

STATEMENT BY

**MR. PETER F. ISAACS
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER
U.S. ARMY COMMUNITY AND FAMILY SUPPORT CENTER**

BEFORE THE

**PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES SENATE**

FIRST SESSION, 108TH CONGRESS

ON FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

2 JUNE 2003

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION
UNTIL RELEASED
BY THE COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES SENATE**

**STATEMENT BY
MR. PETER F. ISAACS
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER
U.S. ARMY COMMUNITY AND FAMILY SUPPORT CENTER
ON FAMILIES AND CHILDREN**

Senator Chambliss, it is a pleasure to appear before you today at this field hearing to discuss our Families and Children.

The Chief of Staff of the Army in a recent address to Arlington Ladies 30th Anniversary Luncheon said and I would like to quote: “We are proud beyond measure of each of our Army families—their gifts and sacrifices are unique, but never more so than during a war. Through the strength and devotion of Army families, soldiers can focus on the tough missions that we give them. We ask a lot of our families—families who soldier along with their soldiers. They are—always—the most generous people I know. They constantly reinforce the truth of the proposition—soldiering is an affair of the heart—a quotation also attributed to General Creighton Abrams. So it is, so it will always be—an affair of the heart. “

Over the past several months, the leadership of the U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center (USACFSC) has visited numerous installations in the United States and overseas. On each visit the leadership paid particular attention to family readiness. We held discussions with garrison staffs, senior leaders, and spouses regarding organization and effectiveness of Army Community Service (ACS) centers, Family Assistance Centers (FACs), and Child and Youth Services (CYS) facilities. Principal observations were:

- Family members are phenomenally strong, but many are concerned about Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and other contingency operations and how long their spouses will be gone.
- The spouses agree they are better prepared now than they were for Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm (OP DS/DS) because the Army supported and strengthened Family Readiness Groups (FRGs), ACS programs, CYS programs, and incorporated lessons learned from previous deployments including OP DS/DS.

FAMILY READINESS

The Army places a high value on both military and personal preparedness and is committed to providing a full range of essential support and services to soldiers and their families throughout the entire spectrum of operations: pre-deployment, deployment and redeployment. This commitment is implemented by caring leaders at all levels of command, from the first-line supervisor to the senior military and civilian leadership of the Army.

Both active and reserve component soldiers and their families attend classes and briefings and receive written instructional materials through ACS and Reserve Component (RC) Family Program Coordinators. Ensuring family readiness is a command responsibility. The ACS and RC Family Readiness Coordinators provide commanders with The Army Leaders' Desk Reference for Soldier/Family Readiness. It contains battalion readiness plans, guidance for conducting battalion level pre-deployment briefings and for operating successful Family Readiness Groups (FRG). Additionally, rear detachment commanders (those that remain behind to process necessary paperwork) maintain regular contact

with the commander at the mission location, coordinate with American Red Cross regarding emergency information, and provide vital information to the FRG. As such, they are important elements of the entire family readiness support system. Establishing lines of communication between families, deployed soldiers and units through rear detachment commanders, family readiness groups and family assistance centers is crucial to reducing anxiety and sustaining soldier and family morale. Through technology (internet, e newsletters, video teleconferencing, phone cards) soldiers are able to stay in touch with their families. A Family Assistance Center (FAC) is a building or location that becomes a central hub where professional staff coordinate services and resources a family will need during a deployment such as ACS, ID card processing, medical registration and insurance, legal assistance, emergency financial assistance and crisis intervention. Community support and outreach are essential during deployments. In some cases, the community in which the installation is located considers the soldiers to be “their own” and is as concerned about them as those remaining on the installation. ACS personnel support mobilization and deployment efforts by participating in the Soldier Readiness Processing Centers, talking with soldiers, reviewing Family Care Plans, and identifying any family concerns that may keep soldiers from focusing on their missions. Pre-deployment briefings, FRG instruction, and Rear Detachment Commander training are conducted. They also assist Guard and Reserve units to prepare for deployment.

