



## Home From Deployment: A Soldier's Challenge

A Review of

Wheels Down: Adjusting to Life After Deployment

by Bret A. Moore and Carrie H. Kennedy

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Men and women in the armed services spend anywhere from seven to 15 months away from their families during a deployment, and approximately 1.8 million service men and women have been deployed since the attacks of September 11, 2001 (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2008). In over one million of these deployments, service men and women have left behind a family member.

This is not surprising, given the fact that 55 percent and 49 percent of active and reserve component personnel, respectively, are married; and approximately 56 percent of active and reserve component personnel have a child or other dependent under their care (Department of Defense, 2009). In fact, Pentagon estimates suggest that nearly 900,000 service members with children have deployed to war since 2001, and approximately 234,000 children have one or both parents currently deployed to a combat zone (Zoroya, 2009).

Many of the experiences service members endure in a deployment are quite normal when one considers the nature of the circumstances that surround this event. And, although military training can help them to perform their jobs before, during, and after a deployment, training does not always prepare service members to manage the transition process once they return. *Wheels Down: Adjusting to Life After Deployment* examines some of the most common challenges they are likely to experience after a deployment: It addresses the question of how deployments affect service men and women.

Deployments can give rise to difficulties with sleeping, managing personal feelings (particularly anger), and interpersonal relationships with both spouses and children. Deployments can also bring about financial challenges that returning service men and women may have to confront individually or with their spouse. *Wheels Down* is an excellent resource filled with practical guidance on how to reconcile sleep difficulties and cope with troubling dreams or nightmares that interrupt sleep; how to manage emotions to facilitate the transition back from a deployment; and how to reestablish connections with children and cope with the aftermath of a divorce if necessary.

*Wheels Down* also examines how deployment to a *combat zone* may affect individual service personnel. Deployment to a combat zone can increase a soldier's potential to experience or be exposed to various traumatic or life-threatening situations. Many service personnel return home being easily startled by loud noises (a hyperstartle reflex) or have heightened tendency to remain on guard (hypervigilance) in the absence of tangible threats (Hoge et al., 2004). Are these behaviors normal, or are they indicative of more serious problems? *Wheels Down* addresses how veterans can cope with these behaviors.

Deployment to a combat zone can also involve situations where service members may not sustain physical injuries but instead suffer from memory loss due to loss of consciousness that results from mild traumatic brain injuries (MTBI;

Hoge et al., 2004). What can soldiers expect if they sustained a MTBI? What can they do to facilitate their recovery? What if symptoms persist? *Wheels Down* provides practical advice on these issues.

Deployment to a combat zone can also involve exposure to traumatic or life-threatening events such as experiencing the loss of a fellow soldier or taking another human's life (Hoge et al., 2004). Military training seldom prepares people to deal with these experiences. *Wheels Down* addresses how returning military personnel can deal with the psychological and physical aftermath of such experiences and where they can turn to for help. Importantly, *Wheels Down* also points out that not all combat experiences are necessarily bad; indeed, combat experience can sometimes promote personal development and growth (Tedeschi & McNally, 2011).

*Wheels Down* also identifies potentially maladaptive strategies that military men and women may use to cope with deployment-related experiences. Many service members use alcohol and gambling to relax or take the edge off a stressful day. These strategies are commonly used after a deployment, and it can be difficult to tell when service men and women are developing substance abuse or gambling-related problems. *Wheels Down* examines how much substance use is normal and what is considered problematic, and it reviews military policies that deal with the use and misuse of alcohol and gambling.

The prolonged nature of deployment, particularly to a combat zone, can lead some individuals to think about suicide (Kuehn, 2009). How can service members deal with these feelings? How can they help someone who may be contemplating suicide? What resources are available to help? *Wheels Down* provides practical advice and resources that could save lives.

*Wheels Down* is an important resource for service men and women returning from a deployment, for family members of deployed service personnel, and for psychologists and other behavioral health care providers who are interested in understanding the deployment process and its impact on veterans and their loved ones. Each chapter covers a specific topic, allowing readers to delve into the chapter that contains the most relevant information for their use, but all of them follow a similar format, stressing the ubiquity of the experience, setting realistic expectations, providing important information about the topic, identifying solutions to the problem, reassuring the reader about the nature of his or her experiences, and providing resources to deal with challenges.

The book is written in a familiar tone that is likely to resonate well with service men and women, with each chapter including "quick facts" that highlight main points addressed. The military background and experience of the authors are evident in the examples and illustrations provided throughout the text.

*Wheels Down* is not the first book addressing the challenges associated with the return home from deployment (e.g., Armstrong, Best, & Domenici, 2006; Cantrell & Dean, 2005; Friedman, & Slone, 2008). However, *Wheels Down* stands out as a concise and easy-to-read resource that integrates real-life military experience with psychological principles that speak to everyday service members, addressing the most common challenges they face as they adjust to "life after a deployment."

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