

Should I Stay or Should I Go?

*Items to consider before leaving
on a jet plane*

By Maria Yost

The sky is a gloomy gray and the bitter cold wind stings Elaine in the face as she makes her way toward the Vilseck Post Office. Snow cascades around the 23-year-old military spouse as thoughts flurry through her mind. The weight of the heavy packages Elaine carries is nothing compared to the decisions that embrace her like the Bavarian winter. Maybe it is the cold, or perhaps the approaching holiday season, but more and more, Elaine is considering returning to the States when her husband deploys to Iraq.

Although Elaine is a fictitious character, she could very well be any of us in this community. Cold and snowy Decembers in Germany often leave us dreaming of shopping malls and all those other things that we miss about the United States. This can be especially true if your spouse is deployed or scheduled to deploy soon. Rather than envisioning the sugarplums at the local Christmas Markets, you may find yourself surfing the net for airline specials or making plans to head stateside for an undetermined period of time. While a short visit to the States can be refreshing, returning for long periods of time may not be the best decision for family members of deployed soldiers. Many family members in the 409th BSB may have mixed emotions as the deployment of the 3rd Brigade to Iraq also draws closer. Spouses may be wondering whether they should stay in the 409th BSB or return stateside during the deployment.

When things seem gloomy, it is natural to want to go back to the States where everything is familiar. However, there are many reasons why this might not be the best option. For starters, moving isn't easy. Deployment is stressful enough without moving an entire household. Don't you remember that from when you moved here? Do you really want to do this all by yourself? Then there is the issue of where you are going to go. It might be nice to have family around, but it can be very difficult to go home again. JoAnn Harris, whose husband is currently deployed to Iraq with 1/63 Armor, put it this way, "I am really used to my independence. This (Vilseck) is the home I share with my husband and son. This is our home as a family." JoAnn visited with family

for a few weeks over the summer and chose to spend the remainder of the deployment here in Germany.

One extremely important factor to consider is children. Children will have a difficult enough time adjusting to one of their parents being gone for a long period of time. Do you really want to add more stress into their lives by changing everything they know? Taking them away from all that is familiar will make the adjustment even more difficult. This is especially true for school-age children who have established friendships and routines. Younger children are also sensitive to changes in environment, and their phases of adjustment can amplify the stress on the parent.

Finances are another item to contemplate. Setting up a new household is costly. In addition, Overseas Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) stops after the 31st day that family members are away from Germany. You cannot claim Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) for your stateside residence unless you return on official orders.

You may think career opportunities are better in the States. While this may be true in some cases, the U.S. unemployment rate remains high, and you cannot guarantee that you will find a job right away. Then again, if you do land your dream job, are you willing to give it up after your soldier returns?

There is also the issue of communication and information. Of the units currently deployed to Iraq, most families have chosen to stay in Europe. A significant reason these families have chosen to stay is that they are able to obtain information more quickly than they might stateside. Juanita Phillips, whose husband is deployed to Iraq with the 94th Engineer Battalion, explained why she stayed in Vilseck, "I just felt that this is where I needed to be while my husband is deployed. This is where my support is, and I actually feel closer to him through contact with the Rear-Detachment group of the battalion."

Last, nobody understands the unique situation of Army families better than other Army family members. Friends and relatives may not truly understand the lifestyle that we take on in support of our soldiers' military careers. Your peers can be your best sources of comfort and guidance during difficult times.

While you may believe that the grass is greener on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, the winters of deployment can be cold and harsh no matter where you go. The decision to stay in Europe during your soldier's deployment is an extremely personal one and every situation is different. Before making a quick decision, carefully consider your options. Put on your down coat and go out to discover what our military community has to offer. Break the ice, meet other spouses and find a "battle buddy," a close friend who will help you make it through tough times. Warm up at the 3rd BCT Family and Soldier Readiness Expo to learn what is available for you in this community. As the cold creeps in and uncertain times lie ahead, know that you don't have to brave the winter alone. Your military family in the 409th BSB is here to help you keep the fire burning.



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