

YOUR SOLDIER YOUR ARMY

A PARENTS' GUIDE

By Vicki Cody

The Institute of Land Warfare
Association of the United States Army



Your Soldier, Your Army: A Parents' Guide
By Vicki Cody

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Arlington, Virginia 22201-3385
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Publication of
Your Soldier, Your Army: A Parents' Guide
was made possible by a grant from

Newell Rubbermaid[™]

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Preface

I am an Army wife and a mother. That pretty much sums up who I am. I wear a lot of hats and play many roles, but first and foremost I am a wife and a mother. I'm married to a Soldier (30 years). I've known my husband since he was a cadet at West Point, I've come up through the ranks with him and we raised two sons along the way. Then, I became an Army mom . . . twofold. Both of our sons chose the Army as their career. In fact, both became helicopter pilots like their father. To add to all of this, I'm a mother-in-law—our younger son was married three months before he deployed to Iraq.

So I feel I have some experiences worth sharing. When I began writing this book both sons were deployed to Iraq, serving in the same brigade. As I finish this book, both sons are either in Iraq or on their way. Once again, both are in the same unit, one that their dad commanded. You could say they're carrying on a family tradition—one that's making me go gray with worry!

My husband's still on active duty, stationed at the Pentagon. At one point, two years ago, while he was

commanding the 101st Airborne Division and our older son had just joined the division, both were in Afghanistan at the same time. I guess God was watching out for me because by the time our younger son joined the division, my husband had already been assigned to the Pentagon. I definitely could not have handled all three being deployed at the same time!

My husband has commanded at every level in the Army. Over the years, I've coached, mentored, consoled, grieved with, laughed with and cried with Army spouses. I've helped form and participated in spouse readiness groups. I've done everything in my power to make Army life just a little bit better, a little bit easier on the families, whether in peacetime or during war.

Believe me when I say we've come a long way when it comes to spouse programs, awareness, resources, information flow and outreach in general. For the past four or five years, the Army has been very focused on the well-being of the Soldier and his or her spouse and children. However, many other family members are affected by the Soldier's military service, especially parents and grandparents. What are we doing to help prepare them for deployments?

To the spouses we offer classes, literature, programs, readiness groups and support groups. The Army knows that knowledge is empowering and comforting and even improves the readiness of a unit. Most Army spouses live on or near the post from which their Soldier deploys, so they have access to all the programs and are surrounded by other spouses going through exactly what they are going through—there's comfort and strength in that.

Parents and grandparents, on the other hand, probably don't live near the post. And, yes, some parents are or were Soldiers or happen to be married to a Soldier. Many more, however, are unfamiliar with military life.

I have an advantage of having been part of this system for the past 30 years. I have a deep understanding of the military in general, and I have access to all kinds of information, resources and support systems. Still, I know how scary it's been for me having both sons in a combat zone, and I think about all the parents out there who don't have that background. This must be very confusing and frightening for them.

So, I want to use my knowledge, experiences, candor, insight—whatever I have I want to share with other families. I'm a little old-fashioned in that I still believe in the power of the human touch or connection. I also believe each of us can make a difference. Sometimes it's something as simple as reassuring a frightened mom or dad and letting them know they're not alone, that every one of us who has a loved one in a combat zone lives with the same fear and dread. Sometimes they just need to know there's a toll-free number they can call to get in touch with the rear detachment of their Soldier's unit, or maybe there are some terms they don't understand, or why the mail takes so long, or why their Soldier hasn't been able to call for weeks. Sometimes they just need a little knowledge of a very complex and vast organization. I wish I could wrap my arms around all the parents out there.

Since I can't do that, maybe this book can be of service. If sharing my experience can help family members cope with this war and other deployments, then it will have been worth every bit of my time and effort. Wife of a Soldier; mother of two Soldiers; mother-in-law to a Soldier's newlywed wife—I'm continuing my role as coach and mentor, but now it's more personal than ever. It's from this perspective that I speak.

Vicki Cody
Arlington, Virginia
1 September 2005

A Soldier In Your Family



*S*o you have a Soldier in your family . . . how exciting! Let me just say right now what a great honor it is to have a Soldier in your family. You should feel so proud. Regardless of where you come from, your race, religion or political views, you need to realize how important your Soldier is to our Army and to our country. You may have mixed feelings and emotions about all of this, but above all you should be bursting with pride. You should be “lump in your throat, goose bumps on your arms, and tears in your eyes” proud! There is no greater profession, nothing more noble than wearing the uniform of our U.S. Army. Your Soldier raised his right hand and swore to protect and defend this great country and its Constitution. Wow, that’s pretty powerful!

**It doesn’t
matter where
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Maybe this is a first for you and your family; maybe you’ve never had a relative in the military. Whether

you're military or civilian, this can be a confusing and frustrating time for your family, especially if your Soldier is deployed or facing a deployment. From here on I will refer to your loved one as your Soldier, since that covers son, daughter, spouse, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, officer, noncommissioned officer (NCO), enlisted, active Army, Army National Guard and Army Reserve. Otherwise I would spend most of these pages trying to use the politically correct term every time I want to refer to your loved one.

Because of the world situation, the Global War on Terrorism and the downsizing of the military, you can expect that if your Soldier has not already deployed she will deploy in the near future. It is the nature of this business. Your Soldier may deploy more than once, with only a few months between deployments. Our older son graduated from helicopter flight school and within two months deployed to Afghanistan for six months. He returned to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, for six months and then deployed to Iraq for 12 months. He has spent 18 of the past 24 months in combat. His is just one example of many.

We live in a troubling time, and our military is being called upon more than ever to protect not just the United States but other countries and their people. The military also has increased its homeland security mission. Not every Soldier is deployed overseas; many are deployed to other posts, camps and stations throughout the United States for this homeland security mission. It doesn't matter where the Soldier deploys because whenever a Soldier deploys it puts stress on his family.

Army life is not an easy life, and it's not for everyone. But, if you have a Soldier in your family, let me offer you reassurance. I've been married to a Soldier for 30 years, and while we have faced many challenging times and made many sacrifices along the way, overall I

wouldn't change one thing, and I can't think of anyone else I would trade places with. It's been an exciting adventure for two kids from small-town Vermont. We've traveled all over the world and met some pretty exciting people along the way, from the President and First Lady to music and movie stars, athletes, politicians, generals and privates and every kind of Soldier in between. Most important were the Soldiers and their families who have truly blessed our lives and made this journey so rewarding.

It was these great American heroes our sons grew up with and wanted to emulate. It was

Army life that shaped all four of us. We raised two wonderful sons amid the moves and separations and turmoil of war. And those two boys we dragged all over kingdom come—who went to three high schools each, who did not get to play certain varsity sports because we had just moved to a new school, whose dad missed birthdays and other holidays, who got to see their grandparents and other relatives only once a year or on very special occasions—have chosen the Army for their careers. In fact, each will tell you that all he ever wanted to be was an Apache helicopter pilot like his dad.

Soldier's Creed

I am an American Soldier.

I am a Warrior and a member of a team.

I serve the people of the United States and live the Army Values.

I will always place the mission first.

I will never accept defeat.

I will never quit.

I will never leave a fallen comrade.

I am disciplined, physically and mentally tough, trained and proficient in my warrior tasks and drills.

I always maintain my arms, my equipment and myself.

I am an expert and I am a professional.

I stand ready to deploy, engage, and destroy the enemies of the United States of America in close combat.

I am a guardian of freedom and the American way of life.

I am an American Soldier.


Our boys entered into military service with their eyes wide open. They've lived the Army life for, respectively, 24 and 26 years, and they still chose it when their time came. And we couldn't be more proud. Very worried, but proud!

I tell you all of this not to sound like a bragging parent but to give you some insight into an Army family and how great Army life has been for my family. We are closer than most families; we have something special that people envy, and it's because of this way of life.

As for the upheavals and separations the Army often put our family through, I learned early on that it does no good to dig in my heels and resist. It's a waste of time and energy and only makes the situation worse. I try to learn from the situation and make some good come from it. It's not always easy. So much in life is out of our control, and much about the Army is way out of our control!

It's not that I'm naïve or have my head buried in the sand; I just try to focus on the positive rather than the negative. I know Army life is tough and demanding—not to mention the low pay, long hours, separations, deployments, etc. But the good far outweighs the bad if

Your Soldier can make headlines in your local newspaper through the Army and Air Force Hometown News Service. The Soldier fills out DD Form 2266, which includes the names and addresses of living parents, step-parents, guardians, grandparents or other relatives of the Soldier and her spouse. The Army then sends news of the Soldier's accomplishments to newspapers serving those relatives. It's a good way to notify your community of your Soldier's promotions, awards, transfers and deployments.



you choose to look at it that way.

Your Soldier will meet people and travel all over the world. He will mature faster than you can imagine and learn to shoulder responsibility at a young age, unlike his civilian counterparts. A Soldier learns to survive and take care of himself and his buddies to the right and left of him. The Army, by nature, builds teams and self-esteem; it gives young adults a sense of purpose and self-worth. These are traits that take years to build in the civilian workplace. Think about people who work at a job or go through life and never take a risk, never take a stand, never test themselves. A Soldier does all that very early on; she may be only 19 years old but with the maturity of someone twice her age.

Men and women join the Army for different reasons; as long as they join for the right reasons, our Army will continue to fill its ranks with brave young men and women—our sons and daughters—who make it a great institution and the mightiest Army in the world. These young kids fight battles one day and help innocent victims the next day. They go after the likes of Saddam Hussein and then hand out teddy bears to Iraqi children. (I use Iraq as an example, but our Soldiers are performing peacekeeping acts in many countries around the world.) So get ready for the adventure and just be ready to support your Soldier in any possible way, whenever he needs you.

Remember!

- The U.S. Soldier is a rare breed of hero and should be a source of great pride for you.
- "Soldier" refers to both genders and all ranks, active, Guard and Reserve.
- Despite its hardships, a military life is full of wonderful experiences and people.
- No matter your Soldier's specialty, expect deployments.
- Your Soldier has chosen this profession. While it's natural for you to worry, your Soldier still deserves your full support because your nation's security is now in your Soldier's well-trained hands.
- Embrace it all!

