

Families and Deployment: Giving Voice to the Home Front

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'There is no place like home,' Dorothy said in *The Wizard of Oz*. But unlike Dorothy soldiers do not have magical shoes to get them home. Soldiers and their home fronts have to take care of themselves during deployment. They have to have the characteristics of the actors in *The Wizard of Oz* and be courageous, intelligent and warm of heart and most of all, they have to find and use their inner strength, just like Dorothy. The most important motivation to start a research project into the experiences of partners that were left behind during a deployment was the question 'where do these women find the strength to cope with a difficult period of a half-year separation from their husbands.' We wished to know more because of the white spots in our (theoretical and factual) knowledge on the subject but also to be able to make practical recommendations that could lead to the improvement of the situation for 'waiting wives' (Wood, 1995). The voice of the home front is too seldom heard. This article is meant to give expression to the voice of the home front. In it are presented the first findings of our research project on how Dutch military families experience deployments.

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International and Inter-Institutional Comparisons

Many organisations work on an international scale. Their employees work all over the world. Maritime transport companies, oil companies, international trading companies etc. depend on personnel abroad. But the deployment and family support policies of armed forces differ fundamentally from expatriate policies in civilian organisations. Military personnel is being sent to an area where they are likely to come into contact with military violence. Spouses of military personnel remain in the 'safe harbour' of the sending nation. International civilian organisations often have arrangements for the spouse and the family. In many cases the family as a whole lives abroad. The problem of these organisations is not the problem of separation. Civilian organisations have problems with working spouses who will have to quit their jobs because of the international career of the other spouse. Many organisations have problems repatriating expatriates. Usually the problem lies in finding a function that is equal or higher in rank and pay. In an international research into expatriates about 46% had to accept a position with less autonomy (Black, 1992). The researchers found that 77% of American expatriates in the survey accepted a job that was lower than their expatriate job. Many families had problems adjusting to

living in their country of origin (Solomon, 1995).

The problems of military wives are different and have to do with the period of separation. During IFOR and UNPROFOR most European nations had a deployment with a duration of six months (Belgium is an exception with a four-month rotation system). Americans in IFOR and SFOR leave their families for one year. Separation is the main cause of problems for the military family. Problems become manifest in the stress reactions women have. Most research into military families therefore includes some kind of measurement of stress reactions or physical or psychic well-being. From research we know that military wives cope better than civilian wives. An American research by Eastman, Archer and Ball (1990) demonstrated that navy families scored higher on cohesiveness, expressiveness and the level in which a family is organised than ordinary civilian families. Families that can be characterised as low stress families are as a rule also more cohesive and better at expressing feelings. There is less conflict in low stress families and they are better organised.

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Research in the Netherlands indicates that spouses of veterans (a large proportions of those veterans served in Bosnia) have significantly less sleeping problems than the average civilian Dutch female (Bramsen, Dirkzwager and Van der Ploeg, 1997). Based on these findings one could be tempted to ask: 'Is there a problem? Military wives are doing great!'. On average wives indeed suffer a little less from stress reactions than civilian wives. The problem, of course, is that there is a causal relation between deployments and the occurrence of stress reactions, which makes care for personnel and their families a responsibility of the armed forces.

When the deployment gets rougher, riskier or longer, families will experience more stress. This causal relation is demonstrated by Bartone and Bartone (1997) who compared stressors in the IFOR-I deployment to stressors in Operation Southern Watch (OSW: a Patriot missile battalion of 500 soldiers deployed in Saudi Arabia in 1996). Both deployments concerned American soldiers that are normally stationed in Germany. The deployments differed in many ways. One of the most important differences was the length of the deployment: six months in OSW versus twelve months for IFOR. The length of deployment is stressor number one for the spouses of IFOR soldiers. The number one stressor for spouses of OSW soldiers was concern about the soldier's safety (cf. Table 1). The percentages of wives reporting stressing experiences are higher in the IFOR case than in the OSW case.

Length of deployment is perceived as main stressor when the length of deployment is doubled. One of the wives commented as follows: 'My husband and me and our two kids arrived in Germany two weeks after he returned from a one-year hardship tour in Korea. It was quite hard for me and the kids to be away from him for one year and we were

Table 1: Comparison OSW-IFOR on the Four Top Stressors for Spouses in Germany (source: Bartone and Bartone 1997).

<i>Operation Southern Watch N=52</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Implementation Force N=1711</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Concern about Soldier's Safety</i>	66	<i>Length of Deployment</i>	82
<i>Uncertain Return Date</i>	41	<i>Concern about Soldier's Safety</i>	78
<i>Length of Deployment</i>	40	<i>News about the Situation in Bosnia</i>	59
<i>Lack of Media Coverage</i>	37	<i>Getting Timely Information</i>	58

happy to finally be a family again. So, two days after our household goods arrived, two days before Christmas, he left again leaving us for our second Christmas.'

