

DEPLOYMENT - A PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

It seems like only yesterday that we proudly sat on the sidelines as my shy 12 year old son, David, marched in his first parade wearing his spit-shined boots, green uniform and carefully shaped beret. From his first night as a 2415 Gonzaga Army Cadet, David felt he had found his niche in life. He became a confident young man with a dream to become a Canadian peacekeeper and I supported his dream then, and now, as he prepares for his February deployment.

It's not easy and I find myself going from panic that I may never see him again to panic that he will come back changed by his experiences. I think "I don't want you to go – you may be 20 years old and you may be a trained soldier, but you're still my child – don't go." Instead I say "I'm scared for you but you feel ready to go – trust your instincts and your training. Go with my blessing and know that you're always loved and we'll be waiting for you." But inside I think "Please, please, God, let him come back home."

We're a close family and we've pulled even closer in the time leading up to his deployment. David is the youngest of four children and his sisters, brother, dad, brother-in-law and sister-in-law feel the gap in their lives while he's away. They're fearful for him yet proud of him.

Judy, his Irish girlfriend, stayed with us for the 4 weeks of his extended Christmas leave which seemed to fly by in a bittersweet blur. It's been difficult for her too. My 3 grandsons were so excited that "Uncle David" was home and wanted to spend lots of time with him. It seems as though everyone wants a little piece of David to hold close to their hearts while he's gone.

Yet, life goes on and we have to eat, sleep, go to work and try to keep life as normal as possible. It's difficult and I don't know how I would do it without the Military Family Resource Centre. Since June, they've kept me sane. I'm trying to keep everything in its proper perspective, to realize that there are ways to stay connected to David even if it's through a care package, a red support our troops shirt or a yellow ribbon.

I hate it when people ask questions like "Doesn't he know how much he's worrying you?", "Will he shoot anyone?", "What'll you do if anything happens to him?" I want to say "SHUT UP." People outside the military often do not understand that this is

a life choice; that while a soldier's job requires physical and technical training, it also requires compassion, caring and dedication. Though I may be worried, David is doing what I've always wanted my children to do - which is to reach out and help those who cannot help themselves. There are many ways to do this. David chose to do it by being a soldier. The questions may make me want to weep but there are many more important aspects to David's journey.

As a family we've gained strength from the MFRC. We know that they'll help us cut through any red tape which needs cutting. While providing a shoulder to cry on through the difficult times, the kitchen parties and many other functions lend a lighter side to this humongous experience which is Afghanistan.

On January 27th, David will be home for his final leave before deployment. As always, I'll cook his favorite meals, talk and try to keep everything as normal as possible. Our house will be full as family and friends gather to shake David's hand and wish him well on his journey. The yellow ribbons placed on the trees on Cumberland Crescent in early December are still there. The large 'support our troops' wooden ribbon made by David's older brother is still on the house, and will remain there until his return. David is leaving, knowing that he's supported, and knowing that he's loved for there'll be days when the memories of home will put a smile on his face, a spring in his step and help keep his spirits up.

The days ahead will be tough ones for all of us but we'll get through them. Other families do and so will we. It won't be easy but we'll do it for David and for every other Canadian soldier who is trying to make a difference in the world.

God speed, David, I will always be proud of my soldier son.

Written by a parent in our
Deployment Support Group
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