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New GI Bill Provides Increased Educational Benefits

By Army Staff Sgt. Michael J. Carden, American Forces Press Service



WASHINGTON, The latest GI Bill considerably improves the opportunity for today's servicemembers to obtain their education, a senior Defense Department official said.

President Bush signed the Post-9/11 Veterans Education Assistance Act of 2008 on June 30. The new law mirrors the tenets of the original GI Bill, which gave returning World War II veterans the opportunity to go to any school they wanted while receiving a living stipend, Bob Clark, the Pentagon's assistant director of accessions policy, said.

"The original GI Bill was said to be one of the most significant social impacts of the 20th century," Clark said. "We believe the new bill is going to have a similar impact."

The new GI Bill applies to individuals who served on active duty on or after Sept. 11, 2001, and offers education benefits worth an average of \$80,000 — double the value of those in the previous program. It covers the full costs of tuition and books, which are paid directly to the school, and it provides a variable stipend for living expenses. It's also transferable to family members of career servicemembers.

Its only restriction is that payment amounts are limited to the most expensive in-state cost to attend a college or university in the state where veterans attend school, he said.

The variable stipend is based on the Defense Department's basic allowance for

housing for an E-5, which averages about \$1,200 a month, and \$1,000 a year will be paid directly to the servicemember for books and supplies, he added.

Enrollment into the Post-9/11 GI Bill is free. Eligibility for the Montgomery GI Bill is based on service commitment and requires active-duty servicemembers to pay a \$1,200 fee over the initial year of their enlistment.

The new bill requires that an individual serve at least 90 days on active duty after Sept. 10, 2001, and if discharged, be separated on honorable terms. Servicemembers discharged due to a service-connected disability are eligible if they served 30 continuous days on active duty. Servicemembers must serve 36 aggregated months to qualify for the full amount of benefits.

Servicemembers are entitled to benefits of the new bill for up to 36 months and have up to 15 years from their last 30 days of continuous service to use their entitlements. But as successful as Defense Department officials anticipate the new bill to be, Clark suggested that new recruits still enroll in the Montgomery GI Bill.

The Montgomery GI Bill gives benefits for higher education as well as vocational training, apprenticeship programs and on-the-job training, he explained. The Post-9/11 GI Bill focuses solely on higher education and can only be used at institutions that offer at least an associate's degree, he said.

"We recommend that all new recruits think hard before turning down the

Montgomery GI Bill, because they will limit their opportunities for additional education without it," he added.

Servicemembers also are "highly encouraged" to use the Defense Department's tuition assistance program while on active duty, because the Post-9/11 GI Bill's full entitlements, such as the living stipend and book allowance, will not be available, Clark said.

"If you use the Post-9/11 GI Bill while on active duty, it will merely cover tuition or the difference of what tuition assistance will pay," he explained. "Another downside to that is each month you use [the new bill], you lose a month of your 36 months of eligibility."

So, if servicemembers serve on active duty on or after Aug. 1, 2009, and meet the minimum time-in-service requirement, they will be eligible for the new GI Bill while also maintaining benefits from the Montgomery GI Bill, he said.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill also brings good news for officers and for servicemembers who enlisted under the loan repayment program. Since eligibility for the Post-9/11 GI Bill is based on time already served, more servicemembers will be able to take advantage of its benefits, Clark added. Officers commissioned through one of the service academies or through ROTC and enlisted servicemembers participating in the loan repayment program don't qualify for the Montgomery GI Bill, he said.

Those servicemembers will be able to

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qualify if they finish their initial obligatory service. Commissioned officers must complete their initial five-year commitment if they attended a service academy or their four-year agreement if they were commissioned through college ROTC. Servicemembers whose college loans were paid off by the Defense Department as a re-enlistment incentive must finish their initial commitment ? whether it is three, four or five years ? before they can apply, Clark said.

"Any amount of time an individual served after their obligated service counts for qualifying service under the new GI Bill," he said.

Another facet unique to the Post-9/11 GI Bill is that it's transferable to family members. The feature gives the defense and service secretaries the authority to offer career servicemembers the opportunity to transfer unused benefits to their family. Though Defense Department officials still are working with the services to hash out eligibility requirements, there are four prerequisites that are subject to adjustment or change, Clark said.

Currently transferability requirements are:

- Qualifying service to be eligible for the Post-9/11 GI Bill;
- Active duty service in the armed forces on or after Aug. 1, 2009;
- At least six years of service in the armed forces;
- Agreement to serve four more years in the armed forces.

"We're really excited about transferability," Clark said. "That was one of the things about education and the GI Bill that's come up the most often from the field and fleet."

Individuals who may not qualify to transfer unused benefits because they leave the service before the new bill's effective date most likely still will qualify for the bill. As long as the separated servicemembers meet the minimum qualifying time served, they can contact their local Veterans Affairs office and apply for the program. While payments are not retroactive, eligibility is, Clark said.

"This new bill will allow our veterans to chase their dreams," Clark said. "It will allow them to go back and experience college like they deserve, much like their grandfathers did in World War II."

More information about the Post-9/11 GI Bill is available at local Veterans Affairs Office and at www.gibill.va.gov.

Related Sites: Post-9/11 GI Bill,
<http://www.gibill.va.gov/>

'Troops to Teachers' Translates Military Experience to Classroom



By Donna Miles, American Forces Press Service

FORT MEADE, Md. - About 60 servicemembers preparing to retire or separate from the military got the word loud and clear during a recent Transition Assistance Program workshop here: If Uncle Sam can't have you any more, the public school system would love to have you.

School districts around the country are desperate for the maturity and experience troops have gained through military service, said Robert Henry, who coordinates the Troops to Teachers Program for Maryland and the District of Columbia.

