



One Installation's Mission for Single Soldiers

By Sheryl Nix, Fort Wainwright PAO

In the flurry of activity leading up to a deployment — attending briefings and meetings, signing wills and powers of attorney and tackling childcare concerns — it might be easy to shift the focus entirely onto married Soldiers as the Army works to help build strong and ready families and forget that single Soldiers must also prepare.

Leaders at Fort Wainwright in Alaska are working to prevent that from happening, recognizing that single Soldiers often face some of life's most challenging issues just as they are packing their duffel bags and answering their country's call to serve overseas alongside their married counterparts.

"The single Soldier still needs to do the same sort of (relationship) maintenance (as married Soldiers)," said Chaplain (Maj.) Dwight Broedel, Fort Wainwright's Family Life chaplain. Comparing the process to vehicle winterization in Alaska's Interior, Broedel said single Soldiers must also winterize their lives.

"Certainly [they must take care of] all the finance things and the wills and those things, but have they winterized their relationships? Love begins with the self. It's how do we love ourselves and understand our own love languages and our partners' love languages whether it's our girlfriends or boyfriends; whether it's our brothers and sisters, parents, or our squad mates."

Broedel has witnessed first-hand the outcomes of relationship decisions made by single Soldiers who felt compelled to get married prior to deployments and the devastation and heartbreak that often followed their impulsive decisions. He cites reasons like desire for physical intimacy, loneliness, fear, insecurity and even greed for some Soldiers' hurried weddings, but said that regardless of the motivation, rash relationship decisions often end badly.

"It's a predictable cycle," he explained. "They meet on Facebook; fall in love. They hurry up and get married for whatever reason. They don't really know each other and have all these expectations of what marriage is going to be."

Soldiers from the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division patrol in a single file as they perform a route clearance mission along Route Tampa in southwest Baghdad, Iraq. The soldiers are with the 3rd Platoon, Alpha Company, 2nd Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division out of Fort Drum, N.Y. DoD photo by Staff Sgt. Dennis J. Henry Jr., U.S. Air Force.

Single Service Members and Deployment

By Jenn Rowell

For many, deployment means leaving behind significant others and children.

But for others, deployment means going it alone — which can sometimes be just as complicated.

For Scott P., who deployed with the Air Force as an engineer, being single was not so bad, he says. He deployed to Iraq once and is now separated from the Air Force. He says that for him, it was mostly easier to be deployed without a family at home to worry about. With the exception of figuring out what to do with this things and paying bills, he said he found it less stressful as a single airman in the desert.

For the married troops, there's someone to watch your belongings, drive your car once a week, pay the bills and take care of things at home, but Scott said he noticed more stress among the married service members.

If the husband was deployed, the wife or girlfriend had to pick up his role at home and the reverse was true for the deployed women, he said. Since Scott was unmarried, he didn't have to worry about that added burden on someone at home.

For some of the married service members, Scott said it seemed like they had multiple sets of stressors. They had the work they were doing during the deployment, but also the concern for the people they left behind. And if anything went wrong or there were problems at home or in the relationship, it was added stress and could be distracting.

Those with wives or serious girlfriends, Scott said, would say they'd call at a certain time on a certain day and if anything came up and they missed the call, the wife or girlfriend would worry or get upset. Or, if the connection was lost during a phone call or an Internet conversation — a frequent occurrence — the same scenario was likely to follow, he said.

As a single airman, he didn't have to worry about making those calls.

Scott said he had a single Marine friend who would rarely respond to calls or emails during a deployment, because he'd rather sleep or catch up on work when he had free time.

Scott said he could relate, and didn't feel like he was missing out by not having someone at home to call or come home to or worry about because most of the people around him who were not married, were breaking up with their significant others.

At times, it can appear with all the focus on military Families that single Soldiers are on their own. However, every Soldier has a family, including single Soldiers. All Soldiers and family members are encouraged and welcome at all Family Readiness events and programs. A single Soldier's Family may be made up of parents and siblings, their children, a fiancé, a close friend or a variety of other combinations — all of whom care and support the Soldier.

There are several programs and materials specifically for single Soldiers. The Deployment Cycle Readiness Handbook has a single Soldier Pre-Deployment Checklist, the Strong Bonds program has Strong Bonds for Single Soldiers, and the National Guard Yellow Ribbon has a Single Soldier Reintegration Program. These resources and others can be found at www.militaryonesource.com. More valuable information can be found through your installation's family readiness center.

"When you're married, you're expecting to come back and have life planned out and know it's there. You go back to life as normal," he said.

But if you're dating someone new and get deployed, you're distracted thinking about whether she's out and talking to other men, or what she's doing or if she'll be there when you get back, Scott said.

"With marriage, there's a confidence and a trust," Scott said, that doesn't always exist for unmarried couples during a deployment. There are too many variables, he said, when it comes to girlfriends and deployments. And those variables can mean major stress in what is likely already a stressful environment in theater.

He also knew some female troops who were deployed with boyfriends back home that had the same concerns, issues and stresses.

Scott was deployed for six months in Iraq and stayed busy supporting a large surveillance system.

