



# **Family Handbook for Public Affairs Resources and Dealing with the Civilian News Media**

**Provided by your supporting Public Affairs Office:**

**PAO - xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx**

**Pager xxx-xxxx**

**Media Relations Officer - xxxxxxxxxxxxxx**

**PAO on-call: Pager, xxx-xxxx**

**Cell phone, xxx-xxxx**



*Dear Family Readiness Group Member,*

*We know at a time like this, the last thing on your mind is the news media or public affairs. But with the recent terrorist attacks against our country, we're finding that our lives will never quite be the same again. The challenges our soldiers face will be very complex. Army families must remain steadfast and be prepared for the long haul, continuing to support their loved ones in uniform.*

*In today's media-intensive environment, one way to provide support is for everyone to understand the importance of telling the Army story and to be ready to do just that. Families **are** part of the Army story and news reporters will be interested in what you have to say. It's very possible that you'll be contacted by members of the local or national news media (newspaper, radio, or television) for your thoughts and opinions.*

*As the installation's public affairs officer, I offer you and your group the resources of my staff. We're available to conduct media training to help you understand the role of the news media and show how you can work with reporters. We're also available to assist with your media contacts at any time.*

*Please call the Public Affairs Office at xxx-xxxx if your group is interested in media training or any other public affairs support. We'll be glad to meet with you.*

*Sincerely,*

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

xxxxxx

*Public Affairs Officer*

# How the Public Affairs Office can help you

## Command Information

### *Post Newspaper*

Timely, informative articles on the current situation  
Announcements of special events for family members  
Publicity for your organization's events, meetings, etc.

### Commander's Access Channel

Up-to-the-minute information on many topics  
Reaches all cable subscribers on post

### All-users e-mail

The quickest way to get information to every Army computer on post.

## Public Information

### Media facilitator

Assist with writing statements for your use.  
Be with you when you meet the media.

### Media training

Prepare you before you go to an interview.  
Provide you with answers to possible media questions.

### Radio stations

Tune in during emergency situations to get the latest information.

### Commander's Access Channel

Watch for messages on the current situation.

# The Media

Mission readiness and family readiness are complimentary concepts. Both rely on using information as a critical tool. Wide distribution of information can enhance recruiting, retention, and family readiness. At the same time, wide distribution of unfavorable information can damage the image of the U.S. Army and your unit, and threaten the morale of family members. Incorrect or incomplete information can mislead family members and cause unnecessary concern during periods of mobilization and deployment. The bottom line is this: Messages you want to send about family readiness can be aided by using the news media.

You cannot dictate what the media says about you, nor can you necessarily attract their interest when you want it. There are times, however, when the media will be interested in your unit and your family members. If you are prepared, you can use the news media as a great tool to get your key messages out. Deployments and reunions are always newsworthy events that will attract press attention -- so will bad news, such as casualties.

The news media must always receive accurate, complete and timely information, whether it comes from you, your unit, or your family members. Well-informed unit members and their families can be confident interview subjects capable of giving the press the full story.

Learning to deal with the news media is vital for family members. Both the service member and the family members must understand their rights during interaction with the media.

Everyone needs to plan for a media event well before it occurs. You should identify the three most favorable and three most unfavorable questions you might receive from the press. Prepare answers for those questions and rehearse how you would handle follow-up questions. Never forget -- the press can serve as a highly effective conduit for information which will boost the morale of not only the unit and its members, but other family members as well.

The news media is an integral part of American society and should be cultivated on a continuing basis. Not only can it be used as a means of providing information during periods of deployment, but it can also be used to enhance the public's image of the U.S. Army, individual units, soldiers, and the families that support them.

Media wants to talk with soldiers, commanders and subject matter experts and family members, *NOT* "talking heads" or PAOs. You are the ones with credibility who can best tell the Army's story to the American people.

## What it means

### **On-the-record; background; deep background and off-the-record**

**On-the-record:** Everything you say can be published or broadcast, identifying you by name, title, etc.

**Background:** Everything you say is subject to publication or broadcast, identifying you by whatever ground rules are established, such as "a spouse of...", "a mother of...", etc., but not by name.

**Deep background:** Everything you say is subject to publication or broadcast, identifying you by whatever ground rules are established, but ensuring that your identity is protected. Examples: A knowledgeable family member, an on-post source, etc.

**Off-the-record:** DON'T use this unless your life depends on it! First, reporters don't like to use it. It is only valid if you and the reporter agree *in advance* of anything that is said off-the-record. You can't say something and retroactively declare or request that it is off-the-record. Assume that the reporter can and will make every attempt to get the same information elsewhere. Since you have already given the information, the reporter will merely use that as ammo to confirm it with other sources.

# Media Guidelines for Family Members

Know your rights. It is up to you whether or not to speak to reporters. If you do choose to speak, you may stop at any time. How much information you choose to provide the media is up to you. Based on your wishes, the public affairs office can provide as much or as little information to the media as you desire.

Know the role and purpose of the American press. They perform an important job in our democracy by keeping the public informed. It is not harassment if they call you at home or stop you out in public asking for an interview. It becomes harassment only when they persist after you have said NO.

Know the reporter's identity. Write down the reporter's name, telephone number and news organization before answering any questions. Do this even if you are not going to comment; this will discourage the reporter from persisting after you have said NO.