Deployment Orders



Just when you think you're getting used to your Soldier's way of life and you're feeling pretty good about Army life, it happens: Your Soldier calls you and says the dreaded "D" word—DEPLOYMENT.

Suddenly everything in your life changes. When my husband was commanding the 101st Airborne Division a couple of years ago, our son was getting out of flight school and was assigned to the 101st. (He wanted to come to his dad's division; in case they went to combat, he said, he wanted to go with his dad.) I'm not thinking deployment—I'm thinking that for the first time in six years I'll have one of our sons nearby. I'm picturing Sunday dinners, time together. Well, that scenario lasted less than two months.

The 101st already had a few thousand Soldiers in Afghanistan supporting Operation Enduring Freedom. Then Operation Anaconda started and the commander in Afghanistan called back to my husband for more

**This is one
time your
Soldier needs
your
unwavering
support.**

troops—specifically, another Apache helicopter battalion. I'll never forget that day when my husband came home from work; he had this awful look on his face as he told me he was sending our son's unit into combat immediately because things were getting "hot" over in Afghanistan. I was stunned. I remember saying something really profound, like "I said the boys could be in the Army, but I never signed up for combat this soon!" As if my wishes had anything to do with it.

I'm telling you right now, that was a big jolt of reality. Because more pilots and aircraft were desperately needed, our son's unit deployed within 72 hours. At this point I already knew far too much, so I was scared to death—but I couldn't let our son know that. My husband was scared, too. It just seemed too soon, like our son hadn't been in the Army long enough. I remember asking my husband if our son would go right into combat. My husband reassured me he would be given time to get oriented. Six months later, when our son returned home, I asked what happened when he first landed in Afghanistan. He said they were given a briefing, then their commander tossed some maps to him and his co-pilot and said, "Study these maps, you're going into combat tomorrow." It's a good thing I never knew that until after the fact—I would've tried to say something to someone and totally embarrass myself and our son! (I'd like to think I have some say in all of this, but I know it's totally out of my control.)

That was our first experience with sending a son off to combat. So I know exactly how you're feeling. You're probably thinking, "When did this kid grow up and become old enough to go off to war?" One minute you are sitting proudly at her graduation from high school, college, basic training or flight school; now she's preparing to go into harm's way. I remember thinking, "It's not time yet, just give us a little more time."

The hardest thing for a parent is to let go of a child and not have any control over the situation. It's human nature to want to make everything right and protect our kids no matter their age. It's far worse than when you sent them off to college or to join the Army; an overseas deployment is a whole other level of parental worry. I remember saying to my husband that it seemed like yesterday the boys were in high school and college, and our worries were drinking and driving, drugs, sex, etc. Suddenly, it was roadside bombs, ambushes, missiles shooting down their aircraft, and horrible sandstorms. There were so many things to worry about I didn't know how I could sleep at night. Suddenly, real-world dangers were confronting our young sons, and no one could promise me they would be OK. At this point you've got to have faith and trust in your Soldier's leaders, in his command and in the Army. Otherwise you'll drive yourself crazy. Don't think you're alone in your worries and fears. Everyone who has a deployed Soldier is feeling these things. My husband, the Soldier, has told me many times how scared or worried he is about his sons. It makes me feel better to know I'm not alone.

Deployment Process

"Deployment" refers to the relocation of forces and materiel to desired operational areas. Deployment encompasses all activities from home station through destination, including intracountry, intercountry and intratheater movement, staging and holding areas.

Deployments range in size from a single Soldier assigned a specific task to the wholesale movement of several battalions. Deployments include assignments to combat theaters, assignments to support opera-

tions (overseas or within the United States), responding to natural disasters and standard rotations to the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, California, or Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Polk, Louisiana.

Most military movements, even some exercises, are classified, what's called operational security (OPSEC). Its purpose is to protect Soldiers, units and the mission upon which they are embarking. Soldiers are trained not to give out details—

When both boys deployed to Iraq, I have to say it was pretty rough. The only comfort I had was that our boys were together in the same area in Iraq—and they were excited to be together. Having his brother around was a morale booster for our older son, who'd already been there seven months. For the younger one, knowing his big brother would be waiting for him when he arrived was a huge deal. So my husband and I found comfort in knowing the boys were together.

Now that we have all that out in the open, let's talk about the actual deployment. Military movements, by nature, are classified. Your Soldier is not being evasive when he says he can't answer your questions. Not all deployments are for combat. Your Soldier's unit may be assigned a support mission in the continental United States (CONUS), or it may be a standard deployment for an exercise at one of the Army's training centers. Those 30-day rotations, training-related and publicized well in advance, still require Soldiers to prepare as if for a real deployment—and the negative effects on the family can be the same as for that of a real deployment.

sometimes including destination and timeline—even to family members.

There is no generic deployment. While Soldiers may have established checklists and procedures to follow leading up to deployments, every deployment is different. The one constant in all deployments is flux. Soldiers themselves sometimes feel like they are on a yo-yo as departure and return dates shift. This is a historical fact of military operations, and technology has not brought much improvement.

Scheduling depends on many factors, including aircraft availability, capacity on the receiving end, unexpected changes in the dynamics of the mission and even the weather.


The number and length of deployments vary according to the Soldier's specialty, unit and mission. Some Soldiers deploy several times a year for weeks or months at a time; some Soldiers deploy for yearlong tours and may deploy again within months of returning home.

Deployments are very complex. Their execution depends on many things, and some of those things (e.g., dates, times) change constantly. The larger the deployment of troops and equipment, the more complicated it is. When a large unit like the 101st Airborne Division or the 3d Infantry Division deploys to a combat zone, the units are given a time line to accomplish everything. The Army prefers to give units as much notice as possible, but I know from my experiences as an Army wife, with my husband deploying all over the world for various reasons, that sometimes the Soldier will get no notice at all. My husband literally left one day while the kids and I were at the beach! For Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm, his unit had about 10 days' notice but the rest of the division had six weeks to get ready. When our son deployed to Afghanistan, he had just three days to get ready. Last year when the 101st was leaving for Kuwait, our son starting hinting about a month before that he was deploying.

Commanders can't give out all the details too far in advance, but people can figure out that something is happening just by all the activity in the unit. Then, as the deployment gets closer, the Soldiers are given tentative dates and times. You may get only a small window of opportunity to get there to see your Soldier before he leaves. It's difficult to arrange a flight if you are not sure exactly when your Soldier is leaving. Some parents go well before the actual deployment so they can plan their trip in advance. I like to be there as close to the departure as possible, but that's risky when you live far away. The last time, my husband and I barely got there the night before our son left.

If you're able to drive, that's the best way to go. Then, when your Soldier finds out she's really leaving, you would still have time to get there by car unless you live across the country. It's such a difficult time because

The home-front support organization for Army units is the Family Readiness Group (FRG) at the unit's home post. But now that units are deploying for longer periods, and the home front itself is as broad as the nation, the Army is starting a new program of virtual Family Readiness Groups (vFRGs). These Web pages provide a portal for official and unofficial information between the unit, Soldiers and families, including instant messaging, forums, postcards and file sharing. Visit www.armyfrg.org for more information.



you want to be there to say goodbye, but sometimes it's too difficult. If your Soldier is stationed outside the continental United States (e.g., Hawaii or Germany), you may not be able to get there. If that's the case, at least try to be there when your Soldier comes home from the deployment.

Most of the time units deploy on Air Force transports, which can make it even harder to predict when they will depart; schedules change, planes break down and other priorities can intervene. Sometimes, if the deployment is huge and the Air Force can't provide enough transport planes, the military contracts charter or commercial airlines to get the troops overseas.

Even if you can't be there in person, there are things you can do to support your Soldier during this stressful time. A Soldier's life gets very hectic as the deployment approaches. He'll have so many things to accomplish to get the unit and himself ready. He'll be working long, exhausting hours for days on end; it's backbreaking work, and there's little personal time. If your Soldier is in a leadership position (e.g., platoon sergeant, platoon leader, company commander), she'll have a lot more responsibility and work even longer

hours. The bottom line is that the unit has to be packed up and ready to go by a certain date, so everything has to be accomplished. There's no "almost ready" or "we need a few more days"—everyone in the unit works day and night until everything is ready.

All you can do at this point is be there for your Soldier, to listen, guide, advise and, above all, be positive. This is one time your Soldier needs your unwavering support. His plate is more than full, and it's a stressful time, so try not to do anything to bring him down or show doubt about what's happening. None of that will help. There's no turning back, so just be upbeat.

You can express your fears to your spouse or a close friend, but if your Soldier thinks you're scared, it puts more pressure on her. I know it's hard to be upbeat at a time like this because deep inside you are scared and worried. But at the same time, you are probably proud and maybe a little excited. Focus on that.

Remember!

- Your Soldier is likely to deploy at some point during his career. That's part of his job, and you can't change that.
- Your worry adds to his worry; be supportive and helpful.
- For most deployments, destination and timeline are classified.
- Most deployments are complex and subject to change.
- You may get months' notice of your Soldier's deployment, you may get only hours' notice. Don't blame him, and complaining doesn't help.

As for me, I do really well leading up to the actual deployment; I put on an amazing performance. I am able to talk about the deployment—it seems surreal, as if it's not happening—and I'm very positive. But the minute that plane takes off, I cave in; I become a blubbing fool, and for a few days I cry over anything and everything. I've heard this same testimony from countless moms and dads, so if this happens to you, know that you're not alone. It gets a little easier with each passing day.

Planning Ahead



Because Army life is full of the unexpected, I suggest you and your Soldier discuss things and get organized before deployment orders come down. Much of what I'll talk about in this chapter is common sense, but you'd be surprised the details that get overlooked when a deployment is looming on the horizon. Things you can do ahead of time will ease your mind later on and hopefully make life easier for all of you when and if you face a deployment.

If your Soldier is single and you have a good relationship, I suggest that he provide you a power of attorney (POA). Both times our single son deployed he gave me a power of attorney. You both have to feel comfortable about it. Unfortunately, not everyone has a trusting relationship with his parents, and I've heard some horror stories about parents wiping out bank accounts. Here are some circumstances when you would need a POA: to renew

You'd be surprised at the details that get overlooked when a deployment is looming on the horizon.

his car registration and car insurance, access bank accounts and file his income tax.

