

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH COLONEL JAMES RICE, DIRECTOR,
ARMY WOUNDED WARRIOR PROGRAM, VIA TELECONFERENCE TIME: 1:00 P.M. EDT DATE:
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LINDY KYZER (Army Public Affairs): This is Lindy Kyzer with Army
Public Affairs. Thank you so much, everyone who's joining us on the line.

We're very pleased to have with us Colonel James Rice. He's the AW2
program director. He's going to be discussing AW2 and the Army wounded warrior
care program. Basically, they're celebrating their five-year anniversary, so he
can kind of talk to you how wounded warrior advocates and the program have
helped change the way that we take care of our soldiers and wounded warriors.

Sir, just to let you know, with us on line we have Sean Pillai with
DefenseIQ, Marti from War on Terror News, Terri from A Soldier's Mind, and
Jonathan Rick from jonathanrick.com.

So with that, sir, I will turn over to you, if you have a couple
minutes of opening remarks. COL. RICE: I do, and Lindy, thanks for that
introduction.

The Army Wounded Warrior Program, or AW2, as we call it, marks five
years of service this month. Starting with a population numbering in the
hundreds, we now provide personalized support to more than 4,000 severely
wounded, injured and ill soldiers and families, wherever they are located, for
as long as it takes.

We have more than a 120 AW2 advocates, located across the country and
beyond, who are the backbone of AW2. Three hundred and sixty-five days a year,
our advocates are assisting our soldiers and families with everything from
making a medical appointment to accessing career and education opportunities to
connecting with local communities.

I also would like to note that our advocates have helped more than a
hundred severely wounded soldiers who want to stay in uniform accomplish that.

The majority of our population, though, is medically retired, which
means they -- that we have a commitment to them to make sure that they know
about the opportunities out there for careers and education. AW2 established
the career and education section to help severely wounded soldiers and their
families find the path that is right for them after leaving the military. We
help streamline the -- we've helped streamline the federal hiring process and
build relationships with corporate America.

We can't do this without community support.

Our severely wounded soldiers and their families have settled in communities across the country. We have learned over the past years and through feedback, from initiatives like the Army Family Action Plan, that community support is integral to wounded soldiers' recovery and transition to civilian life.

One new program we are launching this month, in honor of our five years of service, is the AW2 affiliate program, which was created to build and maintain relationships with organizations that support AW2 soldiers and families.

We are looking for affiliate organizations now that are interested in working with us. These organizations can be civic organizations, local businesses, corporations, non-profits, veterans service organizations or federal, state and local programs, just to name a few.

Another program we're in the process of launching is a speakers bureau for our soldiers and families. We're doing this because we believe that the only way for audiences to truly understand what our program does is to hear the experiences of our soldiers and their families, face to face.

Again this is all about building communities of support and ensuring that our soldiers and families feel empowered to move confidently into their future and their new normal.

Before we take any questions you might have, I wanted to take a moment to share, with you, some of the accomplishments of our AW2 soldiers. Sergeant First Class Daniel Metzdorf, an above-the-knee amputee, became the first wounded soldier to join the U.S. Army Golden Knights Parachute Team as an above-the-knee amputee.

Captain D.J. Skelton, blinded in his left eye by a rocket-propelled grenade, among other severe injuries, took command of Company E, the 229th Medical Intelligence Battalion, at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center.

Double-amputee Major Tammy Duckworth has been nominated to fill the post of assistant secretary for Public and Intergovernmental Affairs for the Department of Veterans Affairs. And right now former Army medic and paralympian Kortney Clemens is getting ready to compete in the Mt. SAC Relays, this weekend. And with that, I'll be happy to take your questions.

MS. KYZER: Wonderful. Thank you so much, sir.

We'll go ahead and start with Sean with Defense IQ.

Did you have a question?

Q I did, Lindy. Thank you.

