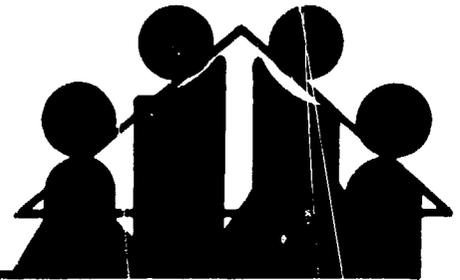


**FAMILY  
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**GRADUATE SCHOOL OF HUMAN BEHAVIOR**

**DIRECTOR: EDNA J. HUNTER**



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LEVEL II

**FAMILY SEPARATION AND REUNION  
A STYLE OF LIFE IN THE MILITARY**

EDNA J. HUNTER  
ROBERT A. HICKMAN

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FAMILY SEPARATION AND REUNION

A Style of Life in the Military\*

EDNA J. HUNTER

ROBERT A. HICKMAN

USIU-TR-81-04

1981

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## INTRODUCTION

Recently in compiling an annotated bibliography (Hunter, den Dulk, & Williams, 1980) on military family literature, 100 published and unpublished books and papers specifically focusing on family separation were located which had been written over the past 40 years. Spanning the 1940s, during World War II up to the present, papers were written and released at a geometrically accelerating rate. Seventeen studies which dealt with military separations were reported in the decade between 1944 and 1954, but it was not until 1964 that another report appeared. By 1974, however, 20 additional reports were available. Subsequent to 1975, 62 more reports appeared, clearly representing a substantial increase in interest and research activity in this topic over the years.

## FAMILY SEPARATION AND THE MILITARY LIFESTYLE

Mission accomplishment requires that service personnel tend duty stations within the United States, on the high seas, and around the world in order to protect the interests of the nation and to maintain world peace (Punke, 1952). Maintenance of combat readiness necessitates continuing availability of fresh personnel on a rotational basis for these existing duty stations. Consequently, married service personnel are required from time to time to separate from their families during routine unaccompanied overseas tours or when housing is not available at the new duty station.

### The Hardships of Separation

Military family separation invariably requires that the entire family adjust to the changes imposed by the absence of one parent (Hunter & Benson, 1977; Nice, 1979). Significant stress experienced by all family members has often been reported in the literature (Baker, et al., 1968; Bey & Lange, 1974; Fagen, et al., 1967; Montalvo, 1976; Nice, 1979). Although the first family separation appears to have the greatest effect on family members (Rienerth, 1978), recurring

father absence can lead to a sense of artificiality and a chronic sense of fragmentation in the family and represents an ever-present threat to family stability (Rosenfeld, Rosenstein, & Raab, 1973).

The loss of one parent shifts the burden of family responsibility to the remaining parent, usually the wife. Alterations in family roles is evidenced when the wife must assume sole responsibility for the physical and emotional well being of the family, as well as the management and maintenance of the household (Jones, 1977; Rienrth, 1978; Rosenfeld, Rosenstein, & Raab, 1973). The care and discipline of children can become a never ending obligation (Decker, 1978; Rienrth, 1978; Rosenfeld, Rosenstein, & Raab, 1973; Spjut & Studer, 1975). The consequences for military wives of a role shift of this proportion into unfamiliar family roles can mean either conflict and anxiety leading to unsuccessful adjustment (Rosenfeld, Rosenstein, & Raab, 1973), or, on the other hand, promote the development of independence, self-sufficiency and maturity (Rienrth, 1978; Worthington, 1977).

Most of the literature on family separation has addressed the impact it has on the wife. Wives have reported an increased incidence of problems experienced during separation, as well as the perceived intensification in their severity (Decker, 1978; Montalvo, 1976). The loss of companionship has been cited as contributing to various emotional reactions, such as loneliness (Decker, 1978; Hartog, 1966; Jones, 1977; Landry, 1977; Lindquist, 1952; Paige, 1976; Peck & Schroeder, 1976), boredom (Lindquist, 1952), depression (Jones, 1977; Nice & Beck, 1980), anxiety (Pearlman, 1970), anger (Decker, 1978; Landry, 1976; Lumsden, 1978), and guilt (Landry, 1976; Lumsden, 1978). Sexual frustration can make extra-marital sexual activity an enticing possibility (den Dulk, 1980; Lindquist, 1952; Lumsden, 1978; Peck & Schroeder, 1976; Rosenfeld, Rosenstein & Raab, 1973). An increased incidence of physical illness has also been reported (Hunter, 1980; Lindquist, 1952; Lumsden, 1978; McCubbin & Lester, 1977; Nice, 1979; Peck & Schroeder, 1976; Snyder, 1978). Furthermore, separation appears to inhibit the wife's pursuit of other adult social relationships, thus fostering social isolation (Bey & Lange, 1974; Hartog, 1966; Paige, 1976; Rosenfeld, Rosenstein & Raab, 1973).

