"*With You All the Way*" helps children deal with deployment

By Elaine Wilson, American Forces Press Service

Department of Defense and United Service Organizations (USO) officials joined military families at the U.S. Navy Memorial in Washington, D.C., March 31 to celebrate the launch of a new DVD created to help military children cope with a parent's deployment.

"*With You All the Way*," a joint effort by the Defense Department, USO and the Trevor Romain Co., offers school-age children help with preparing for and dealing with all stages of deployment, from pre-deployment to separation to reintegration.

"We are grateful for the dedication and creativity of people like Trevor Romain and the generosity of groups like the USO," said Barbara Thompson, director of the Pentagon's office of family policy and children and youth. "With [their] support, we are better able to help bridge the gap that results from months and miles of separation between children and their parents. This is no small feat and the worthiest of missions."

The free DVD is slated for distribution through USO centers in May as part of a children's deployment kit that also contains a stuffed bear called Cuzzie, postcards, a journal and a set of dog tags inscribed "*With You All the Way*."

"The USO is devoted to supporting the military family, especially military children who aren't able to choose their situations," said Sloan Gibson, USO president. "Our partnership with Trevor Romain allows us to bring unique programming to these individuals, giving them resources to handle some of the tough circumstances and sacrifices that come with being a military child."

(Left) USO President and CEO Sloan Gibson talks with the creator of the film "*With You All the Way*," Trevor Romain, during the March 31 film screening at the Navy Memorial in Washington, D.C.

USO photo by Mike Theiler

Thompson echoed his remarks, calling the DVD a "fantastic resource."

"The DVD helps to let [military children] know that even though it may feel like they are alone, we are with them all the way," said Thompson.

The DVD follows main characters Jack and Skye as they help their friends Darrell, Pablo and Brittany deal with different aspects of deployment. Darrell's brother is preparing to deploy, Pablo's mother has deployed again, and Brittany is adjusting to having her father back home. It also includes interviews with military families who discuss how they work to stay connected. Noted children's author and motivational speaker Trevor Romain interacts with the characters and guides viewers through the DVD.

When faced with deployment, Thompson noted, parents and children often deal with a gamut of emotions ranging from anger and fear to worry and uncertainty.

"Something else I know, is that together they work hard to stay connected and to work through all those feelings," she said.

While it's a natural impulse to want to bottle up or hide feelings, the weight of doing so can take its toll, Thompson said, using the "doughboys" from World War I as an example.

"They had a song that told them to 'pack all your troubles in your old kit bag and smile, smile, smile.' Can you imagine how heavy your kit bag, your backpack, would be if you packed it full with your worries?" she said. "Since 1915, we've learned that although you can pack your worries away, you may only want to do so for a while. It might be healthier to take those troubles out of the bag and deal with them."

Thompson lauded the efforts of Romain, who worked closely with the USO and military to ensure the DVD met the needs of military children.

In a blog about the DVD, Romain said he decided to start the project about three years ago after he went on several overseas tours with the USO. "After visiting with these kids, it became very apparent that a resource was needed to help them with deployment," wrote Romain.

Children relate to his characters because they share many of the same concerns, he wrote. "We try to never shy away from being real and telling the story from a child's perspective," Romain said. "If this DVD can give these kids just a little support, some hope and inspiration, and validation of what they are feeling, it will make me extremely happy and proud."

New service supports military children with hearing loss

By Lt. Anne M. Jarrett, Audiologist, USNH Yokosuka

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), hearing loss occurs in one to three of 1,000 live births annually and, when left undetected, can result in developmental delays. To support early identification of infants with hearing loss and to help children with hearing loss reach their full potential, state health departments established early hearing detection and intervention (EHDI) programs following benchmarks developed by CDC National EHDI and the Joint Committee on Infant Hearing (JCIH).

