

# DCoE in *Action*

Vol. 3/No. 7 | July 2010



*This issue focuses on the unique challenges faced by our National Guard and Reserve members and highlights resources that are available to assist these warriors and their families.*

## **NICoE: Instrument of Hope, Healing, Discovery, Learning**

More than 1,000 people attended the June 24 ribbon cutting ceremony of the [National Intrepid Center of Excellence \(NICoE\)](#), a state-of-the-art center dedicated to advancing treatment, research and education for complex combat-related traumatic brain injury (TBI) and psychological health conditions affecting service members and their families. Representatives from the Departments of Defense (DoD) and Veterans Affairs (VA), the [Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund](#), service members and families from across the country attended the monumental event.

NICoE is fully equipped with a variety of cutting-edge technologies that will be used to plan the treatment of service members seeking recovery and reintegration into active duty. These technologies include the Computer Assisted Rehabilitation Environment (CAREN), virtual reality capabilities, a Digital Imaging Visualization Environment (DIVE) and advanced neuroimaging equipment. NICoE will also have a training and education component and will accept a small cohort of patients beginning this fall.

“The journey has really just begun—we’re at the edge of the beginning of our new capabilities to better understand



Kenneth Fisher, Chairman of the Fisher House Foundation (left), Arnold Fisher, Honorary Chairman of the Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund (right) and Gen. James E. Cartwright, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (center) cut the ribbon to officially open NICoE during the dedication ceremony | DoD photo by Cherie Cullen

those things that are preventing our wounded warriors from regaining that quality of life,” said Dr. Thomas DeGraba, NICoE deputy director.

CAREN, one of five machines available worldwide, is a system that allows virtual reality to be incorporated into the assessment and rehabilitation of injured service members. This system contains

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**DEFENSE CENTERS  
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For Psychological Health  
& Traumatic Brain Injury

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## Welcome Message from NICoE Director



Dr. James P. Kelly, director, National Intrepid Center of Excellence

In last month's edition, we featured articles on technologies for treating traumatic brain injury (TBI) and psychological health conditions, such as the Computer Assisted Rehabilitation Environment (CAREN) that will be used at the [National Intrepid Center of Excellence \(NICoE\)](#). In late June, we celebrated the dedication of NICoE, which stands as an extraordinary example of what a public-private partnership can accomplish.

Representatives from the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs, the [Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund](#), and most importantly, service members and their families from across the country, were all in attendance for the dedication of the state-of-the-art facility.

NICoE is dedicated to advancing the diagnosis, clinical care and research of complex psychological health and TBI conditions affecting service members, with the goal of restoration to a quality of life that allows them to return to active duty and reintegrate with family and friends. With this as our focus, the center will be an instrument of hope, healing, discovery and learning.

I am immensely proud of NICoE and the Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund, as this was an effort that would not have been possible without the coordinated efforts of everyone involved. What makes this so special is that NICoE is a gift by the American people for our wounded warriors and will be a bridge between the civilian and the military health care systems.

Members of the National Guard and Reserve will be among the service members that NICoE will support. With

more than 123,000 National Guard and Reserve component personnel activated in the Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom missions, these warriors play an integral role in keeping America safe.

These service members face unique challenges as they juggle the demands of both military and civilian jobs and raise their families in civilian communities, as opposed to on bases. Caring for these warriors and their families means ensuring they have access to the health care resources they need both in theater and at home, and I am committed to supporting these heroes.

I encourage you to check out this edition. Read about NICoE and articles featuring a variety of military, government and community programs and resources that are specifically for members of the National Guard and Reserve.

We would like to hear from you. Please continue to [share](#) your thoughts with DCoE about how to help our service members and their families.

Dr. James P. Kelly, director,  
National Intrepid Center of Excellence

“NICoE is dedicated to advancing the diagnosis, clinical care and research of complex psychological health and TBI conditions affecting service members...”

## NICoE: Instrument of Hope, Healing, Discovery, Learning (continued from page 1)

a large motion platform with an embedded treadmill that moves in sync with virtual environments projected onto a large, curved screen.

