

*“If the Army would have wanted you to have a wife ...
it would have issued you one”*

THE SYSTEMIC COST OF LONG TERM DEPLOYMENT: COHESION IN PEACEKEEPERS FAMILIES

*Helping Post Modern Military Families reach a Post Deployment Equilibrium through
Second-Order Changes and Good Communication*

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ABSTRACT

In this paper the typical marital or family problems, occurring during the emotional and operational stages of long-term deployment, are analyzed by using various key-concepts of the systems theory and the pragmatic communication theoryⁱ.

The aim is to present a model for psychosocial support which includes pre-, peri- and post-deployment care for post modern veterans and their most significant others, based upon action-oriented and psycho-educational counselling sessions for couples, at the critical stages prior-to, during and after the deployment period. This innovative approach, which is less based on pure symptomatic intervention and merely providing basic information on how to cope with deployment, as seen in most of the other intervention models, allows peacekeepers and their partners (or family members) to increase their relational competences and their coping skills before, during and after the separation. It also consists of a series of counselling sessions, both prior-to and after deployment, of “new peacekeepers” by “veterans”.

First, we will bring the well-known (emotional) stages of deploymentⁱⁱ ⁱⁱⁱ along with the so-called operational stages of deployment^{iv} into focus. Secondly, the basic concepts of the systems theory and the axioms of pragmatic communication, needed to select relevant work-items for psycho-educational counselling, will be discussed. In a third part, we will introduce the conceptual framework for systemic psychosocial support; it will be formulated in terms of learning to go away, learning to be away, and learning to come back. Finally, the most important support activities will be placed on a time axis and explained in the construct of a structural model.

Introduction

Since 1991 Belgian troops have been deployed on regular basis in several out-of-area operations, peace support operations, creating a unique situation of psychosocial family trauma for the concerned soldiers and their significant others.

First there was little to no concern at all about the potentially high risks of cumulative family stress, due to the repetitious deployments, on the peacekeepers' families and their quality of life. Initially, it seemed that neither the soldiers nor their family members or relatives had the right to “complain” about the repetitious long-term deployments. After all, didn't they make the choice for such a life? ...

It seemed as if fifty years of (relative) peace during the cold-war period, had literally paralyzed the military leaders' good sense about the importance of natural social support - i.e. the family or private living environment - on the (mental) readiness and morale.

However, after several years of experience our military and civilian authorities began to understand that the fore-mentioned deployments and especially the overwhelming rhythm at which couples and families were confronted, again and again, with long-term separation, created unique family stressors beyond those experienced during peacetime exercises and training periods.

Several years of practical clinical experience, with peacekeepers and their partners, within *the Centre for Military Family Action* (CMFA, Royal Military Academy), learned that it is most important to provide marital and family counselling prior-to, during and after long term deployment to prevent serious problems or dysfunction of the deployed family member on the one hand, and his family on the other hand. Although the current support measures concerning the various meetings of families and/or spouses, aimed at providing basic information and social support, are very important, they do not seem to be preventive with regard to severe marital or relational problems. The soldiers and their spouses are often, even after a second or third deployment, in search of a language to share mutual experiences and to explain how they really felt about the long term separation imposed by the armed forces. Even the children of peacekeepers continue to experience problems to understand what really happened to their family and why one of their parents, or both, seem to have changed.

Therefore a psychosocial support model should include proactive activities aimed at enhancing the communication and negotiation skills of both partners of a relationship, to teach them to cope with long term separation and its effects on the family system. Our armies should understand that long term deployment affects a couple or a family in a permanent and profound way. The last years many children grew up in a single-parent household for nearly most of the time. Giving peacekeepers and their partners the illusion that after a long term deployment everything remains the same is hiding the truth: some relationships will never recover from the psychosocial scars that deeply damaged their life. This will become clear in the next paragraphs in which we will analyze some of the occurring mechanisms, responsible for driving the partners of a relationship away from each other. If military leaders do not take these mechanisms as serious they will, sooner or later, be confronted with a total burnout of the personnel of combat units, overwhelmed by repetitious deployment and deep family wounds from which they will only recover very slowly or never.

We will first take a closer look at both the emotional and operational stages of deployment.