Sir, actually my first question has to follow up on the topic you just had, with a lot of the soldiers continuing on. I had the pleasure of speaking with -- (inaudible) -- who is headed to warrant Officer Candidate School. And

I'm wondering how the Army is trying to keep current amputees and other severely injured soldiers within their current MOS groups or on active duty.

COL. RICE: That's a great question. And it is just not amputees. The hundred or so soldiers that we have who have chosen to continue on active duty, or continue on active reserve, really are across the gamut of the various injury -- injuries that we have.

We work with those soldiers -- AW2 works with those soldiers to develop a five-year career plan. So a soldier who is, for example, in a military police specialty, our AW2 advocate support branch will work with that soldier's assignments branch sergeant major and develop a five-year plan -- so how that soldier's going to be successful over the next five years. Obviously, some of their injuries will prevent them from doing some things other MPs are able to do.

So what we look for are those opportunities where they'll -- they'll remain competitive with their peers, while continuing to serve in uniform.

Q Thank you, sir.

MS. KYZER: And Marti with War on Terror News, did you have a question?

Q Yes. You talked about how you -- the community support through organizations, the larger ones. And how would you -- are you ever looking for support, you know, lower down, like from individuals, churches, things like that?

COL. RICE: I mentioned that we've got 120 advocates across the country, so a lot of the support that we generate is with those advocates in their communities. In fact, we charge those advocates with getting to know their communities.

The level of support for wounded warriors varies across the country, but the better our advocates get to know their local communities -- and whether that's a local Rotary Club or some other volunteer organization or, as you mentioned, a church or other civic group -- those are the kinds of connections that we want to make and maintain.

Q Okay. Thank you.

MS. KYZER: And Terri, with A Soldier's Mind, did you have a question?

Q Just to expand on the advocates a little bit, you said you have 120 of them across the country. And what areas of the country is that? Major metropolitan areas, or smaller towns?

COL. RICE: It is 120 advocates across the country. They're actually in Alaska and Hawaii. And we have selected an individual now for a number of wounded warriors who are in Germany. And we place our advocates in communities where there are wounded warriors. We plot, using the -- using a zip code, for everybody who is in the program. And we try and stay ahead of where the population growth is.

We try and maintain a one-to-30 ratio between our advocates and the soldiers and families they serve. So we look at an area where there is some growth. So where we're going to hire the next advocate, there is an increase in population.

Q Okay. Thank you.

MS. KYZER: And Jonathan Rick with jonathanrick.com, did you have a question?

Q Yes. I'm just curious -- the 120 advocates that you referred to, is there a way to find out who they are?

COL. RICE: Absolutely. If you go to www.aw2.army.mil, that is the Army wounded warrior program, the AW2 website. There is a listing of every advocate and their contact information, by state, at that website.

Q Got it. Thanks.

MS. KYZER: And I think we had a couple other folks join us after we got started. Are there any other folks on the line who have questions who haven't yet asked one?

Q Yes. Hi. This is Beth with -- (audio break) -- thedonovan.com.

I was wondering, what is the biggest challenge that the program faced since its inception? How does it deal with that? And what's the next challenge you see coming on the horizon?

COL. RICE: I'd say the biggest challenge is -- has been in the -- in keeping pace with the growth of the program. I mentioned in my opening statement that five years ago, when the program started, there were about 340 soldiers who were part of the program. And similarly, the staff was -- there were about five or six staff here in the headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia.

So the growth over the -- over the five years has been pretty remarkable, so the challenge has been keeping pace in getting the right people on board to support these soldiers and families. And looking ahead, we think that's going to continue to be a challenge as the program continues to grow.

MS. KYZER: Okay, and I'll --

Q Hi, Lindy.

MS. KYZER: Yeah, go ahead. Q Lindy, this is Beth with Homefront in Focus. Can I ask a quick question?

MS. KYZER: Oh, absolutely. Go ahead.

Q Sir, thank you so much for taking your time and for all that you do. You mentioned partnering with nonprofits and other civic organizations. Can you expand just a little bit about what your needs are with them, what kind of nonprofit partnerships or civic- organization partnerships that you still have a need for? And maybe a success story of one that's already in place.