The Defense Department launched the Troops to Teachers program in 1994 to attract departing military members into teaching positions in low-income and underprivileged school districts. Fourteen years later, the program has placed more than 11,000 former troops into public schools nationwide, Henry told the group. Almost half the TTT teachers work in high schools, 30 percent in middle schools and about 20 percent in elementary schools. More than 80 percent of them are men, compared to about 25 percent of traditional teachers.

To qualify for the program, candidates need a bachelor's degree and teacher certification that the Troops to Teachers program can help finance, Henry said.

A retired Navy petty officer first class, Henry called the Troops to Teachers program a great opportunity for former servicemembers who enjoy working with young people and want to continue serving their communities.

He called former troops prime candidates for teaching jobs -- particularly in math, the sciences and special education -- who bring a unique quality to their classrooms.

"They have real-world experience, and they bring a level of maturity, along with good communications skills," he said. "Most have a sense of service and want to continue to give back to the community."

"But beyond that," he continued, "troops bring a sense of commitment to mission accomplishment. For them, failure is not an option. There's a kind of mentality they bring to the job that means they will do whatever they need to do to get something done and to do it right."

Participants in the program say military service gave them the skills they needed for the job: discipline, patience and a readiness to face challenges. They also report a personal satisfaction that comes with working

with young people, Henry said.

Seventy-five percent of TTT teachers were still teaching five years after going through the program, Henry said. After 10 years, 60 percent were still involved in education, as teachers or administrators.

Among them is Ernie Jackson, who returned to his hometown of Port Jervis, N.Y., in 2000 to teach fifth grade and special education. Jackson, who retired as an Army infantry officer with the rank of lieutenant colonel, said he found the Troops to Teachers program a good way to transition into the education field.

Jackson said he drew on his 20 years of military experience as he moved into the classroom, tapping into the management skills the Army taught him, along with the ability to work under pressure and deal with people. He said he applied the Army's way of training troops, emphasizing group dynamics and team building -- "skills you need in life, but that you can't get on the Internet or on a cell phone."

Jackson said that as he rose through the education ranks, becoming a vice principal, then a principal, he got the satisfaction from his interactions with his students.

"You change kids' lives," he said. "It's a great opportunity to make a difference in a young person's life. And there's a tremendous amount of gratification that comes with that."

Now a principal who hires teachers, Jackson said he seeks out former servicemembers through the Troops to Teachers program. "Having time in the military gives them a definite edge in my book," he said. "I find there are a lot of parallels between teaching and the military. We need servicemen and women to become teachers."

Jackson isn't alone in praising the Troops to Teachers program. School districts rave about the teachers they recruited through the program, Henry told the Fort Meade troops. Ninety percent of principals report that TTT teachers are more effective than traditional teachers, particularly in classroom management and student discipline. Eight-nine percent of principals said TTT teachers have a greater impact than other teachers with equal teaching experience on student achievement.

"The school districts that have us all want more of us," Henry told students at the Fort Meade transition workshop. "It's a great opportunity to build on the military skills and experience you have built, and to use them in a meaningful way as you begin a new career."

Related Sites: Troops to Teachers Program,
<http://www.ed.gov/programs/troops/index.html>

Videos for Children of Deployed Military Members Gain Popularity



By Navy Lt. Jennifer Cragg, Special to American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON - Two videos produced by Army Medical Command and the American Academy of Pediatrics to help children and adolescents cope during a parent's deployment are gaining in popularity.

"Military Youth Coping with Separation: When Family Members Deploy" addresses a variety of deployment-related concerns for teens, and "Mr. Poe and Friends Discuss Reunion After Deployment" was made for elementary-school-age children.

"We hope these videos will support the healthy emotional development of military children and adolescents during potentially difficult times in their lives," Army Maj. (Dr.) Keith Lemmon of the pediatrics department at Madigan Army Medical Center at Fort Lewis, Wash., said during a "Dot-Mil-Docs" radio show on BlogTalkRadio.com July 31. "We also hope these videos will decrease feelings of stigma and isolation in our military children while sensitizing the larger American community to military child and adolescent culture and support needs."

Lemmon is a co-founder of the Military Child and Adolescent Center of Excellence and vice president of the Uniformed Services West Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

The videos, developed by military pediatricians and youth professionals to help military children understand and deal with the emotions related to a family member's deployment, have been so well-received that another 100,000 copies of each video will be distributed by Military One Source in the near future. More than 100,000 copies initially produced in the project already have been distributed.

"Our goal is to reduce the anxiety and fear surrounding a military deployment, and let children know they are not alone in the struggles their families are facing," Lemmon said.

Lemmon, an Army pediatrician and adolescent medicine subspecialist, first became aware of the need for more support for the children of deployed families when he served in Afghanistan in 2002. He and his wife, a teacher, did their best to prepare their son for the deployment, but it soon became clear they hadn't done enough.

"Within just a couple of weeks of my departure, my normally well-behaved 4-year old son started having some acting-out behavior, and a little bit of regression, kind

of moving backward in his development," Lemmon said. "[He] was expressing that he wasn't comfortable with my absence."

The doctor said it struck him when he returned from his six-month deployment that if he and his wife were having this degree of difficulty as child health and educational professionals, how might this be affecting the average soldier, airman, sailor or Marine, who is likely to have less understanding of child behavior? When Lemmon returned to his duties as a pediatrician at Fort Bragg, N.C., he began noticing how the frequent and extended deployments were affecting the children in his practice.

"When I got back from my deployment, a lot of other soldiers were deploying, and I began to notice a lot of children who were presenting with complaints of headaches and stomachaches that I couldn't explain," Lemmon said.

He added that if children are not emotionally content, perhaps associated with the lack of a connection with an important adult in their life, they may start to display physical symptoms.

"As pediatricians, we are not trained to look that closely at how emotional concerns and stress affect the physical health of our young patients," Lemmon acknowledged. "However, we are hoping to address that lack of training through the videos we've developed and many other opportunities developing through the Military Child and Adolescent Center of Excellence that is being established at Madigan Army Medical Center."