My son also left me a book of signed checks so I could pay a few monthly bills. He was able to do much of his banking himself once Internet service became available in Iraq. Sometimes, however, they get to a location where they don't have access to the Internet. Also, your Soldier can have payments for many of her monthly bills (e.g., car, rent or mortgage, loans) automatically taken out of her paycheck. Our son deployed so quickly he didn't have time to set up those accounts.

If your Soldier is renting a house or apartment off post, he may decide to move out before the deployment begins and put everything in temporary storage. This has some advantages, mainly not having to pay rent and utilities. The problem comes upon return from the deployment; unless someone has found him a place ahead of time, your Soldier will have no place to live when he gets off that plane. Recently, when the 101st returned to Fort Campbell, rental property was in such short supply that Soldiers and their families were living in motels. That can use up a lot of money really fast.

Our son was renting a house off post with another helicopter pilot, and they decided to keep the house while they were deployed. They had their phone and cable shut off but kept their account open so they wouldn't have to start over when they returned. They had to keep the water, gas and electric on, but the monthly utility bills were small. Our son had his mail forwarded to me, and I paid these monthly bills as they came in using the book of signed checks he left me. The biggest expense was the rent. He and his roommate had left signed, dated checks with their rental agency for 12 months. Once again, your Soldier has to know and trust whomever he's dealing with before he can leave checks with people or agencies.

Deployment Checklist

Even when a Soldier gets notice of a deployment well in advance, the crush of her preparing for the mission can leave the family unprepared for her absence. The following checklist helps a Soldier's family, including parents, handle the deployment:

- Set up a power of attorney, one for financial matters and one for health matters. The base Legal Affairs office can help. This would be a good opportunity to get wills written, too.
- Work out a budget to make sure monthly bills and deployment-induced costs are covered. Determine who will pay bills in the event the Soldier cannot. The Soldier can set up pay allotments to cover bills and household expenses.
- Make child care plans, especially if both spouses work. Set up contingency child care plans in the event of an emergency.
- Write a list of next of kin, personal lawyer, family mechanic, trusted friend and the like, with phone numbers and addresses.
- Create an e-mail list of family members and friends to send updates.
- Inform next of kin about how to contact the Soldier in case of emergency and let them know the assistance available to them.
- Check the expiration dates on military ID cards and make sure the Emergency Data Cards and Family Care Plans are up to date.
- Check the car and major appliances to make sure they are in good working order.
- Give family members tours of the house to show them such things as fuse boxes and water heaters. Give family members tours of the post to show them the Army Community Service Center, chapel and unit.
- Create an important documents file that is secure but the family can easily access. Among the documents that should be readily available are medical, shot and dental records for every member of the family (including pets), birth certificates and adoption papers of each family member, citizenship or naturalization papers, marriage certificate, divorce papers, death certificates, discharge papers, passports and visas, copies of orders, leave and earnings statements, wills and living wills, real estate documents such as leases, mortgages and deeds, car title and registration, federal and state tax returns, and a list of credit cards, installment contracts and loans with account numbers.

I also paid our son's credit card bills each month. He had paid off the account before he left, but once things were more settled in Iraq, he was able to make on-line purchases. A post exchange (PX) was also set up over there, and he was charging items on a regular basis. You're probably wondering what kinds of charges he had from over there; he bought a small TV/DVD player and started buying movies—so many movies that he became known as “Blockbuster” and everyone came to him to borrow or watch movies. I sent him his air popcorn popper and a supply of popcorn, and he was living large! It's amazing what little things like that mean to Soldiers when they've been living in the desert with absolutely nothing for a couple of months. The bottom line is to get all the finances organized now and consolidate wherever possible. That makes it easier for you and your Soldier.

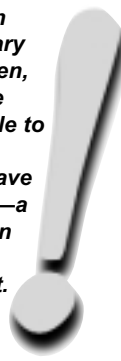
If your Soldier has pets, make sure she has a plan for them. I can't tell you the number of stray animals at Fort Campbell when the division deployed for Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm. Soldiers just didn't take the time—or maybe they didn't know who to turn to—and simply left their animals behind when they deployed. It was a big problem. In those days none of us were ready for such a huge deployment that involved the entire division. Because everyone was deploying, the Soldiers couldn't leave their pets with buddies. I think it caught many people off guard. Don't let that happen to your Soldier. Make sure someone is able to keep the pets long before there are deployment orders.

If your Soldier rents or owns a house with a yard, he needs to make arrangements to have the yard taken care of. Our son and his roommate forgot to ask anyone; because they had deployed in February, it was easy to forget about the yard. The following summer when our other son got to Fort Campbell and stayed at his

brother's house, he was surprised to see the yard in perfect shape. Then he learned that the next-door neighbor had been caring for our son's lawn the whole time he was gone. And not just mowing, but edging and watering! When I met this man he told me he had been caring for three lawns for deployed Soldiers, and he wouldn't accept any money. He said it was the very least he could do for Soldiers fighting for the freedoms he and his family enjoy. What a wonderful patriot!

If your Soldier has a high-profile or expensive car, she needs to find a safe place to store it. Most Army posts have a secure area for vehicles, but they are outside in the elements. If the post is prone to severe weather—hail, tornadoes, extreme temperatures—she may want to make other arrangements. One of our sons kept his car with one of our friends who lives near the post. Our other son brought his car to us in Arlington, Virginia; we have a garage and he didn't.

Make sure you know your Soldier's exact unit—his company, battalion and brigade. Ask for the names of the First Sergeant and the company commander. You never know when you might need that information. Like when your child first went off to school—you knew the teacher's name, the school number and probably the names of your child's playmates—you want to



Single Soldiers with children, dual military couples with children, and Soldiers whose spouses are not able to care for children or themselves must have a Family Care Plan—a designated guardian for the children—in case of deployment. If you are the designated guardian make sure you are fully prepared physically and financially, and immerse yourself in the deployment process, the Army's family services and your Soldier's duties.

know the people closest to your Soldier. Get the name of the rear detachment commander and the unit phone number. You never know when you might need to call that person.

When I was working the Army Hotline I got a call from a concerned father. He and his wife were going on a 10-day cruise and he was afraid that if something happened while they were gone, the Army wouldn't know how to get in touch with them. This was during the combat phase, so there was no e-mail yet—they could

Remember!

- Make sure your Soldier has the proper powers of attorney and all financial matters organized.
- Help your Soldier make arrangements for children, pets, vehicles, lawn maintenance and household items needing storage or care.
- Know the names and phone numbers of your Soldier's unit, commander and the First Sergeant.
- Know the name and phone number of the rear detachment commander.

not even let their Soldier know they were going away. I referred him to the Family Assistance Center (FAC) at the post from which their Soldier had deployed; from there he was given the phone number for the Soldier's rear detachment. He called to provide an emergency phone number and information about how long they would be away from their home. It gave this father peace of mind just to know that his Soldier's unit would know how to get in touch with him.

Getting Through the Deployment



*H*aving your Soldier in a combat zone will be the most stressful time for you and your family. There's not much I can say or do to ease your fears, but I can give you some things to think about and tell you what has helped me and other parents.

You get back into your routine, but you think about your Soldier constantly and wait anxiously for that first phone call, e-mail or letter. Once you have contact with your Soldier, you feel better.

Suddenly, you don't take anything for granted.

If your Soldier goes into a combat situation where you have limited—or nonexistent—communication with him, the situation is much more stressful for everyone. When our son got to Kuwait, he was able to call a few times. Then the war started and they all moved up through Iraq for combat operations. That began the most stressful time I've ever been through: no phone calls, no e-mail, nothing for weeks at a time. And he wasn't getting mail from us. I was so frustrated—I wanted our son to get our packages and letters, and I wanted to get mail from him!

Family Readiness Groups

Many Army units have developed Family Readiness Groups (FRGs), officially sanctioned organizations providing an avenue of mutual support, assistance and communication for the unit's Soldiers, civilian employees and their family members.

FRGs grew out of Family Support Groups, which formed when Army families banded together during war or at isolated locations. These groups provided information, moral support and social outlets for their members.

After the Gulf War the Army

recognized the role of these groups in overall force readiness and changed their name to emphasize the need for readiness and self-sufficiency among Army families. While membership is automatic, participation is voluntary.

Furthermore, FRG membership is now encouraged for extended families, boyfriends, girlfriends and members of the community.

FRGs are an information conduit, welcoming organization, self-help referral organization and a source of social support and group activities.

It seemed like a simple request but, as my husband reminded me, our son was in a combat situation. His unit was flying their helicopters up through the desert; there were no phone booths or Internet services, and mail call was sporadic at best. That was a tough time for all of us. We went six weeks without hearing from him, and it almost did me in. I just wanted to hear his voice and know he was OK. My husband would come home from the Pentagon at night and tell me our son's unit was "fine." And I would always say, "But that's not enough . . . I want to hear from him!" You just have to get through those tough times, and it is hard. Once they all settled in and we were able to e-mail and talk every week or so, it made a big difference. It made it bearable.

Mail is so important to your Soldier and to all of you back home. E-mailing is a great quick fix if your Soldier can do it on a regular basis. The only problem was getting used to daily e-mails and then not hearing anything from our son for a few days. Usually he would

They fill many roles:

- building Soldier and family cohesion and morale;
- preparing soldiers and families for deployments and for the reunion;
- reducing Soldier and family stress; and
- providing an avenue for sharing timely, accurate information.

For family members, FRGs give a sense of belonging to the unit and the Army community. It provides a way to devel-

op friendships, share information, obtain referrals to Army resources and share moral support during unit deployments. They also provide a better understanding of Army life and the unit's mission.

For Soldiers, FRGs give peace of mind. Soldiers can be assured their family members will be more self-sufficient and will have reliable and friendly support during their deployments. This peace of mind helps Soldiers focus on their work, perform better and be safer.

warn me if he was going somewhere or if he knew the Internet would be down, but once I got used to regular contact it was hard to go without for even a few days. The e-mails were my lifeline to both our sons while they were in Iraq, but we couldn't always count on it. It was about four months before our son had regular access to the Internet. So those first few months we depended on regular mail, which took forever! But I would savor those letters and read them over and over. I found that both our sons would say more and reveal more in letters than they might say on the phone. I felt a closeness to each one that was so special. Letters give both parties a chance to say things they might not ordinarily say.

