



YOUR SOLDIER YOUR ARMY

A FAMILY GUIDE

BY VICKI CODY



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Your Soldier, Your Army: A Family Guide

by Vicki Cody

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YOUR SOLDIER, YOUR ARMY

A FAMILY GUIDE

PREFACE

If you are reading this book, you probably have a loved one serving in the Army. This is the new and revised edition of my original book, *Your Soldier, Your Army—A Parents' Guide*, published in 2005. A lot has changed since then and I, along with the Association of the United States Army's Institute of Land Warfare, decided it was time to update the original book.

In the 12 years since the original release, I have continued to get feedback from so many people from all over the United States—moms and dads, spouses, Soldiers and civilians—about how my book has helped them to cope with and understand the Army. Their words, letters, cards and feedback have been a source of great pride for me and, at times, have given *me* strength. The fact that I continue to meet people who have recently read the book, and that AUSA continues to get requests for it, tells me that there is still a great need for it. And, as the original struck such a chord with readers, I have tried to keep as much of it as possible, merely reworking, editing and adding new material as needed. One significant change is reflected in the deletion of the original subtitle, *A Parents' Guide*; this revised edition is not just for parents—it is for any family member of a Soldier.

My perspective has also changed since 2005. My husband retired from the Army in 2008, after 36 years of service. Our two sons are still on active duty, both helicopter pilots and now both married with children. Since 2002, we have had one or both of our sons deployed at any given time and for varying lengths of time to Iraq, Afghanistan and Korea. Sometimes, I have trouble remembering how many times we have said good-bye, but the homecomings remain as blessings never to be taken for granted. My husband and I are on the sidelines now, cheering on this next generation of Soldiers and families. Now we see the life we once lived through the eyes of our sons, their wives and our four young grandsons.

The need for this book came out of my own fears and stresses when our sons began deploying to combat zones early in their careers.

I realized then that there was not a lot of information out there for parents of Soldiers. The Army had made great strides in educating and providing for Soldiers' spouses, but there just wasn't much for other family members. The war in Iraq had begun and, with both of our sons deployed in the same unit, I knew that if I were concerned and worried, I could only imagine how stressful it was for the moms and dads who had never been in the Army and who knew little or nothing about what their son or daughter had chosen to do. In a peacetime Army that may not be as critical, but during a time of war and with almost every unit deploying at one time or another, I knew that there was a real need for information for Soldiers' families.

My goal back in 2005 was—and continues to be today—to share, teach, comfort and ultimately help others experience the joys that come with serving this nation. Whether it is you, someone in your family or someone you know who is in uniform, I hope this book opens your eyes, ears and heart and helps to give you the resources, the strength and the courage you may need. It is not easy having a loved one in the Army, especially in today's climate of unrest in so many places around the world.



I was an Army wife for 33 years. Over the years I wore many hats and played many roles, but “wife and mother” pretty much sums up who I was and who I still am. I met my husband when he was a cadet at West Point. I had the honor and privilege of being by his side as he rose up through the ranks in his Army career. And now, watching our sons follow in their dad's footsteps is one of the greatest joys in my life.

During my husband's career, he commanded at every level, affording me opportunities to coach, mentor and form or participate in spouse readiness groups on a large and varying scale. I consoled, grieved, laughed with and cried with spouses in every imaginable situation. I did everything in my power to make Army life a little bit better, a little bit easier on the families.

I still want to use my knowledge, experiences and insights; whatever I have I want to share with other families. I'm a little

old-fashioned in that I still believe in the human touch or connection. I also believe that each of us can make a difference, especially through the written word. Sometimes it's something as simple as reassuring a frightened mom or dad and letting them know that they are not alone, that every one of us who has a loved one in a combat zone lives with the same fear or dread. Even if their Soldier is not deployed, maybe they need some clarification or knowledge of the complex and vast organization that is our Army.

I wish I could wrap my arms around all of the families out there; I hope this book does just that. I hope it explain things, helps steer you in the direction you need, helps you cope with deployments and, above all, I hope it helps you enjoy the journey that your Soldier is making.

Vicki L. Cody

Vicki Cody
McLean, Virginia
August 2017

A SOLDIER IN YOUR FAMILY

So, you have a Soldier in your family. How exciting! Let me say right now what a great honor that is. 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 should be “lump in your throat, goose bumps on your arms, tears in your eyes” proud! Your Soldier raised his right hand and swore to protect this great country and its Constitution. There are few professions more noble than wearing the uniform of the United States Army.

From here on I will refer to your loved one as your Soldier, since that covers son, daughter, spouse, officer, noncommissioned officer (NCO) and enlisted—in the Regular Army, Army National Guard and Army Reserve.

Maybe this is a first for your family; maybe you’ve never had a relative in the military. Whether you are in the military or a civilian, this can be a confusing time, especially if your Soldier is deployed or facing a deployment. Deployments are a fact of Army life and part of the nature of the business.

Army life is not easy and it is not for everyone. But let me offer you some reassurance. I was married to a Soldier and, while we faced many challenges and made sacrifices along the way, I wouldn’t trade any of it. It was an exciting adventure for two kids from small-town Vermont! We traveled the world and met some pretty amazing people along the way,

including presidents and first ladies, rock stars, movie stars, athletes, politicians, privates and generals and every rank of Soldier in between. Most important of all were the Soldiers and their families who touched our lives and made the journey so memorable.

**Army life can
be tough and
demanding,
but the good
far outweighs
the bad.**

THE 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.

It was these great American heroes that our two sons grew up with and wanted to emulate. It was Army life that shaped all four of us. We raised our sons amid the moves and separations and turmoil of war. And those two boys, whom we dragged all over kingdom come—who went to three high schools each, whose dad missed birthdays and other holidays, who got to see grandparents and other relatives only sporadically—have both chosen the Army for their career. They grew up living the life and still chose it when their time came. In fact, each of them will tell you that all he ever wanted was to be an Apache pilot like his dad. And we couldn't be more proud! I tell you this not to sound like a bragging parent but to give you some perspective of our family and how great Army life has been for us.

Army life can be tough and demanding, but the good far outweighs the bad if you choose to look at it that way. Soldiers will learn to shoulder responsibility early on, as they learn to survive and to take care of themselves and their buddies. In doing all this,

Soldiers will learn so much about themselves—and much of this will occur just during initial training, i.e., boot camp. The Army builds teams and self-esteem, giving young adults a sense of purpose and self-worth. You will see a maturity in your Soldier, almost immediately after he or she joins the Army.

Young men and women continue to sign up even in these times of uncertainty and frequent deployments. This is a great testament to their characters and upbringings. Not everyone can be a Soldier; it takes a lot of courage. Equally brave are all of the spouses, parents and family members who stand beside their Soldiers—it takes the love and support of a family for Soldiers to be able to do what they need to do. So, thank you!