He said that being deployed as a single airman allowed him greater focus.

"You're completely consumed in your work over there and what's going on," he said. "And if you're sitting there worrying about stuff that's going on at home, you're more stressed. It's out of your control and you sit and freak out and there's nothing you can do." ●

Jenn Rowell is a freelance writer who grew up in the Air Force and has written about military issues for the Free Lance-Star, the Montgomery Advertiser and KMI Media Group.

Pre-Deployment Checklist for Single Soldiers

GENERAL

- Is your emergency data card up to date with the names and telephone numbers of parents, other Family members, and/or friends?
- Have you generated a Power of Attorney for a trusted Family member or friend to handle your personal affairs while you are deployed? Who has it?
- If you have pets, have you made arrangements for their care and have you provided that person with medication, shot records, appointments, and veterinarian's telephone number? Who has the pets?
- Do you have addresses for Family and friends you intend to stay in touch with and do they know how to reach you?
- Do you have enough uniforms to last for the time you are gone?
- Do you have an AKO account? Do you know how to access it?
- Does your Family:
 1. Have your complete mailing and e-mail address?
 2. Know your unit information?
 3. Know the name and telephone number of your commander and supervisor?
 4. Know how to use the Red Cross in case of an emergency?
- Have you thought about your homecoming/return and do you know who you want to meet you when you get back?
- What kind of support and information will your "parent, sibling, friend" need in your absence?
- Will any promotion or other military boards take place during your deployment that you will be eligible for? Have you updated your ERB/ORB, DA Photo, OMPF and other important files in anticipation?

FINANCE

- Do you have a MyPay Account and do you know how to access it?
- Do you know how you are going to pay your bills?
- Have you made plans to save money while you are deployed?
- Have you to set up any electronic bank transfers, automatic bill payments, or allotments to pay your bills or provide money to others during your deployment?
- Are all of your credit cards accounted for? Are numbers logged and kept in a safe place? Do you have the addresses to notify them in the case of loss and do you know how to contact them if you have any billing inquiries?
- Do you have all of your bank account information in one location for easy reference? Location: • Who has the information on your estate?
- Are you taking a checkbook and/or ATM/Debit Card with you to access cash/pay bills during your deployment?

From U.S. Army Deployment Cycle Readiness: Soldier's and Family Member's Handbook

Throw a deployment into this mixture and Broedel said the situation almost always spells disappointment and heartbreak. "Often the reality is nothing like what they thought marriage was going to be so there is this gap. And the bigger the gap, the bigger the problem," he said.

Possible problems from rash relational decisions can range from tough adjustments after returning from deployments to divorces, depression and anxiety disorders and even homicides and suicides, Broedel said.

"People get married because 'we're in love,' but they don't often consider all the emotional and financial consequences that flow from that decision," he said. "So we live in a society that sees marriage in a very disposable kind of way. 'I can just get a divorce.' But what's the cost of a divorce. What is the cost of a broken heart and lost dreams, dead love or a loveless marriage? What kind of price can you put on that?"

Researchers have attempted to do just that — put a price on divorce and heartbreak. Defense Department studies have shown a slow but steady increase in divorce rates in the military in the post-9/11 era.

And still others have placed a dollar amount on those divorces. Experts place divorce costs at anywhere from \$10,000 to \$50,000. Adding in child support, alimony and other obligations, the financial consequences for failed marriages are substantial.

But as Tom McFliker recently wrote on <http://fatherhoodchannel.com>, financial considerations are just the beginning. "Besides divorcees' wallets, divorce takes its toll on your body's sleep, appetite and exercise routine. The drain causes everything from gray hair to high blood pressure. Depression medications are expensive and can have severely negative side-effects. The stress alone can be lethal, whether it comes out on the highway or at a bar."

Broedel said the antidotes for the allure of intimacy or the tricks or

deceptions Soldiers often encounter as they make these important decisions before they deploy is to slow down. "It's a huge gamble getting married to someone you don't know," he said. "Would you buy a car without checking under the hood?"

He said Soldiers should seek true friendships in their relationships, get premarital counseling, try to bolster their existing relationships with friends and family and work at growing personally and spiritually so they can be comfortable in and out of a relationship.

"My warning would be: don't rush into a relationship prematurely," he said. "I have seen some horrible things come out of this rashness. Friendship is the antidote. You have to figure what it means to be friends and what does this love really mean. And out of that growth of friendship and love comes this wild passion. That's good stuff. But if you go into it backwards you're going to end up tripping and falling."

Before clinging to the idea of marrying someone they do not really know as a life raft, Broedel said Soldiers should tap into the resources available to them through their friends and family and Army resources.

"Don't do this alone," Broedel said. "No Soldier stands alone unless he wants to. I don't recommend that. There is strength in unity."

From new single Soldier Strong Bonds and resiliency programs offered through their chaplains to BOSS events, Army Community Service programs, community resources through Military OneSource and Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation programs, events and trips, there are healthy options for Soldiers who are lonely, bored or confused.

"They also need to be connected with themselves, their God and their purpose," he said. "And if your life has no purpose, find one. People who have a purpose generally enjoy life a lot better." ●