

**DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE**

**PRESENTATION TO THE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL**

**UNITED STATES SENATE**

**SUBJECT: "Family Support Issues Related to Deployments"**

**STATEMENT OF:           MS. ANN LUKENS  
                                  DIRECTOR, FAMILY SUPPORT CENTER  
                                  MOODY AIR FORCE BASE, GEORGIA  
                                  UNITED STATES AIR FORCE**

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Good afternoon Senator Chambliss. I'm honored to appear before you today and to have the opportunity to present information that will spotlight Moody Air Force Base's family programs and services that aid and support our dedicated men and women of the United States Air Force and their families.

The mission of the 347<sup>th</sup> Rescue Wing is to organize, train and employ a combat-ready force consisting of approximately 4,500 military and 400 civilian employees. The Wing executes worldwide peacetime and Combat Search and Rescue operations in support of humanitarian and U.S. national security interests. Moody also hosts and supports Air Education and Training Command's 479<sup>th</sup> Flying Training Group and the 820<sup>th</sup> Security Forces Group that provides contingency response support around the world.

Currently, Moody has a total population of approximately 2,000 spouses of military members and 1,800 dependent children. The Family Support Center also serves the needs of approximately 15,000 military retirees and their families, as well as a small cadre of Guard, Reserves, Navy and their families.

Moody personnel have been deployed to Southwest Asia since the end of the first Gulf War in support of Operation Northern and Southern Watch and other contingencies. A focus on personal and family readiness is the cornerstone for unit, group and wing readiness. The reality is that families of personnel assigned to our installation are expected to be ready to function without their sponsors at any time, with as little as a few days notice, and for as long as 179 days. The challenge for the Moody Family Support

Center is to assist airmen and their families in meeting the highest possible level of individual and unit readiness. As of 30 Apr of this year, 58.6% of the 820 Security Forces Group; 44% of the Operations Group; 38.7% of the Mission Support Group; 30% of the Rescue Wing staff; 29.1% of the Maintenance Group; 9.5% of the Medical Group and 9% of the 479 Flying Training Group were deployed away from home station. Additionally, for several months Moody has been supporting seven families who were part of the State Department ordered departure from the Middle East after hostilities began. It goes without saying that our total focus in the Family Support Center at Moody has been on family readiness issues and supporting the needs of those families who are separated by the current contingency.

The Air Force established Family Support Centers in the early 80's to meet the needs of families. For nearly 22 years, the Moody FSC has sought to do just that through various types of needs assessments targeted to help us understand our community, consultation with leadership on community issues, individual contact with customers, educational programs and services, and as the advocate for military families both on-base and off. Like our military and our families, the Moody FSC and all other Air Force Family Support Centers have been an evolving, flexible agency. We believe that it is this flexibility that has made us strong enough to adapt to the new steady state of accelerated operations and personnel tempo.

One of the largest stressors on our airman and their families is deployment. Responding to increasing deployment cycles, the Air Force established the Family Readiness Program

in our Family Support Centers. When we talk about readiness, often people have a difficult time seeing how we—the Family Support Center staff—have anything to do with what “they” conceive as readiness—launching planes, bombs on target, search and rescue, etc. However, research shows that there is a very direct link between “mission readiness,” our ability to go to war, and personal and family readiness. Personal and family readiness refers to our people and their families being equipped with the skills they need to deal with the day-to-day demands of military life—whether they work on the flight line or in supply. People who have financial family or other concerns are just not as well equipped to perform their duties as people who are not experiencing these kinds of problems and anxieties. With 45% of our airmen in the 25 years or younger age group, most are definitely dealing with the issues associated with young relationships, young children, low finances—exacerbated by frequent moves, underemployment of a spouse, and most certainly separation of the family unit because of extended deployments. The programs provided by the Family Support Center help to relieve the airman from some of the “tug” back and forth between the Air Force requirement for “Service Before Self” and the family needs for “service to us first.”

The Family Readiness program has grown tremendously at Moody under the leadership of the Family Readiness NCO, assigned in Oct 1997 and charged with making it work (TSgt Jerry C. Thornton seated here with me). Readiness is made up of three components—the pre-deployment, sustainment, and reunion cycle; family disaster preparedness; and casualty assistance.

Since June 2002, and particularly since January of this year, predeployment briefings and outreach efforts have increased to provide a safety net for Moody families, as Operation Enduring Freedom became Operation Iraqi Freedom.