Lemmon said his family's experience with his own deployment inspired him to address the effects of deployment among adolescents. If servicemembers have the perception that their children's emotional and physical health are being well-cared-for when they are deployed, he explained, they are more likely to be able to focus on their critically important military missions.

"As we start to frame the discussion more in terms of military family readiness and support, it is becoming more popular," he said. "As we provide more support for our military families to prepare them for the potential stresses of deployment and separation, then our warriors are going to be more able to focus on their mission."

Lemmon added that while servicemembers voluntarily join the military, their children's service and sacrifice are more of a compulsory condition of being a military child, so it's important to acknowledge that and to honor the children's personal service and sacrifice.

"Being a military child or adolescent is actually a very unique experience," Lemmon said. "We think belonging to a military family really is a special thing. Military children serve and sacrifice for their nation in a way

that is very important and is different from the way we as military servicemembers serve and sacrifice."

In addition to the videos, the national community continues to show its support for military children and adolescents. Lemmon added that the American Academy of Pediatrics is providing a voice for what it means to be a military child through its funding and supporting much of the advocacy work that has been done in this area, including the development of the AAP Military Youth Deployment Support Web site.

Lemmon added that other programs also offer assistance, such as the Military Child Education Coalition.

"They advocate for educational issues for children, making sure that military children are treated fairly when they transfer into new school districts and that their credits transfer and they don't have to retake the basic history course every time they move to a new place because they are military kids," Lemmon explained.

The doctor said the videos for teens and younger children are different because their deployment-related needs are different. "We know children experience stress differently based on their developmental age," he said. "Younger children may have significant attachment concerns when their parents deploy. They need to attach to their parents, feel comfortable and connected in order to grow up emotionally healthy."

Both videos are available for online viewing on the American Academy of Pediatrics Deployment Support Web site at www.aap.org/sections/unifserv/deployment/ and are available for ordering in DVD format through Military One Source at 1-800-342-9647 or www.militaryonesource.com/skins/MOS/home.aspx.

New Program Offers 'Care for Caregivers'



By Elaine Wilson, Special to American Forces Press Service

FORT SAM HOUSTON, Texas, May 22, 2008 - The U.S. Army Institute of Surgical

Research here has launched a program aimed at caring for a segment of the military population much more accustomed to administering care than receiving it.

Compassion fatigue, also known as secondary traumatic stress disorder, is the emotional residue or strain of exposure of working with patients recovering from traumatic events.

The relatively new term, coined by Dr. Charles Figley in the 1990s, is becoming

increasingly popular as caregivers are faced with the long-term care of trauma patients surviving the battlefield in greater numbers than ever before.

"We're starting to notice signs of compassion fatigue in caregivers of wounded warriors," said Army Col. Kathryn Gaylord, director of the Army Institute of Surgical Research's Care for the Caregivers program. "Caregivers are giving everything of themselves to care for patients, but there's a price sometimes associated with that."

Taxed by deployments of their own and the complicated care of severely wounded servicemembers, caregivers are beginning to exhibit signs of trauma normally reserved for patients. With symptoms such as heightened irritability, anxiety, depression and sleep disturbances, the syndrome bears a marked resemblance to post-traumatic stress disorder.

"Compassion fatigue is when caregivers have such deep empathy they develop symptoms of trauma similar to the patient," Gaylord explained.

While similar in nature, Gaylord pointed out the difference between compassion fatigue and "burnout," an emotional exhaustion many people experience due to increased workload and institutional stress. Unlike compassion fatigue, burnout does not contain a trauma element.

Over time, compassion fatigue can lead a caregiver to grow distant from patients or, on the flip side, too close. Both can be detrimental to the patients and families.

Caregivers at the burn center, for instance, treat the same patients for months or even years, which can lead to a strong connection, and a strong sense of failure, guilt and loss if a patient does not survive.

"We treat patients for many weeks to months, during which time they undergo many operations and procedures," Gaylord said. "A strong relationship develops with the patient's family; we get to know them very well."

Army Spc. Antonio Cevallos, a physical therapy technician at the institute, is familiar with the ongoing intensity of day-to-day care. He went from transferring patients wounded in Iraq via ground ambulance in Kuwait to treating wounded warriors in the burn center.

"I see a lot more here [at the institute]," he said. "Compared to minutes or hours of one-on-one contact, it's days and weeks. It has its ups and downs."

Cevallos said he grew close to several patients and was pained to see two patients deteriorate, then pass away.

"It's difficult at times," he said. "But what keeps me going is the fact that I'm helping other people. As long as I keep my purpose, it keeps me above water."

Caregivers are trained to be compassionate, but there is little training in the military on how to handle the stress of compas-

sion, said Gaylord, who hopes to remedy the problem through the Care for the Caregivers program.

The doctor described the program as a combination of prevention training and treatment through the use of seminars and stress-management techniques.

"We have a series of world-renowned experts coming here to speak on topics such as grief, relaxation, nutrition and exercise," said Gaylord, who said the key to prevention is to find ways to manage and alleviate stress.

The seminars include education on the latest relaxation techniques, including "Alpha Stim," which is cranial electrical stimulation and vibration sounds that trigger the brain to relax.

In addition, Gaylord and her staff are building a respite room at the institute, which will serve as a peaceful haven caregivers can retreat to and regenerate. Wanting a state-of-the-art area, Gaylord contracted an architect who designed relaxation rooms for Nike and Hilton.

"The room will be very relaxing with a waterfall, music, massage chair, special motion chair and a video with headsets," she said.

Gaylord also plans to integrate group sessions and questionnaires that will help identify issues and track the impact of the program.

Cevallos said having a support system at work is beneficial.

"Sometimes you need to talk to someone or relax with a group," he said. "I've sat down in a session, and it was soothing. There's a sense of comfort from being with other people who are going through similar experiences."

Army Chaplain (Maj.) Philip Kochenburger, Brooke Army Medical Center chaplain, attended a compassion fatigue seminar on loss, grief and trauma May 9 and used an air travel safety briefing analogy to describe the importance of caring for caregivers.

