



# FAMILYPRINT™



BY TIFFANY PORTER STONER AND TIMOTHY DEWITT STONER

ONE FAMILY'S  
**UNIQUE REFLECTION**  
DURING WAR



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# **MOBILIZATION**

FROM WINGTIPS TO COMBAT BOOTS













MONDAY | MAY 21, 2007

## Becoming Ignorant

I really need to stay away from newspapers and the evening news for the next year. And, I need to remind myself to do so. But here I am waiting on my van to get serviced ... so I pick up *USA Today*. The leading article is "Copter Attacks." You would think I would just set it down but NOOOOOOO ... I keep nosing into it.

I learned that helicopters come under attack 90 to 100 times per MONTH in Iraq. Most attacks have been ineffective small-arms fire. But they have changed in recent months. A group of loosely connected cells have employed heavy machine guns. And they have studied the routes regularly used by U.S. helicopters. According to the article, the difference in the recent attacks is they were deliberate military operations conducted in ambush style against our aircraft.

And for those who don't know ... MedEvac helicopters have to fly UNARMED. So, please keep Tim and his troops in your thoughts and prayers as they mobilize for this mess.

"You have to remember every day that in that MedEvac helicopter sits some of the most highly trained fighting machines this country has to offer. And surrounding that copter is God and angels. It's scary, especially when the news doesn't make it any easier, but have faith, be strong ... and maybe don't pick that newspaper up."

– Sara Beckwith





WEDNESDAY | JUNE 20, 2007

## Wakeup Call

I have always known that I will command young soldiers in combat, but it caught me off guard today when the birth years were called out to the soldiers. Specifically, I have several soldiers whose birth year is 1988. 1988? 1988? I was in college in 1988!

These kids will grow up very fast and that is unfortunate.

They will be robbed of their free-spirited college years. They will be forced to become grown men – right now. They will be forced to make life-and-death decisions; they will fear for their life, daily; and inevitably they will witness life extinguish – before their very eyes.