The Army National Guard (ARNG) has capabilities to operate 400 FACs. They've activated 387 so far with at least one at every State Area Readiness Command (STARAC) – Headquarters for the state National Guard. Typical services provided by ARNG FACs include information and referral services relative to the local community and follow-up services. The Army doctrine that governs mobilization does not require the US Army

Reserve to have FACs. Instead, they receive support through the ARNG FACs. However, the Regional Support Commands conduct pre-deployment briefings for family members prior to units deploying. Briefing materials are mailed to those families who cannot attend the briefings. U.S. Army Reserve Command Family Program staff make monthly telephonic follow-up with all family members of Individual Ready Reserve soldiers, and the Rear Detachment operations cell makes monthly calls to all families in the unit. USAR Rear Detachment Operations is a new concept implemented since the beginning of current deployments. In addition to the active FACs and those established for the NG, the Surgeon General established three operational FACs at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Landstuhl and Brooke Army Medical Center to support families of the injured.

Eleven FACs were activated at Forts Benning, Bliss, Bragg, Campbell, Carson, Hood, Lewis, Riley, and Stewart; and Vicenza, Italy; and Wiesbaden, Germany. The FACs provide a full range of family support program services and emergency assistance.

The ACS has fielded a comprehensive set of resource materials for use to guide families, leaders, and staff through deployments. Known as “Operation **R**esources for **E**ducating **A**bout **D**eployment and **Y**ou” (Operation READY), these resources include personal checklists for families and unit commanders to ensure that deployments and reunions are successful. This training program assists commanders in meeting family readiness objectives. Modules include: Army Leaders’ Desk Reference for Soldier/Family Readiness, The Army Family Readiness Handbook, Pre-deployment and Ongoing Readiness, Homecoming and Reunion, Family Assistance Centers and Children’s Workbooks and videos. Operation READY is available through ACS, RC Family Program

staff and is on-line at Virtual ACS, www.goacs.org. The Operation READY materials have been revised based on lessons learned from recent deployments. The Leader's Guide and the Family Member Deployment Survival Guide were distributed in June 2002. The remaining modules were distributed in October and November 2002. Three modules have been translated into German, Spanish and Korean. Those modules are Pre-Deployment, Post-Deployment, and The Family Readiness Group Leaders' Basic Handbook. Feedback from Commanders, staff, and soldiers and their families indicates Operation READY has been invaluable in helping prepare for deployments.

All Army Component soldiers (Active and Reserves) who are single parents, and dual military couples with family members, are required to have a "Family Care Plan." This is the means by which soldiers provide for the care of their family members when military duties prevent them from doing so. The Family Care Plan includes proof that guardians and escorts have been identified and thoroughly briefed on the responsibilities they will assume for the soldier as well as the procedures for accessing military and civilian facilities and services on behalf of the soldier's family members. This ensures family members will be well cared for while single parent and dual military couples are fulfilling their military obligations. While Family Care Plans are required for single parent and dual military couples with children, all married soldiers are encouraged to complete and maintain a Family Care Plan.

The Army Family Liaison Office (AFLO) maintains a toll-free information line that is available within the Continental United States Monday thru Friday, during normal duty hours. The purpose of the toll free number is to provide a mechanism for family members to get answers to routine questions on all aspects of military family life, including family

readiness and benefit eligibility. The toll free number is published monthly in newsletters from the Well-Being office and the AFLO, and is also available on the AFLO website at www.aflo.org.

To accommodate the increased demand of Operation Iraqi Freedom, we expanded this to a 24-hour toll-free Family Assistance Hotline (FAH) on March 21, 2003. Primary function was to provide referrals and information to the families of deployed or activated soldiers. The FAH was intended for use by family members of soldiers on active duty as well as those in the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve called to active duty. It was a 'safety net' for those who had exhausted all other resources. After hearing a short, recorded message, callers were able to speak to hotline staff members with access to extensive reference materials. In addition to local and Army-level assistance via telephone, family members could find answers to many routine questions about family readiness, ACS, and deployment support resources online at the ACS Web site, www.goacs.org.

The FAH operated 24/7 from March 21, 2003 to May 19, 2003. The mission has now returned to AFLO based on the level of demand. During its eight weeks of operation, the FAH received over 8,000 telephone calls. Primary areas of caller concerns were locating a soldier, accuracy of media information, delays in mail, exact dates of deployments and returns, how to contact a soldier's unit, and casualty notification information. Family members of single soldiers connected neither through rear detachments nor family readiness groups made up the greatest number of callers.