Know your limits. It's best not to talk about anything of which you do not have first-hand knowledge. A response of "I don't know" is perfectly fine in response to questions for which you have no answer. Do not speculate or engage in rumor or gossip.

Know who will hear what you say. Even family members might have sensitive information, which should not be released. With today's technology, unauthorized sources can access what you say the moment you say it. On a positive note, your enthusiastic response about your spouse's mission can help build morale and show American resolve.

If you reside in government housing, you may not invite media to your home without prior clearance from the Public Affairs Office. Media must be escorted when on post.

As a matter of courtesy, whether you live on or off post, please contact the Public Affairs Office when media approaches you. The PAO is available to advise and assist you in any contact with the media.

Last, but not least: Be careful about information you share. It would be typical terrorist tactics and asymmetric warfare to strike at the family members of deployed soldiers, especially for those who have gained a profile in the media. An attack on family members would be disastrous for the morale of deployed soldiers and that is precisely why such an attack is a possibility.

If your spouse calls home with information about the unit's return to the states, about casualties, or how the mission is going, remember that deployments spawn rumors. Some of what you are told could be sensitive, wrong or subject to change. Unless information is verified, it is best to keep it to yourself. Keep in touch with your Chain of Concern for accurate information.

For your own safety and security, as well as other family members, it is best not to announce to the general public that you are alone by giving out personal information such as your home address or telephone number. You may also want to consider not releasing your last name or the name of your children's school.

# Tips for media interviews

**Before the Interview:** Talk to your PAO. Know the reporter, publication and audience. Know deadlines and formats. Respect the media's curiosity and its right to know about matters of public interest. Know what you want to say. Have two or three main points. Know current issues and positions. Do your homework. Prepare for the toughest questions. "Worst case it." Know the ground rules.

## Interview Tips:

**ABC's:** Be accurate, brief and clear. Be quotable: Conversational, colorful. Don't use military jargon or acronyms, and don't be long-winded. Be positive: Asked about a problem? Talk about solutions! Make your point: Say what YOU want to say. Don't let false or negative statements go uncorrected and don't repeat these in your answer. Address the audience (reader) and NOT the reporter. DON'T let the reporter interrupt or cut you off when you're not finished. **NOTE:** If you feel unsure of what you will say, it is best to prepare a statement in advance so as not to be led to other subjects that you choose not to discuss.

**Never:** ...Say "no comment." ... Answer speculative or hypothetical questions. You may, however, offer personal views as long as the reporter understands that it is YOUR opinion and not necessarily that of the Army. ...Lie. Assume the reporter knows the facts or has other sources. ...Talk off the record, unless you trust the reporter more than God and your Mother. ...Ask to review a story or check the facts. ... Get mad. Always keep your cool.

**For Television Interviews:** Review the above. Wear appropriate clothing and look sharp. Keep your bearing, but don't be too relaxed or stiff; don't fidget. Be pleasant, sincere and confident. Keep your bearing **BEFORE AND AFTER** the camera is on. Assume whatever you say will be recorded (microphones often are left turned on when cameras are off).

**You Set The Rules:** Make it clear to the reporter at the start of the interview what matters you choose not to discuss and if you want to be filmed, photographed or taped during the interview.

**Stop The Interview If Needed:** Feel free to end the interview at any time if you feel the reporter is being abrasive, intrusive, or otherwise insensitive to your wishes.

**Open Door:** Keep in mind that once you grant an interview, other members of the media may also contact you. Also, you may open yourself up to unscrupulous individuals who may try to take unfair advantage of your grief. Remember, it is hard to close the door once it is opened.

**Bottom Line:** If you don't want to see it in print, or have it broadcast on radio or TV, please don't say it. The public has the right to know what the Army does. The media is the most effective means for telling our story. You don't hit a home run every time. Sometimes the message isn't what the media and public want to hear. The truth is what they must hear if we are to maintain credibility.

When in doubt, please call the installation Public Affairs Office for assistance.

## **Examples of Questions a Reporter Might Ask**

Below is a listing of likely media questions you or the installation Public Affairs Office may face when dealing with the press. These questions are *not* intended to offend you, but are designed to prepare you for what you can expect to face in case you choose to speak with the media.

1. How long will your spouse be deployed?
2. What's been done to prepare your family for this deployment?
3. Do your children understand why daddy/mommy is going away?
4. What sort of support are you getting/will you get from the Army?
5. Do you know where your spouse is going?
6. Do you think your spouse has received adequate training for the job ahead?
7. Considering the recent terrorist attacks, does your family feel safe living on the installation/in the local area?
8. Do you support the reasons for this deployment? Why? Why not?
9. Are you angry/upset about this deployment?
10. Do you have confidence in the Army's leadership?
11. How will you stay informed about your spouses whereabouts/well being?
12. What family problems do you foresee during the absence of your spouse?
13. Is the soldier survived by a family?
14. Is the family living on the installation/in the local community?
15. How many children does the soldier have? What are their ages?
16. May we talk with the spouse/family?

17. Does the soldier have family members residing in other locations? Who? Where? What is their relation?
18. Will there be a memorial service?
19. Will news media be allowed to attend the memorial? Can we speak to the families after the service?
20. When will the remains arrive in the United States?
21. Where will the soldier be buried? When?
22. Where will the family members go? When?