

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH GENERAL JOHN MACDONALD, COMMANDER OF THE U.S. ARMY FAMILY MORALE, WELFARE AND RECREATION COMMAND; BECKY PILLSBURY, SPOUSE OF GENERAL JAMES PILLSBURY, THE DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF FOR LOGISTICS AND OPERATIONS, ARMY MATERIEL COMMAND SUBJECT: THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ARMY FAMILY ACTION PLAN TIME: 1:30 P.M. EDT DATE: THURSDAY, AUGUST 21, 2008

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LINDY KYZER (U.S. ARMY PUBLIC AFFAIRS): Okay, again, this is Lindy with Army Public Affairs, Media Relations Division. We are absolutely thrilled to have with us today Major General John MacDonald, commander of Family Morale, Welfare and Recreation Command.

We are also extremely pleased to have with us Mrs. Pillsbury. She is an Army spouse, the spouse of a major general with Army Materiel Command. So she has traveled to be with us today and we're absolutely very excited to have that, have that spouse perspective.

Again, as most of you are aware, we are here to talk about the Army Family Action Plan, which celebrated its 25th anniversary on August 15th, so the program has been in existence for some time now. Also with us, in addition to those of you on the line, we have John Grady (sp), with Army Magazine. So just so you have an awareness of who's here.

As usual, we'll get started with some comments by Major General MacDonald, then we'll go to your questions. I will call on you in order to ask a question, and -- (incoming call) -- hi, this is Lindy with Army Public Affairs, who's joining us?

Q Hi, this Katie Sevant and (Bailey ?), the National Military Family Association.

MS. KYZER: With the National Military Family Association?

Q Yes, ma'am.

MS. KYZER: Great, okay. You were a little soft at first, but now we can hear you.

Again, please put your phone on the "on mute" if you're not speaking. And again, this is Lindy with Army Public Affairs. I already did our introductions, I'm going to go ahead and introduce Major General MacDonald to start out with comments.

GEN. MACDONALD: Greetings. John MacDonald here. We're thrilled to have you all.

We're excited about the Army Family Action Plan in its 25th year. We have resolved -- (audio break) -- 33 issues over the 25-year period. We have a number of legislative changes, policy changes, but mostly we've got a significant number of wonderful changes we've had for the Army.

Let me tell you just a little bit about myself first. I was born and raised in the Army. I was recruited when I was five, when my dad took me on an amphibious vehicle in the Monterey Bay. I thought this was pretty cool, and so I've been doing this a long time. I know about Army families because I'm married to a soldier. So, I am an Army spouse, as well as running the family in MWR Command.

To give you a little more perspective, as being an Army brat and growing up in the system, mom told me recently -- reminded me that I -- (audio break) -- have, in fact, been thrown out of three of the finest child development centers the Army has to offer. (Laughter.) So I've grown up in the gyms and the dining facilities, and then 29 years of being in and around the Army.

I went to my first Army Family Action Plan meeting when I was a young lieutenant colonel. And I wasn't sure what this was all about, and I went in the Education and Training Forum -- one of the eight forums. And I learned a tremendous amount in the two days that I went as a representative at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. And then, to be able to put this conference on for a number of years now, and to be able to solve issues, and see how this grassroots effort -- that is what Army Family Action Plan, is the beauty of Army Family Action Plan. We really get to listen to family issues; Force issues; soldier issues; Reservist issues; National Guard issues; parents' issues; now, wounded warrior issues; soldiers from overseas issues. I mean, the whole gamut. And the group then votes on what's most important and what they want the Army to work on.

It started 25 years ago with General Wickham's White Paper, which we're just thrilled about. It has words in it that we -- that resound today, in terms of resilience, in strength. Not welfare, not "gimmies," but things that Army families depend on to be able to persevere through this persistent conflict.

And so we're excited to celebrate 25 years worth of General Wickham's White Paper, the Army Family Action Plan, and, in fact, we're going to have General Wickham (sp) come back and talk to us during AUSA -- 6 to 8, October; and we think he's going to be able to come back to the next Army Family Action Plan meeting that will be in January. And so he'll be able to tell us what his visionary thoughts were about, and we'll be able to share with him what, in fact, his vision has come to fruition.

So, with that, let me turn it over to Becky Pillsbury for just a minute. She can give you her perspective on her Army family.

MS. PILLSBURY: It's a pleasure to be here today. It's quite an honor to be invited. This is our 19th move. I've retired as a teacher for 11 different school systems -- soon to be 12. I don't think I have a curtain in my house that matches, because all the windows in every house we've lived have been different shapes and sizes. And we foolishly adopted a puppy four days before this last move, so life is always an adventure when you're a military spouse.