Equally as important as support provided to soldiers and their families during deployments is the post-deployment help they need to

readjust after returning home from combat. In addition to its on-going reunion training, typically provided by ACS and chaplains, the Army recognizes the need for a proactive program to be up and running prior to soldiers redeploying from Operation Iraqi Freedom. In response to this requirement, the Army has implemented the Deployment Cycle Support (DCS) plan. DCS operations begin in theater/area of operations, continuing at home and/or Demobilization station, and through the sustainment phase at home station. DCS taps wide-ranging resources including medical, mental health, chaplain, schools, and family support staff. The Army's goal with DCS is to standardize the process of providing our forces with the proper psychological screening, debriefing, and most importantly, identify those "at-risk" personnel that may require immediate attention. Soldiers, Department of the Army Civilians, and family members are provided information that will educate them on the need for individual reconstitution. The plan calls for returning soldiers and civilians to remain with their unit or organization through mandatory medical and mental health screening, as well as reunion training designed to ease soldiers' move back into family relationships. Unit leaders will use a new "tip card" to help screen soldiers for any personal problems. Family members will be offered reunion training. The Army will implement a toll free employee assistance program that includes telephonic information and referral assistance and up to six face-to-face counseling sessions. The toll free line, Army One Source, is anticipated to be available when the first soldiers return, in early June. This is particularly important for the Reserve Component where units may be hundreds of miles away from an armory or support system. It allows significantly more privacy for those concerned that mental health assistance may negatively impact their careers.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The ultimate aim of the Army child care system is to meet 80 percent of the demand of the Objective Force in the outyears. Only through a well-resourced strategic mix of different child care delivery systems (on post centers, family child care homes, and local community partnerships) can the Army ensure its system remains “a model for the Nation.”

The Army currently has a DoD-assigned goal to meet 65 percent of the potential child care demand in the field. Fiscal Year 2002 was a challenge in that the Army was only able to meet 61 percent of demand and, for Fiscal Year 2004, we anticipate a loss of capacity to serve another 2,800 (equating to meeting only 59 percent of demand).

The Army Child Care Program is experiencing high turnover and staff shortages because current salary levels do not match other positions with common labor pools (e.g., local public schools, fast food and retail establishments, etc.). Workforce issues were a key factor in the decline of Army child spaces to 61 percent and are a major element in some Army child care centers losing their accreditation status this fiscal year.

Army Child and Youth Services (CYS) fielded a *CYS Mobilization and Contingency (MAC) Plan Workbook* that gives installations support materials to develop and monitor their *CYS MAC Plans*. The workbook includes briefings, procedural guidance, planning references, on-line resources, and "lessons learned" from Desert Storm, Bosnia, and other contingencies. The detailed checklists and worksheets allow the installation staff to customize their *CYS mission support*. One chapter of

the workbook specifically addresses how to identify signs of stress in children and provides coping strategies for dealing with it.

In addition to the MAC Plan, several ongoing CYS outreach efforts are aimed at geographically isolated Active Component soldiers as well as Guard and Reserve members. A pilot Memorandum of Agreement with the General Services Administration (GSA) permits active duty patrons in Minnesota, New York, Georgia, and Washington to apply for subsidized child care in accredited GSA centers. Walter Reed Army Medical Center in the National Capital Region established a pilot program to support monthly weekend drill for a reserve unit -- with the concept, once validated, capable of being expanded to additional sites. Finally, cooperative programs between Army CYS and the Boys & Girls Clubs of Miami, Florida; Killeen, Texas; Tacoma, Washington; Silver Spring, Maryland; and Dale City, Virginia, have opened opportunities for military youth not living on installations to be served in the local community. We are encouraged by these successes and continue to seek further partnerships.

The value of this CYS focus on preparing to meet the challenges of extraordinary contingency conditions – to include actual wartime deployments – is being validated in practice. Indeed, the Army addresses the needs of Soldiers and their families by offering extended hours at many of its facilities. The CYS makes arrangements for on-site child care sessions where CYS takes the program to a site rather than parents bringing children to a specific location like a child development center. In the family child care program, providers agree to provide care during evenings, weekends, and rotating shifts and round the clock care for up to 60 days in long-term care homes.

To this point in Fiscal Year 2003, through its different initiatives, CYS impacted nearly 10,000 families with more than 20,000 children by delivering 231,400 child care hours beyond “normal” operations. Soldiers requiring this extra child care are not asked to pay more for it. The additional costs are being covered by supplemental funds received from the Department of Defense.