I wrote at least once a week and tried to send a package once a week. It was like therapy for me. When I mailed a box of goodies I felt close to him, like he wasn't really that far away. It gave me a lot of satisfaction to find certain goodies I knew each son liked. Every week when I shopped my cart was full of stuff

For security reasons or host-country cultural issues, some items you would like to place in a care package may not be allowed. Then, too, you want to make sure that what you pack reaches your Soldier. Operation Military Pride provides a good guide on care package packing, as well as suggestions on activities you can do in your community. Visit www.operationmilitarypride.com for more information. Another organization, *AdoptaPlatoon*, (www.adoptaplatoon.org) can help you set up a community support group for your Soldier's unit. Other ideas for supporting Soldiers are at *Defend America* (www.defendamerica.mil), and the *USO* (www.uso.org) has been serving America's troops for more than 60 years.



how often do we as parents take the time to write our thoughts and tell our kids how proud we are of them and how much we love them? Most parents say these things in a card on special occasions, but how often do we do it throughout the year, especially with our adult kids? I've always been pretty open with my feelings and my affection toward my boys, but when they leave to go to combat it puts life in a whole new perspective for all of us military moms and dads. Suddenly, you don't take anything for granted. I think it brings close families even closer and affords all of us a wonderful opportunity to show our love and support for one another like never before. So don't miss the opportunity.

for the boys, and I loved thinking of innovative things to send. I was doing what I love doing—"mothering." For me this worked. You need to check with the unit and post office about any content and mailing restrictions.

The boys' dad wrote to both every week. What a great opportunity to communicate with your adult kids. Think about it—in our normal, busy, hectic, everyday lives,

When our older son was in Afghanistan, only a few family members wrote to him. Then, six months later when he left for Iraq, many of our extended family members started writing him. I think our family felt sorry for him and seemed to take more of an interest. That deployment was all over the news, and then the combat phase really hit home to just about everyone in our country. The neat thing was all these people writing to our son—some, like distant cousins, aunts and uncles from other parts of the country, had never even met him. But they wrote faithfully and sent goodie boxes.

Let me share a little story with you. We live on Fort Myer, a beautiful little Army post across the Potomac from Washington, D.C. It's so picturesque, with beautiful views of the Washington and Lincoln memorials and, on a clear day, the nation's Capitol. It's also home to the Army's Old Guard and Arlington National Cemetery. For the past two years I've watched the daily funeral processions go down the street with the riderless horse and the caisson carrying the flag-draped coffin. It's always a sobering sight, something none of us here takes for granted. Arlington Cemetery averages about 26 funerals a day. In the past it was mostly World War II, Korea and Vietnam veterans being buried. But last year the caisson began carrying Soldiers from this war. For me, with two sons in combat, the funeral processions took on a more personal meaning and served as a daily reminder of the war in Iraq.

One afternoon while on my daily walk with our dog, I noticed a large family gathering on the porch of the guest house next door to our home. A young man and woman came down off the porch and wanted to pet our dog, a big, friendly chocolate Lab. They appeared to be in their 20s. I asked if they were here for a family reunion. The young man said, "We buried our brother today. He was killed in Iraq last week."

I was caught totally off guard. I offered my sympathy and condolences and asked how they were doing. They both said they were OK but that it was really hard on their mother and grandmother. I asked about their brother—his name, his unit—and found out he was in one of the infantry brigades with the 101st Airborne Division. I told them my husband had just finished commanding the 101st, that we know most of the commanders and that it's a great unit. I could tell it was a small comfort to them that I knew the 101st and some of the Soldiers in their brother's unit, and I was glad to be able to connect with them in any small way. I then told them that both our sons were in Iraq with the 101st and how worried I was. I think they were surprised to meet someone who had loved ones in Iraq.

As I turned to leave, the young man asked if he could hug me, and he told me he would pray for my sons. Then he said something so powerful that it has stayed with me since. He looked right at me and said, "I feel so bad I never wrote to my brother while he was over there. I kept thinking he was coming home, and now it's too late." It broke my heart, this poor young man with all this guilt. It was hard for me not to cry, but he needed something more than tears. I calmly asked, "Did you love your brother and did you support what he was doing?"

He said, "Absolutely." And I said, "Then he knows that, believe me, he knows how you feel." He thanked me and I continued on my walk—crying the whole way. Don't miss an opportunity to write your Soldier—you may not get another chance.

Now we're going to talk about phone calls. Though you won't be able to make phone calls to your Soldier, he will be able to call you. Because of the time zone difference, the calls may come at any hour of the day or

night. Your Soldier may have waited in a long line to get to the phone. Most likely he will have other Soldiers around him. He also may get only 10 minutes to talk.

Keep all that in mind when he calls. Always be upbeat and glad to hear from him, even in the middle of the night. One time I made the mistake of crying; I couldn't help it. I felt terrible afterwards because that was upsetting to him. One time I yawned and reminded him it was two in the morning; another mistake because it made him feel bad. I'm very open and honest with both sons, but there are times when I hold back telling them something on the phone unless it is really serious. I don't want to needlessly worry them. Instead, I think of upbeat things to talk about and fun news from home. Often after a conversation I would think of something I could have or should have said, but then I couldn't call him back. Now I keep a list by the phone of things I want to say when he calls.

E-mail is great for daily communication, but there is nothing like hearing your Soldier's voice on the phone.

Something that helped me get through the tough times was talking to other parents who had a Soldier deployed. I found myself gravitating toward other moms and dads whenever I was in a large group. As kind and understanding as my close friends were, none of them truly understood what I was going through. I wanted to talk to other people in my situation; it was comforting to know people who were experiencing what I was. I stayed in touch with the parents of our son's roommate. I had met them only briefly two years before at flight school graduation. They're from Louisiana, and I think this was their first and only experience with a military deployment. She called the weekend after our sons left, and we basically cried and told

each other how scared we were, though I tried to explain some of what I knew. She and I continued to talk on the phone periodically throughout the deployment, and it was helpful to both of us. When the guys returned we were all there to welcome them home . . . and we had a good cry of relief.

I have another friend whose daughter deployed with the 3d Infantry Division. Her daughter left the month before our son; I comforted the mother then, and she was there for me when I needed it. Some days she would call me and be really down; I'd talk her through it and listen. Then maybe the next week I would be in a bad way and she would get me through it. It's so important to connect with other people who are going through something similar. If you have to, start your own support group for other parents of deployed Soldiers in your area.

An important connection for you—to your Soldier, her unit and other families—is the unit's Family Readiness Group (FRG). As a military spouse for all these years I've watched the evolution of these groups from coffee and social groups, to Family Support Groups, to what they are today. In the true sense of the term they are meant to include anyone and everyone who is connected to a Soldier.

This war more than others is showing all of us the need for family and community support for our Soldiers. Probably because of the length and frequency of the combat tours and related deployments, more and more parents, grandparents, other family members, employers and entire communities want to be part of the Family Readiness Groups. With so many Army National Guard and Army Reserve units deploying, the war has brought Army life into many more cities and towns across America. The wonderful part of all this is the way these cities and towns are wrapping their arms

around their citizen Soldiers and their families. They're supporting them throughout the deployments, from the time they prepare to deploy until they return. Entire communities have banded together to form a network of support for these Soldiers and their families. This is what Family Readiness Groups are all about!

While our sons were deployed, I received monthly newsletters and phone calls from their unit Family Readiness Group leaders. It wasn't so much the information they would give me—it was the connection I felt to this person on the other end of the phone whose husband was serving with my son in Iraq. I desperately needed that connection, that link to my son who was half a world away. I always felt better after talking to someone who was going through what I was going through. Months later when I would finally meet that person, I would always feel a special bond; we were complete strangers yet connected by what we had experienced.

I can't stress enough the importance of belonging to a Family Readiness Group, whether your link is the telephone, e-mail or monthly newsletter. It will give you something to belong to, something to put your energy into, and it's a way to meet other families who are going through what you are. So find out if there's a Family Readiness Group for your Soldier's unit or in your community and join it—or start one yourself if you have to.

Remember!

- Keep those letters, packages, e-mails and phone calls flowing; they are very important, both to your Soldier and for you.
- Check with the unit and post office for any restrictions on packages.
- When your Soldier calls you, be upbeat.
- Connect with other parents. Start a support group in your community.
- Link up with your Soldier's Family Readiness Group (FRG) and rear detachment.
- Make sure your Soldier has all your current contact information, including when you are away from home.

It's a Matter of Trust



*D*uring a deployment, there will be times when the only thing that gets you through is your faith. I've noticed that people with a strong faith (whatever it may be) do better in these situations. With so much out of your control you have to absolutely give it up to a higher being.

The other key element you need is faith and trust in the Army in general and, more specifically, the leadership in your Soldier's unit. You have to trust the chain of command, from the battalion commander all the way down in direct charge of your Soldier.

Chances are you've never met any of your Soldier's commanders or NCOs. Also, when the media reports only the stories of poor leadership, it's easy to think we have a lot of poor leaders in the Army. This just gives the spouses, moms and dads one more thing to worry about. Believe me, I think I've

**There's no
halfway when
the Army puts
someone in
charge of
Soldiers.**

cornered the market on worry in the past two years, but the one thing I do not worry about are the leaders in charge of our two sons. I've been in this environment for so long and have witnessed firsthand the wonderful NCOs and officers who lead our Soldiers.

The Army, an all-volunteer force since the end of the Vietnam War, is half the size it was in the 1990s, and we are now a nation at war. So what we have in our ranks is a group of dedicated and committed NCOs and officers who are in the Army because they want to be. Individuals in positions of leadership—from platoon sergeants to command sergeant majors, from platoon leaders to brigade commanders, and all the way up the chain of command—are doing this because they love soldiering and are absolutely committed to the mission and the care of the Soldiers in their command. They've been to the best leadership schools in the country, and every step of the way they're trained to lead. Only the very best get to be in command positions—there's no halfway when the Army puts someone in charge of Soldiers. You must love the Army to be in it; otherwise, how do you explain why Soldiers reenlist in combat zones?

My husband has served in six different divisions and countless brigades, battalions and companies, in both the "Green Army" and Special Operations. He could count on one hand the number of poor leaders he's encountered over the past 30 years. The NCOs and officers we've known along the way have been dedicated and hard-working, and they've always had the best interests of their Soldiers in their hearts.

