

Running head: DUAL MILITARY AND DEPLOYMENT

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## Abstract

The change in the army's op-tempo is having a tremendous impact on military families. Soldiers are deploying more often leaving behind their families. Everyone is making a sacrifice. When or how dual military Soldiers should deploy is a decision that is being made by leaders with different biases. When and how dual military couples should deploy is an ethical dilemma. Who should determine when a dual couple should deploy? Should the army have a policy that governs dual military deployment, allow the service members to decide, or leave the decision up to the leaders? The army has to consider how deploying dual military Soldiers together or separate will affect the mission.

## Dual Military and Deployment

On many occasions I have sat in different forums and heard the guest speaker talk about how important the family is. I often wonder what do the term family members mean or consist of. I know that may sound strange. The fact of the matter is the word family members mean something different to different people, depending on the circumstance or situation. I have not figured out how or where the dual military family fits into the big picture. Are dual military families viewed the same as any other military family? The ethical dilemma is how the army treats dual military couples when it comes to deploying. If it is such a major concern for the army to keep families together, should a dual military couple have a voice when it comes to deploying on a major operation at the same time as their spouse? Should the company commander be allowed to make the decision for the Soldier or should there be an army wide policy?

To determine when or how dual military couples should deploy we first have must determine or establish how they are viewed. Some or even most people will say it shouldn't matter because they are Soldiers 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and deploying is part of their job. However, some of the same people will be the first to admit that deployments are hard on a family. Most of the time those Soldiers voicing their opinions has a spouse at home holding the family together providing some type of stability. What some people fail to remember is that dual military Soldiers are a couple; they are husband and wife and possibly mothers and fathers. If they have children, who is left back to take care of their families? I'm fully aware of the requirement to have a family care plan; however, no one can take care of a child better than their parents. The army must give some type of consideration to the children if they are going to continuously preach the importance of family. The concerns of the children of dual military

Soldiers are a little different from those left in the care of a civilian parent. Now the children have to deal with both parents being in harms way with the realization that one or both of them may not return. If the dual military couple cannot find anyone to come to their home to take care of their children, the children must be up-rooted, moved to a new area, make new friends, attend a new school, and adjust to their new surroundings. The children don't have a parent there to provide them the emotional or moral support they need. So tell me is it ethical to require these children to endure these challenges and hardships?

It is stressful enough leaving your children behind but it is even worse when you have to worry about your spouse, so again another ethical dilemma is created. Who or what do you put first, the mission or your spouse? Has anyone ever considered the effects of deploying dual military couples at the same time have on a mission? Deploying them together has its pros and cons and they both have to be considered. Some people think it is better for them to deploy together so they won't have to worry about one another, but in fact they still worry. The concerns and worries are just different. They have to worry about a spouse in harms way. This, to me, increases the stress and concern level. The male spouse can not be the protector that he is so accustomed to being. The couples are faced with different challenges. One positive thing about deploying with your spouse is that you always have someone you can count on. Some Soldiers even have the luxury of sleeping with their spouse every night.

A Soldier deploying with their spouse does not eliminate their concerns for a deployed loved one; the concerns just change. The army has to keep in mind they are still a couple. Deployment doesn't change the things that normally occur in a marriage. Spouses are still arguing, bickering, and bantering with one another. Soldiers have to learn to separate family life from the professional work environment especially when they are allowed to share living

quarters. If Soldiers are not able to separate the two it can put a strain on the marriage along with the mission. The Soldier also becomes pre-occupied which can put them and their comrades in danger. They are not always able to function with a clear mind. If a Soldier is so consumed with what is going on with their spouse on the battlefield how well can they do their job? Can they focus on the mission at hand, give 110 percent, or be preoccupied with what's going on with their spouse? The spouse's boots are on ground so they understand what is really going on. They are living some of the same fears, emotions, highs, and lows as their spouse. They have firsthand knowledge and experience, unlike the spouse sitting at home listening and depending on news which only tells them what they want them to know.

Some people will say what is the big deal since the army has the Army Married Couple Programs for dual military couples? The Army Married Couple Program is designed to help ensure Soldiers married to other Soldiers are considered for joint domicile assignments. At this present moment, statistics show that dual military couples make up only 8.9 percent of the Army. This is such a small percentage; I can't really see how it affects the overall mission. The Army Married Couples Program is a good program, when it works, but it does not cover deployment.

Right now Soldiers are being separated more than they are together, so the choice should be up to them. Instead, the choice is left up to the Soldier's leaders who are making these decisions sometimes without considering how it's going to affect the dual military Soldier's family. As a result, some Soldiers are sacrificing money and their career to keep some type of stability within their family. How can the command let this happen when the army needs Soldiers? Leaders also must keep in mind that Soldiers deploying separately face the possibility of being separated for up to 3 years, with the new 15 month rotation. The ethical dilemma comes into play because not all leaders think, act, or make the same decisions. You have some leaders

who will deploy dual military Soldiers together on a case by case basis and some who don't care. When they say everyone will deploy, that means everybody, no exceptions. So is it ethical for a leader to make such a major decision for a Soldier without considering all the facts? For Soldiers who want to deploy together it is not always a simple matter of just asking because a position may not be available. Then it is up to the leadership to create the position. I am well aware that the mission comes first. If you think about it, every time a unit deploys someone is left behind so why not let the dual couple decide. The army is an institution and it is not built around any one Soldier. One person not deploying with the unit will not affect the mission unless they are the only person qualified to do that job. With that being the case, what happens when that same Soldier is wounded or even killed during deployment? Who does the job? The army teaches us that no one is irreplaceable.

I am a part of a dual military couple; and I really wish I would have had the opportunity to make a choice when it was time to deploy or my commander would have considered my situation. No, I never asked my commander could I stay in the rear because he knew my situation. My husband deployed 30 days before I did; they told me on a Friday that I would be leaving the following Friday. I was not given the opportunity to take my kids to my family and help get them settled before I left. During the entire deployment I never worried about myself, I worried about my husband and kids. If something happened to me then what was going to happen to my kids. My deployment required my oldest daughter to grow up fast and help take care of my younger children. What sticks in my mind the most was when my children told me they never wanted to experience anything like that again and it wasn't fair that both of us had to go when some of their friends had one parent to stay back. How could that have been the case when the installation commander said everyone would deploy? It was possible because every

Commander handled the situation differently. If the decision would have been left up to me, I would have waited for my husband to return from his deployment and then I would have deployed without a problem or a care in the world. I deployed with a thousand worries and all I could think about was how I could get back to the rear and get out of the army, quick fast and in a hurry. My husband wrote to me every day and anytime he could get to my location he was there.

In conclusion leaders at all levels must enforce the standards as they apply to all Soldiers. They should always take into account the situation and circumstances surrounding the Soldier. Who should decide when a dual military couple should be deployed will always be an issue. Someone needs to determine who should make that decision. Should it be the dual military couple, the Company Commander, or an Army wide policy? As long as we have dual military couples this will, in my opinion, continue to be an ethical dilemma.