REMEMBER

- The U.S. Soldier is a rare breed of hero. Having a Soldier in your family should be a source of great pride for you.
- “Soldier” refers to both genders and all ranks in the Regular Army, Army National Guard and Army 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. Your nation’s security is now in your Soldier’s well-trained hands.
- Do your best to embrace it all!

DEPLOYMENT ORDERS

Just when you think you are getting used to your Soldier's new way of life, it happens: your Soldier calls and says the dreaded "D" word—*deployment*.

Deployments are just one aspect of Army life, but they are pretty significant, even if there are several years between them. Whether it is to Iraq, Afghanistan, Kuwait, Syria, Korea, Germany or any number of other places throughout the world, they mean leaving home and family and saying good-bye to your loved one(s) for a long period of time. The length and frequency of combat deployments has changed in recent years, with most deployments now being nine months long instead of 12–15 months. Regardless of the circumstances, if the deployment is to a combat zone or for training, it is still stressful for everyone.

For me and my family, the stress of deployments first began during my husband's career, but then it continued without a break when our sons began deploying. My husband was commanding the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) on 11 September 2001. Our oldest son was in flight school and requested

The hardest thing for any parent is to let go of a child and not have any control over the situation.

the 101st for his first aviation assignment so that he could be with his dad if the division went to combat. Our younger son was still in college, but soon he would also be going to flight school, just like his dad and brother. I was always so proud that our sons wanted to follow in their dad's footsteps and loved the fact that they were living their dreams of becoming helicopter pilots. I had just never thought about them going to combat—that was something their dad did, not my *boys*! But all of that changed on September 11th, when the rules of the game shifted, especially for those of us with a loved one serving. And a few months later, when our son deployed to Afghanistan for Operation Anaconda, I felt the true impact of

Army life up close and personal in a brand-new way. The day that he left, I felt my world shifting as I realized that I was an Army mom as well as an Army wife. And a year and a half later, when our younger son finished flight school, also signed into the 101st and then joined his brother in Iraq, my worries and fears doubled. There were times in those early years of the war in Iraq when I didn't know how we would get through the deployments. I'm sure glad that I didn't know back then that for the next 15 years our sons would deploy multiple times to Iraq and Afghanistan, and sometimes in the same unit. Sometimes it is just as well that we don't know what the future holds!

The first deployment is definitely the hardest; I know exactly how you are feeling. You are probably thinking, *when did this kid grow up and become old enough to go to combat?* One minute you are sitting proudly at their high school, college, basic training or flight school graduation, and the next your child is preparing to go into harm's way. I remember thinking, *this is happening too fast—just give us a little more time with him.*

I look back on those times, especially the early months and then years of the war in Iraq, and I see them as times of contrasts for my family; my husband was in one of the top leadership positions in the Army, and our sons were just beginning their Army careers. It was a time for feeling scared and worried, but also for feeling relief that our sons were together and were able to look out for each other. Somehow, we got through it, and every time we welcomed them home a huge burden was lifted. We counted our blessings, knowing that not every family was as lucky.

People often ask me if it has gotten any easier, given the number of deployments that our family has faced since 2002. I struggle with an answer for that question because it is easier in that I know what to expect and I know that, as my boys' mom, I can get through it. But what has not gotten any easier is watching them say goodbye to *their* families.

The hardest thing for any parent is to let go of a child and not have any control over the situation. It is human nature to want to protect our kids, no matter their age. It is hard enough to let go when they go to college or move away, but if they join the Army,

your find yourself in a whole other level of parental worry. You worry for their safety, especially if they are deployed to a combat zone. If you are not familiar with the Army, it can be overwhelming.

Deployments are very complex and their execution depends

on many variables. Some of those variables have changed in recent years now that the troop commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan have been reduced and the emerging security threats in Europe and South Korea have increased. The Army has moved to nine-month rotations to the Middle East, Afghanistan, Europe and South Korea, most of which are planned two or three years in advance, giving Soldiers and their families predictability and time to prepare. Another change since 2010: the Army is not deploying entire divisions from a post, but brigade-sized units from throughout the Army. So, your Soldier may deploy with a brigade-sized task force from 1st Infantry Division at Fort Riley, Kansas, but will be attached to another headquarters at the deployment destination. The important thing to remember, as a family member, is that the support system and network is always at the Soldier's originating post. So, before any deployment begins, make sure you have the names and points of contact for the rear detachment of your Soldier's unit.

Most units deploy on chartered airline flights or military transport planes. The process is staggered over two or three weeks with the vehicles, aircraft and equipment leaving a month or two earlier, ensuring that everything is at the destination when the Soldiers arrive. All of that requires time and effort from everyone in the unit, from the commander down through the chain of command to each and every Soldier, everyone with their own duties and responsibilities. Consequently, the months leading up to a deployment are exhausting and can be extremely stressful for the Soldier and, in turn, for the Soldier's family. As a spouse, that was a difficult time for me. I resented the Army and did not understand why my husband had to work long hours and be gone for training when he was already

If your Soldier is in a Special Forces unit, deployments might be more frequent and shorter. Most of these missions are classified and you may not know when or if he or she has deployed.

going to be gone for a long deployment. It was hard for our kids, too. We all just wanted to have more time with our Soldier. And now, as I watch our sons with their wives and children, it breaks my heart as I see them preparing for deployment. I understand the emotional roller coaster in the weeks leading up to it and then how difficult the goodbye is. I guess some things never change.

What I have learned over the years, first as a wife and now as a mother of Soldiers, is to be there for moral support. If necessary, be a sounding board, listen, guide, advise, and above all, be positive. Soldiers need your unwavering support. Their plates are more than full and they, too, are struggling with emotions and the stress of the upcoming separation, so be as supportive as you can. You can express your fears and doubts to someone else, but if you are scared it will be harder on your Soldier and it won't change the fact that the deployment is happening. I know how hard it is to be upbeat during that time—I've been there! But I also know that in spite of all the difficulties, you are proud of your Soldier. Let that pride shine through. Focus on that instead of all the negative feelings.

All of this sounds straightforward enough on paper, but I know that the reality is a lot more complicated. It is hard saying goodbye. I do great leading up to the departure; I put on a great performance and act positive, but the minute the plane takes off, I cave in and allow myself a good cry. I am very emotional for a time, but then gradually it gets easier and the days pass. Just know that you are not alone in your fears and concerns.

REMEMBER

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

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 at the details that get overlooked when a deployment is looming on the horizon. Things you do ahead of time will ease your mind later and hopefully make life easier when you face a deployment.

Even if your Soldier does not deploy to a combat zone, there are other kinds of deployments and training exercises that might last for long periods of time. It might be a standard deployment for training at one of the Army's training centers—the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) in Louisiana or the National Training Center (NTC) in California—for 30-day training cycles leading up to a deployment. This is critical unit

training and is executed like an overseas deployment. While it is comparatively short in length, it is still another separation that takes your Soldier away from your family.