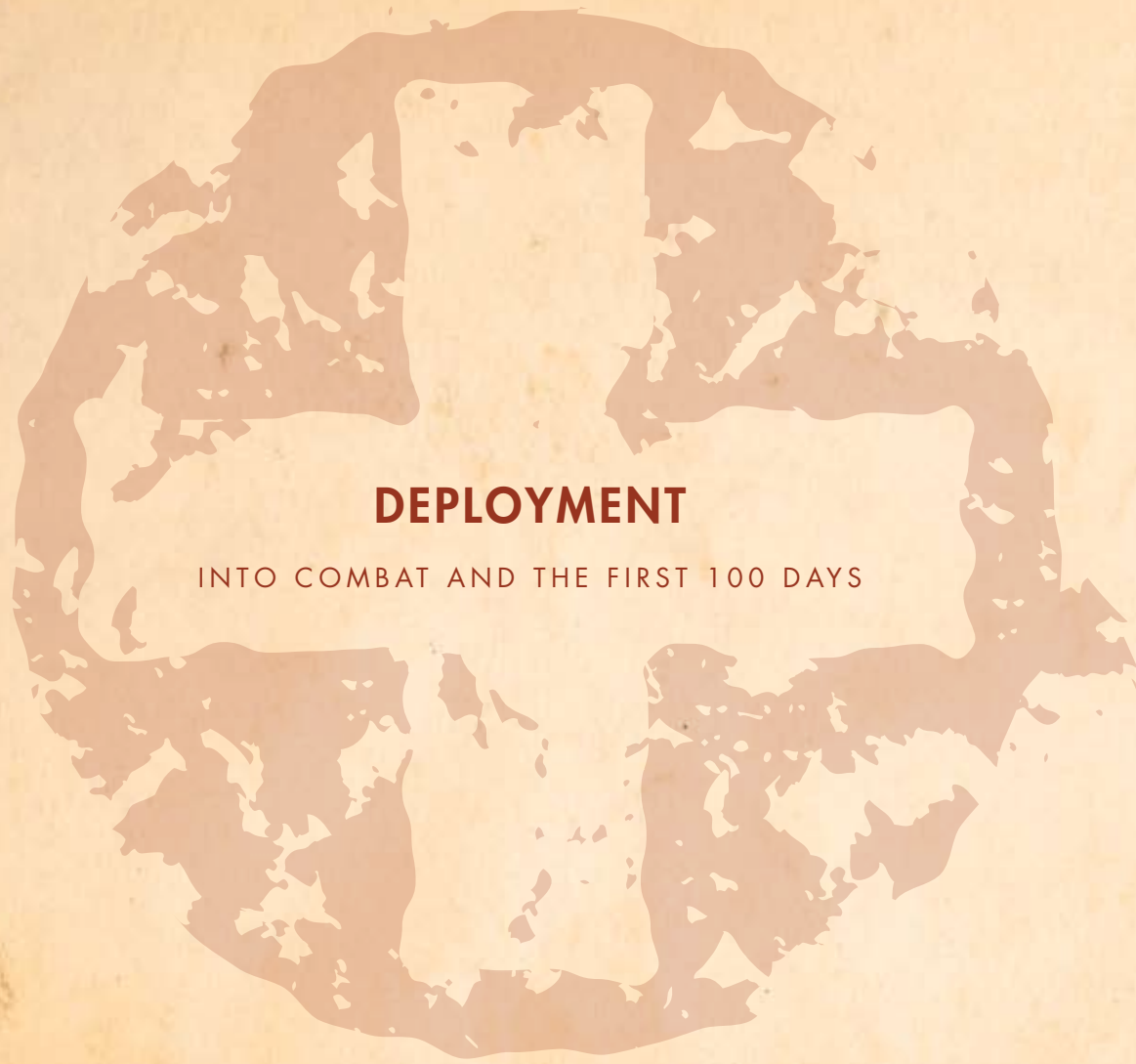
They will not carry book bags, or ride their mountain bike to class. They will: wear body armor with ballistic plates, wear Kevlar helmets, carry a loaded M4/M16, fly in a helicopter in the most dangerous place in the world, continue to keep their guard up and defense mechanisms working overtime, and they will be targeted by an enemy that loathes the very ground they walk on.

Even when they return, their innocence and care-free approach will have been exchanged for a battle-hardened kid – not even old enough to legally drink.

An unfortunate travesty.

“Even when they return,  
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even old enough to legally  
drink.”

– Tim



## **DEPLOYMENT**

INTO COMBAT AND THE FIRST 100 DAYS

← Surface Parking

11  
AGENCY





American









THURSDAY | AUGUST 2, 2007

## A Tougher Goodbye

I should have figured saying goodbye a second time might be a little tougher ... but perhaps I didn't give myself a chance to think that far ahead.

After Tim said his goodbyes to his father, sister, and our children, I clung to him just before he passed through security at the Indianapolis Airport today. I couldn't help but feel the time zones and distance will grow much wider between us now. The existence of danger will be constant. And, the length of time away will extend far beyond the New Year.

I also got to thinking that Tim got the last meaningful hugs he will get for at least six months. I'll get them every day but deployed soldiers go without effective human touch for a long time. Kind of like orphaned children. I thought about suggesting to Tim that he should institute some kind of 'hug line' or 'hug machine' or 'weekly hug buddy' amongst the unit but didn't think it would go over so well. But really ... who doesn't need a good hug now and then?

Briggs described it best as we drove away. He told me that he had an "empty space" and couldn't figure out where it was. I asked him if he felt like it was in his heart. And he thought it probably was. I told him that every one of us (even the babies) had an empty space without Daddy. Ten minutes later though, he thought the empty space might be the frustration he had not being able to get to the next level on his video game. Go figure!

And for all those who may think this is some idealistic marriage, I will give you two things to nibble on ... 1) distance makes the heart grow fonder and 2) even while Tim was visiting he still managed to drive me crazy. And, I managed to bug him too. With Tim, I am often in a holding pattern ... waiting. His shower and getting dressed process typically takes well over an hour. I can shower myself, get the kids dressed, bags packed, and be waiting in the car for Tim. This is my biggest rub. But I suppose if that is the worst thing I can complain about then he is a pretty good catch.

