

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

THE LONG WAR AND THE FORGOTTEN FAMILIES: DUAL-MILITARY COUPLES

by

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ABSTRACT

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The all-volunteer Army brought about tremendous changes in military service since its inception in 1973. One of the significant current challenges for the Army is the marriage of one military service member to another military service member - officially known as a dual military couple. The number of dual-military families has been increasing since the military provided the opportunity.

The current long war has exerted significant pressure on military families, especially on dual-military families. This SRP examines dual-military couples' personal and family struggles as a result of the challenges they face in fighting the long war. It also examines the Married Army Couples Program since 9/11, its impact on readiness, the challenges of dual-military couple assignments, and the Army's OPTEMPO impact on dual-military marriages. Army professionals at all levels have sacrificed much to perform their wartime duties.

THE LONG WAR AND THE FORGOTTEN FAMILIES: DUAL-MILITARY COUPLES

The all-volunteer Army brought about tremendous changes in military service since its inception in 1973. It first provided the opportunity for women to volunteer just as men had been allowed to. This opportunity also led to marriages of actively serving women and men. One of the significant current challenges for the Army is the marriage of one military service member to another military service member - officially known as a dual military couple. The number of dual-military families has been increasing since the Army provided the opportunity. The dual-military couple may or may not have children. They are considered a family whether they have children or not.

For forty years prior to 11 September 2001 (9/11), the U.S. military forces engaged in very few extended combat operations. Post-Vietnam, the Cold War period was considerably a more peaceful time for the U.S. military forces as they mainly conducted Peace Keeping Operations and Humanitarian Assistance Operations. During the Cold War, dual-military couples were able to balance the family and their military responsibilities because the military was much more predictable prior to 9/11. The challenges that the dual-military couples may have faced then are the same challenges they face today. However, these challenges were not fully evident to military senior leaders, Congress, and the American public until the U.S. prepared for deployment during Operation Desert Storm.¹ Desert Storm unveiled many issues for the families of active duty and reserve component Soldiers. One issue that in particular received more attention than others was the availability of child care for single parents and dual-military couples during deployment. The childcare issue was of special concern for single parents. This issue raised the question of whether single parents and both members of a dual-military couple would be allowed to remain in the military. Since Desert Storm was a short war that produced very few U.S. casualties, the issue received less attention than it deserved. The effect of deployments on dual-military families following 9/11 has once again raised the issues of long-term childcare. Today childcare still remains as one of the military's top family challenges for single- and dual-military families.

Although childcare is one of the military's top family challenges, the long war and its deployment schedule have raised another significant challenge for the military family: maintaining marriages. With marital problems on the rise since the Iraq war began, the Army is investing tremendous resources (money, people, time, etc.) on programs to help its families. Although the Army attempts to support marriages, current programs offer little to the dual-military couples when they are on different deployment or different work schedules, at different

locations, or when one of them has a Permanent Change of Station (PCS) ninety days after returning home because of his or her unit's inactivation. Perhaps there is an assumption that the dual-military couples do not need any assistance since they are both military. In the swirling controversy surrounding the war in Iraq, are dual-military couples the forgotten families?

Army professionals at all levels have sacrificed much to perform their wartime duties. Many have felt compelled to leave the profession they love for the sake of the family they love. Others have lost their marriages to divorce in order to continue their military service. Many dual-military couples are finding that for the foreseeable future it is increasingly difficult to maintain the dual-military family structure, especially with children, and support the long war at the same time.

This SRP will examine the Married Army Couples Program since 9/11, describe the challenges of dual-military couples' assignments, and describe the impact of the long war on dual-military marriages. It will also explore issues that the dual-military couples confront daily. It concludes that the military must provide better support to this nontraditional family, the dual-military couple. This SRP does not examine the impact that this long war may have on dual-military couples in the National Guard or Reserves. However, most of the challenges active duty dual-military couples face likely apply to the National Guard or Reserves as well.

Families

Since the events of 9/11, the military has faced many challenges. Military families have experienced their share of unique challenges. Families are extremely important to the Army. In dual-career families or dual-military couple families, both husband and wife pursue active careers and a family life simultaneously. They are subsets of nontraditional families.² Both spouses individually pursue work roles for many reasons, such as their pride in serving our country, pride in oneself, independence, monetary gain, sense of identity and self-worth while simultaneously maintaining a family life. This family life-style contrasts with that of traditional families (military member married to civilian spouse) in which the husband is the sole breadwinner and the wife is the homemaker.³

The all-volunteer Army has learned that one key factor to military retention is supporting the family, not just by words but through its actions. Numerous programs have been created to assist families in areas such as child care, finance, education, medical care, job affairs, separation, and divorce during peacetime and during war. These programs have been very successful during peacetime. But the current long war has brought tremendous challenges to the families, particularly for the dual-military families with children. The dual-military family is

under more stress and making more sacrifices than ever before. This stress includes the normal anxiety that comes with long separations from loved ones and is compounded if the dual-military couple has children. Additionally, it is even more stressful if both dual-military parents are deployed, as is often the case today.

