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### Deployment: A Different Outlook

Announcements of military units being deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan have become a common feature on the evening news. Local news teams show up at the pier to film naval battle groups, deploying for six month deployments. The media seldom shows images of the families and friends left behind when the servicemen and women deploy. In Hampton Roads, the War on Terror doesn't seem thousands of miles away due to Norfolk Naval Base, the world's largest naval base, along with Fort Eustis and Langley Air Force Base.

According to the US Department of Defense (DOD), "On any given day, the United State has about 40,000 soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines deployed on operations in support of our global interests. This is in addition to the 200,000 troops that we have permanently stationed overseas, with approximately 100,000 in Europe and an equal number providing a strong presence in the Asia-Pacific region." That is a total of 440,000 families who are affected due to deployment of a loved one. In order to fight the War on Terror, many service members are deployed three or four times during a single enlistment. What are the effects of multiple deployments on service members and the families that they have to leave behind?

Not surprisingly, deployments can put great stress on a marriage. The spouse left behind can become resentful when suddenly they become responsible for everything, when they are used to their spouse sharing the duties. It can be hard to maintain a strong bond when there is little communication and a spouse is absent for a year or more. According to CNN's Wolf Blitzer, within the first year of the wars in Iraq and

Afghanistan the divorce rate in the army has increased from 7,453 in 2003 to 10,477 by the end of 2004. The increase can surely be linked to the increase of military deployments. Navy Lieutenant Jereal Dorsey, 29, disagreed, "I think it is a factor, but not a major one. Society as a whole has a high divorce rate, and the rate of divorce in military just reflects society trends." Lt. Dorsey has completed five deployments in his military career, this year alone he has deployed to Bahrain, Iraq Cyprus and Lebanon.

Heidi Tilby, 25 of Yorktown, VA, is married to an active duty Airman from Langley Air Force base. She is not surprised by the high divorce statistics of military families. She has experienced how hard it is to have a healthy relationship with a spouse who is deployed for over a year. "It was lonely and sometimes I would wonder why did I ever marry a military guy, she said. "I love him and I know that deployments aren't forever so I do my best to stay busy and find ways to support him and his unit when they are gone." She enjoyed the few video conferences that she and her husband participated in while he was in Iraq. "It was nice to be able to see that yes, he really was still alive and I was able to get an immediate response when I communicated with him, versus waiting for him to reply to my emails," she said. She has seen marriages of other Airmen that didn't work out. "It's sad to see someone go through something as hard as a deployment and then come home and their wife is waiting with divorce papers," she said. Tilby believes that people who have a "shaky" marriage before a deployment are almost guaranteed to get divorced after a service member returns from deployment. "If you don't have a strong bond and a commitment to being together, a deployment can break up a marriage."

Deployments don't just affect the adults in the family; they can also be particularly difficult for children who may not fully understand why one of their parents must leave. Families can be innovative and work with their children before the deployment to take some of the stress out of the situation.

Katie Groton of Virginia Beach, whose husband is in the Navy, said, "Our children, aged 3 1/2 and 2, are used to separations from him. Once when he was getting ready to leave on a four-month-long deployment, he taped the kids' favorite stories so they could hear his voice while he was gone; they made a photo album and a book of their artwork for him to enjoy. Most importantly, though, I'm always honest with our two children I tell them when their father must leave and encourage them to share how they feel about his absence." Ideas like these are just one of many different solutions in helping soldier's children cope with long deployments.

The Fleet and Family Support Center of Hampton Roads is an invaluable resource for sailors and their families. The centers can help the spouses that are left behind with managing their personal finances, finding employment and parenting skills. The center can even provide spouses and their family members with counseling if needed. Trained Counselors from the centers give seminars to deploying service members and their families before a deployment, so that they are informed about what services are available to them during the deployment.

Service members have the stress of working in a high risk area added to the discomfort of being away from home. Having a routine can make time pass by a little more quickly while deployed. "I establish a routine of working, exercising, reading,

watching T.V., as well as call home as often as I can helps me keep my mind away from home,” said Lieutenant Dorsey.

Before any service member is deployed he or she is given a mental health screening. Mental health problems reported on the post deployment evaluations were significantly linked with combat experiences. Thirty-five percent of Iraq war veterans were admitted into the military’s mental health services within a year after returning home. Twelve percent of returning veterans are diagnosed with a mental health problem [JAMA]. More than 50 percent of those referred for a mental health reasons were documented to receive follow-up care although less than 10 percent of all service members who received mental health treatment were referred through the screening program. “Weapons wear out, machinery wears out, so do soldiers, and so do marines” said Dr. Gary Solis, former Marine Jag officer and adjunct law professor at Georgetown University/ So many service members have been sent to Iraq for multiple deployments in a matter of just a few years, that it’s hard for them to process the emotions that they experienced in war, he said.

Many families are against the war in Iraq and feel that their loved ones are being deployed for wrongs reasons and sometimes against their will. Several citizen action groups have been formed to inform the public about the injustices that are occurring to servicemen and women. Military Families Speak Out (MFSO), is a national organization with over 3,000 members and chapters across the country. MSFO’s objective is to influence lawmakers to end the war and bring their loved ones from Iraq. The group organizes protests, rallies and letter writing campaigns to government officials. MSFO

also acts as a support group for those who have family members deployed. Currently the group's main focus is educating the public on the matter of "back door draft methods."