In addition to the imposition of family separation, the military organization can inflict undue hardship on the family in other ways. For example, one Army regulation requires that dependents vacate military housing while the service member is on an unaccompanied assignment. This requirement can seriously jeopardize the security which the military community offers the family (Bey & Lange, 1974; Montalvo, 1976). Moreover, the limited availability, redundancy, and fragmentation of existing military services can exacerbate the frustrations experienced by father absent families (Benson, 1977; Nichols, 1976). Also, the husband's long hours of preparation for deployment, as well as any delays in the date of departure or return, are reported to be difficult for both spouses (Benson & Van Vranken, 1977).

Although it appears that mothers, rather than the fathers, have the greatest difficulty adjusting to family separation (Lindquist, 1952; Rienarth, 1978), the departing husband also can be affected deleteriously by the separation. Difficulties reported center around worry, guilt, and shame about leaving the family, disruption of primary relationships, and the enticement of extramarital sexual activity (den Dulk, 1980; Rosenfeld, Rosenstein & Raab, 1973).

There appear to be common individual and family characteristics found in families that are particularly vulnerable to the stresses of separation (McCubbin, et al., 1976). Younger and less mature servicemen tend to express more concern about their families' abilities to cope. They also tend to feel less secure in the military setting than in the civilian sector since they have usually had less exposure to the demands of military life. They are less aware of the availability of support services and hold negative attitudes towards both informal and formal military supports. They also are likely to be autocratic family leaders.

Wives, on the other hand, tend to play subordinate family roles and have a poorer assessment of family strengths, as well as their own, and the quality of the marital and family relationships. Moreover, vulnerable families have usually experienced a recent relocation, exhibited poor communication, and were less prepared for the separation. These characteristics may assist in identifying vulnerable families prior to deployment.

### Adjustment to Separation

Successful adjustment to separation requires that the family develop and implement constructive coping patterns. Coping usually begins prior to departure, with predeployment or anticipatory tension commonly occurring (Landry, 1976; McCubbin & Lester, 1977; Nice, 1980). Here, the family must be adequately prepared through open communication about the changes that will take place (McCubbin, 1977; McCubbin & Lester, 1977; Pence, 1976). Pre-deployment and prevention activities appear to be successful in facilitating family preparation (Benson & Van Vranken, 1977; Bey & Lange, 1976; Decker, 1978; den Dulk, 1980; Dibsie, 1979; Jones, 1977; Landry, 1976).

During the separation, wives must depend on their own inner resources to facilitate adjustment (Decker, 1978). Behavior aimed at maintaining family integration and stability, as well as managing personal tensions appear to be essential. From this, an acceptance of or resignation to the separation, and the motivation to adjust to the subsequent changes were reported to be related to successful adjustment (McCubbin, 1978, 1980; McCubbin, et al., 1980).

External support, provided through the extended family and other social contacts, is also a necessary component of successful adjustment. The informal support provided by the extended family has been reported to be useful in mitigating the stresses of separation, even though inter-generational conflict can occur (Decker, 1978; Hayles & Noble, 1978; McCubbin, 1979; 1980; McCubbin & Lester, 1977; McCubbin, et al., 1976; Montalvo, 1976). Relationships with friends also provide added support during separation (Decker, 1978; McCubbin & Lester, 1977).

