

I remember the first time my husband gave me the news that he was leaving. We had been to our first duty station, Fort Hood, TX and then moved to Fort Sill, OK to do more schooling. Upon graduation from career course, Kevin had received orders for Korea. It was an unaccompanied tour. Wrena, our daughter, was two years old at the time. Separation is never easy, and this being our first it was quite a uneasy feeling knowing he would be so many miles away from us. Since we didn't really belong to any certain unit we moved our family back to Springfield, MO where we were both raised. We didn't want to live with our family, but being near them was much better than being alone. We rented a small house near my mom. It was a down size from our home in Texas. I remember when Kevin boarded the plane. It was a commercial airline, much different than I am used to now. We said goodbye to him, Wrena completely clueless as to what was about to happen. I heard a lady standing beside me say "oh honey, it's going to be ok" and I snapped at her, "no it's not going to be *ok*, that soldier is my husband and he won't be home for a year." She didn't say another word.

The year went by fairly quickly. Being near our family was an odd situation. Normally you would think that it would be wonderful being near family. I think though, when you are near them it's much too easy for you to become "yesterday's news" because you're always right there. I was used to being "special" because we were always so far away that when we did get to see them it was special. The hardest part of the separation at this point wasn't not knowing the military, but not being connected to it. There was no commissary or PX or military hospital anywhere near Springfield, MO. No one knew how I was feeling or that I was a military spouse that was missing her best friend. There was a time when Wrena thought her Daddy literally *lived* in the computer. She would tell anyone who asked about her Daddy he lived in the computer screen. To most it was funny; to me it became my mission to explain to her that he really was a real person.

Kevin returned from Korea and we moved to Fort Stewart, GA. We were here not quite a year when the soldier's deployed for OIF III. Getting the news that he was leaving was expected, yet still devastating. I had never had a husband deployed to a war zone and I had just gotten the one we sent off to Korea back. I didn't know much about our unit and the Family Readiness Group (FRG) and we had just moved into our new house. How could he be leaving again so soon?

The day he left we said goodbye to him and it was the most surreal moment. You go through what they like to call the "deployment cycle" of emotions. I remember standing there with Wrena thinking to myself that there was no way I was going to make it. Four months later, Army Wife Talk Radio was born. The only way I made it through that deployment was deciding to run full force into the "Army life" and arm myself with more resources than I knew what to do with. Sharing this experience with other Army spouses truly helped me. One year later I remember standing in the parade field with a huge sign that read "Welcome Home Daddy Kevin" with what my husband would describe as his fan club. I will never forget the words, "Soldiers, you are released to your families. Families, go get your soldier!" We just stood as still as we could, and hoped he'd find us.

They all look the same when they are standing there in the camouflage. I've never had such a feeling as we did that day walking to the truck we had decorated with "welcome home daddy" and balloons. My best friend had made it home.

Today, as I write this blog entry, we are in our second deployment (OIF V) from Fort Stewart. Kevin left 365 days from the day he returned from OIF III. The day he left was the same song and dance, only this time I was different. Kevin and I celebrated our ten year anniversary in May. Our original intent for our life and our family was to have two children, two years apart. The Army had different plans. As I sit here and type, and I am thirty-one weeks pregnant with our second baby girl. Her daddy won't see her birth, but he will get to spend two weeks with her on mid-tour in September. Wrena is now six years old and in those six years has spent less than three with her Daddy – and less than two if you count all the time he has been away training up for his time away.

Reading through all of this I am sure you are asking yourself a few questions. How does my child even know her daddy? Why would I give birth to our other daughter without him home? How do we even stay married with so much time apart? Why don't we just get out? Believe me, I ask myself the same questions everyday.

It's not easy, this life, but it has so many wonderful things that come out of it that you deal with the deployment and separation. Life isn't like every other show you see on television where couples cheat or split. Some couples use separation to their advantage and actually strengthen their marriage through the communication. I always think of it like, what other time do you take the time to sit down and literally type out what happened to you each day? When your husband is home he probably knows less of your thoughts, feelings, and daily actions because you just go through the motions.

Kevin and I work very hard to make sure that Wrena knows that he is present in her life. There are plenty of ways to keep connected through the miles. Giving birth to our newest family member while Kevin is away is the hardest thing I think I've ever had to face alone. Family is so important to both of us. The Army is so unpredictable we wanted to make sure he was able to be home when she was actually here. It's not the best of situations but we make it work.

I won't sugar coat it, there are many days full of worry. The communication from Iraq this deployment is very sporadic and unpredictable. It's hard not knowing what he is doing and if he is ok. There are days when the whole house seems to be falling apart and then I realize that the lawn needs mowing and I think "what the heck did I get myself in to?" *I am an Army of one.* I am mom. I am dad. I am lawn maintenance worker, plumber, zoo keeper, and chef. There are moments he misses that I am sure he is glad he missed, and others that if I mention I'll break into tears.

Separation is never easy, but I can bet you that most Army wives you asked would tell you that they wouldn't change a thing about their lives. Sure we don't like deployment, separation, and training missions who would? Then again, I can tell you once they have been home for about four months after they have been away for a year you do start asking

“when is that next field problem?” Kidding, of course, but you do develop a system when they are gone and there are certain quirks of marriage and household that you just don’t have to deal with when they are away.

In the end, there is a bond that is created with this life, from the very beginning, that can make you hate it in one breath, and love it in another with no explanation for either. I suspect pride, determination, independence, and strength have a lot to do with it, but love of our soldiers is what holds it all together.