

Illinois National Guard servicemember raises children, servicemembers

Written by Staff Sgt. Michael Camacho, 108th Sustainment Brigade Public Affairs
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CAMP ARIFJAN, KUWAIT (05/10/2014)(readMedia)-- Mother's Day in the United States is annually held on the second Sunday of May. It celebrates motherhood and it is a time when people show appreciation to mothers and mother figures. In today's military there are thousands of mothers who serve the U.S. at home and abroad. Many of these military moms have blended their leadership skills with maternal care used in their family and military family. Staff Sgt. Maria McEnroe-Prentiss, the noncommissioned officer in charge administration with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 108th Sustainment Brigade out of Chicago, has merged her troop care and leadership training as a NCO with her lessons learned as a mother of 11 children. She said her military service and experience has aided her as a mother and was the encouragement for her older children to also enlist. Deployed to Kuwait with the 108th Sust. Bde., Prentiss will spend this Mother's Day with the Soldiers she provides leadership and care for and be away from her seven children still at home. Prentiss enlisted into the Army Reserves in 1980 and later joined the Active Duty Army in 1982. While stationed at Fort Campbell, Ky., she met Todd Prentiss, who was also stationed at Fort Campbell. The two married at the post chapel in 1983, two years later the couple had their first child, the start to the family they wanted. Shortly after their first child's birth Maria left the Army to raise their new family, while Todd continued to serve. "The military was a big part our life, but we both know we wanted to have a big family and I wanted to be a dedicated mother while Todd continued to serve," said Maria. The two moved to Germany when Todd was reassigned to his new duty station. In Germany the Prentiss family continued to grow as the couple now had four children. In 1989 Todd's military service had come to a close and the family moved to Maria's hometown of Peoria, Ill. Todd joined the Peoria Fire Department while Maria continued to care for the children at home. Even after her service Maria said what she learned through professional leadership training and experience was never forgotten. "When I attended (the Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course) we learned a lot about troop care, leadership, compassion and all the things needed to provide the best for your Soldiers," said Maria. "Nearly every leadership trait or skill was something I put into practice with the children, especially as they grew up and our family grew." Todd and Maria often told their children about how they met while serving on Active Duty. On a few of their family trips the children were able to visit Fort Campbell and see the chapel where their parents were married. Maria said she believes

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this exposure to the military coupled with her and Todd's stories about military service influenced their children to also enlist into the military. Air Force Staff Sgt. Sean Prentiss a Peoria Native, with the 86th maintenance squadron was one of the first of their children to join the military enlisting into the Active Duty Air Force in 2006. Sean said the values his mother instilled in them help prepare him for military culture. "I feel that when it came time to go over customs and courtesies along with the proper mentality needed to be effective in the service, her parenting had already formed that foundation prior to going into the recruiters office," said Sean. As her children came closer to the age of 18, the military option was not low on the list for her children, said Maria. Army Sgt. Sonja Prentiss also a Peoria native, with the Active Army's 8th Military Information Support Battalion said her mother was a critical influence in her joining the military. "If it wasn't for her, I wouldn't be who I am today," said Sonja. Sonja said her mother had always encouraged her to join the military when she was growing up to help her decide what she wanted to achieve in her life. "I joined in 2009, when I was 19 years old," said Sonja. "I had not gone to college, and couldn't figure out what I wanted to be. Being in the military has given me a life that I never could have had if I had stayed in my hometown."

While Sonja credits her mother for enlisting, it was Sonja's visit to the recruiters office that lead to Maria re-enlistment into the Army. Maria said she wanted to accompany Sonja to a visit at the recruiters office, the recruiter mentioned the opportunities for prior service wanting to return into the military. Soon after Maria enlisted into the Illinois Army National Guard, and in the following months Sonja joined the Active Duty Army. As Maria shows pride in the service of her children, her children share the same pride in their mother. "I am extremely proud of my mom and her ability to push herself," said Sonja. "Not many people would take the steps that she has and rejoin the military so late in life, and with seven out of 11 children at home," said Prentiss. "My mother is a true inspiration to all of the people that she comes in contact with, and she most certainly has what it takes to be an outstanding NCO and take care of her Soldiers."