

# FOCUS on the Military Family

A Marine's expeditionary nature—his ability to deploy on a timely basis, his quality fighting skills, and his combat focus—is directly related to the quality of his home life. If a Marine family is having trouble at home, it will be reflected in the Marine's on-the-job performance. This month, we focus on Key Volunteers, a group organized to provide help and support to the families left behind when Marines deploy. Key volunteers are indispensable to the Corps. Along with a host of additional programs aimed at solving problems and enhancing quality of life—the Family Readiness Support Program and the Family Service Centers—they provide a foundation enabling commanders to focus on their mission.

## The Fifth Leg of the MAGTF

by Gen Carl E. Mundy, Jr.

*Perhaps the Corps greatest strength lies in the involvement, dedication, and cohesion that characterize a Marine's family.*

I've written before on these pages about Marines. The very word creates an instant image of who and what we are; but that picture and our history are incomplete without recognizing those who maintain the "second front"—those among our family members who support our creed of duty, honor, and commitment to Corps and country as staunchly as any of us who wear the uniform. In spirit and fact, they too are Marines. Our story is their story.

Today, family members outnumber those of us in uniform. The tremendous responsibilities military spouses shoulder, and the immeasurable contribution many make relate directly to our operational effectiveness. The Marines and Sailors of our Corps are able to respond whenever and wherever needed largely because of this support structure at home.

Over time, I've come to realize that if there is a state of "dependency" in the Corps, it comes from those of us who wear the uniform who are dependent on those who don't. They enable us to have both a family and to fulfill what the Corps demands of us. The dedication of Marine Corps spouses, their ability to maintain themselves when we deploy while picking up many of the responsibilities normally

carried by us, and their increasing efforts and readiness to sustain each other during our deployments, are a mainstay in enabling the Corps to function effectively.

In a very real sense then, Marine families are an integral component of the Corps. They are, in effect, a fifth leg of our deploying Marine air-ground task forces (MAGTFs)—a true rear

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area support element. Like any one of the other four elements that comprise our combined arms team, the fifth element has a certain interaction and interdependency with the others, but also, a requirement for a level of independence in sustaining itself if it is to contribute to the overall effectiveness of the Corps. Let me talk briefly about

both the interdependent and the independent aspects of this support element.

Over time, as the number of spouses and families in the Marine Corps has increased, we have come to realize that a stable family and a productive Marine are interdependent. Family problems distract from a Marine's attention to duty, affect him or her psychologically, require time away from duty, and on occasion, result in an inability to deploy or to complete a deployment. In effect, a Marine with family problems tends to become a loss to his unit and to both himself and his family in terms of his potential for assignment, retention, and promotion. Thus, family stability, individual Marine performance, and organizational mission accomplishment are all interdependent.

Recognizing this, over recent years, the Marine Corps has evolved or adopted a number of programs designed to aid Marines and their families with destabilizing problems. These include:

- **Marine Corps Family Readiness Support Program.** This program is a network of agencies, programs, services, and individuals that support readiness by preventing or reducing family stress. Nearly two dozen in number, the components of this program address such



important issues as alcohol and drug abuse prevention, child care, family advocacy, spouse employment, spouse and child abuse prevention, deployment support, relocation assistance, and many, many more. Put simply, the objective of this program is to free the Marine and the Marine family from many of the tensions and worries of Service life. This prepares the family for the separations associated with

field duty, unit deployments, or war, and permits the Marine to focus on mission accomplishment.

• **Family Service Center.** The family service centers support commanders by providing help to military families. Many of the opportunities addressed within the Family Readiness Support Program are administered by and available through our family service centers.

- **Marine Corps Key Volunteers Network.** While technically part of the Family Readiness Support Program, key volunteers deserve special mention. During the 1990-91 period, key wives' (now called key volunteers) family support activities gained prominence in response to personnel and unit movements associated with DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM. Today, that splendid tradition continues as these volunteer groups of highly motivated military spouses support and assist local commanders by providing improved communication between the command and the families of Marines, and between the families themselves within the command.

These and other family programs and facilities have paid big dividends to the Corps, to Marines, and to Marine families. In defining readiness too narrowly, in applying it only to Marines, the Corps risked overlooking the thousands who constitute the "Marine family," and whose readiness is also important. These programs anticipate the short or no-notice rapid deployment of Marines in the event of war. Marines can't get ready; they have to be ready for the call. The same is true of Marine families. Thus, these programs embrace the entire Corps—those who wear the Eagle, Globe, and Anchor and those who do not but who are very much a part of the Corps.

But at the end of the day, there are no programs the Marine Corps could establish or afford that can offset the fact that the involvement and interaction of our spouses, as concerned and active contributors, are the most effective ingredients in maintaining rear area stability—and thereby, forward area cohesion. The four component elements of the MAGTF are sharpened in training and forged together for war by leadership, determination, and the esprit that marks Marines. But the fifth element—the fifth leg of the MAGTF—our Marine spouses—are increasingly the foundation that enables us to send Marines forward with the confidence that their rear area is stable and secure.

For the Marine Corps, a Service oriented on people, spouses and Marine families may be the great secret weapon. It's no secret anymore.



>*Gen Mundy is the 30th Commandant of the Marine Corps.*