Virtual Reality capabilities include a sensory suite and physiological suite, as well as a fire arms training simulator (FATS), used to re-create simulations in more than 200 combat scenarios. A driving simulator will be used to detect cognitive, visual and motor skill impairments and will assist in maintaining individual independence and mobility. It will also be used for assessment, rehabilitation, research and training.

The DIVE room will have multiple digital images of the brain and other neurological images of patients that can be projected three dimensionally onto a large, curved screen, which will provide a forum for interdisciplinary staff discussion. The neuroimaging technology includes a positron emission tomography (PET), computed tomography (CT), magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and Magnetoencephalography (MEG).

NICoE will focus on physical therapy, speech/language pathology and recreational therapy as part of the recovery process. It will have continuity and concierge services, which will be critical to establishing an environment that is attentive to the service member's needs and the family's needs—before, during and after their stay. Beyond the advanced technological capabilities, NICoE will also incorporate a holistic and interdisciplinary approach to patient and family care. This holistic approach continues with the center's "Central Park," an indoor, serene, naturalistic center that will provide a place of solace and relaxation for service members and families.



U.S. Marines wounded in combat applaud during the NICoE dedication ceremony | DoD photo by Cherie Cullen

“CAREN, one of only five machines available worldwide, is a system that allows virtual reality to be incorporated into the assessment and rehabilitation of injured service members.”

“To be that place of hope, healing, discovery and learning, that place where the next generation of innovative care occurs, it's tremendous,” said DeGraba.

For more information, please visit the [NICoE](#) section on the DCoE website.

Connect with NICoE's social media applications:

[www.facebook.com/  
NationalIntrepidCenterofExcellence](http://www.facebook.com/NationalIntrepidCenterofExcellence)

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A wounded warrior salutes during the playing of the national anthem at the NICoE dedication ceremony | DoD photo by Cherie Cullen

## DoD/VA Offers Resources to Help Guard and Reserve Members

Approximately 1.1 million members of the Guard and Reserve protect our nation. With ongoing high-operations tempo overseas, guardsmen and reservists across all services will continue to deploy.

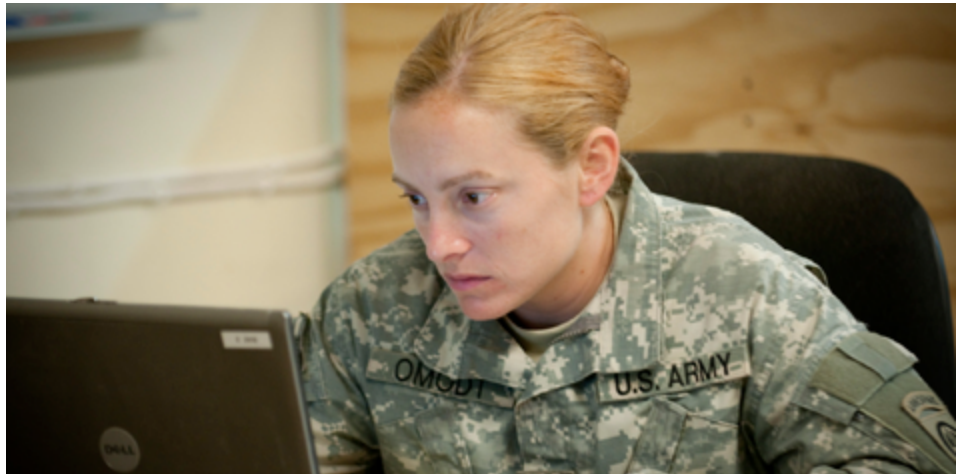
Since September 11, 2001, nearly 775,000 Guard and Reserve members have served or are currently deployed. These deployments bring increased exposure to conditions that may affect psychological health, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In 2009, there were 17,538 hospitalizations for psychological health issues throughout the military compared to 11,156 for physical injuries and battle wounds.

“Our National Guard and Reserve members find themselves increasingly on the front lines fighting to protect our homeland,” said Lt. Col. Christopher Robinson, DCoE senior executive director for psychological health.