"The flight attendants always tell you to put on your own oxygen mask first before you help others," he said. "The same is true of caregivers. They have to make sure they take care of themselves along with the patients."

Gaylord said the focus will remain on resiliency and mental well-being.

"We'd like to eventually delve into the research aspects of this so we can determine what makes some people more innately resilient than others."

Compensation, Benefits Handbook Consolidates Warrior Care Information



By Donna Miles
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Nov. 3, 2008
- Defense Secretary Robert M.

Gates calls a new handbook that compiles the myriad information seriously wounded, ill or injured servicemembers and their families need in one succinct, easy-to-read publication another step in improving the care and support they deserve.

In his foreword to the Compensation and Benefits Handbook, Gates said its biggest benefit is that it "compiles into one source the relevant information that you and your family previously had to search through numerous sources to find."

The handbook was created to help servicemembers and the family members helping to care for them navigate through the military and veteran disability, evaluation, compensation and benefits programs designed to help them, explained Sharon Gunselman, a department policy and resource analyst.

It walks readers through the processes of recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration back to the military or into civilian life. Each section describes the compensation and benefits available at each stage.

The Dole-Shalala Commission, led by former Sen. Bob Dole and Donna Shalala, health and human services secretary during the Clinton administration, identified the need for a comprehensive information source last year during its investigation of problems at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Gunselman said.

The departments of Veterans Affairs, Labor, Health and Human Services and Education and the Social Security Administration, as well as other governmental and non-governmental agencies and organizations, contributed to the handbook.

The handbook, mandated by the 2008 National Defense Authorization Act, is now available online and is being distributed by the services in hard-copy format. It provides Web sites and toll-free phone numbers, and the electronic version includes hyperlinks. Guneselman said the book will be updated annually to include new information.

Gates emphasized that the handbook is not intended to be a replacement for what he called "the best source of information" - the servicemember's chain of command or medical and nonmedical care providers.

He noted that because all affected servicemembers will have different requirements, their support staffs will help design individual plans that ensure they and their

families receive the support and benefits they need.

"You and your fellow patriots who volunteered to serve in our armed forces have no equal in the world," Gates concluded. "Our responsibility is to provide you care that is unequalled in the world. We owe this to you. We will deliver this to you."

TroopTube Gives Morale Boost to Deployed Servicemembers



By Gerry J. Gilmore
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON - Overseas-deployed servicemembers can receive video "shout-outs" from home, as well as senior-leader messages, thanks to the new TroopTube online information service, according to military officials.

TroopTube is a new Web site managed by the Defense Department's Military OneSource online information network. It is patterned after YouTube, the popular commercial video site, said Gail Lobisone, who works with Military OneSource at U.S. Army Family, Morale, Welfare and Recreation Command in Alexandria, Va. It can be accessed at www.trooptube.tv/home.

Each armed service manages a MilitaryOneSource.com site that connects servicemembers and families to assistance programs that deal with moving, finances, deployment, childcare and other military-life issues.

The TroopTube concept is right for the times, Lobisone said during a Nov. 14 interview with the Pentagon Channel. Today's soldiers, she said, "like the ability to connect through technology."

TroopTube is expected to raise troop morale by providing near-real-time communication to loved ones back home, said Army Col. Brick T. Miller, U.S. Army Family, Morale, Welfare and Recreation Command's deputy commander and chief of staff. The in-house communications system, he added, also helps the military to conserve Internet bandwidth.

Deployed servicemembers can access TroopTube to view their children's stateside high school graduations, birthdays and other notable family events, Miller said. Single soldiers, he added, can keep current with parents, siblings and friends back home.

Sites like TroopTube exemplify and provide "what the younger soldiers want today to be able to communicate with their families," Miller said. TroopTube helps to ease the minds of overseas-deployed servicemembers, he said, while helping family members stay in touch.

"We see it as a way of lowering the stress level," Miller said. "This is a way of getting closer to real-time gratification, which is what the Millennium Generation is used to."

Group Helps Guard, Reserve Children With After-School Activities



By Jamie Findlater
Special to American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON -

Deployments are tough on military families, especially on the children.

Children of deployed National Guardsmen and reservists often must deal not only with a parent's absence, but also with the financial burden their family must bear when the deployed parents' military pay is less than they earn in civilian life.

"Our Military Children" helps fund after-school activities for children of the National Guard and reserves when a parent is deployed, one of the organization's founders said in an interview on the "ASY Live" program on BlogTalkRadio.com. "ASY" stands for America Supports You, a Defense Department program that connects citizens and companies with servicemembers and their families serving at home and abroad.

"It is so important to keep these kids in a routine, to keep them involved in activities and on track," said Gail Kruzal, executive director of Our Military Children.

"Unfortunately, the challenges these families face are compounded by the fact that when a reservist is called up for active duty, many times his or her income can drop substantially. So, just when the children most need these extracurricular activities, the family can no longer afford them."

Our Military Kids funds activities ranging from Tai Kwan Do to scholarships for tutoring for children in kindergarten through high school. "A lot of times, kids that are good students start falling behind in school," Kruzal said. "Tutoring grants help the kids get back on track. We fund a wide range of programs depending on the child's interest, ... from modeling to drivers education."

Kruzal and her partner, Linda Davidson, founded the organization to do their part. Kruzal knows first-hand about the challenges of raising children in a single-parent home; her children were 12 and 14 when her husband, a diplomat, was killed on a peace mission to Bosnia.

For many military kids, Kruzal said, the ability to continue to pursue activities they love keeps them focused and helps them

cope. One of the organization's first grants went to a "daddy's girl" who was greatly distressed with her father's deployment and falling behind in school, she recalled.

"[Her father's deployment] was really upsetting," Kruzal said, "but as soon as she got the extra help, ... she got almost straight As the next year in second grade."