On an interesting note: We got the stats on this here little blog ... it is not so little. We were shocked to realize how many visitors we get on a daily basis (it isn't just my cousin Suzy and Uncle Wally). So I am asking for a special request. If you are a religious person, a spiritual person, or neither ... if you pray, even if you don't ... please keep my husband at the forefront of your mind, your thoughts, and your prayers. Please ask that he come home safely and with a mission accomplished ... saving the lives of soldiers.

Once again, I am grateful that my brother Nate was there to capture the event. Nate has a true gift of remaining completely in the background unnoticed. I will forever cherish the images he took. I will post them in the next day or so.

Miss you already, Partner!

“Briggs told me he had an ‘empty space’ and couldn’t figure out what it was. I asked him if he felt like it was in his heart. And he thought it probably was. I told him that every one of us (even the babies) had an empty space without Daddy.”

– Tiffany



“Our state has NEVER sent a helicopter unit into combat, in any war, EVER. We were not handed an overall strategy, an operational plan, or tactical plans. There has been no playbook, we have defined, built and refined it along the way.”

– Tim



SATURDAY | AUGUST 11, 2007

## The Eleventh Hour

It's here, it's finally here ... we are in the eleventh hour.

We're currently completing our desert flight training and will be crossing-the-berm soon. The eleventh hour is producing more energy, anxious energy, within the soldiers. Some people release this extra energy by working out, some pack and repack, some clean weapons - again, some are reading, some are listening to iPods, many are joking with their buddies, smoking, chewing tobacco, and some simply sit in solitude.

This window we are in is having quite a diverse affect on the group. You quickly see how people deal with enormous amounts of stress: in-public, by mentally escaping, or by remaining quiet.

Most of the soldiers want to end the training, and end the waiting, by “going forward” and “getting into the fight.” I too, just want to go.

The visual picture of a boxer comes to mind. Just before the bell rings, many boxers begin to jump around, shadow punch and move - exuding energy, concentrating and increasing focus.

We have plans, and contingency plans, for everything, but we simply do not know “what's next.” We've never been here before. Our state has NEVER sent a helicopter unit into combat, in any war, EVER. We were not handed an overall strategy, an operational plan, or tactical plans. There has been no playbook, we have defined, built and refined it along the way.

The team is highly capable, and confident - amazingly confident.

As I write, tears begin to well in my eyes. I will not hide them.

We are ready.





“We are all learning a lot from this experience right along with you. I am learning to take the unimportant things less seriously and not to worry about the things I cannot change (of which there are many!). Thank you for continuing to teach me about patience, friendship and motherhood.”

– Susan Sedita



WEDNESDAY | SEPTEMBER 12, 2007

## Points Of Reflection

Someone asked me recently how I was REALLY doing and it got me thinking. The kids and I are doing well ... we have adjusted to life without Tim's presence ... but he is ALWAYS in our thoughts, prayers, and conversations. We are in a routine of sorts. But I do miss my buddy when the house is blissfully quiet with slumber.

Some days I feel a great deal of frustration and hope that I have thick windows (I am known to yell loudly from time to time). However, I committed myself to maintaining a positive spirit. I believe a positive outlook can be contagious. For me, it is unrewarding to expend energy on bitterness and worry. There is so much in life that I cannot control (especially during deployment) but I can illuminate a positive perspective. The bottom line is Tim is at war, in an unsafe place, and with little comfort. But I believe wholeheartedly that they will successfully complete their mission having learned a great deal about themselves and the human spirit. And, I believe when Tim arrives home we will ALL have bigger hearts, greater patience, and a deeper gratitude.

From the beginning, this deployment has offered me a time of great reflection. In many ways, it will also provide us with a revitalization of our marriage. Like many young couples with young children, Tim and I were consumed with first building our family and now raising our family.