Dual-military families are dual-career couples, not simply dual-earner couples as we have in our civilian society. For dual-career couples, both spouses pursue careers, not just jobs. Dual-career couples are committed to a career so they must stay current in their professional fields. They are expected to relocate at any time. Both spouses may pursue careers in the same or different fields or occupations and in the same or different organizations. Some may even singly or jointly operate their family enterprise. In dual-earner families, both spouses have jobs.⁴ The dual-earner couples' jobs do not demand a high level of individual commitment to the work role or constant updating of professional knowledge.⁵ Based on the definitions presented by Rapoport and Rapoport, one must agree that dual-military couples fall in the category of dual-career couples, although many junior officers and first- and second-term junior enlisted personnel have generally not decided whether they plan to pursue a military career. The Army acknowledged some of the unique survivor-based challenges that dual-military couples faced by establishing the Married Army Couples Program.

History of Married Army Couples Program (MACP)

During World War II, the War Department's policy on marriage as evident in the Women's Army Corps (WAC) and the Army regulations did not change during the war. The policy guidance stated that marriage did not disqualify a woman from enlistment, nor did it provide a basis for requesting transfer or discharge.⁶ Commanders in the United States and overseas, in areas such as North Africa, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East theaters, allowed military personnel to marry. In the European Theater, marriage was permitted. But one spouse was immediately transferred to a distant station within the command or out of the theater. The purpose of the immediate transfer was to discourage hasty wartime marriages and pregnancies.⁷ In the Southwest Pacific Area and in the China-Burma-India Theater, marriage was not permitted unless the woman was pregnant. In this case, the pregnant WAC was sent home and discharged—therefore the couple was no longer considered as a military person married to a military person.⁸

Allowing females to enter, marry, and remain in the military was a major change for the Army. Of course, this brought more married women in the military, but not just to a civilian spouse. Today, female Soldiers are more likely to be married to someone who is also serving in

the military than male Soldiers.⁹ Over thirty-seven percent of married enlisted women and more than forty percent of married female officers were married to servicemen in 2005.¹⁰ Now increasingly military women are married to men in the military.

Nonetheless, married Army couples must be prepared to meet their separate military obligations, regardless of assignment. Favorable consideration for a married Army couple assignment depends on four valid criteria: 1) the needs of the service, 2) requirements for the military skills and grades of both members in one area, 3) career progression of both members not adversely affected, and 3) the married Army couple's eligibility for the assignment. These four criteria, prioritized in the order of presentation, determined whether the dual-military couple would be assigned to the same location.¹¹

Assignment Policy

According to Army Regulation 614-100, Officer Assignment Policies, Details, and Transfers for Officers and Army Regulation 614-200, Enlisted Assignments and Utilization Management for Enlisted Personnel, Soldiers married to other Army Soldiers had to be enrolled in the program to be considered for an assignment to the same location - in other words, a joint domicile assignment.¹² The official description of the Married Army Couples Program indicate it is designed to provide a means whereby service couples may be considered for assignment together to establish a joint household while fulfilling the mission of the Army.¹³

In the 1970s the Army established a policy to assign Army married couples together, if practicable. Assignments of married military couples together were initially called "Joint Assignments."¹⁴ In the early 1980s the program became more formalized and was renamed "The Assignment of Married Army Couples." This program provided ways for married Army couples to apply for joint domicile assignment. Some requests were considered under provision of the "Married Army Couples Program," which provided automatic assignments to both Soldiers to the same location or area whenever either one of the soldiers was selected for an assignment.¹⁵ On 1 October 1985, the program was redesigned and the two programs were combined into one program, "The Married Army Couples Program." This change sought to make the program more proactive and to take advantage of available automation.¹⁶

According to Human Resource Command (HRC), there have been no policy changes in how the program works since it was redesigned in 1985.¹⁷ However, internal Army joint domicile procedures have been improved to bring more visibility to the program, and some cosmetic automation changes have been made to ensure that Soldiers married to other Soldiers are considered for assignment together.¹⁸