Another child who had taken dance lessons for more than nine years was forced to drop out when the family's finances suffered during her father's deployment. "It was a part of who she was," Kruzal said, "and when we were able to get her dancing again, it helped her get through this difficult time."

Since its inception, Our Military Kids has given out nearly 3,000 grants, and it's now a nationwide program. To date, the organization has honored all eligible requests, Kruzal said, and is celebrating the distribution of its millionth dollar.

Eligible families can apply online at www.ourmilitarykids.org, attaching a copy of the deployment orders, the child's military ID, and information about the child's desired activity. Upon submitting the application, families will hear back in a matter of days.

"We feel that kids need to know if they can be on the baseball team or participate in dance or gymnastics, so we have a very quick turnaround," Kruzal said.

Our Military Kids is a supporter of America Supports You, a Defense Department program connecting citizens and companies with servicemembers and their families serving at home and abroad.

"Military families make so many sacrifices, and we're helping to do our little part to minimize the sacrifices here at home," Kruzal said.

Sesame Street Coaches Kids Through Parent's Deployments, Returns



By John J. Kruzal
American Forces Press Service

ARLINGTON, Va., April 29, 2008 - Following a workshop that helped children cope with a military parent's deployment, the familiar, furry denizens of Sesame Street are starring in a new program focusing on multiple deployments and family adjustments upon a parent's return.

Sesame Workshop, the makers of Sesame Street, today released "Talk, Listen, Connect: Deployment, Homecoming, Changes," a video workshop that aims to

aid children in understanding and unbundling the tangle of complex emotions many feel in the midst of a mother's or father's tours of duty away from home, and even broaches the difficult subject of dealing with a parent's debilitating war injury.

"This follow-on DVD to talk about the changes, dealing with new medical injuries -- living in the 'new normal' -- is tremendously important," Army Col. Loree K. Sutton, chief of the newly created Defense Center of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury, said here during the workshop launch at the Women in Military Service for America Memorial.

More than 80 percent of those surveyed said the first installment of Sesame Workshop's military outreach effort -- which covered all phases of deployment -- was incredibly effective, Gary E. Kneel, president and chief executive officer of Sesame Workshop. "And they really wanted us to also go to the next step to deal with two issues," he added, referring to multiple deployments and changes, especially mental or physical injuries parents suffer while deployed.

To help keep the program authentic to children's experience, an advisory committee composed of members of military families and advocacy groups, child psychologists, educators and other experts offered perspective to Sesame Street creators throughout production.

The show's creators also vetted the program through "real world" military families and adapted it according to their feedback, said Jeanette Betancourt, vice president for content design at Sesame Workshop's education and outreach division.

In the original script, for instance, writers used broad strokes to paint an effusive reunion between Elmo, a red, furry and perpetually 3-year old character, and his fresh-from-the-front-lines father. After seeing a rough cut of the scene, the advisors recommended tweaking the script to reflect a greater emotional range.

Leslye A. Arsht, deputy undersecretary of defense for military community and family policy, said the first treatment failed to capture the emotional complexity of the reunion.

"In the original version, they had [Elmo] all excited and enthusiastic and happy. It's sort of what you expect if you really don't know how hard it is when somebody's been gone for a while and you're so anticipating their returning," Arsht said in an interview. "And yet there's this (worry), 'Is he going to be the same?' You know, all those mixed emotions."

The creators heeded their feedback and re-wrote the scene to be more three-dimensional and true-to-life, through what she described as "powerful adjustments" in the script. The effects of such realism are evi-

dent, she said: "You cannot watch these DVDs without crying."

Arsht said the anxiety arises, in part, because children feel ambivalent about the growth and progress they make in the midst of their parent's absence.

"The child has been growing; they can do things they couldn't do before. They don't know whether to be proud about that, or to think that the dad's going to feel bad that he didn't get to see that happening," Arsht said, describing a common reaction of 3- to 5-year olds, the show's target demographic.

According to statistics, some 700,000 children of military members are under the age of 5. Through Sesame Street's lovable characters, the program manages to teach young children about painful subjects in a medium that speaks to them.

In one scene, Rosita, a cheerful, bilingual blue monster from Mexico, sees her servicemember father return home in a wheelchair after an injury he suffered during deployment.

"Initially she's angry. Her emotions emerge. And what Sesame Street is able to do is turn the conversation to what is the same, what the parent can do," Arsht said. "If he can't kick the ball -- which he couldn't -- he can catch the ball.

"It's elementary," she continued. "But it carries a much bigger message than the words themselves convey."

Elmo and Rosita are the best venues for relaying such tender messages because they are trusted by young audience members, said Barbara Thompson, the director of DoD's military community and family policy office and advisory board member.

"The children will listen and resonate with their message," she said. "Sesame Workshop captured the right message and how to say it in a very sensitive way. It's a well-done resource for our families."

Sesame Workshop, a nonprofit education effort, has been doing these special projects since its inception in 1968. The group has done outreach projects on subjects like early literacy, asthma, lead poisoning, going to the doctor and school readiness.

Performed in English and Spanish, the workshop will not air on television but will be distributed free to schools, child care programs and family support centers, thanks to a gift from Wal-Mart stores and other sponsors. The DVD kit or downloadable video is available at the Military OneSource Web site, www.militaryonesource.com.

The previous Sesame Street workshop, a broader installment entitled "Talk, Listen, Connect: Helping Families Cope with Military Deployment," covered all phases of deployment, from predeployment to homecoming. A separate Sesame Street program, "When Parents Are Deployed," was nomi-

nated for an Emmy Award for Outstanding Children's Program.

First Community Sites to Open for Reserve, Active-Duty Families



By Donna Miles
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON - A new "virtual installation" concept that helps families who live far from a military base get information and tap into services available for them during their loved ones' deployment is expected to begin rolling out next month.

Focus groups are under way to identify where to put the first three to five sites, she said, likely in areas with big Army Reserve and National Guard populations and no Army post nearby.

