

USAREUR
FAMILY SUPPORT
DURING OPERATION JOINT ENDEAVOR:
SUMMARY REPORT

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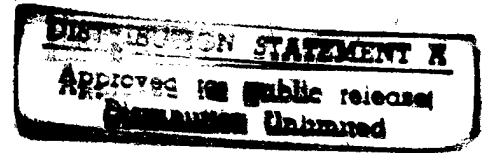
USAREUR Family Support During Operation Joint Endeavor: Summary Report

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Research Requirement:

The purpose of this report is to summarize the major findings from a joint Walter Reed Army Institute for Research (WRAIR) and U. S. Army Research Institute (ARI) study of the ability of U.S. Army Europe and Seventh Army (USAREUR) families to adapt to the stresses of Operation Joint Endeavor (OJE) in Bosnia and Hungary.

Procedure:

The research -- which was conducted between April and June 1996 -- had two parts: an intensive study of four USAREUR communities and a USAREUR-wide spouse survey. The combined effort resulted in group and individual interviews with 257 individuals and surveys from 1,776 spouses. The interviews, observations, and data analyses were fed back to USAREUR in the form of community (and USAREUR Headquarters-level) briefings and preliminary reports.

Findings:

Overall family adaptation was comparable to what was seen during Operation Restore Hope in Somalia, which was a shorter deployment. About half of the spouses believed that OJE had a negative impact on them and their families. Stress levels were higher than before the deployment but were somewhat lower than those observed during the Gulf War. Financial problems were less frequent than in other recent major deployments. Use of various family support services was high and the services were evaluated as helpful. More OJE spouses (85%) reported that "their unit" had an active Family Support Group than we have seen in other major deployments. Satisfaction with telephone communications and with the mail service was greater than during the Gulf War.

Most spouses favored the Rest and Recuperation (R&R) program, even for brief

returns. One-third of the spouses reported that their soldiers had taken R&R. The short term impact of R&R seemed to be to increase stress symptoms, to increase depression, and to reduce retention desires, especially for spouses with children. These outcomes appear to be related to the stress of rapid re-entry and repeated exits from the family. Long-term outcomes of the R&R program may be more favorable.

Spouse support for United States participation in peacekeeping in Bosnia has improved since OJE began but still remained low as of early Summer 1996. Over half of the spouses who felt prepared for the deployment and who felt they understood the mission were supportive. Despite misgivings about the United States' role in this peacekeeping mission, most spouses believed that their soldiers were well trained for the mission and that the Army was doing all it could to keep their soldiers safe.

Utilization of Findings:

Most of what USAREUR did in the area of family support should be used as a model for future deployments. Areas of possible improvement that were suggested include: more emphasis on helping spouses understand (and therefore support) the OJE mission, more support for newly arrived spouses, more limited hours of operations for Family Assistance Centers, and better organization/training for Rear Detachment personnel. Information from this research has been summarized, briefed, and disseminated to senior leaders throughout Europe immediately following the data collections.

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INTRODUCTION

The research -- which was conducted between April and June 1996 -- had two parts. The Community Study used group and individual interviews of spouses, family service providers, and Army leaders -- as well as a spouse survey -- to intensively study four U. S. Army Europe and Seventh Army (USAREUR) communities that had sent soldiers to Operation Joint Endeavor (OJE). These communities were Bad Kreuznach, Kirchgöns, and Baumholder in Germany and Vicenza in Italy.

The USAREUR-Wide Study involved mailing the same WRAIR-ARI survey to a sample of USAREUR spouses of soldiers sent to OJE, throughout Europe.¹

The purpose of this research was to learn, through field interviews and spouse questionnaires, how spouses in these communities and USAREUR, in general, were handling the strains of a large deployment of USAREUR-based soldiers. The emphasis of this data collection was to provide immediate feedback to USAREUR leaders and family support professionals at all levels on how to improve family support operations. This report continues the feedback process by providing a short summary of (1) each family support issue investigated, (2) the research findings concerning that issue, and (3) our recommendations for this and future Army deployments. The full report of the analyses conducted and the results of those analyses are available from the U. S. Army Research Institute (Bell, Bartone, Bartone, Schumm, Rice, and Hinson, 1997).

¹ Since the spouse survey in both studies was the same, spouses were instructed to only complete the survey once.