The Departments of Defense (DoD) and Veterans Affairs (VA) continue to take action ensuring the psychological readiness of our armed forces by: providing extensive resources to manage psychological health conditions; encouraging service members to seek treatment; and working to create an environment for service members to ultimately improve and thrive.

One way DoD is helping ensure psychological readiness is by improving access to care and by embedding psychological health workers among deployed units. This allows service members to get the care they need when they need it most.

The department is also focused on families of all service members. Families are connected to important information through toll-free hotlines, such as the



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Michael J. MacLeod

24/7 [DCoE Outreach Center](#) and online resources.

Since DoD is aware that Guard and Reserve members face unique transition challenges, a director of psychological health has been appointed in every state. The director's goal is to help provide consistent support to guardsmen, reservists and their families.

Guardsmen and reservists can face additional stressors such as returning home from service without access to community support, living far from base without nearby unit camaraderie, or immediately transitioning from their military to civilian job.

A variety of resources and programs are available to assist those in the National Guard and Reserve:

- DCoE's [Real Warriors Campaign](#) provides helpful information and resources on psychological care and treatment.
- The [Rural Assistance Center](#) provides numerous resources and information for those living in rural areas.
- For members with children, [Sesame Street Family Connections](#) provides

resources for parents and children to manage deployment-related challenges.

- The [Courage to Care Campaign](#), launched by the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, provides tips and resources for those transitioning back to the civilian workforce.

To help service members separate from the military, the [VA's Vet Center](#) program provides counseling, outreach and referral services to eligible veterans and their families, including those who served in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). VA maintains a list of medical centers, Vet Centers, outpatient clinics and benefits offices in a handy [state-by-state map](#). VA offers a broad range of psychological health services for veterans of all eras of service, including specialty PTSD clinics. Thousands of new healthcare providers have been hired by VA in the past several years to provide evidence-based treatment for psychological health conditions.

For service members, including Guard and Reserve members, DCoE collaborated with DoD Health Affairs and VA

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## Yellow Ribbon Program: Vital Link for National Guard and Reserve

Making the change from civilian to war fighter and back is exciting and at times stressful. More than 770,000 National Guard and Reserve soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines have made that transition since September 11, 2001. Most National Guard and Reserve service members and their families don't live near military installations and don't have direct access to the information, resources and benefits available to families throughout the deployment cycle. The Department of Defense (DoD) [Yellow Ribbon Program](#) provides that vital link for our Guard and Reserve members.

When Army Reserve Lt. Col. Ed Beck first heard about Yellow Ribbon, it was after his third deployment. He and his wife, Linda, decided to take advantage of the program and travelled to St. Louis to a weekend-long post-deployment Yellow Ribbon Event with almost 1,000 soldiers and families from the 88th Regional Support Command.

"I wish we had had [Yellow Ribbon] after my first two deployments," said Beck. "Just getting plugged into all those service providers out there—I've been in the military 28 years and I didn't know all the things we were eligible for."

Yellow Ribbon events now include all National Guard and Reserve components



The Beck family: Their Yellow Ribbon Story | Photo courtesy of Yellow Ribbon Program  
[www.yellowribbon.mil/multimedia/edlinda](http://www.yellowribbon.mil/multimedia/edlinda)



before, during and after deployments. Most events last one to two days and give service members the opportunity to reunite with fellow unit members. They also offer family members a chance to meet. At most events, service members and their families take advantage of workshop-style sessions on issues such

as financial planning, marriage and family, combat stress, and health care benefits.

Guardsmen and reservists who have deployed can find out more about Yellow Ribbon events by contacting their chain of command, or by visiting [www.yellowribbon.mil/events.html](http://www.yellowribbon.mil/events.html).

For more information, visit [www.yellowribbon.mil](http://www.yellowribbon.mil).

