

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

DoD BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE
REAL WARRIORS CAMPAIGN

Washington, D.C.

Tuesday, November 26, 2013

PARTICIPANTS:

Moderator:

WILLIAM SELBY
Office of the Secretary of Defense, Public Affairs

Guests:

MAJOR ED PULIDO
Retired, U.S. Army

KEN MacGARRIGLE
VA Operation Enduring Freedom/
Operation Iraqi Freedom Outreach Team

Other Participants:

CLAUDETTE ROULO
American Forces Press Service

DALE KISSINGER
MilitaryAvenue.com

JOHN McCANLISS
Navy Memorial Blog

JUDY DAVIS
Direction Diva blog

MICHELLE KULL
MilitaryMatters

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PROCEEDINGS

MR. SELBY: Well, I'd like to welcome you all to the Department of Defense Bloggers Roundtable for Tuesday, November 26, 2013. My name again is William Selby. I'm with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Public Affairs, and I'll be moderating the call.

Today our guests are Real Warriors profilee retired U.S. Army Major Ed Pulido, who will share his story of seeking care for invisible wounds and the tools and resources that have helped him the most. Joining Maj. Pulido will be Ken MacGarrigle from the VA Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom Outreach Team to discuss the resources and benefits available for veterans.

We are pleased to have you both on the line today.

A note to the bloggers and journalists online today: Please remember to clearly state your name and organization in advance of your question. Please respect our guests' time, keeping questions succinct and to the point. And if you are not asking a question, we ask that you please place your phone on mute.

With that, Maj. Pulido and then also Mr. MacGarrigle, if you have any opening statements, the floor is yours.

MAJ. PULIDO: Okay, I can start. This is Maj. Ed Pulido.

My father once told me that when you take the oath of office to defend the greatest nation in the world -- for me it was about God, country, family, and all of those that serve in the Armed Forces of the United States of America, and it is with that spirit that on August 17th of 2004, I would hit an improvised explosive device, a roadside bomb, that would change my life forever. The fragments hit my knee and broke it in three places, fragments to the size of my body. I was in the city of Baquba, Iraq. Ironically, on that day, the men and women in uniform took care of me, rendered aid, and would put me on a helicopter 45 minutes after I'd been hit by this roadside bomb. I would end up at Baghdad, and from Baghdad I would go to Germany, Germany to Walter Reed, Walter Reed and Brooke Army Medical Center for a total of about 17 surgeries during that timeframe. I'd have *E. coli*, anti-tobacter, two staph infections. And I would deal with the physical wounds of war. And it wasn't till my left leg was amputated on October 1st of '04 that the mental wounds of war would sink in.

You see, it was at that time where I'd been dealing with the physical side of the wounds, and now mentally I was in a place that I was alone. I felt that the support system was there for me, but certainly I was dealing with the grieving of my lost left limb. And through that process, I was able to get and seek help, but unfortunately during a period of time I had suicidal ideation. I experienced the night sweats, the night terrors; and on October 2nd I just -- you know hours and days after that amputation and going through that whole process, I felt that maybe I just didn't want to live any more. As hard as it was to say that at the time to myself, I knew that that wasn't the answer, and I would be on my road to

recovery. From there, I would get connected years later to the Real Warriors Campaign, learning about the tools and the resources that would render recovery for me and my family. We would seek out counseling. We would understand not only living with post-traumatic stress but also traumatic brain injury, which was diagnosed in 2008.

And so for me, my road to recovery has been great. I am living a great life and prosperous life. I work. I'm involved in many other activities. And certainly I couldn't have done it without the American people, the counseling that I've received, and then learning as a wounded service member, as a disabled veteran, that I needed to learn about the mental health aspect of living life today. And so with that, I thank the Real Warriors Campaign for their outstanding support, and certainly we want to get the word out to let everyone know that we're not going to leave them behind on the field of battle, and we're going to take care of them and their families on the home front.

That's my opening statement.

MR. SELBY: Thank you, sir.
And Mr. MacGarrigle?

