

The Internet Newspaper — at your doorstep. Follow HuffPost on Facebook and Twitter.

January 10, 2011

This is the print preview: [Back to normal view »](#)



Amanda Terkel

aterkel@huffingtonpost.com

HuffPost

Reporting

Top Army Official Peter Chiarelli: Soldiers Need More Time At Home Between Deployments

First Posted: 12-26-10 10:44 AM | Updated: 12-26-10 12:03 PM



BUFFALO, N.Y. -- Repeated troop deployments are putting an enormous strain on members of the U.S. military who are forced to deploy to Iraq and/or Afghanistan with an insufficient amount of time at home between rotations, according to a top Army official.

On ABC's "This Week," host Christiane Amanpour asked Peter Chiarelli, the Army's vice-chief of staff, how U.S. servicemembers are affected by repeated deployments. There are approximately 2 million men and women who have been rotated through the two wars.

"You want to get at these issues, we need more time at home before deployment," said Chiarelli. "I was just down range, and I went to an aviation for a day of about 1,500 folks. Those senior pilots in that unit, those individuals who have been flying mission after mission, 62 percent of whom are on their third -- their third deployment, and over 40 -- 40 percent, almost 40 percent were on their fourth deployment, with very, very little time at home."

He added that the stress of these repeated deployments also has serious repercussions for servicemembers' civilian lives:

It affects everything. It affects the divorce rate. It affects substance abuse. It affects everything. And we've kind of taken our focus and shifted it to ensure that we're getting at

that.

You know, the problem with post-traumatic stress is that in the United States, the National Institute of Mental Health will tell you, for regular civilians, it is 12 years between the initiating event and when someone first seeks help. Now the issue there isn't that they finally seek help. It's all the things that happen in between. Everything from high-risk behavior to drug abuse to prescription drug abuse, anger management issues, to divorce. I mean, those kinds of things are affected when people don't get treated for post-traumatic stress.

Homelessness is also a continuing issue for America's veterans. Anywhere from 10-25 percent of the county's adult male homeless population used to serve in the U.S. military, and approximately 9,000 veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars are estimated to be homeless.

The New York Times, however, notes that the number of homeless veterans has gone down in recent years, aided by "\$3.5 billion spent on housing, health care and other programs by the Obama administration." Nevertheless, according to comments made by Paul Rieckhoff of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America on "This Week," women servicemembers are becoming homeless at twice the rate of men.

Chiarelli said that the Army is "working very, very hard to get at high-risk behavior." "We're looking at programs that, first of all, ensure that we are identifying early on those who are going to have a rough time reintegrating," he said. "And then taking soldiers and putting them in high-stress kind of events that are safe for them, such as water rafting and out doing those kind of sports to burn off that adrenaline, rather than getting on a motorcycle and traveling down the road at 100 miles an hour without a helmet on."

Another major problem the military is trying to address is simply getting over the stigma of traumatic brain injuries.

"We're not there, and as the chief says, he used to go into a room and ask 100 people, 'How many people think that, if they went and sought help, it would affect their career?' and he'd get 90 hands up," Chiarelli added. "Now he goes into a room and asks the same question and 50 hands come up. So we're making progress, but we've got to keep on it. I brief every single brigade combat team that goes to Iraq today. The leadership of that brigade, I do a video teleconference where we talk about traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress and try to explain to them what happens in the body when this occurs and that they've got to seek help."

More here on the Army's Wounded Warrior Program and resources from IAVA.