The strength, I think, that came from General Wickham's White Paper is that the military -- specifically, the Army, started respecting the fact that the military family needs to be strong so that their soldiers will be strong. And if a soldier is worried about his family, he cannot perform his job to the best of his ability.

So, by taking care of military families, and helping them take care of themselves, and empowering them, they have allowed the soldier to go about and do his job with the strength that our U.S. Army requires. And I believe that is the best part of what General Wickham did, was empowering the military families and helping to take care of them so these soldiers could go and do their best.

GEN. MACDONALD: I'd like to add one more thing, and then we'll open to questions. Becky and I have both been Family Readiness Group leaders. And lots of soldiers have not had that opportunity, but I've had the opportunity to run four. And it is probably the most that I've ever learned about the Army is from the spouses, because you can ask questions and you get very pointed, relevant answers. And so, the fact that you all are on with us; and that you're going to put this on a blog; and that you're talking very much straight talk to families, is just another forum for us to be able to talk to families and get the word out.

But, it's amazing that sensations you have as a spouse, when your soldier deploys, and when you have injuries or casualties. It is a -- it's a pretty lonely feeling when that goes on, but when you build up a Family Readiness Group, and when you have the support of the Army, that knows that all that's important, it makes a huge, huge difference. So, with that, we'll open for questions.

MS. KYZER: I think we'll start out with John -- if you have a question?

Q (Off mike) Yes, first question that I have is, the Army Family Covenant came into play last year, and has had a dramatic impact across installations. I mean, you can see it with the construction, et cetera.

Is that a program that will be sustainable over a long period of time, because I know that some of these funds are coming out of emergency supplementals, and I'm sure that this will come up at the next AFAP meeting. I mean, I can guarantee it -- (inaudible) -- (Laughs.)

GEN. MACDONALD: Let me answer that from -- did you all hear the question? Cat (sp), did you hear the question okay?

MS. KYZER: He faded out a little bit.

GEN. MACDONALD: Okay, his question was really, are the things in the Army Family Covenant sustainable, since most of them are funded by our global war on terrorism supplemental dollars?

And the answer is, yes. They will be sustainable, because we've taken about half of those dollars and put them into the base funding program. That's the kind of commitment that General Casey and Mr. Geren have towards Army families. And they've said that these programs will survive and will be sustained in the Army Family Covenant, because they realize, really, in the long-term we won't retain an all-volunteer force unless we retain Army families.

MS. KYZER: Great.

Now we'll go on the line here, Brian (sp), did you have a question?

Q Lindy, yes I do. Thank you.

Good afternoon, sir. Hope everything's going well there.

Two real quick questions for you. The first one is, I got to see it -- both before deployment, and then during two deployments, a lot of the great things that have come about with modifying and developing the FRGs programs farther, and a lot of the opportunities that had been increased for the wives and other spouses that are home when the actual units are deployed.

Can you talk a little bit about 1) What AFAP has done to help with that process -- some of the new thing that are coming about? And then 2) Also, I know that there's been a very large emphasis on counseling for the wives when the guys are gone; and also when they return; in addition to a lot that the Army has been looking at with PTSD. Can you talk a little bit about that also, sir?

GEN. MACDONALD: I will. I'm going to let Becky talk a little bit first. She's -- she's poking me here to get an answer in here, so. (Laughter.)

MS. PILLSBURY: We have started a grassroots effort called "Still Serving Veterans" to address that exact thing. Only 3 percent of those returning have lost limbs, and yet that is who the people think of when they think of severely wounded veterans. The rest of them have multiple injuries. Most of them have PTSD or Traumatic Brain Injury. And these are the ones who may or may (sic) decide to get out of the military.

And the military's doing everything they can to keep them in if they want to stay in. If they want out, they will help them get out. But so many of them are National Guard and Reservists, and when they get out, they go back to their very small towns -- the heartland, and they don't realize many of the benefits to which they are entitled. All they want to do is find that paper, get out of the hospital -- they don't want to read it, they don't want to learn all those benefits are being presented to them, they just want to go home.

And so we wrap our arms around them and their families to provide some of them counseling necessary, to help get them job skills. We actually have a university that will broadcast classes into their room at Walter Reed or wherever they are, at no charge, so that they can go ahead and get their bachelors, their master's, whatever. They will get life-skill credits in the college. And we do everything we can to get them employable. And then we help find them specific jobs.

