

AT EASE: WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER



U.S. ARMY WAR COLLEGE
Spouse Project
AY 2015
Carlisle Barracks, PA

We all have a story to tell. Imagine handing this publication to your civilian friends and helping them better understand and appreciate the lives of our military families. At the same time, you could hand this publication to your best friend at the War College and he or she will nod and agree with some stories, maybe tear up at others...but feel a sense of unity and understanding with the story writers. These are our stories...We're all in this together.

Introduction

Each year, spouses of students at the Army War College (AWC) have the opportunity to combine their experience, talents, and skills into a project. This year, a group of us met to determine how we wanted to proceed in creating a worthy project. Many options were discussed, tossed, reintroduced, and amended before we boiled it down to two simple questions:

How can we best serve the military community? And perhaps even serve as a bridge between military and civilian communities?

How can we best utilize the resources available to us at the Army War College?

In order to address both questions, we came to the conclusion that some of our best resources are our people. The students and families of the AY15 Army War College class have vast and varied experiences and we wanted to tap into that knowledge and experience to share with others.

We looked at a variety of ways to do this and decided we wanted to provide an opportunity for this class to simply share its stories. We created a website and a submission tool and spent weeks inviting and encouraging spouses to submit their own personal stories of their military lives. We invited children of service members in this AWC class to submit stories or artwork depicting their perspectives on their military lives.

The rules were simple:

- 1. Stories must be first-hand, personal accounts told in first person format. Authors must be family members associated with the AWC AY15 class.*
- 2. Stories must focus on positive, encouraging, valuable, and personal lessons. Stories can run the gamut from humorous to tragic ... but should include a lesson learned to encourage or inspire the reader.*
- 3. Avoid unnecessary identifying factors unless relevant to the story. We want readers to gain encouragement from the story itself.*

Then it was time to give this project a name. We liked the double meaning of “At Ease” from the military definition -- a position of rest in which Soldiers may relax -- to a more general definition -- freedom from concern, anxiety, or solitude. We felt that sharing stories, whether stories of joy or doubt, tragedy or humor, could encourage and inspire the larger military community. After all, we are all in this together. This is our final product. These are our stories.

Traci Cook, Amy Kirk, Tamra Konczey, Julie Cooley,

Carol Baxter, and Jenny O'Rourke

Fun Facts and Figures

About This Year's Spouse Project

6 Spouse Project team members

2 advisors

2 guest contributors

32 AWC spouse contributors

26 AWC military kid contributors

45 Quick Response contributors

Which adds up to ...

72 total submissions for you to enjoy!

All branches of service represented!

Army

Navy

Air Force

Marines

Coast Guard

Army National Guard

Air Guard

US Army Reserve



Plus three International Spouse contributions from:

Australia

Japan

Nigeria

And 20 of 25 seminars represented!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1	Paying It Forward {Jenny O'Rourke}	29
Fun Facts and Figures	2	Proud to Be a Marine Corps Wife {Erin K. Dockery}	30
Foreward	6	Lt. Dan and the Ice Cream Thieves {Traci Cook}	30
Acknowledgements	7	The A-B-Cs of Army Life {Katie Payne}.....	32
Guests of Honor Submissions.....	9	A Dual Military Couple Q & A {Ben & Dolly Livingston}.....	35
Turn the Uprooting Into Uplifting {Debbie Rapp}.....	9	Making a House a Home	37
Running My Best Race {Sharon Parrish}.....	11	Quick Response: You Won't Believe What Happened During Our Last Military Move.....	37
Our Military Love Stories	13	Making Each House a Home {Beth Watkins}.....	40
How Did You Meet Your Military Sweetheart?.....	13	Try It Before You Buy It {Joy Underwood}	41
Falling in Love {Cheri Fish}.....	15	My Old (Ft. Campbell) Kentucky Home {Mary Elizabeth Hedrick}	42
The Tradition of Japanese Military Matchmaking {Mizuho Kimura}	15	Take Them With You {Amy Kirk}	43
Meeting the Corps Guy {Katie Payne}	16	Move 17 {Valerie Caldwell}	44
It's All in the Twists and Turns {Julie Cooley}.....	17	Military Friendships.....	45
The Military Lifestyle	19	Quick Response: How I Know My Military Friends Are There For Me ...	45
Quick Response: You Know You're A Military Spouse When	19	The Gift of Mateship {Katy Stuart}	47
We Just Do It {Carol Baxter}	21	The Darkest Days {L.W.W., Army Wife}	48
The Fireweed {Michelle Sullivan}	24	The Driveway Moms {Jaimie Devine and Julie Nuckols}.....	48
It's a Family {Celinda Colavita}	24	Head Over Heels in Friendship {Tamra Konczey}.....	50
The Secret Life of an Army Reserve Family {Terese A. Trebilcock}	25	My Army Journey: Reflections (1994-2015) {Naida Mundell}.....	51
Helping Hands, Helping Hearts {Army Spouse}.....	27	The Things We Do For Love {Catty Corson}.....	52

Lessons Learned	54	Artwork: A Dandelion Life {Nathan Cook, age 15}	72
Quick Response: I Started Asking Myself “What Have I Gotten Myself Into?” When	54	Artwork 2 by Nathan Cook	72
Lessons Learned as an Army Wife {S.M.N., Army Wife}.....	55	Hope for the Somedays {Abigail Payne, age 17}.....	74
Dear Military Spouse {Army Spouse}	56	Guilt {Molly Newton, age 17}.....	76
A Little Namasté Goes a Long Way {Amy Kirk}.....	57	Artwork: Correspondence {Clarissa Skipworth, age 14}.....	78
The Carlisle Experience	59	Artwork 3 by Clarissa Skipworth	78
Going on Adventures - The Carlisle Experience! {Donna Kendrick and Mary Elizabeth Hedrick}	59	Artwork: US Air Force Memorial {Ella Skipworth, age 10}	79
Life at the War College {Franca Bratte}	60	Artwork 4 by Ella Skipworth.....	79
F.L.A.G.S. {Kristine Goodfellow}.....	61	My First Military Move {Lilly Klahn, age 11}.....	80
A Spouse on the Road to Abilene {Air Force Spouse}.....	63	A Dreaded Day {E.M.P., age 17}.....	80
Raising Military Kids	64	Around the World and Back Again {Martha Dwyer, age 9}	81
Quick Response: You Know You’re A Military Kid When	64	Artwork: Lucky to Be a Coast Guard Kid {Martha Dwyer, age 11}.....	82
Their Story {Karla J. Bilafer}.....	65	Artwork 5 by Martha Dwyer	82
The Power of a Proper Goodbye {Erin Dockery}	66	Artwork: USCG is Awesome {Mary Dwyer, age 9}	83
Special Advice for Special Needs {Cari Tedesco}	66	Artwork 6 by Mary Dwyer.....	83
Celebrating Change {Traci Cook}	67	California to Carlisle {Katie Kirk, age 12}	84
A Life-Changing Story {Cheri Fish}.....	68	Simile for my Family {Sarah Burns, age 11}.....	84
Artwork: Robot Soldier {Gage Roberts, age 5}.....	70	Farewell, Soldier {Hannah Watkins, age 18}.....	85
Artwork 1 by Gage Roberts.....	70	Marine Corps Life {Colleen Dockery, age 12}	86
Stories from Our Kids	71	Changing of the Seasons {Paddy Dockery, age 8}.....	86
Quick Response: You Know You’re A Military Kid When	71	Cleats? Czech! {Georgia Watkins, age 14}.....	87
A Dandelion Life {A Sonnet by Nathan Cook, age 15}	72	Behind the Camo and Boots {Joshua Cook, age 11}.....	88
		Freedom {Will Norman, age 11}.....	89

Raising the Flag {Will Norman, age 11}.....	90
Artwork 7 by Will Norman	90
Why I Appreciate America’s Veterans {Will Norman, age 11}	91
Liberty {Will Norman, age 11}.....	91
Artwork 8 by Will Norman	91
Go North, Young Man {Andrew Powers, age 15}	92
The Deal of a Lifetime {Kayleigh Powers}	93
Deployed Across the Ocean {Brianna Danielle Sullivan, age 11}.....	94
USA to Afghanistan {Brianna Danielle Sullivan, age 11}	95
Artwork 9 by Brianna Danielle Sullivan.....	95
The Best Daddy of All {Aiden Sullivan, age 11}.....	96
Greeting Daddy at the Airport {Aiden Sullivan, age 11}.....	97
Artwork 10 by Aiden Sullivan.....	97
Artwork: Singing the National Anthem {Natalie Tedesco, age 11}	98
Artwork 11 by Natalie Tedesco	98
Artwork: Welcome Home, Daddy {Julia VonFahnstock, age 11}	99
Artwork 12 by Julia VonFahnstock	99
Artwork: Fort Irwin {Ben Rush, age 7}.....	100
Artwork 13 by Ben Rush	100
Artwork: When Daddy Comes Back {Emily Rush, age 5}.....	101
Artwork 14 by Emily Rush.....	101
Artwork: Letter to Daddy {Abigail Payne, at age 5}	102
Artwork 15 by Abigail Payne	102

Glossary of Terms	103
Glossary Sources	106

Foreword

The strength of our military depends on the strength of the family members who support our service members. I am appreciative of the family members of U.S. Army War College (USAWC) students and staff for Academic Year 2015 who shared their stories, poetry, and art in this publication, *At Ease: We're All in This Together*. This book showcases the strength that is demonstrated in our children, spouses, and families who support us and each other as we answer the call in support of national interests around the world.

One of the great benefits of the USAWC is our connection with the future strategic leaders from all services and over 70 countries from around the world. Our students and their families enhance our communities and enrich our education with their presence. It is a sincere honor to have writings representing the joint and multinational student population at USAWC in this publication.

At Ease is the first of its kind in the history of the annual USAWC spouses' project. It provides an opportunity for USAWC family members to share what they have experienced and what they have learned, with the intention to inform and inspire all who read it. A labor of dedication and shared connection, it is a positive reflection of the special strength, fortitude, generosity, and loyalty of military family members. Simply put, this book celebrates resiliency at its finest.

It is the hope of the *At Ease* project that you will read and share this book with others, both within and outside the military, and that it may serve to strengthen the bonds of our military families for years to come. It is by sharing our experiences that we increase our understanding and gain strength from one another. We are all in this together!

Strength and Wisdom!

ARMY STRAWB!



William E. Rapp
Major General, U.S. Army
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Beth Watkins
Beth Woods

Guests of Honor Submissions



Turn the Uprooting Into Uplifting {Debbie Rapp}

US Army

Military families are all too familiar with change and the challenges that frequent moves impose upon their children. Our military assignments (with children) have taken us to West Point, NY; Ft. Leavenworth, KS; Ft. Lewis, WA; Washington, D.C.; Bamberg, Germany; Tokyo, Japan; Carlisle, PA; Ft. Lewis, WA; Portland, OR; West Point, NY; Ft. Belvoir, VA; Ft. Myer, VA; and back to Carlisle, PA. Our children have been influenced and impacted by each move. I believe that our moves have made them stronger and more knowledgeable about our world and people in general.

Our daughter attended ten schools in twelve years before going on to study as a cadet at the United States Military Academy at West Point. Our sons, who are now in high school, have attended eight different schools so far. While thoughts of attending new schools and making new friends have made our children apprehensive at times, they've been able to integrate successfully and thrive academically and socially at each place. I attribute this to some

simple habits that we've practiced with each move.

Over the years, we always made it a point to tell our children about upcoming moves just as soon as we knew about them. We thought this would allow them time to digest the news and prepare for the new adventure. When possible, we'd make a trip to our future hometown and take the kids for a weekday tour of school options. On the tours, we'd encourage them to ask questions of the faculty, staff, and students. Before we'd even visit the schools, I would ask our children what they were curious about in case they did not remember or have the confidence to ask all of the questions during the school tours. I would act as their back-up. Allowing our children to lay eyes on their future home and school alleviated some of their anxiety. We'd try to make an adventure of it, see some local sights, drive around the neighborhood, and then go to some food joint -- generally lighten the mood.

During the high school years when more than one school option was suitable, our children could offer input into the decision of where they would attend school. Our children never vehemently reacted to having to move, but they did voice concerns at times, especially our youngest son who attended three different middle schools over the course of three years (and six different schools in six years).

Each time we moved, we had a tradition that became a way of settling in. I did neighborhood laps with our kids, which became our family's version of a friendly reconnaissance mission. I walked them through the neighborhood while I kept an eye out for toys in other yards, basketball hoops, kids on the playground, etc. We'd do this several times upon moving in. If we spotted kids on the playground, I'd strike up a conversation with them and introduce my children. For the most part, the other kids were friendly. Although this would make my children cringe at times, it accomplished

neighborhood introductions, and connections were soon formed. I became really adept at it!

In short, I taught my children the fine art of finding other children without resembling hunters seeking prey! We'd go up and introduce ourselves. I'd ask a group of boys if my sons could play basketball with them – that is, if my sons would not ask for themselves. If there were all boys on the playground, I'd ask if they had sisters that were my daughter's age or if there were other girls her age in the neighborhood. Keeping mental track of house locations and names, I'd get the details and empower my kids to make the connections. I was like a mother bird "gently" nudging her chicks out of the nest. (But I don't know if my kids would say gently!)

On one of our moves, I suggested that our sons go and ask to join a basketball game down the street. I laughed when they responded that they wanted me to do the neighborhood lap with them first! I think it's important to teach our children that sometimes we have to make the first gesture in establishing friendships. We shouldn't necessarily wait for others to approach us. This has been an important lesson with each move.

Our Tokyo, Japan assignment stands out as a move that required us all to go beyond our comfort zones. We lived in a Japanese neighborhood, with very few neighbors who spoke English, and our kids attended the America School in Japan (ASIJ). On weekends, our family would tour Tokyo and the surrounding areas to learn about this new and vastly different culture in which we were immersed. Sometimes exploring a foreign land and eating different kinds of foods can be intimidating, but we've found that the rewards far outweigh the apprehension, and we look back on that assignment as a great gift.

One move required me to step outside of my comfort zone and allow our high school freshman daughter to ride the city bus to school on her own. We moved for an assignment to Portland, Oregon with the United States Army Corps of Engineers. There is no post housing for this assignment, so we were in a regular neighborhood, and our daughter's school was located across the city. I was not able to drive her across town to school and get our sons to their nearby school which started at the same time. We turned that challenge into empowerment. Before school started, I rode the city bus with our daughter for a week and I introduced her to the "regular" bus driver. Riding the bus with our daughter for a week gave her the skills and confidence to do this on her own once school started. Some of our neighbors took the same bus to work and kept an eye on her as well. She emerged from the experience with increased confidence and independence.

With each move, we've stressed to our children the importance not only of academics, but of school, sports, and community activities as well. We've cautioned them to never become so complacent that they avoid making community ties using our frequent moves as an excuse. We've advised them to look at every year and each new place as a valuable opportunity to learn new things and to meet new people. They now have friends all over the world. I believe that if you put time and positive effort into each place, you'll walk away from it with wonderful memories and experiences. Being uprooted can be challenging, but at the same time, it has the potential to be uplifting.

Military kids face the challenge of having to move often. Find the methods that work for your child(ren) in acclimating them to each new place. The rewards of friendship, community, and an increased knowledge of the world can make frequent moves uplifting rather than just uprooting.

Running My Best Race {Sharon Parrish}

US Army

“When did it happen? When did I stop taking care of myself?” That is what I asked myself one day.

It was July 2012 and we were on a family vacation in Croatia. I knew I had gained weight, but in times past I would tell myself, “Hey, I look okay. I’ve always been this size.” In reality, I was not okay. I was not healthy, and I was making excuses. During this trip, I began to think and say, “I look like a big fat cow,” and for the first time my husband did not say, “No you don’t.” Instead he responded, “If you think that, then do something about it.”

I vowed that, once our vacation was over, I was going to get serious about taking care of myself. We lived in Vilseck, Germany where I kept a pretty full schedule as an active volunteer on post. I kept busy with everything from PTSA, Spouses’ Club Board, Regimental Advisor, and Oberpfalz Area Representative of Americans Working Around the Globe (AWAG). I started to realize that I needed to make time for myself as well.

I began by walking everyday regardless of what was going on and despite any weather challenges. My husband supported me by making an appointment for both of us at a wellness center. He told me that he loved me, and he wanted to help us both get healthier so we could be around for each other and for our 12-year-old daughter.

A group called the Rocky Mountain Hot Moms (RMHMs) welcomed me and invited me to enter a weight loss challenge. This provided increased motivation and wonderful support from other women.

By the spring, my efforts began to produce gratifying results. The RMHMs were running a 5K in Grafenwöhr, Germany. It was my first race, and I was so nervous. I didn’t know if I could run the entire distance, but I was excited that I could wear my running leggings without sweatpants because of the weight I had lost. Not only did I finish, but I took less than 29 minutes to complete the race. This was the same woman who huffed and puffed running a quarter of a mile that prior summer! A few weeks later, I completed the weight loss challenge and discovered that I had lost the largest amount of weight of all participants: 25 pounds!

As I continued running, I began to enjoy it. I credit my friend Amy for being the one who really inspired me to run. She ran with me even if it was a slow pace for her. She motivated me to continue running after we moved that following summer. By then, I was up to three to six miles, three days a week. It had become a lifestyle change for me. I looked forward to my long run on Mondays. It was a great way to start the week and it served as a time that I dedicated to myself. Making this time for myself made me happier, and my family was happier as a result.

Less than two years following my vacation epiphany, I was completing my first half marathon with my friend Erica. I finished in less than two hours, and I loved it! At first I thought it was a crazy idea to do it, but I’m so glad that I faced the challenge. Since then, I’ve completed four half marathons, even winning my age group in one. My personal record is 1:53:05 and my next goal is 1:52:55. I take baby steps.

My truest test was yet to come. My friend Mona kept asking me to run the Marine Corps Marathon with her. I told her that it was closed already and that was a sign for me to not run it. Out of curiosity, I ran 15 miles one day just to see if I could run more than 13.1 miles. It felt great, and I continued to add miles to my runs.

Then there was a sign that it was meant to be. Mona's friend was moving and could not run the race. She transferred her bib to me. I joked with Mona as to whether we would still be friends after the marathon. I trained for eighteen weeks and it paid off. I completed the marathon in 4:02:26. As soon as I crossed the finish line, I was smiling and thinking about my goals for the next race, and yes, Mona and I remain very good friends!

Throughout this process of getting fit, I had family and friends who supported and believed in me when I didn't believe in myself. I had lost faith in what I could do, but my family, friends, and this journey reminded me of my potential. Today I am stronger and more resilient than I ever thought possible. Making this time for myself enabled me to be better in all facets of my life. I learned that when we take care of ourselves, we are better able to take care of others and that helps us to run our best race in the marathon of life.

Our Military Love Stories



How Did You Meet Your Military Sweetheart?

Julie Cooley

My grandmother introduced us at my childhood church. He was a brand new captain at Eglin Air Force Base, FL. Six months later we were married and twelve years—and lots of kids—later, here we are at the Army War College!

Natalie Miller

I was a DoD civilian with MWR at Fort Wainwright, AK and he was in command. I was facilitating an AFAP conference and he was an observer. His FRSA introduced us; a year later during a deployment R&R, he proposed...the rest is history! Never would have guessed in a million years to have met my match in Fairbanks, Alaska!

Hayley Parsons

We met at a youth group but I didn't really notice him until we were both camp leaders at a Youth Camp. I was 18 and he was a fresh-faced 2nd Lieutenant. Twenty-two years and four kids later, here we are.

Kathy Kraft

We had Physical Education together in 5th grade, "went together" for a couple weeks in 8th grade, were friends throughout high school, and dated each other's best friends until the summer before our senior year...that's when we began dating. We grew up two corn fields away from each other. We attended the same college and dated throughout college. After six years of dating, we got married. We have been married for 20 years.

Jaimie Devine

I was his date for the Marine Corps Ball.

Myra Lewis

David and I met in Kindergarten (actually delivered by the same doctor). We started dating in high school. We dated for five years and have been married almost 24 years with three beautiful girls. So, I've known this guy for 42 years... I always say I've been with this guy forever!! Small town USA!!

Cari Tedesco

He lived a door down from me in the BOQs at Ft. Irwin. I was a nurse, and he was new there. We met 15 April 1999 and were married 2 April 2000 and moved in November to DC. 9/11 happened and Joseph was born and I resigned my commission. Almost 15 years and 3 kiddos later, here we are.

Shellii Roach

He was a major stationed at MacDill Air Force Base at CENTCOM and had just moved to Tampa. We met up at a bar and during his three years in Tampa, we dated, got engaged, got married, and had a baby girl. Four months later, we moved to Hawaii at K-Bay for his command selection. It was my very first PCS move and I hardly knew anything about being a wife in the Marine Corps.

Gina Botters

Jim was a big brother to my sorority at University of Alabama Birmingham. One afternoon I saw him in uniform outside the ROTC building next door to our suite. Frat guy, ROTC cadet, AND Sorority big brother--what a bonus! A year later he was off to Ft. Huachuca then to Ft. Campbell and Desert Shield/Storm. We finally married in July, having never celebrated a Valentine's Day together!

Traci Cook

Nate and I were in the same 1st and 4th grade classes in elementary school but went to different schools starting in the 5th grade. In high school, my grandmother was a substitute teacher in his English class and she decided that he should be the guy for me. She took some photos of me to show him—unbeknownst to me!—and set up a clandestine meeting at our hometown church. She was sneaky, but it worked! He introduced himself that Sunday morning and we began a fun friendship that developed into a romance that has lasted through the years.

Falling in Love {Cheri Fish}

US Army Reserve

Most people ask, “How or where did you meet your husband?”

Instead, I like to tell people the story of the moment that I fell in love with my husband.

We had been dating for approximately eight weeks, and he had come over to visit my two daughters and me. My youngest daughter, Erica, who was nine years old when we first met, had been having a bad day. One of her teeth had become very loose and was barely hanging on by a thread and she was in a ton of pain.

I had finally talked her into letting me pull the tooth out; however, I just couldn't seem to get a hold of it. Calvin offered to pull it out for her, and she reluctantly agreed.

Well, Calvin pulled it out and she started crying and then he started crying. I knew right then and there that this was the love of my life.

Fourteen years later, I love him even more than that day that he pulled out her tooth and yes, he still cries when any one of us girls cries, but that's one of the things that we love the most about him.

Open your hearts and true love will find its way, even through the tears.

The Tradition of Japanese Military Matchmaking {Mizuho Kimura}

Japanese Army

I am an International Fellow spouse from Japan and I would like to share a unique military tradition from my country that involves the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force (SDF). The Maritime SDF has always been respected in Japan. They received even more positive attention after their efforts following the 2011 tsunami and nuclear accidents. That attention has resulted in more ladies who attend the Talking Festivals which are held several times a year.

What are the Talking Festivals? For single ladies who are interested in dating or being married to a sailor, they are exciting events which take place three times a year at the Yokosuka Base and several times during the year at other bases. Women from all parts of Japan enter a drawing to win the opportunity to purchase tickets to these events. There is very high demand for these tickets. The Yokosuka Base Talking Festivals are even broadcast on television! The purpose of the events is to provide a place for single male sailors and single ladies to meet. The Talking Festivals have been going on for more than fifteen years.

Ladies who are twenty years old or older can attend. At a festival, there are drinks and food, but no dancing. There is a tour of a naval ship for the ladies. This tour provides an opportunity for sailors to show their knowledge and training and to meet the ladies. There is also a session with a facilitator who manages many five minute meetings that enable a woman and a sailor to have conversation. At the facilitators' signal, the woman and sailor will stop their conversation and then the woman will begin a new conversation with a different sailor.

Eventually, ladies and sailors are given a card on which they indicate the person(s) that they are most interested in dating. A staff studies the cards and looks for matches of mutual interest. Then the matches are revealed to the crowd and couples are announced. The crowd gets very excited when the names are called. Then a second round is held and more couples are matched together.

There have been many marriages that have resulted from the Talking Festivals. This is not, however, how I met my husband. He's in the Japanese Ground Self Defense Force, and they do not participate in Talking Festivals. I met my husband through my high school friend on New Year's Day. My husband saw my picture in my friend's school album and asked to meet me. I did not have plans on New Year's Day so I went to meet him. We were happily married fifteen months later and I have enjoyed being his wife for the past fifteen years.

An International Fellow spouse from Japan shares a unique matchmaking tradition from her country called The Talking Festivals. Many Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force (SDF) sailors have been married to very enthusiastic ladies as a result of these events.

.....

