



THE BRIEFING

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Paying it Back, Paying it Forward



Two of Major Scott Riggs' children received grants from Our Military Kids back in August of 2009 so they could participate in karate while he was deployed to Iraq. Two years later, on the tenth anniversary of September 11, the Iraq and Afghanistan War veteran and father of four is giving back to the organization. He will swim, bike, and run in the Wisconsin Ironman to honor his fellow Service Members with a goal to raise \$2,000 for Our Military Kids.

viewed their role in my deployments," said Riggs. "It was the first time anyone outside of our house had ever recognized them for their sacrifices for our country. Karate was something new to focus on and an exciting way to help the days pass quicker. Receiving the grant gave our kids a sense of pride – pride for how I serve the country as their dad, and most importantly, for how they serve the country as my children."



Riggs' deployment with the 128th ACS of the Air National Guard was not easy for him or his family. Scott, who had been diagnosed with stage four Hodgkin's Lymphoma in 2007, had just received a clean bill of health when he received his orders for an overseas deployment. To top it off, his house was heavily damaged in a fire while he was gone, leaving his wife and children to live in a hotel for six months.

As he continues to collect pledges and train for the upcoming Ironman, Riggs is receiving fundraising assistance from Midwest Professional Karate where his children take classes. They hosted a Kick-A-Thon on August 24, encouraging students to write a bad habit they want to break on a wooden board and collect donations from friends and family. On the night of the event, the students broke their boards – and hopefully their habits, too.



One shining light during the deployment was Our Military Kids, which awarded grants to Jacob and Ian so they could take karate classes while their father was fighting for our country in the Middle East. It kept them focused on a positive activity during a difficult time, teaching them discipline and offering a positive adult role model. Now, with his kids still involved in karate, Riggs is returning the favor.

Our Military Kids thanks Scott Riggs and his family for their service to our country and their support of the grant program. Good luck in the Ironman, Scott!

"I started being deployed in 2003, and when Our Military Kids came into our lives in 2009, it made a tremendous difference in how our kids



www.OurMilitaryKids.org

Letter from the Executive Director



This year marks the tenth anniversary of the September 11th attacks in New York, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania. It seems difficult to believe it has been a decade since that ill-fated day. Yet, for many, especially our military families, the reminders of that day are ever present. We must not only remember the victims of the tragic events on 9/11, but those who died during two wars over the past ten years.

This September 11th also provides an opportunity to remember those who have been forced to accept a “new normal” as a result of the tragic events of 9/11. Our Military Kids has invited some of those impacted most to share their stories and allow us a look at the people and the stories of those serving our nation. You will have the opportunity to read excerpts of those essays in the article ***A Decade of Change*** found in this newsletter or read an entire sampling of essays found on the Our Military Kids web site. This is also a good time to assess our nation’s past and future commitment to military families still facing serious challenges.

The Our Military Kids program has grown tremendously over the past seven years, in large measure made possible by generous people throughout the country who understand that a healthy family is the foundation of a first class military force. Through it all, our military families have done a miraculous job of remaining resilient and steadfast. As resilient as they are, they continue to face tough challenges. Our littlest warriors must continue to be strengthened and uplifted by those in the community desiring to make a difference. Sometimes, the simplest things in life have the biggest impact. The discipline and self-esteem that come with enrollment in a martial arts class, the sense of achievement and self-confidence provided by horseback riding lessons, or the sense of well-being stemming from a dance class all go a long way in sustaining the health of our military children. Parents have reported how their children benefit simply by receiving our grant award packet in the mail, allowing the child to feel more a part of their parent’s military deployment.

As we recognize our first responders and our men and women wearing a military uniform on September 11, 2011, let us also remember to say thank you to our littlest warriors, the sons and daughters of our troops.

Spreading his Wings

Logan Monahan is training to hunt. But in this case, his weapon of choice is not a hunting rifle, but instead an animal. Logan is training to become a falconer who controls a wild bird capable of hunting prey and returning it to him. Logan’s grant from Our Military Kids covered fees for him to attend workshops that teach him more about the sport, something he’d wanted to do for years.

“We first drove by the falconry school when we went on vacation two years ago, and he’s been doing research on it ever since,” said Jackie, Logan’s mom. “We stopped in while the owner was doing a demonstration, and it definitely grabbed his attention. Logan had done 4H projects with chickens before, but at 14, he was ready to move on to bigger birds.”

And that’s exactly what Logan is doing. In the classes he’s taken so far, Logan has learned how to transfer the bird from a perch to his arm, make it fly away, and then return again to his arm using food as a reward. He said while it was difficult to not fear the bird when it flew directly toward him, it was not his biggest challenge.

“The falcon clawed my hand once,” Logan said. “It didn’t really hurt until a few days later, but it hurt.”

If anything, it will be a scar with a story behind it to tell his father when he returns home from Kuwait later

this month. Sgt. Matthew Monahan has been in the military for 15 years, currently with the National Guard. His first deployment was to Iraq when Logan was eight, but this current deployment has proven to be more difficult.