*The Yellow Ribbon Program contributed to this article.* 

## DoD/VA Offers Resources to Help Guard and Reserve Members


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to develop [inTransition](#). The program provides support for service members receiving psychological health treatment as they transition between health care systems or providers due to a change in status, relocation or return to civilian life. With the help of a Transition Support Coach, service members are successfully connected with a new healthcare

provider who allows them to continue care through their transition.

"In 2007 DCoE was created to ensure all service members, to include members of the Guard and Reserve, veterans and their families, have access to resources for psychological health and traumatic brain injury," added Robinson. "DoD and

VA continue to increase efforts to improve the support for Guard and Reserve members and to ensure they have access to the health care resources they need both in theater and at home as they continue to honorably serve our nation."

For a full listing of National Guard and Reserve resources, click [here](#). 

## Guard and Reserve Members Face Unique Deployment Challenges


Members of the National Guard and Reserve experience challenges that are unique from other service members—they must balance their military service with their civilian life. Often living far from a military base and other service members, it's important for guardsmen and reservists to identify available support and resources to guide them through times of transition such as deployment.

Pre-deployment can be a stressful time for all service members and their families. For Guard and Reserve members, it's especially important to be prepared. Involve your family and loved ones early in the deployment process. The better they understand, the more support they can provide during each phase of deployment.



U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Elisabeth A. Matulewicz

Likewise, when you return from your deployment, the transition to civilian life can be stressful. Work with your

family and employer to develop a plan. By setting realistic goals, making life normal again is possible. 

### Pre-deployment Tips for Guard and Reserve

#### ***Prepare your home for a long deployment***

Tend to any home repair projects before you leave. Make sure the person who will be left responsible knows who to contact if an issue arises. It is important that this person is aware of their responsibilities, knows how to respond and can make decisions in your absence

#### ***Check over your finances and any legal issues***

You don't want to worry about your finances or any legal issues that might occur while you are deployed. Make the necessary arrangements and share important information with those you trust to ensure these matters will be resolved

#### ***Prepare children for the absence***

An absence will undoubtedly have an impact on children, but it doesn't have to be a negative one. It is important to keep the lines of communication open between deployed parents and their children. The sooner they are involved in this process, the more prepared they will be to handle the separation, especially young children

#### ***Prepare spouses, parents and siblings for deployments***

Separations from loved ones are never easy. Talking about concerns, expectations and plans with family members can help families deal emotionally with your deployment. Leaving may require a shifting of responsibilities, so adequately plan and develop the best strategies that fit your family. This will ensure everyone experiences less stress during this period

#### ***Communicate openly with your employer***

Your civilian employer understands your military responsibility, but it's important to discuss any concerns you may have prior to your military leave. Also, organize your work in a way that someone else can easily understand and can take it over until you return

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## Post-deployment Tips for Guard and Reserve

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### ***Take time to readjust***

Giving yourself time to decompress when you come back is essential. Months of working long hours in high-stress conditions takes a toll physically, mentally and spiritually. Therefore, get plenty of rest and take care of any health issues that may have developed. This will not only be a benefit to yourself, but also allow you to be in a better state when dealing with family members and friends

### ***Restore relationships with family and friends***

Expect family routines, daily activities and social dynamics to have changed while deployed. Good communication will help as you begin to rebuild healthy relationships. Be patient and understanding as you reconnect with loved ones

### ***Know the signs and symptoms of combat stress***

Experiencing uncomfortable physical, mental, emotional and behavioral symptoms such as frustration and detachment, having difficulty concentrating or having flashbacks are normal stress reactions. However, if you're concerned that symptoms are not getting better or have become worse after several weeks back, consider speaking with an expert. To get started, contact the DCoE Outreach Center at (866) 966-1020

### ***Reconnect at work***

Returning to your civilian job after a long absence presents some challenges. Before jumping in, make sure you understand what took place while you were away and what your current responsibilities will be now that you're back. A period of adjustment is expected before feeling connected at your workplace again

### ***If you're not, get connected within the community***

Getting involved outside of work and family will help you as you readjust. Search for opportunities or support systems that are in line with your interests

More tips and support resources are available in the [Guard & Reserve](#) section on the DCoE website.