MR. MacGARRIGLE: Well, I can't really top that, but let me just say I was also in Iraq, 2003-2004, and when I came back I joined an outreach office to try and get more people signed up for VA health care and also to get them involved with counseling at the VA. Real Warriors has been a good friend to this office through their social media, which I also do, and providing resources to take care of the vets whether that's through their outreach center, their 24/7 outreach center, or other outlets that they use.

And with that, I'll give it back to the call.

MR. SELBY: Thank you, sir.
Claudette, you were first on the line, and you can go ahead with your question.

MS. ROULO: Hi. My name's Claudette, and I'm from American Forces Press Service, and my question is for Maj. Pulido.

I was wondering if you could briefly describe the role that your family played in your recovery.

MAJ. PULIDO: That's a great question, and my family was not well versed in mental health wellness. Certainly that's the role that they've played to this point.

One of the things that happened is that they were very tired after going through all of the problematic issues I had to deal with, whether I was keeping my

leg, whether I was going to lose it, and certainly it wasn't till later -- several years later -- that we would all seek out counseling on a full scale, not only to talk about the grieving process but also about how we would go on with our lives and of course how we would educate our young girl at the time, who was four years old, and was asking questions. And certainly for my family, they had to deal with those night sweats and the night terrors and just the hypervigilance of my behavior. And it wasn't anything negative, but just to cite an example, you know, maybe driving too close to the middle lines as we did in Iraq or being in places where I would have to know and see the door and not have my backed turned in certain situations, dealing with a little bit of how I would cope with the social aspect of being in social places and just learning how to walk and going to Disney World and just, you know, knowing that I just probably couldn't give it all my all but I try, you know, and so it was living adaptively, not only physically but mentally.

And, thus, what you have is you have to get counseling, you have to seek help, and certainly you have to have a support system. And I think the greatest gift I received from that support system was that we started a group of servicemembers that actually was supported by the VA, and service members from the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts were able to get together fellowship once a month. And certainly it was a time where we could just talk about things that we were dealing with and maybe ways to cope and adapt to the situations at hand.

So, your family does play a role. I'm just glad that there are services in place and the VA and Department of Defense have recognized that families need to be connected and be part of the unit and certainly need to be part of the recovery process and in learning about these tools and resources, and I think that's why the Real Warriors Campaign is very important, because it's your one-stop shop for services.

MS. ROULO: Thank you very much.

MAJ. PULIDO: Thank you.

MR. SELBY: Dale, you were next.

MR. KISSINGER: Good morning, Major. My question from Dale Kissinger at MilitaryAvenue.com is concerning what changes you've seen.

I do believe I participated in a roundtable back in 2011 or 2010 with you, and we talked about peer support and how the units were critical to the mental health. Have there been any changes that you've seen that have helped the veterans at this current date?

MAJ. PULIDO: I've seen a lot of changes. Certainly I think that there are

a great deal of -- a lot of the commanders now are actually doing the checklist of what is available out there, what the outlets are, creating a prevention system for suicide in some regard. That is not what I had seen in the past. And certainly there's a lot more emphasis in not just doing the PowerPoint and, yes, this is part of training but that the training is real.

On the other hand -- you know what, I'm not going to sugarcoat anything, because that's not how I operate, but certainly I see that there are still some commanders out there that don't see -- they understand the value of we've gone through, but in certain cases they may look at it as something that may not be that warrior spirit. And I don't like to talk about it in that regard, but certainly having us come out and talk about our experiences and being a part of the system and doing that peer-to-peer support as you indicated is truly important. But I think -- at times I think commanders are reluctant to bring people out just because of the fact that maybe an individual may say something that may deter someone from deploying, and at the end of the day it's about taking care of our servicemen and women and providing what I call holistic wellness and not in the medication side of the house but what I mean is getting people together and the whole community rallying, because when you deploy, it's about making sure that you take the oath office and you defend the greatest nation in the world, and I think that that patriotic spirit's the way the way that it needs to be handled.

Finally, just one last thing that I think is very positive, and that is that through the Department of Defense and the VA the services have improved whether they're homelessness services to connecting the dots with case management and then also just raising awareness. I think that what I'd like to see in the future -- and maybe you all could help -- is that we could certainly do more of a national campaign to raise awareness about how businesses and employers and certainly civic groups and others can get and rally around our men and women in uniform.

