

Hearing on Military Families

Bill Number: Oversight

Hearing Date: June 2, 2003

Witness:

Gricell Medley

Family Readiness Group (FRG) volunteer

Spouse of Deployed Soldier

Clarksville, TN

Testimony:

Senator Alexander (Distinguished Members of Congress)- good afternoon! Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to talk to you today about our family's experience with the military.

My name is Gricell Medley. My husband, Major Lee Medley, is the Commander of a CH47 Chinook Helicopter Company in the 7th Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment. We have been married nine years and have been blessed with two young daughters, Lia and Emma.

I met my husband during his service in Panama. We married in 1994. The challenges of being newlyweds from two different cultures created a special bond between my husband and I. The main reason we've stayed in the Army is because my husband loves his job and serving our nation. Some of the other reasons we've stayed are because of the excellent medical care, career advancement, continuous training, retirement benefits, on-post housing, DOD schools and sense of community.

My husband took command of his company in 2001. As the Commander's wife, I assumed the role of the unit's Family Readiness Group (FRG) Leader.

Since Desert Storm the Army has continued to place emphasis and importance on the Army's FRGs. I think this is one of the things the Army has done well in the business of taking care of soldiers and their families. Simply defined the FRG consists of volunteers, usually the spouses of the soldiers working together to provide assistance and information to all families and single soldiers within the unit. It is important to remember that everyone is welcome to participate regardless of his or her rank. Above the company level we join with the FRG from our higher headquarters supporting the larger efforts and beneficial projects. Our FRG organizes informational briefs for the spouses, updates and disseminates information about deployments, welcomes new spouses, visits hospitalized family members and soldiers, and plans Easter Egg Hunts and other special events. In my opinion the most important role of the FRG remains information management. Without our dedicated volunteers FRGs would not function.

While the FRG is a great strength of the Army, we could do better by actually funding the FRG program with paid personnel to provide continuity and stability for the unit.

One of the things the Army needs to take a closer look at is the price the op tempo takes on its soldiers and family members. The operational tempo of the Army has increased over the last decade while the divisional strength of the Army has decreased. In other words, more missions and more deployments with fewer people, especially in certain fields like Chinook helicopter units.

I would like to take a moment to tell you how these increased deployments have affected my family. Our youngest daughter, Emma is seventeen months old. My husband has been deployed fifteen of those months. He has been deployed to Korea, two JRTC rotations in

Fort Polk, Afghanistan for eight months and to Iraq since March of this year. He was only home for twenty-one days between Afghanistan and Iraq. The majority of that time was spent training and preparing his soldiers for redeployment. While I am extremely proud of our soldiers and families these numerous separations and deployments to stressful environments have taken an enormous toll on our Army families. I am afraid it is a retention issue for our young officers and enlisted personnel. Many of them get out of the Army because they don't like the repeated separations from their families.

I mentioned to you that my husband's company spent eight months in Afghanistan. I would like to make sure that you know that 7th Battalion of the 101st has maintained all of the Chinook personnel rotations in Afghanistan since January 2001. C Company currently in Afghanistan was previously there for four months, home for 2 months and then returned to Afghanistan in December of 2002. We do not know when they will return.

This "unknown" is one of the frustrations that soldiers and their families face. We don't know when they will return home or what their recovery time will be. In addition, I have read in the Army Times about the Army's plans to send fewer families to Europe and Korea and instead rotate battalions for six-month deployments. To our family we see that as "one more deployment". My family hopes that change never happens. We would much rather go as a family for two or three years. It is very important to us to keep our family together as much as possible.

Again, thank you for taking the time to listen to my comments today. I feel honored to have had the opportunity to share my thoughts with you and appreciate your interest in improving the quality of life for our Army families.