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STATEMENT BY

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CASUALTY NOTIFICATION HEARING

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Chairman Snyder, Representative McHugh, distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for providing me an opportunity to appear before you today on behalf of America's Army. The Army, over 1 million strong, serves proudly around the globe. Your continued support for our Army is critical and we thank you. There is no greater act of heroism than serving this great country in uniform. For more than two centuries, American men and women have given their lives to gain and defend the freedoms we enjoy today. In return for their bravery, we owe them our deepest gratitude.

Our Soldiers are this generation's heroes. They continue to make history demonstrating to America that our Army is the best. This generation shows that the All-Volunteer Force can be called upon time and time again to persevere in prolonged conflict. We owe our Soldiers and their Families the highest standards of support when they make the greatest sacrifice for their country.

The Soldier remains the centerpiece of our formations. Honoring the sacrifice of Soldiers and their Families is the mission of the Army's Casualty and Mortuary Affairs Operations Center (CMAOC). We take seriously our obligation to our fallen Soldiers to support their Families during their time of grief and sorrow. Our Warrior Ethos states, "[We] will never leave a fallen comrade." We have that same covenant with the Families of our fallen Soldiers. We are committed to providing Families with accurate and timely information as soon as it is known and verified. Our goal is to have the system as close to 100-percent correct as possible out of respect for the memory of our fallen comrades and to provide solace to their Families. The Army leadership expects that those Families who suffer the loss of a Soldier will receive the fullest possible accounting for the circumstances that led up to that Soldier's death, whether under hostile or non-hostile circumstances.

As I speak to you today, we have provided casualty notification to the Families of over 21,848 Soldiers who have been killed or wounded since the start of the Global War on Terrorism. Since April 2004 and the death of Corporal (CPL) Patrick Tillman, we have conducted over 2,100 official casualty notifications. Of these, 16 were initially

reported as possible friendly fire and later confirmed. In 15 additional cases initially reported as hostile, we made re-notifications when we learned of possible friendly fire.

The Army is a very complex organization. We continually strive to improve our procedures and processes, including the notification process for deaths caused by friendly fire. Casualty notification to Families of our fallen Soldiers depends upon timely receipt of accurate reports from theater commanders. Thus, we continue to work with our commanders in the field to ensure they understand the importance of the timeliness and accuracy of the information they provide to us.

The current Army's Casualty Notification Process for Notifying the Families of Deceased and Wounded Soldiers

The Army's policy is to notify all Family members listed by the Soldier on the Department of the Defense Form 93, Record of Emergency Data, in a professional and respectful manner. Notification is conducted in-person, by a two-Soldier team in Class A uniform, between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. local, unless special circumstances arise.

The Casualty and Mortuary Affairs Operations Center in Alexandria, Virginia, directs and oversees Army casualty notifications. One of the Casualty Assistance Centers (CAC), located at 27 geographically-dispersed United States and 6 overseas sites, will be directed to execute the casualty notification.

The goal is to notify the primary next of kin, who is the person most closely related to the Soldier, within 4 hours of the CAC receiving the initial casualty report. The primary next of kin is usually the spouse for married Soldiers and the parents for unmarried Soldiers. This procedure is directed by Army Regulation (AR 600-8-1). The only time this procedure would change is if we have exhausted all avenues to locate the primary next of kin. In such cases, we would seek alternatives (local authorities such as hospitals, police agencies, etc.) then, perhaps, neighbors. In cases where the spouse is the primary next of kin, we would complete these actions before contacting the Soldier's parents.

The notification team consists of a notification officer and a Chaplain if available without unduly delaying the notification. The notification officer must be at least of the same rank as the casualty, and be at least a Sergeant First Class, or higher, for enlisted Soldiers; Chief Warrant Officer Two, or higher, for Warrant Officers; and Captain, or higher, for commissioned officers. If a Chaplain is unavailable, another Soldier in the grade of Staff Sergeant or higher, accompanies the notification officer.

After the primary next of kin is notified, the Army notifies the remaining next of kin listed on the DD Form 93 (Emergency Data Card). In the event the notification team cannot locate the primary next of kin, notification to the other Family members can proceed on a case-by-case basis.

For Soldiers who have been wounded or become ill, CMAOC will coordinate with the appropriate CAC and rear detachment commander to conduct telephonic notification for Soldiers (Very Seriously Injured/III (VSI), Seriously Injured/III (SI), Hostile NOT Seriously Injured (Hostile NSI)) within 2 hours of receiving the official report.