I know that's a lot, but I just needed to say all of that. Thank you.

MR. SELBY: Well said, sir.
John McCanliss, you're next.

MR. McCANLISS: Hi, it's John McCanliss from the Navy Memorial Blog. A question for our guest from the Veteran's Administration.

How do people get in touch with the Real Warriors and, more importantly, how do you reach out to veterans (inaudible). Certainly we know (inaudible) served in theater whether they're still serving in uniform or, now, out of uniform. Is there a direct link -- is there an e-mail list? Are most of our veterans aware of this program?

MR. MacGARRIGLE: This is Ken. Yes, for the Department of Veterans

Affairs, the outreach has become a lot better since 2008. We try and reach more veterans through various DoD and VA programs such as the Yellow Ribbon program, the Post-Deployment Health Reassessment, VA -- every medical center has a welcome home for OEF/OIF veterans and all veterans. And, yes, we could always improve. It's gotten better for the -- as a veteran myself, it's a challenge, because right now we try and sign up veterans when they return from theater, from combat; and the success rate there has been great for the National Guard and Reserve, and once you get them signed up, I think you can do -- then you can do outreach to them, but you have to sign them up first. And Real Warriors has been a real help there for myself getting the word out. A lot of the web pages and campaign messages, if you will, are the same that we would send out. It's kind of a one-person operation here in social media. But to reiterate what the major said, yes, if we could -- we want to have successful care, positive outcomes, and that's going to take place if there's early intervention as Real Warriors points out. Kind of a roundabout answer there.

MR. McCANLISS: Right. A question: Is there a main website on the VA site for Real Warriors?

MR. MacGARRIGLE: For -- well, we have -- it's two separate organizations. It's DoD and VA. I mean, we re-tweet them and they re-tweet us and that type and try and get the message out that way.

MR. McCANLISS: Yes. My question is if somebody's reading one of our reports, where do we direct them to so that they can find out more information?

MR. MacGARRIGLE: For -- well --

MR. McCANLISS: For the Real Warriors program.

MR. MacGARRIGLE: Oh, for the Real Warriors. That would be *RealWarriors.net*.

MR. McCANLISS: Okay, thank you.

MR. MacGARRIGLE: Sorry.

MR. McCANLISS: Mm-hmm.

MR. SELBY: Thank you.
And, Judy, you're next. Did you have a question?

MS. DAVIS: Yes. Hi, I'm Judy Davis. I write for the Direction Diva blog, and I'm just curious (inaudible) on ensuring that family members seek out treatment and support to be able to deal with the residual effects of traumas such as what you have. And can you address some of the issues that I'm seeing out in the field today of dependent family members having difficulty accessing treatment, especially through TRICARE or depression or residual PTSD when they're not host installations and how we can make sure to connect them with the resources that they need?

MAJ. PULIDO: And that's for me, Maj. Pulido, is that correct?

MS. DAVIS: Right, right.

MAJ. PULIDO: Yes. I think that you've actually hit on something that I think, from a strengths and weaknesses point of view, certainly we can improve on. The thing about it is that there are services in place close to the installations.

On the other hand, when you have National Guard and Reserve component servicemembers, certainly it becomes a community issue, and in Oklahoma what we have done -- and this is just an example of how that outreach and connection can work -- is that I was actually put on by the governor to sit on the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Board, which is the state board that oversees and governs basically everything in the mental health sector. And the great thing about that is that there was an educational process that occurs not only for me but for the participants and/or board members that are on that board to say here are some services that need to be taken or put in place in these various communities, because right now we're missing that boat on where we can infuse services for our veterans. And what we're finding is that in the rural areas we've been able to work here in Oklahoma on getting community mental health centers and private citizens that deal with mental health and substance abuse services to jump on board, create governing boards; and certainly we have one in Tulsa in Oklahoma, we have one now in Oklahoma City and in Laughton, and those are the strategic places. And so for us, it's creating some infrastructure, creating a meeting space, utilizing the United Ways, utilizing the 211 help lines, to sort of have what we call a safety net of various groups that can address these issues and have resources in place. And because I've worked with the 211 group -- and 211 of course is the information referral hotline-- its cause is similar to what we have with Military OneSource. We were able to get them to the table and they were able to let our people know in the veteran space about the hotline that they have for suicide, et cetera. And that way, the families were able to access those services as well, thus not utilizing some of the TRICARE supports that may be out there.