- 5,500 individual calls were made by TSgt Thornton and other FSC staffers to ensure spouses, parents, significant others and children were aware of the many services available and how to access help no matter the time of the day or the day of the week
- 473 family members attended 16 daytime, evening and weekend pre-deployment briefings
- 1,868 Moody personnel received hugs and hotdogs and cold drinks during at least 35 Personnel Deployment Function lines
- FSC staff planned and executed an old-fashioned BBQ for 43 Army Guard personnel assigned to backfill for deployed security forces personnel

The poet John Donne stated that no man is an island. Efforts to support the community required the commitment of an entire team of helping professionals—the Moody Integrated Delivery System. The cumulative expertise and dedication of a team composed of Family Advocacy and Mental Health specialists; First Sergeants; Health and Wellness specialists; Chaplains; Childcare and Child Development experts along with FSC staff ensured success. Every effort was made to empower Moody spouses so they felt more in control of their lives.

- The Extended Duty Care program provided 275 hours of free childcare monthly
- The staff of the Moody Child Development Center (CDC) provided free childcare so spouses could attend Town Hall Meetings hosted by our Wing Commander

- The Give Parents a Break program provided monthly free child care to more than 50 children at the CDC and 30 children at the Youth Center during OIF
- Family Advocacy Outreach provided 278 interventions in the form of support groups, lunchtime seminars, and parenting classes
- Mental Health professionals made themselves available at anytime to talk with stressed family members
- The Chaplains spearheaded monthly deployed family suppers attended by more than 329 spouses and children
- 2,721 *Hearts Apart* family morale calls were placed through the Moody switchboard by spouses, children, parents, and significant others
- FSC staffers were available on a 24-hour basis; kept spouses company while hospitalized for tests; wrapped holiday presents so every deployed family had presents under the tree; talked with children having a hard time with parent's absence
- IDS agencies played key roles in the annual Parent University Program conducted in concert with the local school systems; a workshop on preparing and supporting children during parental separation and in cases of trauma was very well-attended

The Family Support staff and IDS members were particularly visible during redeployment festivities during the duty day, in the evening, and on the weekends.

Reunion is presented as the opposite side of the pre-deployment coin and is often the most difficult part of the process. Research has shown that education for the family and the airman on what to expect after a long deployment has a positive affect on the reunion process. More than 200 individuals attended nine reunion briefings during the past

twelve months. ACC has developed a very useful Return and Reunion CD that is provided at many of our deployed locations, as well as to our family members at briefings. We hope that you enjoy reviewing a copy of this CD also Senator. We have also provided you with some of the education materials that we give to family members when they attend our deployment or return and reunion briefings and programs.

During all this activity, we were also deeply imbedded in the welcome home support process for seven families who been stationed with their military member in Turkey or in Saudi. All these families were personally met at the airport by our staff. After meeting them, we did an initial needs assessment of the family status to see the type assistance they would require, helped with school issues, ensured they knew what their Safehaven benefits would be and that they understood who various points of contact were for issues/concerns, made at least weekly visits with each family, and reported weekly accountability and status stats directly to Air Force on each family. We are currently assisting each family return to their duty station now that the State Department has terminated the Authorized Departure for those areas. We are processing waivers for a few families to remain at Moody until the end of the school year. The services provided in a Safehaven effort is just other example of how the Family Support staff support the needs of our Air Force families so that the member is relieved to focus on the steady state of accelerated operations at a forward location.

In addition to supporting Parent University in our civilian community, immediately upon declaration of OIF, we contacted the offices of both local public school superintendents

to provide information on dealing with separation anxiety for their guidance counselors. The Moody School Board Liaison Committee works tirelessly to address any issues that can affect the welfare of military students. We personally met with Valdosta City School System counselors to discuss specific needs and problems associated with deployment anxiety of our students.

Senator Chambliss, we would also like you to know that the Moody Mental Health Clinic data shows a 16% decrease in maltreatment incidents for the last 12 months. Everyone is striving to prevent domestic violence that results in needless and tragic headlines. We are hopeful that the education processes we have in place at Moody are beneficial in this reduction.

The greatest test of the Moody family support system came on 23 Mar 03. On that date, six members Rescue Squadrons answering to the call sign of Komodo 11 made the ultimate sacrifice while on a humanitarian mission to rescue two Afghani children. The crash and loss of all souls on-board hit every heart in the Moody community. Under the leadership of Maj Nancy Weingartner, the MAFB Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Team mobilized to be present in every corner of our community. We closed ranks around six family units while they awaited the official word about their loved ones. We cried with them; we listened to memories recounted by parents and friends; we prayed with them. We are still there for them-- no family is left behind at Moody!