Rest assured the Army has the best schools for developing leaders and the best training centers. Maybe your Soldier has mentioned the NTC (National Training Center) or the JRTC (Joint Readiness Training Center). At these centers our units train as a unit for

The Baron's Legacy

The U.S. Army is the world's best-trained military force, and has been since Valley Forge in the War for Independence. After devastating defeats and with his Continental Army in dire straits, General George Washington enlisted the help of a Prussian officer, Baron Friedrich von Steuben.

Von Steuben literally wrote the book on training and discipline. His warfighting procedures and training methods gave the American Army the ability to topple the better-equipped, better-supplied and larger British Army.

The U.S. Army has maintained that tradition. All Soldiers receive training upon entering the Army and continue both their military education and college degree pursuits as they rise in rank. The U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) operates an extensive Army school system, and all Soldiers, including those in the Army National Guard and Army Reserve, have access to this education network.

NCOs start with initial entry training (IET or boot camp), a strenuous program in which they learn the organization of the Army and the intellectual and physical requirements of being a Soldier. IET also instills the Warrior Ethos: to place the mission first, never accept defeat, never quit and never leave a fallen comrade.

Officers undergo similar training with Officer Candidate School (OCS), and these mental and physical regimens are part of the curriculum at the Military Academy and in ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) programs.

Soldiers proceed to courses at an Army branch school or unit to learn skills specific to their assigned career. Each career has specialized training, and when a Soldier changes careers, she "cross-trains" at another branch school.

An ongoing set of courses and schools help develop Soldiers' leadership skills and warfighter knowledge. NCO schooling includes the Primary Leadership Development Course, the Advanced NCO Course and the Sergeants Major Academy.

An officer might attend Command and General Staff College, the Armed Forces Staff College, the Army War College or the National Defense University. Army officers may also attend U.S. Air Force and Navy schools, or be assigned as exchange students at foreign schools.

In addition to coursework, Army schools and training centers formulate warfighting and organizational strategies, or "doctrine." Doctrine evolves through scholarship of military techniques and strategies past and present, and lessons learned from recent and ongoing campaigns.

real-world contingencies. Every unit in our Army does 30-day rotations to these centers, even during times of peace. Obviously, these centers have become even more important now that so many Army, Army National Guard and Army Reserve units are deploying to combat zones.

Back in the mid 1990s when my husband was commanding a brigade at Fort Hood, Texas, he averaged four to five trips a year to the NTC at Fort Irwin, California.

Every time one of his battalions went he went with them, and he said he learned so much from those 30-day rotations. It is the most realistic training these Soldiers could ever get before they deploy to a combat zone. On my husband's visits to Afghanistan and Iraq in the past two years, the Soldiers have told him time and time again that their training at the NTC and JRTC has saved countless lives on the battlefield and prepared them for much of what they've faced.

These training centers not only teach the unit all the necessary skills for combat operations, but the leaders are also building a cohesive team based on trust—Soldier to Soldier, leader to led, unit to unit. Trust is the

Scam artists often target military families. Among the cons you should beware of are phone or e-mail solicitations encouraging family members of deployed Soldiers to sign up for tax breaks. Others offer, for a fee, daily updates on your deployed Soldier. Unscrupulous loan firms with military-sounding names offer to help financially strapped families but, in reality, sink them into further debt. Your Soldier's unit Family Readiness Group provides legitimate resources for financial aid and contact with your deployed Soldier—and it's free.



foundation of every successful unit, just like in a good marriage! This trust is critical to the safety and success of every member in the unit. If you have this same trust in your Soldier's unit and leadership and in the Army, it will certainly help you get through this very scary time.

A little bit on the subject of morale: it can and will get low from time to time. After all, combat's a miserable place to be—even on a good day it STINKS!—and your Soldier may complain. Sometimes he may have a legitimate complaint, but usually it will stem from being in hot, dusty, cramped living conditions with no privacy. People get on one another's nerves, and they're all in a scary place. So just be a good listener.

If your Soldier gets really down—beyond your capacity to help—he has plenty of people to turn to. Wonderful chaplains are assigned to each unit, and mental health care experts serve in every camp. It is no longer taboo to seek help when you need it. The Army has made great strides in this area in the past decade,

Remember!

- Your Soldier and his leaders have gone through the best military training in the world.
- Commanders are trained not only to win battles but keep their Soldiers safe.
- Almost everything your Soldier is facing in combat he's already endured in realistic training exercises.
- Your Soldier's morale may wane during a deployment; his venting is likely to pass, and he has a wide range of mental health services in theater if he needs them.

realizing the importance of a healthy Soldier, both physically and mentally. So, plenty of services are available, even in the combat zone, for any kind of problem your Soldier may have, and you should encourage him to take advantage of them.

Once again, you must allow yourself to have faith in the system; otherwise you'll go crazy with worry. It really is a matter of trust.

The In-Laws



Your daughter is married to a Soldier. Yours is not a military family, and you struggle with trying to understand the Army and what your son-in-law does for a living. At the same time you miss your daughter; this is the farthest she's ever lived away from home. Now, on top of everything, he's deploying to a combat zone and leaving your daughter alone. Deployments are every bit as hard on the in-laws as they are on the Soldier's family. The in-laws have a lot at stake here, too. It's their daughter or son who's left behind, perhaps with a couple of kids to care for. So what should you do, what can you do as the in-laws?

**Her family
never knew
where to send
Christmas
cards.**

I have a dual perspective on this. I'm a relatively new mother-in-law, but for 30 years I've been the daughter of a Soldier's in-laws. I think back to when my husband and I were married. I was just out of college, living at home in Vermont that summer before we got married. My husband-to-be was a first lieutenant stationed in Hawaii. We'd been dating

for six years. During that time, I'd visited him while he was a cadet at West Point and then numerous times in Hawaii. But the day after our wedding when we boarded a plane for Hawaii, we weren't just going on our honeymoon—we were PCSing (Permanent Change of Station, the military term for moving to a new post—though it's anything but “permanent”). I'm sure my parents were wishing I had married someone else, someone who wouldn't be taking their daughter so far away and into this strange world called the Army. It is a different way of life, about which my parents and my husband's parents had no clue.

I was as new to all of it then as our daughter-in-law and her parents are now. During those first few years of marriage I think my parents and I, as well as my husband's parents, were just trying to figure out this whole thing called “The Army.” It was so foreign to all of us; no one in either of our families had ever served in the

Unique Army for a New Nation

Soldiering became a vocation as early as the classical Greeks. In ancient Rome, service in the army was a matter of social duty and personal honor. Through the ages, soldiers have been everything from noble knights to opportunistic mercenaries.

A new standard evolved in the American colonies. The Massachusetts Bay Colony formed a militia in 1636, and other colonies soon followed the example. These armies comprised farmers and tradesmen who took up arms only when their town or village was threatened, then they'd go back to their daily vocations.

These citizen Soldiers pro-

tected the fledgling colonies and joined forces with the Continental Army—also comprising volunteers—to defeat the British and win independence for the Americans.

This experience was fresh in the minds of the nation's founding fathers. When writing the U.S. Constitution, they put “the common defense” of the nation in the hands of the federal government, allowed states to maintain militias (which evolved into today's National Guard) and, most significantly, placed all military authority under civilian control.

The President, elected by the people, is the Commander in Chief. The Secretary of

military. All I knew was that I had fallen in love with a Soldier and I was willing to go anywhere with him and walk beside him as he made his way in the Army. Because of our love for each other, our parents stood by us . . . as hard as it must have been for my parents to let me go.

Two years after we married, while my husband was going through helicopter flight school, I got pregnant with our first son. I'll never forget the day my husband came rushing in from class to tell me he had orders for Korea following graduation. I was bent over the sink with morning sickness, and I looked at him and said, “Guess what? I'm pregnant.”

Thus began a whole new chapter in our married life, one that would test my will and that of both of our families. Up to that point Army life had been fun—dating a West Point cadet, moving to Hawaii, then off to

Defense and the secretaries of the individual services are all civilians, appointed by the President and approved by Congress. The Constitution gives Congress the responsibility of establishing rules and regulations for the military and sole authority for providing the armed forces' budgets.

The highest ranking military members, the Chiefs of Staff, serve only in advisory capacities on matters of military policy. Military operations are conducted through unified “combatant commands,” whose commanders report directly to the Secretary of Defense and the President.

In departing from the way

most nations used their armies as internal enforcers of the leaders' will, America's founding fathers created an armed force that serves the will of the people and ensures their freedoms without sacrificing their security.

This significant difference between the U.S. armed forces and the traditional role of armies is embodied in the oath American servicemembers recite upon enlisting or receiving their commission: rather than swearing to protect and serve a person or a country, the American servicemember swears to support and defend a document, the U.S. Constitution.

helicopter flight school at Fort Rucker, Alabama. Then reality set in pretty quickly: I'm pregnant and he's going to Korea (without me) for 12 months.

We all agreed the best thing for me to do was to move back home to Vermont while he went to Korea—I really had no other place to go. When he graduated from flight school we would lose our housing at Fort Rucker, and because we didn't know where he would be assigned after Korea, I couldn't move on to the next duty station. So he moved me to Vermont, stayed long enough to see his son born and then left three days later. This was not exactly the happiest time of my life, and I don't recall that I sent him off with a smile on my face. But with the love and support of both our families, somehow I made it through the 12 months. It was the best place for me to be that year, but there were times I missed the support of other Army spouses. I didn't know of any other Army wives in Burlington, Vermont, so I had no one who understood what I was going through. While my parents loved having me and the baby at home with them, they've told me it was hard for them to see me alone with a brand-new baby while my husband was halfway around the world.

Through the years there were many separations—different types of deployments for different lengths of time. Once we had kids, I never considered moving back home during a deployment. The kids and I made our home wherever we were living at the time. “Home is where the Army sends you” was the slogan we all lived by. When my husband deployed to Saudi Arabia for Operation Desert Shield/Storm, he was gone for 10 months. We were living at Fort Campbell at the time; we had friends, the boys' school, church and, most important, the comfort of being surrounded by other mothers and kids who were going through what we were. For us it was a normal existence. That Christmas I took the


boys to Vermont to see all our relatives. It was great being with grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, but after about 10 days the boys and I couldn't wait to get back to Fort Campbell. In Vermont we felt out of place; our comfort zone was back at Fort Campbell with the other moms and kids who were just like us. When we got back there all my friends expressed the same feeling about their visits home. You see, home had become the Army post, and our friends had become our family. You become so connected to one another, and the Army community is the lifeline to your Soldier.