## ESGR Supports Guard and Reserve Members Returning to Civilian Jobs

Nearly 775,000 members of the Guard and Reserve have been deployed for overseas contingency operations since September 11, 2001. The Department of Defense (DoD) shares these service members with their civilian employers, many of whom provide significant support to these employees.

Guard and Reserve service members called to active duty are protected by the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, referred to as [USERRA](#). Reentering



the workforce after a long absence has its challenges, especially for those returning from deployments overseas. When military members experience difficulty with their civilian employers, the [Employer Support of the Guard and](#)

[Reserve \(ESGR\)](#) provides ombudsman services for dispute resolution.

ESGR, a DoD organization established in 1972, seeks to develop and promote a culture in which all American employers support and value the military service of their employees with ESGR as the principal advocate within DoD. The organization does this by advocating relevant initiatives, recognizing outstanding support, increasing awareness of applicable

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## ESGR Supports Guard and Reserve Members Returning to Civilian Jobs (continued from page 7)

laws and resolving conflict between employers and service members.

ESGR's services are free for both employers and military employees. ESGR handles deployment related issues and a variety of situations including the inability to take time off work for military training or facing unemployment as a result of multiple or extended tours of duty.

"Members of the Guard and Reserve are truly admirable," said Maj. Melissa Phillips, ESGR Strategic Communications. "They must maintain their training, skills and abilities in both their civilian and military occupations. They must leave behind their civilian environment for military duty at a moment's notice. ESGR helps these service members transition between their military service and their civilian position by ensuring their rights under federal law are protected. At the same time, we work with employers so they understand the integral role these service members play in the defense of our nation."

Nearly 4,700 trained ESGR volunteers across 54 states, territories and the District of Columbia are available to provide information and counseling, while conducting a wide range of programs designed to foster employer support of Guard and Reserve members.

"By working with members of the Guard and Reserve and their employers, ESGR volunteers help maintain the integrity of our armed forces and ease the transition for these service members and their families when they return to the civilian workforce," said Phillips.

While ombudsman services are among ESGR's most notable resources, the organization uses outreach programs to improve and maintain ties with both



U.S. Air Force photo by Abner Guzman

public and private employers. Volunteers and community leaders network and discuss issues arising from employee participation in the Guard and Reserve.

Through programs such as Boss Lift and Briefings with the Boss, employers are exposed to their employees' military duties and see the direct contribution their support has to the nation's defense.

ESGR also offers a variety of recognition programs for employers, including the Patriot Award, Pro Patria Award and the

[Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award](#), presented annually to up to 15 employers who go above and beyond the requirements of the law, while providing outstanding support to their Guard and Reserve employees.

"Whether serving in uniform, or supporting those who do – We All Serve," said Phillips.

Check out [Tips for National Guard and Reserve Members](#) and explore more ESGR resources at [www.esgr.org](http://www.esgr.org).



## Real Warriors, Real Battles, Real Strength: Staff Sgt. Meg Krause

As a Real Warriors Campaign profilee, U.S. Army Reservist Staff Sgt. Meg Krause is sharing her story about seeking treatment for the invisible wounds of war and encouraging fellow service members to reach out for the care they may need. Since the launch of her profile in October 2009, Krause has shared her story at events nationwide on behalf of DCoE's Real Warriors Campaign.

In January 2002, I joined the U.S. Army as a health care specialist. During my five years of active duty service, I served in Iraq, where I was on patrols and convoys. Like most deployed service members, I was exposed to standard missiles and small arms fire, and experienced improvised explosive device (IED) attacks.

When I returned home after my deployment, I did not think my psychological health was an issue. I knew the signs and the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but I thought I was going to be fine. I talked about my deployment and assumed that the few nightmares and flashbacks I was experiencing were normal and easy to cope with. I immediately began college coursework and shortly after I joined the Army Reserve; I was active as a soldier, a student and a volunteer in my community. As I prepared to graduate from college, I started to notice things were getting worse, but I still didn't reach out for care right away.