From research we know that there are phases in the way spouses react to deployment and we know what are considered to be good coping strategies. The stages wives go through are: initial shock, departure, emotional disorganisation, recovery and stabilisation, anticipation of the homecoming, reunion and reintegration/stabilisation (De Soir, 1997). Positive coping strategies include : maintaining family togetherness, developing self-esteem and a positive attitude, developing social support, learning about a problem, reducing tension through hobbies, talking, balancing the above mentioned coping strategies (McCubbin, 1979). As a corner stone in personnel policy, social support is stimulated in many countries. The effectiveness of social support is discussed in many articles (Rosen and Moghadam, 1990; Cohen and Wills, 1985; Bell, Segal and Rice, 1995; Moelker and Cloin, 1997).

An important topic in international research is the time after the deployment (Wood, Scarville and Gravino, 1995; Wouters, 1997). Successful reintegration of the soldier and his/her family are essential in developing a positive attitude toward future deployment. Successful marital reconciliation is important for the motivation of many soldiers. Many studies report that wives have found new confidence in themselves and that the relation between the spouses has become closer. In a Belgian research 60% of the couples said that they stood the test and are 'stronger and closer, because both partners have become more autonomous and mature' (Wauters, 1997: 23). Getting psychiatric help for couples that have difficulties is not ideal in the Belgian system of care: people complain about the location of the Centre for Crisis Psychology in a Military Hospital in Brussels (too big and frightening, understaffed). Decentralisation would be better. Belgian policy makers have implemented improvements on the basis of this research.

History and Organisation of Family Support in the Netherlands

Organised family support did not exist at the time when forces were sent to Korea (in the early fifties) or the Middle East (the late seventies - early eighties). The newsletter *de Achterbanier* was the only medium that created a link between the home front and those deployed abroad. The Cold War meant that deployment abroad in the army and air force was rare and only then on a voluntary basis. We have to turn to the navy therefore to trace the origins of organised family support.

156 The world of the navy in this regard is quite different. Service personnel with the navy is regularly away from home for longer periods. Wives of navy personnel therefore have always been confronted with periods of separation from their spouses. During the partner's absence, the need for contact between the women who have been left behind is great. No wonder then that the initiative for what we would now call the first family support group came from the women themselves. It began simply on the quayside where the women gathered to say farewell to their husbands. There in the period 1976-1977 upon the departure of the submarine *De Tonijn* from Den Helder, the idea was put forward to organise more contacts between the women. To reach the women a wife of a corporal went to all the corporals' wives and a wife of a sergeant went to all the sergeants' wives etc. In the seventies these differences in rank and status were very fundamental so that it was necessary for the wives to be approached in this way. It turned out that the wives of corporals and able seamen had seldom heard anything from the navy. They knew no-one and had little contact. The idea of a family support group therefore was certainly not a luxury. That emerged, too, when the initiative was picked up by other submarines with the co-operation of a number of clergymen. At first the navy frowned on the idea of women organising themselves at their own initiative. But gradually, and in response to signs that many families were wrestling with problems in the period when the pater familias was at sea, they changed their mind and, in 1980, an office for the family support organisation was set up by the navy. This office offers help to women who want to participate as volunteers in a family support group. The office operates at the request of the family support group or the ship. The women (all volunteers) are and remain the most important driving force in the family support group. The committee consequently strongly resembles a self-help group that organises social activities such as a mid-term get-together where women and families can meet each other. Family support groups are still organised on a voluntary basis.

With the deployment of ships, the home front activities remain relatively small-scale. The number on board after all is no more than 300 in the case of the biggest vessels. The M-frigate has a crew of about 150. The crew of a submarine or mine sweeper is approximately a third of this figure. The matter becomes quite different when the scale of the

mission increases. The Netherlands marine corps was confronted with this in 1991 with the missions to Iraq and Turkey. Later there were missions to Cambodia (1992-1993), Haiti (1995) and Bosnia (1995-1996). The concept of family support was broadly copied from the navy at sea. The larger scale, a battalion has 600-800 service personnel, made it imperative to have closer guidance from the organisation and a higher degree of subdivision of work. Tasks were subdivided between telephone circle, a newsletter group and a mid-term-day group.

The deployment of Dutch army units to Bosnia started in 1993. The scale and complexity of this mission was greater than the missions of the marine corps: not only was a complete battalion deployed, but it was accompanied by support units and UN observers. Approximately 2000 Dutch service personnel were deployed in Bosnia and still are.

The diverse ways in which service personnel can be assigned are important for the organisation of family support. Military personnel who are assigned as UN observers are isolated from the colleagues with whom they normally do their daily work. They come from diverse, geographically separated departments or sections. The partners of these soldiers live all over the Netherlands. This is why the family support organisation for this category of personnel is centralised in a national family support group.

A great many service personnel are sent out by battalion, i.e. the unit in which they have been working and training for some time is deployed en masse. The women who are left behind usually live in the same region and frequently know other women from staff evening get-togethers. Battalions have decentralised family support groups which fall under the responsibility of the next highest organisational unit, the brigade.

In terms of social support this set-up means a lot to the partners of deployed service personnel. It is precisely those families where the partners have not been deployed by battalion that will have greater difficulty in finding fellow-sufferers who understand what they are experiencing and how they feel.