Over the past several years our children have been the priority ... the center of our lives. We are undoubtedly blessed with four children we like to describe as our "family unit." However, it is so blatantly obvious to me now how important it is that Tim and I carve out time for ourselves when he returns. And more importantly, we make a habit of it.

I remember long ago people passing judgment on Nancy Reagan for putting her marriage first ... but maybe there is something admirable in that. In less than two decades our children will be gone. I do not want to wait to enjoy my Partner until then. I want to enjoy him along the entire journey.



FRIDAY | OCTOBER 19, 2007

## Best Mission On The Battlefield

I've been asked, over and over, what I think about the situation here.

It may sound odd, but I rarely think of it in terms of "whether the surge is working, or whether we should be here or not." The job I have to do is MedEvac!

With MedEvac; there are no politics, no care about current media events, who is leading in the presidential candidacy polls, or anything else - it's ALL ABOUT THE PATIENT. You may not realize, but we must evacuate EVERYONE - not just our soldiers. In addition to our soldiers, we evacuate Iraqi Army, Iraqi police, Iraqi citizens, Coalition Forces, third country nationals, and even the enemy. Yes, the insurgents are evacuated - just like everyone else. In fact, if an insurgent has a more life-threatening wound than our soldier - we evacuate the enemy FIRST.

I've said it before, but after 17 years of being on the "pain-dealing" side of the Army, this MedEvac mission took a little getting-used-to. Now that I am on the "pain-healing" side of the Army, I have loved the switch in karma.

It's simply about taking people out of harm's way, providing them with medical care, and giving them a chance to live out the rest of their lives.

It absolutely is the BEST MISSION ON THE BATTLEFIELD!

"I'm grateful for the examples that you have unintentionally set for me. I'm grateful that despite the fact that you are thousands of miles away from your wife, your love and commitment is so strong that I am still learning lessons from you. And I'm grateful that despite the fact that I don't have a CLUE what the future holds for me, I know that I am FREE to do whatever it is that makes me happy. And for that freedom I owe you and your troops a million thanks!"

– Sara Bauer





THURSDAY | JANUARY 17, 2008

## My Daddy's Notebook

As I was purging closets today (my favorite pastime lately), I found this. Actually, let me continue with the purging closets thought for a minute ... it is completely liberating. I think I feel several pounds lighter from the experience, and I knew it would all go to people that really needed it. I figure most of us can be categorized into two camps: purgers and pack rats. Let's just say, I am a purger and Tim, well ... he is a pack rat.

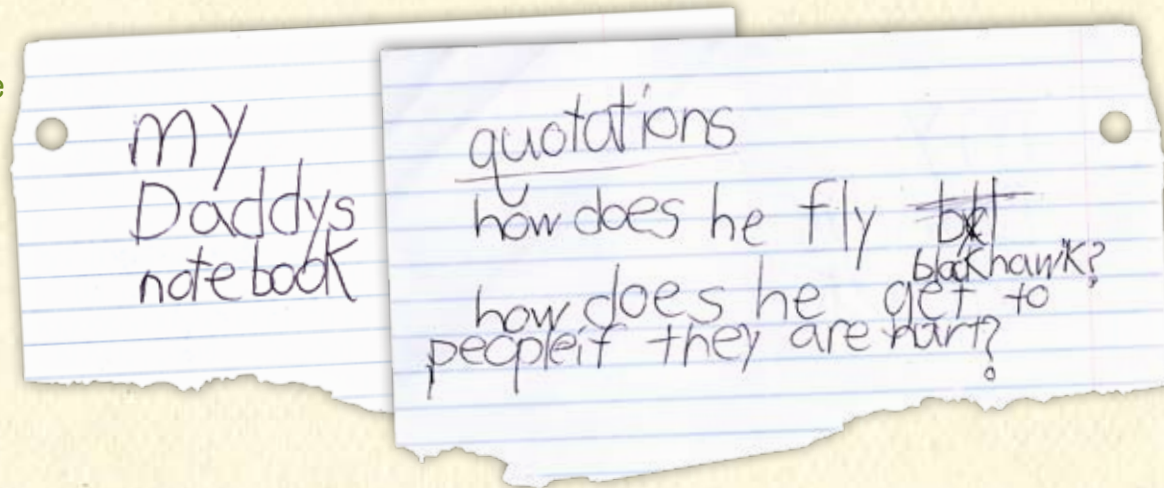
Not only I am purging closets but we hit a MAJOR milestone this week. I packed up all of the bottles, gladly handed them over to my sister-in-law, and did a celebratory dance (no joke ... I did a dance). We are a nipple-free, bottle-free household. While maybe sad for an eensy-weensy-tiny moment, I am thrilled that I no longer have to fill another bottle!

