

**NC Air National Guard – Yellow Ribbon Reintegration – Pre Deployment Event
Charlotte, NC**

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“Service before self”

Brig Gen Tony McMillan

By: Matthew and David

Photography by: David Harris

While we were at the NC Air National Guard Yellow Ribbon Pre-deployment event, we had a chance to talk with Brigadier General Tony McMillan, Commander of 145 Air Lift Wing. After thanking us for what our parents do in serving our country, we were able to have Q and A.

Q: What is the mission of the 145?

A: We organize, train, and equip our service men to meet worldwide tasking by the USAF.

Q: What got you to start serving?

A: After college, I joined the air force and I liked the program because I could help my country, my home state, and my community.

Q: What are some examples of the things the National Guard does to serve its country?

A: Well, state-wise, we served NC by sending service men to the coast to help clean up and support the people with supplies after Hurricane Irene. Country-wise, we have sent servicemen to Texas to help stop the forest fires out there and in terms of even just the community, a lot of people are nurses, firefighters and stuff like that and they are there to help their neighbors when they need it.

“Service before self.”



Assistant Adjutant General, NC Air National Guard
By: Melanie M.

At the NC Air National Guard Yellow Ribbon Pre-Deployment Event, as Backpack Journalists we had the opportunity to speak to General Todd Kelly briefly. Attempting to get a better understanding of exactly what it is that an Assistant Adjutant General did, we asked him questions about what kinds of things General Kelly dealt with. He explained to us that he advises Major General Lusk, who is “the boss for all the soldiers in the Air Guard and the Air Force in North Carolina.” Day to day, he helps with any issues a servicemen might deal with, whether it be personal issues, training issues, etc.

Smiling and nodding at people passing by as us BPJ’ers interviewed him, it was easy to tell that General Kelly really knew the people attending the event. When this was brought up and he was asked if he felt that the Air Guard in NC was a tight-knit group, he nodded resolutely, stating, “I feel that it is definitely a close-knit organization, because it really is community based.” Other

than the discussion of the community based organization, perhaps the most valuable piece of information gleaned when asked “What advice would give the children at this event as they’re getting ready to see their service member deployed?”

“Let your feelings show.” He replies quickly. “Don’t be quiet about how you feel and make sure you stay close with your friends and your family and really talk about it. That’s the best thing you can do.”

And this seems to be a sentiment expressed among many of the people experienced in deployment at the event. When asked the same question, Monique Watson from MFLC replied much the same – “Be open about your feelings.” Was her quick reply. “...I always emphasize journaling. It is so good to just write and it helps you talk to yourself and work out what you’re feeling.” She goes on to explain the value of saying “I love you” to a family member, stating “You always think you have tomorrow, but...”

Ms. Watson explained to BPJ the valuable counseling services MFLC provides for the families - pre, post and during the deployment itself. In terms of perhaps the “Biggest Issue” MFLC helps family with; the transition during the moving process was a crucial one.

“Families move every two or three years and this can be positive or negative...We help normalize the issue and help explain to the kids that may be thinking “We’re the only ones who deal with this, our family is so messed up,” that they’re *not* the only ones who feel like this or who go through this. So we try to go to bases and help it transition easier for these kids to transition and to understand that they aren’t the only ones going through this.”

Learning about services such as these, as well as the vital advice about expressing your opinions and feeling during deployment are just a few of the things the teens of the families present learned at the event.



First time deployment can be nerve-wracking, as Mr. Henderson discusses with our Backpackers – his girlfriend who *has* deployed before can testify to that.”

First time deploying
Soldier with Soldier GF

By: Matt and David

Q to GF: Considering the fact that you’ve deployed before, does that make it harder or easier to watch your boyfriend deploy?

A: Well, it’s hard. Since I have deployed before, I know the dangers that he could be in, I know what it’s like over there. However, I know it’ll be ok.

Q: Why did you join the Air Guard?

A: Well, I wanted to serve my country to some capacity - I mean I am still in school and I want to become a pilot in the civilian world.

Q: Where are you being deployed to?

A: Afghanistan

Q: Has anyone else in your family served?

A: My dad was a navigator in the Coast Guard.

Q: Did he ever deploy?

A: No, he got out when I was young, but he has been around the world and back.

Q: Did you ever think how your family would feel?