The impact of these Child and Youth Services initiatives on Fort Stewart/Hunter Army Air Field has been: 11 on-site sessions; 844 children served; and 22,243 child care hours. Please note that the high figure for child care hours reported by Stewart/Hunter reflects the large number of long term care [overnight] hours provided in family child care homes.

Communicating via email with parents who are deployed is an essential factor in maintaining well-being in the lives of our children and youth. Youth computer labs located in Army CYS programs provide controlled access for youth to use internet to stay in contact with deployed parents. Because technology continually changes, the need to replace computer labs on a three year replacement schedule that keeps pace with the industry standard is becoming more evident if we are to attract and keep young people involved in our programs. The Youth Computer Labs are the primary implementation strategy to meet the statutory requirement for the Youth Sponsorship Program, which also supports youth education transition initiatives.

SCHOOLS/EDUCATION TRANSITION

Significant progress has been made since the initial Army Education Summit held July 2000. The School Liaison Services (SLS) mission was established to mobilize and use community resources to

reduce the impact of the mobile military lifestyle on military children and youth; implement predictable support services to assist children and youth with relocation, life transitions, and achieve academic success; and provide access for parents, children/youth, schools, commanders, and communities to a wide range of resources that facilitate school transition. The SLS provides the following baseline services: School Transition Support Service, Partnerships In Education (PIE) Initiatives, Installation/School Communications, Home School Linkage/Support, and Post-Secondary Preparation Opportunities.

A School Liaison Officer serves as the “point person” for facilitating the delivery of quality school transition and education support services and assisting parents to ease the impact of the military lifestyle on the academic success of military children and youth. The Army has funded 117 School Liaison Officers at the both the installation and Installation Management Agency (IMA) Regional level to support commanders, parents, and youth with school transition issues that were highlighted in the groundbreaking Secondary Education Transition Study (SETS) Report.

As a result of The Army Education Summit 2002, School Transition Specialist positions have been established at the IMA Regions and at Army headquarters. The School Transition Specialists work with local school superintendents to build on the successes, share promising practices, establish a system to provide feedback to superintendents, and to continue to build on the success of the SETS Memorandum of Agreement (MOA).

The Army CYS supports youth education transition initiatives through coordinating the Youth Education Action (YEA) Working Group and monitoring the SETS MOA. As of May 16, 2003, the SETS MOA had

123 signatories representing 127 school districts. Signed by school superintendents, it addresses reciprocity of specific youth education procedures (e.g., the timely transfer of records, improved access to extracurricular activities, grading standards) that affect military youth as their parents move them from one school system to another throughout a military career. Army CYS will undertake another coordination project to set up a July 2003 meeting of the National SETS Steering Committee (NSSC). The NSSC is being formed to enhance communications among superintendents and promote expansion of the SETS MOA process in school systems supporting military installations. We expect superintendents will use it to strengthen reciprocal practices.

MWR SUPPORT AT HOME STATION

Recreation programs support mobilization and deployment in multiple ways. Installations use recreation and physical fitness facilities as mobilization staging areas. For example, Fort Hood, Fort Campbell, Fort Riley, and others processed deploying personnel and equipment in their gymnasiums and recreation centers. Program managers adjust operating hours to meet increased demand and community support requirements. Normal recreation programs such as those at Fort Stewart provide non-deploying units and family members with opportunities to participate in both self-directed and organized activities designed to increase social interaction and individual resiliency. Individual installations offer special programs to meet local demand. We furnished 49 Small Unit Recreation Kits to Reserve and National Guard units activated for force protection at remote stateside posts.

CONCLUSION

Today, our nation is supported by the best trained, best equipped, and most technologically sophisticated Army in the history of the world. These volunteer warriors, who sacrifice so much to serve their country, are unequivocally sustained by loyal, dedicated families who, themselves, sacrifice much in fulfilling their vital role in the lives of soldiers. Never has this dedication been more evident than in the global challenges the United States faces now. Our soldiers and their families are the nation's best. They deserve the best we can give them. Every day, Army MWR and ACS fulfill this sacred obligation with programs and services delivered around the world, wherever soldiers and their families might be. While duty to country calls them in an uncertain world, America's promise to them must be one of gratitude demonstrated by opportunities for a quality of life comparable with that afforded to the citizens they pledge to defend. Army MWR and ACS answers that call. We know our success would not be possible without your committed and steadfast support. Thank you.