I've talked about some of the places that your Soldier may deploy to, places that you read about or see on the news. But life is full of the unexpected and sometimes events occur that mean our Soldiers might have to leave at a moment's notice, such as natural disasters that require humanitarian relief. Your Soldier's unit may be assigned a support mission in the continental United States (CONUS). In 2005, Hurricane Katrina had a big impact on our Army; there were Soldiers returning to Louisiana from combat tours and flights had to be rescheduled and rerouted due to the storm. The devastation and aftermath of the storm required the help of many

Life is full of the unexpected and some events occur that mean our Soldiers might have to leave at a moment's notice.

thousands of Soldiers—Regular Army, Army National Guard and Army Reserve—to deploy to Louisiana for months. Your Soldier’s unit might be assigned a support mission outside of the United States (OCONUS). The Ebola outbreak in 2014 required a deployment of U.S. Soldiers to Africa. You should be prepared for unexpected events like these to affect you and your family.

Our oldest son deployed to South Korea in early 2017. At the time, most of our family and I thought it would not be as dangerous as his many deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. I fooled myself into thinking that maybe I wouldn’t have to worry as much. But, as tensions rose in that part of the world, I found myself watching the news and worrying about him and I realized that some things never change. And I know that I’ll always have to struggle to find that balance to work through my own fears so that I can be there for our son, our daughter-in-law and our grandsons.

I guess the question we should be asking ourselves is, *“How do we prepare, given the tenuous and unpredictable world situation, to support our Soldier?”* Being an Army wife for so many years has certainly helped me with coping skills, and the many lessons learned from the boys’ numerous deployments have given me perspective and enhanced my faith and trust. Here are some things I’ve learned:

Knowledge. The more we know and understand, the better we cope. Listen and learn as much as you can about your Soldier’s unit, the mission, the people and the leadership. Learn about the history of the unit; it will give you perspective and pride. It will also help you to enjoy your Soldier’s decision to serve.

Acceptance. Accept the fact that your loved one has joined the Army. Now is not the time to dig in your heels and question that decision. Your Soldier needs your unwavering support to fulfill his or her duties and responsibilities.

Flexibility. The Army throws a lot of curve balls. I’ve had to learn to be patient, to try to react to each situation as it comes and to anticipate just enough to be prepared. Don’t waste time and energy on the fear of the unknown; fear can paralyze you. In other words, don’t borrow trouble. It will show up at your door in its own time.

Living in the moment. Never miss an opportunity to spend time with your Soldier, especially before and after a deployment. Army

life not only makes us realize the importance of family but also reminds us to cherish our time together and to make memories today rather than wait till tomorrow. It is the good times we will remember—the fleeting moments that we will cherish and carry with us. Now that our sons are grown with families of their own, living at different duty stations, with someone usually deployed, it is a real challenge for us to get everyone all together. We take our moments with them when we can, a couple of days here, a weekend there. One summer, we managed to have everyone here for a weekend. It was in between moves for all of them so it was not a planned vacation. It wasn't Disney or any fancy vacation spot—just two days here at our house in northern Virginia. After a hot summer day at the local water park in Reston, I was saying good night to our grandsons who were all sleeping together in the same room. Relishing their laughter as they jumped on the beds, I asked them what their favorite thing of the day was. Each of the younger ones named their favorite water slide, but it was our then eleven-year-old who said, “The best part of today was being with our family.” He summed it all up.



Like any parent, I am a “fixer.” In my quest to make life easier for my grown sons and their families, I sometimes have to take a step back to gain the perspective I need so that I can be there to support them. I have to remind myself that I can't always make it easier and I certainly can't change what the Army and life have in store for them. Even with all my years of experience, I'm still caught off guard by just how emotional it is to see my sons leave. My heart breaks every time one of them deploys, not so much for me but for their wives and young children. I hate the rigorous training cycles and all the time spent away from their families in the days leading up to deployment. Like any mom, I worry while they are gone, I worry about the stress on each of them, and I worry about long-term effects of frequent deployments. So, I make a conscious effort to keep my fears at bay, I work on being strong for all of them, and I try to be a positive influence. I guess that's the best thing I can do for them, but it is a struggle and I know I'm a work in progress.

Most of what I have talked about in this chapter is mental preparation, which is not always a tidy little checklist of concrete things to do—though I do provide such a checklist in the box on page 12. I think what it all comes down to is trying to understand the various situations and having flexibility, compassion and a positive outlook.

As parents of Soldiers, we don't care how old our kids are. We never stop worrying, never stop parenting and never stop wanting to fix things. If you are a spouse of a Soldier, the separation is difficult in a different way; you miss your partner and you ache and worry, too. If you have children, you have the additional stress of being a single parent for a long period of time. But whether you are the parent of a Soldier or the spouse of a Soldier, you will never stop loving and missing your Soldier and counting the days until homecoming.

DEPLOYMENT CHECKLIST

Even when a Soldier gets notice of a deployment well in advance, the crush of preparing for the mission can leave the family unprepared for their upcoming absence. The following checklist can help a Soldier's family to 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.
- Make a budget to cover monthly bills and deployment-induced costs. Determine who will pay bills in the event that 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 friends and the like. Include phone numbers and addresses.
- Create an e-mail list of family members and friends to facilitate sharing updates.
- Inform next of kin about how to contact your Soldier in case of emergency.
- 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 that the family can easily access. Among the documents that should be readily available are medical and dental records for every member of the family (including pets), birth certificates and/or adoption papers of each family member, citizenship or naturalization papers, your Soldier's 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.

NAVIGATING ARMY LIFE AND GETTING THROUGH DEPLOYMENTS

As I've stated before, Army life is not always easy and it presents challenges that most civilians never have to face. So much about Army life is out of your control. In the beginning, you might think you can control things, but the Army usually wins (take it from someone who thought she could get the upper hand!). Having said that, let me offer some advice and tips that might help you cope with Army life. And remember, too, that even "ordinary" life is pretty much out of our control!

SOME REFLECTIONS

You fall in love with a Soldier and you begin your life together. You are so in love, and the adventure of Army life is new and exciting. Things are going along pretty well. You get through a deployment, you start a family, make some moves. You hit some bumps in the road; another deployment, maybe more children, more challenges. You begin to resent the Army because your life is not going as planned and you feel out of control. I have lived it myself and watched as so many young spouses go through those first years of Army life. The early years of marriage can be tricky even in the best of circumstances, but when you add in all of the unique challenges of Army life, it can be a very stressful time for a couple.

**You can be a
participant in
your destiny,
or you can
watch from the
sidelines.**

At some point in time, and for each of us this time is different, you will have what Oprah calls an "ah-ha moment," when it all becomes clear and you feel like you and your Soldier are right where you are supposed to be, doing exactly what you were meant to do.

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 that 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.