COL. RICE: Sure. As I mentioned, the advocates in local communities -- we try to tie together the various opportunities that are available in any community. And whether that's a(n) education program or an employment program, it's that local community that will be able to help that soldier and family. Because our vision is that that soldier and family, when they're reintegrated in

that community, that they are full -- they're doing everything they can do to the best of their abilities in that community.

So what we look for from a nonprofit organization is -- oh, I'm trying to think of an example now -- that the -- that a nonprofit may help with getting a soldier hired, that there may be a nonprofit that does -- that'll work with a soldier on resumes, that will help -- although there is support that's available from the Veterans Administration, there are -- there are nonprofit organizations that will help further accommodate an amputee's home, the -- those kinds of things.

Q Thank you. If I could just say, Lindy, offline, I would like to get in touch with the colonel. I have an opportunity for him that might help further his efforts.

COL. RICE: And anybody who would like to get in touch with us that -- 1-800-237-1336. And that's the -- that's the AW2 800 number.

Q Great. Thank you.

MS. KYZER: Absolutely.

Okay. And again, I will open the forum now. Are there any other questions out there from other folks on the line?

Q Yes. I'd like to ask another question, please.

MS. KYZER: Go ahead.

Q At what point do people leave the AW2 program, and who decides when they leave? Is that up to the soldier? Is that up to the program? Or is it -- are there, you know, certain timelines involved in that, that they can only be in it for so long? And then what happens?

COL. RICE: That -- that's a great question. When I came on board about 20 months ago, to get in this current position, I had to interview with the vice chief of staff of the Army. It was then General Cody. And General Cody said, he said, "Colonel Rice," said, "I've heard about three-year plans and five-year plans and timelines for these soldiers." And he said, "I don't want to hear any of that." He said, "We are going to do this for as long as it takes."

The -- that is our motto, that we're going to do this for as long as it takes for these soldiers. So the short answer to your question is that we do not have exit criteria, if you will, for any soldier or family from our program. Our -- the charge to our advocates is that they contact these soldiers and families at least once every 30 days. That is the minimum.

Looking ahead, I think, with the growth of the program -- we're now over 4,000 soldiers in the program -- we are going to look at the population that maybe doesn't need a phone call every 30 days, that we may taper off on that. But I don't foresee, even in the next couple of years, dropping someone from a program -- again, having any kind of an exit criteria. We're going to do this for as long as it takes.

Q All right. Thanks.

MS. KYZER: And any other questions?

Q I (wonder ?) if I could piggyback on the question about charities. Do you have a specific -- or specific needs that you think that charities or other supportive-type organizations can help with that are best met through those organizations? What's the biggest need out there right now?

COL. RICE: Again, it really -- it really varies by community.

We won't turn away anyone who comes to the program and offers some help. We get organizations, national organizations that say, we want to hire wounded warriors.

So at the national level, we try and make that connection. So one of our biggest challenges is matching that -- a local opportunity with the nearest soldier family who has a need that can be met by that opportunity.

I get the sense I'm not answering your question.

Q Well, I was just trying to see if there's any big overarching issues that you're seeing from where you are. And that's kind of why I asked earlier what the biggest challenge was. You know, what's the big overarching issue right now?

COL. RICE: The two biggest overarching issues are education and employment. But it's difficult to say, in any one community, that we have a soldier who is ready to begin college.

These are severely wounded soldiers. So they're not always, even when they've left the military, when their medical board is complete and they are medically retired, that doesn't mean that they're necessarily ready to go right back to work or to start school.

So our advocates keep in touch with them. They develop a plan. And when they're ready to go back, we get them involved in vocational training or four-year colleges or whatever the desires of that soldier and family are; same with employment.

When they're ready to go to work, we'll work with them, on resumes and interviewing techniques, or get them linked up with an organization who can do that, if that expertise isn't on our staff.