The military community potentially offers the family the most support available during separations (Montalvo, 1976). The military community also provides the norms and expectations of how families can best cope with separation. Informal support and assistance are available through wives' clubs allowing families to cope "collectively" (Decker, 1978; McCubbin, 1979; McCubbin & Lester, 1977; McCubbin, et al., 1980. Social, emotional, and esteem support are also available for families and their members (McCubbin, et al., 1980. Formal supports such as the chaplaincy, ombudsman, and family service

centers are also available during times of need (Decker, 1978). Psychotherapy has also been reported to be effective in facilitating adjustment (Bey & Lange, 1974; den Dulk, 1980; Hartog, 1966; MacIntosh, 1968).

The absent husband can even help foster the wife's adjustment during separation (Rosenfeld, Rosenstein, & Raab, 1973). Emotional support can be offered through frequent correspondence and telephone calls. The husband can be involved in helping with family issues and decisions that crop up while he is away. Through these contacts, he assures the family members of his interest and concern and thus helps reduce anxiety.

#### Utilization of Military Resources

Utilization of military supports during separation varies from family to family. It appears that those that use existing services identify more with, and consider themselves to be contributing members of the military community (Allen, 1972; Decker, 1978; McCubbin, 1977; McCubbin & Lester, 1977; McCubbin, et al., 1976). In other words, they are more committed to the military institution. One study suggested that wives tend to prefer using their own inner resources and the informal assistance of family and friends before seeking help through formal military resources (Decker, 1978). A lack of awareness of, as well as viewing the use of available resources as a threat to the husband's career (McCubbin, 1977; McCubbin, et al., 1976) can also impact utilization patterns. Moreover, civilian resources are least likely to be used (Decker, 1978).

#### **SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES**

Changes in duty stations which often necessitate family separation create a dilemma for the military organization and the family where single-parented families are involved. Although no research has focused on this phenomenon and the impact of separation on them, studies carried out in the civilian sector have suggested that an increasing number of fathers in the military are gaining custody of

their children through divorce. Moreover, increasing numbers of families headed by single/divorced women are now found in all service branches. The sudden deployment of single personnel with children can create serious logistical problems for the military organization (Department of the Air Force, 1979; Orthner, 1980; Orthner & Brown, 1978).

A recent study indicated that the number of single parents in the military is continuing to increase (Orthner, 1980). The Air Force has anticipated the problems that may arise and has passed down a regulation which mandates that single parents must assume the responsibility for making alternative child care arrangements in advance to ensure that those services are available immediately at the time of any permanent or temporary change of duty stations. Similar arrangements must be made for dependents accompanying service personnel to overseas locations. Moreover, the arrangements must be sufficiently detailed and systematic to provide for a smooth, rapid turnover of responsibilities to another individual during the parent's absence (Department of Air Force, 1978; 1979; Orthner, 1980; Orthner & Brown, 1978). Failure to do so can result in actual separation from the military for the active duty person.

#### DUAL-CAREER FAMILIES

In examining the literature, only one article was found which examined the impact of family separation on dual-career families (Stanley & Stanley, 1978). The conflict that exists between the pursuit of individual goals and family togetherness can indeed serve as impediments to the realization of both. A military career requires that it take precedence over all other family goals. However, when the non-military spouse has a career that is perceived as being of equal importance to the career of the military spouse, a family crisis may occur. Consequently, the available options, i.e., the family staying together at the expense of the non-military spouse's career, or family separation to pursue individual careers, make such a decision fraught with unidentified consequences for both spouses, as well as for the children.

## SUBMARINERS' WIVES

Families of submariners appear to be particularly vulnerable to the stresses of separation. In their case, separation is repeated again and again since submariner crews have schedules which alternate three months at home and three and one-half months at sea. Consequently, this situation places tremendous pressure on the family's ability to adjust to father/husband absence.

The impact of repeated family separations has been studied solely from the wives' perspective. The wives' reaction, of course, must always be put in the context of the availability of social supports (O'Bierne, 1976). The absence of extended family and community support systems, inadequate amounts and degrees of military-based supports, as well as the restrictions placed on communication between the wife and husband during his absence make the submariner wife extremely vulnerable to separation.

### Submariners' Wives' Syndrome

Shortly before and after the submariner returns from patrol, a significant number of wives have been reported to exhibit a specific psychiatric symptom constellation. Depression, dysphoria, uncontrollable weeping, irritability, sleep disturbance, appetite loss, and multiple somatic complaints make up this syndrome which has been called the "submariners' wives' syndrome" (Isay, 1968). These reactions caused by feelings of unacceptable rage over being deserted and a frustrated need to be cared for, are manifested by those wives who are unable to adapt to the repeated separations.