Prior to deployment, information days and a farewell evening are organised as part of the family support system. During the mission abroad there are regional contact days. Questions that arise can be posed to a telephone circle. A newsletter is compiled. After the mission, a ceremony is organised at which service personnel are awarded a commemorative medal and their partners a silver home front rose. Although the family support organisation depends on the effort of many volunteers (for one thing to man the telephone circle and to arrange the information and contact days), it is inevitable that ever more work is being done in the army by professional carers.

The organisational structure of the air force is arranged in the most decentralised way possible, i.e. by air force base, since a complete squadron from a particular air base is deployed.

A Qualitative Approach

In order to understand the situation of the home front better we started with qualitative depth interviews. The interviews took place in the spring of 1996. IFOR-I had only just begun. In mid-June the servicemen of IFOR-I returned from their mission. In total we interviewed 38 women (Moelker and Cloin, 1996, 1997). The interviews were based on open questions. From these interviews we learned much about the troubles of military families but also about the ways in which the families coped with the situation. Even when nothing special happens to a family during deployment, the period of separation is hard on the women and children. Some people (women and their military spouses) said that deployment is harder on the home front than on the deployed soldier.

The variance in the way the women feel was great. When the women were asked "how happy they felt on a scale from one to ten," they gave themselves a happiness score varying from eight to three. Strikingly the wives determined their happiness score in relation to the normal situation before their partners were deployed abroad. Usually three or four points were deducted from the normal happiness score to indicate that the partner was missed.

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One of the women was normally so happy that she gave herself a ten, but scored only five because of the separation. The simply formulated question about their perception of happiness triggered off a lot among the women and provided the researchers with much more information than they themselves had thought, given the fact that a detailed explanation always followed afterwards. In one interview the partner gave herself a five because "I really miss him badly, more than I had expected, I admit it, I just miss my mate with whom I can talk and whom I can tell my problems to."

However, most of the women were getting on well to reasonably well. But these women, too, said that they were less happy than they normally were. We will elaborate one of the more positive experiences to give an example of successful coping behaviour. Someone who reported that everything really was going well, on the happiness scale she gave herself a score of 8, had benefited from the experience of an earlier separation. This was a middle-aged wife of an NCO who had been sent out to the Sinai earlier. She had much confidence in the positive ending of the present deployment because she knew what a deployment is like. At the time of the Sinai deployment she had the opportunity to visit Egypt for two weeks and get a first hand impression of her spouse's daily life during the deployment. This visit helped to get a clear picture of peacekeeping operations. The separation during the Sinai deployment was no problem to the children, even though they were very young at the time. The positive experience from the past made a major contribution to the degree of independence and self-confidence during the IFOR deployment. She coped then and is

confident that she will cope now. The administrative tasks, normally carried out by her spouse, were taken over without any problems by the NCO-wife. Her children were in the phase of adolescence, accepted the fact that their father had his job to do and were helping with household chores (cooking, getting groceries, etc.). Technical problems with for instance the television set or other domestic forms of technology were solved by the NCO-wife herself or else by her 21-year-old son. The NCO-wife was satisfied with the information given by the army. She would certainly participate in the family support group if she felt the need (which she clearly did not feel). When her husband would be obliged to go on a deployment a year after this IFOR-deployment, the NCO-wife would not be enthusiastic, 'on the other hand,..., if it has to happen, then I'll get over it.'

All of the women were asked what they thought was the difference between the IFOR mission and the "blue" UNPROFOR mission to, for one thing, Srebrenica. Precisely the fact that the IFOR mission was characterised as a "green" mission, so that military personnel had been given a wider mandate as regards the use of force, gave the majority of women a secure feeling. It was this "green" image of the IFOR mission that gave the impression that the servicemen would be able to protect themselves better. The blue UNPROFOR mission was associated with the impossibility of being allowed to defend themselves properly.

Powerful feelings of insecurity greatly detract from the ability to function well. This was the case for the battalion called *Limburgse Jagers*. This group was originally due to relieve the third rotation of UNPROFOR before the summer of 1995. This relief operation proved unnecessary because of the fall of Srebrenica. The *Limburgse Jagers*, however, remained deployable with the result that the men were left uncertain about what would happen to them for more than six months. Moving plans, holidays, arrangements for child care etc. were frequently disrupted as a result. Just before Christmas 1994 the soldiers heard the news that they would be deployed as part of IFOR. The response to the question of how they look back on this period of uncertainty was unanimously negative. Someone who said that she did not feel happy with herself explicitly linked this to her feelings of depression and uncertainty. As a result of her partner's transfers, for two years now she has not known for certain whether her husband will or will not be deployed abroad. When asked why she did not feel well, she said: "Well I suppose that's just two years of uncertainty." Despite the fact that her partner has 19 years of service and she knows what it is like to be married to a serviceman, uncertainty has a detrimental impact on her functioning.