So back to the point of the post ... Briggs is known for creating books. He loves to staple pages together to make journals. Anyway, I know Tim would enjoy seeing the start of his notebook below.

Briggs stays up at night after the little ones are tucked into bed. I think he likes the peace and quiet just as much as I do. I am sure he wrote this on one of those nights. Actually, it makes me kind of sad that, alone in his room, he is thinking about his dad. But as we know ... soon enough ... Tim will return.

"Tell him that the hurt people have radios that 'know' where they are (GPS), and that I go to the location of the radio – to get them. Tell him not to worry about me, and that I love saving people. Tell him that 'just like he protects his sisters, it's my job to protect these soldiers.' Tell him I will see him turn eight and be his most excited guest at his birthday party."

– Tim







## THE LAST STRETCH

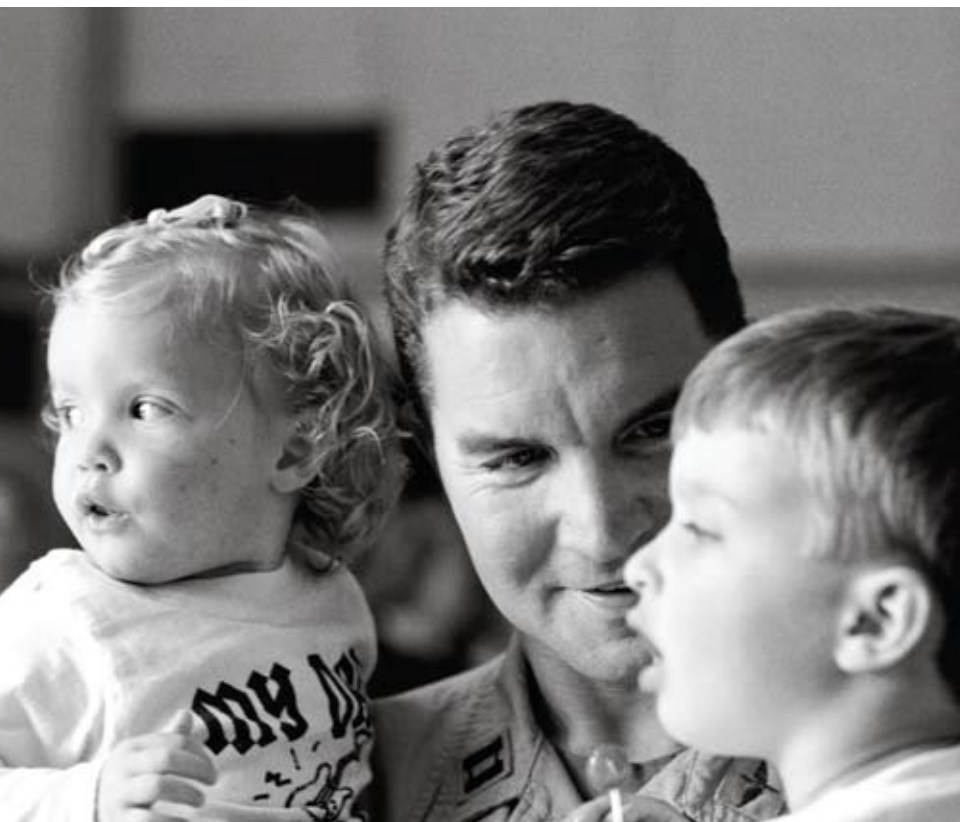
A TASTE OF HOME,  
AND KEEPING OUR FINGERS CROSSED















FRIDAY | MARCH 7, 2008

## “Over-The-Berm” ... Again

After returning from a wonderful time on leave with the Stoner Six, extended family, and friends - it was time to return to the desert.