After a long night of drinking, I didn't show up for formation during drill weekend. My NCO finally got me on the phone and encouraged me to talk to my first sergeant. When I talked with my first sergeant, he encouraged me to reach out for care for PTSD. With the support of my Reserve unit, I was able to find the care I needed through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).



Staff Sgt. Meg Krause | Photo courtesy of Real Warriors Campaign

The VA was able to give me the help I needed exactly when I needed it and in a manner that made sense to me.

Reservists may think that because they are only at drill one weekend a month and two weeks a year they don't have the support they need when seeking help. I found that not only are NCOs supportive and understanding 24/7, there is absolutely no shame in seeking treatment—the barriers I feared were in my head. I was promoted to staff sergeant the day after I told my leader that I needed treatment and I'm still Staff Sgt. Krause to my peers and my soldiers. I've also kept my security clearance, maintained a thriving civilian career, and I've been scheduled to attend airborne training school. I continue to exemplify the citizen-soldier we all strive to be.


As a volunteer for the Real Warriors Campaign, and as a leader, I've been able to help fellow soldiers realize that psychological health resources are available,

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“I found that not only are NCOs supportive and understanding 24/7, there is absolutely no shame in seeking treatment...”

and they work. I am thrilled to be able to continue to support America's service members both on and off the battlefield.

My experience has shown me that it takes strength to reach out for care, but it also takes the intuitiveness and support of a friend, a leader or a supervisor to encourage their service member to get the help they need.

It takes real strength for someone to admit that they need help and to go get it, especially when they don't want to. 

Staff Sgt. Meg Krause  
Real Warriors Campaign Volunteer  
Medical non-commissioned officer, D  
Company, 450th Civil Affairs Battalion

## Tools You Can Use

Additional links are available at [www.dcoe.health.mil](http://www.dcoe.health.mil) under “Resources”

### Resources for Service Members and Families Deployment Health Clinical Center (DHCC)

[www.pdhealth.mil](http://www.pdhealth.mil)

A component center of DCoE, DHCC offers the Specialized Care Program Track II, a multidisciplinary treatment program for service members experiencing operational stress, post-traumatic stress disorder or disabling symptoms associated with recent combat deployment such as: anxiety, panic attacks, depression and difficult family reintegration. For additional information, click [here](#).

### National Resource Directory (NRD)

[www.nationalresourcedirectory.gov](http://www.nationalresourcedirectory.gov)

The NRD is a website for wounded, ill and injured service members, veterans, their families and those who support them. It provides services and resources at the national, state and local levels to support recovery, rehabilitation and community reintegration. Find information on a variety of topics, including benefits and compensation, education and training, employment, family and caregiver support, health and more.

### Our Military Kids

[www.ourmilitarykids.org](http://www.ourmilitarykids.org)

Specifically for children of National Guard and Reserve personnel either deployed overseas or children of severely injured service members, Our Military Kids provides grants for sports, fine arts and tutoring programs to ensure that the children have access to activities and support during the time a parent is away in service to our country.

### Resources for Health Professionals

#### Updated TBI Materials

<http://bit.ly/TBIclinical>

Check out our recently revised Traumatic Brain Injury quick reference fact sheets on the DCoE website:

- DoD ICD-9 Coding Guidance for TBI
- Cognitive Rehabilitation for Mild TBI Consensus Conference (2009): Summary of Clinical Recommendations
- Driving Following Traumatic Brain Injury: Clinical Recommendations (2009)
- Fact Sheet Summarizing VA/DoD Evidence Based Clinical Practice Guideline for Management of Concussion/Mild Traumatic Brain Injury (2009)



U.S. Air Force photo by 1st Class Brittany Barker



U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Garrett Hothan



U.S. Air Force photo by 1st Class Nicholas Pilch

DCoE In Action is a publication of the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury (DCoE). Please send us your comments on this newsletter and story ideas to [dcoemedia@tma.osd.mil](mailto:dcoemedia@tma.osd.mil). Our mailing address is 2345 Crystal Drive, Crystal Park 4, Suite 120, Arlington, Virginia 22202. Phone: (877) 291-3263.

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