Four of the 38 wives were faring badly. Given the size of the sample one cannot draw any hard conclusions as regards the number of women with problems. But it seems difficult to deny that there is a serious problem for the armed forces organisation. An example may

make this clear. The example illustrates the impact of a pile-up effect which is important because problems accumulate in such a way that people are no longer able to display effective coping behaviour. For privacy reasons, the names used are fictitious.

Petra Jansen's story is interesting because she can look at the problem from two sides: as a servicewoman and as a partner. Petra herself has been sent out to Yugoslavia. It is her experience that the sound functioning of the home front has an impact on one's own functioning. But she did not have much time for a peaceful life after her deployment because her partner, who is also a serviceman, was sent out to Bosnia. For Petra's partner, Hans, this was the second time that he was deployed abroad. Hans also took part in the operation in Cambodia. Petra finds it difficult and feels very unhappy. She gives herself a happiness score between three and four. A lot has happened recently in her life that contributes to her dissatisfaction with the situation.

160 First of all she has only just moved because she went to work together with Hans in the same battalion. Since Petra had expected to be sent out as well, she and her partner had to fit out the new house while they were being trained, to be able to participate in the mission. Petra has a health problem that is caused by a chronic slipped disk. For the time being she cannot get round to her foreign language study, so that she is getting further behind. Petra has a new job and this means she has to learn the ropes.

The last straw was when she was told that she was not being deployed abroad with Hans' battalion. At a public meeting Petra was informed that personnel who had been posted to the unit after 1 May 1995, could not be deployed abroad. Petra is annoyed about the announcement and the way in which it was conveyed and that colours all the other changes in her life: "for me it was the fact that we would be deployed abroad at the same time, not to walk hand in hand, but to experience the same feelings and not to run the risk of me being sent out at the point when Hans comes back."

Since the problems are accumulating (pile-up) it is difficult for Petra to develop a coping strategy. "I'm desperately unhappy that they're away and I'm here. Desperately unhappy, yes, it has cost me a great deal of effort. In the last few weeks I've just slammed the door shut on several occasions and sat crying like a child." Nevertheless she is taking steps towards effective coping behaviour. She plans to play an active role in the family support group. She can talk to friends about her problems. She is in touch with her family and a female friend in the Netherlands. She is not in close touch with the wives of the servicemen in Hans' platoon who have been left behind. Although she has had a talk with a psychologist, Petra has not resorted to official help. Despite all the setbacks, Petra remains optimistic. "We have grown closer together in this period. I see it in a positive light. For me it has drawn a line under a certain period." To the question whether this

period is also the end of Petra's military career she replies that she is thinking about looking for a job in civilian society after her current posting. She would like children in a few years time.

The Survey

The open interviews were the basis for the construction of a questionnaire that covers most of the experiences of spouses of deployed soldiers in the preparation, separation and reconciliation phase. We asked questions regarding mental and physical health, stress reactions, the quality of the marital relation, opinions about the deployment policy (for instance: duration of deployment), reactions of the children, the social support system, etc.

In January 1997 400 questionnaires were sent to women whose partners had been deployed about a year ago (UNPROFOR and many other smaller missions). 233 persons responded. 210 questionnaires were used in the analysis below. The sample was taken amongst wives of military personnel with long-term contracts. We did not want the analysis to be influenced by adolescent problems of young people who do not yet have committed themselves to a stable relation. The choice of investigating a population that experienced a deployment a year ago had two advantages. First of all, it enabled us to ascertain long-term effects of the deployment. Second, we had the opportunity to connect the experiences of wives to the data from deployed soldiers that were collected 2 months earlier so that we can study the phenomenon of stress-cross over and secondary traumatisation (to be published elsewhere).

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On average wives in the sample were 38.5 years old and had had a relation with their partners for 17.3 years. 50% of them live in villages. 43% live in cities. 7% live outside the Netherlands. About 65% had completed intermediate vocational training or less. During deployment 34% of the wives did not have a job. About 12 % was studying.

Attitudes towards Deployment and Preparation for Deployment

In the survey we used open questions so that the women could complete the information. Some of the reactions to these open questions were more common than others. Many women answered to the open question 'Did you have a positive or negative attitude towards the deployment of your spouse?' that they themselves were not happy about the deployment but accepted it, because their spouses were positive about being deployed. Another common reaction is that deployment is part of the military profession, by which is indicated that the family will have to accept this. One woman said that she agreed to the deployment in order to find out if they (man and woman) could take it. If the experience turned out badly, her spouse would leave the army. Some women answered that they were positive

toward the deployment. One woman viewed the deployment as a challenge to herself. A second wife said "I have learned much from this experience, independence and I have become more confident." A third person wrote: "I am positive, you cannot help the situation and you have to make sure that your spouse does not worry about the home front during his deployment." In answer to the 'closed' questions 40% of 209 women reported a positive attitude toward deployment. 47% was neither positive nor negative. 13% had a negative attitude towards the deployment of their spouse.