During the Cold War, orders assigning dual couples to the same location fulfilled the purpose of the program: The program enabled dual-military couples to establish a joint household while fulfilling the mission of the Army. Today more dual-military couples have joint domiciles than pre 9/11, according to Human Resource Command.¹⁹ Pre 9/11 information on joint domicile for officers was not available. Pre 9/11 79.2% of dual-military couples were assigned to joint domiciles. The overall number of Soldiers enrolled in the program has declined, but the joint domiciles have increased.²⁰

		MACP ENROLLED	JOINT DOMICILE		NOT on JOINT DOMICILE	
PRE 9/11 -May 2001	ENLISTED	21,984	17,417	79.2%	4,567	20.8%
OFFICERS---MAY 2001		3,838				
ENLISTED—OCT 2006		7,964	14,886	186.9%	3,078	38.6%
OFFICERS—OCT 2006		4,765	3,831	80.4%	934	19.6%

Table1. Enlisted and Officers' Joint Domicile Status²¹

Based on data from HRC for 2006, there were 4,012 Army dual-military couples, enlisted and officer personnel, who were not on joint domicile. These service members were serving in jobs based on needs of the Army on unaccompanied tours. Or they were patients, prisoners, students, Drill SGTs/Recruiters, and Soldiers with less than one year in the Army or only recently married.²²

According to U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) G-1, 17,000 plus dual-military couples are not tracked once they have been assigned to the same location, although many of them are assigned to different units.²³ This in turn may mean they have different rotation schedules, so these couples do not really share a joint domicile. This is a growing concern for dual-military couples, more so now than during the Cold War.

Personnel managers often see dual-military couples as problematic, because most dual-couples request joint domicile. They find it more difficult to coordinate assignments of two Soldiers than one Soldier, especially for those of different career fields or when one Soldier volunteers for a special duty assignment. Separation of dual-military couples due to assignments in different locations is more common than for other married military personnel. In 1984, 38 percent of dual-military couples were not approved for joint domicile because they were serving in jobs based on the needs of the Army or jobs that provided career advancement. Or they were on unaccompanied tours, were students, were recruiters, or had less than a year

in the Army or were only recently married.²⁴ According to data presented by HRC, joint domicile has increased in the Army: Only 17.1% of dual-military enlisted personnel and 19.6% of officers are not joint domicile.²⁵ Again the data may indicate that the Army is doing better at assigning dual-military couples to the same location. However, in reality assignments to the same location may not provide true joint domicile.

Consider this example of what dual couples are experiencing during their assignment to the same location: According to a February 2004 *Stars and Strips*' article, Sergeant Brian Stewmon returned late from an 11½-month tour in Iraq. He got home just in time to kiss his wife goodbye and send her off on her own year-long deployment. "We expected separation, but we never expected two years," Sergeant Michelle Stewmon said last week, just after arriving in Kuwait. "People don't know that it's going on. They're shocked this is happening."²⁶ The Stewmons are among a small number of dual-military families taking a double-barreled hit from the Army's supercharged operational tempo the past two years.²⁷ Quite commonly, the military assigns married service members to separate units in the same area. With the heavy demand for Army units in Iraq, inevitably some of those units have gone downrange at different times.²⁸

Service members who marry know that one or both could be deployed. Most Army families have endured a South Korean or Balkans tour. But Operation Iraqi Freedom, with its one-year tours and large personnel demands, has increased the burden to something no pre-9/11 soldier could have imagined. "This is the first time we've had to face a situation like this," Michelle Stewmon said. "These year-long rotations are new."²⁹

All the services in recent years have emphasized family stability. They allow lengthy leaves to service members back from deployment and offer counseling to help with the adjustment. But for dual-military families, there is barely time to hand over the car keys, much less rebuild a marriage. Duty always trumps family.³⁰ The situation worsens when dual-military couples' tours are unexpectedly extended three or four months, and both spouses are on different deployment schedules. Then there is no one to hand over the keys to or reunite with. There is no "dwell time" for the marriage. The Army defines dwell time as the time a Soldier spends at home between combat deployments, operational deployments (non-combat), or dependent restricted tours.³¹ Commanders, Human Resources Managers, and Soldiers are responsible for tracking Individual Soldier's dwell time. Capturing Soldier's dwell time is a useful indicator for determining stress on the force and a management indicator for manning, assignment, and personnel management decisions.³²

FORSCOM leadership is aware of the problems dual couples are experiencing. During the 2006 FORSCOM Army Family Action Plan (AFAP), eleven issues were briefed, and then

five were chosen to go forward to Department of the Army. The third FORSCOM issue addressed assignment and deployment considerations for dual-military couples. The Married Army Couples Program manages duty assignments for dual-military couples, but does not manage deployment cycles. Thus some couples face alternating deployments and increasingly long separations, while others find themselves deployed simultaneously. FORSCOM recommended that the Department of the Army establish a policy that allows dual-military Soldiers to indicate their duty locations and deployment-cycle preferences as a couple with HRC. This endorsement would help reduce hardships and uncertainty for dual-military couples and improve retention of these Soldiers. Also, the AFAP work group recommended that commanders should be mandated to consider these preferences with respect to deployment cycles, with HRC oversight.³³

