

## COMMUNITY CORNER

# Commander encourages others to thank public servants this week

By Col. William Clark  
GARRISON COMMANDER

Did you know that more than 2 million public employees protect our nation through service in our armed forces? Did you know that the Department of Defense employees were at the forefront of developing the networking system that led to the creation of the Internet or programming that led to global positioning system technology? Additionally, pub-

lic employees advanced both radar and sonar; they developed instrument landing systems and aircraft designs now used by commercial and military aircraft; and they eliminated diseases like typhoid and yellow fever. This week, Public Service Recognition Week, we honor



Col. Clark

these individuals and many more who serve our nation. Celebrated the first week of May since 1985, Public Service Recognition Week is a time to honor men and women who serve our nation as federal, state, county and local government employees. At Fort Riley, we are a community of public servants, and these individuals who selflessly chose to serve their community are crucial to our success. Whether you are one of the tens of thousands of

Soldiers who wear a uniform daily, the hundreds of civilian employees who support those Soldiers or public servants in our communities who help us accomplish our mission as a post, and as an Army, thank you. What you do day in and day out makes a difference for our nation. Public servants are on the front lines guarding our national security, curing diseases, caring for veterans and providing important services to the American people.

Since the founding of our country, public employees have worked to ensure our government is the best in the world. Over the course of my career in the military, I have had the pleasure to work with many of these talented and hard-working public servants. These individuals often put the needs of others before their own, working countless hours in service to their nation. They keep our country and our communities running.

I hope you will join me in celebrating our military and civilian public servants this week. Public Service Recognition Week highlights the accomplishments of the dedicated public servants who work tirelessly on behalf of all Americans and who rarely get the credit they deserve.

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## MILITARY SPOUSE APPRECIATION DAY

## Spouses make difference in lives of others

### It's little things that count, says Manhattan Army wife

### Former military spouse becomes support caregiver to husband

By Flavia Hulsey  
1ST INF. DIV. POST

It's the "little things," Alison Pulcher said, that make her proud to be a military spouse. It's watching her husband get promoted, seeing him return from a deployment and hearing "thank you" from local community members.

But on May 4, Pulcher, wife of Sgt. Thomas Pulcher, 2nd Battalion, 34th Armor Regiment, 1st Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, and mother of two, saw her experience as a military spouse come full circle when she attended the battalion's change of command.

"(May 4) was one of my proudest moments ... It just very much struck me that we had come full circle - that we had gotten through a very difficult deployment."

The battalion returned in January from a yearlong deployment in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. During that deployment, the battalion lost six Soldiers.

"We came together very much during this time," she said. "Now we've come full circle - we've healed and are moving on, and that was a very proud moment."

It's every military spouse's worst fear - to lose one's spouse to war, Pulcher said.

"It was shocking, and it was hard, and it is still very emotional and very raw for a lot of us," she said. "But it's part of it, and, unfortunately, you kind of know that going in. We hope that nothing ever happens to any of our Soldiers, but it's a possibility. It was just know that they died with the most amazing honor, and they sacrificed for the rest of us ... And, we just have to remember to honor that and appreciate that."

As a military spouse for more than nine years, Pulcher said, although it's a difficult life, it's one she's proud of.

"I am so proud, so honored to be such an integral part of that life - of the life of service for our nation's freedom," she said. "And not holding a gun and not deploying, but feeling that this is how I serve my country - that's the best part of being a military spouse."

Pulcher said she never thought she'd be a military spouse; she never even thought she'd get married - that was until she met Thomas Pulcher. "The day I met him, I knew I'd marry him," she said.

The couple met while working at a restaurant and bar in Annapolis, Md. They married eight months later.

When they met in 2004, Thomas Pulcher was in between jobs, having ended a career as a district sales representative at a grass seed company and prepar-



COURTESY PHOTO

Alison Pulcher, right, and her husband, Sgt. Thomas Pulcher, 2nd Bn, 34th Armor Regt., left, pose for an undated picture before a military ball. The couple has been married for nine years and have been through three deployments together.

ing to become an active-duty Soldier in the Army.

"The military was ingrained in him," Pulcher said of her husband, whose father and both grandfathers were members of the armed services. "He's always been super patriotic and just wanted to serve and felt that 2004 was just a really necessary time to join the service."

But for Pulcher, who never anticipated a life as a military spouse, the transition was not as easy, she said.

"At the beginning, it was very difficult for me. I worked at the restaurant where we met, but I also worked for a (Maryland) state delegate in Annapolis. So I am used to a very professional setting. I am very career-minded; I was very driven in that direction," she said. "And then to all of the sudden marry, and, 'we're moving to Kansas, or I'm deploying' - that kind of threw kinks in my armor."

After about a year, Pulcher said she had adjusted to her new lifestyle as a military spouse and realized her focus - her career - was supporting her Soldier.

"I feel that (being a military spouse) is just as much of a full-time job as being a Soldier," Pulcher said. "When they sign their contract, we sign an invisible contract saying that we will honor and uphold the core values of the Army. We will support our Soldiers and make sure they are mission-ready at all times. We will keep the home fires burning. We will raise our children, knowing to honor and abide by their Soldiers, whether they are there or not."