The Emotional Stages of Deployment

The emotional stages of (peacetime) deployment, as described by Peebles-Kleiger & Kleiger (1994), were used to describe the cyclic experiences of peacekeepers and their partners; prior-to, during and after deployment. In this paper we will focus on normal relationships in which, as in most cases, there are no pre-morbid marital or family problems.

We could distinguish two different versions of the present emotional cycle. The first version describes seven phases of adjustment, from the anticipation of the loss (being the departure of the soldier) to the final re-integration and stabilization of relationships within the family upon reunion. The second version, which we will name the *grief model*, describes the four emotional stages of adjustment based on the stages of grief after bereavement (Kübler-Ross, 1969); those stages of grief being (1) anger/protest; (2) sadness/despair; (3) coping/detachment; and (4) return/reunion.

Since the two versions are similar in thrust, Peebles-Kleiger & Kleiger (1994) integrated the two in a composite description which we will briefly discuss below.

Table 1. The Emotional Stages of Deployment

- Stage 1: Initial Shock (Anger/Protest/Emotional Numbing)*
- Stage 2: Departure (Detachment/Withdrawal)*
- Stage 3: Emotional Disorganization (Depression/Anxiety)*
- Stage 4: Recovery & Stabilization (Coping/Detachment)*
- Stage 5: Anticipation of the Homecoming (Confusion/Mixed Feelings)*
- Stage 6: Reunion (Euphoria)*
- Stage 7: Reintegration & Stabilization (Working Through Process)*

2.1. Stage of Initial Shock

Both versions of the above model describe a one to two weeks period of tension, protest and anger as the news of the impending deployment is released and the family begins making preparations for the separation. People are described as being “*on edge*” and “*slight irritations can grow to major proportions*”. This can be compared to the “Anger/Protest” stage in the grief model.

Clinical experiences indicate that early warning for deployment (sometimes 8 months before departure) raises the family stress considerably (testing the problem solving capacities of the family or the partner, living by “last times”, sharing “last special moments”, etc...). Peacekeepers spouses’ and/or family members should learn to understand that “going away for several months” initiates a specific emotional separation process: partners do not need to focus on this one moment, during which they have to find the right words to say goodbye; saying goodbye to each other ... can take several weeks!

2.2. Stage of Departure

The final few days before the departure bring the second stage of “Detachment/Withdrawal”, in which members, frightened by the impending loss, typically distance from each other.

Clinical experiences indicate the ‘marital or relational threats’ of the ‘emotional numbing’ which occurs during this stage. Therefore, it is important to inform both partners in a relationship that absence of expressed emotions

is not equal to absence of emotions, nor a signal of an absence of caring. It is quite the contrary, the stronger the numbing, the stronger the underlying emotion.

Peebles-Kleiger & Kleiger (1994) stated, in this context, that the absence of time to prepare for the separation, coupled with the intensity of fear and uncertainty, can trip a sort of “emotional circuit breaker” in the mind, cutting off all feelings, so that the person does not get overwhelmed and consequently paralyzed.

2.3. Stage of Emotional Disorganization

Beginning at the time of departure itself, *as the buses are pulling out or the plane is taking off*, is the phase of “Emotional Disorganization” or “Sadness/Despair”. In this phase, tension and/or detachment are replaced by sadness and loss. Partners of departing soldiers sometimes cry a whole weekend. It is when the practical things have been completed, and a few weeks have passed, demonstrating that this is not simply a “bad dream” or an ordinary separation, that the intensity of feelings of emotional disorganization and sadness/despair can hit. Symptoms of depression can set in, with problems sleeping, periods of tearfulness, and difficulty eating. This period is described as lasting about two to 6 weeks. In the same context, we like the description given by Norwood, Fullerton & Hagen^v: *“The extended absence of a spouse creates new stressors and opportunities for the individual left behind. Responsibilities and decisions related to managing the household that normally are shared, must now reside with the husband or wife remaining at home. If there are children in the family, the parent left behind temporarily becomes a “single” parent. He or she must assume all the responsibilities of caring for the children while the other parent is away. During the deployment, the stay-behind spouse often experiences emotional confusion that can last for several months. The initial experience of the separation is frequently characterized by feelings of abandonment, loss, pain, and disorganization. Frequently, the spouse will report mild and transient depressive symptoms of tearfulness and loss of sleep or appetite. Generally, these feelings subside as the family settles into a new routine. Often, the spouse at home will develop greater confidence as he or she negotiates the activities of daily life as a temporarily “single” person or parent. Ideally, the couple stay abreast of each other’s experiences through phone calls and frequent letters”.*