In January 2007, the Army implemented a change to the MACP per MILPER message number 06-363, Voluntary Deployment Preference Initiative for the Married Army Couples Program. This change allows enlisted personnel married to enlisted personnel to indicate a preference for simultaneous deployment cycles. The career managers will know the dual-military couple's preference for the same or opposite deployment cycles. This change also gives HRC the ability to assign Soldiers to Brigade Combat Teams, which will assist them in supporting families.³⁴ However, this new change does not apply to the dual-military officer couples because of their density in the officer population, assignment needs in the force structure, and general assignment management strategy.³⁵ So there is still a constant struggle for dual-military couples to keep their families together, even though they understand that the military mission will always have priority over family priorities.

Theory of Two Greedy Institutions—Family and Military

For the past 40 years the military and the family has been in competition. This tension is even greater today. The proportion of military personnel who are married has risen. Fifty-four percent of the force is married today, and over 73 percent of married personnel have children.³⁶ This is largely due to increased Department of Defense (DOD) emphasis on retaining trained and experienced personnel and reducing turnover.³⁷

Both the family and the military require significant commitments of loyalty, time, and energy from all individuals, but more from some than others. According to David and Mady Segal, a social institution is considered "greedy" when it requires a great commitment of time and energy, and seeks to limit participants' other roles. The military's distinctive lifestyle affects service members and their families—especially their spouse and children, although they are

reflected indirectly through the service members.³⁸ This is not only true for the military but also for certain civilian occupations that share similar lifestyles. The military is unique in that career military personnel are likely to experience all these demands. The quality of family life is affected by the demands of the military life, and often family issues affect service members' commitments to the military.

The family makes different demands on different members of the family. It is not a greedy institution for all members. According to studies by Lewis and Rose Coser, the family is greedier for its female member. They found that the female is expected to devote most of her time and emotional energies to the family. Their finding also noted that certain occupations require commitments that interfere with family obligations. Because of these family demands, women have been excluded from high-status occupations in the civilian environment. The study also showed that the conflict between family and work may occur for men as well. Men's work interferes with their ability to provide a reasonable expectation of time, energy, and affection to the family.³⁹

The opportunities, demands, and constraints faced by dual-career couples take on added dimensions of complexity since both spouses are deeply committed to two major concerns of their lives--a full-time demanding career to which each is personally and professionally committed, and a wholesome and happy family life to which both are emotionally, psychologically, and perhaps spiritually committed. Added to this are the unique problematic situations encountered by dual-career families with young children. When both spouses have to travel on official duty, when one or both are transferred, or either or both have to be out of town for long periods of time to participate in training programs or for other reasons, these career demands greatly stress family relations.⁴⁰ In today's society, people are less willing to join a community; this lack of community support makes family life even more difficult. People are afraid to get involved and help their neighbors.

Managing both realms of life to optimize the satisfactions at work and in the home becomes a formidable task. Some families cope with their dual role fairly well on their own, but most need help and counseling.⁴¹

Making a Marriage Work

How do dual-military couples make a marriage work when so many others fail without the added stress of war, particularly a long war? When couples express their vows, do they really mean what they say? Will their marriage bonds endure through good times and bad, through sickness and health, through long work hours separated from family for what can seem like an

eternity? Are they really going to stand by each other and say, “Yes, really? It’s okay that I haven’t seen you in eight months, a year, or two years for that matter.” So how do some couples manage to stay together?⁴²

During the course of a marriage between two active-duty service members, most couples will have to make trade-offs between career and family. They may pass up a career-enhancing assignment or school in order to stay together. Or they may accept a less desirable job so the spouse can advance. Dual-military couples frequently make such choices. As married service members progress in rank and responsibility, these decisions often become more difficult.⁴³

Is it currently practicable for junior enlisted dual-military couples and young officer dual-military couples to remain married and reach the rank of sergeant major or colonel? The author believes it is doable – but very difficult. It is even more difficult today than pre 9/11, mainly due to the current OPTEMPO of the military.