"We don't receive a paycheck, but it's my job - being a military spouse."

Supporting her Soldier has included three deployments - one just a week after they were married, and the latest, as Pulcher described, was "a little com-

By Dena O'Dell  
1ST INF. DIV. POST

It took Carolyn Tolliver-Lee a long time after her husband became ill to accept and appreciate her "new normal." For the 12-year Fort Riley Family Advocacy Program specialist, mother of four, grandmother of seven and former military spouse, the "new normal" meant accepting the fact that her husband would always live in long-term care; he wasn't coming back home; he would never drive again; and they would never be able to sit and have a conversation together.

Tolliver-Lee's story began in 1988, around the time the Army was gearing up for Operation Desert Storm. While stationed at Fort Riley, Tolliver-Lee's husband, Earnest, then a scout in the Army, became ill and suffered a major seizure while training at Fort Knox, Ky. The Army put him on a non-deployable status, but the seizures, known as grand mal seizures, were unpredictable and kept coming. Earnest was diagnosed with a seizure disorder in 1990.

Neither Tolliver-Lee nor her husband knew what to expect from the seizures and their unpredictability, she said. One day, while driving home from work, Earnest had a seizure and totaled his car, Tolliver-Lee said. Fortunately, no one was injured, she said, but the Family was always under stress because the seizures could not be brought under control.

"For a spouse - myself - it was extremely challenging because the support services that can embrace Families today didn't exist then," Tolliver-Lee said. "Traumatic brain injuries were not spoken of like they are today. None of this education was available or made known available as it is today in abundance, which made it very hard for my husband, not to mention, me, and then my children."

The emotional side effects of her husband's seizures began trickling down to the rest of the Family, Tolliver-Lee said. Because traumatic brain injuries are invisible injuries, not physical ones, the symptoms are in the Soldier's behavior. Her husband became angry, withdrawn, irritable and difficult to live with, she said. He didn't understand what was happening to him; the only thing he did understand was that what he had could be treated, but not cured.

"So here I am with this Soldier, this husband, this man, this father, whose having grand mal seizures, known as traumatic brain injury, also creating (post traumatic stress disorder) in him, which also trickled down to the Family," Tolliver-



COURTESY PHOTO

Carolyn Tolliver-Lee, left, and her husband, Earnest, right, pose for an undated picture at the VA hospital in Topeka. The couple has been married for more than 30 years, with Earnest spending the last eight years of their marriage in VA care.

Lee said. "We were five people living in a house with post traumatic stress. A Family becomes secondary to it because this is traumatic - the fact that he couldn't drive anymore, he couldn't remember, he couldn't sleep, he could have a seizure at any given time. We lived on edge all the time."

The Army recognized Earnest's disabilities as service-related, and in 1993, they medically retired him as a staff sergeant. But the Family's journey - which Tolliver-Lee later described as a Christian one - did not end there. In March 2004, Earnest had multiple seizures causing a stroke, which left him physically and mentally impaired and in need of 24-hour nursing care.

He was in a coma for four days, she said, and when he woke up, he was blind, paralyzed from the neck down, and he had no speech and no memory.

"He had to learn how to swallow again through swallowing classes, in which therapists would come in and massage his throat to teach his brain how to swallow," she said.

As his brain began to heal and as the swelling went down, some of his body functions were restored, she said. His sight did come back; he had physical therapy for two years to help him regain his ability to walk with a walker; and with speech therapy, he now has minimal speech. Although his comprehension is good, to this day, he is still unable to write or read, Tolliver-Lee said.

"I often read scriptures from the Bible and local newspaper articles to him," she said. The physical limitations were tough for the Family, but her husband's memory loss seemed to be the hardest blow to grasp.

"After he had a stroke, it took him almost a year and a half to two years to recognize us as his Family. He did not know

who we were," Tolliver-Lee said. "He had to have therapy. Therapists would try various exercises and activities to help stimulate his brain by teaching him pictures of how to associate our names with who we were in his life (and tell him), this is your wife, Carolyn, this is your son, Harold, this is your son, Joey, and this is your son, Cameron ... he had to be re-taught that this was his Family and what a Family meant. It wasn't sad, but that hurt that I had been married to this man for 25 years at that time, and he didn't know who we were. That was the hurt part - to see him so detached and disassociated from us."

Tolliver-Lee described her journey through her husband's illness as a mental struggle to get to the place where she is now - appreciating her "new normal."

"For a long time, I thought he would come back ... But now, I'm not looking for that man. My question now becomes, 'Can I be married to the man he is today?' (The answer is) yes because I have a lot of support, and I cannot see myself walking away from him. I think about what he would be missing in his life.

"Yeah, my life has experienced many changes. Yes, I have to do all of this, but when I see him with all of his limitations, I think to myself, 'there is no way I can walk off and leave someone like that.' It just doesn't seem right, and it's not who I am because he needs an advocate. I'm his advocate - someone other than his medical team, who has his best interest as a priority. I'm the one who fights for him ... And, I could not do this if I wasn't his wife. We are Family, and Family takes care of one another no matter what."

While her friends go home at night and have dinner with their husbands, Tolliver-Lee's

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