Phases of emotional reactions to separation commonly found in submariner wives seeking psychiatric assistance have been identified by Pearlman (1970). There appeared to be an initial lack of acceptance of the separation followed by an increasing feeling of despair related to the fear that the husband would not return, and an eventual acceptance that he would not return. Acceptance of this possibility marked the return to normal functioning and was viewed as a defense against the feelings of possible loss. This was believed to reflect immature thinking. Moreover, wives were reported as showing significantly more

depression during husband absence than husband presence (Beckman, Marsella, & Finney, 1977).

#### Responses to the Stress of Separation

The emotional reactions of submariners' wives appear to parallel the stages of grief experienced by individuals who have lost loved ones through death (Bermudes, 1973; 1977). The first symptoms are shock and denial of the impending loss which occur two weeks prior to actual separation. A release of anger occurs around the time of actual departure. After the husband has left, a period of depression and loneliness sets in. Next, there is an increase in tenseness, crying, irritability, and insomnia, reflecting the anger felt towards the absent husband, but often displaced on the children or herself. Finally, the wife reaches a point where she must come to grips with the separation and either adapt to it or go into deep despair and withdrawal. The duration of the grief cycle for submariners' wives normally lasts from four to six weeks.

It appears that submariners' wives' reactions to the repeated separations are mediated by personality variables, life experiences, and the degree of role flexibility exhibited by that particular individual. Pearlman (1970) categorized wives into four groups according to the distinct emotional reactions they manifested which required psychiatric care: the sybiotic group, the situational stress group, the self-identity group, and the marital disturbance group. The sybiotic group exhibited reactions upon separation that were infantile in nature, indicating inadequate individuation from the parents of origin. Although these wives appeared to be superficially independent, they were found to be extremely dependent and were unable to meet their own needs, and were convinced that the husband would never return. They often required psychiatric hospitalization, attempted suicide, developed drinking problems, and/or engaged in hectic social activity. The situational stress group was able to withstand prior separations but appeared to be predisposed to develop an emotional disturbance when a life crisis occurred coincidentally. The majority of wives who had sought psychiatric care comprised the marital disturbance group. Chronic marital difficulties were evidenced in this group.

Although these wives remained relatively stable during the separations they would become severely depressed after the husband's return because of their inability to express their rage at having been deserted. Moreover, they were often dominated and exploited by their husbands and felt powerless to change the situation. And, lastly, the self-identity group was comprised of the more mature women who had developed a personal identity independent of the marital relationship and family responsibilities. Pearlman was of the opinion that the wives in this last group probably could have adjusted to the separation period successfully, even without therapy.

Increased occurrences of physical illnesses have also been evidenced in submariners' wives, apparently related to the frequent family disruptions. The crisis precipitated by separation appears to be responsible for an increase in perceived physical ailments and medical visits during the husband's absence (Snyder, 1978).

#### Family Developmental Crises and Separations

Over time submariners' wives may experience transitions in their family roles that exacerbate the problems of adjustment to separation. The new wife who has not been socialized into her role as a submariner's wife, as well as the seasoned wife of the career submariner who experiences a mid-life crisis, may both have difficulties coping with family disruptions (Snyder, 1978). Especially for the new wife, however, who is confronted continually with role conflict, role ambiguity, and role shifts, the adjustments required can represent a severe life crisis (Boynton & Pearce, 1978; O'Bierne, 1976; Snyder, 1978). Family instability and feelings of personal aloneness are consequences of repeated separations (Boynton & Pearce, 1978).

#### Adjusting to Separation

Successful adjustment requires that effective coping mechanisms be developed and utilized. Boynton and Pearce (1978) delineated three strategies used by submariners' wives who cope successfully with family separation:

Internalization occurs when a wife comes to accept the disruption of the family caused by the separation and relies on personal resources to cope. Substitution involves the use of other people to engage in activities normally done with the husband in order

to replicate the same meanings. Replacement, on the other hand, occurs when new activities of a non-social nature are implemented and utilized only during the husband's absence.