They fill many roles:

- building Soldier and family cohesion and morale;
- preparing Soldiers and families for deployments and reunions;
- 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. They provide a way to develop 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 that 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.

For me, my defining moment happened at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, after a very tragic event; a plane carrying 248 Screaming Eagles on their way home from a peacekeeping mission in the Sinai crashed, killing everyone on board. It was at the memorial service on the division parade field, as I looked at the formation of 15,000 Soldiers and the Screaming Eagles banner, that I suddenly “got it.” I’m not sure why it was during such a tragic and somber time,

but I do know that something inside me changed that day. I was overcome with pride for my husband and his fellow Soldiers, more so than before, and I began to understand what Soldiering meant and what my husband had chosen to do. I'm not saying I never again complained or dug in my heels or tried to be in control; I'm not saying I was always a "happy camper," but I definitely turned a corner in my maturity as an Army wife. As I allowed the love and pride to override my feelings of resentment or my thinking that I was getting short-changed, I was able to live in the moment and embrace the way of life we had chosen. I hope each of you reaches that point sooner rather than later. It impacts you, your Soldier, your family and those around you.

While so much *is* out of your control, you do have choices: how you accept things, your attitude, your happiness, whether life passes you by or whether you *live* life. You can be a participant in your destiny, or you can watch from the sidelines. You can choose to be happy, or you can allow circumstances to make you miserable.

SOME LESSONS LEARNED

- Balance is so important for strong marriages and families. I am not here to tell you how exactly to find it—there is no recipe or checklist for the perfect marriage or family. Because every couple and every family has unique qualities and needs, *you* have to find what works for *your* family. That is not easy, given the nature of Army life. I'm sure we didn't always get it right, but I do know that with compromise, staying committed to each other, putting each other and our kids ahead of everything else whenever possible, and juggling and balancing every step of the way, we not only stayed intact, but we thrived. We made the most of our times together, we made lasting memories, we found laughter in everyday life, we supported each other, we were proud of each other, and there was never any doubt that we loved each other. Sometimes that is about all you can do.
- If you are an Army spouse, you will spend time alone. That is a fact of Army life. Our first duty assignment was in Hawaii. My family and hometown were back in Vermont, so it was not like I could run home when Dick left for training or went to the field. I got a teaching job, took up some hobbies and made some

friends. It took time, but I learned to be comfortable by myself and with myself. It was empowering. When my husband went to Korea for a one-year assignment, our first son was just days old, so I went back to Vermont and lived with my parents. It worked out great and I was so grateful to be able to do that at that point in time, but once we had our second son, there was no going back “home” when Dick was gone. By then I had learned to be on my own.

- If you have children, deployments and separations can be difficult on them. They affect you and your children in different ways, depending on their ages. For me, the roughest times were when the boys were young, about preschool age. If you are a stay-at-home parent like I was, the days can be long and grueling. It is exhausting being the sole parent with no break at the end of the day or on the weekends. There are times when all you can do is put one foot in front of the other and get through each day. You count the days, weeks and months, marking off the calendar just waiting for that homecoming date with the big star or circle on it. Without my fellow Army wives, I’m not sure I would have survived those years. We supported one another, we understood each other and we became family. Again, my hobbies, volunteer work and Army wife duties gave me something to do and focus on and helped pass the time. And, while I did not necessarily realize it at the time, all of that was character-building and made me who I am today—strong and independent. And our sons turned out pretty good, too!
- Your attitude directly affects those around you, especially your children. I know how hard it is to remain positive when you have months looming ahead of you and you are worried or concerned about the safety of your Soldier. The best thing you can do for your kids and your family is to be strong and positive. They watch you and read you for signs. If you are miserable, chances are they will be as well.
- Take care of yourself. Exercise your mind and body, take care of your spiritual needs, and take time for you. You need that and you deserve that—and it will help your attitude.
- Get involved with the Family Readiness Group (FRG) in your Soldier’s unit; whether it is through e-mail or in person, it will

connect you with other spouses who are experiencing the same things that you are, and it will keep you informed about the unit. If you have the time, volunteer work is a great way to meet people and it is gratifying. While helping others, you are helping yourself as well. Again, it will give you a sense of belonging.

- If you live on or near the post, take advantage of the facilities; sports programs, fitness centers, the Child Development Centers offering hourly childcare and sometimes free respite care; and all the various programs and activities for moms and kids sponsored by organizations like Army Community Services (ACS) and Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR).

ADVICE FOR PARENTS OF SOLDIERS

People often ask me what it is like to send my sons off on a deployment. I always say it is so much harder than it was with my husband. I always felt my husband was tough and nothing could hurt him. But when it is your children, you think *anything* can hurt them. My mind tells me my sons are adults, but my heart says they are still just kids. When I watch them go, it feels like a part of me is leaving. I've heard this from so many other parents. And, just as when a spouse is gone, it leaves a void and an ache in your heart as you count the days and weeks and watch the news for any word. As often as I had been through it with my husband, nothing quite prepared me for saying goodbye to our sons.

In the early years of the war in Iraq, communication was almost nonexistent. I would live for that first phone call, that first letter, and then I could move forward. All of that has changed and now there is daily communication via e-mail, video chat and cell phones. I am able to e-mail our sons and we do video and phone calls, but I still like to write a card or letter from time to time. Mail means so much to Soldiers when they are far from home. I don't think that will ever change. Even though I know my boys can get what they need, I still like to send packages and goodie boxes. Sending things is as much for me as it is for them. It makes me feel connected to them because they are receiving something tangible from me. So, I encourage you to send things from time to time, and to remember the power of the written word!

A few tips for all you parents:

- About the news—I once talked to a mom who said she cried every day of her son’s twelve-month deployment to Iraq. I asked her why she kept watching the news if it was upsetting her. She said she couldn’t stop. Those first years of the Iraq war we were all inundated with 24-hour news of everything that was going on in Iraq and Afghanistan. It made it even more stressful for those of us with Soldiers deployed. I was scared like everyone else, but I tried to control the amount of news I watched. I admit that during the initial months of the war I was consumed by it and had to have the TV on whenever I was home. At one point, we went six weeks without hearing from our deployed son. That was the scariest time of our lives. I would hear something on the news and the feeling of dread would creep in. So, I decided to do what I had done so many times in the past when my husband was deployed: I compartmentalized so I could live my life. Still, my husband and I spent many a sleepless night. I advise parents and spouses to watch just enough news to keep up with what is going on, but take breaks and get away from the TV, especially if you have young children. Seeing all of those images puts too much stress on them.
- Parents can be part of the unit FRG. Just as it was helpful for me as an Army wife to be connected with the FRGs, now I find it helpful as an Army parent to be connected with people who are all experiencing the same things I am. Whether your Soldier is single or married, you can be put on the FRG mailing list for newsletters and e-mails. Most units have Facebook pages, so if you have a computer you can easily stay connected. I love looking at our sons’ units’ Facebook pages and seeing pictures and reading about what they are doing, especially when they are deployed.