Signing up new recruits is not the only way that the military is keeping fully manned; some branches of the Armed Forces have been using back door draft methods in order to keep their numbers up. The Bush administration continues to assure the American public that there will not be a draft for the Iraq war. Former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has been quoted as saying, "We're not going to have a draft -- period." Back door draft methods keep the war in Iraq from affecting most of America. A reinstatement of the draft would be a signal to Americans that the Iraq war isn't going as smoothly as reported by the Bush Administration.

The Marine Individual Ready Reservists are former Marines who have usually served 4 years active duty and then go into an inactive reservist status that for 4 years. During their IRR time the reservists do not drill with the regular Marine Reservists. President Bush announced July 26, 2006 that 2,500 marines from the IRR to serve in Iraq. The IRR Marines who had served in combat arms, communications, intelligence, engineers, and military police units while they were active duty were among the 2,500 who would return to active duty. When Marine officials were questioned as to why these Marines were needed vice using new volunteers, the officials said, "Our biggest challenge is timing. Often with Marine volunteers it is difficult to sync the volunteer's availability and the assignment start/end date."

While using IRR personnel is convenient for the Marines to use because IRR personnel have already completed all the training necessary to perform the job. Returning to active duty can be very inconvenient for IRR members who are attending

school or have begun new jobs since their discharge from active duty service. Dr. Gary Solis often talks about the difficulty his friend had when he was recalled to active duty. The IRR member owns a floral shop and during his absence his wife had great difficulty running the business without him and they almost had to close the store.

Matt Rhodes, a 25 year-old Norfolk native, served a four year active duty enlistment with an additional four year in the IRR in the Marines. He spent four and half months with his unit in Iraq. His MOS (military operating specialty) was Field Radio Operator 0621. IRR Marines in the communication field are among those being recalled. He has about one year left on his IRR contract and it is possible that he could be recalled. "I enjoyed my time in the Marines but now I am in a different chapter in my life, I am happy being in school, I wouldn't want to have to go back" said Rhodes about the possibility of going back. Rhodes is currently a junior attending ODU, pursuing a psychology degree. He is active on campus; he is on the Crew team and is involved in Veteran's Affairs activities. It would be devastating for Rhodes to go back to Iraq with the Marines. Being recalled would mean saying goodbye to his girlfriend, family and giving up being a civilian again.

Kaci Smith, 27, an energetic ODU Student, served four years in the Navy as a Hospital Corpsman (HM). She was recalled to active duty from the Navy's IRR just 9 months after she separated from the Navy in 2000. Smith was a full time student at Tidewater community college and was planning her upcoming wedding when she got the call that she needed to report for active duty, the day of the her wedding. Smith initially thought that the call was a prank being played by a family member; she soon learned that this was no joke. "I couldn't believe that I was going to have to go back, I had already

been to Kuwait while I was in....I was supposed to be getting married not going back to the Navy!" she said. Smith was able to find a sympathetic Master Chief Petty Officer who helped her to change her report date till after she returned from her honeymoon. She was able to remain in the area with her new husband by serving at the Little Creek Amphibious Base in Norfolk, Virginia. She worked there for about two years until she was released from active duty. She is now working towards a Health Services Bachelors degree at ODU and hopes that she doesn't get recalled ever again.

Another method used to keep the military manned is "stop loss." This practice keeps service members in the military despite the service member fulfilling their obligation. In a 2004 interview with Wavy-TV Channel 10 News, former DOD Secretary Rumsfeld explained how stop loss works. "The way the stop loss is used in the most of the services today is essentially this – if a unit is going to go over and, say, a person is due to get out in six months or less, that person doesn't go. If it's six months or more, that person goes. And when they get towards the end of their period, they have a stop loss. And so, the number of months, if your service in Iraq, for the sake of argument, is up to one year in Iraq, therefore, the stop loss would very likely keep them into Iraq no more than six months," he said.

Many service members and their families are against the war. They don't agree with the mission or the reasons that American troops are occupying Iraq. The initial reason and justification for the U.S. to invade Iraq was the threat from Saddam Hussein and his regime, weapons of mass destruction, terrorism and terrorist links, and human rights abuse. Many Americans believe that the U.S. entered and invaded Iraq for financial and economic reasons, or oil. Dennis Kucinich, U.S. Congressman (D-OH), stated in an

interview with NBC's Meet the Press, "The fact that there is \$5 trillion worth of oil above and in the ground in Iraq, that individuals involved in the Bush administration have been involved in the oil industry, that the oil industry certainly would benefit from having the administration control Iraq, and that the fact is that, since no other case has been made to go to war against Iraq, for this nation to go to war against Iraq, represents the strongest incentive."

More than 3,140 U.S. soldiers have died to date in the Iraq war. There are a lot of people that don't believe in the war but they do believe in our soldiers. Nonetheless, if our soldiers are going to war we should equip them with the proper protection, both physically and mentally, which the military has been under a lot of scrutiny for not doing. Going on deployment shouldn't mean that a person's personal life falls apart while he/she is gone.