Family separations due to deployment or to remote or unaccompanied assignments are one of the major stressors that dual-military couples face. But these separations are also a fact of life for all military families. Dual-military couples are likely to spend even more time apart than does the traditional military family (military service member married to a civilian spouse). Dual-military couples should not expect to be together at every duty location throughout their careers. Even when they are assigned to the same location, long hours and different schedules can make them feel like strangers passing each other in their homes. And the demanding operational tempo sometimes means that one member of a dual-military couple sometimes comes home from a long deployment just in time to say goodbye to a deploying spouse.⁴⁴

Advantages

Dual-military couples have one major advantage over most civilians. They understand the military so they can share experience sometimes first hand. In a successful dual-military marriage, spouses are able to appreciate their special kind of bond. They understand each others’ job - the requirements, struggles, and accomplishments.⁴⁵ A disadvantage of dual-military couples where both are deployed is not what they may be doing back home but anxiety over the danger of their spouses’ job or location.⁴⁶

Compared with couples in which one member is a civilian with career aspirations, dual-military couples may actually benefit the military organization. Although personnel assignment systems must be adapted for them, this may be accomplished more easily than coordinating with a spouse’s civilian employment opportunities. Dual-military couples are likely to be more committed to the military way of life and to understand each other’s job requirements.

Challenges

The main challenge for the military and dual couples prior to 9/11 came with assignments during Permanent Change of Station. Dual-military couples often make tremendous career sacrifices to be stationed together in order to live as a family. Most dual couples have expressed their willingness to accept a one-year separated assignment in order to plan their next assignment, which will bring them back together.

Dual-military couples nonetheless make difficult career decisions during the course of their marriage. Trade-offs between their careers and families are required in order to sustain both careers and to maintain a healthy marriage.⁴⁷ Passing up career-enhancing assignments or school in order to be or stay together and accepting a less desirable job so the spouse can advance are decisions almost every dual career couple faces. Those with children frequently call upon family and friends to make sacrifices in support of their military service. Asking children to make sacrifices and accepting help from extended family and friends can sometimes become a source of guilt and a cause for conflict in dual-military relationships.⁴⁸

During deployment, one of the challenges dual-military couples face is the added stressor of being together in a combat zone.⁴⁹ These couples must be constantly aware of their military surroundings and bearings at all time. They are Soldiers first in a military environment; then they are spouses. Why is this so? It is because they are never really off-duty in combat. Not only are they working hard and focusing on their job, but they also worry about the well-being and safety of their spouse.⁵⁰

Status of Dual Couples in the Military from 9/11 Until 2006

Married

Prior to 9/11 there were a total of 65,916 military dual couples. Today, there are over 78,636 military dual couples spread throughout the globe supporting and defending this great nation.

Across all services, a substantial proportion of the dual-marriages are enlisted. The largest percentage of enlisted dual-military marriages occurs in the Air Force. There are several conclusions one can draw from the data presented in Table 2. First, all services except the Army saw an increase in dual-marriages since the U.S. entered the long war. The Navy has doubled its dual-marriages from 2001 to 2006. The Marine Corps is on somewhat the same operational tempo schedule as the Army. However, the Marine Corps percentage of dual-military marriages compared with that of the Army has increased, especially with its officers. We should also consider all services' programs and policies toward dual-military marriages.

Then we quickly wonder why dual-military marriages have increased in the other services, but not the Army. Can it be that service members in the Army are choosing not to get married? Or are dual couples choosing to leave the military because of the Army's operational tempo and deployment schedules? Or perhaps the Army's dual-military couples are divorcing more than they are marrying during this long war period.

Married to Service Members						
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
ARMY						
ENLISTED	19 624	18 318	19 636	19 541	18 388	18 082
OFFICER	4 032	3 891	3 809	3 550	3 659	3 666
TOTAL	23 656	22 209	23 445	23 091	22 047	21 748
AIRFORCE						
ENLISTED	27 239	26 273	28 029	30 864	31 685	30 368
OFFICER	4 371	4 293	4 672	5 288	5 449	5 428
TOTAL	31 610	30 566	32 701	36 152	37 134	35 796
MARINE CORPS						
ENLISTED	4 360	4 485	4 729	4 807	4 925	5 021
OFFICER	393	432	486	560	588	624
TOTAL	4 753	4 917	5 215	5 367	5 513	5 645
NAVY						
ENLISTED	5 251	4 238	7 470	10 662	12 323	13 294
OFFICER	646	568	887	1 326	1 619	1 733
TOTAL	5 897	4 806	8 357	11 988	13 942	15 027
TOTAL						
ENLISTED	56 474	53 314	59 864	65 874	67 321	66 765

Table 2. Military Members Married to Military Members' Status for All Services⁵¹

Divorce

Americans overall are working longer hours. Between 1989 and 1999, middle-income Americans increased their annual work time 3.8% according to the Economic Policy Institute, a Washington think-tank.⁵² Increased hours at work diminishes time at home. When couples think their relationships are on autopilot, they sometimes neglect domestic relations or family obligations in favor of work. One of the first things to fall by the wayside can be the marriage.⁵³