ISSUES, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Spouse Support for and Effect of the OJE Mission

Issue 1: Spouse Support for the Mission

Spouse support for the soldier and the soldier's mission is an important factor that influences soldier morale and duty performance (Schumm, Bell, Segal, & Rice, 1996). Deployments and other long family separations are very stressful for many families (Bell, Stevens, & Segal, 1996; HQ, USAREUR and Seventh Army, 1996). The level of support that families have for a given deployment and the amount of stress they experience are related. However, it is hard to predict these levels of support and stress in advance. The variables that seem to be important are: the length of the mission, its perceived level of danger, whether there was advanced notice of who would go and when, and whether there is a fixed return date. Therefore, USAREUR wanted to assess how those variables would play out in the current deployment and what, if anything, predicted the level of mission support among the OJE deployment spouses.

Findings

Spouse support for having their soldiers participate in this peacekeeping mission was relatively low -- much lower, in fact, than was seen during Somalia (29% favored this mission versus 46% who, in 1993, had favored the Somalia mission). Spouses were also less positive about humanitarian/peacekeeping missions in general, with only 34% being favorable compared to 43% during Somalia. A greater percentage of spouses agreed with sending troops to future peacekeeping missions (34%) than with sending them to Bosnia (29%). However, more spouses reported being favorable to OJE at the time the

survey was completed (32%) than they had been when it began in December (26%). Although it is clear that spouses are less positive about this mission than their counterparts in earlier peace-keeping missions, it is not clear why. Some spouses feel the mission is dangerous and that their soldiers are being asked to sacrifice more than others not deployed for OJE. Moreover, many spouses are afraid that once U.S. troops pull out of Bosnia, the civil unrest will recur and their sacrifices will be negated. Their concerns are not with the Army per se but more with the assigned mission.

Despite their concerns about the OJE mission, the majority of spouses reported that the Army was taking good care of their soldiers. Most spouses felt that their soldiers were well-trained

(66%) and that the Army was doing all it could to keep the soldiers safe (67%).

Support for the OJE mission was correlated with spouse's education, age, feeling prepared for the deployment, participation in and satisfaction with the unit's family support group, and with soldier's rank. Support for the OJE mission ranged from less than 20% for spouses of enlisted soldiers to more than 40% for spouses of

officers; similar findings were seen in the comparisons of those spouses with less than a high school education to those with graduate degrees. Reported level of spouse preparedness for the deployment was dramatically related to spouse support for OJE. Over half (52%) of those who felt "very prepared" were in favor of their soldier serving in OJE compared to only 15% of those who reported being "very unprepared."

However, many of the factors that we thought

might be related to the level of spouse support (i.e., spouse gender, pregnancy status, number of children, distance from post, and time assigned to Europe) were not related to support for OJE.

Lower levels of support for having soldiers serving in Bosnia were also seen among spouses who were troubled by or worried about: (1) mission uncertainty, (2) their soldier's safety, (3) accuracy or



timeliness of information about the mission, or (4) news [probably bad news] about Bosnia. The largest difference in this set was in the area of mission uncertainty. Only 14% of those who were very worried about mission uncertainty were supportive as compared to 45% among those who had little concern. Concern about mission uncertainty was also related to other key Army concerns (i.e., spouse reports of soldier

willingness to stay in the service, spouse stress symptoms, and spouse beliefs that OJE was having an adverse effect on the soldier's family).

Those spouses who reported using the more formal military sources of information -- Stars and Stripes, Rear Detachment (RD) staff, unit chain of command, e-mail, Family Support Group (FSG) members, command briefings, Armed Forces Network (AFN) Radio -- reported less mission uncertainty. In contrast, contact with the soldier (via telephone, letters) and civilian sources of information (e.g., use of CNN) were not related to mission uncertainty.

Recommendations

- Make a greater effort to help families understand the mission and its prospects for success. (Spouses who understand the mission are more supportive of it.) The effort here should be focused on the families of junior enlisted personnel, less experienced NCO's and junior officers.
- Make greater use of those media associated with understanding -- and therefore supporting -- the mission. These media are: *Stars and Stripes*, unit videos, command briefings, Armed Forces Radio, and FSG telephone trees.
- If prospects for a lasting peace improve, broadcast those facts to increase spouse morale and mission support.

Issue 2: Deployment Effects

The impact of deployments on spouse stress levels and family life is a perennial concern of the Army. USAREUR was concerned, however, that the unique aspects of the OJE deployment might impact stress levels, family life, and family adaptation to Army life in different ways than in previous deployments.