Our clinical experiences confirm the existence of a ‘cry-weekend’: the partner who stays behind cries nearly a whole weekend, feelings of loss and sadness/despair can become overwhelming during those first days. Furthermore, we believe that certain families are more vulnerable to emotional disorganization than others. The last years we considered the following group as being a “risk-group”: 1) the age of the stay-behind spouse is 25 to 30 years; 2) the age of the children did not reach 5 years; 3) the age of the relationship is less than 5 years; and, 4) the service member is fulfilling his 2nd or 3rd deployment.

Using the concept a risk group means that the degree in which families correspond to the profile of the fore-mentioned group seems to correlate with the adjustment/ emotional recovery of the family system.

2.4. Stage of Recovery and Stabilization

At about the sixth week, the phase of “Recovery and Stabilization” or “Coping/Detachment” begins. The sadness drifts away, and what supplants it is “a state of relative calm and confidence in handling day-to-day living”.

Although the occurrence of a major crisis can temporarily upset the psychological equilibrium, for the most part the calm is described as lasting the bulk of the deployment. This phase involves settling into a comfortable routine, making community and group connections and maintaining communication with the deployed service member.

*Our clinical findings indicate that the recovery and stabilization sets in as a function of what Peebles-Kleiger & Kleiger (1994) call the **media roller coaster**. The emotional and psychological equilibrium seems to be function of the quality of the contact and the communication (postal service, telephone, press, television, rumours, etc.) with the deployed member(s). At this stage one can claim a same reality with respect to the deployed soldiers: morale shuts rapidly down when contacts with the home-front deteriorate.*

For example, many families still don't have any idea about where in the Former-Yugoslavia, or Kosovo, their family member is deployed. Panic and anxiety arises when TV images of other "near-by" conflicts reach the home-front.

The result of this combination of fear of death, lack of hard knowledge, and rapidly oscillating media news spills is that the mood and courage of the stay-behind family members is rather fragile and permanently oscillates between hope and despair, up and down, like a YoYo.

2.5. Stage of Anticipation of the Homecoming

About 6 weeks before deployment ends, "anticipation of homecoming" begins. Activity, tension, and even despair emerges again as the families rush to prepare themselves and their home for the return of the deployed service member. Fears and hopes run high as the family's conflicting expectations of reunion vs. change, and fulfilling vs. disappointment, are stirred. The deployment nears an end and expectations about the reunion grow high. There is a sense of excitement about being together again but also some apprehension about how everything will have changed. All kinds of activities, aimed at making the re-union even better - such as last-minute diets, new cloths and/or underwear, house-cleaning, etc - only raise the reunion stress on both sides of the relationship. It is certain that is better to leave surprises behind, on both sides of the relationship!

Our clinical experiences indicate that this period is to compare to the stage of the short timers syndrome on the side of the deployed servicemen. Navy officers talk of 'Channel Fever' : when their ships are at some two weeks of the end-of-mission or homecoming, stress on board of the ship reaches a top level and created numerous conflicts.

Soldiers and their families start thinking of 'normal' life again and disinvest psychological energy from the deployment situation, especially from unpleasant but necessary routine activities. This creates a lot of tension among the military personnel.

3.6. Stage of the Reunion

The actual stage of "reunion" is described as beginning on the reunion day and lasting about 6 weeks for 'low intensity deployments' (i.e. the UNPROFOR & UNTAES- missions in Eastern-Slavonia, Croatia) and up to 6 to 9 months for 'high intensity deployments' (i.e. the RESTORE HOPE-mission in Somalia).

The combination of emotional overwhelming and estrangement make the returning spouse seem "different" to those who welcome him/her. When couples or families are reunited after the deployment, their readjustment stage begins. In this stage the family tries to become a

family again, to get re-acquainted and re-accustomed to each other, to negotiate changes in old roles and *territorial* changes, and to respond to the specific changes in each other. The marital couple works to re-establish intimacy, and children and parents work to re-establish familiarity and connectedness.