Meeting the Corps Guy {Katie Payne}

US Army

It was a hot Texas morning in the summer of 1992. It was the first day of the summer session at Texas A&M University. As a Communications Graduate Student Teacher, I was introducing myself to the classroom of Public Speaking students when in rushed a tall guy with short brown hair, obviously a corps guy. After that first

period, he came up to me and told me he had ducked into my class because he was running late and wasn't sure where his class was. Could I tell him what lab he was in? After a quick look at the roster, I told him he had stumbled into the correct class.

For the next six weeks, I listened to student speeches: a how-to speech where the corps guy explained how to repel like they do in the movies; a tribute speech where the corps guy gave a eulogy to himself. At first appearing rather arrogant, his speech took a turn halfway through to a self reflection of what he hoped people would say about him when he passed. The corps guy expressed himself well and showed a quiet confidence when speaking in front of others.

After the grades were turned in, I got a phone call one evening from the corps guy. I had given my phone number out to all the students to answer questions or give help. I thought he was calling to question his grade. He, however, had a different reason for calling. He called to ask me out on a date. Surprised, but delighted, I said yes. We went to dinner at a Mexican restaurant and then went country western dancing. We've been dating ever since.

Twenty-two years, 4 children, and a rich Army life experience later ... I am so grateful that the tall corps guy with short brown hair was in the correct lab section of Public Speaking.

It's All in the Twists and Turns {Julie Cooley}

Alabama Air National Guard

There he was--the cute new guy in a sea of old married men. I was 24 years old, divorced, and the mother of twin 3 year olds. I was the definition of "baggage."

My family--and by family I mean four generations of aunts, grandparents, cousins, nieces, and in-laws--attended a small Lutheran church in Shalimar, Florida. It was the church I grew up in. It was a very patriotic congregation of retired Airmen from Eglin Air Force Base, Hurlburt Field, and others. It was an 8:00 a.m. Lutheran service which meant that the median age of folks in attendance was about 80 years old. Everyone was married, most were grandparents, and there never was anyone new in our congregation - until him.

It started with my grandmother and then my daughter Kayleigh. They were flirting with this man for me, almost handing the poor guy my résumé. My grandmother took up drinking tea just to find herself near him so she could bend his ear. After a few weeks, I gave in. I met Casey and gave him my 'digits.'

I had spent my entire life in a strong military community, ignoring the sea of cute boys in uniforms. I knew that if I fell for one of those boys, I would end up moving from this stretch of beautiful beach I had called home for my entire life.

But here he was, a man in uniform. I fell head over heels in love.

Within six months we were engaged and two months later we were married, just in time to schedule a short honeymoon between Casey's temporary duty (TDY) and a logistics readiness con-

ference. A short year later we were told that we were moving to Warner Robbins, Georgia and ended up at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama instead. (I'm sure that has never happened to anyone else, right?!). It was hard to be in a new land with absolutely no job prospects and a husband who was TDY for the first six weeks that we were in our new home.

Fast forward three years and a baby later, and we had fallen in love with our new home of Prattville, Alabama. We loved it so much that we actually chose it over continuing to serve in the active duty Air Force. Casey separated from service. Well, it was 2007 and the economy tanked. Our normal life in the civilian world was interrupted quite quickly by a job offer in the Air National Guard. I learned immediately that the 'one weekend a month and two weeks a year' motto was not an actuality. Casey headed to Louisiana unexpectedly for weeks, over the holidays, for an assignment.

He came home with a full time position as a technician in the guard and we were once again a full time military family, but with one huge perk: we were stationary!

The "Guard" as Casey calls it, is often described as 'the best kept secret in the military'. Casey gets to put on the uniform, serve, and stay in one place. What could be better? We called Prattville home, I opened my own real estate business, and we established roots. Life was perfect! We had a home, a family, lots of friends, and a stake in a community that we loved.

With just two years out of major's school, and with the majority of his workforce deploying, my husband decided to apply to War College. Since we lived at the Air War College (AWC), it made sense for him to pursue Professional Military Education (PME) while we lived there.

Within a few months I got the call. His voice was unsure, quiet, and questioning. "I got PME, but there's an issue. There is a little 'r' in the AWC. It says Army. It says Carlisle. That's a post in Pennsylvania," he said.

Being from an Air Force family with a husband, two grandparents, three uncles and many cousins who were all Airmen, The U.S. Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania was not on our map.

There were many sleepless nights and lots of family meetings. How had we gotten here? I was a girl who was going to spend my life living on the beach with a great business and a boat. Then I was a girl who found my niche in central Alabama. I was going to raise my kids there, retire there ... I had started my own business there, I'd made connections there, and we had made a life there.

In August, we made the leap and moved to Carlisle, Pennsylvania. We settled into an appealing house in a respected school district. I signed up for everything, did everything, and decided to spend my year figuring out what the Army was all about. I was called out by many people for not sounding like I was from Alabama, and I became known as the crazy outsider who knows squat about the Army and its traditions. Maybe that is part of my charm because I made tons of new friends.

While this year was the last thing that I expected on our crazy journey, I have had the time of my life! With sixteen years under my husband's (our) belt, I am proud to say that we have hopped back onto this roller coaster that we call the military life. I sure have enjoyed the ride. I have learned to fasten my seat belt, to enjoy life's unexpected twists and turns, and to look forward to wherever this thrill-ride-of-a-journey takes us next!

Embrace the unexpected on your military journey. Often the twists and turns hold the best surprises.

The Military Lifestyle



Quick Response: You know you're A Military Spouse When ...

- None of your furniture matches or is even from the same state. Collection from moves at its finest! {Tina Moore}
- And thanks to living at Ft. Rucker... you can listen to a helicopter and tell which one it is. {Tina Moore}
- The Automated Housing Referral Network (AHRN) is on your computer "favorites" list. {Luann Nogle}
- You meet someone new and you find out you have at least two mutual friends. I love that! {Sharon Parrish}
- You go out to eat and everyone pulls out the same USAA card when the check comes. {Cathy Fox}

- If you've ever had a pay stub that said "No Pay Due." {Christina Lindner}
- While shopping at the commissary, you can spot at least half dozen recyclable bags from stores in other states! {Elsa Bennett}
- When you wake your kids up at 5am to see snow flurries ... Because you don't know when they will see snow again. {Cathy Fox}
- You/Your kids find it comforting to fall asleep to the noise you can hear from the training areas. {Cathy Fox}
- Your kids' scrapbooks are arranged by PCS moves. {Beth Chambers}
- You say your husband/dad is deployed to Iraq and a civilian replies, "Good. They are so much safer there than Afghanistan." {Mary Carlton}
- You miss the sound of artillery fire from Soldiers training when you live off post. {Traci Cook}
- Your kids go to school on base and at sporting events with other schools they are asked if they have to learn to march and shoot in junior high. {Mary Carlton}
- Your 4th grader tells a civilian friend his dad left for a year and is told "That's not deployment. When your dad leaves, that's called divorce." {Traci Cook}

- I'm constantly giving out my sponsor's SSN. It's like I don't count or I'm not good enough, lol. {Shellii Roach}
- Your résumé makes you look like you've had to move out of state to get away from your reputation. {Cathy Fox}
- You fill out an application or background check form & they don't have enough spaces for the places you've lived the previous 10 years. {Cathy Fox}
- Your 6 year old has lived in 5 different states. {Kristin Jones}
- When asked for an emergency contact at your children's school...you list a neighbor you just met the day before. {Katie Payne}
- The cannon goes off, every child (even the little ones), on the soccer field during a game stops and turns in the direction of the nearest flag, puts their hand over their heart, and renders respect to the flag during retreat. The laughter and noise of a lively game becomes total silence. Always makes me proud. {Liz Knouse}
- Someone says "we just got orders to move to (fill in the blank)" and you immediately think I know someone there...I need to put them in contact with each other. {Kathy Kraft}
- Your longest job is three years! {Anjoleen Himes}
- When you take your child to a grocery store and they said this is a different looking commissary. {Sharon Parrish}
- It takes you a year or so to find the perfect nail tech, hairstylist, dentist and doctor, and you go home and tell your husband only to have him say "We need to talk" meaning aka we're moving soon. Sorry Charlie. {Cheri Fish}
- You know what "last 4" means...and you know your husband's last 4 better than you know your own! {Sally Dawson}
- Someone asks "Where are you from?" and you say "Pick a state." You've most likely lived in a half dozen of them. {Cheri Fish}
- You think others should be bored to stay on the same street, same house, and same neighborhood, kids at same school, same city, and same state for more than 3 years! {Tonya Jackson}
- Your toddler refers to EVERYONE in uniform as "Daddy." {Natalie Miller}
- You rattle off acronyms such as MTF, PCS, TDY, POC, and BAH in your everyday conversations, even when taking to extended family and civilian friends who have no idea what you just said. {Carrie Jones}
- Even your kids get annoyed at people who don't show respect during the national anthem. {Mary Carlton}
- When you move off post and are floored by the so-called utility bills! {Cathy Fox}

- You have two passports... one official and one personal. {Sharon Haseman}
- You know the difference between 8th Army and 2ID and have spent time in a “hootch.” {Chris Gardner}
- You think nothing of the fact that every car in your neighborhood has a license plate from a different state. {Kathy Kraft}
- You know what to do when you hear the bugle calls “Retreat” and “To the Colors” ... and so do your kids! {Traci Cook}
- You stand waiting for the national anthem to play before the movie and then you realize you are at an off-post theater. {Christina Lindner}
- You know what year something happened by where you lived at the time. {Amy Oskey}
- You know your Soldier’s social security number better than your own. {Katie Payne}
- You’re singing along to Miranda Lambert’s “The House That Built Me” and during the chorus *“If I can just come in, I swear I’ll leave ... won’t take nothing but a memory ... from the house that built me ...”* your 8-year-old belts out, *“If I can just come in, I swear I’ll leave ... won’t take nothing but an MRE ... from the house that built me!”* {Traci Cook}

We Just Do It {Carol Baxter}

US Army

I just do it. I’m a military spouse.

When I get together with friends from high school or college, they tend to ask me the same question: “How do you do it?” So much of our extended family says it too, every summer when we are together. Or they’ll comment, “I don’t know how you do it.”

It used to be when I heard that, I would get frustrated. But after 23 years, the thought and answer that comes to mind is, “I just do it. I’m a military spouse.”

In the beginning as a new military spouse, I wasn’t so sure. I was quiet, shy and watched as the wives of my husband’s bosses were busy planning coffees, luncheons, and fundraisers. I remember thinking that I could never do what they did and that I wasn’t good at those sorts of things. I would say to myself, “I can’t cook like that and my house will never be clean enough.”

So I worked full time. Was it an excuse to not have to do what they did? Maybe. Then we moved for the first time as a couple. It was awful. Having cleaned the house that we were leaving so thoroughly that you could have eaten off the floor, we got in our cars and sprinted five states away to arrive at our new home, only to find it in a terrible state and not clean enough to even allow a single box inside.

“How do military spouses do this?” I asked.

Then I would visit my husband’s office or see him in the mess hall with Soldiers close by. I observed how he mentored them and

empowered them. I would watch him among his peers and think to myself, "He's making a difference. Maybe I can too."

How I would do that, I wasn't so sure at the time. I made fast friends with some of the other spouses at this new assignment. Some had been married longer than I had. They had moved two or three times. They were the "experts." I would ask lots of questions or just quietly observe them. They would talk with pride about their husbands and of the places they had been. We definitely had something in common. What was it? I wasn't sure then.

Desert Storm had just started. Patriotism was at a high. Then tragedy struck our group. I got a call about one of my friends. She was gravely ill, so I raced to the hospital and prayed with her husband and the other wives in our circle. Many of our husbands were on temporary duty (TDY).

Despite our prayers and the doctor's best efforts, our friend passed away. She was a mom and a military wife far from her family. Our husbands came home and did what they could for their friend and brother in arms. The other spouses and I kept things as normal as possible for their daughter and we helped with the arrangements. How did we know what to do? We just did. We kept the support going for months with food and childcare and whatever was needed. Then it was time for my husband and me to move again. "How do I leave?" I would ask and wonder sometimes, but my friends kept supporting the family in their grief because as military spouses, this is something we just do.

Over the years there has been much joy, sorrow, excitement, heartache, laughter, tears, adventure and frustration. Bonds have been made. Military friends became family. Much of the laughter and the tears of our lives were shared with this family. This unique military family bond can be difficult to explain to biological family.

I continued to watch my husband lead and mentor Soldiers and bond with his peers. I also bonded with the spouses of the unit and my peers. I gave birth to two amazing boys. We lived overseas for over 13 years (half of my husband's career). Holidays, birthdays, concerts, sporting events, and award ceremonies were shared together with our family - our military family. We've never considered our military family a replacement for our biological family, but we appreciate that within the military family there is a special bond of shared experience unlike any other.

We cry together at deployment or welcome home ceremonies even if our spouses aren't coming or going. Why? Because we've been there. On post, we stop what we're doing on the field or playground at five o'clock for retreat and to render honors to the flag, children included. It's what we do. Without hesitation, we help our neighbor mop her flooded basement, jump start her car, make her a meal when she's ill, take care of her kids during her move-in day, and give her a shoulder to cry on or a pep talk when she needs it.

I'll never forget our fourteenth move. We were settling into our new house in a normal, non-military neighborhood. I had just signed the inventory sheets for the final set of boxes that had been delivered to our door. It was late morning, and I was jolted by the sound of a siren. The wailing of the siren got louder as an ambulance followed by another emergency response vehicle raced down our street, passed by our home, and stopped in front of our neighbor's house two doors down. We had met those neighbors four days earlier. They were a family of two working parents and four children. I immediately worried about the kids and so many thoughts raced through my head: Are the kids okay? I'm a nurse. Should I go and see if I can help? I'm not on a military post neighborhood. What do I do? I don't want to intrude as I just met these neighbors, but I want to help.

I waited at first. I assumed that most of the other neighbors were at work, and then I walked to the house. As I arrived, the emergency responders rushed out, with CPR in progress, trying to save the life of the father. Into the ambulance they went. The kids, ranging in age from elementary school aged to rising college student, stood on the front lawn in shock. I offered my help. I explained as calmly as I could that the emergency responders were doing everything that they could for their dad. I learned that their mother was at work one hour away. More thoughts raced through my head: Call her. Stay calm. Don't promise anything, but stay positive.

After several minutes of waiting with questions from the children to the emergency responders, the ambulance took off with sirens screaming. A police officer followed behind it with the kids in tow. It didn't look good. I worried and I prayed. My sons came over. We cleaned our neighbor's house and closed it up, working quickly.

A few hours later our fears came true and despite the best of efforts, our neighbor passed away. I questioned what I could do to help, and I decided to cook. We had just moved in and there were so many items that we had not yet unpacked, but that didn't stop us. Our sons didn't bat an eye. We rummaged through the boxes, found what we needed and cooked mounds of pasta as one car after another came to our neighbor's house. The boys and I arrived with trays of salad, bread, and pasta. We wondered if they'd even want to eat, but bringing the food seemed the right thing to do. As the hours and days passed, we met more neighbors and friends of the family. They frequently commented about how we helped without hesitation. They'd ask, "How do you do that?"

For the entire two years that we lived in that neighborhood, we would get comments from the family and other neighbors about how we just jumped right in to help after only having lived there

for a matter of days. When it was time for us to move, there were refrains of: You're leaving already? You just got here. We've lived here for fifteen years. I don't know how you do it with moving so often.

We would look at it other, chuckle, shrug our shoulders, and say, "We just do it."

How do we do it? As part of the military family, we get that question so often. I think as military family members, we are called to be brave because of what our Soldier stands for. It's about living bravely in every circumstance. It's about letting go of our plans of how our days, months, or our journey should go.

We teach this bravery to our children and not with a lesson plan or a lecture. We teach it by doing it. It's about helping each other to stay up. It's about being there for each other. For ourselves, it's about trying again when we stumble.

How do we do it? We just do it.

Military spouses and children are often asked, "How do you do it?" With frequent moves, deployments and living far from our families, that's a fair question. The answer can be difficult to articulate but the ability to "just do it" comes from the heart.

The Fireweed {Michelle Sullivan}

US Army

The fireweed is a strong plant that thrives when the rest of its environment is in a state of chaos. While some know it as a weed, after the land is overcome by fire or other disturbance, it is the fireweed that holds strong and germinates the area transforming the landscape into a magenta and pink floral beauty. The true strength and adaptability of a military spouse shows through in challenging and adverse situations. Military spouses are able to take any situation and turn it into a triumph for themselves, their spouse, their family, their friends, and their community. They are always the ones standing strong in the face of adversity. They never give up. They always find a way to grow and flourish in any situation they encounter.

Fireweed seeds are easily spread to new areas by the wind. Once the seeds take root and become a plant, they are able to grow into a large patch. On a moment's notice military spouses travel around the world. Once military spouses take root, they are able to find their place in the new military community. They help their new community grow and become better than when they arrived.

The leaves of the fireweed have unique veins. They do not end at the edge of the leaf, but form a circular pattern and join together inside the outer part of the leaf. Military spouses bring their own unique strengths to the community; however, they join in and volunteer to become part of the team of military spouses. In doing so, they enhance the team. This incredible team of military spouses stands strong, uplifts its members, and beautifies the community around them.

It's a Family {Celinda Colavita}

US Army

Eighteen years ago, I married my Soldier and moved from Northern Virginia to Fayetteville, NC. At 24 years old, I had moved only once in my life. I didn't know a Private from a Colonel. And I most certainly didn't know what to make of my new hometown.

After settling in to our new home, I decided to do a little exploring around town. I had no idea one small town could keep so many tattoo parlors, gentlemen's clubs, and pawn shops in business. I came home feeling a bit overwhelmed. Aside from my husband, I knew two people in town. I didn't understand anything about the Army. Just a month earlier, I held a promising job in Washington, D.C. and now I struggled to fill my days. I sat in the tiny living room of our tiny townhouse feeling lost.

My giant mid-'90s flip phone beeped wildly from my purse. I ran to answer it, excited to have another human being with whom to talk.

"Hi, Celinda, it's Rena, Joe's wife." My mind raced to place her. Then it hit me. Oh my goodness --the Joe she mentioned was the LTC, my young Lieutenant husband's Battalion Commander! Oh, no! Why is she calling me? Is something wrong? Something must be wrong! She's the Battalion Commander's wife! She's not just calling to shoot the breeze. She's too important to bother with me. What's wrong?

"Yes, Ma'am, hello," I stammered.

I learned something that day that absolutely changed my life. I realized that I hadn't just gained a husband when we married. I had

gained a new family--my Army Family. Rena was calling to welcome me, not only to town, but to the Army. This experienced, older (or so I thought at the time) Army wife took time to call me, a new young spouse whom she had never met, to welcome me and to set my mind at ease. She told me she was coming to pick me up and show me around.

And she did. We had lunch; she drove me around town and showed me that there was so much more to this little community than what I had first thought. She told me about life in the Army and what to expect. She showed me that this world that was so new and so foreign to me held so many wonderful friends and adventures that I had yet to discover. I had so much to look forward to! So with the support of my new friend, I dove into life as an Army spouse.

Our Army Family is a big, sprawling network of husbands, wives, children, and even extended family and friends of service members. In fact, as we continued to PCS around the country to different types of units, I discovered that our family was even bigger than I thought. We had Navy, Air Force, Marine, and Coast Guard family members, too! Wherever we are, and whatever we need, there is someone to offer support, lend a hand, guide us, advise us, and make us feel understood.

Over the years, I have seen our Military Family mow lawns, make meals, babysit children, teach skills, and arrange playgroups. I have seen lifelong friendships begin, and continue to bloom even though thousands of miles separate them. I have heard "...you need to meet ___", and "___ would know the answer to that", and "___ has been through that, too."

Like our own families, our Military Family is always there for us. Whatever we need, whatever we're wondering, whatever we're

worried about, whatever we've been through, we have a family that understands and supports us. It is a life like no other, this Military life, and I feel honored to be a part of this great family.

As a twenty four year old newlywed in a new town, surrounded by a foreign culture called the Army, I could never have imagined that I had gained not only a new husband, but a new family: my Military Family. A kind senior spouse introduces me to Army life and all the adventures to come, and reminds me that I'll never be alone because of the friendships and support I would find in my Military Family.

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The Secret Life of an Army Reserve Family {Terese A. Trebilcock}

US Army Reserve

Our military family story is a bit different from those of active duty families. My husband is a JAG (lawyer) officer in the US Army Reserve; he served for five years on active duty in Germany and Washington, DC before turning to his civilian career and has been a Reserve officer ever since. Most people think of Reserve duty as "one weekend a month" but that one weekend is served in addition to a full-time job. Reserve duty also includes at least one two-week training period per year as well as additional duty periods, correspondence courses, and staff conference calls completed in evenings, frequent email taskers, and, in my husband's case, travel of two hours each way to his reserve unit. So it makes for a busy, two-career life for my husband.

For me and for our children, it has created some challenges. For example, in his early years as a Reservist, I was a stay-at-home mom with two very young toddlers. We had one car. So on re-

serve weekends, the boys and I had the choice of staying home with no transportation or accompanying my husband to his site and occupying ourselves while he trained. Of course, challenge is another word for opportunity! Instead of sitting at home and moping, we became adept at walking and navigating our community on foot. When we tagged along to Reserve, we took advantage of our chance to see historical sites, museums, zoos, and even Fabergé eggs!

We have found that the Reserve experience is pretty alien to most of the people we meet. In the civilian world, people are busy and tend to make a lot of presumptions. We live more than 500 miles from our extended families. We live about one hundred miles away from the Reserve Center, and even farther from Reserve families and resources. And, since we do not live on post, we don't cross paths with active duty families very often. So when my husband has been sent overseas on active duty—Bosnia, Iraq, and so on—we get some pretty strange reactions. One neighbor, for example, reacted to news of my husband's Iraq deployment with curse words. (And, we wondered, how do we respond to that? "We're sorry?")

This "isolation" of the Reserve family in the civilian world, without the support system of fellow military families, has created challenges—how to get myself to work, the boys to their schools and sports, and so on. How to manage everything when my teaching job required that I take a college course during a summer when my husband was away. Once more, the challenge created opportunities.

First, we found that we are stronger than we suspected. The boys and I found ways to get it all done on our own. As elementary schoolers, they did the dishes, made the lunches, and helped with the house and yard. As they got older, they were less bashful about

asking friends for rides to practice. We had to learn pretty quickly how to talk about international issues and about our feelings because those two areas intersected in our home.

And while the civilian world at large remained pretty ignorant of our efforts, we found a huge reserve of loving, generous assistance in our close friends and family. When one nearby neighbor could no longer let the boys wait for the bus at her home in the mornings, another stepped in and welcomed them with breakfast each day. When I had to take that college course, I arranged to take it out-of-state so that our family could take the boys on adventures with them.

All sorts of random acts of kindness occurred—my homeroom students took attendance for me so that we wouldn't waste time if dropping off the boys made me late to school. My colleagues all pitched in for a fancy dinner for my husband and me when he was home on leave. A wonderful friend mowed our lawn. One day when a blizzard dumped two feet of snow on our very long driveway, a neighbor roared up in his plow and dug us out. Several moms took turns driving my boys to weekly youth group meetings, giving me a much-needed hour or so of peace per week. Dear friends invited the boys and me, and sometimes just the boys, to enjoy outings or holidays with them. One friend even took the children shopping for me for Mother's Day.

There were some odd attempts to help us—a pan of lasagna arrived anonymously one day, and a Sunday school teacher began greeting me with awkward hugs—but we knew that these gestures were all made out of an effort to be helpful. In addition to learning the extent of our own strength, we learned that we are truly blessed with the best of friends. We learned that there is a lot of good in people, even if it sometimes manifests itself in strange ways. People may not quite understand what we were dealing with

inside, but they were beyond willing to help however they could.

In this War College year, we are once again living a life that nobody else does. My husband—the Reservist, the JAG, the civilian judge—commutes to Carlisle. I am still teaching full time in Maryland. Our children are grown and living on their own. But we are all capable of taking care of ourselves and each other. We are all still active citizens, aware of world events, voting, and volunteering. We know that we can rely on friends and family if we are in need. And, of course, we are so proud of our officer husband-dad!

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Helping Hands, Helping Hearts {Army Spouse}

US Army

When you are a military spouse, the most challenging events seem to happen when your husband is deployed. That was true for a group of us who learned that military spouses always take care of each other. We were stationed at a large Army post where deployments were frequent. Many spouses lived off post and joined a “moms of preschoolers” group. Once a week our meetings would consist of guest speakers, breakfast potluck, and much needed socialization while the kids enjoyed two wonderful hours of free childcare.