Our number two son recently married a wonderful young woman he met in college. She's from a small town in Texas; her entire family lives there. They're all civilians and haven't been exposed to the military that much. To say our lifestyle is a bit different from theirs is an understatement. Imagine this: During the four years our son and their daughter dated, we moved three times—and not across town but across the country. Her family never knew where to send Christmas cards.

I know the apprehension they felt, thinking their only daughter was marrying someone who was from everywhere and was going to take her off to God knows where! About two weeks after the wedding, our son learned he would be deploying to Iraq as soon as he finished flight school and signed in to the 101st Airborne Division. This was when the military leaders and planners (which included my husband) realized the situation in Iraq called for stability and continuity, so the troops would have to do 12-month rotations rather than six months. That meant our older son would be there another six months, and our younger son would be joining him.

I could tell by the look on my husband's face that night when he walked in the door. It was probably the lowest point for me—and for him, too, I think. We

If your Soldier is a single parent or married to another Soldier, child care responsibilities during deployments may fall on you, the grandparent. If the children are better off staying at their home, your Soldier can arrange to have you live on post with them. Make sure you hook up with the unit's Family Readiness Group (FRG) for assistance and integration into the Army community. Even if the grandkids move to your home during the deployment, keep in touch with the FRG. After all, your Soldier's children belong to the FRG, no matter where they may live. For help, contact Military OneSource at 800-342-9647 or online at www.militaryonesource.com/.



they do? Where would she go while he was deployed? How would her parents react? Our son and daughter-in-law decided he would move her to Fort Campbell and get her settled before he left. Even though her parents begged her to come home to Texas, she said she wanted to begin her new life as an Army wife, and if she went back home she wouldn't be able to do that. She also wanted to be close to his unit and the Family Readiness Group. This was a tough decision for a brand-new wife who had never lived outside the state of Texas and had never been away from her family for any length of time.

always knew it was a possibility, but we'd been so caught up in the joy of the wedding that I put it out of my mind. I try not to borrow trouble; until something is definite, I try not to dwell on it. All my years as an Army wife have helped me with this, and I'm pretty good at living in the moment. That really is the key here for all of us: live in the moment and don't think too far ahead.

My first concern was for our son and daughter-in-law: What would

Her parents supported their decision, but I know how difficult it was for them those first weeks. They were confused, worried, proud—probably a hundred different emotions going through their minds. The important thing is that we all supported what the kids decided. You have to let these kids make their own decisions and change their minds later, if they need to. In these situations there's no right or wrong answer—it's whatever makes the person feel good about the situation. What may feel right to one person may be entirely different to another. And at different times in your life you have different needs.

When our son signed in to his unit they told him to take some time to get his wife settled and then he would leave on the next available flight to join his unit in Iraq. Just knowing when he would leave relieved some of the stress and anxiety. Once we had a date to work around, we all got busy preparing for his deployment. I tried to think of everything and anything that would help our new daughter-in-law get ready for what lay ahead. I tried to think of the most important things she and her parents needed to know. She hadn't been part of an Army unit, and she hadn't yet made any friends at Fort Campbell. I think I may have been feeling as overwhelmed as she was because I just didn't know where to begin to help her and her parents understand Army life at the same time her husband of two months was leaving to go to a combat zone. And, once again, I had to deal with a son going to combat. Honestly, the only thing that kept me going was the need to be strong for our daughter-in-law.

Our daughter-in-law knew she needed to be with other Army spouses if she was going to survive this first deployment. The first two weeks were pretty lonely for her, and she considered packing up and moving back to Texas. Then she met a group of spouses, and

that was the turning point. These new friends taught her more than I ever could because they were living it and going through it together. They found comfort in one another in ways that neither her mother nor I could provide. She still talked to her mother daily, and we talked frequently. But it was those other wives who taught her the ropes, the language and the ways of the Army. When we visited her two months later she was talking like a veteran Army wife, and it was heartwarming to see the bonds and friendships that had developed in such a short time. It reminded me of my experiences as an Army wife.

The Army offers so much for the spouses and kids, more so now than ever before. The schools on and around the posts work hand in hand with the military to ensure the needs of the students are met, especially during deployments. There are all kinds of social services and counseling services available for Army spouses and children. The Family Readiness Group is the real lifeline for information flow and the connection to the Soldier. I could go on and on about the resources, programs and medical facilities available on the post that you don't have if you go back to your hometown. So don't be surprised if your daughter or son decides to stay put during their Soldiers' deployment.

I wish I could tell you when I began to understand the Army and my husband's commitment to it . . . when I "got it." It was a gradual process, I'm sure. My parents and my husband's parents have told me they began to understand it when they came to ceremonies and visited us at the different posts where we lived. This understanding grew out of the ups and downs, the joys and fears, the happiness and sadness, the expected and unexpected, the rewards and sacrifices, the long hours, the separations, the romance and the "never-a-dull-moment" life of an Army family. It grew out of a sense

that my husband and everyone around him was making a difference in this world, that we are all part of history in the making and not just sitting on the sidelines watching life pass us by. With this understanding came immense pride and respect for my husband and all Soldiers. I learned what "duty, honor, country" really means. I learned that being a Soldier comes from the heart. It's a calling that one either feels or doesn't. It's not part-time or temporary, or just when it's convenient or when the weather is nice or when the world is at peace. It is 24 hours a day/seven days a week/52 weeks a year. It's what happens from the day he puts on the uniform until the day he retires. It's a way of life. Once I, my parents, my in-laws and everyone around us understood this simple truth, we all "got it" and began to truly love Army life.

My advice to you as in-laws is to learn everything you can about Army life and support your son's or daughter's Soldier. Go to the graduations and ceremonies and visit them at their Army post whenever you can. You will learn so much about their way of life, and you'll be ready to support your child when the Soldier deploys.

Remember!

- If your son or daughter has married a Soldier, your child not only is in the Soldier's capable hands but also in the care of the Army community.
- During deployments your child might prefer to remain on the post to take advantage of Army services and facilities and remain with a community of spouses sharing the same experiences and emotions.
- Become familiar with your child's new lifestyle by visiting their posts and attending career-significant ceremonies, deployment embarkations and homecomings.

What if . . . ?



*L*et's talk about some questions you may have—things you're wondering or worrying about but don't know who to ask or, probably, don't want to think about. Let me give you some information you can file away in the back of your mind just in case you need it someday.

What if something happens to your Soldier while she is deployed? I know none of us wants to think about this, but sometimes it's better to know what to expect rather than to wonder or to live with (and perhaps act upon) misinformation. Let me walk you through the Department of the Army notification procedures.

Every Soldier fills out a next-of-kin sheet that is kept on file with his unit. Primary next of kin (PNOK) is the Soldier's immediate family: spouse or parents. Secondary next of kin (SNOK) would be other close

It's difficult to stay calm when you are waiting to hear if something's happened to your Soldier.

family members, e.g., in-laws, siblings, grandparents. All of this is decided by the Soldier before he ever deploys.

In the event of a death or of a Soldier being listed as missing in action (MIA), the Army will notify all primary next of kin and secondary next of kin in person, face to face. Someone from the Department of the Army will come to your house to make this notification.

In the event a Soldier is seriously injured or ill, the Army will make the notification by telephone to the primary next of kin. The Army does not make notification in the case of minor injuries or illness.

Make sure your Soldier's unit has your current address and phone number. If you move or go on vacation make sure you give that information to the rear detachment. If your Soldier is married, make sure her spouse has all your current information.

Sometimes the notification process can take hours or even days if mass casualties are involved. I hear time and time again from families who want to know why it takes so long to receive word. Sometimes the circumstances make it difficult. It's a painstaking process, and because of the obvious sensitive nature of this, the Army is committed to making sure the process works with great sensitivity and the fewest possible mistakes. So it may take some time for the Army to make sure it's making the right notification. The consequences are worse if a mistake is made when notifying a family.

Most of the time the system works; however, sometimes mistakes are made. The Army tries hard to do the right thing and always has the family's best interests in mind. The media tries to be sensitive about the notification process and is not supposed to release any names until all notifications have been made. Usually, all phone lines and Internet access is cut off so Soldiers cannot call home.

I know how difficult it is when you hear something on the news and you think it may involve your Soldier. Every time I hear the words “101st Airborne Division” or “Apache helicopter” on the news, I panic. For a brief moment I’m convinced it involves one or both of my sons. Even though I know if something has happened I will get a phone call or a knock on the door, I can’t tell you how many times I’ve called my husband, holding my breath and thinking the worst. Most of the time, he’s just as scared as I am. Until we hear our sons are not involved, we live in fear. Every time those words are

Emergencies at Home

What if you or someone in your family becomes seriously ill or there’s a death in your immediate family? You can call the American Red Cross (available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year) and they will relay the message to your Soldier.

Your Soldier’s commander will decide whether she will be able to come home. It depends on both your circumstances and these of your Soldier.

When you call your local Red Cross chapter, have the following information ready:

- your Soldier’s full name, rank and Social Security Number;
- her branch of service (Army, Navy, Air Force, etc.);
- military address and information about the deployed unit;
- the nature of the emergency.

For all the services avail-

able to the military and their families, visit the American Red Cross Website at <http://www.redcross.org/index.html>.

If a disaster hits your community while your Soldier is deployed, remember that he will see just as much news coverage of it as you do. Therefore, he will likely be as worried about you amid your community tragedy as you are about him in a combat zone. Get word of your status to him as soon as you can.

Hurricane Katrina showed the kind of impact natural disasters at home can have on Soldiers deployed overseas. If civil authorities order you to evacuate, EVACUATE! Then you can e-mail your Soldier to tell him you are safe and how to contact you.