Leaving was tough on me, not in an overwhelming “sad” way or “nervous” way - but an angry way.

The first time I departed left me sad - as I looked at how long I would be apart from the family and a bit anxious - as I did not know what to expect or what the outcome might be.

This time I was angry. Angry that I had to leave the family, angry that I could no longer participate in their daily routine, and angry that I could not hold them/hug them/kiss them and tuck them in.

When Tiffany hugged me and kissed me goodbye, I turned away with only one thing on my mind, getting back to Iraq. I wanted to get back, get the mission completed, get ALL of my soldiers home, and get back to raising our children with my wife.

It took 4 days to get back into theatre. We experienced multiple 6/8/12 hour delays and flight cancellations. When we finally arrived at the Kuwait airport, we traveled by bus for a couple of hours to be pre-positioned to go North (Iraq) on a military transport plane.

When I stepped off the bus I donned my body armor, put on my Kevlar helmet, slung my ruck across my back and boarded the C-130. It was a familiar sight, as I cycled through the mental pictures of the first time we came over-the-berm and entered into combat. Although the mental pictures were familiar, the feeling was completely different.

The feeling this time was not of nervous bravery, but of complete confidence. I had been here before, sustained operations, and had been flying combat missions since the summer.

The mission here feels normal, like it's my occupation. I was telling people on leave, “you absolutely can get used to anything.”

It's been a long tour; it will be great to get back to life in our town and something closer to “normal.”



“Tim, I respect you. I am proud of you. I love you.”

– Stacy Meyer

“The deployment has forged deeper relationships (husband, children, family, friends, God) than I have ever had because I am more open than I have ever been (just read this blog for Pete’s sake). Forcibly, I have required myself to also find something to be thankful for each day no matter how much suffering ensued that day.”

– Tiffany



SUNDAY | MARCH 30, 2008

## Embrace The Suffering

I was recently asked at my neighborhood Bible Study what I was most grateful for. I boldly responded, “Without question I am most grateful for Tim’s deployment.” I believe most were shocked around the room because this group of women has been particularly supportive over the past year.

I didn’t answer my health, my children or the safety of my husband. I didn’t even contemplate my answer because it encompasses all of that and more.

The deployment has forged deeper relationships (husband, children, family, friends, God) than I have ever had because I am more open than I have ever been (just read this blog, for Pete’s sake). Forcibly, I have required myself to also find something to be thankful for each day no matter how much suffering ensued that day.

I truly respect my health, and that which my body can endure. I have suffered through, what I hope, are some of the darkest moments in my life. As deployed wives, there is no doubt that we have an immense responsibility when our husbands are deployed. On top of the incredible weight of keeping our families and homes intact, let’s be honest, there is also the overriding fear that our husbands won’t return. No one understands that feeling like a woman left behind while her soldier fights a war. However, without being trite, what doesn’t kill us makes us stronger!

Every day you can witness me rolling my eyes at the drama that ensues between the walls of our home. Every day I yell at my children. Every day I look forward to bedtime when the house is peaceful. BUT ... every day I love my children more authentically because I know that it has not been painless with just me. They have equally suffered, if not greater. What I do hope they learn from the suffering is to be more resilient and resourceful. I hope someday they will be tougher for it but also cherish our family unit more than they would have otherwise.

The love for my husband is greater for not only what he is doing for our country but his self-fulfillment. I respect him for providing for this family and keeping us close to his heart. I love my family and friends more for the sacrifices they have consistently made to support me both emotionally and logistically. And quite frankly, I love myself more because I believe I have maintained some form of dignity.