Whether you are a parent of Soldiers or a spouse of a Soldier, never miss an opportunity to tell them how proud of their work you are and how much you love them. Things happen and your life can change in an instant—you don’t ever want to regret a missed opportunity.

I think back to the many farewell and homecoming ceremonies that I have been to for our sons. I always like to watch the other

parents in the crowd, knowing that they are experiencing the same emotions that I am. I see the tears, the fears and concern on their faces. But I can also see the love and pride they feel for their Soldier. I love it that they drove all night or got on a plane so they could be there. I love it that they cry like I do and hug their Soldier no matter how old he or she is. I am struck by the fact that no other profession brings parents and their grown kids together in quite the same way, giving them opportunities to show their love so openly. I find such comfort in the presence of other Army families.

REMEMBER

- Keep those letters, packages, e-mails and phone calls flowing; they are very important, both for 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

There are times in life, especially during a deployment, when the only thing that gets you through is your faith. Faith is such a personal thing and only you know how strong yours is, especially when faced with adversity. But you also need to have trust—in your Soldiers and their abilities, in their commanders and in the Army itself. Maybe I can help you with the trust factor.

The Army, an All-Volunteer Force since the end of the Vietnam War, has supported continual combat rotations to multiple countries for the past 16 years. Afghanistan is America's longest war and, for much of that time, our Army was also fighting the war in Iraq. What has been asked of this generation of Soldiers and their families is unprecedented!

I allowed the trust that I had in the Army and our sons' abilities to take over so I could live life while they were away.

But, as a result, we have a generation of Soldiers, NCOs and officers who have come up through the ranks while the Army has been at war. They are uniquely battle-tested leaders who thoroughly know how to motivate, train, develop and lead their Soldiers. You should rest assured that the current generation of leaders that fills the Army ranks are there because they want to be—they are there because they are Soldiers at heart.

The Army has the best schools for developing leaders: the Captain's Career Course, the Command and General Staff College, the Army War College and the NCO Academy. These required schools for future Army leaders prepare them for commanding Soldiers. The training centers that I mentioned before—the National Training Center (NTC) and the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC)—provide the opportunity for units to train as a unit, for 30-day rotations. This is vital to teach the Soldiers of the unit necessary

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. 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 installs 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). 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. If Soldiers change careers, they "cross-train" at another branch school.

An ongoing set of courses and schools helps to 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, strategies past and present and lessons learned from recent and ongoing campaigns.

skills for combat operations and, at the same time, for the leaders to build a cohesive team based on trust: Soldier to Soldier, leader to led and unit to unit. Trust is the foundation of every successful unit, just as it is in a good marriage. It is critical to the safety and success of every member of the unit. If you can cultivate in yourself this same trust in your Soldier's unit, the leadership and in the Army, it will help you get through the stressful times.

Having said all of that, there are still times when each of us is faced with something that we struggle to get through, times when you have to dig even deeper for that faith and trust to kick in. When our son deployed to Iraq and the war began, my husband and I entered a whole new phase of worry, having no idea that that was just the beginning of multiple combat deployments for our sons. At that point in time, our son had already been deployed to Afghanistan once before and had only been back home for six months when his unit left for Iraq. During the winter of 2003, as he and his unit were flying helicopters through the desert towards Baghdad, in addition to the fear of what was awaiting them when they reached Baghdad, they were also faced with sandstorms, the threat of chemical weapons and the real possibility of helicopters getting shot down. All of that was playing out on the news, 24/7. As a mother, I had never felt so helpless and scared.

Then, a few months later, when our younger son joined his brother's unit in Iraq, I honestly did not know how we would get through the next few months. There were times when we were pacing in front of the TV, consumed with worry about our sons, with my husband admitting to me that he shared all of my fears. On those scariest of nights, we were just like all the other parents who had a Soldier in harm's way—nothing guaranteed our sons' safety. But it was during those times, and in the coming years when we faced the same worries again and again, that I really learned how to let go of the fear and put everything in God's hands. I allowed the trust that I had in the Army and our sons' abilities to take over so I could live life while they were away. Otherwise, I would have been paralyzed with fear and unable to do all of the things that I needed to do.

Faith and trust can get you through the toughest of times.

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 also to keep their Soldiers safe.
- Almost everything Soldiers face in combat is something they have already endured in realistic training exercises.
- Your Soldier's morale may wane during a deployment; their venting is likely to pass, and they have a wide range of mental health services available in theater in case it does not.

ADVICE FOR 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. You miss your daughter, and maybe this is the farthest she's ever lived away from home. On top of everything else, her Soldier is deploying and leaving her and their kids (your grandchildren) for months at a time. Deployments are every bit as hard on the in-laws as they are on the Soldier's family. You want to be there for her and to support her, but you are not sure what to do.

As a brand-new Army wife, I remember trying to explain things to my parents, things that I didn't fully understand, but not wanting them to worry about me. Neither of our families were from a military background, so when I married my husband and flew off to Hawaii, I'm sure my parents wondered just what I had gotten myself into and worried about me being so far from home. I wish there had been a book for our parents back then; it sure would have helped!

If you are the in-laws of a Soldier, I encourage you to get involved and learn everything you can about the Army and the life your son or daughter has married into. You probably don't live near the Army post, and it takes time to start

Be flexible and understanding and, above all, be supportive.

to understand this different world, but you will learn, just as my parents did. I tried to teach and educate them in the ways of the Army, but it was their visits to our duty stations that really helped them to understand what Army life is all about. The more they took part in it with us, the more they understood and enjoyed it. And the more they understood, the less they worried about all of us. Our parents got to see so many places and meet all kinds of people that they otherwise would not have. They shared our sense of pride when they attended the various ceremonies and parades. We made some wonderful memories with our families that we will

carry with us forever. I am so thankful for that, and so are they.

Sometimes during a spouse's deployment, your son or daughter might want to come back home for a long stretch, if it is possible. But oftentimes, and especially if there are school-age children, it is just easier for them to stay on or near the Army post. The Army offers so much for spouses and kids now, more so than ever before. Whether living on or near post, there are medical, dental and social services and even childcare for the spouses and children of Soldiers. The Family Readiness Group is the lifeline for information flow and the connection to the Soldier. The schools both on and off post work hand-in-hand

with the Army to ensure that students' needs are met, especially during a deployment. This should reassure you that your daughter or son and your grandkids will be supported in every way, especially during a deployment. This network may also be the reason why they choose not to move back home during a deployment.

Be flexible and understanding and, above all, be supportive. I know it must have been so hard on our parents and siblings with us moving all over the place. I know they missed us and our kids, and we missed out on many family events, but through it all they were understanding. We could not have lived this life without their love and support.