So, that was a way, in an intervention, to take care of those families. And I know that's a long answer, but I needed to kind of set up the infrastructure, because it would be great to kind of look at the best practices all over the country and for maybe the Real Warriors Campaign to maybe ask those questions in the future as a next step of what are you doing in your states and how can you collaborate better to support services. Just an idea --

MS. DAVIS: Thank you, Major.

MAJ. PULIDO: Yes.

MAJ. PULIDO: Did you get that, Judy?

MS. DAVIS: Yes. Thank you very much.

MR. SELBY: Okay.
Michele, you were next.

MS. KULL: Hi, this is Michelle Kull from *Military Matters*. My question is for our VA representative.

With respect to the OIF/OEF/OMD format that the Department of VA has set up working with Real Warriors Campaign and the Defense Centers of Excellence, how do you reach the individuals who actually come to those VA facilities? Do you only rely on those who come into the VA facilities, or do you utilize the community resources as well to reach the vets who have not signed up? Because they must sign up for VA services. How do you bridge that gap?

MR. MacGARRIGLE: Well, that's a great question. Yes, for the -- in the past it was pretty much you waited for them to come, and nowadays it's more if you sign them up through the -- it's called the 10-10EZ, the VHA healthcare form -- and it's done when they come back from combat, and that is sent to the local VA, and from there they do the outreach, say why don't you come in and get an appointment through the various DoD programs -- PHRA. If there are -- if they see something that needs to be taken care of there where the VA works with the DoD, they can get a referral to the VA. Or if they're still on active -- if they're still in the six-month TRICARE window, they could have the referral to TRICARE.

But, yes, the VA needs to do more, in my opinion, reaching out to local communities. Speaking as a veteran, how that veteran ends up getting the care -- I don't really care who gets the credit, I just like to see it happen. And whether it's Real Warriors or through the bloggers or any -- DoD -- whoever ends up doing it. I think that's ultimately what we're looking for, what I'm looking for

here for the Veterans.

MS. KULL: Sure. Which VIS Center are you located nearby or that you participate with?

MR. MacGARRIGLE: I'm in Washington, D.C., so I go to the VA Medical Center in D.C.

MS. KULL: Okay. I know they've done some tremendous work. There's -- contrary to many years of disdain for the VA, the VA has wonderful programs today, and they all need to sign up whether they're OIF, OEF or prior veterans.

MR. MacGARRIGLE: I agree, and also to kind of dovetail what the major's talking about, within the VA there is a program called Vet Centers for combat vets, which is open to any combat veteran for counseling. Families can also utilize that, and if you're -- through the severely injured -- I'm not sure the program was in place when the major came back, but it's called the Caregivers Program, which is designed to help the severely injured when they come back.

MS. KULL: Our vet centers are my best friend.

MR. MacGARRIGLE: Oh, glad to hear that.

MR. SELBY: Thanks very much, sir.

And somebody else join the line. Has there been anybody who's joined who has not had the chance to ask a question or would like to? Okay. Well, then we will go back around.

Claudette, did you have a follow-up question?

MS. KULL: No, I don't. Thank you.

MR. SELBY: Okay, Dale?

MR. KISSINGER: Yes, sir. Could we have a more in-depth description of the caregivers program that's given from the VA for family members?

MR. MacGARRIGLE: Oh, there is a website. If you Google Veterans Caregivers, I guess that would be the best way to do it. It was set up I'm not sure how many years ago, but it is -- let's see if I can bring it up here. It's *caregiver.va.gov*, and they also have a support line, 1-855-260-3274, and the website's I think pretty complete. It can give you information on how to apply and advice for caregivers. It's just for the -- right now, the OIF/OEF population.

Is that helpful, or does that answer your question?