I was on the group’s board along with three other military spouses, and an Army brat. Of the five board members, four of our spouses were deployed. Many members of our group were spouses of deployed Soldiers as well. Despite the deployment challenges, the year was going smoothly until one day when we received a phone call that one of our group members needed help. This group member was described as struggling and upset, so we phoned her

and asked if we could come by to visit her.

Upon arriving, we noticed that her house was in an unusual state of disarray; there were clothes everywhere, dirty dishes piled high in the sink, and a 7 month old baby boy who needed a bath and a change of clothes. Now on any given day, you could have said the same of my house and my children; however, this was far from normal. It was a much worse situation than simply having an untidy home.

We noticed that our friend’s behavior was quite different. She displayed rapid mood swings while we were there. After we helped clean up her house a bit and took care of the little boy’s needs, she finally asked us to call her doctor. She admitted that she had bipolar disorder and that she had stopped taking her medicine.

We called the doctor right away. He was in a neighboring city, about 45 minutes from us. He instructed us to get her to the hospital as soon as possible and that her son would be taken to social services once they arrived. Her husband was deployed.

Our friend was naturally upset at the thought of social services taking her son. We asked if she had family members nearby and she explained that her mother was a great distance away and that she didn’t know where her father lived. She would not tell us her husband’s unit. She said she’d go to the hospital if one of us would watch her son. It was late on Friday afternoon and in order to get her the medical care she needed, we had to act quickly.

One board member drove her to the hospital. One worked the phones to locate her husband’s unit and inform the unit’s rear detachment commander of the situation. Two ladies stayed to clean the house and find someone to care for her dog. I took her son, the children of the board member who drove her to the hospital, and

my own children and we headed to my house for the evening. We had it covered!

We tried to make sense of the day and the weeks leading up to it. Why didn't we see the signs of someone in so much need? What would the hospital do for her? How quickly could we contact her husband? By the end of the evening all that mattered was that our friend was getting help and that her son was safe in a warm bed getting much needed care and rest.

The next day, the rear detachment commander called me. He located our friend's husband and was working to get him on the next plane home. He also gave us the name of her father who lived about an hour away. He would be by to pick up the little boy and care for him until our friend's husband arrived home.

We learned that our friend's father actually visited them often and helped with repair work at her home about once a month. I expressed my concern about this information compared to the information our friend told us about not knowing the whereabouts of her father. We would learn from the rear detachment commander, who himself had a family member with bipolar disorder, that our friend's response about her father was quite typical of someone with the disorder who has stopped taking medication. He was able to shed so much light on the situation and we thanked God that someone familiar with bipolar disorder was able to both inform us and assist our friend and her family.

Our friend's father and stepmom arrived the next afternoon. They were very grateful that we did not allow their grandson to go to social services. They watched their grandson play with my children as they asked me about the details of the last few days.

I described the issues we faced and the teamwork that occurred to ensure that their daughter and grandson were in good hands. They were surprised that so many spouses pulled together to help someone they barely knew, yet treated as a lifelong friend. My response was, "We are military wives, we are family, and we take care of each other."

Our friend's experience also put a face to mental health disorders and their very real presence in society. You simply never know what a person might be going through. I'm glad we visited her that day and I'm so grateful that our friend shared her diagnosis with us so that we could assist her in getting the care she needed.

Military spouses make up a very special community. We are a network of spouses from all walks of life and from all parts of the country. When military spouses meet, there is an instant bond and a familiarity rarely found anywhere else. We tend to take a quick assessment of where we have lived, people we know, and units we have in common. When deployments, sickness, or family emergencies happen, we immediately rise to the occasion, ready to help in any way that we can. I am thankful and proud to be a part of this sisterhood of military spouses.

Paying It Forward {Jenny O'Rourke}

US Army

Several years ago I volunteered as a point-of-contact for our unit's family readiness group (FRG). My husband was on staff, and I decided it would be nice to volunteer while not being in a position of having to lead anything. As a point-of-contact volunteer, I was assigned a few spouses to keep in contact with during the upcoming deployment. I started by calling all the spouses that were local and made sure that things were going well for them. The last spouse that I called was a newlywed and lived in a city about two hours away.

After speaking with her for an hour or so, I found out that she was trying to move close to the post and that she was having some issues understanding the process and the terminology associated with the Army. It can all seem overwhelming when you are a new Army spouse. It just so happened that my group of friends had planned an overnight trip to her city for the next weekend. I made plans to meet up with the new spouse so that my friends and I could answer any questions that she had.

The next weekend we packed up the kids, headed south, and checked in at the hotel. I called the spouse, and she and a friend headed over to our hotel room. We sat there, four experienced Army spouses and one brand new one, and talked for hours. We answered all of her questions, reassured her, and even volunteered to help her move into her new house when the time came. Time rolled along, she moved close to the Army post, the deployment eventually ended, and our husbands came home.

Several years later, my husband returned home after a doctor's appointment and asked me if I remembered this particular spouse

and her Soldier. Since it had been several years by then, I really had to think about it. It turned out that both the spouse and her Soldier had recognized my husband and stopped him in the hallway of the medical building to talk to him. Apparently, the spouse had told her husband about the evening my friends and I had spent with her, helping her better understand the Army, assisting with her move, and generally making her feel a part of things. Unbeknownst to me, my husband had also helped her husband downrange.

The spouse proceeded to tell my husband about the help we had given her and how much she appreciated everything that we had done. I truthfully didn't think it was anything out of the ordinary. Helping new spouses is one of the goals of an FRG.

Because of that initial encounter, she had become very active in all of her unit FRGs from that point forward. In fact, she had even stepped up to be the leader of her current FRG. It was really touching to know that something that I had considered ordinary had such an impact on her. Also, it was gratifying to learn that she was enthusiastically "paying it forward" by volunteering to lead her FRG. It goes to show that even seemingly ordinary acts of assistance or kindness have the potential to empower and inspire others to do the same.

Proud to Be a Marine Corps Wife {Erin K. Dockery}

US Marine Corps

As I look back over the last twenty years, I realize how far I've come from where I started. Almost twenty years ago, I was newly dating my future husband when I saw him for the first time in his utilities. I told him that he looked cute in his Army outfit. With pure disdain, he snapped back that it was NOT an Army outfit, but that it was a Marine Corps uniform. Guess what? My next question was, "What exactly is the Marine Corps?"

I grew up near the Coast Guard Academy in Connecticut and Otis Air Force Base in Cape Cod. The extent of my military knowledge was the sage advice in high school to not date a "squid." I didn't even know what that meant. And here I am now, twenty years later, having lived the life of a Marine Corps spouse much of my adult life.

My husband has held many different jobs, some of them with leadership roles. I can honestly say that at times, I have been nervous about my role as his wife and the expectations that would be placed on me, but through all this, I have had some of the most profound experiences of my life. I have received incredible personal reward from serving others and our country.

I can't say that there have not been difficult moments these past 20 years. I have dealt with multiple deployments, mean girls, post-partum depression, loneliness, etc. but I have also been blessed with the richness of meeting other amazing women who are resilient, fun, supportive, eager, proud, and equally patriotic. There is really nothing that I would change as it all has made me who I am and led me to where I am now.

I would like to challenge you to travel this Marine Corps (or other branch) course of your own with intention and integrity. I don't believe that "Semper Fi" only belongs to our Marines; it belongs to us as well. Over time, it becomes just as much a part of us and our life as it is theirs. This is our Marine Corps too and how we behave and carry ourselves speaks volumes of who we are as people. We will define what the Marine Corps is to become -- let's do it well. We are a remarkable and powerful group of women -- be proud to be a Marine Corps wife ... Semper Fi.

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Lt. Dan and the Ice Cream Thieves {Traci Cook}

US Army

During one of my husband's deployments, my kids and I attended an event on Fort Hood that included a concert featuring the Lt. Dan Band. After an evening of fun and a few turns in the bounce houses, my boys requested ice cream. I'm never one to turn down Blue Bell ice cream and the night seemed to call for a treat, so I agreed. I stood in the line while my ever-energetic boys ran laps on the track with some friends (friends they met for the first time a few minutes earlier -- as military kids do). The line for ice cream turned out to be one of the longest I've encountered ... maybe ever ... but I happened to be in line surrounded by Soldiers in uniform-- a pleasant place to be.

In much the same way hostages being held against their will often bond quickly, so did our group of ice cream aficionados. We began chatting and I learned that this group of Soldiers had been transported to this event from training in North Fort Hood and they were very much looking forward to getting their frozen treat.

After about half-an-hour, we realized we were standing in the wrong line and all moved together to the correct place. There was lots of kidding amongst the Soldiers as to who was to blame for the error, but all was in good fun. Eventually, we all ordered and paid for our ice cream, then moved to a new line to wait for the orders to be given out. We spent another forty minutes or so standing here waiting. We soon began to notice that there were people receiving the ice cream orders that had not paid for them. The ice cream worker would come to the window and announce “single dip chocolate waffle cone” and someone would step up and take it. Since there was no ‘check,’ it appeared that a group of young people was taking advantage of the situation and accepting ice cream that they had not ordered.

When we realized what was happening, the group of Soldiers -- without talking about it -- moved in closer to the window, creating a ‘border’ that the offenders did not care to cross. It was almost instinctive and amazing to see. Not only did these guys fix the problem with no controversy, they did it as a group without any planning whatsoever. The term ‘band of brothers’ came to mind as I watched them work together.

Once the thieves were thwarted in their efforts, we still had a long wait in front of us. By this time, the return buses were lining up at the gate, and Soldiers were moving in that direction to board. My kids had just about worn themselves out and were playing quiet games of hide-and-seek. The concert was ending and Gary Sinise was addressing the crowd. My favorite moment of the night came when he was talking about where the band had performed. At his comment that he had “been to Iraq four times,” the Soldier standing next to me smiled and said, “You and me both, brother.”

So now we’ve been in line for what seems like an actual eternity and the first few buses begin to pull away. When a couple of

Soldiers joked that they were not leaving without their ice cream, even if it meant paying \$60 for a cab ride back, I assured them that I’d drive them through Dairy Queen for ice cream then take them back before they’d need to do that. At some point, we realize that time has run out. These guys are not going to get their ice cream unless some action is taken. Most of the buses have left, and the ones remaining are ready to go as well. Because these are my newest heroes, I can’t help but intervene. I knocked on the window of the ice cream booth and explained that these Soldiers were very patiently waiting for their ice cream and were moments away from missing their bus ride home. Could they possibly be served first? The owners were very accommodating and starting asking each Soldier what he had ordered. As the orders were completed and the guys were moving out to their buses, they each called out in turn, “Thank you, ma’am!”

The most impressive part of this entire encounter to me was the attitude of these Soldiers. They ranged in age, rank, and experience, but each had an attitude of polite patience and deliberate respect for others. In a world focused on “me” and “now” so much of the time, it was refreshing to see humans who were not ruffled or upset by having to wait.

I pondered this on the way home (with two boys sleeping in the backseat) and wondered ... could it be that these Soldiers developed a new sense of priorities having spent time in a combat zone? Why did they instinctively appreciate the fact that waiting for ice cream is just not a big deal in the bigger picture of life? Especially in a culture where so many would be angry and frustrated? I don’t know the exact answer, but I do know that these guys reaffirmed for me my basic belief in human kindness, decency, honor, and respect.

I realize that Soldiers are heroes on a much bigger scale than simply showing patience in a line for ice cream. These very same men could be on their way to a foreign land any day, ready to pick up a weapon and fight for our country. What they do on a daily basis ... and what they commit themselves to doing each day ... is truly mind-boggling. I love them for that. But I also love that they are just good people.

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The A-B-Cs of Army Life {Katie Payne}

US Army

“Welcome to the Army, Mrs. Payne.” These were the first words I heard after our pastor introduced my husband and me as ‘Lt. and Mrs. Brian Payne.’ And yes, in keeping with military tradition, I was gently swatted on the fanny with a saber. Thus began my adventure as an Army wife. I am not from a military family, and I had no idea what to expect from life as a military wife.

It has been 22 years and we have had ups and downs, laughed and cried, moved a lot, and said hundreds of hellos and goodbyes. Through it all, I have loved being an Army wife. Our lives are complicated and not easily understood unless you have walked in those boots.

This is my tribute to the very special women who stand beside their Soldiers...

Adaptable

The Army wife can read books to her child’s elementary class in the morning, serve at a community meeting in the afternoon, and

attend a Hail and Farewell with her husband in the evening with ease.

Brave

The Army wife is enormously brave. She is courageous when faced with hardship and shows a resiliency that pulls her through the most challenging times. For those times when she is feeling anything but brave or courageous, she can count on her military friends to encourage her.

Creative

The Army wife is wonderfully creative. She can turn her military quarters into something that is unique to her family even though they look exactly like all the other houses and sometimes have industrial tiled floors or cinder block walls.

Dependable

The Army wife is a friend you can depend on. You can call an Army wife in the middle of the night, and she will come take care of your children while you are in the hospital birthing another baby. You can ask an Army wife you’ve just met to be your emergency contact at your child’s school.

Expert

Out of necessity, the Army wife becomes expert at moving her family from place to place. She learns to keep the baby’s very special blanket under lock and key so the packers don’t get a hold of it. She learns how to mark the all-important boxes of linens and the prized toys. But no matter how many times she moves, she will

never understand why she finds shower curtains with books in a box marked 'garage items.'

Flexible

The Army wife is often challenged by the changing of the military tide. One day she thinks she is going to Fort Hood and the next, she is headed to Fort Bragg. One day she is told that her husband will redeploy by Thanksgiving, and the next day she finds out he will be gone for another four months.

Generous

The Army wife helps raise money for her Family Readiness Group and gives her time through volunteering. She supports redeployed troops with cookies, phone cards, care packages, and prayers. Her generosity touches people far beyond her family and friends.

Helpful

The Army wife is extraordinarily helpful to other military wives who are in need. Making meals, running errands, and watching kids become second nature.

Independent

The Army wife manages her home while her husband is TDY, in the field, or deployed. She doesn't always like being independent, but she has learned to handle the broken washing machine, the broken leg, or the broken heart.

Joyful

Welcome Home Ceremonies are one of the most joyful times she has ever experienced. The feelings of relief, excitement, anticipation, and pride are almost overwhelming. It is amazing to her how the time and pain of separation just seem to disappear as she is finally able to put her arms around her Soldier.

Knowledgeable

Thank goodness for the Internet. It has become an indispensable tool for the Army wife to learn all she can about her family's next duty station. She can research schools, churches, activities, jobs, housing, and more with a click of the mouse. She can also get hands-on advice from those who have been there.

Lonely

Being an Army wife can be a lonely experience. Sometimes she feels very isolated after moving to a new place. It may take her several months to find her place and to feel at home. Loneliness comes when her husband is away, but it is also something she feels when she is unable to get back home to visit extended family.

Mothers

By and large the military is a fruitful group. Being a mom to "Army brats" can be one of the most challenging aspects of being a Army wife. Moms have to explain why Daddy isn't going to be here for a child's birthday or why he is missing Christmas. She does whatever she can to make the separation as bearable as possible.

Navigator

The Army wife is often the one who sets the course for the family in how they will handle PCS moves or deployments. How she reacts to these situations has a profound impact on how the kids will respond.

Overwhelmed

The Army wife can sometimes feel overwhelmed by moving again or by all the things that seem to go wrong when her husband is gone. Often she is overwhelmed with sadness when she is faced with another separation or saying goodbye to good friends.

Patriotic

The Army wife can't help getting misty eyed when she hears the national anthem, and she often has at least one area in her house that is decorated with Old Glory.

Quilters

The Army wife is a quilter—perhaps not in the traditional sense of the word, although lots of military wives have taken up quilting as a hobby—but she weaves together the many different experiences, joys, and hardships that she faces and in the end, she has a beautiful tapestry that is a reflection of who she is.

Resourceful

Any Army wife that has learned to navigate her way through the military healthcare system known as Tricare is a very resourceful person.

Sisterhood

Army wives are a part of a sisterhood that is very diverse but united by the sacrifices their families make in service to their country.

Thrifty

Army wives can be amazingly thrifty. She might be able to use the same wallpaper border in three different houses! Army wives often find ways to make extra money through selling their hand-made items or starting a home-based business.

Understanding

Usually she is fairly understanding of deployments. She just asks her husband not to whistle while he packs!

Volunteer

The Army has numerous wonderful groups and activities available to the Army family. Many of these activities would not be possible without hours and hours of volunteer work. The quality of the community is directly impacted by the volunteer hours that Army wives dedicate.

World Traveler

Some Army wives have lived all around the world. Some wives have just explored the States from coast to coast. But all Army wives have been exposed to various cultures through the people they meet.

eXtraordinary

The Army wife lives a complicated and unique life.

Yard Sale Queen

Moving every couple years forces a family to downsize and the Army wife can put together one heck of a garage sale. She is also terrific at shopping garage sales and finding things to fill up her new house. It's a crazy cycle!

Zany

Army wives can be quite zany at times. Just observe a Bunko group!

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**A Dual Military Couple Q & A
{Ben & Dolly Livingston}**

Active Guard Reserve & Army Reserve

My husband, Ben, and I are both in the Army. I am in the Active Guard Reserve and he is a traditional Reservist. Dual military couples exist everywhere, on every post. But questions and confusion arise when Ben and I show up for duty at the same place. Why, you may ask? Because I am a lieutenant colonel and he is a captain. The stares and questions we get are hilarious and keep us laughing all the time. Below are some of the comments we have heard since we arrived at the Army War College:

Q: How did that happen?

A: How did what happen?

Q: Your marriage and difference in rank?

A: I met my husband after he left active duty. His last duty station was Fort Stewart, GA. I still remember him moving into the apartment complex wearing blue jeans and a t-shirt, while carrying duffel bags up the stairs. It was love at first sight. As for our promotions, I out-rank my husband because I commissioned seven years earlier than he did.

I am sometimes tempted to ask, "What is the big deal?" I am confident that this question would not be asked if Ben outranked me.

Q: Does your wife pull rank at home?

A: No. She is my wife. The house has always been her domain, regardless of rank.

Q: Does it bother you that your wife makes more money than you?

A: Does it bother your wife that you make more money than she does?

Q: Does your husband and family move with you every time you PCS?

A: Yes.

Q: Who watches the kids while your husband is at work??

A: (eye roll).

My husband rocks and we take the questions we receive in stride. Dual military marriages are hard work, but the Army has blessed us with a great support system. I experienced it firsthand when pregnant with our third daughter while Ben was deployed to Afghanistan. I was surrounded by great people who made sure my family was okay. We may have to juggle more things than most families, but we wouldn't trade our life for the world. Go Army!

Making a House a Home



Quick Response: You won't believe what happened during our last military move...

- My rubbish bin, complete with rubbish, was wrapped and shipped. {Hayley Parsons}
- 5 sheets of paper to wrap 3 screws. {Hayley Parsons}
- Our sea freight and air freight was mixed up for this move from New Zealand to the USA. Our linen shipment for six people arrived with 3 pillows, a single bed sheet, and a single comforter. LOL. Had to go shopping because I was NOT going to share one sheet and one blanket with five other people! {Hayley Parsons}
- I was shifting between cities in New Zealand and had a crate end up in London. Go figure. {Hayley Parsons}

- Used coffee grounds in coffee pot greeted us at the next house. {Beth Woods}
- My really nice dress heels from my closet were found packed in a garage box with our chainsaw. {Bobbi Holbert}
- One time we had two days to PCS. Orders came in on a Friday and I dropped my husband off at the airport at 5am on a Sunday morning so he could fly to our next duty location! There was no way TMO would have been able to get us out that quickly! We joined him a couple of months later. {Michelle Pantleo}
- When we moved from Virginia to Germany we had 12 crates. Once they arrived in Germany they had crossed off the number 12 from the 1 of 12 crates and put in #9. 1 of 9 crates had arrived. We had lost 3 crates someplace! It took six months, but the three missing crates were eventually found! {Michelle Pantleo}
- Ours would have to be my grandfather passing away between day 1 and day 2 of packing, a custody battle, and the moving company losing all of our household goods for a period of time. After 3 weeks of being 'homeless' and 3 weeks in Carlisle without our things, we really appreciated having 'most' of our things arrive in mid August! The weirdest part is we had one of the best times visiting family, the beach, NYC, and camping out in hammocks and on air mattresses in our new home. One of the most fun months we have had in years! {Julie Cooley}
- Going to Disney world when our stuff was in extended storage when we moved to Tampa. {Cari Tedesco}

- I was already a week and a half past my due date for my son to be born, and our packers were arriving in 2 1/2 days. We were in Ft. Benning, it was summer, and I was extremely frustrated and hot and huge. I drove myself to Martin Army Hospital and had a temper tantrum in the OB ward: "I'm not leaving here until this baby is born! My movers will be here in less than three days!" A few hours later I was checked in on a Pitocin drip. My son arrived that night just before midnight. 48 hours we were required to stay, and I insisted we be discharged on the very minute we hit that time. I went home with my son at midnight 48 hours later! Stayed up the whole night getting ready and the movers arrived first thing in the morning. I remember trying to get up on the fridge to paint my kitchen walls the following night. We left a few days later for Newport, RI... and my son's first bath was in a hotel sink. Good thing he was my third or I might not have been so calm. LOL. {Beth Watkins}
- We were supposed to have a door-to-door move from Ft. Knox to Ft. Carson, only our stuff didn't come and we waited and waited (ever so patiently). After a couple of weeks and multiple conversations with the moving company, the moving company finally fessed up that the moving truck had caught fire somewhere in Kansas. The good news - only the cab of the truck caught fire and was damaged. The bad news - the trailer sat on the side of the road for weeks waiting for a new cab to pick it up. So...the moving company generously (ha!) purchased us new pots and pans, new linens, new towels, and even paid for us to rent equipment to build a fence for our new house (since our tools were MIA). If only they had told us the truth from the beginning... {Christina Lindner}
- A few moves ago, we had to ditch a couch after it showed up...and the box with the couch cushions in it did not show up. No amount of tracking or tracing found that box. However, in our last move, the cushions to our old couch showed up. They were not on the inventory, but there they were... {Lorelei Coplen}
- I thought I was the only one who had a moving van fire! My very first military move--the truck caught fire. Lucky for me, my stuff was the last to be loaded on and was the furthest away from the cab and front of the trailer, but I had massive smoke and water damage to everything. I got to see the truck in San Antonio and I asked what happened. The guy said, "I don't know. The truck just done burnt up." {Heidi-Rose McFadden}
- Our last movers were a wonderful group of Spanish-speakers; only one in the group could speak a little English. When they came to load our things, one of the movers came to me, clearly worried but having a hard time telling me what the issue was. Finally, he took me to my teenager's room and said, "No can move." I looked at the boxes and understood. My teen --thinking he would be funny-- had added to their lists on each box. After the typical entries of "books, papers," he had added crazy things like "human organs," "deadly poisons," and "live spiders." I was eventually able to calm the movers, mark through all the additions, and ensure that all of our boxes were loaded. {Traci Cook}
- Most of our fifteen moves have had their share of "hic-cups." I feared the worst on our move from Grafenwöhr Germany to Heidelberg Germany- WHILE my husband was deployed. It turned out to be the best move and the best

packers ever. I was moving from a very large house to a small house. I had to get two dogs, two kids, a camper, and two cars there as well. The moving company and amazing packers felt sympathy for me. They put the camper on the truck so I didn't have to pull it. They allowed a door-to-door move on my terms and then help me set up the whole house. They fixed furniture that was broken from the previous move and made my unrealistic furniture plan work in a very small room. They took things apart to get them in the room and then reassembled them without even telling me. When they were done, they called me to the room with big smiles on their faces and said "SURPRISE!" {Carol Baxter}

- When we moved from Alabama to Oklahoma, we decided that we would buy a cargo trailer to carry things that either could not be replaced or would be immediately needed. We decided to vacation en route so we began our journey by heading to the beach in Florida. Before we got there, the trailer had a flat tire. After getting that fixed, we noticed that the brake box to the trailer was smoking. No fire but lots of damage to the brake line. The next day was spent trying to get that fixed without having it go up in smoke. When we left Florida, we drove to New Orleans. As we entered the city, my husband, who was driving with the trailer behind me, radioed to ask me if I felt any vibrations on the road. Just when I said no, he yelled, "Oh, \$*#!?! I think I just lost a tire." We veered through traffic to get off the freeway and found ourselves in a rough neighborhood. A somewhat-good Samaritan said she saw our tire fly off and would help us find it. So we followed along to where our tire had in fact flown off the freeway into the neighborhood below. Upon returning to our trailer, she demanded reimbursement for her help. At that

point, we limped our way to our hotel, and my husband immediately embarked on a trip in the rain to find the one place in the area that could fix a trailer tire. When he came back later, he could only say with a shake of his head that the tire had flown off because they had put the lug nuts on wrong when they fixed the flat tire. {Karla Bilafer}

- When we moved to Virginia, I remember walking into our kitchen and encountering a huge wall of boxes labeled "Cookbooks." Once we started unpacking and pulling out book after book, we eventually realize that the boxes were not labeled "Cookbooks" but rather, they were labeled "Cook" [our last name] "books" ... and every single book we owned was in those boxes. {Traci Cook}

Making Each House a Home {Beth Watkins}

US Army

When I first moved into our new house in Germany, it was empty with the exception of the temporary government loaner furniture and five suitcases. There was an echo, the floors were bare, the closets were empty, and the walls were stark white. It was a lot smaller than what we were coming from in Tampa and a lot older. But as a military wife who has moved around a few times, I truly relish that feeling of stepping into our next new home for the first time. It is like handing a painter a blank canvas. Only the painter can envision the masterpiece he will create with it; only the painter can see the potential of what it can become. The first step is to buy the paint.

