

DCS helps Soldiers, families following deployments

By Sgt. Jimmy Norris

Soldiers returning home from deployments face a potentially stressful situation when attempting to readjust to life outside of the combat zone. After spending a year or more in a mentally and physically taxing environment away from home, family and loved ones, Soldiers may have to re-learn the skills necessary for survival in day-to-day life.

"I believe that this is a lesson learned from both Vietnam and [Operation] Desert Storm. When our Soldiers came back from Desert Storm we held a parade for them and then let them go – put them straight on leave and didn't allow for an adjustment period," said Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Gravens, command sergeant major for U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR). "And what we had was Soldiers who got into problems. They had big adjustments to make having alcohol and fast cars back in their lives."

To make the transition from combat and extended deployments to life back home easier for both the Soldiers and their families, units are employing the Deployment Cycle Support (DCS) program. It includes a series of briefings, classes and medical examinations which begin while the Soldiers are still in theater and continues until Soldiers go on block leave.

"The reason we have a DCS program is to ensure we're taking care of our Soldiers and their families," said Brig. Gen.

Mike Flowers, director of Human Resources Policy for Army G-1, Alexandria, Va. "The purpose is to normalize their lives."

Flowers explained that a year or more away from home and family can lead to dramatic changes in a Soldier's household.

Spouses have been running the households alone and may have become accustomed to doing things differently than Soldiers were used to before they left.

There are also financial considerations, Flowers said. Soldiers may return home and find there's no money in their bank accounts, or they may have to readjust to an income minus Hazardous Duty Pay and tax-free status.

Because of these and other considerations, Soldiers are required to take classes on subjects ranging from financial management to communications.

Spouses have the opportunity to take similar classes to help ease the transition back to life with their Soldiers.

"It's the goal of the Chief of Staff of the Army and all Army leaders not only to accomplish the mission, but to take care of Soldiers and their families," said Flowers. "With the DCS program in place, we have a tool to do that."

Some units have gone even further than the Army's DCS program.

"[DCS] was a good step," said Maj. Judith Price, senior military coordinator for the 4th Infantry Division's Ironhorse



Photo by Grazyna Musik, Ft. Hood, Texas

Soldiers from various units at Forts Hood, Bliss, Benning and Carson redeployed from Operation Iraqi Freedom to Fort Hood, prepare to enter Abrams Field House to participate in a Welcome Home ceremony. Following the ceremony, the soldiers reunited with their families or continued on to their home duty stations.

Family Reintegration Program (IFRP), Fort Hood, Texas. “But we owed our Soldiers more.”

The 4th Infantry Division’s IFRP contains the core briefings mandated by the Army’s DCS program, but also consists of six weeks of college-level instruction designed to meet the specific needs of Soldiers. The Soldiers are separated into four demographic groups: married, married with children, single and single with children. By dividing Soldiers into these categories, Price said, the Soldier-to-instructor ratio went from one instructor for 500 Soldiers to a more manageable one instructor for every 25 Soldiers. This allowed for more interaction between Soldiers and instructors and made the information more relevant to Soldiers who weren’t forced to sit through briefings that didn’t pertain to them.

Price said the one class mandatory for every Soldier, regardless of their demographic status, was *Stress on and off the Battlefield*.

Price explained that IFRP is designed to help relieve the stress Soldiers and their families may feel when returning home from war and keep Soldiers safe.

“If we save one relationship or save one Soldier’s life, we’ve met the criteria,” Price said, who added that Soldiers’ and leaders’ feedback about the program has been very positive.

But successful reintegration programs are not one size fits all, said Price. Different units with different needs must tailor their reintegration programs accordingly. Gravens agreed, saying the USAREUR reintegration program was tailored to meet the needs of Soldiers and families stationed overseas.

“When [Soldiers] return home, home isn’t Home USA. Home is in Europe. We have to take that extra step to help them,” said Gravens. “Back home in the States, generally speaking, means you’re back home with your entire family. You’ve got the support of the entire community. Let’s say you return to Fort Hood, Texas. Chances are you’ve got family somewhere close that can help you as you come back in. Or you’ve got the local First Baptist Church in downtown Killeen. You’ve got Wal-Mart and all those kinds of things. In Germany, we don’t necessarily have all that. You’ve got your unit. You’ve got your spouse – possibly, if you’re married – and that’s about it. So we try hard to bridge that gap, to help them readjust.”

Under USAREUR’s reintegration program, before going on block leave, redeploying Soldiers begin a half-day training schedule for seven days. During that time they go through many of the components of reintegration including moving back into billets, reclaiming their privately owned vehicles and attending various briefings.

The unique aspect of the process, is the schedule itself Gravens said.

“It’s a half-day on purpose,” he said. “What that half-day does is allow the Soldier and spouse to readjust to one another, as well as the Soldier with his [or her] family should [they] have kids. It allows the unit leadership to observe the Soldier on a daily basis – to see how he or she is readjusting.”

Another problem unique to Soldiers in Europe is unfamiliarity with European driving rules. Many USAREUR Soldiers, said Gravens, have never driven in Germany. They either deployed to Iraq almost immediately after arriving in Europe or joined their units in Iraq and redeployed to Germany. To ensure



Photo by Grazyna Musik, Ft. Hood, Texas

Sgt. Matthew B. Geoffroy, 4th Infantry Division, Company A, 220th Field Artillery, wastes no time sharing his experiences with his wife Crystal at the Welcome Home ceremony at Fort Hood, Texas.

Soldiers drive their vehicles safely, the Soldiers are required to watch a European driving-rules video and obtain a USAREUR driver’s license before driving their POVs.

Army Reserve Soldiers also have unique needs that must be addressed for successful reintegration to occur, said Command Sgt. Maj. Michele Jones, the U.S. Army Reserve Command Sergeant Major. Reserve Soldiers have to receive information about their reemployment rights. They are also briefed on organizations that can help them such as Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve, a Department of Defense organization dedicated to informing and safeguarding Guard and Reserve Soldiers’ reemployment rights.

One of the most important things leaders should do for returning Soldiers is ensure the Soldiers receive thorough medical evaluations, Jones said.

“One of the biggest concerns is continuing the treatment of any type of medical injury,” said Jones. “Many of the Soldiers are going to have to go back to communities where the closest [Veterans Administration] hospital may be [300] or 400 miles away.”

In many cases Reserve Soldiers can’t legally be kept on active duty once they’ve returned from deployments, Jones said. The unit leadership isn’t able to monitor their Soldiers for medical or psychological problems or any signs of difficulty readjusting to life at home.

Luckily, said Jones, many civilians have volunteered to help bridge the gap for Soldiers who may not have access to military facilities. Returning Soldiers should contact their local Army Community Service office for information about services available in their area, Jones said.

Regardless of unit needs, Gravens said it’s important to have a reintegration plan and to follow through with it.

“Stick to a deliberate reintegration model. Don’t let Soldiers and families just drift toward readjustment,” he said. For more information, go to <http://www.wblo.org>, and click on *deployment cycle*.