FAMILY SUPPORT

Military families united during deployment

By Mike Chrisman
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

SPRINGFIELD – Eighteen-year old Daphney Bell of Windsor, Ill. had a baby girl, Addilyn, in February, but something was missing- Addilyn's father.

Addilyn's father, 21-year old Spc. Dereck Bly of Shelbyville, Ill., was mobilized with the Effingham-based Company B, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry in June 2008 and is part of the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT) that deployed to Afghanistan in the fall of 2008. Dereck found out his fiancé was pregnant the same day he was mobilized and left Illinois for training.

"We were shocked," Daphney said with a smile. "He was excited, but he was also scared. There were a lot of different emotions all in one day."

Just eight days after giving birth, Daphney learned what to expect when her fiancé comes home from deployment in Afghanistan at an Illinois National Guard Family Academy in Mattoon.

"I am trying to get information to help him when he comes home and help him make the transition easier," Daphney said. "I know this won't be easy for him and I just want to be able to help him in every way I can."

Daphney and hundreds of families have taken advantage of a series of family academies throughout Illinois. The academies include booths where families can get information from different agencies and classes on what the families should expect when their loved one returns home.

The academy provides an opportunity for families to meet experts to answer their questions and give them the tools and insight to ease the challenges of reintegration. Reintegration is a process service members endure as they transition from Soldier back to citizen following mobilization.

Photo courtesy of Daphney Bell

A SPECIAL INTRODUCTION: **Spc. Dereck Bly, Soldier with Company B, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry based in Effingham, sees his daughter, Addilyn, for the first time at an airport in mid-March after coming home on leave from Afghanistan. Addilyn was born in February while Dereck was deployed to Afghanistan with the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team. His company is expected to be home in late May or early June.**

While Soldiers receive reintegration training upon returning from deployment, families need to receive similar information prior to the service member returning home. Family academies were started in 2008 to teach families about the information the Soldier will learn when they attend reintegration training.

Col. Michael Haerr of Eureka, Deputy Commander of the 33rd IBCT, said the academies are extremely important for the families to understand what to expect after deployment. He said it is also imperative to meet others who are experiencing similar issues.

"It's important for the families to come out and support each other," Haerr said. "Just like Soldiers have a network, families need to build a similar network and understand they are not alone. This is the first time many people are separated from their loved ones and they are all learning to cope."

The Illinois National Guard has taken a proactive approach by reaching out to the families to make sure the Soldiers are aware of what services and help are available when they come home.

Maj. Gen. Dennis Celletti of Springfield, Assistant Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard, said he understands that Soldiers receive this information when they get back to the states, but said reintegration is not what they are thinking about.

"We give the same information to the Soldiers, but they're not listening to the briefings because they only have one thing on their mind and that's coming home to (their family)," he said.

Reintegration is not just a program for service members after a deployment, it is something the entire family must undergo as everyone readjusts to changes that have happened during the course of the service member's deployment. This is one of the many ways the Illinois National Guard is trying to help families of deployed men and women who are sometimes fighting their own battles at home while their Soldier is fighting a war overseas.

For more information on the Illinois National Guard's Family Academies and reintegration, log onto the Illinois National Guard's Web site at www.il.ngb.army.mil or call the Illinois National Guard reintegration office at 217-761-3071.

Proud to be a military spouse, despite challenges

By U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Stephanie McCurry
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

SPRINGFIELD – Recognizing the commitment and increasing sacrifices families make every day and to acknowleding the strength of Soldiers comes from the strength of their families, Spouses routinely put the welfare of their Soldiers, family and nation above their own. Today, military spouses confront multiple deployments, relocations and separations while gracefully coping with military life.

These spouses are celebrated May 8 with Military Spouse Day.

Lindsey Williams has been married to Brad Williams, both residents of Aledo, for more than three years now. Staff Sgt. Brad Williams is a Soldier with the 444th Chemical Company based in Galesburg, and has been in the Illinois Army National Guard for more than nine years. Brad proposed to Lindsey in March 2003 during a military ball and were married in December 2005.

"Being a military spouse means a lot to me," said Lindsey. "When you put military in front of spouse, it means you do all of the things necessary to be a spouse and then you do them over long distances and under a lot of stress. It's difficult being a military spouse but the reward you feel is so worth it."