This led to our first trip to the German baumarket, where we stood in the paint aisle for at least an hour contemplating what kind of paint to buy, what color, and how much. Then there was the issue of tools, paint rollers, drop cloths, etc. If only we had known you could get free paint at Self Help, it would have saved us a lot of Euro and a VAT form. But the baumarket experience was a learning one, and I would not have found that perfect shade of cappuccino for my walls at Self Help.

By the end of the night, our walls were painted and our new dwelling was magically transformed into a warmer, cozier little place. We were one step closer to making it feel like “home.” We went on to paint our daughters’ rooms: Hannah’s bedroom was coated with a shocking shade of fuchsia and Georgia’s room metamorphosed with a gallon of “passion purple.” Posters and pictures and mirrors were hung and new bedding was purchased for the new (smaller) beds. Perhaps my kids’ favorite thing about moving is redesigning their new bedroom to make it uniquely their own.

As the next few weeks and months passed, our new home welcomed many new visitors, neighbors, and friends. We heard a lot of this:

“You painted?! You know you have to repaint before you move, right?”

“I can’t believe you painted the kids rooms in colors that aren’t approved by housing! What do you think they will say about it!?”

Ignorance is bliss, and I honestly had no idea before I started painting our walls and transforming our government leased quarters into a home that we were only “allowed” to paint with certain colors. But even if I had known, that would not have stopped me. Call me a rebel without a cause, but I think creating a home that reflects our personalities is vital to making us feel like we belong here.

A neighbor once commented to me that she never paints or unpacks all her stuff because the house is just a temporary place to sleep for a year or two before they move onto the next assignment. I can understand that, but the idea makes me sad. This is not just a place holding my stuff. This is where we live, day to day. These walls shelter my family and watch them grow. My daughter will spend her last year of high school here before she leaves us to go off into the world on her own. Why on earth would I want her to feel like this is just a temporary place to hang her jacket? Home is where your family is; it is a place where we feel safe, warm, comfortable, and loved. From station to station, I strive to make my Army Brats feel like “normal” kids.

As Army families, we PCS, we leave our friends, we make new friends, and then we leave them behind when we PCS again. We are nomads, always on the move, ever feeling the push and pull of

conflicting emotions, living on shifting sands, and waiting for the bottom half of the hourglass to fill before it's time to start over again. Stability may not be a luxury we enjoy, but learning how to optimize each year, each day, each minute...that is a gift we are given. We understand that passing time is not merely sand filling an empty chamber. It is being filled with unforgettable experiences and people: travel, friendships, language, culture, traditions, and countless memories. Our cup runneth over.

Wherever you are, plug in. Optimize each and every opportunity you are given. Live your life with your head up. Make your mark. Go ahead and paint the walls!

I wrote this several years ago as a blog post after we moved to Germany. Making each place we live a "home" has given our family a stronger sense of stability even in a lifestyle that lacks it. It's not just about the house ... it's about becoming part of the community as much as possible and taking advantage of the unique opportunities we have been given. If we always feel like we are just passing through and don't invest ourselves into the whole experience, we will miss out on so many wonderful things!

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Try It Before You Buy It {Joy Underwood}

US Navy

Being a tourist gives me a small glimpse of life in a community, but being a resident, even for only a few years, helps me understand life there to a greater degree. Having grown up in the same town, attending the same school, I had no idea what was in store for me as a military spouse. How much I have learned and what valuable communities we have been able to touch down in for a time. There

is great diversity, even just in our country, and I'm grateful for having experienced areas of it.

I'm sure lessons of these communities are stored away in my heart, but the actual information that I store after a move is something more concrete - the house. The opportunity to "try it before you buy it" is so unique that I started writing down aspects of each house that we enjoyed.

Whether it's base housing or a rental out in town, I always find some part of the house that deserves to be recorded. There are always parts to complain about, but it does little good. I find it more useful to figure out ways to make each home work for us.

One of our first homes was so very small, but it had a large kitchen sink with a curved spigot. It was the perfect sink for washing dishes, and no other kitchen sink since has been quite as useful. Of course we've also discovered that things we thought would be exciting, like that pool we had once, are actually not. The pool did not make the list, but we are wiser in understanding the maintenance costs for things like that. Maybe someday that wisdom will help us remodel or build a house. For now, it helps us find the house that will fit well with our family of six at each stop that we make.

Change is hard for all of us to deal with, but it can also be exciting. Being given a new blank slate to fill is an interesting challenge, a bit like a game of fitting together blocks of different shapes and sizes. I'm not gifted with interior decorating, but I find that the sooner the house feels like home, the sooner we all start accepting the change. I also find that focusing on the best aspects of the house, and worrying little about the annoying parts, keeps me content with yet another address change.

My Old (Ft. Campbell) Kentucky Home {Mary Elizabeth Hedrick}

US Army

The idea that “We’re all in this together” took a firm hold on my heart in May 2001 while we were stationed at Ft. Campbell, KY. I was living off post in a rental home while staying at home with my preschool aged son and pregnant with my daughter when my husband and I realized our name was coming up on the post housing list. We borrowed boxes from military families who were just moving in, and I almost single-handedly packed up my worldly belongings while my husband worked long hours as a company commander. Our name popped to the top of the housing list; we took a look at the home we thought could potentially be ours (through the windows!), and I woke up the next morning in labor. Forget packing the house, it was time to have a baby!

We dropped our son off at my friend’s house, called my mom, and off we went to the hospital to meet our new baby girl. With work, a new baby, and a pending move looming, my husband stayed at the hospital during the day and spent his nights transferring a few critical items to our new home. I never went back to that rental house! I went into labor at one home and arrived home with a baby in my arms to my new quarters on post. We had tile floors, a box spring with a mattress, a working kitchen, a rocking chair, the washer and dryer, a crib, my son’s bed, toilet paper in the bathroom (Thanks Mom!), and a newborn baby.

The next morning, my husband went back to the rental house to prepare to move our household goods with a U-haul truck. The next thing we knew, a crowd of friends and strangers was streaming through our door with food, a sofa (where I sat all day nursing my baby and trying to figure out how to stop swelling up like a bal-

loon!), and box after box of our belongings. Somehow in one day, all of our unit friends and neighborhood friends managed to move everything we owned into our new quarters. I was so grateful to see so many friendly faces willing to do the difficult work of emptying out our rental home and carrying truckload after truckload of boxes and furniture into our new quarters. All the while I sat on the sofa trying to recover from delivery, getting to know my newborn, and learning how to care for my sweet boy whose world was turned upside down in the space of a few days!

We took one week to get settled and immediately began making friends with our new neighbors. I have fond memories of that housing area and that time of my life although it was arguably one of the toughest times that I’ve experienced as an Army spouse. We didn’t know it, but 9/11 was right around the corner and our close friendships would be critical as we supported each other through everything from deployment casualties to simply keeping up with the tasks of single-handedly raising kids, getting dinner on the table, and mowing lawns.

Family is wonderful, but knowing that they are not always available to help with childcare, lawn maintenance, or providing a “sanity Mom break,” my circle of friends became creative and available to one another at a moment’s notice. I remember the day a dear friend arrived at my door unannounced to help me clean and then took my kids to the park so I could prepare for a last minute meeting when we had unit casualties. I remember strapping on a baby backpack to weed whack everyone’s lawn on the block because I owned the only “weed whacker” and the post did not provide lawn care even during a deployment. A friend with a riding mower cut everyone’s front and side lawns and another friend mowed inside the back fences. We each took turns watching children so the job could get done.

I will never forget when I found out a news crew wanted to come to my house to film my husband coming home from the field. He had been away for two weeks and I was home with a sick baby and a kindergartner. I was totally unprepared to have my husband come home 3 days early and with a film crew in tow! I rushed next door, dropped off my kids, and explained my situation to my friend. Without a moment's hesitation she pulled a pan of lasagna out of the oven, a salad out of the fridge, and she handed me a loaf of Italian bread. Then she kept my kids while I showered and tried to make my messy house look film-worthy. Believe me when I tell you I put that lasagna in my own oven and served that meal as if I had slaved for hours cooking it!

Over the years as deployments come and go and duty stations change, I still treasure that time at Ft. Campbell, KY and I still keep in touch with many of those ladies more closely than I do some of my own family. I like to think I could have moved onto post and delivered a baby without help or that I could have taken care of my lawn or that I could have kept a clean house and prepared a meal for company while my kids were tiny. But I did not have to do that because I was blessed to make friends with some fantastic ladies who believed that same thing I did: "We're all in this together."

Take Them With You {Amy Kirk}

US Army

Take them with you to the next place,
Try to make the memories last.
Look back at where we've been,
Can you believe the time has passed?

Newlyweds to Fort Hood,
The journey had begun,
Texas sunsets and bluebonnets,
We received the gift of our son.

The Sunshine State of Florida,
The Gators football song,
College classes and papers,
Then our daughter came along!

Louisiana lagniappe,
New Orleans Mardi Gras season,
Friends and spicy crawfish boils,
Celebration needed no reason.

Take them with you to the next place,
To the footsteps of Lewis and Clark.
Leavenworth small groups, cook-outs,
And our favorite restaurant in Park.

The view from the Baumholder Rock,
German castles and beers,
Friends who became our family,
Deployments that brought many tears.

A Southern sanctuary was next,
With Charleston painted ladies,
Low country food and the Battery,
And summers as hot as Hades.

A drive across the country,
California welcomes you!
Mojave heat while training the best,
Irwin Road, Route 66 too.

A road trip move to the East,
For books, papers and talks,
Carlisle legends and history,
Old buildings, brick sidewalks.

Take them with you to the next place,
Big moments and things that are small.
On this great military adventure,
Don't forget the wonder of it all!

*A poem to my family inspired by the places
that the Army has sent us.*

Move 17 {Valerie Caldwell}

US Army

The Army life . . . for country serve;
To boldly go (if one has nerve).
Twenty one years so far have given -
I have adapted to army livin'.
Now seventeenth move without hysterics -
To Pennsylvania and Carlisle Barracks!
So, come July, the truck we'll load
and leave Fort Knox and all its gold!

It is fun to find entertaining ways to announce the next assignment to family and friends. Besides, one must take one's sense of humor on every move.

Military Friendships



Quick Response: How I Know My Military Friends Are There For Me ...

- When we arrived at the airport in Honolulu, a friend picked up all six of us, 15 suitcases, 2 car seats, and a large dog. She greeted us with leis, helped us get a rental car, fed us dinner, and got us safely to the hotel. Also, while in Hawaii...rushing to make our flight off Island for Christmas, I hadn't gotten our Christmas letters stamped and mailed yet. A friend took care of getting them mailed out. {Katie Payne}
- Taking me to the hospital when I broke my leg and my husband was down range. Escorting me into the airport with my 3 kids because I had broken my leg. {Cari Tedesco}

- I had a military friend take care of me for two weeks by bringing me food, checking on me, and coming over to take our dog out when my back went out. My back going out was a total fluke and without skipping a beat she was kind and generous enough to help me. Those moments really make my heart full and I'm so thankful for her and so many women exactly like her. I love that you get the opportunity to meet and make so many wonderful military friends. {Tamra Konczey}
- Sometimes it's the simple things and the little surprises... During our last PCS pack out, my best friend came over and kept me company so I wouldn't be alone. She kept the packers in stitches as they worked. She's very gregarious and funny so the packers enjoyed her company as much as I did. Unbeknownst to me, she wrote me many messages on the packed boxes that I did not discover until the boxes arrived at our next duty station. Some had words of encouragement and others had catch phrases for jokes and humorous situations that she and I had shared while at Ft. Irwin. It amazed me that she managed to hide all of these "box adornments" by situating the boxes just so before the truck loading took place. It made for a funny and uplifting unpack on the other side and it reminded me of one of the great gifts of being a military spouse: the military sisters that we make along the way. {Amy Kirk}
- When we moved back from overseas, there was of course that gap of time where we were living with very little while waiting for our shipments and vehicle to be delivered. Our neighbor immediately decided to be our angel of help. She came over every morning for a load of laundry and returned it clean every evening. For weeks she did this with a smile. Another neighbor offered a vehicle because her

spouse was deployed. We were well taken care of without ever asking for anything. {Joy Underwood}

- The Army friends I've made through the years seem like family to me. Once, when I lamented that my washer was broken, a friend down the street gave me her garage door code and told me to come in the back door and use her washer and dryer anytime. When I ran out of gas in my car, a good friend jumped in her car with a container of gas, poured it into my car, then followed me to the nearest gas station to make sure I made it okay. When my water pipes burst (days after my husband deployed ... of course), my neighbor joined me in my front yard to battle the geyser together. When we were in a car accident in College Station, Texas, we called a Fort Hood friend for help. Without hesitation, he jumped in his car, drove over a hundred miles through the rain, and picked us up to take us home. We found out later that he had a flat tire on the way and had to change it in the pouring rain before he could get to us. That's friendship, y'all! {Traci Cook}
- Military families stick together and the proof of that can be seen at any post, at any time. Drive through a military housing neighborhood in the fall and you're sure to see groups of friends gathered around a fire pit, enjoying each other's company. During winter's darkest days, you may see Soldiers out shoveling snow off of their sidewalks and taking care to shovel the area of their neighbors' yards whose Soldiers are deployed or training. After school on a spring day, you can observe groups of military kids playing in the neighborhood together; riding bikes, drawing with sidewalk chalk, or running in a game of tag. When the heat of summer descends, front yard sprinklers and slip-n-slides pave the way for fun afternoons filled with

laughter and fun. When Soldiers deploy, families depend on each other. If the unthinkable happens and a neighbor gets the dreaded knock on the door that tells her that her Soldier has been killed in action, entire neighborhoods will spring into action, supplying food, comfort, childcare, and friendship to support her while she grieves. They grieve together. I have seen groups of wives attending the birth of a child whose father is deployed, supporting their friend in labor; women walking arm-in-arm to a memorial service to honor a hero who has given his life in service to his country; children stopping cold when they hear a bugle call to render proper attention to our flag being raised or lowered; families bonding together and planning walk-to-school groups to keep the neighborhood children safe; neighborhoods gathering for a night of Bunco or a simple cookout, laughing and living their lives together. Military friendships are strong enough to last entire lifetimes. {Army Wife}

The Gift of Mateship {Katy Stuart}

Australian Army

My husband is in the Australian Army. Years ago we were posted to the United Kingdom for his assignment. It was there that I gave birth to my first child, my beautiful daughter.

In the months prior, I had met a wonderful woman from Texas. Her husband was in the U.S. Army, and he was also posted to the United Kingdom. She drove an hour to the hospital to visit me upon hearing of my daughter's birth.

When she got there, she was shocked to find me sitting in a cold, dark room on my own. I had been waiting for over half an hour for a nurse to come and move my daughter's crib within reach of my bed. I couldn't walk and I was not able to move the crib myself. It was very upsetting to have my daughter so close but not within reach to hold her. Plus, the temperature of the room was uncomfortable and concerned me.

Horrified to find me in this situation, she moved the crib within reach and went looking for a nurse to warm the frosty room. Her visit lifted my spirits and gave me hope. She then went home and organized a roster of American ladies to provide meals for my family for the next two weeks after we returned home from the hospital. Each night during those two weeks, we were treated to homemade meals and offers of support. The American ladies shared in the joy of our newborn daughter and that meant so much, especially with us being so far away from Australia and our family there.

Mateship is a concept at the heart of Australian culture and carries with it a specific status of high regard and trust. Australians

choose their mates carefully, based upon a person's character. The American ladies had become my mates.

From that moment on and during the weeks that followed when my perfect gift of a daughter was placed in a Pavlik harness, my Texan mate's support made me strong. The help and companionship that I received placed a love and trust of American military spouses in my heart that has never left. I was grateful for their willingness to come together and help a fellow spouse. It was a very special time in my life that I will always remember with great fondness. Not only had I received the gift of my daughter, but I had also received the gift of mateship from several generous military spouses. I dedicate this story with love and thanks to my American mates.

Upon the birth of her first child, an Australian military spouse living in the United Kingdom experiences friendship and support from a dedicated group of American military spouses.

The Darkest Days {L.W.W., Army Wife}

US Army

I would like to tell my story about two military families that helped us through the worst time of our lives.

It was April 2, 2006. We (my husband, our youngest son, and I) were stationed in Washington, D.C. Our two oldest sons Cody (age 22) and Kyle (age 20) had stayed in Texas when we moved to D.C. We were called at 10:00 pm from the school in Texas where Kyle was attending to tell us what no parent should ever hear.

Our son was hit by a car and killed. We called our friends John and Jen (they were also stationed in D.C.). We also called our friends Brian and Tami (they had just gotten out of the military). John and Jen came right over. Brian drove two and a half hours to be with us. They helped us make plans to fly to Texas and get packed. Brian drove us to the airport the next morning then drove back to Elkton, MD. John and Jen took our two dogs. Brian and Tammy called and had a catered meal sent to Oklahoma where we are from and were burying our son. They then picked us up at the airport when we flew in to Baltimore and drove us back to Fort Belvoir. They took care of us and helped in any way they could.

This is what a military family does.

The Driveway Moms {Jaimie Devine and Julie Nuckols}

US Army

Sometimes the best friendships are born from the simplest beginnings. Nearly 20 years ago in Fort Hood, Texas, we were the Driveway Moms. There were eight of us military spouses with children who were babies, preschoolers, and elementary school-aged. We all lived in the same military post housing neighborhood. Julie's home was the one with the large, sprawling oak tree which shaded her driveway and front yard.

Our group began with small conversations as we walked our children home from school. Soon, the conversations got longer and we began to linger and eventually plop down under the shade of Julie's oak tree. We'd go through our children's backpacks, compare notes, share community information, swap recipes and talk about Army life. Our husbands were all from different units, so the JAG spouse learned some things from the tanker spouse, and vice versa. We asked each other questions about military customs, traditions and protocol. The more experienced of us taught the newer military spouses.

Soon, we began to look forward to our Driveway Moms gatherings as part of our daily "battle rhythm." We'd peek out of our window blinds to see if anyone was outside yet. Once it was time, we'd grab a cold drink, snacks, some magazines and go outside for what became for us, the ultimate support group. We all came to value that each afternoon, it was a given that there would be someone to talk to and friends for our children to play with.

It was the best way to spend time before going in to make dinner. As soon as the first husband came home from work, that was our informal signal to disband and go home to feed our families. We knew that the Driveway Moms would meet the next day and that our conversations and laughter would continue.

During the time of the Driveway Moms, some of our husbands deployed. We were there for each other. We'd watch each other's children. When Jaimie's children would see her apply lipstick for a meeting or appointment, they'd ask, "Mom, whose house am I going to visit today?" It was a given that no matter what in life came up, the rest of us would be there to step in and help out. We supported each other in sickness and we celebrated the holidays and the milestones together. When those of us with a deployed husband would become upset by the network news and distressing accounts of war, the rest of us were shoulders of support and voices of faith and reason. We became a family.

The Driveway Moms group began without much forethought or planning, but its success speaks to the unique bond of military spouses. Perhaps only on a military post can you walk out to mail a letter, stop to talk to a neighbor and two hours later return home and consider it all a normal part of the day and time well spent.

In later years, one mother in our group would tell us that our meet-ups helped her to keep her sanity. She was a nervous, new mom and completely unsure of her decisions at times. For her, it was invaluable to have other ladies to bounce ideas off of and to learn from and most importantly, to know that she was not alone.

Gathering under Julie's large oak tree was an oasis from not only the hot Texas sun, but also from the stresses of motherhood and military spouse duties. It was on the driveway and under that tree that our children learned to get along with others. They laughed,

cried, rode bikes and dressed up like superheroes. We truly had a village to raise our children and to support each other.

When the first of our Driveway Moms packed up to move away, she sat and wept in her boxed up house recalling all the memories that we had made. None of us had expected such gifts of friendship when we moved to Fort Hood. Soon after, the rest of us moved to other military posts and the large oak tree ceased to become a lively gathering point.

The years have gone by and our kids have grown up. They're now in high school and college. Some of us have children attending the same college. Half of our families are no longer in the military. We've had several reunions over the years, and we never cease to marvel at how truly magical that time was. One of us described it as memories that she'll treasure for a lifetime and bonds that were never quite matched anywhere else.

We became improved mothers and military spouses for having spent our time together. Our lives were enriched by simply offering a smile and conversation under the shade of an oak tree. Sometimes the best friendships are born from the simplest beginnings.

A group of military spouses found friendship and support on a shaded driveway. Their simple gatherings impacted and improved their lives.

Head Over Heels in Friendship {Tamra Konczey}

US Army

Army life is full of treasures, some untapped and some joyfully discovered. One of the treasures that I discovered, or in all honesty stumbled upon, has deeply enriched my life.

I met my best friend one sunny afternoon when her beautiful Labrador retriever had broken loose from her grip and ran from her yard to mine. Our quarters were catty-cornered from one another and they had just moved in a few days earlier. Her gregarious Lab had a mission of his own and decided that he would introduce us by bounding up to me and ignoring her pleas to return. My first image of her is of chasing him, with utter horror on her face and wondering whether or not I was a “dog person.” To her relief, I was, and her dog and I were fast friends by the time she caught up with him.

Within that initial encounter we introduced ourselves, realized how much we had in common and promptly made plans for our first walk together. The next day she further solidified our connection with much hilarity by entering my yard with the flair of a circus performer. You see, the combination of strength and excitement from her Lab created tension on the leash, which promptly propelled her into a front flip. We both immediately erupted into laughter, and it was at that moment I knew that we had a bond. This particular moment set the easy tone of our relationship for years to come.

Daily walks became our “thing” and soon after, so did coffee, wine, and workout dates. We quickly became inseparable with each passing day. Our friendship further deepened with her husband’s six-month temporary duty (TDY) trip and my husband being TDY a total of 335 days out of the 25 months we were at this duty

station. She and I even coined the term “PSP,” which stands for “Pseudo Spouse” because we spent so much time together. It was our little joke.

We bailed out flooded basements together, bandaged her Lab after recovering from his emergency surgery, picked up my new dog together, rescued a neighbor and called 911 together, shared in one another’s important life moments like baptisms and promotions, spent countless hours on the phone together, enjoyed movie nights together, cooked meals together, supported one another at the highest and inevitably lowest points, put up an entire chain link fence together, and experienced so many more things too numerous to count. My husband and I even received the honor of being godparents and legal guardian to their daughter when my friend and her husband told us that they were expecting their first child.

I reflect over my relatively short time of seven years as a military spouse and six of those years include an amazing friendship with this Army spouse. This friendship is truly a gift that continues to be one of my most treasured in my military spouse life.

I hope everyone experiences a friend like mine, and that maybe, just maybe, when you go to a new duty station and there is that unexpected chance meeting, you will relish that opportunity with open arms because it may not be a dog bounding into your life, but an amazing friendship.

My Army Journey: Reflections (1994-2015) **{Naida Mundell}**

US Army

Two metaphors best describe my life in the Army. The Army is like a box of surprises and at the same time, is like a tree full of different kinds of fruit that represent the type of people in the Army family. This box of surprises and the people that grow from that tree represent the most precious moments--both happy and sad--in my life as an Army spouse. Over the past 22 years, my box of surprises and that fruit tree are mainly full of my family and friends from all over the world who have proven to be a source of strength for me.

My Army journey began in Hawaii in 1994 when I met my husband, and at that moment in time I never imagined that 21 years later we would be where we are in life today. My husband represents one of the best surprises in that box. He is a kindhearted person, and he loves me unconditionally. I truly believe him when he tells me that he would never trade me for anything. Every morning he gives me the most benign kiss, and like a broken record, tells me he loves me—but in reality, I cherish that broken record, because there have been far too many mornings that his absence prevented me from hearing it.