We agree with Norwood, Fullertoon, & Hagen (1996) on the fact that the high expectations about the reunion are a source of considerable problems. The reality of reunion often does not live up to these fantasies. Reunion begins with a “honeymoon” phase that lasts until the first major argument. As the couple re-establishes intimacy, there are commonly feelings of euphoria and excitement. However, the couple will soon have to cope with a difficult readjustment period which can easily last up to 8 weeks. The relationship and the roles in it, as well as in the household, have to be redefined and renegotiated.

Our clinical experiences indicate some special problems. Among others we have the specific problems of “the loners”: servicemen with poor education, weak family ties and/or without a partner relation. After deployment they start living in social isolation and want to be deployed again as soon as possible: they just want to find back the social situation of emotional sharing and friendship they experienced during the mission, sometimes for the first time of their life. Their readjustment risks to be very slow or not to exist at all. In some cases they become totally isolated and can be considered as a special risk group with respect to long term psychological sequels.

Other typical reunion problems consist of what could be called “emotional numbing behaviour”, detachment, non-comprehension of the enormous importance of the repetitious rehearsals between what could be called “the group of companions in fate” (which consist of the servicemen who were deployed together in a small group) and a diversity of relational problems among which the fears (and possibly the consequences) of “marital infidelity” within both partners.

The rapid re-entry and feelings of (unchannelled) aggression between family members and/or partners (“You shouldn’t have let me/us down so long”, “Don’t think you can just come back and start taking things over again”, etc...) will influence the period of reintegration and stabilization in a negative way.

2.7. Stage of Reintegration and Stabilization

Finally, about 6 to 12 weeks after reunion, “*reintegration and stabilization*” set in, with the family resuming their coherence as a functioning system again (with new borders between the different subsystems). Some relational “after-shocks” still remain possible, but generally most problems disappear. Unfortunately, the concerning couple or family soon tries to “forget” the bad experiences coupled to the deployment. As soon as possible, they (try to) start again to behave as before the long term separation, as if nothing happened. In fact, as a marital or family system, they didn’t learn much nor did they take the time to really integrate this challenging period into their life cycle. In many cases this “non-learning behaviour” will be the source of severe problems prior-to, during or after later deployments or family crises. This problem will become clear through the explanation of first vs. second order changes in the next paragraph.

First, we will list the Operational Stages of Deployment and discuss them only succinctly. Since there is a considerable overlap between those stages and the fore-mentioned stages of deployment, we will not further treat the operational stages in this text.

Table 2. The Operational Stages of Deployment

1. Preparation Stage (Work Overload)
2. Departure Stage (Psychic Numbing)
3. Habituation Stage (Culture Shock)
4. Routine Stage (Increased Stress Resistance)
5. Half Time Stage (Homesickness/Depression)
6. Anticipation Stage (Anticipation of the Homecoming/Short Timers' Syndrome)
7. Reunion Stage (Existential Shock & Psychosocial Readjustment)
8. Reintegration & Stabilization Stage (Occasional After Shocks)

Table 3. Goals of Psychosocial Support of Long Term Missions

1. Educate the 'military' couples & families on deployment adjustment: prior-to (pre), during (peri) and post deployment (post)
2. Reach out and make the availability of professional support known to the families left behind
3. Provide a training to enable both partners of a relationship to cope with the critical stages of the deployment: prior-to departure, departure plus two weeks, half time, homecoming minus two weeks and post deployment.
4. Provide a permanent counselling and/or therapeutic support for both the military families and the rear unit command
5. Provide a permanent counselling for typical child problems during a father/mother separation

General Systems Theory

*Plus que ça change, plus que ça reste la même chose
(Mony Elkaïm)*

The most general definition of a system - coming from the Greek ‘systema’, a composite thing - is the ordered composition of (material or mental) elements into a unified whole.

The ‘General Systems Theory’, like cybernetics, concerns itself with the functions and structural rules valid for all systems, irrespective of their material constitution.

The premises of systems theory are based on the insight that a system as a whole is qualitatively different, and “behaves” differently, from the sum of the system’s individual elements.

In the framework of family therapy, the application of the term “system” is identical to its application in the field of cybernetics.

Interrelationship, Patterns & Consistency in Families

The notion of pattern, one of the most fundamental concepts in theories of family systems, implies an ordered sequence or correction of events.

