

FAMILY DEPLOYMENT



This deployment has been a rich time of shared experiences with my troops, yet these all stand against the backdrop of this one: we miss our loved ones back home. The separation and longing we feel for our families is mirrored by the angst that affects them at home as well, and perhaps to a greater degree. All our families—I can certainly vouch for my own—are exposed to the hardships of such separation. My concern over the past fifteen months, and even before we started this deployment, has been how my family would fare during the time I would be gone.

I felt that we had a strong family when I left for Afghanistan last January, but we hadn't been through a deployment before, so I wasn't sure just what to expect. Hearing some of the many deployment horror stories about family struggles and tragedies led me to much more dedicated prayer for their wellbeing and for God's provision in their lives. But I began to catch myself praying that God would sustain my wife and our boys while I was away. *and then what?—I thought—until I get back home to take care of them myself?* That struck me as patently absurd. I needed God to take care of them regardless of whether I was home with them or away. I certainly wouldn't take God's place once I got home to Ft. Bragg! So I shifted to praying for God to make his presence known in their lives, and for our family to grow stronger during our separation. How that would work, I didn't have any idea. But I've been trusting God for it as a matter of faith.

Before I left, Krista and I were concerned about how my absence from the family would affect our four boys. Our oldest was nine and our youngest was just over a year when I left. Would they remember me? Would they rebel or go astray growing up without a dad in the home for so long? We had heard plenty of horror stories there, too. I knew that my wife was a strong and capable mother, but young boys also need their dad. We were both concerned, but we moved ahead in faith. I was relieved over the months as I learned, from seven thousand miles away, that the boys were doing well in school, enjoying Cub Scouts

FAMILY DEPLOYMENT

and ice hockey, and making friends in their new neighborhood. I'd call and talk with them every week or so, and they would tell me what they were up to, then get back to playing with their friends.

Then just last week, fourteen months into our fifteen-month deployment, I received an e-mail from home with a subject line that just said 'Justin.' I figured it was a note from my son, but it turned out to be much more than just a note. It was a paragraph that Justin had written for school, and it told me just how God was answering my prayers for my family. I'd like to share with you what he wrote:

“My Military Hero”

Heroes are people who do amazing things or save someone. My military hero is my dad, who is in the 82nd Airborne Division of the Army. He is currently deployed in Afghanistan, but he's coming back in April after being away for 15 months.

My dad's job is being a Chaplain. He visits other F.O.B.s (forward operating bases) by helicopters to visit soldiers, gives sermons at churches, runs Bible studies, does counseling, and performs memorial services. My dad enjoys his job because he likes helping other people. He does the same things when he is at his own base. Usually he doesn't call when he is visiting different F.O.B.s because they are small. But when he is at his base he calls more often because his base is bigger and he has his own phone. Since he is a Chaplain, he never fights, but he sees the people who do fight. He has an assistant who travels with him and protects him. At home he reads to us at night, wrestles with us and much more. While he's away we read to ourselves, and I, the oldest, sometimes wrestle with Ethan, my 6-year old brother. I will be excited when my dad gets to come home. He is a real hero.

Justin Kennaugh, 5th Grade

We dads have a right to brag about our kids, but this unexpected expression of love and support from my son went straight to my heart. I didn't expect him to have such a grasp on the reasons for my absence this past year. Hearing those memories of his makes me miss home even more, but it also thrills my soul to think that in just a few weeks I'll be right back home to make more memories with him and his brothers.

There have been many difficult days during this deployment, stemming both from our mission and our separation from home. But I have seen in new and unexpected ways how God cares for my family while I'm away. And I've learned that a family can grow closer even with half of the globe separating us.