Like most Army couples can attest, we have had more than our share of ups and downs, and I never imagined the Army would teach me so many life lessons that have allowed me to better understand what truly matters in life. In reflection, I believe that God is responsible for my husband and me meeting. We have three children, two grandchildren and a future together. Collectively, these are the most precious treasures in my box of surprises.

My fruit tree is also full of friends that I have met from all over the world. I never imagined I would meet so many sincere and benevolent people, who care for each other as if they were family. The care and concern demonstrated by my Army friends--my family--was realized when my brother Pedro passed away in 2005, three days after the birth of my daughter Martha, and one day after my husband returned to Afghanistan after his mid-tour leave. My inability to attend my brother's funeral and be with my family during that time of mourning, given these circumstances, still troubles me today.

My Army friends were also there when my grandmother who raised me, passed away three years later when my family was stationed at West Point, NY. Even today, I still feel as if my grandmother is watching over me and protecting me. During these two devastating periods in my life, I cried so much, but I tried hard to never let my children see me cry.

I thank God so much for giving me the strength to make it through those times. I also know that enduring through those life altering events would not have been possible without the support of my Army family. Army life, at times, makes the most trying times even more trying, but with the support of friends, resilience becomes a way of life.

When I think of the Army as a fruit tree, the Army is a tree of different kinds of fruit that represent all kinds of people. Some of the people are sweet like ripe fruit and full of flavor. Others are hard and sour like unripe fruit. If you ask me what kind of fruit I am, I would say that I am like a mango, sometimes hard, green and sour, and sometimes ripe and sweet. When the mango was green, I sometimes made decisions from my heart because those decisions had to be firm even when I realized they were difficult and sour--like a green mango. With time and faith, I knew the results of those

decisions would become sweet just like a ripe mango. Most of the decisions I made were mostly based upon love, like extending the hand of love to a friend in her time of need. These two different characterizations of a mango best represent me and the types of decisions I have made as an Army wife.

I believe that God has given me a solid tree that bears fruit full of seeds of love and as my time as an Army spouse ends, I believe that He has again filled my tree with many friends from different nations here at Carlisle Barracks, PA. These new seeds--mostly my international friends--are my new seeds of love.

An Army wife considers what she has learned about herself and others as her time as a military spouse nears its conclusion.

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The Things We Do For Love {Catty Corson}

US Army

While my husband was en route home for R&R on deployment number 2, I managed to slip on the stairs (darn fuzzy socks!) and break my tailbone; though later my kids would fondly refer to it as when I “broke my butt.” I had enjoyed a wonderful evening with Army wives playing Bunco and had just returned home when it happened.

After deciding that I could just sleep it off, I headed off to bed. I got up the next morning and made it to my one-year-old’s bedroom door before I blacked out from the pain. I fell back, hitting my head and back on a door jamb on the way down. My 12 year old found me 30 minutes later and called 9-1-1. As I lay there in my pajamas in serious pain, I heard my daughter say to the operator,

“My mom has fallen and she can’t get up.” I was laughing, which caused more pain, and all I could think was, “I’m a cliché!”

The first to arrive on the scene were the firemen. I answered their questions but one fireman kept asking me to open my eyes. I kept saying no. I knew I would be embarrassed to look at the men there to help me and I felt like if I couldn’t see them they couldn’t see me... right? Then it was off to the ER. After multiple x-rays and a CAT scan, I was in the hospital, with my eyes closed again, and I felt someone kiss me on the forehead. I opened my eyes and it was my wonderful Army battle buddy, who had jumped out of bed and thrown on some clothes to come and be with me.

Shortly after she arrived, the doctor came in and told me I had a concussion and broken coccyx. He told me about home care, pain medications, and what to do to take care of myself. As I listened, holding my girlfriend’s hand, all I could think was, *my husband will be home in two days*, I can’t have a broken butt! So when the doctor asked if I had any questions, I looked him in the eye and told him, “You do understand ... my husband is coming home for 16 days on Monday.” He simply nodded and said, “Understood.” My battle buddy went out into the hall and I heard her burst into laughter. Another friend arrived and she told her I was obviously going to be okay since all I could think about was the return of my Soldier.

When I arrived home, another battle buddy was there with her husband who was already home on his R&R. They had made my kids breakfast, done some laundry, and cleaned up for me. I couldn’t believe they had come over to help when they had such a short time to spend together and with their kids. Asking for help is very hard for me so I would never have dreamed of calling her while her husband was home. I was incredibly grateful but also shooed them out the door quickly!

Another Army friend showed up to check on me shortly thereafter. She (and my girlfriend who came to the hospital stayed with me all day) took care of my kids, made dinner, and even cleaned and rearranged our finished basement. I swear it was like extreme basement makeover. When they helped me downstairs that night to show me, I was completely overwhelmed. I realized that day that Army wives really do take care of each other. They saw something that needed to be done and they did it, all while taking care of me and my family.

Two days later my husband was flying in and I was obviously very excited but also still in a lot of pain. What does a good Army wife do? She puts on her heeled boots --because she looks best in those--and loads up on pain medication so she can make the walk all the way to the gate to greet her husband.

He, of course, thought I was crazy to be wearing those boots, but the minute I saw his handsome face, I couldn't feel a thing. Nothing is better than the first minute you see each other after a long separation and I wanted it to be perfect. For me, that meant looking perfect for him, even if it was a pain in my backside.

Lessons Learned



- When my husband called and said, “Pack me a bag. I’m leaving in 30 minutes for 6 weeks!” Yikes! {Jennifer Burns}
- I got a voicemail message that said, “I’m on my way to the airport; I don’t know when or if I’ll be coming home.” He turned up on our doorstep four months later. It was a stressful time. {Hayley Parsons}

Quick Response: I started asking myself “What Have I Gotten Myself Into?” when ...

- The first time I started to wonder what the heck had I gotten myself into was at 0300 in a dark loading dock swarming with Soldiers, buses, and families. We had just moved into our on-post quarters when Saddam started acting up over in Iraq. My husband hadn’t even hit his one-year anniversary being in the Army. His unit was activated to deploy; I had unknowingly volunteered to be the FRG Leader and was 6 months pregnant with baby #2. I was there, in the dark, handing out newsletters (on paper... do you remember those?) and trying to answer questions that I had myself. We had no idea how long our Soldiers were going to be gone, what communication was going to be like, or even where exactly they were going. What an eye-opening experience that was! {Jenny O’Rourke}

Lessons Learned as an Army Wife

{S.M.N., Army Wife}

US Army

I grew up as an Army brat and swore to myself that I would never marry a Soldier. I am laughing as I write this because we have been married for eighteen years, and I would not trade it for the world. I would be remiss, however, if I did not tell you a few things that I have learned along the way as an Army wife.

It is not always fair. The Army asks a tremendous amount of our husbands. The hours are long, training can go on for months, and separation is expected. Many of us have endured multiple deployments, lasting up to fifteen months. I cannot tell you how many times I was alone packing us out for a PCS to a new duty station. Or, the number of times I have completely set up a house alone because the needs of the Army. Along the way, I have learned that finding a way to channel the negative into a positive will make things better for everyone. I found running to be my savior. It was a way for me to clear my head and work through the frustrations. Many times, I had a good cry on those runs.

There will be disappointments. Disappointments come in all shapes and sizes. They can range from missing the birth of a child, to missing high school graduation, to your spouse not getting a promotion. Allow yourself, and your spouse, the opportunity to work through the disappointment. Then find a way to move forward. There is no point in living in the past. This may be cliché, but it is so true—you cannot start the next chapter in your life if you keep re-reading the last one!

It is never boring. There is never boredom in the Army. We have had orders changed at the very last minute, which has involved household goods going one place, and us going another. Luckily, our household goods have always found their way back to us. I have had the opportunity to live all over the United States and the world. There are many places I would not “pick” for our family. However, when these places “pick” us, we have always found a way to make the most of it.

Don't wear your husband's rank. You are your own person. Remember that when you meet people. Do not introduce yourself by saying I am the wife of [insert rank and last name]. I think people find this off-putting. In most instances, if they want to know what your husband does, they will ask. You do not have to tell them. Keep your husband's rank out of your friendships. Remember, it is his job, and it is not your identity.

The friends you make will last a lifetime. You will meet so many interesting people, from such diverse backgrounds. Take time to listen to their stories, and learn from them. The friendships I have cultivated in the Army life have been my greatest gift. The friendships are what have sustained me through the ups and downs, and disappointments. I remember the day I gave birth and my husband was deployed. I was so scared. It was my friends, my Army sisters, who held my hand, fed me ice chips, and made me laugh because they knew I was missing my husband. I love this group of women—they are strong, beautiful, independent, and gracious.

Being an Army wife is no doubt tough. Through the change, the disappointments, and the ups and downs, know that these events are shaping you. However, if you embrace this life and “bloom where you are planted”, it will shape you into being a strong, resilient, and independent woman.

Dear Military Spouse {Army Spouse}

US Army

Dear Military Spouse,

I know that you are upset that your Soldier's name was not on the promotion list. Or maybe it was the command list on which your Soldier's name was not to be found.

Know that you are not alone in your disappointment and allow me to lend some perspective as someone who has been there.

My husband has served in the Army for twenty-four years. He has always served with distinction and has been highly regarded by his peers and superiors. He has a history of adeptly mentoring and taking care of his Soldiers and never wavering in his commitment to the success of any mission.

My mind is full of memories of him standing at the battalion motor pool gate shaking the hands of each of his unit's almost eight hundred Soldiers prior to a training holiday. He'd wish them well and urge them to stay safe so that their unit would be reunited again at the holiday's end. He valued each of them and made them mindful of their individual contributions to the unit. His ability to communicate and lead others has been something that I have long admired.

Fast forward to the day that all of his peers were included on a promotion list to Colonel, and he was not. I was the indignant one upon hearing the news. I felt that we had sacrificed, supported the community, and zealously done our part as an Army family. I felt that he had earned that promotion. Others expressed their shock that he was not included on the list as well.

My husband gently reminded me that the Army owed him nothing. He told me that his selfless service came from his love of his country and if the Army decided that he was not to be named on the promotion list, so be it. He added that he would not change a thing and would never have regrets about his career, the people he was privileged to serve among, or the life experiences that the Army afforded our family.

I questioned him as to what he (or we) could have done differently and if he was being penalized for not deploying often enough in the Army's eyes. He had experienced several planned deployments that were eventually canceled. He told me to never look back. He reminded me that though he was ready, willing, and wanted to deploy, those cancellations provided him the great gift of time with his children. He spoke of getting to teach our kids to swim and ride bikes and that he would never dare to trade those times for anything.

As spouses, sometimes we get wrapped up in our Soldier's title or rank. We all think our Soldier is deserving of great things. The reality is that as the years go by and the pyramid narrows, there are only so many opportunities for a vast pool of many talented Soldiers.

Never let your Soldier's promotions and titles define who you are as a couple or family. When this military ride is over, all you have is each other. The real mark of success will be when you finish this military life as a strong family with a treasure of loving memories and the energy and capacity to go out and make a positive difference in another realm.

Don't continue to be sad and questioning of what might have been. It's okay to feel initial shock and disappointment. That's only natural but never let it consume you. We cannot change the

thoughts and reasons behind the selection of some and the overlooking of others.

In the end, disappointment can be a great lesson in humility. It was for me. It was a tough but valuable lesson for our entire family. We decided to stay in and not retire immediately. He still loved the Army.

Two years later, as my husband was weeks from submitting his retirement paperwork, his name appeared on the promotion list. We could hardly believe our eyes as this sort of thing is highly uncommon. I had much more gratitude for his promotion than I would have had two years earlier. I am wiser for what we went through. I know that this military adventure will come to an end one day. When that day comes, I'll be sad to leave the military community, but I'll be more accepting of it and grateful for having had the experience.

Sincerely,

An Army Spouse

A Little Namasté Goes a Long Way {Amy Kirk}

US Army

It was autumn in Germany, and I was volunteering in my son's first grade classroom. His teacher, Loretta, asked me about my hobbies as we sat cutting out geometric shapes for a future class project. She was friendly and eager to learn more about her classroom volunteer.

"I love yoga," I responded. "I teach it at the post gym, but with scheduling issues, decreased attendance during this deployment, and another yoga teacher coming on board who'll compete for the few students I have, I think my yoga teaching days are ending." Looking back, I'm sure I sounded defeated and somewhat resentful. I'd successfully taught yoga the prior year, and it bothered me that my situation on that front was changing.

Loretta asked me more about yoga. She'd recently read an article about its benefits, and she was intrigued. We became fast friends, and I looked forward to volunteering at the school. I felt needed there. I witnessed how hard elementary school teachers work.

Soon after, Loretta approached me with a request. Would I be willing to teach yoga once a week to the teachers at the elementary school? She viewed it as an opportunity to reduce the stress of the teachers as they daily faced classrooms of students with a deployed parent. The teachers would provide a babysitter for my children down the hall from the cafeteria where I could teach after school on Tuesdays. It would be a volunteer assignment.

I needed a change and a fresh perspective. With an eager class and a deserving one at that, I left my teaching position at the gym and began to focus on this new willing group of participants.

Our first class was very basic and slowly paced. Most of the teachers had never practiced yoga. I admired that all arrived for class prepared with mats, comfortable clothing, and a sense of adventure. There were giggles as some teachers felt awkward in some of the poses and laughed at themselves, especially during the happy baby and pigeon poses. One teacher couldn't be persuaded to remove her socks even though I told her that the poses would be easier without them. All throughout the class, I reminded them of a basic concept of yoga: to accept where you are on your yoga journey as well as your life's journey.

Besides linking breath with motion, yoga is about patience with oneself and resisting comparisons and competition with others. Each week as I'd repeat this mantra to the teachers, I began to really listen to my own words. I realized for perhaps the first time in a long while that there were some areas in my life that required acceptance and humility. Was I too competitive at times? How had I resolved conflict in the past? Was I accepting my own limitations that I would never be the perfect parent, the most dynamic family readiness group advisor, or the most sought after yoga instructor? These were questions, seemingly buried before, that were now coming to the forefront of my life as I taught yoga to the school teachers.

Seasons passed and I took great pleasure in seeing the sturdier tree poses and marked increased balance and flexibility of the class. I also enjoyed getting to know my students and having this unique circle of friends. They became another lifeline for me during my husband's deployment. I was learning more about them and about myself with each sun salutation and warrior pose. We

were all growing in ways that I couldn't have predicted. I'd even convinced the sock lover to go barefoot during class!

Two years later it was time for our family to PCS back to the United States. I taught the last yoga class with tears in my eyes as I offered a final Namasté bow. In the years since, several of us remain close. Our lives have taken many twists and turns and sadly, one class member passed away. The elementary school which brought us together eventually closed with the downsizing of U.S. troops in Germany.

Memories and friendships that resulted from that class remain golden to me. The mirror that was held up to my own life from having taught that wonderful group has been a gift. As is often the case, the teacher learned much from the students. Success no longer meant being the best, but instead became the joy of freely sharing something that means so much to me. I also learned that it's important that I continuously seek to grow and to be persistent in working on those areas of my life that need improvement. With each roll out of my yoga mat, I think of these friends and of the lessons learned from our time together and I offer them a Namasté from across the miles.

A volunteer assignment results in long overdue self-evaluation, motivation for self-growth and an appreciation for the joy of giving.

The Carlisle Experience



Going on Adventures - The Carlisle Experience! {Donna Kendrick and Mary Elizabeth Hedrick}

US Army

Who knew there could be so many adventures here and near Carlisle Barracks?

You are the holder of your happiness while at the United States Army War College (USAWC). It really can be the best year of your life! This writing serves as both a celebratory summary of our year and a window on the “Carlisle Experience.”

The size of the barracks can fool you at first. It really is more than just a postage stamp! With well-appointed gyms, the two-mile track, trails, neighborhoods, the dog park and a new youth center, the opportunities to stay active and to meet new friends

are abundant and everything is within an easy walking distance.

This past year included many USAWC-organized events to encourage camaraderie. A Community Information Fair was held in the late summer. Everyone who attended learned about all that the post and surrounding area have to offer for recreation, self-improvement, fitness, education and travel. We were then able to get our adventure file started and we kept our calendar as full as we desired.

Other late summer and autumn events included a Welcome Picnic, The Boatyard Wars (student seminars built two-man boats out of cardboard and raced them!), and the Air Shipwreck Ball which during our year was planned as a fun 80’s themed family event that was held outside. An annual Chili Cook-off brought warmth and festivity to our winter.

Many spouses joined the Carlisle Barracks Spouses’ Club (CBSC), an organization dedicated to providing social connections and community service. They hosted delightful monthly luncheons and interesting day trips to regional sights. The LeTort View Community Center Pub served as a hidden gem where neighbors and seminar members got together to enjoy food and company.

If you are coming here in the future, we suggest that you try to seek out someone that you don’t already know. Common interests may be shared and new adventures can begin, particularly if you reach out to some of the International Fellow (IF) spouses. “Know Your World” was hosted by the International students and has become a traditional event that is not to be missed. We had the opportunity to learn about all countries represented at the USAWC this year. In addition, the IF spouses gave interesting presentations as part of the Conversation and Culture Program. They talked about their traditions and they let us sample their tasty food.

We even learned how to dance! Ballroom dance lessons were available on post, and the instructor had the talent and ability to teach us how to move our feet in ways we never knew they would go. He even made the husbands feel willing to get out on the dance floor.

The biggest industry in Pennsylvania is agriculture/farming. Especially in the fall, festivals galore took place and featured apples, pumpkins, gourds and corn. Flowers and fresh produce are readily available in this area of the state. We enjoyed both picking our own flowers and choosing beautiful bouquets from nearby farms and markets. Juicy berries (blueberries, blackberries, and raspberries) can be harvested at the touch of your hand on nearby berry farms.

Opportunities for family outings were endless. From the Halloween parade in downtown Carlisle to the Mifflinburg Christmas Market to the annual tree lighting ceremony in front of the post chapel, there were many ways to mark the seasons with family and friends. Day trips to Amish markets, antique stores, and historical sites gave us an appreciation for this unique part of our country.

Carlisle is situated just a few miles from the Appalachian Trail. Hikes for every fitness level - flat, steep, snakes, and rocks - can provide peaceful, serene, unexpected beauty and trail magic. Outdoor Recreation organized many trips for hiking, snowshoeing, canoeing, and other outdoor activities. Consider taking the opportunity to ski, snowboard or snow tube while you are in the area. The youth were able to enjoy their own adventures through Youth Services and the chapel youth group. From climbing ropes to amusement parks to snow tubing, the opportunities were plentiful.

Our opportunities for adventure were infinite during our year at USAWC. We enjoyed our year at Carlisle Barracks! If you are coming here in the future, be sure to take advantage of your time here to enjoy your family, to explore the area, and to connect with friends old and new. Don't let time slip away; embark on a new adventure every day!

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Life at the War College {Franca Bratte}

Nigerian Army

When my husband told the family that he would be going to the U.S. for his War College course, my entire family was excited. A few months after the announcement, preparation for his departure started. When the day came, he finally left for the U.S. The rest of the family was looking forward to joining him in the U.S. at a later date.

My husband left first because I was working and the children were in school. After six months, I got a phone call from my husband that we should start preparing to come over to the U.S. I had to quit my job and make necessary arrangements for our eldest son who was in boarding school and was preparing to write his Junior High examination.

Our two younger sons and I departed Nigeria, and almost 14 hours later, arrived in Carlisle. A few days after our arrival in Carlisle, I received an email from the coordinator of the International Fellow (IF) spouses informing me of some of the activities they have for us. I was excited and looked forward to meeting the other IF spouses. My first outing as part of the IF spouse program was the Hershey's Foundation Trip. I was really amazed at the awesome

preparation made by the college to take the entire IF spouses out on a trip at their own expense. The coordinators made me feel welcomed, especially being my first outing with the other ladies. Later, I was briefed by the coordinator on other events coming up. I was really dumbfounded with the whole arrangement knowing that the trips, parties, and other activities were organized for free.

After my first trip, I started participating in other events and activities such as luncheons, apple picking, country presentations, and FLAGS, just to mention a few. These activities and events helped me to improve socially, academically, and otherwise and also kept me busy. Without these activities, it would have been very boring staying indoors twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week for one year. Notwithstanding, my kids were always willing and happy going to school on weekdays.

In the past, it had been my husband attending all his courses alone while I stayed back, taking care of the home front and ensuring that everything is cool and calm. But on this occasion, I am glad that it was not just my husband, but the entire family that came to Carlisle.

At the end of the course when we have returned home, I will always remember with nostalgia that the whole family was privileged to be part of my husband's fantastic Carlisle experience.

F.L.A.G.S. {Kristine Goodfellow}

US Air Force

The Facilitating Leadership and Group Skills (F.L.A.G.S.) Program has been offered to U.S. Army War College Spouses for over twenty years. Intended to foster leadership as well as mutual respect and understanding, it is a curriculum and tradition that is unique to Carlisle. As a tribute to the F.L.A.G.S. facilitators, graduates, and the program itself, we feature this poem which is routinely read at F.L.A.G.S. graduation ceremonies and was penned by a past F.L.A.G.S. graduate.

Taking this FLAGS course, we took a chance,
Our leadership skills we sought to enhance.
So we let the cleaning go and the laundry slide,
To belong to a group where we were free to confide.
With trust in each other to listen and learn,
We gave each other some comfort and even concern

We will move to other places and use the skill,
New roles as leaders that we intend to fulfill.
During this week, we gained some friends,
A bond that time and location always transcends.
We shared our secrets and stories did tell,
On families did we mostly dwell.
Sometimes the stories made us blush bright red,
Sitting at the edge of our seats to hear what was said.

As military wives we are the queens in our castles,
Putting out fires and coping with hassles.
Sometimes the queen has to hold down the fort,
Rising to the occasion and never falling short.
In this task she succeeds because she's strong and resilient,
Through deployments and wars she remains caring and
brilliant.

Doing her part and sometimes his, too,
If it needs to be done, then that's what she'll do.
Sisters who shine the light to lead the way,
With the love of a warrior so far away.
For our children we walk with the torch held high,
Keeping our feet on the ground but reaching for the sky.
Sometimes mom, sometimes nurse, teacher and mentor,
Our hearts remain wide open for new friends to enter.
She's always strong and yet always gentle,
The military spouse's bond is never accidental.

We "trusted the process" enough to speak,
And found in each other an ally this week.
Strong women taught about leadership,
An arsenal of information they used to equip.
So we'll know ourselves even better,
To be a good mentor and even trendsetter.
As we discussed leadership styles at length,
Feeling humbled by stories of courage and strength.

We know what it takes since we've come this far,
We've dealt with the odd, the tough and bizarre.
Juggling roles and titles as fast as we can,
We do it for love of a gallant military man.
But know there is a sisterhood of inner strength and
self-reliance,
And military spouses make a quick, beautiful alliance.

A circle of women so elegant and refined,
We won't soon forget after we are all reassigned.
For we are no more unfamiliar wives,
But now friends in each other's lives.
Thank you for being my new FLAGS friend!

A Spouse on the Road to Abilene {Air Force Spouse}

US Air Force

I recently had the opportunity to watch *The Abilene Paradox* during the Facilitating Leadership and Group Skills (FLAGS) course. As an Air Force spouse, I was familiar with concept: a group of people collectively decide on a course of action that is counter to the preferences of the individuals in the group. However, I had never heard of the film. In considering the film, I started to reflect upon the role of a military spouse on the long ride to Abilene.

I have found myself many times in my 20+ years as a military spouse asking my husband why. Why are you going? Why is it done that way? Why do we have to?

I have been to “Abilene” a few times. As a military spouse, I have gone, not gone, done, and not done things in accordance with needs (but not necessarily the desires) of the group.

In our family, my role for the road trip is not always to decide if we should go; sometimes we just don’t have a choice. My job instead is to pack snacks, prepare the kids for our destination, and make the ride as pleasant as possible for everyone in the car even if they think they don’t want to go.

After meeting many spouses from each branch of service, I am confident that I am not unique. Military spouses are smart, determined, pragmatic, and protective. I love my spouse and support his passion to serve. I’m learning how to accept those “whys” and to make the best of them. I give each ride a lot of thought, both those that are required and those that might be “roads to Abilene.”

Raising Military Kids



Quick Response: You Know You're A Military Kid When ...

