EXPERIENCING NAVAL LIFE: DEPLOYMENTS

The NFF team recently asked our community to share their experiences dealing with deployments and time apart. Thank you to those who shared their stories with us, these offer an insight into the realities of dealing with time apart from across the Royal Navy services.

"My husband's three-month deployment this year was the first our two children had experienced. We tried not to put life on hold, keeping busy with family, friends and local events while also making space for quieter days together when we needed them. ***A countdown calendar, visual deployment wall, letters and parcels helped the children feel connected to Daddy****. We also kept a list of special memories to share with him when he returned. The time apart was challenging, but focusing on connection, routine and making positive memories helped us all navigate it together."* **– RM spouse**

"We met when he was a Young Officer and within weeks he deployed. He went back to sea when our first born was 4 days old. He has missed milestones. Parent/Teacher sessions were spent with me taking photos of schoolwork I could send him. A concerned parent once stopped me in the playground to tell me that a man was walking off with my child… "that's his Dad!"

Our boys know the drill. ***He doesn't like goodbyes, we say "see you later"****, we don't hang about the Dockyard carpark. It all sounds a bit cold, but as a RN Family it's what works for us. We have fine-tuned this system through mistakes, tears and utter grit. There have been some clangers! When the boys were younger, I wanted to fill deployments with happy memories, day trips and treats. Anything to distract. But at the end of the day I was shattered, resentful and so very done.* ***I worked it out, do one thing a day****. If that works and you all come away "ok", bank it. If it didn't work, try something else.*

What I am trying to say, is there is no right or wrong way to manage a deployment. ***Do what works for you, your family****. Yes, paper chains are great, marbles in a jar. But my kids had no idea of time and I don't do craft! As they got a bit older, I was more open with them if I was having a hard day. My eldest is now a 6ft teenager who can haul things to the dump, carry bags and walk the dog.*





So should Deployments now be easier with the kids older? My Sailor left 2 weeks into the school summer holidays and won't be back for several months. The boys message him, we have a family group chat and they can steal away and chat with him privately. All good and heading in the right, supportive direction. But this time round I think it might be harder emotionally for me, the RN wife of 20 plus years. The boys are with their friends more, busy with clubs (thank you sea pay!!)

I work and have elderly parents to care for; ***I just miss his presence****. Him being around. Again harsh! I don't need him around for jobs, I booked the mobile mechanic today as the car had a problem, already sorted and paid for! I'll bank that victory.*

If you are new to this or a few years in, it will get easier as you work out your "drill" Some maybe coping better than you and you don't get it, but it will click in time. Join some of the RN partner FB groups out there, speak to others, follow the RN charities. Check the RN Forum and sign up for days out, you don't need your person to be with you, others are going it alone too. The people that run these events and clubs get it, they may be serving and veteran partners themselves. Ask your Sailor to buddy you up with a Shipmates partner or family back home, if nothing else it's another way to contact your person on deployment, if you can't get hold of them! I didn't seek out help or support in the early years; I now work with RN charities within the community and the support available is incredible.

To wrap up, ***we all have things we do to remind us of our person when they are away****, mine…. I dig out the t shirt he was wearing before he left, I hang it up for the deployment so it's there every day. I only take it down for the wash basket on the morning I know he is coming back in, again subject to change! He has worked this out, he started to wear the most awful, old tops. He loves a football shirt, has a collection, and would pull one out from a random team from a country visited on another deployment. I would have to sit and look at that thing for months! Before he left the other day, he replaced the roof on his Dad's shed and painted it. I am now looking at a sweaty (heatwave!) filthy paint covered t shirt. But that's what we do.*

If you are going through a deployment, about to experience your first or your person is on their last one before going outside. I wish you with all my heart the very best. Things will happen, the car may breakdown or you prang it, teenagers won't listen and babies won't sleep, civilian friends and family will say the predictable "you knew what you were getting into! "and "why is everything grey?" classic warship comment! But ***we live in a unique community****, thank you for reading. I am off now to check I have all the passwords, car breakdown cover up to date and find the credit card he left me for any emergency spends…… um, weekend away with the boys? (that sea pay again!)"* **- RN spouse.**

"Returning from a long patrol onboard a Ship Submersible Ballistic Missile Nuclear (SSBN) is a moment that is difficult to put into words. After months away from home, operating in an environment where routine, discipline and teamwork are everything, the anticipation of returning alongside begins to build.

For the crew, homecoming is about far more than simply arriving back alongside. It is the culmination of months of hard work, commitment, and sacrifice. Every member of the ship's company has played their part in ensuring the Submarine and her mission are delivered safely and successfully.

But the real significance of homecoming is waiting on Rhu Spit. Seeing family and friends after such a long separation brings a mixture of excitement, relief, and emotion. For those returning, the world above feels strangely different after so long at sea, while for loved ones, the wait is finally over.

The first sight of familiar faces, the first hug and the simple feeling of being home make every long day away worthwhile. Homecoming is a reminder that although the crew may be the ones who sail, it is the families who serve in their own way, carrying the responsibilities of home while their loved ones are away.

Homecoming is something we all look forward to, but stepping back into family life after a long deployment can be overwhelming. Families have had to carry on without you, routines have changed, and it takes time for everyone to readjust. Giving each other time and space to settle back into a routine makes a huge difference."
– Serving Submariner