General Stultz acknowledged that all spouses face hardships when their loved ones deploy -- regardless of whether they're active-duty, National Guard or Reserve. But he said his wife reminded him that unlike active-duty families, who can turn to their local post for help if they need it, Army Reserve families often live far from an Army post and don't know how to tap into available services.

"She said, 'If I am living on an installation, I have Army Community Services, child and youth services, legal support, medical support, the Red Cross. I can go to Army Emergency Relief if I need to get help,'" the general said. He paused, then continued his wife's point: "But if I am in Pocatella, Idaho, who do I turn to?"

As Laura Stultz sees it, the gap is as much cultural as geographic. Active-duty families tend to live on or near a military post, know each other and know where to go for assistance, or at least who to ask how to get it, she said.

Reserve families often don't. A single Reserve unit can draw members from a 10-state area, and families may have had no past exposure to each other or to the Army system overall.

That quandary led her to come up with the virtual installation concept. As she envisions it, it not only will fill a gap for reserve-component families, but also will benefit the many active-duty families who leave their post for their hometowns during their loved one's deployment.

Each site to open next month under the pilot program will be slightly different; one may be a kiosk in a local shopping mall, another may be an office in an Army Reserve center or National Guard armory. "We'll try different approaches of going into the community and see what works

best," Laura Stultz said.

Military family members will be able to walk into the sites to talk to someone about their questions or needs. A trained staffer? most likely a military or veteran volunteer? will know the answer or be able to pick up a phone or go online to get it.

The general's wife said she envisions people from the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and other veterans as well as community groups manning the sites. "They keep asking what they can do and saying that they want to help, so I am giving them a job to do," she said.

In addition to providing personal service to military families, the brick-and-mortar sites will serve as visible signs of a broader community outreach effort, Laura Stultz said. Volunteers who staff them will help make inroads into local businesses, churches and other groups to remind them that members of their community are deployed, and that they and their families need support, she added.

The sites will represent the first step in a two-pronged effort designed to reach out to Army Reserve and National Guard families who are nowhere near installations and the full range of support services they offer to active-duty families, she said.

In addition to physical sites, the new concept calls for a Web-based virtual installation that families can tap into from their computers for information and support. That site is expected to go live later this year.

Once it's operational, users will be able to navigate the streets of a simulated Army base with a click of their computer mouse, stopping wherever they wish, Laura Stultz explained. They'll be able to "stop" at the military identification card desk to find out how to replace a lost card, the Tricare office to check on their medical benefits or the family assistance center for other support. "You'll be able to navigate down the street just like in a video game and get the information you need," she said.

Families also will be able to enter their ZIP codes into the site to find the nearest place to get help or services or to contact the nearest family readiness group.

The Army Reserve chief's wife cited the "Fort Family" Web site launched by the Army Reserve's 108th Training Command as an example of the virtual installation's potential. That site links families with local military and civilian resources. It also offers a virtual volunteer program for people seeking ways to help local soldiers and families.

The Web initiative and other programs promoting family wellness and readiness earned the unit honors in the Defense Department's 2007 Reserve Family Readiness Award program.

Laura Stultz praised the 108th Training Command for taking the lead in helping make the virtual installation concept a reali-

ty. "It's a wonderful program," she said. "It's a smaller model of what we will take and then add to."

Among additional services she hopes to offer is a chat room for children of deployed troops.

While the general's wife never has served in the military herself, she said she's had lots of experience holding down the homefront far from the nearest military post when her soldier-husband deployed.

She recalled his deployments to the Persian Gulf and the Balkans in the 1990s, when she had four young children at home and couldn't make the two-hour drive to a family readiness group meeting for help and support. "So I know what it's like to be out there and not know where to turn," she said. "I understand."

Now that her husband is chief of the Army Reserve, Laura Stultz said she feels a personal responsibility to make things smoother for other Army Reserve spouses who keep the home fires burning during deployments.

"Their soldiers are putting their lives on the line just like everyone else, so they deserve and need the same help and resources available for active-component families," she said.

General Stultz called the virtual installation an important step toward taking better care of Army Reserve families. After all, he said, the Army Reserve recruits soldiers, but it retains families. "And we have to do a better job of reaching out to those families," he said.

VA to Contact Recent Combat Veterans



WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will begin contacting nearly 570,000 recent combat veterans to ensure they know about VA's medical services and other benefits. A contractor-operated "Combat Veteran Call Center" will telephone two distinct populations of veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan.

In the first phase, calls will go to an estimated 17,000 veterans who were sick or injured while serving in Iraq or Afghanistan. VA will offer to appoint a care manager to work with them if they don't have one already. Care managers ensure veterans receive appropriate care and know about their VA benefits.

For five years after their discharge from the military, these combat veterans have special access to VA health care. The Department screens combat veterans for signs of post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury. VA personnel have been deployed to the military's major med-

ical centers to assist wounded service members and their families during the transition to civilian lives.

For the new call center, the second phase will target 550,000 Operation Iraqi Freedom-Operation Enduring Freedom (OIF-OEF) veterans who have been discharged from active duty but have not contacted VA for services. Once contacted, veterans will be informed about VA's benefits and services.

The initial calls will be made by a private contractor, EDS, which specializes in technology.

Troop Support Group Launches New Web site



By Sharon Foster
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON - A troop-support group that provides education on the brain's and body's natural responses to stress launched its redesigned Web site yesterday.

"Our Web site is completely redesigned to power our mission of providing the best education, training and resources for supporting strength and resilience in all areas of military life," said Elizabeth Hawkins, executive director of "One Freedom."

"The new One Freedom Web site is a portal for our nation's warriors and for everyone who cares about them to connect with a wealth of knowledge and new possibilities for strength and healing," she said.

The Web site contains a listing of One Freedom programs for military servicemembers, veterans, families and care providers, with easy online registration.