Both documents agree that hearing loss can and should be diagnosed by three months of age. To reach this goal for identification, newborn hearing screening should occur before one month of age, and preferably before hospital discharge. For infants identified with hearing loss, both JCIH and CDC agree that families with infants should be connected to intervention services before the infant is six months of age. Research has compared children with hearing loss who receive early intervention before six months of age versus after six months of age. It indicated that by the time children with hearing loss enter first grade, those identified by six months of age and entered into early intervention are one to two years ahead of their later-identified peers in language, cognitive and social skills.

Military and civilian birthing hospitals fell in line with CDC and JCIH benchmarks and established newborn hearing screening programs. In the continental United States (CONUS), military birthing hospitals operate similarly to the way in which civilian hospitals operate and report newborn hearing screening data to state EHDI programs. State EHDI programs can offer military hospitals program support as well as support and resources for families. The challenge unique to the military is the transient nature of its members. Active duty members and their families may change duty stations at least every three years; ensuring all children are screened, rescreened, diagnosed and undergo intervention can be difficult. Families must stay connected to services, especially those families who transfer right after the birth of a child, to ascertain that any childhood hearing loss is identified and treated appropriately before it has a lifelong educational or developmental impact on the child.

For the military, the connection between the initial screening and intervention may best be made by pediatricians who play a key role in making certain that newborn hearing screenings, rescreening and diagnostic services are completed. Most large military birthing hospitals in CONUS and outside the continental United States (OCONUS) have audiology programs with the ability to diagnose children. When higher level audiology services are needed, CONUS families may be referred to military or civilian hospitals with higher level diagnostics audiology care. If a child is found to have greater then a moderate hearing loss in both ears while the family is located OCONUS, the family usually must return stateside for more intense early intervention services and family support. Generally speaking, children with minimal hearing loss who are mainstreamed with or without hearing aids or assistive listening devices can attend overseas Department of Defense schools. Additionally, the exceptional family member program ensures that families are stationed at bases that can support the medical and educational needs of the children and family.

Having a child with hearing loss adds extra challenges for military families as they transfer to new duty stations. Parents need to confirm that hearing aids, assistive listening devices, medical and educational records are not lost in the move and that emergency audiology and medical care are available. At new duty stations, families have to reconnect to resources and support services. Making friends and meeting other parents with children who have hearing loss takes time. Just as connections to resources and friendships become well established, often it is time to move again.

To help military families make stable connections to resources and other parents, a group of parents with children with hearing loss in Yokosuka, Japan have teamed with military families in Kansas to establish a military family support program which follows a national model called "Hands & Voices." Hands & Voices is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting families and their children who are deaf or hard of hearing and the professionals who serve them. It is a parent-driven, parent and, or professional collaborative group that is unbiased toward communication modes and methods and allows parents to obtain resources and information regarding all options of communication without pushing an opinion or agenda. Its diverse membership includes those who are deaf, hard of hearing or hearing impaired and their families who communicate orally, with signs, cue, and, or combined methods. Hands & Voices exists to help families obtain support and to help children with hearing loss reach their highest potential. Chapters of the organization can now be found in 18 states, and an additional 15 chapters are in the provisional start up phase.

Currently in provisional start up status, the Military Hands & Voices is quickly on its way to full chapter status. The chapter will offer military families information on accessing military and civilian services and resources, as well as the ability to connect to other military families with children with hearing loss. Professionals that serve these families will also benefit from resources and information provided by the chapter.

The Chief asks:

"Did you know the authorized standard footwear worn with the Navy Working Uniform (NWU) is a black 9-inch smooth leather steel-toe safety boot with black laces, issued at Recruit Training Command, Great Lakes and sold at Navy Exchange (NEX) Uniform Centers?

"Smooth leather boots will be blackened and buffed. An optional 9-inch rough side out leather steel-toe safety boot, available at NEX Uniform Centers is authorized for wear ashore.

"When worn, bootlaces will be tucked inside the boot in a manner to present a sharp military appearance.

"Read Navy Administrative Message NAVADMIN 343/08 for more information.

"If you didn't know, now you know." – MCC(SW/AW) Eric Hannah, CFAY Public Affairs