MR. KISSINGER: Yes. Oh, no, that's great. I was just wondering what kind of services it provides to the families. Is there counseling available on that site from the VA for family members?

MR. MacGARRIGLE: On the site itself?

MR. KISSINGER: Yes, does it provide resources on it?

MR. MacGARRIGLE: You could call the 855 number. It kind of goes into the site itself. I'm not part of that organization, but they have support groups and the focus groups on improving the program. It's pretty new, so it's -- but so far, as far as I've heard, it's going well, and it's got a tool box for if you're new to caregiving -- you know, your tips and checklists -- because generally if you're a caregiver it's many times a family member who is kind of thrust into that job, if you will, and rather than, you know, learn it all, this way they can talk to other caregivers and support groups and the rest.

MR. KISSINGER: Okay, thank you very much.

MR. SELBY: And, John, did you have a follow-up? John, you still there? Okay.

MR. McCANLISS: Sorry, had you out of view.

MR. SELBY: Oh, that's okay.

MR. McCANLISS: Yes, a quick follow-up. I need to know Ken's title, and also I'm curious about Ed's (inaudible) activities now, in addition to being of course an advocate for this program. So, Ken's title?

MR. MacGARRIGLE: Oh, just program manager for OEF/OIF outreach.

MR. McCANLISS: Thank you.

MAJ. PULIDO: And then I work for the Folds of Honor Foundation, which is a veterans charity which provides the spouses and children of the falling wounded educational scholarships. I have been there practically from day one. I'm what they call a co-founder, and certainly I have a great job -- that I honor and provide support to our military families.

On the other hand, I also started another veteran's charity, local here in the

state of Oklahoma, and now it's kind of gone viral to several other states. It's called Warriors for Freedom, and Warriors for Freedom provides mental, physical, and holistic wellness support to our nation's heroes and their families. Certainly what we do is we connect the families and also our service members with activities that they can do jointly, which means not only bowling, fishing but also hunting and doing other things as a family unit, and that is kind of our focus.

And then I also have a book coming up in 2014 called *Warrior for Freedom: Challenge, Triumph, and Change*, and it's my personal story of what happened to me and what I experienced. And there'll be a mental health focus in the book, as that is one of the areas that I will be looking at as a way to educate the general public on the needs of our heroes and their families.

MR. McCANLISS: Thank you, and thank you for your continued service.

MAJ. PULIDO: Thank you. That means a great deal.

MR. SELBY: And, Judy, did you have a follow-up?

MS. DAVIS: Yes, I did.

Maj. Pulido, you just spoke about the different community issues and things that you guys are doing in Oklahoma. What would you recommend that we do out here in the grassroots to support your effort to create that infrastructure within the civilian community, especially for -- I immediately think of our college-age students that are away from bases, away from family that might have residual (inaudible) the issues and depression as well as veteran dependents and their families? So, what would you recommend how we could support your efforts to kind of get that community outreach going?

MAJ. PULIDO: Well, that's a great question. The first thing that I tell people is that you have to connect with your state Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services and let them know that they ought to have an agenda item in their state regarding supporting veterans and mental health issues, and I think that that's very important. That's what we did here.

The second thing we did is of course we worked very closely with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, closely with the governor's office, in creating agenda items and also goals and objectives that the whole state can rally around.

We also connected and did some events with businesses. Not only were they doing employer-based activities but they also had me come out and speak about mental health and wellness within their space and in their -- as an employer and what they can do to support our men and women in uniform.

You brought up colleges. That's a great avenue of approach, because what we've ended up doing here in the state of Oklahoma -- and in fact we've got

a meeting with all of the schools here in the next month, but through the University of Oklahoma, they were able to bring everyone together to create a listening -- kind of like a town hall kind of atmosphere, listening, hearing -- where servicemembers can tell their story and then the schools can actually implement some strategies to support them. One strategy that has been very effective is that they've created veterans resource centers at the colleges. And I know everyone's doing it across the country, but that's just a way to bring respite, bring connection, and certainly bring out collaboration. And then also, because of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and her hard work and due diligence, because she thinks outside the box, we were able to get -- we actually did a speaker's bureau where we went to various schools across the state and actually talked about these strategies. And so if you ever need me to come out and speak, certainly just pay my expenses, I'll come out and tell the story, because I think the Real Warriors Campaign can be a catalyst for change and movement.