So, a lot of this must be done at the grassroots area. And it is done because the people care about it and because the communities care about them. There is -- there is such love for the military member and for their family. The communities are just wrapping their arms around them.

One of the basic things that I think inspired ASTB, was Julia Moore (sp). And she was in, "We Were Soldiers Once, and Young," both the movie and the book -- actual person; lived in southern Alabama; still lives in southern Alabama -- I'm sorry, she died about two years ago; and Helmore (sp) was her husband. And she would follow the taxicabs that would come to drop off the

telegrams talking about the deaths of the military members in Vietnam. And it was a horrible way to find out. I cannot imagine what they went through. So, she started asking the telegrams to be given to her.

And this was really one of the greatest examples of a military spouse helping other military spouses. And I really think inspired ASTB to go on and do what they have been doing so beautifully, and find out what the problems are, and solve them. And once a problem is sent to AFTB, it must be addressed -- either at the local level, or as far up as the national level.

It must be addressed one way or another, even if it's something as -- why is that traffic light so long, there's no traffic coming the other direction? It must be addressed. And the problem will be solved, or a reason will be given as to why it can't be solved. But so many of them are things that would not come to forefront if it weren't for AFTB.

So, that's -- that's my story.

GEN. MACDONALD: Let me -- and as Becky said, AFTB, she was talking about Army Family Action Plan --

MS. PILLSBURY: AFAB --

GEN. MACDONALD: Army Family -- Army Family Team Building --

MS. PILLSBURY: Team Building, right. (Laughs.)

GEN. MACDONALD: -- and Army Family Action Plan.

Q Roger, sir.

GEN. MACDONALD: Let me answer a couple things. New things: Family Readiness Support Assistance, and those have been around about eight months, but they're now funded. And that's very exciting, and that makes them new and permanent.

We're finally getting after our geographically dispersed soldiers. We really couldn't even conceive of how to use the technology to get to our Reserve, National Guard, Engineer District, ROTC recruiting battalion, soldiers and families. And now we're doing that with Military One Source, and what we were calling "Army Integrated Family Support Network," AIFSN, we'll now call "Army One Source," and we'll unveil that at AUSA 6-8 October.

Additionally, we have allowed Army funding to be used for Family Readiness Groups. Instead of the first part of each meeting talking about how were going to do fundraisers -- bake sales, car washes, and collecting things to sell, we now talk about information and referral, because the Army's realized that a Family Readiness Group is the center of strengthening and giving resilience to an Army family. And so they've said, you know, we ought to put some money in that. That's pretty exciting. So, I'd say that's three things that are new with the Army Family Covenant.

And on your counseling question, I know that you know that Military One Source have an ability to call in and talk to someone in 143 languages. They also have the ability to provide six free counseling sessions instantaneously. We have Military Family Life counselors, MFLCs. We've increased that by about 45. They have done great work, all -- whether it's under a tank, or at the

commissary, or in some schools -- we send them into the schools to talk to the teachers, because the kids have just had mom or dad come back, and we're having such acting out with the kids, we're having to talk to the teachers about staying. So, we have to counsel the teachers.

So we're excited about that part of counseling, and we're discussing -- I'm sorry, another piece is, Family Readiness Group PTSD film. We put that out to show at town halls, so that spouses can recognize PTSS symptoms and PTSD disorder. It has been a great source of us to help in the counseling world of first recognizing and then taking care of all the things we have to do in the counseling business.

Does that answer your question?

Q Yes it does, sir. And I'll tell you, that was absolutely awesome about the money for the FRG's because that fixes a huge problem.

The last question I had was -- I think you've answered a lot of it -- but is there any other programs that you're looking to in the future that you really want to get implemented, kind of like a short- to medium-range goal here over the coming months and coming year?

GEN. MCDONALD: I have one I talked to Brigadier General Loree Sutton about yesterday, and that is we have done a tremendous job with our combat lifesavers. They can get to a young soldier in 30 seconds and punch him with a bag and do some minor surgery downrange. And two minutes later a platoon medic can be there, and four minutes later a medevac can be there.

Loree and I talked about now teaching those combat lifesavers to look for PTSD symptoms in soldiers. We can take another two days of training, and now downrange when their buddy that they live beside every day starts to twitch or jump or act differently, you can go to platoon sergeant and say, hey, I think John McDonald probably needs to go see the doc for a few minutes or needs to take a day off. But what a great way to start understanding and taking PTSS off the table, soldier to soldier, because our warrior creed says never leave a fallen comrade.

