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THE HOUSE ARMED
SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT OF
MICHAEL P. DOWNS
DIRECTOR

PERSONAL AND FAMILY READINESS DIVISION
MANPOWER AND RESERVE AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT
HEADQUARTERS, UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

BEFORE THE
MILITARY PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE
OF THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

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Michael P. Downs
Director, Personal and Family Readiness Division

Michael P. Downs entered the U. S. Marine Corps via the Naval Reserve Officers Training Course, and was commissioned a second lieutenant in June 1961. In April 1962, he completed The Basic School in Quantico, VA, and was assigned to a transplacement battalion where he served as a platoon commander, company commander, and assistant operations officer at Camp Pendleton, CA, and the Far East until December 1964. His next assignment took him to Marine Barracks, Yorktown, VA, where he served until February 1967. He was promoted to first lieutenant in December 1962, and captain in September 1965.



Upon completing the Amphibious Warfare School in Quantico in September 1967, he was transferred to the Republic of Vietnam where he served with the 1st Marine Division as Commanding Officer for Company F, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines; Assistant Operations Officer for the 5th Marine Regiment; and Operations Officer for the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines. While serving as Company Commander of F/2/5, he was awarded the Silver Star Medal for heroic actions during Operation Hue City in February 1968.

He returned to the United States in October 1968, and was sent to Quantico where he was assigned to the Development Center, and to The Basic School, and then to Marine Barracks, Washington, D.C. He was promoted to major in November 1968. After his tour in the National Capital Area, he attended the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, and upon graduation in July 1975 was assigned to Okinawa, Japan, where he served as Executive Officer, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, 3d Marine Division.

Follow on assignments included Headquarters Marine Corps, Washington, D.C., where he was Administrative Assistant to the Deputy Chief of Staff, Operations and Training , and then monitor for Ground Lieutenant Colonels; student at the National War College, Washington, D.C.; Plans Officer at Headquarters, Allied Forces Central Europe, Brunssum, The Netherlands; Director of Operations and Training , and Commanding Officer, 27th Marines, 7th Marine Amphibious Brigade, Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms, CA; and Deputy for Marine Corps Matters, Office of Program Appraisal, Department of the Navy, Washington, D.C. He was promoted to lieutenant colonel in November 1977 and to colonel in November 1982, and was selected for promotion to brigadier general in December 1986.

In March 1987, he was assigned as the Director, Facilities and Services Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, where he remained for more than two years. In July 1989, he was transferred to Camp Lejeune, NC, where he served first as Commanding General, 6th Marine Expeditionary Brigade, and then as Commanding General, Marine Corps Base. He retired from the Marine Corps in August 1992 after more than 31 years on active duty.

After his retirement from the Marine Corps, he was a consultant to the U.S. House of Representatives, House Appropriations Committee, and to Textron Inc. He became Director, Personal and Family Readiness Division, Manpower and Reserve Affairs Department, Headquarters Marine Corps, on May 1, 2000.

He is married to the former Martha Leigh Puller, of Saluda, VA. They have two sons, Mike Jr., and Burwell.

Chairman Snyder, Congressman McHugh, distinguished Members of the Military Personnel Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today on Policies and Procedures Regarding the Notification of Next of Kin of Wounded and Deceased Servicemembers. As it should be, this issue is clearly one of great importance to the Marine Corps and our Marines and their families.

To be a Marine is to be part of something that represents the best of our Nation. It is to accept a way of life that embodies selfless service, to defend those who cannot defend themselves, to thrive in the hardship and sacrifice expected of an elite warrior class, to march to the sound of the guns, and to ably shoulder the heritage created by those who have gone before us. Only a few Americans choose the dangerous and necessary work of fighting our Nation's enemies. As a consequence of that selfless choice, some have paid the ultimate price, and some have sustained wounds they will carry with them throughout life. We acknowledge their allegiance through various means and integrated Marine Corps support mechanisms.

For our fallen Marines, indeed a tragic loss to their survivors and the Corps, we endeavor to honor their sacrifices with sincerity and commitment. Our Casualty Assistance Calls Officers (CACOs) are trained to treat next of kin and other family members as they would their own family. Providing casualty assistance always begins with the basic rule that there is no standard casualty call; each case is distinct and families grieve in different ways. Assistance to families is carefully measured to facilitate

their transition through the stages of grief and the completion of the casualty process.