Being a military spouse comes with its advantages and disadvantages just like anything else. The honor and pride of being a military spouse is "exhilarating," but there are also the daily challenges of worrying about your spouse, said Lindsey.

The Williams family spent their first year of marriage apart. Lindsey lived in Aledo, where they purchased their home, and Brad worked full-time in Machesney Park, more than 160 miles away.

Lindsey and Brad have three children, a 10 year-old daughter and two sons ages 6 and 7. Although Brad is gone a lot, their children are extremely proud of their father.

"Even though it's hard on them, they are still very proud to have a dad who is a Soldier and they try to do things to make him proud of them when he gets home," said Lindsey. "They brag about him to their friends and people at school and in the community."

None the less, there are a lot of challenges Lindsey faces being a military spouse. She tries to stay positive all of the time, especially for the kids. Also, it's complicated to plan out family activities because of changing and conflicting schedules. The simple fact of everyday life while your spouse is gone is a challenge, reiterated Lindsey.

"Sometimes I feel like a single mom," Lindsey said. "There are many things I worry about having my husband in the military, and I don't want my kids to feel my stress. I sometimes get discouraged and feel like it's not fair that my husband misses so much."

There is something that does help her through the challenges, though.

"Unlike a lot of military families, my children and I still have our Soldier and that gets me through the challenges" she said.

Not everything about being a military spouse is trying; there is a lot of pride and honor being a military spouse.

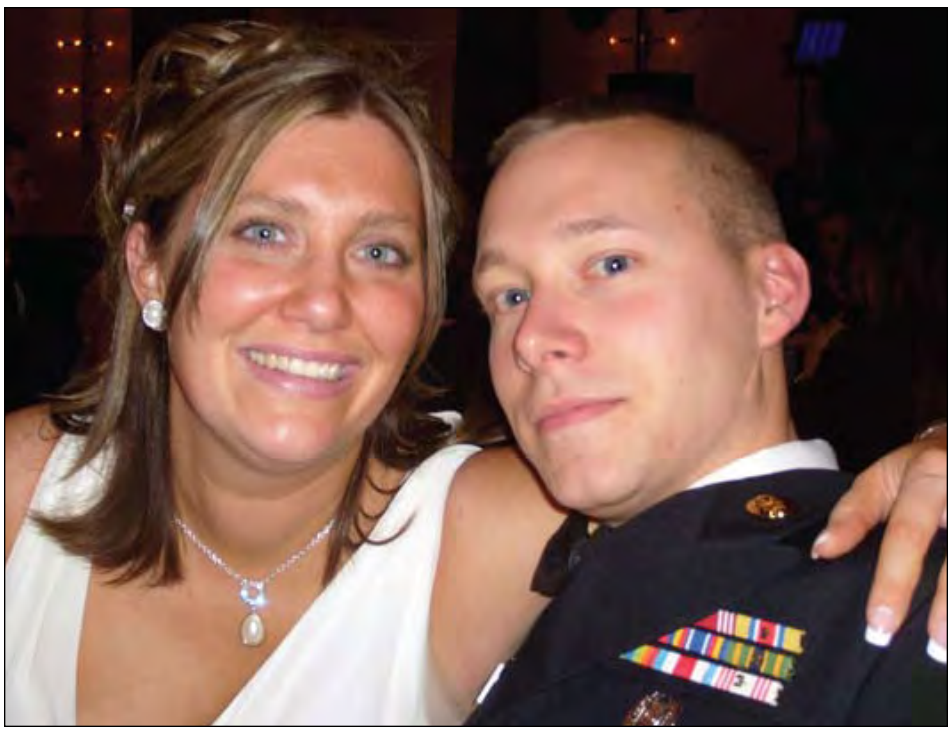

Photo courtesy of Lindsey Williams

THE HAPPY COUPLE: **Lindsey and her husband Staff Sgt. Brad Williams, of Aledo, here during a military ball, have been married for more than three years and have three children. Williams is a Soldier of the 444th Chemical Company based in Galesburg.**

"My favorite thing about being a military spouse is the pride I feel standing next to my husband," said Lindsey. "The way that people look at me when my husband is in his uniform next to me, it's remarkable. I love the way that other people look at him with respect and thank him for everything he does. It makes me proud to be his wife."

Soldiers depend on their families for support, because, there are a lot of challenges in today's world.

"I love being a military spouse and even though sometimes it is very tough, I wouldn't trade it for anything," Lindsey said.