The most difficult thing for the wives in the preparation period before the deployment was the moment of departure from the airport (cf. Table 2). Some of the wives actually stayed at home because they were afraid that they would have too much trouble coping with their emotions. The wives did not like the prospect of missing their spouse for six months. Taking over the tasks of the partner and telling friends and family that their partner was going to be deployed was no problem to the wives. In answer to an open question one of the wives mentioned that very personal situations like the fact that the deployment coincided with a terminal illness of a close relative had made the deployment difficult to cope with. Some women mentioned that they were worried because of the explosive situation in Bosnia. Several women made the remark that the coincidence of the deployment together with other major changes in their lives (young babies, children leaving the parental house, illness, etc.) was hard on them.

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Table 2: Most Difficult Things in Preparation Phase.

	<i>disagree totally</i>	<i>disagree</i>	<i>neutral</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>agree totally</i>			
	%	%	%	%	%	Count	Mean ¹	%
<i>The departure (saying goodbye) was difficult.</i>	1	6	9	38	46	208	4.23	100
<i>The prospect of missing my spouse was difficult.</i>	2	5	20	40	33	206	3.97	100
<i>Actually, preparation was not such a bad period in my life.</i>	7	18	29	35	10	204	3.22	100
<i>It was hard to explain the situation to the children.</i>	32	21	14	22	12	165	2.62	100
<i>I had the feeling that I had no control.</i>	34	18	18	22	7	206	2.49	100
<i>Taking over tasks of my partner was difficult.</i>	28	35	18	17	2	207	2.32	100
<i>Telling friends/family my partner was being deployed was difficult.</i>	53	25	10	10	2	208	1.81	100

¹ 1=disagree totally; 5=agree totally.

During Deployment: Separation

We asked a lot of questions regarding the experiences with the official army family support organisation during the deployment (cf. Tables 3 and 4). Attitudes towards the family support organisation are positive. The situation centre, a central organisation in the Netherlands that is the central point of contact when you want the latest information about the situation in the operation area, is evaluated most positive of all official support organisations (mean 3.8). Telephone trees, regional family support group meetings and family support newsletters are evaluated slightly less positive. On the other hand there is much support (mean 3.8) for the statement 'that friends and family are more useful than aid provided by the army.' 131 (63%) of the women answered that they never visited regional FSG-meetings. 39 (19%) visited one FSG-meeting. 16 (8%) went twice. 22 (11%) were regulars. They visited FSG-meetings three times or more. Approximately half of all women phoned the situation centre. 89% read family support group newsletters. The newsletters provided information, but also human interest stories of daily life during deployment. The newsletter also provided a possibility to send greetings to the spouse and vice versa. The telephone tree was only used by 7.2%. 3% of the wives were volunteers in a family support group.

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Table 3: Evaluation of the Family Support Organisation

	<i>disagree totally</i>	<i>disagree</i>	<i>neutral</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>agree totally</i>			
	%	%	%	%	%	Count	Mean	%
<i>The central situation centre is doing useful work.</i>	2	5	20	53	20	194	3.83	100
<i>Friends and family are more useful than the aid provided by the Army.</i>	2	10	29	27	32	188	3.78	100
<i>A telephone tree is a good way of making contact.</i>	2	5	39	43	11	185	3.56	100
<i>Regional family support group meetings are useful.</i>	2	7	40	40	11	188	3.49	100
<i>Family support group newsletters provide the information I need.</i>	2	11	37	39	10	193	3.46	100
<i>Because of the distance it was difficult to attend family support group meetings.</i>	16	35	23	13	13	183	2.70	100

Table 4: Use of Family Support Organisations.

	<i>I phoned the situation centre.</i>		<i>I read the family support newsletters thoroughly.</i>		<i>I used the telephone tree.</i>		<i>I was a volunteer for the home front committee.</i>	
	<i>Count</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Yes</i>	101	48	186	89	15	7	6	3
<i>No</i>	109	52	23	11	192	93	202	97
<i>Total</i>	210	100	209	100	207	100	208	100

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Answers to open questions support the above findings. Even when people did not attend family support meetings, they are positive. One of the wives wrote "I have never visited a meeting, but I have heard that they have done a good job." Other common remarks were "It is good that there is family support, thought I did not need it," "it is good to be offered the opportunity to talk to women in the same situation," "they are doing a good job, are open and willing to help," "family support meetings were always clarifying." There were negative reactions as well, such as "impersonal, they treat you as you would treat a difficult child" or "disappointed." However, the majority of the remarks was positive. Many of the women were not negative but preferred help from their close friends and relatives: "personally, I would rather have support from my surroundings, than from people who are strangers to me," "support from my family was closer to me than the support from the army," "there is a bigger barrier to call upon the army support," Family and friends are very important, but there are also complaints. Sometimes family and friends do not understand the problem. In some cases help and attention is offered at the beginning of the deployment, but after some time people lose their interest and are not willing to listen to the experiences and feelings of the home front.