When I wrote the first edition of this book, one of our sons was newly married and our other son was single. Today, I am mother-in-law to two wonderful young ladies. So many times I have put

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 deployment, keep in touch with the FRG. After all, your Soldier's children belong to the FRG, no matter where they may live.

myself in their shoes as I've watched them navigate the rigors of Army life and deployments. I clearly remember what it was like to be a new Army wife facing those uncertainties and challenges. One of my daughters-in-law was brand-new to Army life, just like I had been. Our other daughter-in-law had served in the Army herself with two combat tours in Iraq before she met our son. So, each came into her marriage with different experiences and knowledge, but when you are an Army spouse facing the day-to-day challenges of Army life and deployments, it doesn't matter what your experience level is. It is a whole new ballgame and *everyone* has a lot to learn. And, just like the generations before them, Army spouses turn to each other for support and camaraderie.

REMEMBER

- If your son or daughter has married a Soldier, your child is not only 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 to be with a community of spouses sharing the same experiences and emotions.
- It is a good idea to become familiar with your child's new lifestyle by visiting their posts and attending career-significant ceremonies, deployment embarkations and homecomings.

WHAT IF?

Let's talk about some questions you may have—things you are wondering about but don't know whom to ask for help or maybe things that you don't want to think about. I'd like to share some information that you can file away in the back of your mind, just in case you need it someday.

What if something happens to your Soldier on deployment? I know none of us wants to think about it, but sometimes it's better to know what to expect rather than to live with (and act on) 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. Primary next of kin (PNOK) is the Soldier's immediate family—spouse or parents. Secondary next of kin (SNOK) means other close family members, such as in-laws, siblings and grandparents. All of this information is provided by the Soldier before any deployment.

In the event of a death or of a Soldier being listed as missing in action (MIA), the Army will notify all PNOK and SNOK in person. 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 PNOK. The Army does not make notifications in the case of minor injuries or illness.

Sometimes the notification process can take hours or even days if mass casualties are involved. I understand how hard that is and I have heard complaints from families about it taking so long. First of all, you should know that it may be the circumstances and/or the location that make the notification difficult. It is a painstaking process and, because of its obviously sensitive nature, no one wants to make a mistake.

Most of the time the system works, but there have been cases where a mistake has been made; it can be devastating if a notification is made to the wrong family. It is even more difficult to avoid these sorts of mistakes today with the 24-hour news cycle, cell phones

and social media, even though no one is supposed to report anything until the family has been notified. Sometimes, units will shut down their phones and Internet until notifications have been made to prevent any information leaks.

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 they'll be able to come home. This will depend both on your circumstances and those 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;
- their branch of service (Army, Navy, Air Force, etc.);
- their military address and information about the deployed unit; and
- the nature of the emergency.

For all the services available to the military and their families, visit the American Red Cross website.

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

I know how difficult it is when you hear something on the news and you think it may involve your Soldier's unit. Every time I hear certain words like "Apache helicopters" or the name of the unit or the country where one of my sons is, I want to panic. For a brief moment, I am convinced something has happened to one or both of them. In my mind, I know that I would not hear that on the TV, but my heart tells me otherwise. Once I hear the full story I start breathing again. It can be a rough way to live.

From the moment Army spouses say "I do," we're faced with the realities of Army life. And injuries and death don't just occur during deployments. There are accidents, illnesses and all of the

things that everyone faces in life. But in Army life, we sometimes face those realities relatively early on in marriage. To survive, we accept the dangers and learn to compartmentalize so that we can live our day-to-day lives. But every time we lose a fellow Soldier, we are forced to face that reality yet again. I was 26 when we lost two close friends in a helicopter crash. I realized then what a dangerous business my husband was in—and that happened during what was just a routine training mission on a summer night in Georgia. I will never forget it; I remember feeling so scared and angry, realizing that my husband could get hurt or killed any day he went to work. Most young wives don't have to think about that in the early years of their marriage.

Just because we are forced to face certain realities doesn't mean it has to have a negative impact on the marriage. Rather, I believe it teaches us to never take for granted our love for one another and, for some couples, it can make the marriage stronger and healthier.

REMEMBER

- Your Soldier's personnel records include primary and secondary next of kin to be notified in the event of a casualty.
- If your Soldier is killed or MIA, you will be notified in person. If your Soldier is married, their 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 Parents' Support Group.

YELLOW RIBBONS, REUNIONS AND REINTEGRATIONS

You've made it through months of stress and worry and the wait is almost over; your Soldier is redeploying back to his original duty station. It's time to think about yellow ribbons, American flags and the homecoming! Just like you, your Soldier will be counting the days long before the return date is official. The dates and times are more predictable now than they were back in the early to mid-2000's. But just like when your Soldier's unit deployed, the redeployment has variables and unexpected changes, too. If it is a nine-month overseas deployment, your Soldier will have a pretty good idea of the date, but it can change by a few days, so be prepared and be flexible. It can be a stressful and emotional time. Dick and I are lucky to live in the DC area with multiple airports and flight options; I can't tell you how many times we've changed flights around homecomings or just decided to travel there early and wait. Sometimes it's easier to drive!

As with the deployment, your Soldier will not be able to discuss redeployment details on the phone for operational security (OPSEC) reasons. He will give you clues and you will have an idea of what to expect, but your most up-to-date information will come from the Family Readiness Group and the rear detachment—make sure you are in touch with them. They make recorded calls or send e-mails to keep all family members informed, so make sure to check with your Soldier that they have your correct contact information on file.

As parents of married sons, we always ask our son and daughter-in-law if they want us to be there for the homecoming. We don't want to assume anything or invade their privacy. (But, between you and me, I want to be there every time one of our sons gets off his plane!)

I have experienced every kind of homecoming. First with my husband, before we had children, then with our kids, and also with our parents and without them. I've welcomed Dick home with flags waving, bands playing and hundreds of families. I've also gone to

small, local airports to greet him with our sons and discovered that we were the entire welcoming party. It just depends on the circumstances. Our sons have had many, many homecomings, each one different, but we have managed to be there for each goodbye and every homecoming.

When your loved one has been gone for so long, be prepared for the buildup of emotions during those last few weeks. You have lived with stress, fear and worries for all those months, and you will feel like you are ready to burst.

ADVICE FOR SPOUSES

You can count on some upheaval after the initial “honeymoon” phase. When life settles down and you think things are back to normal, you and your Soldier will most likely experience some “turf” battles. With me and my husband, something would trigger a disagreement that would then turn into a big argument. The thing that sets you off might be so trivial, but because of everything each of you has been through, it suddenly flips a switch and the floodgates open. In the early years of our marriage, when I had no prior experience with military life, I didn’t understand what I was feeling when Dick returned home from 12 months in Korea. We had a brand-new baby and I had been living at home with my parents for the year, but when we got back together and moved to our next duty station, I assumed that because we loved each other and were together again, life would automatically be perfect. No one told me what to expect; there was no literature for spouses on this reunion process. I didn’t even know there was a word for it—*reintegration*—that means “to restore to a state of unity.”