So it is those kinds of things that we'll look for, in a local community, when that soldier is ready to go back to school or go to work. So education and employment are really the two areas where our soldiers need support.

Q Okay, thank you. That's kind of what I was looking for. Thank you.

MS. KYZER: And any other questions. Q Sir, this is Sean Pillai again. I'm sorry to interrupt.

My question actually is going to go -- I know you talked a lot about civic organizations and non-profits. Are there any corporations out there that are specifically helping the Department of the Army and your program, in linking wounded soldiers up with jobs?

COL. RICE: Absolutely, and I'll give you a couple of examples.

Raytheon corporation, about a year and a half ago, came to the Army Wounded Warrior Program. A senior individual there, a retired Army general officer, said, we want to hire wounded warriors. Well, our response is always, well, we want to help you do that.

So we describe our population for them. And cognitive injuries -- that is, traumatic brain injury and PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder -- account for nearly half of our population right now. And that's a challenge for some organizations.

Raytheon said, we can work with that. So there was some back and forth. And we now have a soldier -- (inaudible) -- who is -- who has been hired by Raytheon.

And he is the individual who's been charged by that organization -- he's now a Raytheon employee -- with bringing the next set of wounded warriors onboard at Raytheon.

Disney is another great example. Disney offered an opportunity for 10 wounded warriors to come down, spend the better part of a week at the Disney Corporation in Orlando. Any soldier who expressed an interest in moving to the Orlando area and working for Disney had an opportunity to pair up with a Disney executive in the area that they expressed an interest to work in. We had a soldier who was interested in heating, ventilation and air conditioning. And he spent three or four days with the individual who runs the power plant at Walt Disney World. Seven soldiers interviewed, and four were hired. Another went back for some technical training, and has an open offer to work with Disney.

So that -- but those are just two examples of a lot of organizations out there. And those are on the -- you asked on the for-profit side. That's two examples on the for-profit. Government agencies, as well: We have a number who are at the Department of Homeland Security. And the Army is hiring its own, as well. There are -- we have a fast track with the support of the Army G1, with the Army's chief of personnel, that we have a fast track for wounded warriors and spouses to get them hired. So far, we've had 49 AW2 soldiers and four spouses that have been hired as Department of the Army civilians.

Q That's great, sir. Thank you very much.

COL. RICE: Sorry, that was a long-winded answer. Sorry about that.

Q No, no, sir. That's great.

MS. KYZER: And again, any other questions?

Q Yes, I just have a couple more. How many advocates are generally -- how many patients are generally assigned to an advocate? Or does that just depend on where they're at?

COL. RICE: Well, that's really a two-part question. In some cases, it does depend where they are, but our goal is to get one advocate for every 30 wounded -- severely-wounded soldiers. In some places, if that population is not quite at 60, there may be just one advocate in that local area. Our advocates are in the four Veterans Affairs polytrauma centers, they're in military medical

treatment facilities, and they're in other VA medical centers across the country. But we try and gauge where our population is, to where we're going to put the next advocates that we hire. But 30-to-one is our goal.

Q Okay. Thanks.

MS. KYZER: And any other questions?

Q Okay, you asked for it. I have a question.

So in some of the e-mail traffic I've seen announcing the five-year anniversary, there's been a lot of personal testimonials and individual stories from families and from soldiers talking about how the advocate program has really changed the experience of being a wounded warrior: how they kind of have -- you know, they still have that battle buddy that they used to have, and family members have that battle buddy experience.

Do you have any personal anecdotes or one story that comes to mind that you could share with the folks on the line?

COL. RICE: A success story?

MS. KYZER: Just any -- I mean, I know that there's just been a lot of stories; maybe a family member or a soldier you've met along the way who, you know, had an -- had a(n) experience with an advocate, or a success story from the wounded warrior program, yeah.

COL. RICE: Well, that -- I think that there are any -- any number of them. But I'll tell you one about a soldier and family out in Kansas, just outside of Fort Riley. We've got a great advocate out there.