Findings

From their comments on the surveys and through interviews we found that spouses were prepared for a six-month deployment but they

indicated that a year would be too hard on the family. Many felt that peace would not last beyond the NATO withdrawal and that their family sacrifices would be for naught. Spouses felt that yearlong tours had a very negative impact on the soldier, themselves, and their children. Nearly two-thirds of spouses reported that the OJE deployment had a negative impact on their children while about half reported a negative impact on the soldier or themselves; however, less than a quarter of spouses reported negative impacts on their parent-child or marital relationships. Nevertheless, the impact on marital satisfaction was negative (37% reported a decline versus 12% reporting an increase) and much larger than for previous deployments or other unaccompanied or temporary duty tours.

The key to the impact on family appeared to



be the tour length. Most spouses (68%) reported that the length was much or very much of a concern or worry for them. Furthermore, among those spouses who said tour length presented "very

little" trouble for them, 59% were supportive of their soldier being in OJE, in contrast to only 17% of those who said tour length was "very much" a trouble or concern to them. Not only was it scheduled to continue for a year, but also many spouses commented that their soldier had recently completed another lengthy deployment which in effect was being added to this one, expanding the family separation up to 24 months in duration. The fact that no one really knew when the operation would finish or when a particular soldier would come home only added to the problem.

The frequencies with which spouses experienced classical stress symptoms (e.g., inability to sleep or being depressed) were much higher than was seen among USAREUR spouses prior to the deployment. In fact, they were comparable to the levels shown by USAREUR spouses whose soldier had deployed to the Gulf War. Also, many OJE spouses reported increased use of cigarettes and alcohol.

These problems notwithstanding, the spouses showed good ability to adapt to the stresses of Army life. That is, their adaptation scores were essentially the same as other USAREUR spouses whose soldier did not deploy and the same as the scores of spouses at Fort Drum, New York when their soldiers had just returned from Somalia. Likewise, the percentage of OJE spouses who reported financial problems was comparable to "Somalia spouses" -- and considerably lower than the percentage seen during the Gulf War.

Securing childcare, particularly hourly care, remained a problem for spouses of soldiers who deployed to OJE. The supply of childcare providers tends to contract during a deployment as some in-home providers cease operations with their spouse deployed. Having fewer childcare providers made finding adequate childcare much more difficult during the OJE deployment. Furthermore, spouses with children were more likely than spouses without children to report that: (1) OJE was having a negative impact on them, (2) they were depressed, and (3) they felt that the soldier was unlikely to make the Army a career.

Recommendations

- If possible, reduce tour length to six months or at least make the tour for a given soldier a fixed length (see issue 1, above).
- Document how the tour length and uncertain return date affected the retention of married soldiers.
- Re-examine policies and resources devoted to childcare during long deploy-

ments with particular focus on providing short-term (respite) care to help reduce stress for spouses of deployed soldiers.

- Emphasize orientation and social networking programs for spouses, particularly for new arrivals.

FAMILY SUPPORT SYSTEM FUNCTIONING DURING OJE

There was a variety of issues that related to the general area of family support system functioning during OJE. USAREUR was interested in the overall functioning of the family support system from both the perspective of community family support system workers and the perspective of spouses. Each issue will be considered in turn, along with our findings and recommendations.

Issue 3: Problem Families

Community family support system workers obviously play a critical role in the Army's overall family support system. Their viewpoints are essential for finding ways to maintain and to improve the quality of USAREUR's family support system. Therefore, the research teams interviewed agency staff members and volunteers at several USAREUR communities.

Findings

Our community interviews showed that a relatively small proportion of Army families was creating most of the workload for family support systems. These family/spouse types were described as follows:

Multiple problem families. These families are often well known to the unit command and the community family support providers even before the deployment begins. Problems they exhibit may include: poor financial management, spouse or child abuse, substance abuse, problems with the law and/or schools, and lack of financial resources. Some of these problems can be compounded by the soldier's absence.

Excessively dependent spouses. These

often young and inexperienced spouses usually function well as long as the soldier is present but are unable to function alone because they lack the skills or because the soldier has taken away many of the essential tools for running a household.

Overly demanding spouses. This type of spouse expects that the Army or FSGs provide them with all manner of services such as transportation and childcare on demand. They firmly believe that because the Army took the soldier away, it must fill the gaps until he/she returns. Furthermore, they are seldom satisfied with the speed or extent of services they do receive and often do not try to help themselves.

