

1. As a Senior Flag Officer spouse, how would you describe the exciting happenings at Ft. Bliss during this time of troop movement and troop increase into Ft. Bliss?

Very exciting! Because of BRAC, Ft. Bliss is experiencing exponential growth like I have never seen before and in the last few months a momentum has started at a speed that would make your head spin. The Army has not seen this kind of growth since World War II. The growth is not only represented by the movement of troops and families but also with the construction of the new and beautiful barracks, headquarters and motor pools for our soldiers. Additionally, we are getting a large number of fantastic new homes, expansion of childcare facilities, gyms, commissary, exchange, and support elements for work and play. The economic growth for the city is huge with hundreds of jobs to begin and sustain this growth from construction needs to all types of services. In addition, the economic impact and growth for El Paso and surrounding communities has created a superb and beautiful synergy between the military and our civilian neighbors.

This transition brings about a change in the mission of Ft. Bliss as well. For the past 40 years Ft Bliss has been the home of Air Defense Artillery and next year the Air Defense School will relocate to Ft. Sill, OK. This longstanding history of the Air Defense community has forged bonds of soldiers and families from all over the country along with our local neighbors in El Paso, New Mexico, and Juarez, Mexico. In times of war and peace, joy and sorrow, births and deaths, all resulting in camaraderie and friendships-deep, deep friendships. It is a sad and an emotional move for many. I feel a bit sad for our retired community because part of their family is moving away. They have always and will continue to support the Post from all angles and in very generous ways. They attend every ceremony and salute smartly when the flag passes, shake your hand when you arrive, and squeeze you tightly when you leave. Whenever you ask for help, they are the first to raise their hand. Even though they have retired their uniform, they are still military warriors married to awesome military spouses, proud, giving and always ready to continue to serve in any possible way. I know that when the new units of 1st Armored Division takes charge of the Post, they will embrace the retired community as their own. No matter the patch a soldier wears on his or her sleeve, how young or old, retired or active, a soldier is a soldier and they will take care of one another. And so, in good ol' military tradition with every farewell there is a hail. That is the sad and exciting aspect of military life. The one constant you can count on is change! And the friendship circle keeps getting bigger and bigger.

2. How can relocating military spouses better prepare for their move into Ft Bliss?

With every move we get better and better at the physical aspect of moving. Each new location has its own nuances and even if you have been stationed there before things change. If you have computer access it's helpful to explore the lay of the land electronically. The post or base's web site, ACS, and school liaison - very important, and the Chamber of Commerce are very good beginnings. It's always

nice if you know someone already stationed there. If you haven't already been contacted by someone in your soldier's new unit, get the number of the unit's FRG leader and ask him or her your questions and for resource numbers. In my experience ACS is a great place to start.

3. With so many activities and functions you attend, how do you keep everything in balance?

First of all you can't do it all. Many organizations want you to sit on their board, attend their meetings, and support all their functions and events. If I could I would but in the long run I know my sanity and health would suffer so I've learned to say no and try to volunteer in the areas that I have a greater affinity for and where my talents may best be used. I exercise as often as I can make myself either rollerblade or work the elliptical at the gym. I meditate every morning and I eat healthy, organic food, which includes chocolate! I work on not taking things too seriously and try to find the humor. Balance? Most days it's not about the balance you attempt to maintain but where you place your fulcrum.

4. Why have you worked so passionately and diligently to better the quality of life for military spouses?

Through the years, every experience and challenge we face broadens our awareness and understanding of military life and life in general. Every spouse does her or his part in some way, big or small in an attempt to better the quality of life for our families and Soldiers. It's part of the territory of being a military spouse. As a young military spouse and parent your world revolves mostly around tending to your immediate family, your children and soldier, schools, the animals, the house...life. Any extra time may be given to the unit supporting a fundraiser for the soldiers and families, cooking an extra meal, attending FRG meetings, etc. Each minute giving is a minute learning, believe it or not it, adds up and in a short while you find yourself understanding and knowing quite a bit. Through our experiences, our awareness and understanding of people, our passion and diligence are honed. As we grow and become senior spouses opportunities present themselves and we are better able to support and give and hopefully make a difference.

My love for military spouses and our families comes mainly from spouses. They are the ones who inspire and motivate through their actions and their gifts of energy and compassion, who practice passion and diligence every day. There are many who do so much --they amaze and humble me. There are many beautiful and heart-warming stories out there and I have had the deep and honored pleasure in crossing paths with many unsung heroic military spouses. They motivate me, they humble me, and I am truly honored to have met them. Let me give you a few examples, I will try to be brief.

Michi Carl is a woman who has faced many personal challenges from battling breast cancer twice, raising four beautiful children; one physically and mentally challenged. In the middle of a move during one of her battles, she had to check into the hospital immediately for an operation as her family moved into their new quarters. On a visit that Friday afternoon, she was absolutely - as always - so positive and was highly complimenting the hospital staff at how fortunate she was. Even though she was now going to have to wait the entire weekend because of a delayed procedure of a patient in the queue in front of her. She has probably cooked more dinners for others than most of us have for our own family, supports several organizations and functions, has always been very active in every unit FRG her husband was assigned to, always a player on Post. She is always there in a crisis supporting, saying goodbye, welcoming. Her family is one of the nicest families I know - sweet, polite, well-mannered. She started volunteering at ACS in the School Liaison office and now is a paid employee as the Special Needs Specialist. Without Michi, many, many children would not be getting the services required. She is a friend to everyone and truly one of the most positive and kindhearted persons I know.