A: Absolutely. When they told me I was deploying I thought about how things would be taken care of. What would I do if something went wrong?

Q: Are you scared or fearful of what my happen?

A: I would not say fearful, but more anxious or nervous.

Michelle Cabana
Air Guard Engineer
Charlotte, NC

Only Daughter deploys, accompanied by parents.

Q: So, how long have you been in the Air Guard?

A: I've been in for two years now.

Q: Where are you deploying?

A: Afghanistan

Q: Do you feel frightened or nervous about deploying?

A: Um, a little nervous, mostly just excited. It's exciting to get out of US to learn more about the job and to serve my country.

Q: Do you know anyone who serves?

A: My older brother, he serves in Army National Guard and has been deployed to Iraq – he actually just got back.

Q: Why did you join the Air Guard?

A: I took JROTC in high school, and my older brother did too. He went into the Army and encouraged me to serve. I joined the US Air Force so I could stay close to home, in addition to the help with school on the Air Guard's part.

Q: Did you always want to join?

A: Always thought about it but no real serious thought about it. It just seemed like a good idea.

Q: So, do you have a civilian job right now?

A: No, not right now because of the deployment and stuff. I definitely plan on getting one, though. I plan on going to back to school after I get back from deployment.

Q: Have you had any friends who have been really freaking out at the prospect of you going to Afghanistan?

A: Ha, no, they've all been really supportive of my decision. My best friend actually joined up with me and is being deployed with me.

Q: How do you think your parents feel about you being in the forces? Do you think they feel comfortable?

A: (She laughs) Yeah, I'm pretty sure they're ok with it.

Q: Last question – How do you think the Air Force Guard has benefited you the most?

A: Being in the Guard has pointed me to something I never thought I'd do – the aptitude test was such a surprise when it pointed me towards being an electrician. Also, self-confidence. The Guard has helped me a lot with confidence.



Interview with Michelle Cabana, an Air Guard Engineer about to be deployed for the first time, and her parents, David and Anne Cabana.

Interviewing Michelle: Matthew and David.

Interviewing David and Anne: Melanie and Hunter.

By: Stacey Sharpe

David and Anne Cabana have never been soldiers or airmen. They've never served in any branch of the forces, never been deployed and have never even been a dependent of a service member. So it's hard to explain how their two oldest children ended up in the military, with their third child "on the way," they say. Their oldest son a MP in the Army Guard, their youngest a Junior in high school with a desire to eventually join the Marine Corp. and their middle child and only daughter, Michelle, about to deploy to Afghanistan with her unit in the Air National Guard, they can only offer one possible explanation.

"It might be the Taekwondo," Anne Cabana says with a grin. David Cabana goes on to explain that all three children grew up with the discipline of taekwondo, and gained black belts, under an instructor who was once himself a sniper in the Forces. "So they're used to all that 'Yelling in their faces' stuff," he adds.

But it might be a little more than that. The Cabana family doesn't make a cliché out of the phrase "love for our country," evident in the quiet respect shown as they talk about the military in general. Evident to even a greater degree is the confidence they have in their children. They are very much at ease as they sit down at a round table with our Backpack Journalists, talking very calmly about the first deployment of their daughter Michelle and their feelings about it.

"When your number is up, it's up." David states simply. In an almost amusing fashion, Backpackers Hunter and Melanie seem to struggle with explaining exactly *why* David and Anne are expected to be "worried to death" about their daughter's deployment.

"Why?" David asks. "Because she might get killed?"

"Well...yes," Hunter replies.

"She could cross the street and get killed!" explains David.

"...You guys need to talk to *my* parents!" is Hunter's only response.

My parents have always supported my and my brother's decision to join, replies Michelle Cabana when asked how her parents felt about her deployment in an interview with the other BPJ team taking place across the room. "They're comfortable with it."

And, truly, her parents seem more surprised about the way Michelle's life has gone with her career in the Guard than her actual joining of it.

"We obviously don't oppose them going into the military – we talked to them about what they wanted and feel very strongly that they can do anything they want," says Anne. "We just *never* would have expected her to be pointed in the direction that the aptitude test pointed her in."

"I was expecting an office job," Michelle explains. However, when taking the aptitude test given to her by the Guard, she was pointed in the direction of her current job – an electrician. But she really enjoys it, she expresses to Matthew and David, and her parents proudly say that "She's taken to it," and that she finished in the top three of her class.