It refers to a functional entity whose parts can be differentiated from one another. Its meaning overlaps with that of other concepts such as structure and gestalt.

Patterns (according to Bateson, 1979) should not be seen as static but as “patterns in time”, i.e. “stories” which lead to rules.

Long term deployment deeply changes the family pattern, leads to the development of other epistemological structures, and shows the need for the development of new rules.

(Family) Homeostasis

Homeostasis - from the Greek ‘homois’, similar, and ‘stasis’, stand still - is the relatively steady internal state of a system that is maintained through self-regulation (cf. the regulation of body temperature).

Families or couples, like certain systems, are capable of compensating for certain changes in the environment while maintaining relative stability in their own structures.

There also exist mechanisms in which equilibrium is maintained because a new equilibrium is achieved. For this we will take a closer look at first and second order changes.

Families can be seen as rule-governed systems where rules are not regarded as intrinsic to the system’s function, but as homeostatic mechanisms imposed on the system.

Long term deployment creates a rupture in the family homeostasis, and therefore changes the rules which govern the system. To really (re-)adapt, the family system necessitates second order changes.

The long-term deployment can be seen as a crisis for the military family. In a crisis (Greek krisis, a turning point) situation, the internal and external adaptation (therefore a family needs a certain amount of adaptability) of an individual or a system is disturbed.

When previously successful adaptive mechanisms are insufficient to preserve stability or balances, new skills and a corresponding internal restructuring became necessary.

In his “crisis theory”, Lindemann (1944) distinguished two types of disturbance of adaptation: emergency and crisis. One can cope with emergency situations by using accustomed methods; a crisis requires new patterns of behaviour.

For example, a spouse soon finds out that long-term deployment will need other coping skills than in the case of the much shorter and more frequent training periods the soldier has gone through in the past.

*From a cybernetic point of view, an emergency is regarded as an adaptation disturbance that can be mastered by **first order change**; a crisis can only be overcome via **second order change**. Real evolution can thus be seen as the succession of crisis situations to which an individual, or the systems in which this individual lives, adapted (cf. Erikson’s theories on human development through the experience of growth crisis).*

When change occurs in one family member, this inevitably leads to change in the ecosystem of all family members. Minuchin & Barca (1972) stated with regard to this theory: “ (...) if therapists are able to induce a crisis, they create conditions for change within the family. The solution of such a crisis is only possible through discontinuous and sudden second-order change”.

*Other related and typical systemic notions in the same context are **Territorial Boundaries**, **Rules & Redundancy**, **First & Second Order Changes in Systems** and **(Error activated) Feedback in Family Systems**. These terms will not be explained in detail during this presentation.*

Communication Theory

The Basic Axioms of Human Communication

Information is a difference that makes a difference
(*Gregory Bateson*)

In this paper, communication is seen as each possible form of information exchange between humans and the conditions or variations in which this exchange happens. The contemporary information theory relevant to marital and/or family therapy has its foundations in the pragmatic communication theory, first systematically outlined by Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson in 1967, and in the two-volume edition of *Human Communication*^{vii} (Jackson, 1968). The authors integrated clinical data with the ideas, observations, and investigations of the double bind hypothesis of Bateson et al.^{viii} (1956). The posited principle, or five “pragmatic axioms”, which they believed could elucidate all forms of functional, interpersonal communication. Teaching these axioms to soldiers and their significant others, prior-to, during, and after deployment seems to be essential in the prevention of marital and/or family problems.

In what follows the original definitions of the five axioms, literally taken from Watzlawick et al. (1967), will be printed in italics. We will try to explain in our own words what they really mean.

“One cannot not communicate” ...

Axiom 1: In an interpersonal context “one cannot not communicate” (p51). Every behaviour thus contains a message. Hence the paradoxical situation that a person who is not attempting to communicate will still communicate; non communication itself is a form of communication.

“You always speak double words”

Axiom 2: “Every communication has a content and relationship aspect such that the latter classifies the former and is therefore a meta communication” (p54).

“Everyone has his own truth”

Axiom 3: This relates to punctuation phenomena and states that the nature of a relationship between two partners is determined by the manner in which they punctuate the communication between them.

“With or without words ...”