A growing list of resources -- information, organizations and individuals -- is dedicated to supporting military communities using articles, newsletters, videos, links and listings covering a variety of information.

Visitors also can sign up for a quarterly newsletter and donate to support One Freedom's programs.

One Freedom will continue to offer workshops and training focused on how to self-regulate intense life experiences, trauma and everyday stressors.

One of its most popular workshops? the "Strength after Service" series? is a two-hour program that teaches veterans and family members about the brain and body and how they are changed under prolonged stress. A range of skills is taught, including simple, easy-to-use exercises aimed at improving well-being, inner strength and personal communication.

"This introductory workshop frames military stress in a normalizing framework that takes the emphasis off 'mental-behav-

ioral' and puts it on our natural response to stress, especially under chronic and acute conditions," Hawkins said.

The "Strength after Service" series includes sub-topics that provide veterans and family members education on the cornerstones of health such as sleep, nutrition, exercise and structure. One Freedom also offers day-long training on communication for couples and families, addiction training and assistance with understanding the various therapeutic modalities available today.

Marine Corps veteran and One Freedom trainer Dan Taslitz said the workshops "are a powerful path to strength and healing for our military servicemembers, veterans and families."

"It goes way beyond a yellow ribbon in supporting our nation's warriors by providing the knowledge and skills to integrate their experiences and create bridges of strength back to their families and communities," he said.

The next "Strength after Service" series will be held Nov. 14 in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Related Sites: One Freedom

<http://www.onefreedom.org/about_us>

Army releases message announcing new service uniform



By C. Todd Lopez, Army News Service

WASHINGTON - Out with the old, in with the blue. The Army has made it official, the green service uniform, which has defined the service since the mid-1950s, is on the outs.

In place of the green uniform will be a variation of the blue uniform, something many Soldiers already own. Official word on the new "Army Service Uniform," or ASU, was released Aug. 20 in a message to all Army activities. The message defines the wear policy and the "bridging" strategy for transition to the new uniform.

"It's a culmination of transformation efforts that started in 2004," said Sgt. Maj. of the Army Kenneth O. Preston of the new ASU. "We had three 'Class A' style uniforms, all the same style jacket, with just a different color -- the policies on how we wore accoutrements on them were different. We asked the question -- if we wear one only, which would it be? And the blue uniform was the most popular of the three."

The new ASU coat, similar to the existing blue coat, will be made of a wrinkle-resistant material and will have a more "athletic" cut.

Other changes to the uniform include authorization of a combat service identification badge to recognize combat service, overseas service bars authorized on the jacket sleeve for both enlisted Soldiers and officers, the wear of distinctive unit insignia on the shoulder loops of the blue coat for enlisted Soldiers, authorizing paratroopers to wear the black jump boots with the blue ASU, and the decision to transition to a new short sleeve and long sleeve white shirt with shoulder loops.

It is also permissible for enlisted Soldiers to wear both overseas service bars and service stripes on the new blue ASU coat. Officers and Soldiers in the grade of corporal and above will additionally wear a gold braid on their slacks to indicate leadership roles.

"That is kind of a right of passage as you transition from being a (junior) enlisted soldier to a noncommissioned officer," Preston said of the gold braid.

New items for the ASU will be available in military clothing sales after July 2009.

Soldiers will be expected to possess the entire uniform by July 2014. The two key components of the uniform, the coat and slacks, are expected to cost around \$140, with modifications bringing the total cost to \$200. Enlisted Soldiers will receive an increase in their annual uniform allowance to help offset the cost of the uniform.

Panel Recommends Changes to Military Retirement



By Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON - A panel looking at military compensation has recommended dramatic changes in the military retirement system.

The recommendations are part of the second volume put out by the 10th Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation.

The first volume -- released in March -- looked at cash compensation. Retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Jan D. "Denny" Eakle was director of the panel, and she briefed the press during a Pentagon news conference today.

Eakle said critics of the current military retirement system say it is not equitable, it is not flexible, and it is not efficient.

"There is a perception that the system we have today is inequitable because only 15 percent of all enlisted personnel and less than half of officers will ever receive anything in the system," she said. Reserve-component personnel also believe the current

system discriminates against them, especially at a time when reserve forces are being called on more, she said.

The retirement proposal would offer a defined benefit, defined contributions, "gate" pays and separation pays.

The defined benefit would be 2.5 percent of the average basic pay for the highest 36 months of the individual's career multiplied by the number of years of service, with servicemembers vested at 10 years of service. Payments to retirees would begin at age 60 for those with less than 20 years of service and at age 57 for those with 20 years of service or more.

Servicemembers could opt for an immediate annuity, but the payout would follow the Federal Employee Retirement System methodology -- a 5 percent penalty per year for early withdrawal.

The defined contribution portion would be an automatic government-funded Thrift Savings Plan. Servicemembers would not have to match any government payment. The government would not put any money in for the first year, but would put in 2 percent of base pay for two years of service, 3 percent for three and four years of service, and 5 percent for five and more years of service. Again, this would be vested after 10 years of service.

The military also would make "gate pays" to servicemembers who reach specific years of service. These would vary by years of service and skills, Eakle said.

"This is a payment made for achieving a particular year of service," she explained. "And within the services, they would have the flexibility to vary this by year of service as well as by skill. That way, they could begin to shape the skills by dragging people further into their career by offering them an incentive."

Finally, the system would include separation pays to servicemembers that would also vary by years of service and skills.

"The separation payments would be made available by the service to members that they wished to entice to leave," Eakle said. This would be a permanent tool services would have available, she added.

The panel used a Rand Corporation computer model to test the recommendations, but Eakle said the panel members would like a large-scale test in the Defense Department.

"Therefore, the recommendation of this QRMC is that the Department of Defense conduct a multi-year test of this system," Eakle said. "The way the test would work is this: All four services would be asked to identify some skills that have different types of retention patterns -- some that stay not very long, some that stay longer periods of time -- and ones they wish to influence."