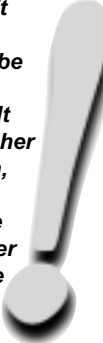
Your Soldier has enough on his mind without worrying about you because you decided to “ride out the storm” and now can’t be contacted.

mentioned on the news it also generates phone calls from our daughter-in-law and the rest of our family. I spend a lot of time talking them through it and reassuring them. So I won’t tell you not to worry; we’re parents, that’s what we do. It’s difficult to stay calm when you are waiting to hear if something’s happened to your Soldier. You just have to let the system work and pray that your Soldier is safe. Then say a prayer for those families who have lost someone.

Chances are that will never happen to you. But it may happen to someone you know—a friend, a neighbor or someone in your community. If you know someone who’s going through this type of tragedy, be there to support and comfort that family. Start a Parents’ Support Group if you know of other parents of Soldiers in your area. You don’t have to wait for a tragedy to happen; start a group now. Then, if a tragedy occurs, a support system will already be in place. The best comfort comes from people who are experiencing what you are. That is how Army spouses survive—with one another.

From the moment we say “I do” we’re faced with the realities of Army life. Those realities include accidents, injuries, death and facing combat deployments

When families visit their hospitalized Soldier, they may be able to stay at a Fisher House. Built and run by the Fisher House Foundation, these lodgings charge an average of less than \$10 per night, and in some locations the rooms are free of charge. Every major military and Veterans Affairs medical center has at least one Fisher House. Begun in 1990, the Fisher House program has served more than 8,500 families. For more information, visit <http://www.fisherhouse.org>.



early in a marriage. To survive, we accept the realities, compartmentalize them, then ignore them and move on with our lives. But every time we lose a fellow Soldier, we're forced to face reality yet again. I was 26 years old when we lost two close friends in a helicopter crash. I realized then what a dangerous business my husband was in—and that was just a routine training mission on a summer night in Georgia. I will never forget it; I remember feeling so scared and angry. My husband could get hurt or killed any day he went to work. Most young wives don't have to think about that so early in

Remember!

- Your Soldier's personnel records include primary and secondary next of kin to be notified in event of casualty.
- If your Soldier is killed or MIA, you will be notified in person. If your Soldier is married, his spouse will be notified first.
- If your Soldier is seriously injured, you will be notified by phone.
- Make sure your Soldier's unit and spouse has your current address and phone number.
- Start a Parent's Support Group.

their marriages. It really was a devastating blow to me and my safe little world. Over the years I can't tell you how many times I've cried with and consoled friends who have lost their loved one. So, when I say we (Army spouses) know how to comfort and support, I really mean it. It comes from years of having to do it.

I know that my sons are doing a dangerous job; but I think my years as an Army wife have prepared me for the life our boys have chosen.

Yellow Ribbons



You've made it through months of stress, fear, anxiety and worry. Now it's time to think about yellow ribbons, American flags and your Soldier's redeployment and homecoming! Get ready for another roller-coaster ride of emotions and stress . . . but on this ride there's a wonderful light at the end of the tunnel.

Your Soldier will be counting the days and talking of her return long before it's official. The return date will be approximately 12 months from the time she deployed—that much is pretty certain. However, the exact date and time can change many times. There are as many variables now as there were when the unit deployed. It's important that you stay in contact with the rear detachment or the Family Readiness Group, especially if you are planning to go to the homecoming. The rear detachment will have the most current information on the flight arrivals.

**To me,
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Most of the units return together as a battalion-size unit, but that can vary. Sometimes the smaller support units come home separately and in stages. Also, when a large unit redeployes it can take four weeks or more to

Reunion Blues

People will tell you that parting is the hardest part. In fact, rejoining is usually more difficult.

What makes it uniquely troubling is that the dynamics of reuniting causes natural stresses while the people reuniting were expecting nothing but bliss.

Your Soldier, coming home after up to a year in combat conditions and, at the least, spartan living and isolation, is looking for normalcy: his favorite food and couch, familiar places and faces, down time and, yes, perhaps a bit of pampering. He could also be detoxing from the stresses inherent with deployments and combat.

His spouse, being alone for up to a year and wracked with worry, is excited: a time of celebration, experiences, togetherness and, yes, perhaps a bit of pampering. She could also be detoxing from the stress inherent with deployments and handling the household (which always seem to suffer Murphy's Law syndrome during the separations) by herself.

Both see the reunion as the solution to all problems. Reality rarely lets it live up to such expectations.

While the homecoming is truly a celebratory moment for all family members, remember that everybody also needs time and patience for readjustment.

get everyone back. You can imagine the logistical feat of getting 16,000 Soldiers back to the home station.

I have experienced both kinds of redeployments. Our son came back from Afghanistan on a military transport plane. With only about 20 Soldiers with their aircraft coming in there was no big ceremony, no band; just a handful of us parents. But what a moment it was! Upon completing their tours in Iraq our sons returned—a week apart—on chartered commercial airliners with their battalions. For us that meant two trips to Fort Campbell, but I would have made the trip 10 times if necessary. Our younger (married) son returned first, and we were able to fly down because we had enough notice and a pretty good date and time. We stayed only one


day because we wanted to give him and his new wife some much-needed time together.

When our older son came home a week later, we drove because it was too difficult trying to schedule one more round of tickets. We also wanted to fly my mom in for this one so she could see both boys. She had never been part of a “homecoming,” and it was the chance of a lifetime for her. We had to change her ticket a couple

of times, and we paid our share of fees, but finally she talked to a compassionate person at the airline who gave her a break and dismissed the fee when she had to make a third change on that ticket! It was an expensive ticket, but we all agreed it was worth it.

I realize that if your Soldier's home station is overseas or on the other side of the country, it may not be possible for you to travel there. Your Soldier will get 30 days of leave; hopefully you'll get to spend some time together then. Still, if you can be there for the return, you won't regret it—it's unforgettable.

To me, “homecoming” ranks right up there with the days the boys were born. I've never felt such happiness and relief! After 12 months of fear and worry, seeing



Upon returning home from a redeployment Soldiers must undergo “Reintegration.” This weeklong program helps both the Soldier and family transition into a normal Army life. In addition to her in-processing the Soldier receives medical tests and health assessments and attends briefings on post-deployment stress and life issues. The Soldier and family also attend sessions on marital relationships, child care and suicide awareness. Reintegration ends with a formal Welcome Home Ceremony, after which the Soldier can take her post-deployment 30-day leave.

our sons walk off those planes evaporated the emotions of that long wait. It was worth every penny spent on travel, it was worth all the stress of schedule changes. Standing in the cold and rain at 3 in the morn-

Remember!

- Try to be at the homecoming. It's a great experience for you and a meaningful moment for your Soldier.
- Don't make any plans until you have a definite, official date and time of the return.
- The rear detachment and the FRG will give you the most up-to-date and accurate information on return date and time. Your Soldier will not be a reliable source for this information.
- Count on the date changing. For that reason, driving is the best way to travel so that you don't have to pay fees for changing your airline tickets. Airlines are under no obligation to waive their change fees.

ing among hundreds of spouses, kids, moms and dads was complete joy. The feelings are universal—they cross all gender, race, religious and economic boundaries. You've come from all over the country by plane, by car, by whatever means possible. You've come for the same reason—to welcome home your Soldier and give her a BIG hug! As I stood there both times I had flashbacks to 12 years earlier when my boys and I waited for their dad to come home from Operation Desert Storm. It was at the exact same airfield—even the same hangar. How ironic is that?

Terms, Acronyms and Other Army Stuff



For this chapter I tried to think of all the words and terms you need to know and may not have a clue about. It's often said that Army people speak their own language. So here is a language lesson.

First, a brief explanation of the types and sizes of units in the chain of command. The Commander-in-Chief, of course, is the President, and the Secretary of Defense and his deputies are next in that chain. Under the Secretary of Defense is the Secretary of the Army and the Chief of Staff of the Army. Though a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who advises the Secretary of Defense and President on military actions and policy, the Chief of Staff answers to the Secretary of the Army in matters concerning Department of the Army policies.

**It's often said
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Most Army units and personnel are assigned to one of nine unified commands or combatant commands,

most of which are made up of Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps components, too. The combatant commander reports directly to the Secretary of Defense and the President. Some of these unified commands are regional, such as Central Command which covers the Middle East, and some are based on types of missions, like Transportation Command.

The top level of the Army unit structure is the 15 major commands (MACOMs), many of which serve as the Army component of the unified commands. These also are divided into regional and functional missions.

As the world has changed and we face new threats to our security like never before, the Army is changing the way it organizes its units. The organization that evolved in the Cold War featured large divisions and corps, like the 101st Airborne Division, with their own brigades. Now the Army wants what it calls a “modular force” in which units of roughly the same size with a variety of capabilities can be put together to form a larger fighting force, like building blocks or players on a team. These building blocks are called Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs) because they are about the size of a traditional brigade. The divisions and corps, commanded by generals, will be deployable headquarter units with BCTs assigned to them for particular situations.

By reorganizing or “transforming,” the Army also wants to even out the frequency and length of deployments. The BCTs are all being set up with same number of Soldiers and capabilities. This interchangeability means the Army can place all BCTs on a deployment timetable, providing predictability for the Soldier. Active BCTs can deploy every three years, the reserve component BCTs can deploy every six years.

BCTs are commanded by colonels. The chain of command within these BCTs is pretty much the same as that of the brigades:

- Battalions and squadrons—with 500 to 900 Soldiers commanded by a lieutenant colonel and a command sergeant major as the senior NCO, these are units with either combat or support missions made up of four to six different companies plus a headquarters element;
- Companies, batteries and troops—with up to 200 Soldiers and commanded by captains and having first sergeants as their principal NCOs, these are the basic, fully-contained fighting force in the Army and typically have three to five platoons and a headquarters section;
- Platoons—led by lieutenants with staff sergeants or sergeants first class as the second in command, these usually have four squads, totaling between 16 and 40 Soldiers, depending on the mission;
- Squads or sections—these are function-specific elements of four to 10 Soldiers led by a sergeant or staff sergeant;
- Fire teams and crews—in the infantry, a fire team contains four or five Soldiers, and a crew is a handful of Soldiers operating armored vehicles or artillery pieces.

Now, here are some acronyms and terms you should know:

AAFES—Army and Air Force Exchange Services, which runs the post exchange (PX) and other shops and services on the post.

ACS—Army Community Services, a one-stop center for family support on the post.

ACU—Army Combat Uniform, a new camouflage uniform.

AER—Army Emergency Relief, the Army's own emergency financial assistance organization.