We had some work to do! Once we recognized the fact that we were out of sync, I took matters into my own hands and started the dialogue with my husband. I had to prompt him to express his feelings (something I had no trouble doing!). We needed to clear the air in order to move forward. By expressing our feelings, communicating and letting go of resentment (on my part), we began to move forward with our new little family. Eventually, we got back on track. But that wouldn’t have happened if we had ignored things or swept them under the carpet. The stress of months apart takes a toll on everyone, and you can’t expect to just pick up where you left off.

As the years went by and we experienced more separations and reunions, I would like to think we got better at it all. In many ways we did, but honestly, each time was different. Reintegration is a process that takes time and effort, but if you are committed to your marriage, you will grow and be closer for having gone through those times. We've been married 42 years now and we are stronger than ever. When you make it through life's challenges and the particular challenges of Army life, you come out more resilient and happier. And because of the hard work you've undertaken to make it through those challenges, you'll know not to take anything for granted—your spouse, your marriage, your children or their families.

Bottom line: expect a transition period for each of you, including your kids. Expect to make adjustments. Don't worry if you have some problems when your Soldier first comes home after a lengthy separation. I used to worry that there was something wrong with me or our marriage, because how could I be so angry with the very person I had missed and waited for all those months, the person I loved most in this world? I wish someone had told me then that it was normal to feel that way, that those emotions were all part of my husband reintegrating back into our family.

But if your problems are bigger than you, then seek help; take advantage of what the Army offers at Social Services and the Family Advocacy Office. Through the churches on post, the chaplains offer couple retreats and family gatherings. Those support services are there for your Soldier, for you and for your children.

All Soldiers go through reintegration training when they return. Sometimes it begins before they leave the combat zone. They are required to attend a course when they get back to their duty station and before they can take leave. It is designed to identify Soldiers who are at risk or are having problems and to screen for physical and/or mental health issues. There are all kinds of innovative approaches being tried in the mental health and behavioral health field. There are behavioral health specialists assigned to every unit, and there are many resources available to Soldiers offering help with everything from reintegrating into their family, to marital problems and to more serious health risks like post-traumatic stress disorder. For support with medical

concerns, your Soldier should check with the medical facility at his or her duty station.

The Army has come such a long way since my husband first entered in 1972; it has made great progress in enabling Soldiers to get the help they need and to dispel the stigma attached to mental health issues. But you all know your Soldiers better than anyone, so please encourage them to get help if they need it.

ADVICE FOR PARENTS OF SOLDIERS

Deployments are exhausting in their own way for you. You will feel such relief when each one is over and your Soldier is home safe. When our sons returned from their first deployments to Iraq, just days apart from each other, I cried tears of joy when I saw each one get off his plane. But I was caught off guard a few days later when the floodgates opened up again and I found myself crying for no reason. I was talking with the mother of our son's roommate when the tears started and wouldn't stop. Then she started crying as well. I remember telling her that I had compartmentalized my fears and worry for 12 months, and now that the boys were back home, I didn't know what to do with all of those emotions that I had worked so hard to control. It was weird and unexpected, but now as I look back, I realize that it was part of the process I had to go through. I had to let go of the fears that had been a part of me for so long.

Above and beyond all of the emotions that are at play during the reunion phase, just be proud, and celebrate your Soldier's homecoming!

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 solid plans until you have an official homecoming date and time of 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, if distance allows, 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.

ONCE A SOLDIER, ALWAYS A SOLDIER

At some point, the uniform is taken off and put away in a closet, along with the medals and all of the other accoutrements of Army service. For some it is involuntary, while others can't wait to finish their commitment and get out of the Army. For almost everyone, retirement from the Army is a significant emotional event. Having watched my husband and so many of his peers transition into civilian life, I know first-hand how emotional it can be. And that is because the Army is not just a job—it is not just wearing the uniform. It is a way of life.

It seems like only yesterday that my husband was commissioned a second lieutenant and we were beginning this journey. It went by in a flash. I can honestly say he pretty much loved every day he was in uniform. Even with all of the ups and downs, the hard work, the time spent away from family, he still loved it. Mostly, he loved flying a helicopter and leading Soldiers. But my husband is also a true patriot and has always felt

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that there is no better profession than serving his country. Over the years, I have met so many Soldiers, NCOs and officers of every rank who feel the same way. They are Soldiers at heart, and it doesn't matter what their job title or rank is, where they are serving or how many deployments they've been on; they just love getting up every day, putting on the uniform and making a difference in this world.

Soldiering is such a unique profession. It is not about a fancy office or a house that reflects your salary, and it is not for those seeking fame and fortune. It is not nine to five, Monday through Friday with overtime, bonuses, stock options and paid vacations. It is

not for the faint of heart; Soldiering is about accomplishing the mission 24/7, 365 days a year in every imaginable kind of weather and under every kind of circumstance. It means working until you are beyond exhausted to finish the job, spending weeks in the field—which could be a desert, a swamp in the heat of summer or a frozen muddy field in the dead of winter—living in a tent with no electricity or running water and eating nothing but MREs (meals ready-to eat). But it is also about “the band of brothers” that you belong to and feeling like you are making a difference, whether it is in combat in another country or helping those in need in our own country. Soldiering tests you in ways that no other profession does, and, in doing so, gives you satisfaction, self-esteem and a sense of purpose. It is all about teamwork—the unit, your family and the Army family.

Not every Soldier makes the Army a career, but the ones who do would probably stay in forever if given the choice. And now, because of the record number of wounded warriors, many are having to leave the Army sooner than they want to. I’ve had the opportunity to talk with a number of young wounded warriors who want to continue to serve but instead have to retire for medical reasons. It is heartbreaking to hear these young men and women, who thought they would serve for years but can no longer do so, try to think about making another life. The Army has made a lot of progress in the past decade in keeping wounded warriors on active duty whenever possible, but there are many situations where, because of the type of injury or illness, the Soldier has no choice but to retire. Soldiers call this being *medically boarded*.

When the retirement orders are read, for whatever reason—you’ve gone as high up as you can go in rank, you’ve served four years or 36 years, you have an injury or an illness, you are leaving voluntarily or reluctantly—it is a huge shift in the life you’ve known. And that’s not only true for the Soldier; a Soldier’s spouse has a lot invested in this way of life, too. My life as an Army wife had become so intertwined with my husband’s career that it had become *my* career. It was our way of life, and we loved it. Suddenly, there were big decisions to make that most people make when they are first starting out. I remember thinking, *Okay, now what do we do? We are in our mid-fifties and have to begin a new life.*

It was a little daunting and definitely took some getting used to but, as always, we adjusted and found a new norm for us. We are truly happy as civilians. By choosing to live near Washington, DC, we are still connected to the military and are able to be involved with Soldiers and their families. With our sons on active duty, we watch with pride as this next generation of Soldiers and families serves this nation. I have also been able to pursue my passion for writing, something I did not have the time to do before, and something that allows me to continue supporting the Army.

