

Serving as co-chair of the three-year Defense Task Force on Domestic Violence, convened by the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) in 2000, was an honor and an incredible challenge. The task required all of my knowledge, skills, and commitment to effective advocacy

Some reporters assumed service members are much less likely to use violence, while others believed domestic violence by military members far exceeds that of the civilian population. Reporters varied widely in their familiarity with the issue and in their desire to delve into it. Some

## My Three Years in the Military:

### *The Department of Defense Task Force on Domestic Violence*

to end violence against women — as well as a tremendous amount of time spent learning about the DOD.

It was the ultimate yin-yang experience: The Task Force wouldn't have been necessary if the violence perpetrated by service members was being properly addressed; we've all heard about the egregious cases resulting in serious injury and death. But, I also worked closely with service members, civilian experts, and DOD staff who are deeply concerned about this problem and who have demonstrated a sincere commitment to making a difference. It is these people who are exercising leadership to significantly improve the military's response to domestic violence.

The work of the Task Force came to a close in April of this year. We wrote three reports to the Secretary of Defense, Donald H. Rumsfeld, making hundreds of recommendations. The Secretary has agreed with much of what we've recommended and has communicated our recommendations to the U.S. Senate and U.S. House Armed Services Committees. Having reviewed Secretary Rumsfeld's responses to the Task Force and considering the renewed concern of the Armed Services Committee members, I can say that the potential is there for great strides to be made. The military knew that they needed such a Task Force, and they didn't oppose the Congressional mandate for its formation in 1999. The need for our work was tragically reinforced to the nation — and became more widely understood — after the murders at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, in the summer of 2002.

While members of the military kill an average of 50 people each year through domestic violence, what happened at Fort Bragg was unprecedented. Five families in the same location were each victimized by a domestic violence homicide in a matter of weeks. The fact that several of the perpetrators had recently served in Afghanistan caused speculation that participation in combat or medications provided overseas to service members might have caused the violence. As the civilian co-chair of the Task Force, I found myself being interviewed by all sorts of news outlets. The frenzy of activity began with the *Fayetteville Observer* (whose military reporter, Tonya Bianca, followed every development) and eventually included calls from several lifestyle magazines and even a Japanese television station.

The media reports transformed the country's understanding about domestic violence, sending the message that this violence can be lethal and is a fact of life for military and civilians alike. There were lots of misconceptions.

were only interested in the story if it could be connected to the war in Afghanistan, since Afghanistan was the story they were assigned to follow. Others wanted to truly understand what domestic violence is and how to make these horrific homicides (and suicides) understandable to the general population.

It wasn't just the public that was transformed by the Fort Bragg cases. As members of the Task Force, we knew in our marrow the deep importance of the work that we were doing on behalf of the military. We saw with renewed clarity the value of many of our recommendations, especially those that called for collaboration between civilian and military victim advocates, law enforcement, prosecutors,



**By Deborah Tucker**

NCDSV Executive Director

court systems, and military command staff. For instance, most military families reside in the civilian world. There is speculation that batterers live off base to avoid the scrutiny that can be a part of living on a military installation. Thus, violence by service members can happen in local communities, and civilian authorities and agencies are a crucial part of a necessary partnership between military officials and community programs to end this violence against women and children.

There are, of course, things the Task Force chose not to do. We did not recommend the elimination of the military command structure for the adjudication of criminal offenses. Some believe that when long distances or time periods separate military members from civilian legal authority, military command must be able to enforce law to ensure order and discipline. Others believe that this system is outmoded and all U.S. citizens who commit crimes should be investigated, arrested, prosecuted, and sentenced by civilian authorities. This is one of many debates we engaged in throughout the three years. In fact, members of Congress even asked us if we wished for the Task Force to continue beyond April 2003, when our time officially expired. Our response was to urge the DOD to move forward with our recommendations; we felt that if we continued as an official body, the DOD might wait to see what else we chose to say. We're ready for the hundreds of proposals we made to be implemented, evaluated, and improved upon by those professionals involved in responding to domestic violence. We suggested that the Secretary of Defense invite us back after two years to discover what he and his staff have tried, learned,

and come to believe. We will reserve the right to say more at that time; we look forward to reconsidering things that weren't part of our initial recommendations and to bringing new ideas we've encountered to the Department.

