



AMERICAN FORCES INFORMATION SERVICE **NEWS ARTICLES**

General, Teenager Address Educators on Growing Up Overseas

By Rudi Williams
American Forces Press Service

ATLANTA, July 8, 2005 – When Army Gen. B.B. Bell flew here from Germany to speak at the recent Military Child Education Coalition 7th annual conference, he brought a teenager with him to help get his point across.



Gen. B.B. Bell, commander of U.S. Army, Europe, and NATO's Allied Land Component Command located in Heidelberg, Germany, said he asked Nykole Norcross, 18, to tell conferees at the Military Child Education Coalition 7th annual conference that about military children growing up overseas. Photo by Rudi Williams (Click photo for screen-resolution image); [high-resolution image](#) available.

Bell, commander of U.S. Army, Europe, and NATO's Allied Land Component Command located in Heidelberg, Germany, told conferees that he brought a sergeant's daughter with him from Europe to them what it's like for military children growing up overseas.

But before introducing her, Bell set the stage by telling the audience about life for military personnel and their families in Europe.

"Your military in Europe numbers about 100,000 - Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines," he noted. "By far the largest is the Army, with about 66,000 active-duty military. We're up to our eyeballs in everything that the military is up to here in the states with a few additional challenges."

Bell said USAREUR has been deeply deployed to combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan since the day of the first shots in

Afghanistan. Germany-based 5th Corps led the march to Baghdad from the south. Airborne units from Italy attacked northern Iraq, augmented by a heavy armor drop by Air Force C-17s into enemy territory, surrounded by enemy forces.

Nykole exemplifies both the advantages and disadvantages of being a military teenager growing up overseas, Bell said.

"Nykole is an example of the real deal of a youngster growing up in the Department of Defense Education Activity system overseas," the general said. "Not having all the opportunities we might see in an independent school district back in the states, but also taking advantage of life as is laid out for her and growing up as a mature young woman to make the best of herself and of her plight."

With a parent in a combat zone, the things on Nykole's mind are the stresses associated with deployment and more responsibilities at home, Bell said. "When you're overseas, there's no one else to help take care of the house, particularly when mom has a job. So to the young people, it may be just like in pioneer days -- everybody has to help, and these youngsters are running these households."

Nykole, 18, recently graduated from the American High School in Vicenza, Italy. Bell said her father's current deployment to Afghanistan is his fourth - the others were to Operation Desert Storm in 1990 and two to Korea. "He came in as a private with his great lady, Dawn, and they're an example of the very best about our noncommissioned officer corps, Bell said.

"I've got these great sergeants, men and women, that go forward into battle and sacrifice for our country and leave their families time after time," he said.

He then presented Nykole to share "her thoughts on being a young person growing up in an overseas environment during war." "Children of military parents are very strong," Nykole told the audience. "I believe that children of deployed parents are even stronger. We don't have it easy, but we try very hard and we get through it because we're tough.

"It's harder with dad deployed," she continued. "I lean on my dad all the time. I think we've grown closer through e-mail. When he was home we didn't have a whole lot of time to talk to each other, because he's always at work and I have things to do, so we're not together all the time."

Norcross told the conferees they can help make life a little easier for military children overseas. "I believe that a couple of those ways are through school counselors," she said. "We have a couple of counselors at my school that do a really good job. There were more counselors in our community, but I was a little bit afraid to use them."

She noted that she volunteers at Army Community Services, where counselors are "more than willing to help at the school or after school, and we need to get them involved."

More cooperation between U.S. and DoDEA school systems, she added, would help to resolve issues over course credits earned in one system not being recognized in another.

"I have a little sister going into middle school," she said, "and I'd like to see her have an easier time."

"We're continuing to pursue the enemy, just as the rest of the U.S. military is in Europe," Bell noted, adding that about 8,000 soldiers from Europe are deployed in Afghanistan, including units from Vicenza, Italy, leading efforts at Bagram Air Base.

Troops from Europe are major players in combat operations in Iraq, the general said. "We're now entering our second deployment in Iraq, with 5th Corps getting ready to go back," Bell noted. "We'll deploy the corps in the winter with all of its separate brigades and other combat power underneath it to replace 18th Airborne Corps out of Fort Bragg, N.C., as they come back after a year's tour in Iraq."

With the details of USAREUR's involvement in the war on terror providing the context, the general posed a question to the conferees: "What does that kind of environment mean for a young person trying to grow up and be normal and her daddy or mommy is a sergeant first class?" Bell asked.

He said many educators in the audience see the military and the global rebasing it's undergoing only as it affects school districts, military installations and communities in the United States.

"Nykole sitting here -- Nykole Norcross, daughter of Sgt. 1st Class Sean Norcross -- could care less right now about rebasing," the general said. "What's on her radar screen is her daddy is in combat in Afghanistan as I speak."

He then pointed out that when Norcross' father and other troops return to Europe, many of them are going to pack their bags and move to the United States.

"That will be a new and complex challenge for the Nykole Norcrosses of the world," he noted.

Bell said one big challenge for servicemembers and their families overseas is the lack of off-base programs, such as churches downtown, boys and girls clubs, baseball fields, lakes to go fishing in, and all kinds of community activities.

"So what these youngsters have in an overseas environment is really themselves," he noted. "That's how they get through the day -- trying to figure out what they can do for themselves to have a great day and to be normal in this life."

However, he said, there are some good things about growing up overseas. "It's good to be exposed to foreign cultures, because it makes these youngsters strong, resilient, and they get it a lot better than mom and dad do, perhaps," Bell said. "They do travel to see the world. Most young people who live in oversea environments get on trains and they're gone."

Military children see places and do things youngsters growing up in Small Town USA never have an opportunity to see or do, he said. "Some of these youngsters come out of Europe speaking three or four languages," he noted. "And that's a good thing."

The recent graduate said she's impressed by what she's learned about MCEC. "I love what MCEC is doing for military children," Norcross said. "I love that they're actively involved and they helping out."

To Norcross and the audience's delight, Bell had arranged for Norcross to speak with her father from Afghanistan after delivering her remarks. After the phone call, Bell re-emphasized the upcoming impact of rebasing. He said he anticipates that about 42,000 soldiers in Europe will redeploy back to the United States by the end of fiscal 2010.

"With them, they'll bring around 40,000 family members and children," he noted. "So upwards of 80,000 to 90,000 Army souls are coming back to the states."

The redeployment trend already has started, the general noted. "A lot of youngsters are on their way back to the states," he said. "We've got about 5,000 people in Europe that will inactivate this summer and go to other accounts in the Army back here, and a large redeployment will be initiated next summer." Bell said there's a lot of concern about so many military children returning stateside in such a short period of time. For example, he asked, "Where are these youngsters going? What school systems will be affected in the fall of 2006? And are those schools ready to accept those youngsters with open arms? Can we get the Student-to-Student program working for us?"

The general said all those things can happen. "It's just a matter of MCEC, me, my apparatus, DoDEA, and all the school districts in the states starting to talk," he said.

Bell urged officials to help the hundreds of children returning to the states from Europe. "They're challenged equally, if not more, than the other youngsters in our military," he said.