A soldier -- a series of storms passed through the area, and the soldier's home -- a young specialist who was in the medical board process, had a couple of young kids -- home was completely destroyed at, you know, 2:30, 3:00 in the morning.

Well, we have -- we had instituted, prior -- several months prior to that, a procedure where if there was local flooding or snowstorms, that the advocates had a requirement to check on their soldiers and families and report that back. Well, using that -- really using her own initiative, she tried to get in touch with the soldier and couldn't.

So in the middle of the night, this advocate drove out to where that soldier's home was, found out that it was completely destroyed, found the soldier and family, brought them back to her own home. And when I got in touch with that advocate the next day, she was at Walmart, where she was buying car seats for the young kids because they were -- the car had been damaged severely in that same storm. She coordinated them for on-post housing at Fort Riley. And they subsequently appeared on a national television show where the -- a home in the area was restored for them. MS. KYZER: Excellent. Thank you so much for that.

Q Lindy, do you mind if I jump in real quick?

MS. KYZER: Absolutely.

Q Sir, this is Sean Pillai again. I actually have this from a follower of mine on Twitter who asked me to ask you this, so I'm just going to relay it to you, sir. And the question is, what can -- we were going back to the for-profits -- how can the for-profits that specialize in medical technologies and solutions do to help out the AW2 and your wounded warriors?

COL. RICE: Let me see if I -- make sure I've got it right. A for-profit that deals in medical technologies, is that --

Q Correct, sir.

COL. RICE: You know, I'm not sure that they can do much more than any other for-profit company can. The -- what they've got to do is consider the people that -- the great people that we have who are ready to go to work for them. They've got a great skill set. They've got great experience inside the Army, in leadership positions and sometimes in technical areas.

But what we need is organizations to be willing to take these people on and in some cases make some accommodation for their conditions.

And that seems to be a challenge with some organizations. And I don't have any specific -- (audio break) -- in the medical field. That when we describe the conditions of our population, there are sometimes some companies who roll back from the table a little bit. They pull back from their "we want to help wounded warriors" opening statement. So what we need is companies who are open-minded enough to see the individual and see their abilities, see what they'll bring to that company, because I can virtually guarantee that any of these wounded warriors who go to work for them will do a great job.

Q Well, sir, I think you hit the nail on the head in saying that the leadership abilities that they're going to bring are top-notch. I agree with that completely.

COL. RICE: Absolutely.

Q Thank you, sir.

MS. KYZER: Okay. And again, any other questions? (No response.)

Okay. With that, we'll go ahead and wrap up again. Thank you, everyone, for joining us.

Thank you again to Colonel Rice for your time. I will turn it over to you in case you have any closing remarks or anything we didn't touch on that you wanted to address.

COL. RICE: Well, thanks. I want to thank everyone who was on the line. I want to thank you for your time. I want to thank you for your interest in the Army Wounded Warrior program. You help tell the story of our soldiers and families.

And if you have any additional questions, I gave our Web address one time, but if I can give it again, it www.aw2.army.mil. We've got our contact information there as well as some fact sheets about our program, the types of injuries our soldiers have sustained.

In July we'll be holding our fifth symposium. We conduct a symposium to allow our soldiers and families to identify and develop recommendations regarding issues that impact them -- their health, their recovery, rehabilitation, transition, the welfare of our AW2 soldiers and family members, as well as their caregivers. It would be great if I could speak with you all -- (interrupted by automated time alert). It would be great if I could speak with you all again the beginning of August about which issues are selected this year. And thanks again for your time.

Q Thank you, sir.

MS. KYZER: Thank you very much, sir. Thank you to all the bloggers who joined us on the line.

I apologize for that message at the end. We have a new conference-call line contract, and they like to remind us of it. (Chuckles.)

Thank you, everyone.

COL. RICE: Thank you, folks.

Q Thank you. And thank you, sir.

END.