“Human beings communicate both digitally and analogically. Digital language has a highly complex and powerful logical syntax but lacks adequate semantics in the field of relationship, while analogical language possesses the semantics but has no adequate syntax for unambiguous definition of the nature of relationships”
(pp.66-67)

“Who is the boss?”

Axiom 5: “All communicational interchanges are either symmetrical or complementary, depending on whether they are based on equality or difference” (p.70)

This conceptual framework makes it possible to better understand the highly complicated communication processes, in particular those governing couples' interaction within the context of "forced temporarily divorce" or long term deployment.

The impossibility of not communicating means that all interpersonal situations are communication situations, and that the very specific situations during the emotional stages of deployment need very specific coping skills before they can be understood as legitimate and normal by both partners of a relationship (instead of giving them the idea that this only happens to them and that they are the only ones having marital or relational problems).

The differentiation between digital and analogical modes of communication is very important because analogical messages and definition of relationship exhibit a high degree of isomorphism. The ambiguity involved in the simultaneous exchange of messages concerning both the relationship itself and things outside the relationship leads to problems of interpretation and translation, which, if left un-clarified, lead to pathological interaction patterns.

The concept of punctuation allows the possibility of talking about the reciprocity of human relationships in a manner that is at once different from and more complex than that of the traditional stimulus-response model of behaviour. Partners of a relationship - certainly in the context of the tough challenge which a long term deployment is for a couple - should understand that their proper behaviour is both origin and consequence of the behaviour of their counterpart.

As Simon, Stierlin, & Wynne (1985) state: "*Punctuation refers to the structuring and organization by an observer of a continuous sequence of events and behaviours. Two partners, for example, perceive and organize their ongoing interaction into various sequences, and each subjectively perceives different patterns of cause and effect, or different structures of interaction. Depending on whether the interactive process between A and B is seen from the perspective of A or B, it may seem as if A is reacting to B, or as if B is reacting to A. According to one punctuation, a wife nags because her husband withdraws from her; according to the other, the husband withdraws from his wife because she is constantly nagging him. The manner in which an ongoing communication process and/or interaction sequence is punctuated determines the meaning attributed to it and how each person's behaviour will be evaluated, that is, who is responsible or "guilty", and how one describes to (re)act*".^{viii}

Punctuation in the communication between both partners of a relationship will be of major importance in the readjustment process after the deployment period. It is important that the returning veteran does not withdraw from his spouse, and that the spouse on her side does not leave her husband alone with his existential shock after the homecoming, due to unilateral punctuation or context marking.

Finally, the concepts of symmetrical and complementary relationships introduce the important aspects of mutual evaluation and their relativity in interpersonal relationships.

Discussion of the Basic Axioms of Communication

The second axiom in the communication theory, developed by Paul Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson (1967), states that every interpersonal communication is not only an exchange of information about some subject matter, but also concurrently contains a message regarding the relationship between the interacting partners. This aspect of communication belongs to a higher logical type and represents a form of meta communication.

The difference between content and relational aspects of communication can best be described by the numerous problems couples experience in the critical emotional stages of deployment. Prior-to the deployment, the soldiers' spouse protests, not only to manifest anger with regard to the upcoming separation but also to react against the complementarity of the relationship, in which the military partner alone is held "responsible" for the difficult period the couple or the family will have to face. Even after deployment, the relational conflicts do not only serve to readjust and work through, but also to (re)define the type of relationship both partners have or want with each other. This relationship can be either complementary or symmetrical. In many cases, both partners of the relationship do not understand this dynamic process in which problems or conflicts mostly arise when one of them rejects the definition of the type of relationship provided by the other.

Through psycho-educational training prior-to deployment, and adequate counselling after deployment, couples can learn to cope with this normal phenomenon and learn to discuss the type of relationship they both want, instead of letting the problem degenerate in an interaction in which both want of have the last word.

CAVE: Soldiers, when being deployed, sometimes leave a dependent spouse who is used to have complementarity in her life. They come back home, after 4 to 6 months, and find out that their spouse turned into a very independent wife: the relationship became a symmetrical one, without a mutual agreement on it.

In such a situation, the relationship that is offered by one partner ("I am superior; you are inferior") is unacceptable to the other, as is any attempt by either partner to agree upon a symmetrical relationship. Leaving a relationship undefined also leaves unclear what is "real" or "not real" in the relational sphere.