A very important question refers to the topic of mid-term leave (cf. Table 5). Netherlands service personnel have a short leave of about two weeks in which they can visit their families. Though everybody wants this leave, there is much discussion about the duration or the usefulness. Sometimes people (women themselves and military middle/higher management) state that, though everybody thinks the leave is necessary, it only makes matters worse. Feelings of the soldier missing the family or vice versa are only aggravated by the leave. The wives in the survey, however, were quite positive about the leave and did not report too much negative side effects. They reported missing their partner more at the beginning of the deployment (4.12) than after mid-term leave (3.7). The same finding applies to the children who missed their father more at the beginning of the deployment (3.7) than after mid-term leave (3.24). On the question of the length of the mid-

Table 5: Experiences during Deployment.

<i>ap.</i> = appropriate	<i>Not at all ap.</i>	<i>Not ap.</i>	<i>A little bit ap.</i>	<i>Ap.</i>	<i>Very much ap.</i>			
	%	%	%	%	%	Count	Mean	%
<i>I wrote a lot of letters to my partner.</i>	1	0	8	23	67	210	4.53	100
<i>In the beginning of the deployment I missed my partner very much.</i>	0	5	19	35	41	210	4.12	100
<i>We kept contact by phone on a regular basis.</i>	9	6	12	19	55	209	4.04	100
<i>After mid-term leave I missed my partner very much.</i>	8	8	22	30	32	199	3.69	100
<i>In the beginning of the deployment the children missed their father.</i>	7	10	19	34	30	176	3.69	100
<i>I was concerned about my partner's safety.</i>	7	13	28	22	30	210	3.55	100
<i>I was annoyed by messages in the media.</i>	8	20	26	17	29	207	3.40	100
<i>In the weekends I did fun things with the children.</i>	7	16	24	39	14	173	3.36	100
<i>After mid-term leave the children missed their father.</i>	15	13	24	29	19	168	3.24	100
<i>I felt lonely during the deployment.</i>	3	19	44	20	13	210	3.20	100
<i>I made plans for the both of us a few weeks before the end of the deployment.</i>	11	23	23	30	14	206	3.14	100
<i>Mid-term leave was much too short.</i>	11	24	28	20	18	199	3.09	100
<i>It was like everything was more difficult.</i>	9	29	36	18	9	209	2.89	100
<i>I found the time after leave more difficult than the time before.</i>	15	32	18	21	13	197	2.84	100
<i>Uncertainty about the date of mid-term leave was annoying.</i>	21	35	14	11	20	207	2.74	100
<i>I was concerned because I could not make contact.</i>	26	31	18	13	11	209	2.53	100
<i>During leave my partner could not forget the mission.</i>	26	31	26	13	3	202	2.36	100
<i>The children had problems because of the deployment.</i>	37	37	16	7	3	174	2.01	100
<i>I had high expectations about mid-term leave, but it was disappointing.</i>	39	39	11	6	5	202	1.99	100
<i>In the beginning I wrote more letters than at the end.</i>	42	38	8	10	2	210	1.94	100

term leave the mean score (3.09) indicates that most people fall in the category 'agree-do not agree' which is exactly the middle of the scale. The wives disagreed to the statement that they had high expectations about the mid-term leave but were disappointed. It was very important to the wives to keep contact by letter (4.5) or by phone (4.04). Writing was important during the whole duration of the deployment.

After the Deployment: Reconciliation

The most striking result from the marital reconciliation questions is that most couples used good/positive coping mechanism to re-establish or to confirm the relation (Table 6). The most important reaction was that the men were proud of their wives for being able to cope as well as they did during the deployment. Talking and listening to each others stories was very balanced. Men listened to what the wives had experienced and were willing to talk about their experiences. Besides talking and listening, the couples spent much time hugging and kissing. 73% of the wives answered that the statement 'Our relation has become more firm because of the deployment' was at least a little bit appropriate. 25% of the couples had some arguments over little things. In about 25% of cases the children had to adapt to the return of their father. Most wives disagreed with the questions that were indicative for a bad marital quality. Only a few people have a bad relation, have sexual problems, did not like to be touched by their partner just after the deployment or wish that they would be divorced.

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Table 6: Marital Reconciliation.

<i>ap. = appropriate</i>	<i>Not at all ap.</i>	<i>Not ap.</i>	<i>A little bit ap.</i>	<i>Ap.</i>	<i>Very much ap.</i>			
	%	%	%	%	%	Count	Mean	%
<i>My partner was proud that I had done well.</i>	1	5	13	46	35	206	4.10	100
<i>My partner listened to what I had experienced.</i>	0	3	13	59	24	206	4.02	100
<i>My partner wanted to talk about the deployment.</i>	3	5	25	47	19	206	3.73	100
<i>Just after deployment it was a time of hugging and kissing.</i>	4	13	31	32	20	205	3.51	100
<i>Our relation has become stronger because of the deployment.</i>	6	22	31	25	17	203	3.24	100
<i>After getting used to each other, things were as usual.</i>	20	11	18	32	19	203	3.18	100
<i>My partner expected that nothing had changed at home.</i>	9	27	26	30	7	205	3.00	100
<i>My partner appreciated me more after the deployment.</i>	8	33	30	20	8	201	2.86	100