I would encourage those who are currently in the midst of a deployment (Hang On!), coming to the end of one (Amen!), or finding yourself close to one (Bless You!) to embrace the suffering! You will be more authentic in the end.



“Imagine the six most content people in the world right now ... four kids smiling from ear-to-ear, yelling for their dad’s attention, a mother that finally has some reinforcement and an enormous weight lifted off of her shoulders with the security of her partner out of a war zone, and a father relieved to be home but completely satisfied with a successful mission of bringing 150 soldiers home alive.”

– Tiffany



WEDNESDAY | APRIL 30, 2008

## Imagine

Imagine the six most content people in the world right now ... four kids smiling from ear-to-ear, yelling for their dad’s attention, a mother that finally has some reinforcement and an enormous weight lifted off of her shoulders with the security of her partner out of a war zone, and a father relieved to be home but completely satisfied with a successful mission of bringing 150 soldiers home alive.

We filled the last seat in our van last night on our road trip home ... together. It was incredible to look to my side and see my husband. It was equally exciting for Tim to look in the back seats to observe our clan staring at him with amazement. Once we arrived home it was as it always is ... crazy.

I know that Tim is haunted with images of a faraway place but we will work through those issues slowly. I imagine it will take some time for him to feel normal again. Right now the images below are more exciting to focus on. I cannot thank my brother enough for his amazing gift of capturing single-handedly the most important moment in our lives.

And, to you ... our friends, family, and followers ... THANK YOU. Thank you for peering into our lives for the last year. Thank you for including us in your prayers (especially Tim). Thank you for all of the small and huge favors. Thank you for your genuine kindness and selfless acts. Thank you for caring about us from a distant or close range. Thank you for supporting these troops on an admirable mission.



# REINTEGRATION

IT TAKES SOME GETTING USED TO









THURSDAY | MAY 8, 2008

## Reintegration

We have been reunited for one week. And while we have relished being together again, there is something to be said about the term we heard often from the military ...

### REINTEGRATION.

I found myself lacking the GPS coordinates to give to Tim when explaining the directions to Briggs' baseball practice. Then, I actually heard him say, "Roger ... proceed" when I told him the plans for our day ahead. I guess removing military jargon isn't all that easy. On another occasion, I apparently didn't give him enough context to a story I was telling because he stopped me mid-sentence and said, "I always told my guys that you can't just start talking about a specific subject, without a transition, or giving me the big picture of what you are talking about." At that point, let me assure you, I wasn't interested in continuing my story.

Tim has been extremely tuned in to the children, extremely hands-on with everything around the house, and having the family whole again is more than words can describe.

With that being said, I think it is important to recognize that there is a reintegration period. I have had to remind myself repeatedly that my husband has just returned from a highly-stressful combat zone into a home with four noisy and needy children. I have tried to keep my "Type-A" personality at bay and have bit my tongue on several occasions. Tim has complained that many things have been moved, I took over "his space," and when he sees my non-reaction to the girls climbing on top of the table he comments that I have clearly been in "survival-mode" for the past year. After these comments, we both kind of chuckle. Through the truth there is a lot of humor.

Tim and I promised we would always uphold a united front with the children's discipline. Well, for anyone else that uses this strategy, it can be challenging. While I wholeheartedly agree with Tim's messages and appreciate the reinforcement, I think his tone has been hard since returning, especially toward Briggs.

I could tell Briggs' heart was hurting one night. So, we snuggled up underneath his sheets. He said, "Things were easier when Dad wasn't here. I'm not sure I'm glad he is back." That is when the "united front" was critical. I explained to Briggs that we have to be patient. Daddy has been gone for a long time in a rough place and we all just need to get used to being together again.

Just like I wrote several posts ago ... Embrace the Suffering ... well now it is Embrace the Reintegration. The bottom line is, it takes some time but time is what we have most of right now. I am so happy to be married to this man who has returned HOME!

"I think it is important to recognize that there is a reintegration period. I have had to remind myself repeatedly that my husband has just returned from a highly-stressful combat zone into a home with four noisy and needy children."

– Tiffany