

By Jennifer G. Williams and Sara Graves

AmeriForce editors recently spoke with Admiral Michael Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The conversation centered on National Guard and Reserve forces, but ADM Mullen also talked a lot about military families and their role in military successes. We highlight those comments here.

More than anything else, military families want predictability. At least that's what they've been telling Admiral Michael Mullen.

"They want to know when they're going to get mobilized...so they can plan their lives," he says. The goal right now is to increase the dwell time between deployments for Guard and Reserve to one out of every six years. Currently, the numbers are more like one in four or five, with even higher frequency on the active duty side.

"I've got an active side which is essentially what we call one to one," says Mullen. "You deploy for 15 months, you come back for 15 months. In the case of the Marine Corps on the active side, you deploy for seven months, come back for seven months, and then you go again. So there's plenty of pressure on both sides that we've got to build some dwell time."

"We're paying a lot of attention to that specific goal," he adds. "And clearly, a reduction in overall commitments will allow us to build dwell time as well."

While Mullen foresees continued deployments to both Iraq and Afghanistan, he says he is "increasingly concerned about Afghanistan. The situation is worsening there and we're try-

ing to do as much as we can as fast as we can, but it is a place that I am generally doing what we can until we get to a point where conditions in Iraq will permit us to do more in Afghanistan."

But once those service members return home, says Mullen, a second battle is often waged. And the military is just as determined to win this battle, as well.

"I think one of the most important programs that an awful lot of people are focusing on right now is a reintegration program on both the active and the Guard and Reserve side and we really need to pay attention to that," he says. "My wife, Deborah, in particular, gets

sooner, rather than later, says Mullen. "We're working to figure out what the best help and solutions are. It's really critical for us to get this right."

Mullen says it's particularly important that communities connect with those injured service members and their families, and for those affected to tap into the "sea of goodwill" that is out there, waiting to help.

"I worry a lot that we've got a peacetime process for a wartime reality with respect to this," says Mullen. "And it's got to be the Department of Defense, the VA, and communities throughout the country working together to make sure these young people who've sacrificed so much for our country are well taken care of, and their dream is still the American dream."

Partnering with private organizations to help those service members and family members in need has been a conscious effort, says Mullen, but it is also evolving. "What I need [are] national organizations like the VFW or the American Legion, or the Chamber of Commerce, or Rotary," he says. "I need national organizations with reach throughout the country to local levels to figure out a way to reach out to these families, individuals and families and take care of them."

But Mullen's highest praise is for America's service men and women—and not just those wearing the uniform. "We simply couldn't do it without them," says Mullen. "And in the 'them' piece, I would not just put military members, but the support of families and employers, in the case of our guardsmen and reservists, [whose] sacrifice, support, and patriotism have added really vital elements to the ability to do so much... throughout the military." ●



Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Navy Adm. Mike Mullen speaks with Angela Rodriguez, executive director of the Camp Lejeune Armed Services YMCA, on Camp Lejeune, N.C. Mullen stopped by the facility to learn about how the YMCA helps service members. (DoD photo by Tech. Sgt. Adam M. Stump, U.S. Air Force)

feedback routinely about when these programs are well run," says Mullen. "The difference they make in terms of reintegrating someone that's been through tough combat, back into the family, the neighborhood...and doing it [in such] a way that recognizes what a challenge the last year or so has been in terms of the kinds of combat or just being away that long."

Many soldiers return from combat having experienced some form of combat stress, whether Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or other mental health issue, all of which need to be addressed