So that's one of the programs we're working on pretty hard, is the education to take the stigma away from brain injury. It's an injury. You get a cut on your arm, you get a bruise on your brain, they're all the same; they're just injuries. So getting rid of that stigma is what we've been really working hard on so soldiers will come forward and talk about it and get it fixed.

MS. PILLSBURY: One of the things I really like about the Military OneSource he addressed is that the six free counseling sessions have no records at all in their military records. So any sort of, quote/unquote, "stigma" that they might feel, which does not exist any more, but any hesitancy they might have about getting counseling is now removed.

Q I agree completely. You know, that was a huge debate we had out here towards the beginning of our CGSE class and, you know, there was a lot of talk being done back and forth. We actually had a roundtable with General Casey about that, and I couldn't agree more with you.

That is absolutely awesome, sir, about the medics. And just from me, just thank you to both of you for all that you've done for the families, whether

it be FRG support, AFTB, everything that's out there under AFAP has just been absolutely awesome. So thank you.

GEN. MCDONALD: Cool.

MS. KYZER: Cat with TheDonovan.com, did you have a question? Q
You all answered a lot of my major ones, but I just have a few to round up the information that I have so I make sure I'm getting enough reference information in my post.

Where -- what is the -- what is the -- sorry -- URL for Army OneSource or Military OneSource? Is there a URL that we can reference?

GEN. MCDONALD: It is -- if you look up on Google "Military OneSource," it will come up.

MS. PILLSBURY: Spell out "one."

GEN MCDONALD: Yes, spell out the --

Q Okay, that was my question.

GEN. MCDONALD: Yep, spell out the "one." The other one that's a great resource is MyArmyLifeToo(.com), and spell out T-O-O.

Q MyArmyLifeToo --

GEN. MCDONALD: -- dot-com.

Q And you were talking about this lovely film about recognizing PTSD or PTSS symptoms. Will that be made available online at one of these websites?

GEN. MCDONALD: I believe it is now. I'm pretty sure it's on MyArmyLifeToo, under community covenant. But you can look it up on MyArmyLifeToo. Or, Cat, we can send it to your dot-com, I guess.

Q Okay. That would be fantastic.

And just rolling up, I just wanted to check back on one of the things. You were talking about the military life counselors. I don't think I got the -- for some reason I was missing it -- the original number of MLCs.

GEN. MCDONALD: It was 100 originally, and I think we have 143 or (1)44 now.

Q Okay. And those are across the United States?

GEN. MCDONALD: Across the United States and some overseas. We have some in Germany and some in Korea.

MS. KYZER: Okay, great.

You, sir, in the room, could you say your name and affiliation, and do you have any questions?

Q Oh, J.D. Leipold with Army News Service -- (inaudible). I don't have any questions. GEN. MCDONALD: Great. Good to have you.

Let me tell you one other piece that -- for the Army Family Action Plan 25th anniversary, we'll have a launch site. On Army.mil it'll have more information, and it's there now so you can download things as we speak.

MS. KYZER: And I'll send out all those URLs to all those -- all the folks on the call.

Okay, we also had the National Military Family Association on the line. Did you have a question, miss?

(Noise.)

Q Thank you.

MS. KYZER: Okay, were -- are there any other questions, both in the room or on the line.

Q This is Phil -- (inaudible). What's been the greatest --

Q One last question, if I can -- I think I just stepped on someone

--

MS. KYZER: Yeah. We'll get back to you in a minute, Brian.

Q Sure.

Q What's been the greatest change that you've seen in Army families as a mother and a person who was working outside the house? Since you came -- not since you came in; let's say in the last 10 years. That'll take it before the war but still while they were doing Balkans deployment.

MS. PILLSBURY: I think Military Child Education Coalition has been a huge change.

My daughter used to have to -- we live in Virginia, so she'd take Virginia history in 4th grade; and then we would go to Pennsylvania and she'd have to take Pennsylvania history; and then we'd go to Kentucky and she'd have to take Kentucky history; because it was all a requirement. Through MSEC -- Military Child Education Coalition -- there is a memorandum of agreement that the states signed saying, hey, once they've had a state's history they don't have to take another one.

My son had grades that were -- (inaudible) -- grades -- A, B, C, D, F. No F's; okay, A, B, C, D. (Laughs.) And we moved to an area that required number grades, so I had to go back to his previous teacher and have her look up what the number grade was in every single subject for the three years that we were there to translate because they had him down as a 90 being an A -- well, he had a 96 so his grade point average just plummeted.