- You have to tell your friends that they need a valid state or federal ID to hang out at your house. {Cathy Fox}
- You've lived in so many places it's hard to say where you're from. {Sally Dawson}
- You're the only kid in your class that doesn't know your address, because you've moved so much that you don't even try to memorize it anymore. {Kerri Dickey}
- A "normal" summer for you means moving to another place. {Kerri Dickey}

- You have friends living all over the world. {Kerri Dickey}
- You are asked your NEW zip code at the checkout. You have a long, awkward pause before telling them...because you have to go through the entire address in your head before you can give the zip code. {Cathy Fox}
- You meet people and they ask when you are moving. {Cathy Fox}
- You have to Skype in the middle of the night if you want to talk to your friend who moved to another country. {Nathan Cook}
- You're always "the new kid" in school and make friends quickly. {Traci Cook}
- You are proud of your service member! {Traci Cook}

Their Story {Karla J. Bilafer}

US Army

It was a week before Christmas in Korea. A young military family from our unit worried that their baby was about to be born—much too early for the baby for which they had longed for many years.

The baby was not due until early March and it was only mid-December. She felt labor pains coming on and went quickly to the Army hospital in Seoul. But because we were stationed in Korea and medical resources there are limited, her doctors transferred her to a Korean women's specialty hospital in Gangnam, the part of Seoul made so famous by Korean pop singer, Psy. The Korean doctors knew how to help but the maternity ward was located in the basement with no windows. And the expectant mother was a native Spanish speaker struggling to understand the doctors' sometimes broken English. However they managed to communicate, the doctors kept the baby from coming before the holiday. A Christmas gift to be sure, but one with a dark lining.

What this young family did not realize was that their journey had just begun. The baby seemed determined to come early and the doctors equally determined to keep her from doing so. Christmas came and went in the windowless room. Hours and then days crept by. Meanwhile the cries of women in labor could be heard through the paper-thin walls—each woman on her way to embracing a newborn while our family kept waiting and praying that their turn would come, but not just yet.

The couple asked often whether they could go home for a while. The doctors said no because home was north of Seoul. They asked for a room with windows and were granted that small gift. Her new room had many windows and some even opened to let

in the crisp, winter air. She stayed in the hospital bed. He slept on a couch. When days began to turn into weeks with no immediate end in sight, he went back to work. Each day he arose early to commute the hour and a half to his unit, and in the evenings he returned again by rail to spend the night with his wife.

Week after week they stayed in the hospital. The baby tried over and over again to come early. Some days she felt better than others. Some days the nurses were better than others. Most days the food was like food in any hospital around the world—unappetizing. Every day was long. And the weeks soon drew out into a month, then two.

With her strong will and his loving support, the little angel finally arrived in mid-February. If any other couple ever wanted a baby so much, it would be hard to say. But without a doubt, what her parents went through to bring her into this world exemplifies all of the strength and good character of an Army family. Each time my life's circumstances seem difficult, I need only to think of their story.

The Power of a Proper Goodbye {Erin Dockery}

US Marine Corps

I have one tidbit to share that I have learned along the way. My husband has been in the Marine Corps for over 20 years and I've always gone out of my way to prepare and support my kids during a move. But it wasn't until this year that it became abundantly clear to me how powerful proper goodbyes are to children.

My 8 year old son came home from school recently and burst into tears because his classmate, his little crush, will not return this year because she is undergoing treatment for cancer. Through his sobs, he shared his pain about not being able to ask her to be his Valentine and that he would not be able to say goodbye to her when we move in June. I've always known that goodbyes are important, but it wasn't until now that I have seen how critically important closure is for kids.

It's amazing that, even after 20+ years, I'm still learning and making myself better. As far as my son and his sweet girl, I've promised him that we will find a way for him to say goodbye, in a way that makes his heart happy, before we leave.

Special Advice for Special Needs {Cari Tedesco}

US Army

Moving with a severely autistic child is difficult at best, but having his father deploy is extremely challenging. As our daughter was screaming for her daddy after we left the drop-off point, our oldest son, who is autistic, just sat there dazed. Our youngest child, a baby, was crying because his routine was off. It was the first of many interesting nights.

How can you possibly explain moving and deployments to an autistic child?

Joseph was diagnosed with classical autism right after he turned two. We moved shortly after his diagnosis. We were devastated and overwhelmed when he was diagnosed. There are so many feelings and thoughts that go through your mind during such a tumultuous time. I tried to focus on helping him and caring for our newborn daughter.

There are many things that we've tried to prepare our son for moves, but the most successful thing we've done is using social stories that my husband would make on the computer. The stories would show pictures of moving boxes, a moving truck and the hotels where we would stay along the way. We would also have a picture of our new house (if it was available) and the new school and therapy center(s) where Joseph would receive care upon the move. On that note, we've found that it's possible to organize therapy services ahead of time, before we PCS. That way it's ready to implement once we've moved. This has been very helpful for our family.

As deployments involve another major transition to explain, we thought, along with our therapist, Christina, that having a social story for Joseph about his dad's deployment would help. So before deploying, my husband did what he does best, and put together a booklet for us to read to Joseph both prior to and during the deployment. By sharing what he could with our son, it helped our family tremendously and it prepared us all for my husband's departure.

Besides preparing Joseph, I knew I had to keep myself going for the deployment's duration and respite programs gave me the breaks that I very much needed. Our family qualified for forty hours a month and that helped us all a great deal. It was nice to have a qualified person take care of my special needs kiddo. It's important to make that time for yourself, especially if you are the parent of a special needs child.

Finally, I would urge parents of special needs children to seek friendship in organizations. For me, my spirituality is grounding and I received much support from attending the chapel programs. Along with my religious faith, having people that care about and pray for you and your children is so comforting, especially during a deployment.

Deployments are a challenge for every family, but especially so for those with a special needs child. In the end, our family has persevered. I learned that with some extra planning and use of programs on post, our family could weather multiple challenges successfully. That's not to say that the home front was not without its difficulties from time to time. We may be a little worse for the wear, but we're stronger for it and we're together.

Celebrating Change {Traci Cook}

US Army

Military kids seem to have their very own brand of independence and confidence, honed by years of moving to new places, meeting new people, and making their way in new situations. When my kids talk about taking a family trip, they don't stop at the local amusement park. They suggest places like Anchorage, Alaska, London, England, and Vicenza, Italy ... all places where we have military friends. When we discuss possible college options, the world of higher education has no limits. They see no issue in moving across the country—or across the world—as they plan their futures.

I clearly remember a military kid I met many years ago, before I had kids of my own. My husband and I had just moved into temporary quarters at Fort Stewart, Georgia when we heard a knock at our door. When I opened the door, a little girl about nine years old was standing there with her parents nearby. "Welcome!" she said, "I am new here, too. Do you have any kids I could play with?" We didn't have any kids but thanked her for her welcome and wished her well in her search for new friends. That little girl left an impression on me. I loved that she was making the most of her situation and had the courage to seek out new friendships. It also made me wonder what personality traits she would take into her adult life—confidence, independence, resilience—that were enhanced by living the Army life during her childhood.

Fast forward ten years ... to the first welcome home ceremony we experienced where my boys were old enough to understand what was happening. My husband was returning home after a 12-month deployment and we were beyond excited. When we arrived at the parade field, my sons immediately approached a group

of kids gathered on the field and, within minutes, were playing like old friends. As “arrival time” grew nearer, I watched the growing group of kids on the field. A DJ was playing fun songs and they ran and danced and played like they had all been friends for life. It occurred to me that having a deployed parent in common just might be as strong a bond as knowing each other since birth.

Eventually, the deejay announced that the buses were just moments away. We watched as a military police car, with sirens blaring and lights flashing, escorted our Soldiers to the field. The Soldiers exited the bus, moved into a formation, and began marching. As they got closer to us, the deejay announced, “Ladies and Gentlemen! America’s Heroes are HOME!” The cheers were deafening and the front row of kids looking for their Soldier-parent caught my attention. The looks of pure joy and excitement on these little faces were a wonder to see.

As the short ceremony ended, the announcer said, “In the fine tradition of the Cavalry, it is time to find your Soldier ... CHARGE!” I think my oldest might have broken some sort of land-speed record as he sprinted to tackle his dad. As caught up as I was in greeting my husband, my hero, and the love of my life ... I still was astounded at the Army kids around me, all welcoming their hero home, and all ready for whatever might come next.

The experiences of being an Army Family have molded my kids in a number of ways. They know what it’s like to say goodbye to a parent for months at a time, they understand the worry of having a dad in a combat zone, and they are aware of world events in a way that defies their age. They have opinions about political topics and can discuss the cultures of a variety of countries. My boys have friends all over the country that they could see tomorrow like there was never a pause in time.

I am so very proud of the young men that my Army kids are becoming. I believe their lives as military kids will prepare them to meet the challenges of life in a successful and productive way. I know that their worldview is expanded because of their many moves, and I am satisfied that they have a kind of courage in facing new situations that can only be attributed to the years of practice they have had in conquering challenges and celebrating change.

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A Life-Changing Story {Cheri Fish}

US Army Reserve

Recently, I overheard someone who was talking about their horrible experience with the Army Family Readiness Group (FRG) and how it was just filled with women who were all about the drama and a complete waste of time and money. Our family, however, can personally say that being a part of an FRG can be, quite literally, life changing. This is our story.

It all started with a simple inquiry.

Our unit was having a Family Day and I was at Lowe’s Home Improvement store trying to refill four different propane tanks. I was looking for a gas propane gauge, and I walked up to a nice-looking couple and asked if they knew where I could find this particular item. After explaining what I was looking for and my purpose (no, I wasn’t a terrorist), the couple asked me politely if they could attend the Family Day event with me. Little did I know that by saying yes to their request, it would forever change the dynamics of both families.

After spending the day with the Soldiers and family members and seeing all the smiles on their faces, the couple then asked to join the unit's FRG, and seven of their family members each elected to take on a position within the FRG. They were very active participants in each and every event that was FRG and unit related. It was also during this time that my immediate family was invited over many times to their house and vice versa for dinner. At these dinners, we had heartfelt discussions of the military lifestyle.

Then it happened one day. The family that had supported our troops and their families for several months now needed our support. They had received a phone call to please come pick up their one-year-old grandson -- the child's mother had left him at her maternal grandmother's house and had simply vanished. Prior to this, the child's father had recently gotten out of jail and was having some difficulties getting a job and caring for his son. Since we had become so close to this family, we decided to help with whatever they needed to include watching the child periodically.

After a short amount of time, the dad had finally gained legal custody of the little boy, and we decided to ask if we could adopt this wonderful child. Unfortunately, the dad immediately said no, and our hearts were broken. We continued to try to help out here and there, and then once again, the unexpected happened.

About a month or so later, we were sitting at our youngest daughter's high school graduation, and she had just walked across the stage to receive her diploma. At that moment, my cell phone went off and the text message read, "Come over tomorrow and let's talk about adoption." To say that we were elated was an understatement. The grandparents of the child had talked to the dad and had convinced him that letting us adopt the child would be in the best interest of everyone involved, including the child. Although the grandparents loved and cherished the child, they were

already raising the child's older brother, and as much as they wanted to take on the responsibility of raising another grandchild, it was too difficult for them.

Once we were given the go-ahead for the adoption process, the next few days were a blur. We were in the process of a PCS move from California to Portland, Oregon. Paperwork was filed quickly that granted us guardianship of the child. One year later, we finally got the call -- the adoption was final. We all celebrated like there was no tomorrow.

The little boy is now five and a half years old, and he has already experienced so much being with his new military family. He has lived in four different states since he was born. He has flown Space A in two different military aircraft and was even able to go inside the cockpit, where a young Air Force pilot gave him the flag off his shoulder. Pending orders and fingers crossed, he will get to see Germany and the countries surrounding it soon.

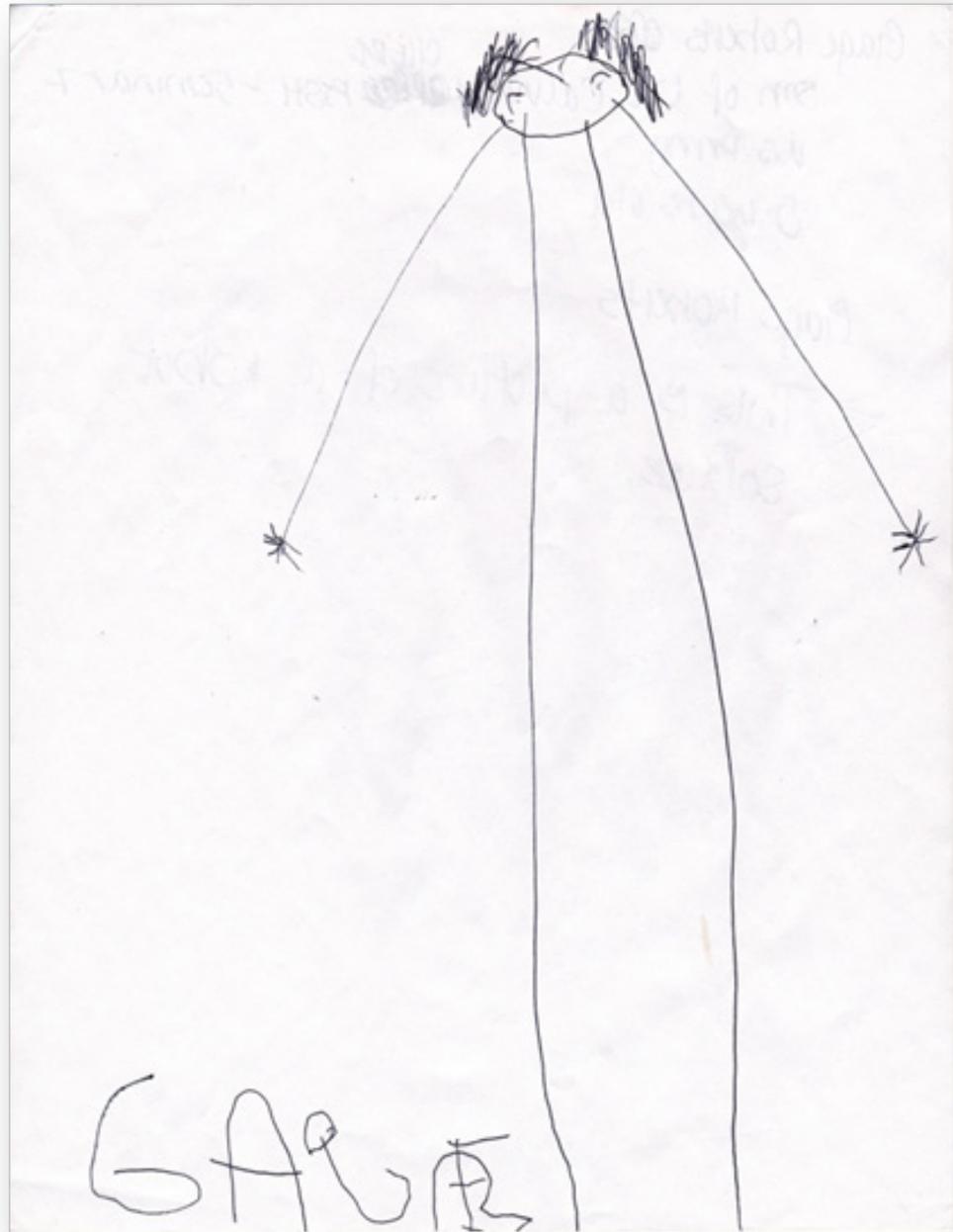
Most importantly, the little boy is surrounded by family that adores and loves him so very much. We are so blessed that he is our son and can't imagine our lives without him.

If you remember at the beginning of our story, I was looking for a gas propane gauge to refill the propane tanks. Would anyone care to guess what our wonderful son's name is? Ironically, his birth name is Gage Mason.

A life changing experience like ours is very rare in the FRG; however, I do believe that FRGs can and have made a difference in Soldiers and Family Members lives. Open your hearts and open your minds, and one day you may find that your FRG will change your life forever.

Artwork: Robot Soldier {Gage Roberts, age 5}

US Army Reserve



Artwork 1 by Gage Roberts

Stories from Our Kids



- You are the only sophomore in your class that has a driver's license, since you got yours in another state that offers them a year before your current state does! {Lorelei Coplen}
- Someone asks you where you are from; you answer "what year?" {Michelle Pantleo}
- Your parents tell you how much you've matured based on where we lived and not because of your age. Example: "you matured so much when we lived in TX." {Maribel Polanco}

Quick Response: You Know You're A Military Kid When ...

- You go on vacation and after arriving you comment, "we drove all that way and never had to go through the gate and show our ID." {Kathy Kraft}
- You think you are fortunate to only attend 2 (or 3) high schools. {Kathy Kraft}
- You have had a driver's permit in more than one state before actually getting your license. {Kathy Kraft}
- You have shot records from multiple states. {Kathy Kraft}

A Dandelion Life {A Sonnet by Nathan Cook, age 15}

US Army

To be as a dandelion flower,
Forever moving in accordance to
An unknowable, controlling power.
Growing anywhere presented to you.
Learning, befriending, moving on again.
A parent sent across the seas to war.
All we can do is pray and hope to win.
To bring an end, this fight we all abhor.
My home is everywhere and nowhere.
The sun never sets on my friends at all,
For many friendships have I started. Where?
Anywhere, yellow shining bright for y'all.
Dandelions life is hard, in a word.
But I would not give it up for the world.

The "official" flower of the military child is the dandelion. Dandelions, like military kids, can put down roots almost anywhere. They are impossible to destroy. They adapt easily and can survive nearly anywhere. They bloom everywhere the wind carries them.

Artwork: A Dandelion Life {Nathan Cook, age 15}

US Army



Artwork 2 by Nathan Cook

Hope for the Somedays {Abigail Payne, age 17}

US Army

It was my last chance to walk the trail that had been my escape the whole summer. Despite the weather that had tormented the past few summer days with rain and winds, the morning air was balmy and quiet. But the sun was just above the hills, rising up to its full height in the sky and the heat was coming quickly.

Normally, I'd walk late in the evening when it was cooler and serene and the sun was as close to setting as it could be; it never truly went down during those Alaskan summers. That was something I relished. But I had to walk in the morning this one last time, because we were leaving; we were moving out to Kansas. The Expedition and truck were packed full, sitting in our driveway as my parents were closing and handing over the house keys.

Just a few days ago, I'd been swaying on the porch swing sipping sweet tea and watching one brown box after another be hauled out to moving vans. I'd been painting white primer over the burnt orange walls of my little square bedroom and exploring the echoes of an empty home. And now the day was here. No turning back, nothing left to do but move forward -- to change.

Chiming Bells and Prickly Roses were sprouting all over and the meadow of tall grass was dotted with the confetti of bushes abundant with new blue and pink buds. The dirt beneath my flip-flop clad feet was hard packed from ATV's regularly traveling throughout the spider web of trails. I didn't need to think about where I was going or look ahead at the trail, this stroll through the woods along the river had become a thing of habit. More than that. It was a luxury I indulged in every day as it provided a few minutes for me to think, to dream, or to not do anything at all. Tanner got his

exercise and I was renewed. I felt free.

When the steady flip-flopping sounds from the rubber sandals on my feet were too vexing to the soft silence, I slid them off and held them in the same hand that grasped the worn leather leash belonging to the only one who shared those sacred evening strolls with me, our dog, Tanner. The damp dirt felt cool beneath my feet as I spotted his white, feathery tail ahead of me, weaving around the tall grasses and flowers. Watching him enjoy this time, which was just as much a pleasure for him as it was for me, I slowly walked along. His graying muzzle turned back to sneak a peek at me, and his inquisitive expression seemed to say, "Are you coming? Hurry up!" He ran a ways up the trail, then stopped and waited for me to catch up, and then would go bounding off again.

Something about him being in the woods and the way he got excited when we came close to the spot at the river where I let him swim made my heart happy. All the stress of the day would dissolve from my body, seeping through the soles of my feet, to be left behind, leaving my shoulders loose and mind carefree. I loved it, delighted in it, looked forward to it.

This walk was different though, because it would never happen again; at least for a long time and never in the same way. Moving didn't worry me because I had done it plenty of times before as the army directed my father to new duty stations. I thought I was ready for another change, for a new adventure. But leaving what I knew and loved so much was so difficult that it was hard to be excited. Alaska, unlike any other place, had become a part of me and was my home. The bittersweet feeling of loss carved a hole inside me. Like I could really, truly feel my heart aching. I wasn't finding much relief for my heavy heart and mind. Tanner couldn't even plunge into the river because Mom would certainly kill me if I brought home a wet dog right before cramming into the Expedition

for a two week road trip.

As we neared the swimming place and what I always thought was the prettiest spot along the river, I unconsciously picked a small white flower with round petals from its stem at the side of the trail. Nothing but a nervous gesture, I suppose. I started twisting it between my fingers and studying its shape and form. It was delicate and intricate, and wild all at once. I kept it in my hand as I broke from the path and trekked down to the river bank.

After expertly making my way down the steep dirt ledge, I reached the pebbly shore. As if he knew everything, Tanner busied himself with something on the trail and didn't pay a glance towards the water. The weeks of packing and chaos and stress hadn't gone unnoticed by him; he knew something was going on. Even he knew the importance of that day. I stood there, letting the sun warm my cheeks, and breathed in fresh, crystal clear Alaskan air. I tried to capture the sensation and save it since mountain air would not be the way to describe Kansas skies.

A bittersweet realization that I would never get back to that moment, that place and time in my life, choked up my throat. I would never be the same person I was, and I would never experience an Alaskan summer like I was then. This time of my life would become a memory that I could never relive, only replay. Overwrought with emotions, all at once, the months of doubts and fears that had been pressed down now churned in my gut. The emotions seemed to be boulders on my shoulders and in that very moment, it all became just too heavy. Too much to bear any longer. The relief I sought after seemed unattainable - the unknowns were too scary and the knowns were too sweet to leave behind.

The thought of leaving the place surrounding me brought me grief, and the hole torn by loss seemed to be getting larger and

larger. It was a strange feeling, leaving and not only missing the people and the place but the person that I was at that time and place because I'd never be the same again. I sunk my toes into the cool sand, ankles deep in clean, natural water. So weak and lost in emotions, only a few words escaped my lips and carried across the breeze, "I'm surrendering it all, everything to you Lord. Whatever your plan is, I know it is good. I trust you Lord." A few words, but powerful they were.

With those words I released the baggage and in turn the weight with a deep breath. The overcast clouds guarding my soul broke open enough to let their pent up waters escape in tears. With droplets sliding down my cheeks, I remembered the little flower bud with symmetrical petals that I had been holding in my clammy hand. Now it was beginning to wilt, but still beautiful in its own simplistic way. Without any thought to why I did it, I laid it upright on the cool water and watched it drift away, slow and smooth with the current. As I surrendered my path to God, I was just like the flower being moved by the soft river. That flower was me. Though slightly crushed, it was still unbroken. Plucked from its home and drifting to a new place, but all under the control of a constant current. A gentle calm washed over me as I felt the warmth of such a sweet experience, of living in Alaska, and accepted that it was time for change.

I smiled as I acknowledged the awesome opportunity to live in a place that did so much to my heart. I was grateful for the experience and ready to find more like it. How I wished I had a way to capture the feeling, bottle it up and keep it 'round my neck always. How I wished I had a magical lens to capture the beauty of that scene in a way so real every detail could be remembered. The smell of pine and birch, of untouched nature. The reflection of the mid-night sun on the river and hundreds of round stones.

With one last long look, memorizing the shape of Birch Hill and the shades of green blanketing its edges, the color and the width of the water, the perfectly placed clouds and the small white flower still floating away, I turned and walked away. Maybe someday I'll get back to Alaska. Maybe someday I'll show my children where I grew up. Where I played foursquare, built a sand fort and walked with Tanner. Maybe someday, I'll stand on the same spot of the Chena River's bank as I did that day.

And though I won't be the same young girl I was then, I will remember her with joy. Perhaps I'll discover that that day was the beginning of an even bigger adventure than exploring wild woods in the summer. It was the first time I understood what it means to surrender; to accept and embrace change. To love and keep alive memories, but be willing to look to the future with excitement at the same time. And when I find the place where I can remember the past days and have hope for the somedays at the same time, the bitter sweetness will be more sweet than bitter.

This essay was written when Abigail was 15 years old.

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Guilt {Molly Newton, age 17}

US Army

Guilt. Something that had found a place in my soul and something that I could not get rid of. This type of guilt was not from something that I regretted doing, but from an event that I had no control over: death.

My dad was a witness to what happened. It could have been him, but Someone decided he needed to stay with us.