Numerous problems, dilemmas, and stresses are experienced by the dual-military couple family as they desperately try to shape their lives. Their attempts to balance two careers and a family are sometimes unsuccessful, and the marriages of these couples often end in separation or divorce. According to Houseknecht and Spanier, the divorce rate in families in which wives have had five years or more of college education is greater than that in families in which wives

are not so highly educated. Likewise, the divorce rate in families where the wife is a professional is higher than in the general population.⁵⁴ This tendency, along with the Army's operational tempo, may explain why divorce among Army officers was on the rise at the beginning of the war as depicted in Table 3. However, it dropped in 2005 but remains above pre-Operation Iraqi Freedom. Also as shown in Table 3 divorce among enlisted dual-military couples decreased at the beginning of the war but has continued to rise and slightly surpassed pre-Operation Iraqi Freedom.

	Deployed	Divorces	%	Not Deployed	Divorces	%	Total Army	Divorces	%
2002									
Enlisted	923	56	6.1%	17395	887	5.1%	18374	943	5.1%
Officer	188	9	4.8%	3703	83	2.2%	3900	92	2.4%
2003									
Enlisted	6107	206	3.4%	13529	496	3.7%	19842	702	3.5%
Officer	1034	42	4.1%	2775	101	3.6%	3851	143	3.7%
2004									
Enlisted	8962	388	4.3%	10579	478	4.5%	19929	866	4.3%
Officer	1494	74	5.0%	2056	87	4.2%	3624	161	4.4%
2005									
Enlisted	10078	528	5.2%	8310	367	4.4%	18916	895	4.7%
Officer	1893	72	3.8%	1766	49	2.8%	3731	121	3.2%
2006									
Enlisted	11235	707	6.3%	6847	324	4.7%	18789	1031	5.5%
Officer	2128	83	3.9%	1448	32	2.2%	3659	115	3.1%

Table 3. Army Service Member Married to Military Member Deployed/Divorces Status⁵⁵

After Operation Iraqi Freedom began, there was an increase of 3,024 divorces Army-wide. Total Army divorces doubled from the 2000 fiscal year to the 2004 fiscal year – an increase of nearly 5,000 divorces over this period. A year before September 11, total active-duty Army divorces numbered 5,658 among 255,353 marriages. Divorces rose a year later to 7,049 from 248,180 marriages.⁵⁶

A University of North Carolina professor who has studied military families for 28 years says he isn't surprised by the rise in divorces. "If the numbers are right, then we have more to worry about than just fighting a war," he says. "We're trying to fight a war with families that are struggling, and that's a real challenge."

The stress of combat, long separations and difficulty readjusting to family life after combat or hardship tours are key reasons for the surge in divorces.⁵⁷ "Rising through the ranks, every subsequent job gets more difficult, more intense and more demanding," claims COL Pamela

Hart, an Army spokeswoman interviewed by *USA Today*. “So the stressors are extreme in the officer corps, especially when we’re at war. The officers have an overwhelming responsibility to take care of their Soldiers as well as the Soldier’s families. There is a lot of responsibility on the leaders’ shoulders, which takes away from the home life.”⁵⁸

The Army has developed and implemented numerous programs to assist married couples and families to prevent divorce. But how is the Army assisting the dual-military couples that are on different deployment schedules and serving in different commands? Is it possible that the dual-military couples, especially officers, may be overlooked when it comes to these special programs concerning marriage and divorce? How do officers and senior enlisted personnel get the opportunity to take advantage of these special programs? Perhaps because they are the minority and only make up 9.1 percent of the Army, they are truly the forgotten families.⁵⁹ But they will immediately become the noticeable families if their personal challenges impact unit readiness.

Impact on Readiness

Unit readiness may be impacted in many ways, but one sure way is through Soldiers and their family. The Army families are directly linked to readiness. The Army recruits individuals, grows leaders, and retains families.⁶⁰ The effect of OPTEMPO on Soldiers, their families, and unit readiness is an important issue for military and civilian leaders. The reason for this concern is that while the size of the US military has decreased, the frequency of military operations has greatly intensified.⁶¹ Although the Army has had high reenlistment rates for the past years, planners, policymakers, and commanders are aware that if left unchecked, OPTEMPO may begin to degrade the force not only in terms of morale but also in terms of retention and family strain.⁶²