So, as you will no doubt discover on your own, there is life after the Army! How you choose to live it is a personal choice that may take some time to figure out. But I do think that you are a better human being for having served our nation. The people you have met and the experiences that have shaped you will be with you for the rest of your life. My husband always tells people, "You can take the uniform off, but you never leave the Army."

FINAL THOUGHTS

As I've finished writing this revised edition, I've been watching the news and seeing that more U.S. troops will be sent to Afghanistan and that we still have thousands in Iraq. Every time I think that maybe we won't need this kind of book anymore, I realize that we always will.

I can't tell you how many times I struggle with the question, from a friend or family member, "Why is your son deployed to Afghanistan? Isn't the war over?" So many Americans have moved on with their lives. A few years ago, when it was announced that combat operations were over in Iraq and that we were officially withdrawing from Afghanistan, people believed that meant the deployments were over. Those of us with loved ones serving don't assume any such thing; wherever there is conflict, whether here or abroad, there will be American Soldiers protecting and defending freedom.

The last six years of my husband's career were spent at the Pentagon. We had the privilege of living on Fort Myer, a beautiful little Army post situated on a hill overlooking many of the monuments and sights of Washington, DC. It is also home to Arlington National Cemetery. During those years, I made daily walks with our dog through the post and in and around Arlington Cemetery. The cemetery was so much a part of the landscape, but I never took for granted what the rows of white headstones, lined up in perfect precision, represent. And as I watched the daily funeral processions, I also never took for granted the riderless horse, the flag-draped casket or the solemn bugler. I vowed then never to take for granted this blessed life I've been given. And I will never miss an opportunity to express my thanks to my husband, our sons and the men and women who sacrifice so much for all of us. Getting to live at Fort Myer and witness the beauty of Arlington Cemetery served as a gentle reminder of the Soldiers who have given the ultimate sacrifice—and that is something I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

TERMS, ACRONYMS AND OTHER ARMY STUFF

ORGANIZATION

Corps and divisions—comprised of 700–800 Soldiers, these are command-and-control headquarters with no permanently-assigned brigades. Any modular brigade combat team or combat-support brigade may be assigned to any corps or division.

Brigades—divided into three categories: brigade combat teams (the tactical building block of the Army, with 3,900–4,100 Soldiers), functional support brigades (including air defense, artillery, aviation, medical support, etc.) and multifunctional support brigades (including combat aviation, combat support, battlefield surveillance, etc.).

Battalions and squadrons—with 500 to 900 Soldiers commanded by a lieutenant colonel and with 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 forces 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.

RANK INSIGNIA

No Insignia

E-1 Private



E-2 Private Second Class (PV2)



E-3 Private First Class (PFC)



E-4 Specialist (SPC)



E-4 Corporal (CPL)



E-5 Sergeant (SGT)



E-6 Staff Sergeant (SSG)



E-7 Sergeant First Class (SFC)



E-8 Master Sergeant (MSG)



E-8 First Sergeant (1SG)



E-9 Sergeant Major (SGM)



E-9 Command Sergeant Major (CSM)



E-9 Sergeant Major of the Army (SMA)



O-1 Second Lieutenant (2LT)
(Gold insignia)



O-2 First Lieutenant (1LT)



O-3 Captain (CPT)



O-4 Major (MAJ)
(Gold insignia)



O-5 Lieutenant Colonel (LTC)



O-6 Colonel (COL)



O-7 Brigadier General (BG)



O-8 Major General (MG)



O-9 Lieutenant General (LTG)



O-10 General (GEN)



General of the Army (GA)



Warrant Officer 1 (WO1)



Chief Warrant Officer 2 (CW2)



Chief Warrant Officer 3 (CW3)



Chief Warrant Officer 4 (CW4)



Chief Warrant Officer 5 (CW5)

ACRONYMS AND TERMS

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

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

ACU – Army Combat Uniform, the camouflage, daily-wear uniform for most Soldiers

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

AR – Army Reserve, Army Regulation or armor

BAH – Basic Allowance for Housing, an addition to the paycheck of Soldiers living off-post

BCT – Brigade Combat Team

BN – Battalion

BTRY – Battery

CDR – Combatant Commander

CG – Commanding General

CONUS – Continental United States

DEERS – Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System, i.e., 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, i.e., the organization that pays your Soldier and keeps track of their allotments and leave time

DOB – Date of birth

DoD – Department of Defense

EFMP – Exceptional Family Member Program, which provides support and resources to Soldiers’ family members with disabilities

FAC – Family Assistance Center

FLO – Family Liaison Office, a State Department program for Soldiers and families

FRG – Family Readiness Group

HQ – Headquarters

HQDA – Headquarters, Department of the Army

IED – Improvised Explosive Device

IET – Initial Entry Training, more commonly known as 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, i.e., a Soldier’s pay stub

LOD – Line of duty

MEDDAC – U.S. Army Medical Department Activity

MI – Military Intelligence

MIA – Missing in Action

MP – Military Police

MREs – 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

NLT – No 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

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

PX – Post Exchange

QTRS – Quarters, the places where Soldiers and their families live

RD/RDC – Rear Detachment/Commander, sometimes called “Rear D”

Redeployment – To return personnel, equipment and materiel to the home or demobilizing stations for reintegration or out-processing

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

SGLI – Servicemember’s Group Life Insurance

SOP – Standard operating procedure

TDY – Temporary Duty Assignment, the military equivalent to a business trip

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

WTU – Warrior Transition Unit, i.e., a source of personalized support at major military treatment facilities for wounded warriors

XO – Executive Officer

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Vicki and General Dick Cody,
U.S. Army Retired

Vicki Cody grew up in Burlington, Vermont, and graduated from the University of Vermont in 1975, with a BS degree in education. For the next 33 years she was an Army wife, supporting her husband in his career. While raising their two sons and moving all over the United States and overseas, she served as a coach and mentor for Army spouses and as an advocate for Army families.



Lieutenant Colonel Clint Cody,
Kimberly, Connor and Dillon

She is the author of *Your Soldier, Your Army: A Parents' Guide*, first published by the Association of the United States Army in 2005. Her articles have appeared in numerous military magazines and publications. Her memoir, *Army Wife: A Story of Love and Family in the Heart of the Army*, was published in 2016 by She Writes Press. *Army Wife* won the 2016 USA Best Book Award for narrative non-fiction and was a Finalist for the 2016 Foreword Indies Book of the Year in the military/war category.



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She and her husband of forty-two years live in the Washington, DC area. Their two sons, both Apache helicopter pilots, continue to serve on active duty in the U.S. Army.

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