My dad has always been and always will be the person that has influenced me the greatest in my seventeen years. Through all the hardships that he has been through and all the deaths that he has witnessed, my dad still manages to be the bravest man I have ever encountered. He tells me to live and to think in the present. Even so, sometimes I dwell in the past and the guilt is still there.

I've seen her in the halls at school every day, for a year and a half now. The difference between us was fifteen yards. I watch her and experience what my life would be like if my dad had been walking fast that day and her dad was the one that was trudging slowly.

After an IED exploded and destroyed all in its path, my dad held her dad in his arms as he died; both of them covered in a deep red. This pains me, even though it was her dad who was wrongfully killed in Afghanistan a year ago, not mine. Any change in how events happened that day--large or small--and it could have easily been my dad coming home in a coffin. It wasn't, and I thank God, but the guilt was still there.

Four months after the explosion, my dad came home with a mangled arm and a purple heart in a homecoming ceremony; her father did not. I saw her mom at the ceremony--one of the strongest people I have ever seen--shed few tears. I didn't hold my tears back. I let out the guilt from the depths of my body. My guilt was still there as I embraced my dad for the first time in a year.

That year, I dropped everything. School, sports, grades--all out the window. And for what? My everyday guilt was about something that happened in the past. It was over something that I couldn't even control. Finally, it was time that I had a real talk about what happened that day with my dad, and for the first time in a long time my head was cleared.

My dad always has a humorous quip for any situation and a habit of saying things so outrageous that we laugh and forget any tension we might have been feeling. For example, after our emotional talk, he left me with this: "Start thinking in the present more, apply yourself to your grades for the future, and STAY AWAY from boys." Thanks, Dad.

Artwork: Correspondence {Clarissa Skipworth, age 14}

US Air Force



Artwork 3 by Clarissa Skipworth

This depicts how much I love receiving correspondence from my Dad when he is deployed.

Artwork: US Air Force Memorial {Ella Skipworth, age 10}

US Air Force



Artwork 4 by Ella Skipworth

This is my family remembering and honoring all those who have served in the military by visiting The US Air Force Memorial.

My First Military Move {Lilly Klahn, age 11}

US Army National Guard

Moving to Carlisle, Pennsylvania from the only home I've ever known in Mississippi has definitely had its ups and downs. It's amazing now considering the seminar we are blessed to be part of, the amazing friends I have made, all the freedom I have enjoyed living on such a small post, and having a wonderful school to attend.

Unfortunately, moving here also had some difficulties due to being a National Guard kid. I know it doesn't seem like that would make a difference, but it did. For one, I had never moved before which was new, especially to be moving to a whole new part of the country.

Also, I had never lived on a military base prior to this so I wasn't used to having to present my military ID and having guards everywhere. To add to this, I wasn't used to having to make friends so I was scared and didn't know anyone. Once I met everyone though, I was so happy and now I'm sad it's going to have to end soon and we'll all be heading our separate ways.

Overall, I would for sure have to say that no matter the ups or downs, I am extremely blessed to be able to get to experience something like this.

A Dreaded Day {E.M.P., age 17}

US Army

I hear a loud beeping noise and know that it's time to get up. The only reason I'm able to move is because I need to turn off the horrible noise that keeps going off right next to my head. I slam my hand down on top of the alarm, but it won't stop. I blindly move my hands around on top of it, trying to find a button to stop this awful noise, a noise that signifies a day I've hoped would never come. Finally, I get it to stop. I close my eyes again. Just as I drift back to sleep, my always cheery mom flips on my lights and announces in the peppiest southern accent possible: "Get up! It's time for school!"

Unlike many kids my age, I haven't been planning on what I will wear on my first day at this new school, only dreading the thought of it. I throw on some nice clothes to make myself look somewhat presentable – first impressions are everything. As a military child, I should be used to this whole new kid thing, but it honestly never gets easier. You learn how to meet people faster than most and you learn quickly the kinds of people you want to be around, or where you fit in; however, the first day awkwardness is never something that you don't experience.

Trying my best to be thoughtful and prompt, I leave my house earlier than I probably should have. I find a parking spot and prepare myself for a day that comes more often for me than most. I turn around and face the school and immediately feel overwhelmed. I don't even know what door to go in. I enter the building reluctantly and try to squeeze my way past the groups of reuniting friends, couples hugging one another, and eyes of experienced students who can tell I have no idea where I'm going. Somehow, I make it to my first class without too much struggle. Throughout the day, each class goes pretty much the same way: students are given a syllabus

bus, told the rules and expectations, and forced to do some type of super awkward ice-breaker in order to get to know the other classmates.

One thing I've been worried about all day is the concern of every new student ever: who will I sit with at lunch? I've learned how to handle this. Move after move teaches a person how scope out the field, test out the water and eventually make life-long friends with each new location. But it all starts here and now. I must remember to be myself and to never ever be afraid to open myself up to people. Who knows how long I will live here? I need to get out there and make the absolute most of this experience. I remind myself that I can do this. I've done it before and I will have to do it again. The rest of the day is a breeze, well, after I finally figured out how to get to the next building. An hour and a half later, and I'm facing my last challenge for the day: how do I get to my car?

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Around the World and Back Again

{Martha Dwyer, age 9}

US Coast Guard

I have been to 16 countries in my 10 years of life. I have lived in Alaska twice. My family and I have driven across the country three times. All of this could not have happened without my dad being in the Coast Guard!

Many places I go, kids would give anything to visit! Next year, I am moving to Hawai'i, and many of my classmates are envious. I have had so many amazing adventures, and I would like to share two of them with you.

Our first adventure starts with a move. My parents love to do cross country drives to move from one place to another. One of our stops last summer on the way from Alaska to Carlisle was the Grand Canyon. We stayed at the Grand Canyon Railway Hotel. To get to the Grand Canyon, we took a train. On the way there, we listened to live music, watched the scenery go by, and chatted. The canyon was amazing and breathtaking! It was one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen. On the way out of the canyon, there were "robbers" that raided the train! The Grand Canyon is definitely one of my favorite places!

The next story takes place in Poland. We stayed at a wonderful little hotel. There was a barn which offered donkey riding. Two gentlemen led my sister's and my donkeys around the farm and into the woods. It was so much fun! We rode into the woods like real adventurers!! My mom and dad would have loved it.

I am so lucky to have been to so many places ... But none of it would have happened if I wasn't a Coast Guard Kid!

Artwork: Lucky to Be a Coast Guard Kid {Martha Dwyer, age 11}

US Coast Guard



Artwork 5 by Martha Dwyer

Artwork: USCG is Awesome {Mary Dwyer, age 9}

US Coast Guard



Artwork 6 by Mary Dwyer

California to Carlisle {Katie Kirk, age 12}

US Army

Can you believe it's the month of June?
Get ready and pack 'cause we're leaving soon.
Leaving the desert and I am told,
That much in Carlisle is historic and old.
Philadelphia, Gettysburg, Hershey Park,
There's an aquarium nearby that has a shark!
It's hard to leave California, I know,
But at least I'll get to play in the snow.
West to East, sometimes East to West,
I wonder if this place will be the best?

Simile for my Family {Sarah Burns, age 11}

US Army

My house is as nice, neat and beautiful as a garden:
Dad is like the gardener, the person who helps us grow.
Mom is like the butterfly, the prettiest of them all.
Christian is like the dirt, which is always helpful.
Savannah is like the flowers, the one who keeps things happy.
Austin is like the worm, which produces love and animal droppings.
Montey, the cat is like the bunny, soft, nice and loves to eat.
Tux, the French Bull dog, is like the cricket, always making noise.
Jake, the dog is like the water, which helps the animals and the plants.
And me, well, I'm the box, the one who keeps the garden together.

Farewell, Soldier {Hannah Watkins, age 18}

US Army

The day was peeking through the fog
of the morning mist that lingered.

The families were there, many of them.

Voices were soft; sobs were muffled.

The Soldiers were dressed in their uniforms;
their gear spread over the ground.

These were the last moments now.

Ready for the farewell, and yet never quite ready.

The buses came. They parked. They waited.

The Soldiers were antsy to go. The families did not want to let
them.

An order was called. A speech spoken. The gear was packed.

The cries were louder now. Hugs, kisses, more hugs.

I was afraid to make eye contact with my father.

My Soldier. It would be too hard now.

One last quick embrace. One last quick kiss on the cheek.

I can think of no words to say. Good luck? Be safe? I love you?

Words are trivial. They are awkward. They feel wrong.

Silence feels right.

I kick the sand at my feet. I cannot look up at him;

it is better to look at the ground.

The Soldiers file onto the buses and wave farewell. Never
goodbye.

Farewell, Soldier. Until we meet again.

The farewell was always the hardest part of the deployment for me. After I hug my dad and send him off, then I can start counting the days until he returns.

I was inspired to write this poem to capture the mood of the morning he left on his last deployment. I don't think I could describe how hard it is to watch him go, but I knew it was necessary in order for him to do his job, make our family proud, and come back home to us again.

Marine Corps Life {Colleen Dockery, age 12}

US Marine Corps

As you probably already know, being a Marine Corps child isn't all sunshine and rainbows. I've lived in seven places including Australia. It's really difficult. You hardly ever stay in one place for over three years, and friends can be difficult to make. When you try to make one, they are always closer to someone else who they have known for years.

People in competitive sports have a hard time, too. They have trouble excelling in their sports. The new club doesn't deem them good enough for their program or they can't concentrate in the new surroundings.

I've learned through multiple moves that most people don't care how you fit in, there is always someone somewhere who will love you for being who you are, whether that person is found within eight years or two seconds or live five countries away or five houses down. Life as a Marine is harsh and bleak, but there are always two ways to look at things, and the bright side is always better.

Changing of the Seasons {Paddy Dockery, age 8}

US Marine Corps

Once we were in San Diego, California and it was about 87 degrees in winter. The next year, we moved to Pennsylvania and we were very excited to get snow. We got lots of snow in Pennsylvania but can you believe that San Diego got snow after we left?

Cleats? Czech! {Georgia Watkins, age 14}

US Army

“Georgia, wake up! It’s game day!” my mom yelled, annoyed that my eyes were still sealed shut. I groaned and crawled out of bed, stumbling and tripping over the junk scattered on my bedroom floor. I lumbered into the kitchen to eat my pre-game “power breakfast,” consisting of scrambled eggs, toast, chocolate milk, and a banana. When I finished I made my way to the bathroom to attempt to untangle the rats’ nest of long, blond hair on top of my head. As I stared at myself in the mirror I smiled as I imagined the great performance I hoped to achieve in my soccer game. I envisioned myself dribbling up the right side of the field and setting up a perfect cross for my teammate to head into the net. I smiled at my reflection and encouraged myself: “You’re going all the way to the Czech Republic for a game today, Georgia! How many American middle school girls have had an opportunity like that? You need to represent America well and prove how good you can be!” I was stoked.

My mom and I climbed into the car and headed to Regensburg to meet up with my brand new soccer team. Since moving to Germany, I had joined a soccer club called SC Regensburg about 60 kilometers away from where we lived in the U.S. Army community of Hohenfels. Being an Army Brat can be really challenging sometimes, but it has taught me to brave and embrace new experiences. I was the only American girl playing on this Bavarian team and not even the coach could speak a word of English. Even though my German was still shaky, the club had welcomed me heartily. I have played soccer my entire life, and leaving my team in Tampa was the hardest thing I ever had to do. Soccer is my passion and moving to a foreign country was not about to change that. This was my third season playing with SC Regensburg, but my first season with Coach Klaus’s U15 team. Nervousness and excitement consumed

me. I desperately wanted to make a good impression. This was my chance to earn the new team’s respect in spite of the language barrier.

We arrived to the soccer field on Prufening Strasse thirty minutes later, right on time—or so we thought. There were no other cars in the parking lot and no sign of my trainer, Klaus. We sat in the car and looked at one another, utterly confused. “Do we have the wrong time? Do we have the wrong place?” I asked my mom. One thing we knew for sure: Germans are never late. Sehr pünktlich! Something was wrong. Thanks to my mom’s lack of understanding the coach’s instructions, she had screwed up the meeting time and we showed up an hour late! Mom of the year.

There was no time to think about what to do next. The coach had given us a business card with the name of a hotel next to the soccer field, so we plugged its address into our not-so-reliable GPS and hit the Autobahn. If everyone else was already halfway to Czech, we had to make up for the lost time. My mom punched the gas pedal and warned me: “Don’t tell daddy how fast I’m driving today!”

An hour later, we crossed the Czech border. We were running a little low on gas, but there was no time to worry about that. The GPS instructed us to take an exit onto an old country road that was wide enough for only one car. Our old BMW bounced its way through potholes and swerved frantically around S-curves as we passed through the unfamiliar, rural turf of the Czech Republic. My mom started to lose hope, saying, “I don’t know about this, Georgia. I can’t imagine there being a soccer field at the end of this old road. You better start praying!”

What an awesome way to prove myself to my new team, by missing my very first game because of a silly miscommunication.

My excitement was replaced with disappointment as my hope that we would find the soccer field began to float away. I stared out the window at the plowed muddy fields and rustic villages. Golden leaves were blowing in the wind and there was a small creek babbling along the road, prodding us to follow it. Strange signs in a language with letters and symbols I did not recognize popped up every now and then, as I desperately searched for a familiar sign labeled "Sportplatz." After several kilometers, I saw something green in the distance. "Mom! Look!" I shouted. "I might be hallucinating, but I think there's a golf course down there!" My mom jerked the wheel and took the sharp turn down an even older dirt road, and we careened towards the hallucination. We crested a hill and discovered a gravelly parking lot filled with German cars a few meters away. On the other side, nestled between two green sloping hills, was a soccer field! I jumped out of my car. My team was already on the field in their uniforms, getting ready to play. Coach Klaus saw me and yelled: "GEEEOOOORRRGGIIAA!!!" Oh boy. "Du bist sehr spat!" I know, I know. I am very late.

I made it to the game five minutes before kick-off. I started as striker and scored three goals that day... a hat trick. We lost 4-3, but everyone was happy, and my new teammates smiled at me. After the game, one of the parents called me "Tor Killer" which in English translates to "Goal Killer." I had earned a new nickname that day, and thankfully I was forgiven for showing up an hour late.

A few days later I came home from school and my mom showed me an article from the local Bavarian newspaper: "SC Regensburg Fußball Mädchen." There was a photograph of our team and the team we played in Czech. My mom translated the article and that's when we learned that the team we played that day had traveled all the way from Helsinki. They were the top U15 girls' soccer team in all of Finland! My photo was in the paper too, highlighting the goals I scored, referring to me as an "Amerikanische Mädchen Fußball-

spieler" (American girl soccer player.) I beamed with pride as my mom stuck the article on the refrigerator with a magnet. For one brief, glorious moment I was (kind of) a famous soccer star in a foreign country. How many American middle school girls can say that?

Georgia won a Scholastic Silver Key award for her story about playing soccer while stationed in Germany and about her being the only American girl on her German soccer team. These are the kind of experiences military brats have that make them unique.

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Behind the Camo and Boots {Joshua Cook, age 11}

US Army

If you're not in the military you might not know a lot of things that go on behind those camo, boots, and helmets. It's alright if you aren't too sure about what military families go through. I'm going to tell you the truth about these events, not looking for sympathy; I just want to write an essay.

One of the biggest events that most Americans even don't know fully about is deployment. Now, deployment is technically the movement of a Soldier to another country where they are most needed for x years/months/days. However, most military families see it differently. Military families see it as a time where a certain loved one is shipped off into hostile territory with danger around each corner. Not knowing if the next time they hear something about their Soldier is going to involve a Purple Heart or a folded flag. Not knowing when the next time they can Skype or call, or that their next letter or postcard may never be answered. For military families, they see it as a sacrifice, they know that their Soldier is willing to give their life and that they're doing it for a purpose.

As if that wasn't enough, military families do end up moving ... a lot. If you've ever lived next to a military base, you'll know. There'll be many times where kids will go somewhere and stay for only a year or two. They will often be "the new kid" and may even deal with bullies along the way. Moving is hard, and many friends you might have had long-term relationships with are gone - promises broken, "keep-in-touches" gone, and girlfriends forgotten.

Not all things in this lifestyle are sob stories though. I can also name some truly awesome things I've done because of my dad being in the military. One of the coolest things I've done is meeting the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Odierno. Just getting into the Pentagon is already something that many people don't get to do, much less see and shake a General's hand. When we lived in Washington DC, we visited many of the Smithsonian museums, saw national landmarks, and even experienced the cherry blossoms in the spring. We got to attend the White House Easter Egg Roll, see a presidential Inauguration Ceremony in person, attend an Inaugural concert just for military kids, and tour the White House with an Army friend who worked there.

Also, if I'd never moved to Pennsylvania, I would never have had the opportunity to go to Hershey Park, eat a Philly cheese steak in Philadelphia, or visit the Gettysburg Battlefield. We've driven into New York City and I've seen Times Square and Broadway shows. I have eaten a cannoli from "The Cake Boss" Buddy's Hoboken store! I've experienced more snow than I've ever known, and my dad taught me how to snow ski, too.

As a military kid, you have friends from everywhere. I started Kindergarten in Texas with a friend that I started 6th grade with in Pennsylvania all these years later. Even as we travel, there's always a chance we'll be able to see someone we know. And just because we leave a good friend behind at one post doesn't mean we won't see them again one day somewhere else.

Being in the military is one of those things that when kids have it in common, it is a very strong bond. When kids can expand on these types of military tough bonds, those promises will be kept, those "keep in touches" won't even be needed, maybe girlfriends even become wives. Every single thing in this short essay is all part of my military life.

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Freedom {Will Norman, age 11}

US Army

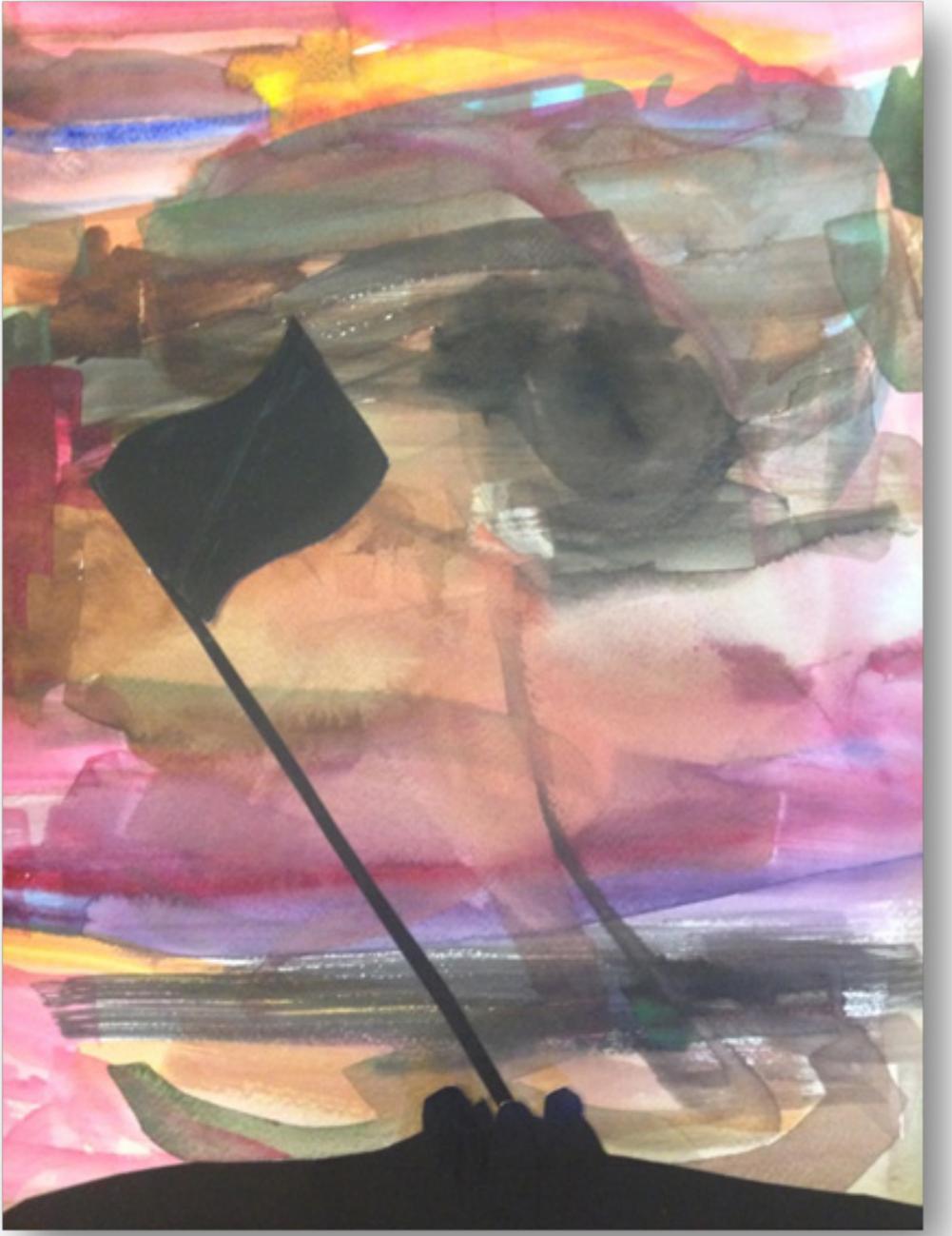
Freedom is the ability to be yourself and not having anyone tell you what you are and what to do. Freedom has many appearances and symbols that give people faith that they are in a place where freedom exists. Three treasured documents describe American freedoms. They are the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and the Emancipation Proclamation. These three documents state that America is a free country and that all Americans have equal rights.

The Declaration of Independence was the first and most important document that America has in its history. It declares our freedom from Great Britain and describes our rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The U.S. Constitution was the document that describes how our free country will operate and it is the foundation of the laws that we have today. The Emancipation Proclamation, signed on January 1st, 1863 by President Abraham Lincoln, states that all slaves in the Confederacy are now free.

These three documents, now kept at the National Archives in Washington, D.C, state our freedoms to become whatever our natural abilities allow and not have anyone rule us. To me, these documents are what freedom looks like.

Raising the Flag {Will Norman, age 11}

US Army



Artwork 7 by Will Norman

Why I Appreciate America's Veterans

{Will Norman, age 11}

US Army

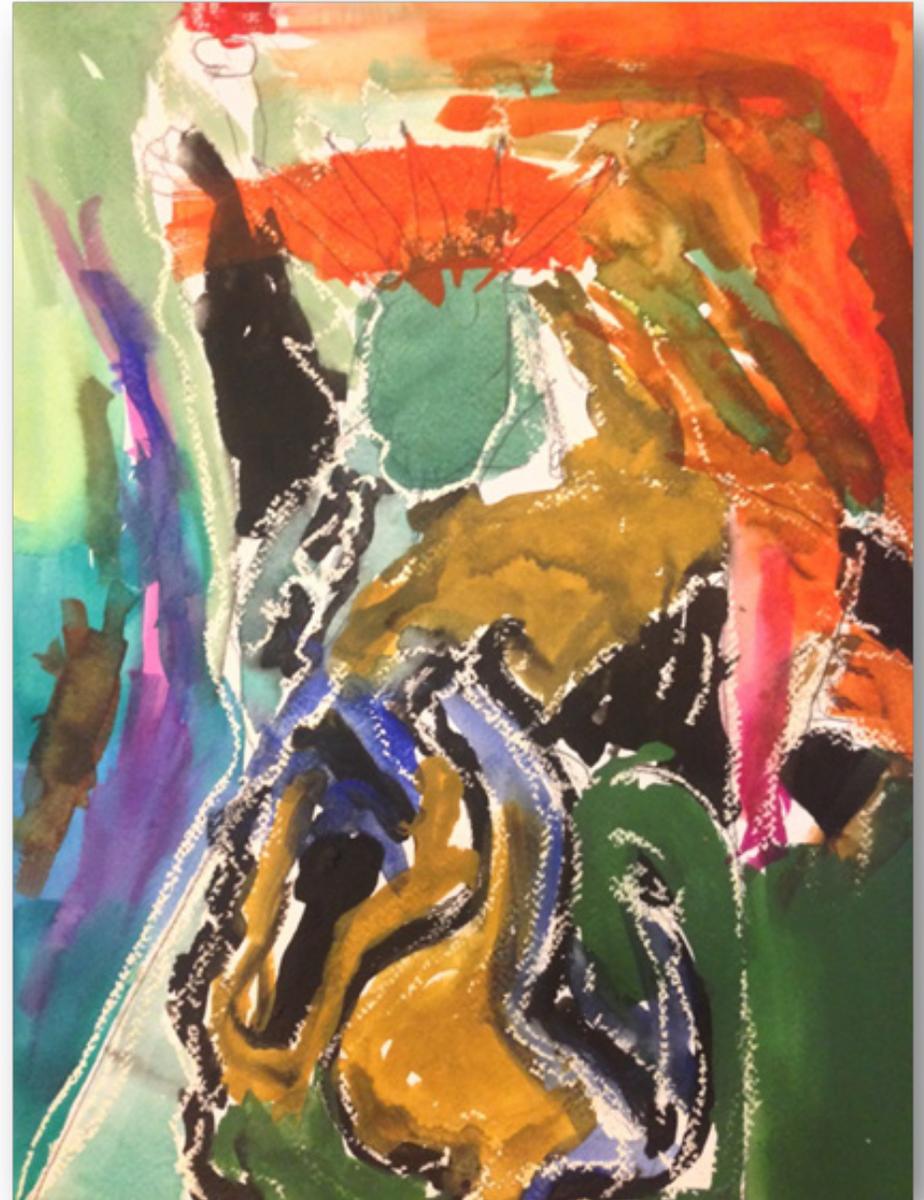
I appreciate America's Veterans for many reasons. First, many of my family members and family friends are Veterans. Second, I appreciate Veterans because one of my family's closest friends lost both of his legs in Iraq from an explosion. Third, my dad's good friend, and someone he mentored, lost his life while serving in Afghanistan. My dad wears a bracelet with his name on it each and every day as a reminder of his service to the United States of America.