This problem has to be treated during the psycho-educative counselling sessions (for example during preparative partner weekends): both partners need to learn to negotiate (wanted) changes.

Psycho-Educative Action Points

Territorial Training
Relational Training (Defensive, Offensive)
Communication Training
Learning to Negotiate
Reporting Relational Irritations & Changes

Learning ... to Cope with Peace Support Operations

Learning to go away ...

Primary prevention of relational and/or family problems
Pre-Mission Briefing Day
Preparative Weekend for Couples

Learning to be away ...

Secondary prevention of relational and/or family problems
Monthly meetings for significant others
Monthly meetings for partners
Children's Activities
Other Significant Activities: CIMIC, special events, etc, ...

Learning to come back ...

Tertiary prevention of relational and/or family problems
Post-Mission Debriefing
Reunion Weekend for Couples

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1. Support Activities' Time Axis (see powerpoint presentation)
Figure 2. Structural Model (see powerpoint presentation)

Conclusions

It takes time for everybody to learn to go away, to learn to be away, and to learn to come back; not only in a physical but also in an emotional way. A new equilibrium or life rhythm can not be established instantly.

Partners and “companions in fate” should communicate about what happened and how they felt in the operation zone with respect to their different social roles: the way of being a soldier, a partner, a husband, a father, etc... changes profoundly.

Spouses and rear unit personnel should also talk about what happened at the home front: in some cases the partner who stays behind with a family has a more difficult mission than the soldier deployed in the mission area. Soldiers are always specially trained for their mission, families mostly aren’t.

However, (pragmatic) communication is a major issue for both the peacekeepers and their significant others and ... they can learn it quickly!

At this moment, still too much precious time is spoiled by criticising each other, being angry when (unclear) messages are misunderstood and trying to hide the deep emotional impact of a long term deployment: in choosing for a job in the army ONE HAS THE RIGHT TO “COMPLAIN “ or TO SPEAK OUT sad feelings.

Being paid “FOR IT” has nothing to do with it ...

Soldiers returning from a long term deployment and their families both have a strong desire to talk about their own experiences. Recognizing the existence of recovery and readjustment processes in our loved ones and ourselves, after participation in a wartime deployment, is essential in preventing a long term psychosocial family trauma which becomes most difficult to treat.

The paradigm of the General Systems Theory and Communication Theory appears to be powerful in the further conceptualization of innovative support activities for couples. They deliver numerous action-oriented ways to increase military couples’ and/or families’ competence to successfully cope with the various effects of repetitious deployments in peace operations.

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Conceptual Framework - Support Activities - Legend Figure 1 (cf. powerpoint presentation)

V1	: Pre-Mission Briefing & Counselling Day for Peacekeepers & Spouses
W1	: Pre-Mission Preparative Weekend for Couples
D	: Departure (on a 4 to 6 month mission)
P1	: Accommodation Briefing & Counselling Sessions for Peacekeepers
S1	: Accommodation Briefing & Counselling Sessions for Spouses
P1/2	: Mid-Term Briefing & Counselling Sessions for Peacekeepers
S1/2	: Mid-Term Briefing & Counselling Sessions for Spouses
P2	: Homecoming Briefing & Counselling Sessions for Peacekeepers
S2	: Homecoming Briefing & Counselling Sessions for Spouses
H	: Homecoming
H2	: Post-Mission Debriefing & Counselling Day for Peacekeepers & Spouses
W2	: Post-Mission Reunion Weekend for Couples
F1-4	: Monthly Meetings & Information Sessions for Significant Others

Conceptual Framework - Structural Model

Reflection/Planning Level:

Multidisciplinary Workgroup on Psychosocial Support which consists of representatives of army general staff, professionals from care centres, training centres and field workers.

Implementation/Execution Level:

1) field psychologists deployed with the soldiers on battalion level; 2) rear-unit personnel and psychologists from care centres for the spouses and the families (child care units); 3) professionals (psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, etc) for the veterans. Peer-support from 'old-veterans' to 'future-veterans', and from the spouses of veterans to the un-experienced spouses who are facing deployment of their dearest ones. Continuous contacts and interactions between soldiers, families and veterans.

(Scientific) Reflection/Evaluation Level:

Led by the scientific personnel of the Royal Military Academy and the Royal Higher Defence College