“Logan was aware of things that happened over there when he was younger, but he’s much more aware now,” said Jackie. “The grant has been great to get him exposed to something that we may not have been able to do beforehand. Logan had been looking into falconry for so long, so it was great that he finally had the chance to do it during the deployment, which kept him busy.”

As for Logan, he’s just excited to have his dad stateside again.

“It was hard having him gone,” he added. “I’m excited to have him come back and go fishing and do all of the stuff we normally do when he’s home.”

Now, they can add falconry to that list. Logan will work with a federally licensed falconer who can sponsor him through an apprenticeship lasting at least two years. He hopes to become a general falconer at age 18, and a master falconer by 24.



A Decade of Change

We are just days away from September 11, 2011, marking the tenth anniversary of the day that forever changed the United States of America. On that day, nearly 3,000 people died as a result of terrorism. In the past ten years, 3,210 US troops have died fighting for our country in the Middle East, and thousands more have been severely injured. These people are among the more than two million troops that have deployed as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation New Dawn.

The numbers are staggering. Hundreds of thousands of people have been affected by the wars over the course of a decade. National Guardsmen and Reservists have had to leave their civilian jobs to deploy overseas. Service members from all branches have returned home severely injured. All of their families have made tremendous sacrifices – many through multiple deployments.

In light of the impact the past ten years have had on all of our grant recipients, we held an essay contest encouraging people to discuss the past ten years and the role Our Military Kids played in their lives. The top entries will be posted on our website by September 11. Here are some excerpts:

“My husband appreciated knowing that while he was serving our country, Our Military Kids was serving his family.”

“Since I have sacrificed so much I am so glad that people like Our Military Kids, and the people who donate to them, have made a sacrifice for me.”

“Our children have not experienced what many of their friends and classmates call ‘normal.’ Our children spent many years saying goodnight to their dad on a computer screen, having dad remind them of house rules, but having mom be the sole enforcer, and believing in their three and four year old minds that ‘The Navy’ is a place, not a way of life. Our Military Kids gave our children the opportunity to participate in swimming lessons. With every stroke they could imagine it was a hug from dad, or use it to escape reality and just be a mermaid for a couple of hours. There is no pressure and no sadness in the water.”

“My daughter still talks about the wonderful package Our Military Kids sent her, awarding her the grant. Making the difference in a child’s life, when they don’t fully understand the meaning of what may be going on around them, is what Our Military Kids does best. They put themselves in the child’s shoes and make them feel supported and special. Isn’t that what we want for all our children?”

“Our Military Kids allowed us to encourage her interest in math and science. Most importantly, the grant made it possible for her to attend camp at a pivotal time in the deployment cycle. It came at a time when she needed encouragement, reassurance, and confidence. Mission accomplished.”

Beauty and Brains

At 17 years old, Brooklyn Hodge is about to begin her senior year of high school. On top of her rigorous academic schedule and active participation in her school’s dance team, she’s adding one more activity into the mix: pageants. Unlike the child stars of TLC show “Toddlers and Tiaras,” Brooklyn is just now dabbling in the pageant circuit for the first time.

The idea crossed Brooklyn’s mind when her cousin participated in a local pageant, which netted her a scholarship to help pay for the cost of college. With Brooklyn’s ambitious plans for college, the idea immediately appealed to her. She’s currently part of Washington State’s Running Start program, which allows juniors and seniors to test into college classes.

The logic is that students can graduate high school with an associate’s degree.

“I won’t quite have my associate’s degree at the end of this year,” Brooklyn notes. “But I’m planning to go to Arizona State University for the remainder of my four-year degree, and then I want to go to Gonzaga for law school.”

Pageants will also give Brooklyn the opportunity to educate the community about military families and the challenges they face during deployments. It’s a topic Brooklyn knows a lot about. Her father is a member



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of the Air National Guard, and has deployed all over the world throughout her childhood. While Brooklyn has never received a grant from Our Military Kids, she understands the importance of being involved in an activity during parental deployments.

"It was hard having him gone because my parents are divorced, so it was just my mom and my brother and me," said Brooklyn. "That's around the time I got started in dance classes, so I had something to do to take my mind off of things, and I made friends to hang out with, too."

Dance is Brooklyn's talent during the pageants, but her overall platform is supporting military families. She says Our Military Kids is the perfect example of an organization that can help military children across the country – a childhood friend of Brooklyn's who received an Our Military Kids grant for horseback riding

is proof. Brooklyn has volunteered to share information about the Our Military Kids grant program at Yellow Ribbon events in Washington this month.



On August 13, Brooklyn competed in the Miss Washington High School America Pageant, finishing as third runner up. She will continue to enter pageants in hopes of winning scholarships and will make sure the public knows about Our Military Kids along the way.

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Supporting National Guard And Military Reserve Families
One Child at a Time