Veterans are not always easy to identify. They can be teachers, nurses, police officers, or firemen. They may have lost a limb, or they may have no visible wounds from their service in the military. They may have lost their friends in combat, or they may have saved the life of a child from the enemy. Or, they may have saved the lives of many people by diffusing a bomb. No matter what they have done, who they are, what they did, or where they have served, Veterans have one trait in common. They have all served their country and are willing to sacrifice their lives for the safety of our nation.

It does not matter how many badges or ribbons a Veteran has on his or her wall or uniform, the most important thing we can do is to say "thank you" for your service to the United States of America. These words could mean the world to them and make their day. It is important to remember it is the Veteran who has sacrificed so that we can have so many freedoms today. They are the reason we live in the greatest country in world.

Liberty {Will Norman, age 11}

US Army



Artwork 8 by Will Norman

Go North, Young Man {Andrew Powers, age 15}

Alabama Air National Guard

My family is an Air National Guard Family. We have spent most of my life living in one small town in Alabama. One day last year, I was told by my mom that there was a possibility that we would move to Carlisle, Pennsylvania to the U.S. Army War College. The news was devastating. I never thought that I would have to leave all of my best friends. It is so hard to move in high school.

A couple of months later we moved and I realized that the transition to Pennsylvania for ten months wouldn't be as bad as I had thought. Carlisle has several big cities nearby and Pennsylvania has a lot of military historical landmarks that I have been able to visit. I realized that being a part of a military family has many benefits with moving being one of them.

Back in seventh grade when I was living in Prattville, Alabama, I was introduced to a boy named Walter who had moved there for one year. He was from Honduras and his dad was an International Officer in Montgomery, Alabama for the military school for majors. We became really good friends and I helped him adjust to the American school culture very quickly. I introduced him to all my friends and made him a part of our group. We took him to football games and school dances. It was really cool hearing all about his way of life in Honduras. I enjoyed telling him all about our way of life in America.

Walter and I met because of my stepdad and his dad being in the same seminar at Air Command and Staff College at Maxwell Air Force Base. I realized that were it not for my military advantages, I never would have met Walter or had a friend from a completely different country. This experience resulted in our family's tradition of opening our home to exchange students to help them like we

helped Walter.

Being a part of a military family has dramatically changed my life. Moving up north to Pennsylvania has given my family great opportunities to see places that we will probably never see again. Every weekend I see something new that none of my best friends in Alabama ever get to see. My family has been to New York City, Philadelphia, Washington, and Niagara Falls just since moving to this region last August.

We have enjoyed apple picking, visited Penn State, stood on the Gettysburg Battlefield, visited Amish Country and much more. We have hosted friends in Carlisle and we have been able to show them Central Park and Arlington National Cemetery. Being a military family member has allowed me to see such amazing locations in my country. I am very thankful for the opportunities that I have received from being in a military family.

The Deal of a Lifetime {Kayleigh Powers, age 15}

Alabama Air National Guard

When I was a little girl, about 3 years old, I lived in Fort Walton Beach, Florida near Eglin Air Force Base. At the time, my single mother, my twin brother and I would go to church with our family every Sunday. The whole extended family of aunts, uncles, grandparents and cousins would fill two whole pews! The church was small and full of older people. My brother and I were raised in this church from infancy. It was a place where we felt comfortable and even today, when we visit, we always get lots of attention and many hugs.

During the time when I was a preschooler, my twin brother and I would fight and yell all the time, causing the sermon to be interrupted. My mother decided to make a deal with us. We could sit with anyone in the church if we didn't fight with each other. For three year old kids, this was the deal of a lifetime! From that point on, I would sit with someone new every Sunday. My mom's deal changed her life and my life as well, and we didn't even know it yet.

That fateful Sunday morning started off like the rest: getting ready for church at 8:00 a.m., seeing all the family, and finding the one person I would sit alongside. The only thing that was different was a new guy. One thing you should know is that there is never a new person at our church. Never! This was something special.

Of course, with my outgoing personality, I decided to sit next to him. I had no idea who this new guy was, but that didn't stop me! During the service, I had to go to the bathroom (like every kid does). You will never guess what I did! I asked the new guy sitting next to me to take me to the bathroom. If you are wondering what happened, he did! He agreed to escort me to the hallway. After the service, I introduced this man to my mother. I bet you won't guess

what happened after that! My mother gave him her phone number a couple of weeks later. A couple of months later, he became my stepdad!

Over the years, I have noticed that coming from a military family can change your attitude on a few things. Every school day starts off with the national anthem and the Pledge of Allegiance at my high school. When they come on the intercom, you stand up and put your hand on your heart. Being raised in a military family taught me how to behave when everyone stands, but some kids didn't have the privilege to learn it like I did. Even in my 10th grade class, there are kids slouched over their desks, sitting in their chairs or even texting while the national anthem is being played.

During the Pledge of Allegiance, very few people say it besides my teacher and me. I have no problem saying it loudly and with reverence, but I wish all students would have the respect to do the same. I thank God each day for leading me to sit next to that new guy in church, Casey Cooley, back in 2002. I'm also very thankful for the military life he has given my family and me.

Deployed Across the Ocean
{Brianna Danielle Sullivan, age 11}

US Army

My Daddy is deployed across the Atlantic Ocean
Fighting in a war that is full of commotion
I try to be his strong little angel while he is away
But not having him with me makes life harder every day
Even if from each other, we are very far
He will always be my Daddy, my hero, my star.

When Daddy is away, Mommy is brave and true
She always helps us, with everything we do
And she always makes us feel better, when we are blue
For us, she cleans and cooks
and because she is our teacher, she reads us books
My Mommy is so patient and kind
She is always the best thing that is on my mind.
When Daddy gets home from across the ocean blue
We will have to move, and I don't know what to do
I am used to living in different homes and places
but sometimes it can be hard to leave all my friends and
meeting new faces.

We have lived everywhere from Alaska to Germany
But wherever we go, I am just glad to be with my family.

USA to Afghanistan {Brianna Danielle Sullivan, age 11}

US Army



Artwork 9 by Brianna Danielle Sullivan

The Best Daddy of All {Aiden Sullivan, age 11}

US Army

My Daddy is My Daddy is the best Daddy of all. He went off to Afghanistan to take part in "Operation Enduring Freedom". He also went to Iraq for "Operation Iraqi Freedom." We keep on moving for Daddy's job. It's hard to make new friends in new areas, I tell you. However, it's a fun challenge because you get to meet new people and make new friends to play with.

While he was deployed, my Mommy did all of the traveling to hockey and other places with us. She is the best Mommy ever. She makes us food, does the laundry, and cleans the house so we can have friends over.

We were all overjoyed when Daddy came home from deployment. I am really good when Daddy's gone. I find it sort of peaceful, but boring without him. Yes it might be hard to move to new areas and even new countries, but I still LOVE being a Brat for the United States Army.

Greeting Daddy at the Airport {Aiden Sullivan, age 11}

US Army



Artwork 10 by Aiden Sullivan

Artwork: Singing the National Anthem {Natalie Tedesco, age 11}

US Army



Artwork 11 by Natalie Tedesco

Artwork: Welcome Home, Daddy {Julia VonFahnstock, age 11}

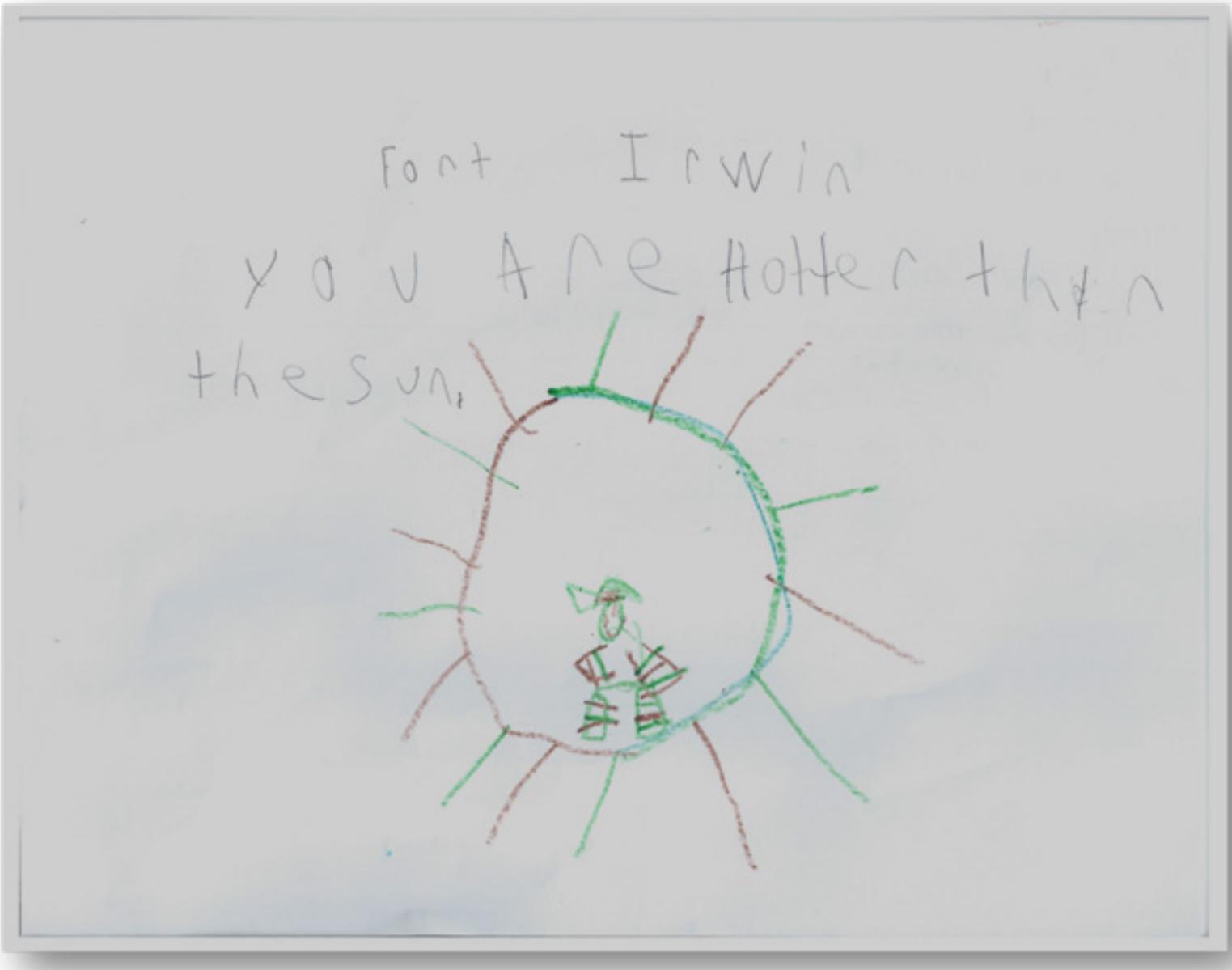
US Army Reserve



Artwork 12 by Julia VonFahnstock

Artwork: Fort Irwin {Ben Rush, age 7}

US Army

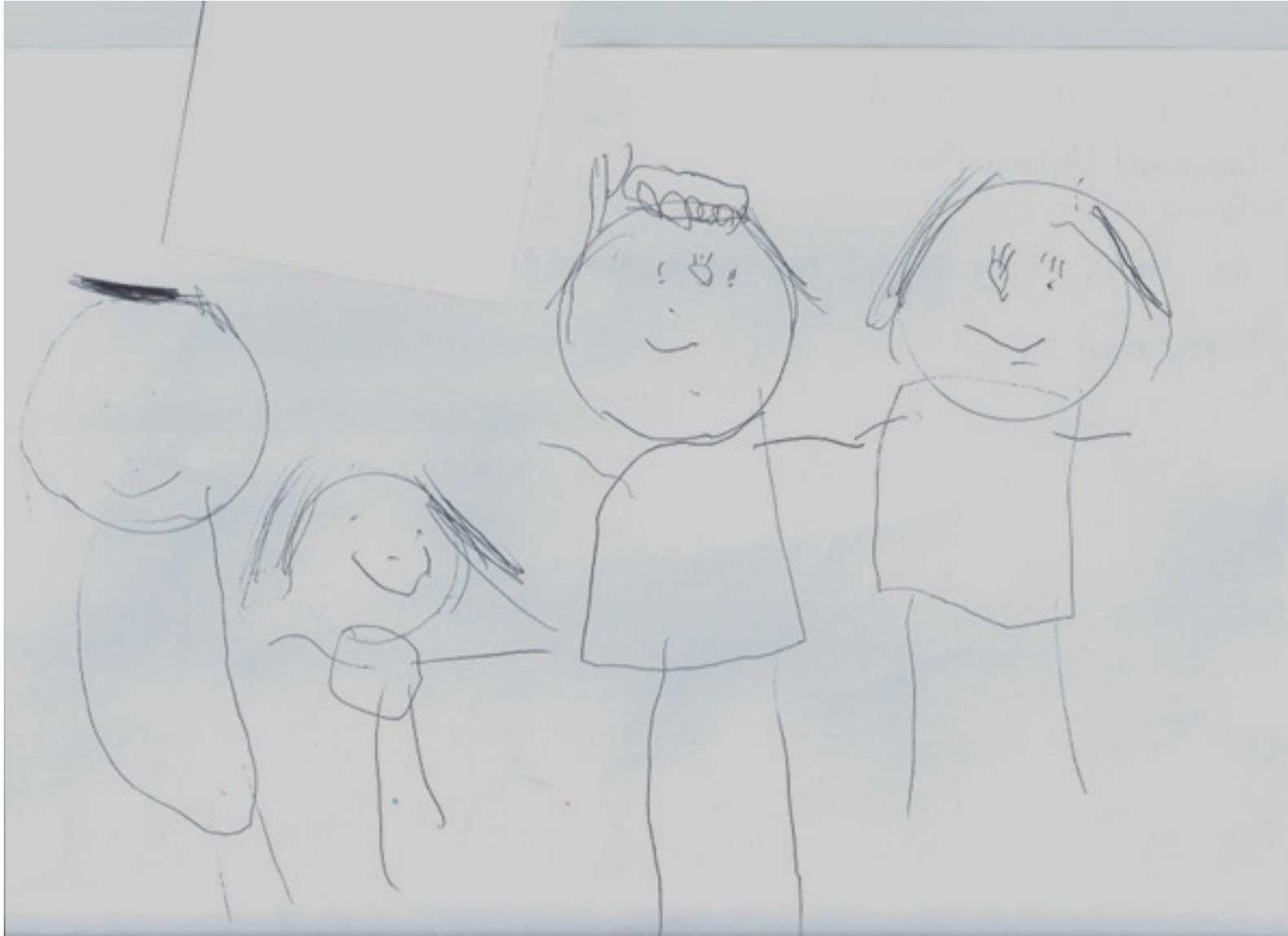


Artwork 13 by Ben Rush

When asked about his dad in the Army, Ben drew this and said, "My dad was hotter than the sun at Fort Irwin and got all sweaty in the box."

Artwork: When Daddy Comes Back {Emily Rush, age 5}

US Army



Artwork 14 by Emily Rush
When asked about her daddy in the Army, Emily drew this and said,
"This is my family all together. I am happy when daddy comes back."

Artwork: Letter to Daddy {Abigail Payne, at age 5}

US Army



Artwork 15 by Abigail Payne

Abigail was about 5 years old when she drew this picture for her dad and asked her mom to write the message for her.

Glossary of Terms

2ID

The 2nd Infantry Division is the last remaining permanently forward-stationed division in the US Army. The 2nd ID mission is to deter aggression and maintain peace on the Korean Peninsula; and if deterrence fails, “Fight Tonight” in support of the US-Republic of Korea Alliance.

8th Army

The Eighth United States Army (EUSA), is the commanding formation of all United States Army forces in South Korea. Eighth Army deters North Korean aggression against the Republic of Korea (ROK)

AFAP

Army Family Action Plan -- AFAP provides Active and Reserve Component Soldiers, Army Civilians, Family members, Survivors, and Retirees a voice in shaping their standards of living by identifying issues and concerns for Army Senior Leadership resolution. Since its inception in 1983, the AFAP remains the only such partnership between a branch of the United States military and its constituents.

AFB

Air Force Base

AHRN

The Automated Housing Referral Network (AHRN.com) is designed to improve the process of connecting the military community with available housing.

Army War College

The United States Army War College (USAWC) is a United States Army institution in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, on the 500 acre campus of the historic Carlisle Barracks. It provides graduate level instruction to senior military officers and civilians to prepare them for senior leadership assignments and responsibilities. Each year, a number of Army colonels and lieutenant colonels are considered by a board for admission. Approximately 800 students attend at any one time, half in a two-year-long distance learning

program, and the other half in an on-campus full-time resident program lasting ten months. Upon completion, the college grants its graduates a master’s degree in Strategic Studies.

ARNG

United States Army National Guard

At Ease

A position of rest in which Soldiers may relax but may not leave their places or talk.

BAH

Basic Allowance for Housing -- The Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) is a U.S. based allowance prescribed by geographic duty location, pay grade, and dependency status. It provides uniformed Service members equitable housing compensation based on housing costs in local civilian housing markets within the United States when government quarters are not provided.

BOQs

Bachelor Officer Quarters

The “Box”

“The Box” is a nickname for the training area at the National Training Center (NTC) located at Fort Irwin, California.

brat

“Military brat” and various “brat” derivatives describe the child of a parent (or parents) serving full-time in the United States Armed Forces, and can also refer to the unique subculture and lifestyle of American military brats. The term refers to both current and former children of such families.

Carlisle

City in Pennsylvania that houses Carlisle Barracks and the United States Army War College.

CENTCOM

Central Command -- U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) is one of nine unified commands in the United States military. Six of these commands, including CENTCOM, have an area of responsibility (AOR), which is a specific geographic region of the world where the combatant commanders may plan and conduct operations as defined under the Unified Command Plan.

Commissary

Grocery store that sells food and supplies to the personnel or workers in a military post.

Deployment

Military deployment is the movement of armed forces and their logistical support infrastructure around the world.

DoD

The Department of Defense

Fabergé

A Fabergé egg is one of a limited number of Russian jeweled eggs created by Peter Carl Fabergé and his company between 1885 and 1917.

FRG

Family Readiness Group - an organization of family members, volunteers, Soldiers, and civilian employees belonging to a unit/organization who together provide an avenue of mutual support and assistance and a network of communication among the members, the chain of command, and community resources.

FRSA

Family Readiness Support Assistant - a Family Readiness Support Assistant (FRSA) provides logistical and administrative assistance to the Family Readiness Group (FRG), a unit-based program affiliated with the U.S. Army, National Guard, or Reserve. Similar positions exist in other military branches; for example, a Family Readiness Officer is the equivalent for the Marines and Navy. In the Air Force, they are known as Caring for People Coordinators.

FY15

Fiscal year 2015

hootch

A hut or simple dwelling, either military or civilian. Also spelled "hooch."

JAG

Judge Advocate General

K-Bay

Marine Corps Base Hawaii Kaneohe Bay is fondly referred to as K-Bay. It is located on the island of Oahu's Windward side on Mokapu Peninsula, and is 20 miles northeast of the Honolulu International Airport. K-Bay is the largest Marine Corps element on Oahu. The other major installation comprising MCBH is Camp H.M. Smith, overlooking Pearl Harbor.

Last Four

This refers to the last four digits of a person's Social Security Number (SSN).

Lt. Dan

Lt. Dan Taylor is a character in the Forrest Gump novel and ensuing film. He was Forrest's commanding officer during the Vietnam War in 1967 and later becomes Forrest's shrimp boat partner in the Bubba-Gump Shrimp Company and best friend. He is played by Gary Sinise. The Lt. Dan Band is a cover band founded by Kimo Williams and Gary Sinise. The band is named after the character Lieutenant Dan Taylor, whom Sinise portrayed in the film Forrest Gump. Sinise has said in interviews that many people know him by sight as "Lieutenant Dan" rather than by his real name, hence the band's name. The concept came about when Sinise requested for permission to bring musicians along during his USO tours. The group was initially known as "Gary Sinise and the Lt. Dan Band."

MRE

Meals Ready to Eat - a self-contained, individual field ration in lightweight packaging bought by the United States military for its service members for use in combat or other field conditions where organized food facilities are not available.

MTF

Military Treatment Facility - A military hospital or health care clinic.

MWR

Morale, Wellness, and Recreation -- Family and MWR programs, services and activities offer Soldiers and Families opportunities to enrich their lives culturally and creatively. Our programs relieve stress, build strength and resilience, and help the Army Family stay physically, mentally, and financially fit.

PCS

Permanent Change of Station - The term is actually used as the verb “to relocate” and describes a military moving from one installation to another.

PX

Post Exchange - The department store on post.

POC

Point of Contact

PME

Professional Military Education - refers to the professional training, development, and schooling of service members in the United States Armed Forces. It encompasses many schools, universities, and training programs designed to foster leadership in military service members.

R&R

Soldiers who are serving in areas designated as hostile fire and imminent danger area may be eligible for one Rest and Recuperation (R&R) trip per 12-month deployment period. R&R is a chargeable leave program that authorizes use of ordinary leave and may not be combined with other absences. Soldiers must meet certain requirements to be eligible for R&R leave.

Retreat

A flag-lowering ceremony held at sunset on a military post.

ROTC

Reserved Officer Training Corps - A training program to prepare college students to be commissioned officers.

Self Help

Location on many military installations where service members and family members can go to get help with basic home maintenance tasks.

Semper Fi

Latin phrase that means “always faithful” or “always loyal.” In the United States it is best known as the motto of the United States Marine Corps.

SSN

Social Security Number

taskers

A definite piece of work assigned to, falling to, or expected of a person; duty; a task.

TDY

Temporary Duty - Temporary assignment to a station or post, usually a training program.

TMO

Theater of Military Operations

To the Colors

To the Colors is a bugle call to render honors to the nation. It is used when no band is available to render honors, or in ceremonies requiring honors to the nation more than once. To the Color commands all the same courtesies as the National anthem. The most common use of To the Colors is when it is sounded immediately following Retreat when the National Color is being lowered for the day.

Tricare

TRICARE is the health care program for almost 9.5 million beneficiaries worldwide—including active duty service members, National Guard

and Reserve members, retirees, their families, survivors, certain former spouses and others registered in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS).

USAA

The United Services Automobile Association - a Texas-based Fortune 500 diversified financial services group of companies including a Texas Department of Insurance regulated reciprocal inter-insurance exchange and subsidiaries offering banking, investing, and insurance to people and families that serve, or served, in the United States military.

USAR

United States Army Reserve - is the Federal Reserve force of the United States Army. Together, the Army Reserve and the Army National Guard constitute the army element of the Reserve components of the United States armed forces.

Utilities

In the United States Marine Corps, olive drab field uniform.

VAT Form

Value Added Tax Form - Relief Support program provides service to individual members of the US Forces. The program is authorized by the German government as a privilege to US Forces personnel. The service is not an entitlement or a right.

Welcome Home Ceremonies

Welcome Home ceremonies are held at military bases across the U.S. to celebrate the return of deployed service members. Each ceremony is slightly different, but it is common for there to be an official formation and quick release to allow service members to reunite with their families.

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