

The Deployment Debate: Easier to leave or to be left?  
© Tara Crooks

Deployments come faster and faster. Home, away, home again and away again. I knew I couldn't be the only one wondering to myself if it is really harder to be the one leaving or the one who is being left. I set out on a mission to find out. When it came to the soldiers and spouses I spoke with answering this question, the majority of them seem to agree; it is easier to leave.

The soldiers agree that the initial "leaving" is hard for them because of the goodbye. But, once aboard the plane or upon arriving at their destination they are able to become mission focused. They are able to do what they were trained to do. Their laundry is done, they almost always have a hot meal, and the gym can be frequented daily. They'll agree that their camps aren't as luxurious as some of the homes back in the states. Their beds aren't as comfortable. They'll even tell you that they don't enjoy using the portable toilet. They comment on missing family celebrations, growing children, and special moments. In the war environment, we know they long for a moment's peace. Inevitably though, they say that their hardship is nothing compared to those that are "back home".

Back home their spouses are concerned for their soldiers' safety. Like their soldier, they can become "mission focused" to survive and function. Jobs need to be done. Finances need to be managed. Lawns need to be mowed. Children need to be fed. Friendships are tested and patience can be thin. Unlike their soldier, their beds are comfortable, they don't miss family celebrations, and they can exert some control over their environment. But there are many lonely nights, blaringly silent moments, and many "additional duties".

Seemingly, with the exception of threat to life, they'd be in equal boats. The dividing line seems to be one of public support & attention. Spouses aren't wearing a uniform; they're not identified in any manner that says, "handle with care". Not that they want to be babied, but they ask that people use a little more tact when talking to them about their situation.

They are running households, holding down jobs and essentially *living* the old Army slogan, "Army of One". All the while, the much appreciated care packages pour into their soldier's unit. Unfortunately, the mailboxes at home are being left empty. It's not that spouses believe that the public doesn't support them; it's that it isn't as obvious as that of the support of their soldier. Spouses are juggling feelings of love and support for their soldier with emotions of guilt for feeling needy or neglected.

Spouses support their soldiers, and most wouldn't have their life any other way. They aren't complainers or martyrs. They are hard working survivors. They wouldn't trade their soldier's happiness for their own, on the contrary, they would "give all" just the same. They'll tell you that their job is nothing compared to the danger that their soldier's are living. They will agree though that day to day they are working just as hard or harder to "hold down the fort" until their soldier returns.

In the end, the great debate isn't over whose job is harder, more dangerous, or less rewarding. Both soldiers and spouses agree that neither is in a position that they truly *want* to be in, even if they chose it. There are positive and negative aspects to each. In general, all are very proud to serve and are very thankful for any support. They agree if improvements in support could be made they need to be family-focused.