AR—Army Reserve, Army Regulation or armor.

ARNG—Army National Guard.

BOQ—Bachelor Officer Quarters.



BHA—Basic Housing Allowance, an addition to the paycheck of Soldiers living off post.

BCT—Brigade Combat Team.

BDE—Brigade.

BDU—Battle dress uniform.

BN—Battalion.

BTRY—Battery.

CDR—Commander.

CG—Commanding general.

CONUS—Continental United States.

DA—Department of the Army.

DCU—Desert camouflage uniform.

DEERS—Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System, the registration of Soldiers' spouses and children that allows them to get their ID cards and access other military services.

Deployment—The relocation of forces and materiel to operational areas. Deployment encompasses all activities from home station through destination, including intracontinental, intertheater and intratheater movement, staging and holding areas.

DFAS—Defense Finance and Accounting System, the organization that pays your Soldier and keeps track of her allotments and leave time.

DOB—Date of birth.

DoD—Department of Defense.

DOR—Date of rank, when a Soldier officially is promoted to his current rank.

DSSS—Disabled Soldiers Support System (sometimes called DS3).

The Association of the U.S. Army's Family Programs Directorate works on behalf of Army families through installation visits, information gathering, supporting family readiness activities and hosting Military Family Forums. Its web page, at www.ausa.org, is full of information, web links, resources and tips. Twice a month AUSA produces the Family Programs Update, a newsletter, posted on the website, containing current news and references of interest to Army families.



EFMP—Exceptional Family Member Program, which provides support and resources to Soldiers' family members with disabilities.

ETS—Estimated time of separation, the date when a Soldier's commitment to the Army ends, unless she reenlists.

FAC—Family Assistance Center.

FLO—Family Liaison Office, an ombudsman program for Soldiers and families.

FRG—Family Readiness Group.

GO—General officer, brigadier general and above.

HQ—Headquarters.

HQDA—Headquarters, Department of the Army.

IED—Improvised explosive device.

IET—Initial Entry Training or "boot camp."

IRR—Individual Ready Reserve.

JAG—Judge Advocate General, the Army's legal branch.

JRTC—Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana.

KIA—Killed in Action.

LES—Leave and Earnings Statement, the Soldier's pay stub.

LOD—Line of duty.

LZ—Landing zone.

MEDDAC—Medical Department Activity.

MI—Military Intelligence.

MIA—Missing in action.

MP—Military Police.

MRE—Meals ready to eat.

MWR—Morale, Welfare & Recreation, a collection of facilities (such as fitness centers and bowling alleys) and services (such as travel agencies and tours) available on the Post for Soldiers and their families.

NCO—Noncommissioned officer.

NCOIC—Noncommissioned officer in charge.

NG—National Guard.

NLT—Not later than.

NOK—Next of kin.

NTC—National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California.

OBC—Officer Basic Course.

OCONUS—Outside the continental United States.

OCS—Officer Candidate School.

OIC—Officer in charge.

PAO—Public Affairs Office.

PCS—Permanent change of station (i.e., moving).

PLT—Platoon.

PNOK—Primary next of kin.

POA—Power of attorney.

POC—Point of contact.

POV—Privately owned vehicle.

PX—Post Exchange.

QRF—Quick reaction force.

QTRS—Quarters, the places where Soldiers and families live.

RD/RDC—Rear Detachment/Commander, sometimes shortened to “Rear D.”

Redeployment—To return personnel, equipment and materiel to the home or demobilization stations for reintegration or out-processing.

Reintegration—The process of transitioning Soldiers from deployment to their regular duties and home station life.

RFO—Request for orders, part of the process of getting authorization for transfers, promotions and awards.

R&R—Rest and recreation.

SGLI—Servicemen’s Group Life Insurance.

SOP—Standard operating procedure.

SSN—Social Security Number; you might hear reference to “last four,” which is the last four digits of the Social Security Number.

TDY—Temporary Duty, the military equivalent to a business trip.

TOC—Tactical Operations Center.

USAR—United States Army Reserve (no longer an official acronym, but still in common use).

USO—United Service Organization, still helping Soldiers and their families.

VA—Department of Veterans Affairs, formerly known as the Veterans Administration.

WO—Warrant Officer.

WOCC—Warrant Officer Candidate Course.

XO—Executive Officer.

Remember!

- Command of military operations descends from the President through the Secretary of Defense to the unified commands.
- The Army is going through a reorganization to create a swift-reacting, full-spectrum, modular force.
- Though these modular units are set up to go to any hot spot in the world at a moment’s notice, deployment rotations will become steadier and less frequent.

Afterword

10

I started writing this book after my boys' homecoming from Iraq. Since then, my eldest has gone back to Iraq, and the youngest will be deploying within the next couple of months.

I feel like we were just welcoming them home. Eighteen months later and here we are again, same Army post, same gymnasium full of Soldiers and families, same lump in my throat, same knot in my stomach. How many times have we played out this scene? Our family has lots of memories of this gym at Fort Campbell: basketball games when the boys were young and lots of "welcomes" and "goodbyes," including a goodbye to their dad when he left for Operation Desert Shield all those years ago.

In these 18 months we've tried to make the most of the time with our sons and daughter-in-law. We gath-

No other profession brings parents and their grown kids together and encourages them to show their love for each other so openly.

ered for promotion ceremonies: the boys pinned on their dad's new rank, and he pinned on their captain's bars. We had a great Christmas together, and we were at Fort Campbell for the birth of our new grandson this summer. If the military teaches you nothing else, it teaches you to make the most of your time as a family and to appreciate each other and make those memories today rather than wait for tomorrow.

This time, as I stood in the crowded gym, I found myself watching the faces of the Soldiers' parents. I felt like I was living this book again. In their faces I saw fear, tears, worries and a lot of love and pride . . . exactly what I was feeling. I love it that many of them drove all night or hopped on a plane just to say goodbye to their Soldier. I love it that they cry like I do. I love it that they hug their Soldier no matter how old he is. I love it that they support their Soldier and her buddies. I was struck by the fact that no other profession brings parents and their grown kids together and encourages them to show their love for each other so openly. It was comforting for me to be with these families. It was comforting to meet our sons' buddies and their commanders.

In many ways it was just as hard saying goodbye this time as it was that first deployment in February 2002. In other ways, it was easier because I knew what to expect. I've learned the hardest part is the actual goodbye and letting go. I've learned that I will get back into my normal routine and get through the next 12 months. But I will never stop worrying and missing my sons, no matter how old they are and how often they deploy.

While my goal with this book is to give you some understanding, insight, hope or comfort, this has also been therapeutic for me. It has helped get me through the scariest time of my life. I hope I've helped with your journey, but it is your Soldier who will teach you the most. You will grow with him. Enjoy every minute of it!

This is a stressful time to have a Soldier in your family. It takes a lot of courage to be a parent of a Soldier and especially to send one off to combat. People ask my husband and me all the time how we can support this war, how we can let our sons go off to combat. Each of us has an answer—my husband as a military leader and a father, me as a mother—but our answers are basically the same: we respect what our kids have decided to do with their lives. We want them to do something important and good, something with meaning, and have an impact on this world. We know without a doubt this is what our sons want to do. They chose it willingly, knowing full well what it means to serve their nation. All of the young men and women who have enlisted in the military since 11 September 2001 know what they're getting into. If this is what your son or daughter wants to do, how could you not support them? For me, the pride outweighs the fear. I look at the man my husband is and I am so thankful our sons are following in his footsteps.

When people ask me how I would feel if something happened to one of our sons while in combat, I tell them it would probably kill me, but at least I would know that it was for something good and noble. At least my son was making a difference in this world and doing something worthwhile with his life.

After his previous deployment our older son left his unit to attend the Captain's Career Course. He requested to go right back to Fort Campbell to be with his brother's unit when they deploy. This will be his third combat tour. He told his grandmother he couldn't wait to go back to Iraq.

She said, "How could you want to go back there?" He said, "I think I can make a difference, and there's still so much to do."

My husband and I know we are among the lucky ones whose kids came home safely. For now, we sleep well at night. The worrying has begun again, but we're at peace with what our sons are doing with their lives, and we continue to be proud of these two Soldiers and all the men and women who wear the uniform.

Useful Websites

As a family member of a Soldier, you can gain access to Army Knowledge Online (AKO), a member-only website through the Army Home Page (<http://www.army.mil/index.html>) and e-mail account. Your Soldier has to sponsor you for an AKO account.

The Army Home Page also has links to the websites of individual posts, laboratories, commands and units. Click on the "Organization" link at the top of the Army Home Page. The Army National Guard home page is <http://www.arng.army.mil/>, and the Army Reserve is at <http://www.armyreserve.army.mil/usar/home/>.

Following are some military family-related websites:

Military OneSource

<http://www.militaryonesource.com/>

Family Readiness Groups

<http://FRG.army.mil>

Army Families Online

<http://www.aflo.org/skins/WBLO/home.aspx>

National Guard Bureau Family Program

<http://www.guardfamily.org/>

Army Reserve Family Programs

<http://www.arfp.org/skins/ARFP/home.aspx?mode=user>

MyArmyLifeToo.com

<http://www.myarmylifetoo.com>

Sgt. Moms

<http://www.sgtmoms.com/home.asp>

Military Pets Foster Project

<https://www.netpets.org/netp/foster.ph>

Disabled Soldier Support System

<http://www.armyds3.org>

National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

<http://www.ncptsd.va.gov/>

Association of the United States Army

<http://www.ausa.org/>

About the author



Vicki Cody (above with, from left, her sons Captain Tyler Cody and Captain Clint Cody and her husband General Dick Cody, Vice Chief of Staff, U.S. Army) has been an Army wife for 30 years and an Army mom for five years. A native of Dayton, Ohio, she grew up in Burlington, Vermont, and earned her Bachelor's of Science in education at the University of Vermont in 1975. Three months later she married then-1st Lieutenant Dick Cody and has had 16 different homes in the 30 years since, including Hawaii, Alabama, Virginia, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Korea, Pennsylvania, Texas and Washington, D.C. In addition to her busy life as an Army spouse, Vicki is an avid skier, knitter and private pilot and a brand-new grandmother. She lives on Fort Myer, Virginia, with her husband and their chocolate Lab, Barkley.