his team encountered some early resistance from investigators accustomed to the traditional interviewing technique, but that dissent has since ebbed.

“We’re over the (point) where more people get it than don’t,” he said.

*Rebecca Ruiz is a reporter based in the Bay Area.*

## New Approach Helps Sexual Assault Victims Recall Details

By Terri Moon Cronk  
American Forces Press Service

BALTIMORE, April 10, 2013 – A new approach to interviewing sexual assault victims is gleaning more information about the crimes and leading to greater numbers of offender prosecutions.

At the End Violence Against Women international conference here last week, Russell Strand, chief of the behavioral sciences education and training division for the Army’s Military Police School at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., spoke with American Forces Press Service about the new Defense Department-backed procedure to investigate sexual assaults.

Calling sexual assault “a secret crime,” Strand said the experience for a victim is the “most embarrassing, intimate, life-changing, traumatic thing that can happen to a person.” Aside from a murder, he added, he doesn’t know of anything that’s “more debilitating and earth-shattering” than a sexual assault.

In 2011, nearly 3,200 sexual assaults were reported in the military, but Defense Department officials say the number of sexual assaults each year is closer to 19,000, based on anonymous surveys of active-duty service members. Officials also noted that only 1,500 of those cases came up for disciplinary review.

Because law enforcement investigations are designed more for witnesses rather than victims, Strand said, he developed the forensic experiential trauma interview as a way to interview victims without making them relive the assault.

Through neuroscience research, he said, he found that part of the forefront of the brain shuts down or is slow to recall key parts of a trauma during an attack. But a primitive part of the brain stem almost instantly records the event accurately, he said.

With that scientific information, Strand said, he tried the law enforcement “debriefing” approach on sexual assault victims by gaining their trust and talking about how they felt, rather than asking leading questions, such as “What happened?”

“We show genuine empathy, and say things such as, ‘I’m sorry that happened to you,’” Strand explained. “The second thing we say is, ‘Help me understand,’ and ‘What are you able to remember about your experience?’”

Strand said Criminal Investigation Division agents and other trained military investigators then stop questioning and sit back to listen to the victim’s recollection.

Rather than asking about the attack in a chronological order, Strand said, he lets victims go in any direction they want, because that aligns with how they've memorized it. Investigators then put the assault into a sequence of chronological events, he added.

"We want to get to their memories, so we ask about the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and their feelings," Strand said.

Through this approach, he said, investigators want to look for evidence of trauma and the absence of consent in a sexual assault. Working with the senses is a "powerful" technique that triggers memories the victims don't realize they could recall, he noted.

Once the psychophysiological evidence is gathered, Strand said, the investigator can then ask traditional questions while the victim's barriers are relaxed, such as when, where and how the assault happened.

Since 2009, more than 700 special agents and prosecutors from each branch of the military have taken forensic experiential trauma interview training, and 500 more are scheduled to complete the course by the end of September, Strand said. He also said DOD has funded more than 400 seats for the FETI special victims' unit course through fiscal year 2017.

Strand said his goal through FETI is to bring the military prevalence rates down for victims -- both men and women -- while making sure that cultural change occurs regarding sexual assault. It might take five to 10 years for the prevalence rates to decrease and he expects reporting rates to increase, he added.

"What we want victims to know is they can be confident we are working really hard to understand what they've gone through, to understand their experience and help them remember [it] in the most natural, scientific way," Strand said.

Strand said he also wants sexual offenders to know that law enforcement investigations of sexual assault have become much more sophisticated in identifying their behaviors, and that the crime is now investigated in a manner in which it never has been before. "They are at much greater risk of being caught than they were five or 10 years ago," he added.

With DOD backing and collaborating with the civilian sector, Strand said, "we want to lead the nation, and I think other countries are looking at us to get this right."

"And we have the capability to do that," he added.