The deployment factor seems to not be bothering the Cabana family to an extreme level - while they obviously are concerned about their daughter as she deploys for the first time, experience with deployment with their first son seems to help a lot.

"We had a lot of contact with him," they explain. "Skype is awesome – it can't lie to you like a phone call can – you can actually see what's going on and if they're alright."

And while one would assume that there might be some difference in how a deployment of a son feels versus a deployment of an only daughter, their stance is firm. "It's kind of the same," Anne maintains.

Michelle herself seems at complete ease with the upcoming change – "I'm mostly excited," she says with a laugh. "I'm excited to learn more about my job and to serve my country." She later goes on to explain that she even has her best friend (who signed up for the Air Guard with her) deploying with her, which helps.

A final question is perhaps the most revealing of the Cabana's unwavering support in the Guard and what their children do. When asked, "How would you say the Air Guard has benefited Michelle the most?" they answer, "It's really given her self-confidence. Michelle was in an abusive relationship when she signed up and if she had stayed on the same path and stayed with the same person..." they trail off. "It [the guard] gave her direction and gave her that confidence back and it gave *us* back the real Michelle."

Across the room, out of the hearing distance of her parents, Michelle gives the same response.

"And she's going to go over there and she's going to be fine." Anne finishes definitively.



Kenneth Brock

“Pro-Deployer” (AKA he’s been deployed 8 times and is about to go on his 9th).

By: Hunter and Melanie.

Q: Tell me about your experience with the Air Guard.

A: Well, I came straight from the Army into the Air Guard, so I’ve been in the Air Guard for 23 years now.

Q: But what made you change from the Army into the Air Guard?

A: Something different. I just wanted something different. You know, the Army really wasn’t for me and I wasn’t really sure what I wanted to do after that but I did know I wanted to stay in the military, stay connected and fortunately the day I enlisted in the Air Guard, I was honorably discharged from the Army, so it just all kind of floated together.

Q: Is there a specific reason you stayed with the Air Guard or is it just the family way that they treat everyone?

A: It’s a good job, a lot of opportunity, that sort of thing. It’s been a lot of travel - I’ve been to a lot of other places other than deployment for this.

Q: How many times have you been deployed?

A: Been deployed eight times, this will be my ninth.

Q: Now, those eight times you've been somewhere, have they always been to Afghanistan, Iraq and places like that?

A: I've been to Kuwait, Qatar, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, I've been through Iraq, to Oman and, finally, I've been to Afghanistan. The last four deployments have been to Afghanistan.

Q: Do you ever get nervous or scared before deployments?

A: Never scared until the day before I leave – then I get a tad bit nervous.

Q: What do you try to do before your employment to make you feel better about leaving?

A: Try to make sure my family is ok and that they're ready for me to be gone. I have four kids and a wife, so that's very important.

Q: So out of the places that you've been, what was the actual worst one?

A: They really don't stand out against each other, but my last deployment we got attacked real badly. I was awoken out of bed - I had just gotten off my shift and had been asleep for three hours - but I kept on hearing this "Bam bam bam bam." I woke up because I thought there was screaming and I was leaning up in bed and thought "What's going on?" And I heard it again, except this time it was directly above me and I thought "Uh-oh." I threw my uniform on, grabbed my weapon and went outside – two Apaches, maybe a hundred feet above me were firing over the fence line at the suicide bombers, the attackers trying to come in. A friend of mine, John - we saw each other and I said, "John, you're with me, let's go." So we went and hooked up with some Army guys and, um, we weren't really sure *what* they had planned, but we were pretty much going to be a part of it. So we spent two hours, two hours and a half with this – the guys at the fence pretty curtailed the attack, so we didn't need to fire a shot. There were a couple of explosions, maybe 60 yards away, lots of gunfire – but the section of the fence they decided to hit were where the marines were, so...

Monique Watson
MFLC

By: The Four new BPJ and Stacey

Monique Watson was kind enough to start the new Backpackers off with their first interview and allow them to get an idea of how it's done.

Q: So, what does MFLC do?

A: Well, Military Family Life Consultants is a DOD program that supplies support to military personnel and family in the deployment programs and deployment related issues.

Q: Can you give an example of a service you provide?