MR. SELBY: Thanks very much, sir.
And, Michelle, did you have a follow-up?

MS. KULL: I just wanted ask Ed, knowing the great efforts that have been made in Oklahoma, how can we connect with you directly outside of this to bring that into our states? I know what you just reiterated, which is extremely important. It's not the easiest thing for many people to really reach their state Department of Veterans Affairs, to have that community outreach on a larger conversation. Is there a way -- like you mentioned about paying your expenses -- I'd like to talk to you about that -- but bringing that into the states who don't know who to initially contact in their own hometown where they need to begin?

MAJ. PULIDO: Yes, and I can certainly -- we can provide my phone number and contact information after this call. I think the best thing is that in order to raise awareness you have to get in front of people and tell the story and then, secondly, have a panel discussion on what the strategies and next steps are; and in creating that, that's how we were able to do it. I don't know any other way to do it, but certainly bringing in a local United Way or a state-based United Way has been a strategy that we've used. Also bringing, as I said, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs into the picture and having those meetings and/or having a conference call and kind of -- basically just kind of tailing on something that maybe is already existing and maybe bringing some awareness to it and possibly - - as I speak across the country, I could tell you that that, to me, has been something that has been very impactful. We're doing something big now in Dallas, Texas, with some folks, because we started a chapter through the Folds of Honor Foundation. Well, now they want to stuff with these cottages at lakes with respite that provides mental health support at these lakes, and it's a project with

the Corps of Engineers. So, there's just all these strategies. But the thing about it is you've got to get in front of people and tell the story, and the only way you can do is you can have -- like we're doing today, you have a professional and you have a servicemember that can talk about the issues.

MS. KULL: You need the individuals (inaudible) who can speak the reality of what they've experienced with that local community.

MAJ. PULIDO: Correct.

MS. KULL: And the community needs to accept that.

MAJ. PULIDO: Correct.

MR. SELBY: Well, thank you very much, sir.

And thank you to all of our bloggers on the line and to our journalists on the line.

Maj. Pulido, I'm going to go to you first. Did you have any closing statements you'd like to make?

MAJ. PULIDO: Well, I just want to thank the Real Warriors Campaign for making this call available and also the Department of Defense and the VA for stepping up to the plate and understanding that we've got to make sure that we take care of our men and women in uniform and their families, and I think that the folks that are on the call today really care about us.

For that, I want to thank you on this week of being thankful, but certainly I couldn't have done it without your support and without your awareness. And please go to the Real Warriors Campaign and have people call the hot line, 866-966-1020 or *RealWarriors.net*. They can view the profiles of PSAs, the articles, the message boards, the materials. And please spread the word, and, certainly, if you ever need an interview or someone to talk to about what's going on in this arena, I'm certainly there and available, and the Real Warriors Campaign staff can let you know who I am and what I'm all about.

And, again, thank you, and on behalf of all of those who serve, we appreciate your endless support on behalf of this grateful nation.

MR. SELBY: Thank you, Maj. Pulido.

And Mr. MacGarrigle, did you have a closing statement?

MR. MacGARRIGLE: I'll just say ditto, and, yes, thanks to Real Warriors for this call and for all the work they do on behalf of the folks who come back from combat and their families. And, yes, if there is trouble in your life,

please get hold of somebody whether it's the Real Warriors Outreach Center or the VA suicide hotline, or just, you know, the Vet Center or someone you -- your old military buddies. But thank you again to Real Warriors for this all.

MR. SELBY: Thank you very much, sir.

Thank you again to everybody on the line and especially our speakers today and our bloggers and journalists. Great questions and comments today.

As I wrap this up, I'd like to let you know that there will be a print transcript online within the next 24 hours from this call, along with an MP3 of this call. That will be online at *dodlive.mil*.

Once again, I want to thank everybody for being on the line. This concludes today's event. Feel free to disconnect at this time.

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