During Desert Storm, Defense Secretary Cheney and General Powell sent a message to Congress regarding single-parent and dual-military couples serving in combat zones. They warned that redeploying single parents and dual-military couples would weaken combat capability by forcing key personnel to leave the Army. It would also undermine unit cohesion and esprit de corps.⁶³ According to a DOD report covering Desert Storm, single parents and dual-military parents did not impede successful military operations in Desert Storm, and military family assistance policies worked well.⁶⁴

In 1999, U.S. Army in Europe (USAREUR) conducted a survey on the effects of OPTEMPO on Soldier retention and family readiness. The findings revealed that 17% of the Soldiers surveyed responded that they would not make the military a career because there were

too many deployments. This response was consistent throughout the ranks. Also a third of the Soldiers reported that they planned to get out at the end of their military obligation because there were too many deployments. Last, the Soldiers that were intending to leave the military also reported that the number of deployments had hurt their marriage and caused a strain on their family. Even among those that reported that they would be staying until retirement, about half reported that deployments had put a big strain on their marriage and family.⁶⁵ Keep in mind that this survey was conducted in 1999. The OPTEMPO during 1998-1999 is nothing compared to what married Soldiers are faced with today, especially dual-military couples.

Many Soldiers married to other Soldiers agree that being a member of a dual-military family involves a lot of sacrifices that are not common to other families that have a traditional support structure (civilian spouse available). Many dual-military families find the sacrifices to be overwhelming, which sometimes leads to one of the service members leaving the Army. On the other hand, some of these couples choose to endure the hardships, attempting to find a balance between their family life and careers. One of the biggest sacrifices these couples endure is deployments.

During the earlier Operations Iraqi Freedom (OIF) deployments, there were no systems or policies in place to keep dual-military couples together.⁶⁶ In recent years, much attention has focused on the unique hardships that these couples bear due to constant deployments required to fight the war on terrorism. As a result, the Army has become both pro-family and pro-discipline, and commanders now determine how to support both when the two may be at odds.⁶⁷

Additionally, our military leadership realizes that if a husband and wife are serving together, the restriction of no cohabitation can cause additional stress in their marriage. Therefore, MNC-I General Order (GO-1) offers relief to dual-military service members. The new MNC-I GO-1, dated 02 May 2006, Para 2, (p) addresses, PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES:

In accordance with and in addition to USCENTCOM GO-1B, the following activities are prohibited: (p) Cohabitation of males and females except for lawfully married spouses. Married spouses will be allowed to cohabitate provided "adequate accommodations are available." This policy clearly indicates that if a dual-military couple is deployed in the same unit or location, they will be allowed to live as husband and wife in the same housing if accommodations are available. In order to make deployment circumstances less stressful on dual-military marriages commanders at every level must understand and enforce GO-1, Para 2, and support cohabitation of dual-military couples.⁶⁸

How has this policy affected unit morale? What does a Soldier's civilian spouse think about this policy? How many domestic incidents have arisen and how are commanders

handling issues like this? What about pregnancy? Have any females become pregnant since this policy came into effect and returned to home station?

An additional consideration in terms of readiness is the impact on our young enlisted personnel and young officers. Young enlisted Soldiers and officers are less inclined to marry another military service member as they become aware of the sacrifice required to maintain the marriage they seek. They view the high divorce rate, separation, and family challenges as undesirable. Many feel that the extremely high operational tempo prevents the opportunity to meet a potential mate even if they wanted to. This collective body of young military enlisted personnel and officers represents the future readiness of our force. The lack of predictability in the lives of these young military members may convince them that dual-military marriage is simply undesirable. In addition to the retention of military youth for our future, serious attention must be paid to overcoming these challenges for our mid-grade and career military dual-military couples. Retaining trained and experienced personnel, whether they are part of a dual-military couple or not, directly affects readiness. Dual-military couples are a minority amongst the population in the ranks of the Army, but should the Army ignore them and their issues? There are no guarantees that recruiting goals will continue to be met during the long war. To retain this unique population in the military, our leaders must learn to treat them in such a way that they are satisfied with their lives in the service. If individuals perceive that the Army is not a place where they are treated well, they will vote with their feet.⁶⁹

Recommendations

To ensure that the Army retains dual-military couples, some institutional changes are needed to enable the military to recruit and retain the most qualified Soldiers.