A: We do a lot in terms of re-integration with individual and couple counseling and we really work with the family to transition back home. During deployment we help the family deal with the deployment itself.

Q: What is the most used service for the "biggest issue," so to speak, that you deal with?

A: The "biggest issue" is helping children with moving. Families move every two or three years and this can be positive or negative. WE view it as a positive thing to show how the world is constantly changing. Something I do is help kids during this transition. I think that that's something to help the families with. We help normalize the issue and help explain to the kids that may be thinking "We're the only ones who deal with this, our family is so messed up," that they're *not* the only ones who feel like this or who go through this. So we try to go to bases and help it transition easier for these kids to transition and to understand that they aren't the only ones going through this.

Q: What would you say has been the hardest thing to deal with in terms of your job so far?

A: The most difficult thing I've had to do was having to assist a mother discuss with a child that something had happened to the parent away while deployed. But, luckily, that's only happened once.

Q: What would you tell kids who have a parent deploying soon?

A: I would say "Be open about your feelings." Always take an opportunity to say "I Love You," to friends and family because we always feel like we have tomorrow. But that's what I would say to anyone, military or not. Also, I always emphasize journaling. It is so good to just write and it

helps you talk to yourself and work out what you're feeling. Nobody but you has to see it; just having a journal for yourself is great.



Camera-shy Hunter interviews a Personal Finance Counselor on the ways families can manage their finances during deployment.

Steve Obendorf
Finance Counselor
By: Hunter and Melanie

Obviously, a lot of issues come up when a unit is about to deploy. Suddenly, a member of your family is gone for an extended amount of time and the ones at home have to figure out how to function without them – who's going to take the kids to school, cook dinner, etc. On the home front, family members re-learn, day by day, how to do the simplest of tasks without their absent service member.

One of the biggest challenges faced at home before, during, and after the actual deployment stage lies in the financial aspect of things. Personal Finance counselor Steve Obendorf knows how important it is to be able to properly handle finances with a family member away.

There are risks everywhere in terms of managing finances, Obendorf explains. One common problem, he continues, is “blowing the combat pay.” All the pay the family receives when the family member is overseas is tax free, so a lot of the time it slips away pretty easily.

The Personal Finance Counselors provide services such as personal finance training to help families deal with problems such as these after deployment, but also provide services for the pre and during deployment stages. Obendorf explains that the most important part comes before deployment – sitting down and discussing a workable budget, who pays the bills and how the bills are paid.



JAG Goodenow

Q: So, what do you do?

A: I am the staff Judge Advocate for the 145th – I’m basically the lawyer in charge of our legal services. My job is anything and everything. I can do anything from helping families with wills and power of attorney to giving commanders advice on military justice issues, for example, if

someone were to get into trouble. We give advice on environmental issues, on labor law issues and everything like that.

Q: When you say we give him advice on labor law issues, what do you mean by that?

A: Well, there are a lot of people on base who are civilians and they have employment rights so if the commander wants to take disciplinary action against them or terminate their employment, he has to make sure that he's doing it correctly

Q: So if he doesn't do it correctly, what happens?

A: The employee can sue the Commander and then they can get the drawbacks. So it's our job to protect the commanders as well as protect the individual military members.

Q: So how did you get into being the Air Force?

A: Well, when I finished law school I just wanted to go into the military. My father was military, he was merchant Marines and then he was Navy during WWII, so he told me that "The Air Force is the way to go!" So when I got out of law school, I put together an application and got interviewed and they send your package up to D.C. and got interviewed again, but this time by a board and the board gets to decide whether or not you get sent into the Air Force. So, they picked me and that was back in 1984, so it was a long time ago. A LONG time ago

Q: Is that the primary reason for being there for service members at Yellow Ribbon Events making sure people have wills, or?

A: Well, wills and Power of Attorney. A general power of attorney is basically a legal document that says "You're not here and you're giving me permission to be you." So if I give you a general power of attorney, it means you're me. You can get into my bank account and take everything out of it. It means you could go to a car dealership, buy a car and put it in my name. *Special* Power of Attorney is limited – a lot of people have to get a power of attorney for someone to take care of their kids. They need a POA to enroll them into school, take them into the doctor – the doctor's can't take care of you if the person bringing you in doesn't have a power of attorney. There's a big difference between a will and a POA. Will is what happens when you're dead, but POA is what takes care of you when you're alive.