The toughest question for me today is, *have we done enough?* Having served on advisory bodies before, I recognize that we made *recommendations*, not actual changes. We were not vested with the authority to make the needed changes, so the concomitant responsibility is not ours. Nevertheless, my fellow Task Force members and I often discussed the huge sense of responsibility we felt to make a true difference. We were advocating for what may be one of the largest "underserved" populations (to use the language of the Violence Against Women Act) in our nation. We examined, interviewed, listened, debated, drafted, argued, redrafted, polished, and finally reached consensus. The usual guidelines found in the battered women's movement guided our decision-making: Work it until there is widespread agreement and comfort that the direction is valid. (I will say, though, that observing how giving orders can result in immediate action made this more traditional method very appealing!)



We also pushed outside the limits of domestic violence and considered linkages to child abuse, sexual violence, and trafficking in women. In our executive summary in the Task Force's third and final report, we spelled out the connections between the types of violence against women. These statements take on even greater significance given our recent awareness of the mishandling of sexual violence at the Air Force Academy. In the summary, we commented, "Members of the Task Force realize that domestic violence is but one aspect of the overall problem of violence against women. Sexual violence is an important concern for the

military as well." Further, we noted, "It is important that all our recommendations for training, assessment, safety planning, investigation, and intervention, as well as prevention, acknowledge that sexual violence is an often coexisting aspect of domestic violence. Any efforts to target sexual violence within families will also serve to educate and further condemn sexual violence against strangers, coworkers, and acquaintances." Our Task Force couldn't fully explore — or develop a special strategy for — sexual violence in the military, but I have frequently stated my support for the formation of a similar Defense Department task force on this issue.

Now, the challenge is to ensure that our work does make a difference, and as soon as possible. We must all consider the ways in which our combined efforts can end violence against women in military *and* civilian families. I am confident that one profound difference the Task Force has made is that military officials no longer feel isolated from the battered women's movement. Today, they know many of us. They have seen the concern, the willingness to help, and the dismay that we felt upon realizing how different our respective approaches have been and how little we understood one another. The unfamiliarity, at least, is irrevocably changed. Hopefully the same collaborative relationships will be developed during an exploration of the problem of *sexual* violence in the military. We are one nation, not divisible into the two worlds of military and civilian. We are one people who must end violence in our homes, in our streets, and someday, in our world.

*For more information about the Defense Task Force on Domestic Violence, visit [www.dtic.mil/domesticviolence](http://www.dtic.mil/domesticviolence). To view the Task Force's three reports, click on Reports on the left navigation bar.*

## Armed Forces Domestic Security Act Extends Full Faith and Credit Provisions to Military Land

The Armed Forces Domestic Security Act, or HR 5590, was passed in 2002 and provides that a civilian order of protection shall have the same force and effect on a military installation as it does within the jurisdiction of the court that issued the order. And, the Secretary of Defense is required to prescribe regulations to carry out this modification. In technical terms, the Armed Forces Domestic Security Act extends full faith and credit provisions to military land.

This legislation closed a loophole that had *prevented* civilian court orders — such as a restraining order against a batterer — from having any force on domestic military installations. As a result, victims of violence residing in military housing did not have access to a host of civilian legal tools.

Currently, the reverse has not been put into effect — that is, military orders of protection have *not* been granted full faith and credit on civilian land. But, there *are* ways for civilian officials to work with military law enforcement to uphold military protective orders. For example, an official can call a soldier's commanding officer to inform him or her that a violation of the military protective order has occurred at the hands of a service member and that the victim is in possession of a military protective order. Further, civilian authorities can gather evidence at the scene for use by the commander or even hold an alleged perpetrator until military police arrive to take the service member into custody.

U.S. Representative Robin Hayes (R-NC) introduced HR 5590 following the homicides at Fort Bragg in 2002, and it passed in record time. The Act made it through both houses of Congress in the fall of 2002, gained President Bush's signature in early December, and took immediate effect. The legislation is a major piece of the protocol recommended by the Task Force to the Department of Defense.