The test would offer people in those skills in the first eight years of service an

opportunity to volunteer.

"If someone was selected for the test, they would be paid all of the TSP that they should have earned up until that point, and it will be put in their TSP account for them," she said. "The program's vesting rules would in fact apply to all those individuals. So should they achieve 10 years of service while they are in the test, they would fully own it."

At the end of the test period, people who are in the new system who wish to revert to the original retirement system would be allowed to do so, she said.

Any change in the retirement system would require action by Congress. DoD officials said they will carefully examine the panel's recommendations and then decide if they should move forward. The study will take at least six to 12 months, so any decision would be made by the next administration, DoD officials added.

Vets, Troops Not in Uniform Now Can Salute Flag



American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON - A change to federal law allows U.S. veterans and military personnel not in uniform to render the military-style hand salute during the playing of the national anthem.

The law took effect earlier this month, according to a Department of Veterans Affairs news release.

"The military salute is a unique gesture of respect that marks those who have served in our nation's armed forces," Veterans Affairs Secretary Dr. James B. Peake said. "This provision allows the application of that honor in all events involving our nation's flag."

The provision builds on a change that went into effect last year. That change authorized veterans and military personnel not in uniform to render the military-style hand salute during the raising, lowering or passing of the flag.

Traditionally, veterans' service organizations rendered the hand-salute during the national anthem and at events involving the national flag while wearing their organization's headgear. Otherwise, as with all other Americans, the etiquette is to place the right hand over the heart.

The most recent change was part of the 2009 Defense Authorization Act, which President Bush signed Oct. 14.

U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma, an Army veteran, sponsored both pieces of legislation.

"The salute is a form of honor and respect, representing pride in one's military service," Inhofe said in a written statement. "Veterans and servicemembers continue representing the military services even when not in uniform. The U.S. Code is now consistent for veterans and all service members in regards to the symbolic gesture of the military salute."

Warrior Care Month 08



In the final paragraph of President Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address he said to wounded Civil War Soldiers that in healing the nation we must "care for him who shall have borne the battle." This clause was so powerful it was later adopted as the mission statement for the Veteran's Administration.

Lincoln's speech set the precedent for providing our nation's heroes the best medical care possible. We owe our wounded warriors the care and medical expertise they need.

In the spirit of President Lincoln's second inaugural address, our senior leaders have declared November Warrior Care Month. Throughout this month we will not only honor those who have given their health and their youth to the cause of freedom, but we also take this time to focus on new and innovative ways to help make them whole again. The Army will conduct a review of our care for wounded veterans and identify areas of improvement for the future.

The age of persistent conflict in which we find ourselves requires the ability to transition warrior care from a lower peacetime medical treatment requirement to an increased requirement during wartime. This adjustment, however, presents many challenges. The Army must increase all levels of care - from its medical facilities, to medical staff, to administrative personnel. Resources must be allocated to address these needs. This ramp-up of requirements must happen in a short amount of time in order to respond to the needs of our of wounded warriors.

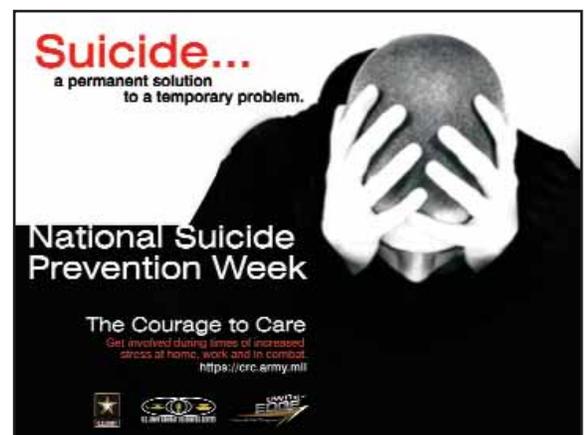
Additionally, with improvements in trauma care and Soldier protection (Kevlar helmets and body armor), many Soldiers' lives have been saved, increasing the percentage of Soldiers who survive serious injuries when compared to previous wars. The Army's Combat Life Saver program, for example, a program where Soldiers get advanced medical training and equipment to apply immediate trauma care has helped saved lives, but has added to the number of

wounded warriors. Lives saved as a result of expert trauma care received in combat is a testament to the quality of Army medical personnel and their technology.

As I said, the Army's response to these many challenges focused on the establishment of local Warrior Transition Units (WTUs). These 36 regionally-based units provide medical treatment to wounded Soldiers so they can transition back to civilian life or returned to military service. The WTUs consist of leaders who help Soldiers and their families with logistical and administrative needs and medical professionals who provide treatment. The wounded Soldiers' only mission in the units is simply to get healthy and be productive again. This arrangement has resulted in a successful transformation of how wounded Soldiers have been cared for over the last two years.

The Army invested \$350 million in renovations to update all 36 WTUs. Soldier Family Assistance Centers have been established at all installations with WTUs to help with access to services and support. Medical management cadres totaling 3,230 personnel are in place at the WTUs to guide Soldiers through the healing process. The WTUs holistic approach to care emphasizes a Soldier's physical, emotional, and intellectual needs and wellbeing. The program also deals with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, brain injuries, and prosthetic technology. Attending to all these concerns and more have resulted in an 80 % satisfaction rating of the WTUs by surveyed wounded Soldiers. This compares to a 17 % satisfaction rating of wounded warrior care just two years ago.

Any organization, and in particular the Army, is largely evaluated by how it treats its members most in need. This Warrior Care Month, the Army can be proud of the many improvements made in "caring for him who shall have borne the battle." The lessons learned from the War on Terror have improved the level of care for our wounded heroes. The Army's efforts have provided the military and our Nation much to recognize and celebrate this Warrior Care Month.



WARRIOR CARE

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WARRIOR CARE AND TRANSITION PROGRAM: [HTTP://WWW.ARMY.MIL/WARRIORCARE](http://www.army.mil/warriorcare)

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