First, the Army must make every effort to provide all dual-military couples with joint domicile that takes into account the possibility of deployments, not only for enlisted personnel but for officers as well. Although the coordination for joint domicile gets more difficult as the numbers of such couples increase, the gains in dedication to the Army may be worth the necessary accommodations.⁷⁰

The Army should consider the U.S. Coast Guard program as a model. The Coast Guard Program allows officers and enlisted personnel to take unpaid leave of absence for up to two years upon the birth or adoption of a child. Either parent may apply for this leave.⁷¹ However, the Army should tailor this program not just for the birth or adoption of a child but also for taking care of a sick child or spouse or aging parent or for reestablishing the marriage after a long separation. The number of leaves and length of the leaves of absence should be based on

years served and rank. Soldiers on leave must register in the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR). They must maintain height and weight standards. They will return to active duty at their same rank, but some may lose their year-group or promotion eligibility status based on the length of their leave of absence. While on leave, they are not eligible for promotion. Soldiers should be allowed to take advantage of this program twice in their entire military career. The Army should consider the following options:

- Grant one of the Soldiers (junior enlisted or junior officers) a six-month leave of absence without pay but with all other benefits to dual-military Soldiers that are on their second commitment.⁷²
- Grant a one year leave of absence without pay for senior enlisted and field grade officers. Soldier will continue to receive benefits such as commissary, medical, housing, and other entitlements as long as Soldiers remain married to the other service members.⁷³
- Allow dual-military couples 90 days together between deployments to reunite as a family. This will enable the dual-military couples to overcome some of the challenges that are unique to them - for example, handing over the children and finances, and locating a place to live when they do not deploy together.

Of course, an overriding consideration for the military when considering any type program regarding an extended leave policy is unit readiness. Leaders' primary task is to get the job done right – to accomplish the mission. So they are understandably reluctant to lose key personnel at critical times. Further, this program should not only be considered for dual-military couples but for all Soldiers. Approval should not be granted automatically, but based on recommendations from the leadership, doctors, chaplains, and HRC. Department of the Army should have the overall approval. Everyone may not be afforded this opportunity, based on available personnel and the mission. However, each request must be considered. Only with further research and testing will the Army know how such leaves of absence will truly impact readiness and families.

There is much that the military does not know regarding how the long war is affecting the dual-military couples. We must identify the challenges and benefits dual-military couples placed on their units while deployed and upon their return to home stations. We should seek answers to several questions unique to this special group of service members: Are dual-military couples reviving their marriage when they reunite? What about domestic violence? Are they seeking counseling or simply divorcing? Are current programs developed to support families available and working in support of the dual-military couples? Is the main reason for those that are

leaving the military separate from their family due to long and constant deployments? What about those who have children? What is the impact on the children? What are some of the issues commanders faced during deployments pertaining to dual-military couples? Were new policies put in place to assure unit cohesiveness or morale, such as not allowing dual-military couples to ride in the same vehicles at any time?

Conclusion

The Army is at war and will be for the foreseeable future. The mental and spiritual state of Soldiers and their families is essential to the ability of the force to accomplish the Army's mission. Quality of life is a vital element in retaining quality personnel, even for dual-military couples. Helping Soldiers balance their responsibilities to both family and country requires an extraordinary effort from Army leaders.⁷⁴

This SRP has examined the Married Army Couples Program since 9/11. It described some benefits and challenges of dual-military couples, their impact on readiness, and the ways some make a marriage work through deployment and separation as the Army continues the long war. This long war should not cause dual-military couples to sacrifice their marriage in order to stay in the military. It is possible to have a rewarding career in the military and maintain a family even during a long war, but this requires great sacrifice that many dual-military couples are not willing to make. For those who are willing to have both the Army career and a family, it can be rewarding. But we must always remember that the mission of the military comes first, no matter how long the war or how strenuous the mission may be. Prior to 9/11, the management, the support, and the implementation of the Married Army Couples Program were far less challenging. However, current operational pressures have rendered the program less effective in supporting dual-military couples.

The long war has surfaced many challenging issues for the Army. As the fight continues, more lessons will be learned. As topics are discussed and decisions are made regarding what should be researched or studied, the dual-military couple should definitely be on the list as an item of interest to the Army.

The military must do more to retain the skills, talents, and experiences of these Soldiers. Although dual-military couples are a minority in the Army, each one of them plays an important role in the military and may play a greater role in the future, when recruitment for an all-volunteer force becomes more difficult as the long war continues. It is time for senior leadership to accept dual-military couples totally, along with programs and policies that have been established for the traditional family. The dual-military family must be accommodated in Army

family policies and programs. Otherwise, the Army should make it clear that it does not fully support dual-military marriages. Discussions with many senior officers and senior enlisted dual-military couples have aroused some concerns over the following comments: “It is the dual-military couple’s choice that both are serving. They can get out if it is too hard or they feel too stressed.” Most dual-military couples are not looking for favoritism or any special treatment. They simply want the Army to remember them when policies are being established. They believe that they may have too often been forgotten. Most dual-military couples serve not for the money, but because they love their country and the military.

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