The Army has made numerous changes after reviewing our handling of the notification process in friendly fire cases, including CPL Tillman's case. Perhaps most significantly, the Army now requires units to conduct an investigation of any hostile death. As a result of this policy change, Families are receiving more accurate and complete information.

Another Army policy improvement requires a field grade officer to review initial casualty information to verify accuracy based on all the information known at the time. This is critical because it is this initial casualty report on which we base our notifications to the next of kin.

Army Criminal Investigation Command and unit commanders are required to notify the Casualty and Mortuary Affairs Operations Center of on-going death investigations and provide copies upon completion. The Center then cross references

these investigations with the initial casualty circumstances to ensure there are no discrepancies between reports.

Casualty Assistance Centers are now required to certify Casualty Notification Officers and Casualty Assistance Officers as trained for duty prior to an assignment as a notification or assistance officer. We have produced a training DVD, and we have made training materials available online to assist in this process.

We have instituted a two-person casualty notification team consisting of a notifier and chaplain, or mature second Soldier if no chaplain is on hand. Chaplains now participate in almost 75% of our notifications, and this percentage is continually growing.

When Friendly Fire is Suspected

Reporting units must report all suspected friendly-fire incidents to the CMAOC as soon as evidence leads personnel on the ground to believe that friendly-fire might have caused a casualty incident during hostilities. This action helps ensure that the information provided is timely and accurate. Reporting units will not wait until completion of a formal investigation to provide the information to the CMAOC as happened in some cases in the past.

When a friendly-fire incident is suspected, we require units to place an immediate call to CMAOC followed by an initial or supplemental casualty report. The report must provide detailed facts concerning the incident, and identify whether Allied Forces, U.S. Forces, or Unknown were the cause of the death. If a casualty results from suspected friendly fire, but is unconfirmed, the casualty report will state "Unknown." In the event the suspected friendly fire is discovered after submitting the initial casualty report, the reporting unit must immediately submit a supplemental casualty report to the CMAOC to update or correct the information provided in the initial report. Families are then notified that the incident is under investigation.

When a friendly-fire incident is suspected, unit commanders must alert the combatant commander through their chain of command and initiate an investigation.

As soon as the inflicting force is determined by the investigation, the reporting unit must submit a supplemental casualty report to CMAOC. Once the investigation is approved for release to the Families by the Combatant Commander, CMAOC will contact the Family's Casualty Assistance Officer and offer a Family presentation to the primary next of kin. A Colonel, normally from the Soldier's chain of command, will conduct the Family presentation outlining the facts and findings of the Soldier's death.

Initiatives Being Taken by the Army

The Army has recently implemented the following additional measures to further improve our processes. On February 16, 2006, the Secretary of the Army directed CMAOC to establish a mechanism to meet the needs of surviving Families members 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. On April 20, 2006, CMAOC established the Long-Term Case Management Branch to provide long term support to family members.

Several recent friendly-fire incidents in Iraq and Afghanistan have highlighted the need to provide a single source document that clearly explains all actions that commanders must accomplish. On April 4, 2007, The Vice Chief of Staff, Army, directed the development of Government Training Aid (GTA) for field commanders to detail all required action when friendly fire is suspected. The Army will distribute the training aid to Commanders serving around the world in the days ahead.

On May 7, 2006, The Secretary of the Army directed a review of all Army accident investigation policies, regulations, and training, to include suspected friendly fire incidents. Additionally, the Secretary of the Army directed a review of all Army casualty reporting policies, regulations, and training, focusing on casualties resulting from friendly fire. He also directed an assessment of the effectiveness of the updated regulatory changes recently implemented. The purpose of the review was to determine if there

were any cases with discrepancies in casualty reporting from before the Secretary of the Army directed policy changes.

Conclusion

The Army recognizes and deeply regrets the pain and suffering caused when we fail to meet the standards in casualty notification. We believe that the changes we have made, and the procedures now underway, ensure that the Families of our fallen Soldiers receive timely and accurate information.

The Army's goal is to be open and honest with the Families of our fallen Soldiers, to care for their well-being, and to keep them informed of developments or changed circumstances. We owe them nothing less. The proper care for our service members, living and deceased, and their Families is our uncompromising goal. It is the least we, as an Army and a nation at war, can do.