Families that scheme early returns. These spouses (often with their soldier's help) plot to develop some scenario that will result in the early return of the soldier from deployment. These families tax the resources and sympathies of the service providers because although the families appear to be in a real crisis, they are only using the service provider to get the soldier home.

Effective community, rear detachment, and family support activities and services helped reduce spouse stress and maintain good health. Handling problem families through family support channels requires close coordination among helping agents and clear expectations about what families can and should be doing for themselves. Dependent spouses can grow into independence if the "helpers" stress that independence is expected of them and if soldiers reinforce that expectation of their spouses. Family support providers must set limits on what kinds of help they will or will not provide. They must be calm, patient, and persistent in their insistence that the family should prepare for "emergencies" and that the Army does not have to supply what is missing just because the spouse is demanding action. Unit commanders must become aware that some soldiers and spouses will attempt to manipulate the system to gain an early return, but not confuse those situations with ones in which an early return is appropriate. Service providers should try everything they can to promote independence rather than

becoming part of a lobbying operation to get the soldier back.

Recommendations

- Help service providers and commanders recognize that these four types of families exist and require different types of assistance to become more independent.
- Multiple problem families may require the attention of the most skilled agency staff rather than that of volunteers or less experienced staff. In fact, reliance upon inexperienced staff or volunteers could cause problems (e.g., if a family member commits suicide and it is determined that a new staff member had not been trained in recognizing common signs of a potential suicide victim).
- Excessively dependent spouses or families may benefit from efforts to help them develop independence, teaching them how to network and become more self-reliant. Volunteers and agency staff can expect to see most of these types of spouses become more independent with time and relatively little outside help.
- Excessively demanding spouses must be treated with respect but clearly informed of the limits of assistance - that the staff can do "X" but not "Y." It may be useful to protect new staff from becoming "stuck" with such families as they can drain resources away from the majority of families who need temporary assistance.
- When families scheme ways to bring the soldier back early, staff, while alert for legitimate concerns, must notify such families that the "game" will not work. Obviously, it is not fair to all soldiers and their families, all of whom experience difficulties during separations, that some are granted special treatment that is

not appropriate. Staff must prevent themselves from being manipulated by such families.

Issue 4: R&R Program

There were particular questions about the usefulness of the Rest and Recuperation (R&R) program during OJE. Did it work well? Did it work equally well for all spouses?

Findings

Survey responses showed that most spouses favored the home leave/R&R program. However, spouses often felt that the leave should not be charged against annual leave, given the length of the deployment and the typical 7-day work weeks. Some families would have preferred to have some say in the timing of the leave, which was usually dictated by unit requirements. Though appreciated, home leave was stressful as it disrupted newly established routines, required another painful good-bye, and was associated with increased depression in spouses after the soldier deployed. Long-term effects of home leave on health, marital satisfaction, and attitudes toward the Army are yet to be determined, though preliminary evidence suggests slight positive effects on health and retention.

Spouses whose soldiers had taken R&R/home leave were not different from those whose soldiers had not, in terms of their basic characteristics such as the spouse's age, years of marriage, or their ability to adapt to the stresses of Army life. However, the spouses who had participated in R&R's were less prepared for the deployment, had less prior experience with family separation, and had lower levels of marital satisfaction even before the deployment began.

Spouse survey results suggest most spouses prefer meeting the soldier at home rather than a recreation spot. However, spouses without children (59%), compared to those with children (46%), preferred meeting one's soldier for a "vacation" at a location other than home. Taking leave at other locations may raise complex childcare issues for those spouses with children.

Recommendations

- Consider offering a shorter OJE deployment in place of a mid-tour R&R. It avoids the problems of readjusting to separation.
- Urge service providers to develop programs that help families, particularly the children, deal with the post R&R adjustment period. A program similar to the reunion video would be helpful.
- Continue to offer a choice of leave at home or in a recreation area (different families have different needs).

Issue 5: Communications Between Soldiers/Spouses

One of the major changes that has occurred in the area of family support during deployments over the last fifty years has been the ease and relative costs of maintaining family communications (Ender, 1995; Ender & Segal, 1996). We examined how families communicated with their deployed soldier during this deployment and what the consequences of those communications were for the Army and for the families.



Findings

Family communications between deployed soldiers and their spouses back home were established in record time and proved easy to use. Soldiers and spouses were much more likely to communicate on a weekly basis by telephone and letter in this deployment than in others. Phone calls and letters from the soldier were rated as helpful by a higher percentage of spouses (89-93%) than during either Somalia (43-76%) or the Gulf War (70%). The provision of free postal service for both letters and packages was cited as a positive factor during the deployment. The high level of communication helped to promote adjustment and coordination. Lack of access to

needed equipment limited family use of FAX, E-mail, MARS, teleconferencing, and videotape/audiotape exchanges.