Nadine Woods has been a relentless volunteer all through her husband's career, is a remarkable woman. During Operation Enduring Freedom she had to go home to Georgia to take care of her dying mother (her husband Bob was in Brigade command at the time). Nadine can't sit still so she got a job working in a mortgage company, then came across a large house, bought it, restored it and opened a B & B. Shortly after that, she bought a chicken business raising chickens and within the first year became the top producer in the state of Georgia and now owns three large chicken businesses. All the while, she was taking care of her sick mother in Georgia and still traveling back to Bliss supporting her husband and the families at Ft. Bliss. Bob is currently the Commanding General of 32d Army Air and Missile Defense Command (AAMDC) and Nadine continues to support him and manages to give classes to the ladies of 32d during her time visiting here. She demonstrates unbelievable management skills.

Debbie McGee is another remarkable and successful business woman who has continually volunteered and worked. Presently she works for an international accounting firm specializing in international taxation, immigration, and administration. She worked for Lafarge, a French construction material company with 85,000 employees in 82 countries running the Global Mobility for the North American region. Global Mobility is a department that assists employees in transferring within the company from one country to another. I wonder where she got the training for that! She recently moved to Doosan Infracore International, Inc (DII), a Korean company out of Seoul, Korea, as the Global Mobility Director. She is putting together a global mobility program for their 33,000 employees. Debbie has said, "While I do have the legal background due to my CPA, I feel most of what I have learned and use routinely in my job, I learned as a military spouse. The Army does a great job of change management and equipping spouses to deal with these changes. The civilian sector, especially foreign companies, does not

have this same mentality yet".

And all the while as a career woman she has unwaveringly supported her husband throughout his career. He has just left brigade command and is now the new Assistant Commandant of Ft. Bliss. Debbie immediately started making phone calls, booking dates, and arranging activities and events for her new spouse group. She has always been a strong and staunch supporter of spouses and families, the first to raise her hand, to stand up for their rights, and go to bat for them. She deeply understands, "If the family isn't happy, it doesn't matter how great the employee is, the assignment will fail." She is definitely a woman to have on our military spouse team!

Cindy King is the wife of Capt Troy King, who was company commander of the 507th Maintenance Company during Operation Enduring Freedom. On Sunday, 23 March, 2003 I was visiting my in-laws in Sacramento, getting ready to return to Ft. Bliss. I was out in the driveway trying to figure out how to get into my gosh darn rental car with the stupid dog-gone keys locked inside the car when my mother-in-law came out and said it was Howard on the phone - he was somewhere in SWA. I froze for a moment and starred at her and she back at me, both thinking the same thing, this is not going to be good. I picked up the phone and said his name, he knew the tone and assured me he was OK, but he said I'd probably be getting phone calls from spouses -- the 507th had been ambushed but they had no details yet. He said it would probably be on the news, I asked my father-in-law, a veteran WWII Army Air soldier and prisoner of war, to please turn on the TV, and sure enough, plastered all over the screen suppositions of what had just occurred. Howard said either he or Chuck (Anderson - his DCO) would call with updates as he got them. I called Angie Dickinson, a good friend and someone with a level head, from whom I knew I would be able to get good solid information. She told me what she knew, how the spouses were, and the general mood of the Post. Essentially, everyone was holding tight, waiting for solid information. The remarkable and very professional folks at ACS were manning the phones and doing what they do best -- supporting the families. I called Cindy King and she was more comforting to me than I think I was to her.

The girls and I eventually got back to Ft. Bliss. I knocked on Cindy's door, someone let me in, and I stood in the kitchen looking into the living room -- Cindy was on her land line, and three or four other ladies were on cells, all talking to other spouses. "I don't know the answer to that but I will try and find out. ... We haven't been told that, the news is guessing, maybe you should turn off the TV for now. ... "We never leave anyone behind," all echoed in my ears. CNN was on -- the sound barely audible. Cindy's brand new son was asleep on the couch, other children were playing quietly, as if they knew this was a time to be on their very best behavior and they were! The kitchen looked like a tornado had hit it. During the few hours I was there the doorbell rang several times, which I was happy for because it gave me a job. The chaplain's wife came with lots of food - cooked meals and desserts (enough to feed the entire 507th). For the next three days that

is how Cindy's house looked like-a Spouse HQ. These ladies took charge, gave support, did not say anything that should not have been said, and were comforting to others. The 507th was a well-organized and deeply caring group starting with the CO and his wife. When Troy first took command he wrote a letter to every parent or spouse thanking them for allowing their loved one to serve and promised he would try and take the very best care of their son, daughter, or spouse. The way Cindy handled herself, the terrible situation, the families, the media - she remained steady, mature, intelligent, passionate, and above all, compassionate. Her story will always be etched in my memory.

These ladies and many like them have been my teachers, my friends, and my heroes. They are remarkable women who do remarkable things and are all products of the military spouse corps, all volunteers from early on in some capacity. I cherish all of them and I'm honored to call them my friends! I am a better person because of them.