

MILITARY SURVIVOR FAMILIES FORM ‘GOLD STAR COUNCIL’

New Coalition to Create Unified Voice for Gold Star Families & Organizations

WASHINGTON, D.C. (May 5, 2009)—More than 20 family members of U.S. service members who were killed in or remain missing from America’s military conflicts and officials from organizations that serve military survivor families met here recently to discuss issues and concerns challenging current and future generations of Gold Star families.

The family members and organization leaders agreed to form a far-reaching coalition—known as the “Gold Star Council”—that will unify the groups’ voices and shared concerns on issues affecting Gold Star and Prisoner-of-War/Missing-in-Action (POW/MIA) family members and the organizations that represent them. The organizations will maintain their individual missions and identities, however, the Gold Star Council will represent the broader coalition on issues affecting Gold Star and POW/MIA family members.

Attending this groundbreaking meeting were the:

- American Gold Star Mothers (founded in 1928);
- Gold Star Wives of America (founded in 1945);
- National League of POW/MIA Families (founded in 1970);
- Sons and Daughters In Touch (founded in 1990);
- American World War II Orphans Network (founded in 1991);
- Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (founded in 1994);
- White House Commission on Remembrance (established by Congress in 2000);
- Snowball Express (founded in 2005); and
- Families United (founded in 2005).

The U.S. Navy Chaplain Corps, founded in 1775, also participated in the meeting and will serve on the Gold Star Council in an advisory capacity.

The Gold Star Council is comprised of parents, spouses, children and other family members who have lost loved ones in America’s military conflicts—from World War II to today’s Global War on Terror. In all, the Council represents a broad and diverse membership of more than one million people—from young children to adults—and includes celebrities, elected officials, corporate executives and community leaders.

Meeting organizer and Gold Star son Tony Cordero said: “For decades members of the Gold Star organizations have operated independently. The formation of the Gold Star Council can provide a comprehensive and cohesive voice to support the interests of the survivors of America’s fallen military heroes. The collective power and united voices of the Gold Star Council will be a major source of consciousness for all Americans.”

Cordero, whose father Maj. William E. Cordero was listed as missing June 22, 1965 during a mission over Laos, is one of Maj. Cordero’s five children. Tony Cordero helped establish SDIT to provide support to sons, daughters and family members of Vietnam War casualties.

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Gold Star wife and U.S. Army Capt. Marissa A. Alexander, said: “The Gold Star Council will work to ensure that all Gold Star family members benefit from the collective experiences and wisdom that we share as mothers and fathers, wives and husbands, sons and daughters of America’s military heroes who made the ultimate sacrifice for our nation. We owe it to today’s generation of Gold Star family members to draw on our unique experiences and create a strong and united coalition focused on providing the highest levels of support and honor for our newest members—the survivors of America’s Global War on Terror.”

Capt. Alexander is the surviving spouse of U.S. Army SSgt. LeRoy E. Alexander who was killed June 3, 2005 in Afghanistan when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle. A Special Forces engineer, SSgt. Alexander was living his dream of serving his country. Beginning as high school sweethearts, the Alexanders’ relationship led to marriage, service to their country and two beautiful children, who sadly never met their Green Beret father. Marissa was five months pregnant at the time of SSgt. Alexander’s death. Through her work in the military and in organizations, such as the Gold Star Council, Capt. Alexander continues to honor her husband and to provide support to other Gold Star families.

The first military survivor organizations got their start May 28, 1918 when President Wilson approved a recommendation made by the Women’s Committee of the Council of National Defenses that, instead of wearing conventional mourning attire for relatives who have died in the service of their country, American women should wear a black band on the left arm with a gilt star on the band for each member of the family who has given his life for the nation. Subsequently, the 89th Congress enacted Public Law 534 that directed the design and distribution of a lapel button, known as the “Gold Star Lapel Button”, to identify widows and widowers, parents and children of members of the Armed Forces of the United States who lost their lives while serving their nation in a military conflict.

Other Gold Star organizations and related veterans or military family groups interested in joining the Gold Star Council can contact Tony Cordero at tony@sdt.org. Please write “Gold Star Council” in the e-mail subject line.

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