<i>We had to get used to each other after the deployment.</i>	31	29	28	9	3	207	2.24	100
<i>We had arguments over little things.</i>	38	36	17	6	2	208	1.99	100
<i>The return of their father was difficult for the children.</i>	38	37	17	5	3	173	1.99	100
<i>At the return of my partner everything had to change.</i>	39	45	12	2	3	204	1.86	100
<i>My partner wanted his responsibility as head of the family.</i>	44	38	12	3	2	203	1.81	100
<i>The children do not listen to me now that my partner is back.</i>	39	49	8	2	3	173	1.81	100
<i>We had sexual problems.</i>	50	43	4	0	2	204	1.62	100
<i>The children perform badly at school now their father has returned.</i>	53	44	2	0	1	171	1.53	100
<i>Just after deployment I did not like to be touched by my partner.</i>	59	35	3	1	1	206	1.50	100
<i>Our relation is still not the same.</i>	61	33	5	0	0	208	1.47	100
<i>Our relation is bad.</i>	71	26	2	0	1	206	1.33	100
<i>Sometimes I think "I wish we were divorced."</i>	77	21	1	0	1	206	1.27	100

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Future Deployments

Although most military families 'survived' the deployment well and proved to have enough inner strength to cope with their problems, the wives are not keen on their husbands being sent on a new deployment soon. About 75% is in favour of a deployment of about three to four months (Table 7). To the question 'How often should a soldier be deployed?' the majority of wives was in favour of once in 30 months (Table 8: officially the deployment cycle is 6 months deployment, one year recuperation time).

Table 7: Length of Deployment.

<i>How long (months) should a deployment be?</i>		
	<i>Count</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Three Months</i>	100	49
<i>Four Months</i>	52	25
<i>Six Months</i>	50	24
<i>Eight Months</i>	1	0
<i>Twelve Months</i>	2	1
<i>Total</i>	205	100

Table 8: Frequency of Deployment.

<i>How often should a soldier be deployed?</i>		
	<i>Count</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Once in 12 Months</i>	6	3
<i>Once in 18 Months</i>	19	10
<i>Once in 24 Months</i>	65	33
<i>Once in 30 Months</i>	107	54
<i>Count</i>	197	100

Stress?

People experienced all kinds of life events that are stressful (Table 9). We asked the wives which experience had shocked them the most. The first position on this scale of life events is taken by the death of a parent. Position number 2 is taken by problems in the relationship between husband and wife. The number 3 most disturbing experience was the birth of a child. Deployment comes eleventh. It is very clear from correlation analysis that when someone has experienced more life events that were affecting the person to a high degree that she will probably suffer more from stress reactions. The simple correlation between life events and the variable ptsd-22 (post traumatic stress disorder) is .30 (Table 11). This finding supports the idea of the pile up hypothesis. The more the wives experience stressing life events, the more there is the chance that wives will not be able to cope with the situation and the greater the chance that they will experience a crisis situation. The stress of the deployment of the spouse adds up to the stress caused by other stressing life events.

Table 9: Life Events.

	It has not affected me at all	It has hardly affected me	It has affected me a little	It has quite affected me	It has affected me a lot			
	%	%	%	%	%	Count	Mean	%
Death of a Parent	4	0	0	11	85	27	4.74	100
Problems with Relation with Spouse	11	0	0	22	67	9	4.33	100
Birth of a Child	7	0	20	7	67	15	4.27	100
Pregnancy	5	0	16	32	47	19	4.16	100
Death of Person who is Important to You	3	3	15	38	43	40	4.15	100
Divorce	0	13	0	56	31	16	4.06	100
Friend or Family Member is Ill	3	6	16	39	36	80	4.00	100
Victim of Crime or Accident	0	0	31	46	23	13	3.92	100
Problems with Friend(s) or Family	3	3	26	39	29	31	3.87	100
Abortion/Miscarriage	20	0	0	40	40	5	3.80	100
Deployment of Partner	1	7	35	34	22	156	3.69	100
Serious Disagreements in Family	11	11	18	29	32	28	3.61	100
Threat of Being Fired	20	0	20	20	40	5	3.60	100
Marriage	9	5	27	41	18	22	3.55	100
Illness of Respondent	6	19	23	32	19	47	3.38	100
Change of Work/Function	5	21	26	26	21	19	3.37	100
Sexual Abuse	33	0	0	33	33	3	3.33	100
Less Money	11	11	33	22	22	9	3.33	100
Loss of Valuable Property	20	0	40	20	20	5	3.20	100
Son/Daughter leaves Home	13	20	27	27	13	15	3.07	100
Problems with Police/Justice	25	0	50	0	25	4	3.00	100
Change of Home/Moving	16	16	48	16	4	25	2.76	100