Recommendations

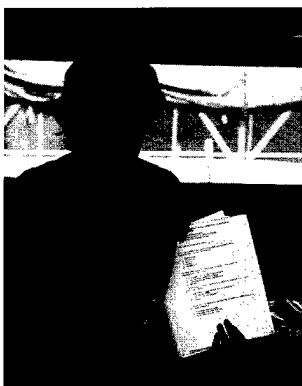
- Urge future deployments to adapt the OJE systems for letters, packages, and telephone services.
- Explore making alternative and cheaper communications more available to soldiers and families to keep down their costs (e.g., audio/videotapes, FAX, and E-mail).

Issue 6: Family Assistance Center Organization

Family Assistance Centers (FACs) have been organized in a variety of ways to support the families of soldiers. The research teams interviewed FAC personnel in several communities in order to obtain their views on which types of FAC organizations and operations seemed to work best during the OJE deployment.

Findings

Most FACs appeared to operate on a 24 hours a day/7 day a week schedule during the early months of the deployment and still had



extended hours during the time of our data collection -- some four months after the deployment began. Although this mode of operation is symbolic of command concern for families, its extended use appears to be counterproductive. Few

clients were actually served after normal hours, there was high staff fatigue, and it was not a good use of professional talent as other useful family programs had to be canceled in many cases to provide personnel support for the FACs. One FAC was located within the welcome center, which was already staffed on a 24-hour

basis; a helpline was activated; a roster of on-call staff was made up, and beepers were used to substitute for 24-hour staffing of the FAC.

Recommendations

- Substitute continuously staffed telephone hotlines for continuous staffing of a FAC (it will reduce staff burnout and increase service coordination).
- Have the FAC staff "on continuous call" to back the telephone coverage.
- Plan and equip the FAC now for the next major deployment in efficient ways that do not require 24-hour operation.

Issue 7: Ratings of Family Service Agencies

From past research, we were confident that family support groups (FSGs) and community service agencies would be again performing their missions well, and would be rated highly by spouses. However, we wanted to be sure that positive trends had continued through OJE and to assess spouse reports for ideas on ways to improve family support services.

Findings

Army agencies were used extensively and rated "somewhat to very helpful" by most spouses. For example, 80% or more of spouses rated their Rear Detachment (RD) commands, Army Community Service, the American Red Cross, and the Family Assistance Centers as "helpful". More spouses reported having used the services of their RD Command (RDC) (74%) than the FAC (31%), ACS (39%), or the Red Cross (14%).

A greater percentage of spouses reported having had an active unit FSG (85%) than during Somalia (80%) or the Gulf War (63%). FSG newsletters (55%) and phone trees (33%) were rated helpful by more spouses than during Somalia or the Gulf War. AFN TV and Stars and Stripes were also often cited (62-71%) as helpful sources of information during OJE. Command family briefings were also cited by more spouses (43%) as helpful than during

Somalia (23%) or the Gulf War (11%). Notably, FSGs (33-55%) were seen as more useful sources of information than the unit's chain of command (21%) or the RD staff (32%). Many spouses contacted their RD but some of them felt that the RD was not always helpful. When RDs sometimes referred spouses to better sources of assistance, some spouses interpreted referral as a "brush-off," even though that probably wasn't intended. Those spouses who said they had an active FSG were more likely to say they were well prepared for the deployment and were more likely to say they had someone they could depend upon to provide emotional support or practical help in emergency areas such as childcare.

Recommendations

- Army agencies and family support groups appeared to be fully engaged to support OJE and were rated as helpful by most spouses. Current successful procedures should be continued.
- There may be a trend for spouses to rely more on unit-based support systems (RD, FSG, command briefings) than on community-based support systems. Both systems should continue to work closely together to gain the benefits and advantages of each.
- During OJE, FSGs and command briefings received higher ratings than did RDs; RD staff may require better training in handling family issues, so that even when referrals are appropriate, spouses feel their concerns have been recognized and appreciated.
- Emphasize unit media in keeping spouses informed about OJE (i.e., command briefings, FSG newsletters and telephone contacts, and the RDC).
- AFN, Stars and Stripes, and other Army media should also be used, particularly to help spouses understand the mission.

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