Our nation also has an enduring commitment to her Marines long after they return from the battle, particularly if they are physically or mentally scarred. Our moral imperative is to ensure this support is seamless, even as Marines leave our uniform ranks. We have recognized gaps in attention and care. As such, care for our wounded Marines continues to evolve and is a top priority of the Commandant. He directed the establishment of the Wounded Warrior Regiment (WWR), which was stood up on 1 April 2007. The mission of the WWR is to provide and facilitate assistance to wounded, ill and injured Marines and their families throughout the phases of their recovery. Although taking care of our own is certainly not a new concept, we have been doing so since 1775, the establishment of the WWR marks the first time the Marine Corps has given oversight in tracking wounded Marines to a single command, supported by a data base and tracking system which will streamline the transition process and help Marines cut through red tape. The WWR will support these injured warriors as they navigate through medical and physical evaluation boards, assist in the processing of traumatic life insurance claims, act as a clearinghouse for charitable donations, work to ensure accountability and non-medical case management during recovery, ensure the same level of medical care regardless of geographical location, and oversee the transition from the Defense Department care to the care of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The service provided by the WWR does not end at separation. "Once a Marine always a Marine." The Regiment supports medically retired Marines in the same manner as those on active duty.

Casualty Notification

For the Marine Corps, the dissemination of factual and timely information to Servicemember-designated family members is paramount and mandated by Marine Corps Order. Our casualty reporting policies and procedures are rooted in Marine Corps Order P3040.4E, the Marine Corps Casualty Procedures Manual. These policies and procedures are standardized for all Marines and there is no distinction between casualties occurring in Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) and those occurring outside the theater of operations.

When a reportable casualty occurs, it is the responsibility of the casualty's command or the first Marine Corps activity learning of the casualty incident to notify those involved in the notification and assistance process. They are required to immediately submit a voice report to the Marine Corps Operations Center (MCOC) and the Headquarters Marine Corps Casualty Section (MRPC). They must then generate a Personnel Casualty Report (PCR) and distribute it to MRPC as required by the Marine Corps Casualty Procedures Manual. The PCR reports casualty information and is used by the casualty's command and/or the CACO to inform the casualty's next of kin (NOK) of the details surrounding the incident. A casualty incident must be reported as soon as possible, but not later than one hour after learning of an incident. It is vital that all information reported is complete and verified. Close liaisons must be maintained between all concerned organizations and agencies involved to ensure accuracy.

Upon learning of the death of a Marine, primary and secondary NOK are notified in person by a trained CACO, generally within four hours after the release of the PCR. The Marine Corps recently changed the hours of notification for OEF/OIF casualties from 24-hours a day to between 0500 and 2400. The change reflects concerns that notification in the middle of the night limits the availability of immediate support for the NOK through assistance provided by family, friends and local support organizations.

For wounded, ill, and injured cases, notification to the NOK is telephonic and is conducted by the parent command, also between the hours of 0500 and 2400. Thereafter, the parent command is responsible for providing updates to the NOK regarding the Marine's condition, location and also coordinates with MRPC to facilitate travel to bedside via Invitational Travel Orders. The Invitational Travel Order program is governed by the Joint Federal Travel Regulation. Ordinarily, up to three family members may be provided roundtrip travel and per diem to be at the bedside of a seriously injured or ill Marine. In extenuating circumstances, additional family members may be authorized roundtrip travel and per diem as well. Family members of Marines who are not seriously injured, but were injured in a combat operation or zone and are hospitalized inside the United States, may also be eligible for Invitational Travel Orders. However, the per diem authorization is limited to thirty days. In cases where a Marine is very seriously injured or ill (VSI), a CACO may be assigned to the NOK upon request of the parent command or if MRPC directs the assignment.

Friendly Fire Incidents

During OEF/OIF, a total of 19 Marine Corps casualties involving friendly fire have been reported. When a Marine is known or suspected of being killed or wounded as a result of friendly fire, this information must be stated in the PCR, with as many details as possible. Actions taken to impede the disclosure of this information are not tolerated. As MCO P3040.4E mandates the timely reporting of all casualties, irrespective of their cause, special procedures are not indicated for friendly fire incidents.

All information contained in the PCR is provided to the families at initial notification, or as may be warranted with the issuance of supplemental PCR updates. It is vitally important that PCRs be stringently reviewed as they are received. Significant circumstances may become embedded within the report leading to potential for human error. We are taking appropriate steps to make sure NOK, especially of the injured, are promptly made aware of supplemental PCRs and the information contained therein. We have a renewed emphasis on attention to the details of these PCRs, and are working to ensure the chain of command, as well as MRPC, thoroughly examine these documents for the appropriate level of scrutiny and information dissemination.

In closing, your Marines are honored to be serving during such an important time in our Nation's history. They are truly a special breed of patriots and the Marine Corps appreciates your dedication to their wellbeing and that of their families. Your continued support and advocacy makes a measurable difference and we thank you for it.