We find that, a year after the deployment, only a few wives are really heavily stressed or have crisis experiences. Table 10 gives some statistics on the most important stress reactions variables used in the research. The subscales for avoidance, hyperactivity and intrusion can be taken together to form a general Post Traumatic Stress Disorder variable. This PTSD-22 variable consists of 22 items that make it possible to decide whether a person is suffering from PTSD in a clinical sense. People who score 53 or higher on this variable are considered to have PTSD. In our survey 3 people out of 210 scored 53 or higher. These findings do not deviate much from those found by Bramsen, Dirkzwager and Van der Ploeg (1997) amongst relatives of veterans (they diagnosed 2.5% of their respondents as suffering from PTSD). The score for sleeping problems can be compared with scores for the general Dutch female population. Army wives have on average less problems with sleeping than the Dutch female population (4.5 versus 5.2; source Arrindell and Ettema, 1986). The different ways stress (or better stress reactions) is measured correlate highly (Table 11). People that are depressive usually sleep badly and have headaches of other somatic complaints. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder dimensions of avoidance, hyperactivity and intrusion also correlate highly to somatic, sleeping and depression complaints.

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Table 10: Stress Reactions.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Depressive	141	1.0	57.0	8.5	10.3
Intrusion	208	3.0	18.0	5.8	1.9
Avoidance	210	1.0	30.0	11.0	3.4
Hyperactivity	209	6.0	30.0	10.6	3.6
Sleep	207	3.0	15.0	4.5	2.4
SOMA	208	6.0	39.0	16.1	4.7

Table 11: Correlations between Stress Reactions.

Pearson Correlation	Intrusion	Hyper-activity	Avoidance	PTSD-22	Sleep	Somati-sation	Depression	Life Events
Intrusion	1.00							
Hyperactivity	.64	1.00						
Avoidance	.66	.77	1.00					
PTSD-22	.81	.92	.89	1.00				
Sleep	.40	.72	.47	.63	1.00			
Somatisation	.44	.61	.52	.62	.59	1.00		
Depression	.52	.71	.71	.77	.56	.63	1.00	
Life Events	.29	.31	.25	.30	.31	.22	.23	1.00

Social Support

We also assessed the amount of help one gets from friends and relatives. Initially we thought that the most effective help would stem from people who are in the same position. Although we cannot say much about the effectiveness of the help that was given, we can say something about the quantity of the help given and the sources from which help stems. The analysis shows that help stems mostly from own parents. Friends, brothers/sisters and neighbours are also very helpful. Little support comes from army wives or army colleagues (Table 12).

Table 12: Sources of Support.

	House/Garden Children	Watching after Children	Illness	Financial Help	Transportation
Children	12	1	1	0	4
Own Parents	56	54	24	2	18
Brothers/Sisters	27	23	9	0	18
In-Laws	35	32	12	1	21
Friends	21	28	17	0	10
Neighbours	41	37	22	0	7
Colleagues	3	1	3	0	3
Partner's Colleagues	7	0	2	1	10
Wives of Partner's Colleagues	2	2	3	0	3
Battalion Wives	0	0	1	0	0

Conclusions

Family support policy in the armed forces is different from ex patria policy in civilian organisations because military wives have to deal with separation. Their spouses may be in hazardous situations. In the Netherlands the Army copied much of the structure of family support organisations from the Navy and the Marine Corps. The bigger army deployment demanded a larger scale of professionalism. The Army has more professional psychiatrists than the Navy, Marine Corps and the Air Force because of the nature of the deployments and the greater risk because of close contact with a (sometimes) hostile population. Most of the army wives cope well to reasonably well. More experienced wives and wives that have long-lasting relationships with their spouses cope better than younger wives. The number of people with stress reactions or living in a permanent feeling of crisis is comparable with results from other national and international researches. The proportion of wives that have major problems with deployment is small. But this proportion may become bigger when families are confronted with multiple deployments within a short period of time and

families are not granted the time for successful marital reconciliation. Then, the burden of deployment will become too heavy for a big proportion of the military families. This enlarged burden is caused by a pile up effect. In this chapter there is evidence that pile up effects correlate with stress reactions. When people have to deal with several difficult situations or 'life events' at the same time they will have the feeling that they are drowning in their problems. It is clear that the home front has a need for a longer period of recuperation than the official policy allows. One of the problems of the official time for recuperation is that during this period there is not always time for marital reconciliation. A soldier comes home and is posted to a new function, maybe far from home. Maybe he is obliged to participate in training which does not allow him to spend quality time with his family. These are factors which have negative influences on marital reconciliation. The wives prefer a deployment of about four months. In Belgium the armed forces have implemented deployment on the basis of a four-month rotation system (Wouters, 1997). It would be advisable to study the Belgian experiences with this rotation system.

Concerning social support the findings show a preference for support from people with whom one is acquainted intimately. Parents, close relatives and friends are the most important supporting persons. This does not mean that family support organisations are not appreciated. On the contrary, wives are mostly very positive about the family support organisation and the people (volunteers and professionals) working in this organisation. But support which is personal, support from close family and friends is most popular. Family Support Groups work best when they can provide this feeling of intimacy. Volunteers (fellow sufferers) are therefore essential for the functioning of Family Support Groups. Professionals should facilitate the work of volunteers as much as they can and they should function as a safety net for people who are trapped in their problems and who want to break out of a downward spiral.

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