So things like this -- getting counselors in the schools to help the military child with transition. The hardest thing in the world the first day of school is who are you going to sit with at lunch? They made sure that they would assign a buddy to go with them. Just knowing things like this as a mother, that

was just a huge thing to me. That made a tremendous difference in the ease of moves for my children and thus for my husband and me.

Now, as your idea, what do you think?

GEN. MCDONALD: I absolutely agree. I think what we've done in terms of -- I mean I went to nine schools in 12 years, so I experienced my lunch buddy a couple of times. You just brought back some horrors.

MS. PILLSBURY: (Laughs.)

GEN. MCDONALD: But it's the Army taking responsibility not for just its on-post schools, but for where 70 percent of its families live, and that's off-post. And what we've done in Installation Management Command is say: garrison commanders, you're in charge. Sometimes I had an assistant division commander who was really excited; most of the time I didn't. I had a CG who was pretty busy and couldn't do that. Sometimes I had a brigade commander. Sometimes I had nobody. So I told the garrison commanders, you're in charge. You go to, get on the board, be voting or nonvoting, the four biggest school districts and their boards around your community, and you bring other military with you because you have most of the kids in the school.

So we shouldn't be getting run over in the school districts outside our camps, posts and stations. We shouldn't have to do five kinds of history. I did eight kinds of history.

MS. PILLSBURY: (Laughs.)

GEN. MCDONALD: And so --

Q Better for it.

MS. PILLSBURY: (Laughs.)

GEN. MCDONALD: I don't know anything about history.

But I think it's us taking charge of our schools. And I'll tell you how this works because you're absolutely right.

I saw this written recently. It said, "A soldier will write a check, 'payee: freedom,' and put down an arm or a leg or his life, but he will not risk his children, ever." When you realize how important children are to our NCOs and our young officers, they will not risk their education or their safety or their security or their future. And so schools are a big deal to our Army families. That's what I think about taking care of schools.

MS. KYZER: Great.

Brian, we'll go back to your question now.

Q Yes, sir. One quick follow-up question for you.

(Know ?) by a lot of the websites and stuff and they are absolutely awesome, but has -- like MNF-I has done where they've set up, you know, YouTube channels and things like that that they actually post a lot of the videos from over in theater sort of thing that are approved. Have you guys looked at utilizing anything of that nature, YouTube or anything like that, to have these

videos out there? And I ask just because I know a lot of the -- especially the young wives, young soldiers spend a lot of time on those sort of sites and things like that, if there was any talk about setting up a channel there where a lot of these videos might be posted, whether it be PTSD or just training stuff that is approved for the Army that can be out there for everyone?

GEN. MCDONALD: I'm going to let the policy people talk about it first and then I'll talk about what I'd like to do.

MS. KYZER: Okay, this -- again, this is Lindy Kyzer with Army Public Affairs. I will say that that's a big issue right now in Army, is looking at how we can expand upon ways to reach out to our families. And as I know you're aware, Brian, we're always coming up against DOD and Army policy in terms of where we can post on the dot-com domain. There have been a lot of opportunities that have been opened up through Soldiers Media Center and other sites, but a big issue for especially -- Public Affairs has some access, but individual commands to post on YouTube -- is not as easy to get content there. So like I say, they're -- I can tell you for a fact that's one thing that our commands are looking into. Like I say, it's just getting the policy and the acceptability. As you know, the soldiers just having access to those sites, we don't have much more access here at the Pentagon unless you've gone through those channels to get permission.

Q Exactly.

LT. JENNIFER CRAGG: And Lindy? I'm sorry, this is Lieutenant Jennifer Cragg. We have another call starting at 1400.

MS. KYZER: Oh, okay.

GEN. MCDONALD: Okay, so we got about two more minutes.

MS. KYZER: Well, we will -- we will wrap up.

GEN. MCDONALD: Brian, let me tell you what I think. I think we got to get to the social media pieces, we got to think through what our concerns are and our policy issues because we're missing the millenials. And when they can send a text message with their phone in their pocket and we can't post on YouTube and some of the social networking, we're kind of behind the times. We're missing out on talking to our youngsters. And so we got to get there. We've got to get there.

Q (Inaudible) -- again. Thank you so much for doing this. Greatly appreciate it.

MS. KYZER: Well, to everyone on the line, thank you so much for calling in.

Thank you so much, Mrs. Pillsbury.

Thank you, Major General McDonald.

It was definitely a worthwhile conversation. The audio file and the transcript will be available on DefenseLink.mil/blogger. And all those URLs that were referenced and mentioned I will make sure I send out to everyone on the line.

So thank you again. This concludes the roundtable.

END.