Of the three strategies, Boynton and Pearce found that substitution was used far more often than the others. However, no relationship was found to exist between the use of these strategies and the wives' perceptions of marital happiness, of being a "good" navy wife, or happiness as a navy wife.

Wives who develop a willingness to try new approaches to problem resolution, assume an appearance of effectiveness, and utilize the supports of more experienced wives, have been found to achieve better adjustment (Ladycom, 1976; Snyder, 1978). Pearlman (1970) suggested that successfully adjusting wives have the ability to be alone. The utilization of community supports can also facilitate adjustment (Bermudes, 1973; 1977). Support groups composed of other submariners' wives, as well as the utilization of existing supports within the military organization can mitigate some of the negative effects of repeated separation (O'Bierne, 1976; Snyder, 1978).

#### FAMILY SEPARATIONS DURING WORLD WAR II

The earliest papers on military family separation examined the disruption experienced by families separated during World War II, and which were reported to be highly stressful for those families (Hill, 1945, 1949; Reeves, 1946; Stolz, 1945). Wives were found to be particularly vulnerable (Duvall, 1945; Hill, 1949; Patterson, 1945; Rosenbaum, 1944). Children, as well as family relationships in general, were also found to be affected deleteriously (Igel, 1945; Rogers, 1943, 1945; Rosenbaum, 1944; Stolz, 1952; 1954). Two comprehensive studies conducted during that early period are particularly noteworthy. Hill (1949) and Duvall (1945) each produced superior studies which examined the impact of family separation and reunion on military families. Hill's study focused on the characteristics and processes which differentiate successfully from unsuccessfully coping families who were called to adjust to separation during the war. Duvall examined the extent of loneliness found in women with war-absent husbands,

as well as the factors that differentiated those wives who adjusted adequately from those that did not. The findings of both studies appear relevant even today.

Various factors, within and without the family, have been found to relate to how well a family adjusts to wartime separation. Apparently, not all families are devastated by the disruption created by wartime father/husband absence (Hill, 1945, 1949; Rogers, 1943). Hill's study (1949) suggested that the degree of adjustment was determined by the political structure of the family. Matriarchial households, where the mother had been in charge even prior to separation, were found to be well equipped to meet the crisis. Moreover, democratic households, where the family roles were flexible and more easily redistributed when father was absent, also adjusted well. The patriarchial household where father was undisputed head, on the other hand, was most vulnerable during separation.

Understandably, families with existing problems at time of separation also appeared to have more difficulties adjusting (Rogers, 1943). The mother's adjustment during the separation was reported to be a determining factor in the family adjustment of the children (Boulding, 1950). It has also been suggested that family adjustment is affected by the mother's own developmental history (Rogers, 1943), as well as by her ability to reach out to others in the context of social relationships (Duvall, 1945). On a community level, energetic, war-related activities are found to mitigate against the deleterious effects of family separation (Hoffer, 1945).

#### **VIETNAM POW FAMILIES**

The conflict in Southeast Asia from 1964 until 1973 spurred a considerable amount of research activity which examined the impact of war-related stressors experienced by the families of prisoners of war (POW) and servicemen missing in action (MIA). That situation offered a view of the emotional responses of family members to separation under extreme conditions and for an indeterminate span of time; the average separation for these families was over five years' duration.

An overview of wives' reactions to the husbands' captivity, as well as the government's insensitivity to those needs, suggests the extent of the pain they experienced. The initial response to capture was shock, followed by intense efforts to learn about the circumstances of the capture and whether their husbands were injured or alive (Hunter, 1977a). The wives' frustrations over not being able to communicate with their husbands were compounded by the reports received concerning the severe treatment they endured. Although the government was able to provide some information about the circumstances of capture and the husbands' status, the wives were discouraged from talking to others about this classified information. Consequently, their fears and anxieties concerning the unknown were intensified by the frustrations of not being able to voice them (Powers, 1974).

After exhausting all possible sources of information concerning their husbands' fates, a period of depression typically set in (Hunter, 1977a; McCubbin, Hunter, & Metres, 1974). The depressed stage usually ended between the second and third year of captivity, reflecting what appeared to be a conscious decision made by wives to become productive again, to close out the husbands' family role, and increase their social, education, and occupational activities.

These POW/MIA families experienced many difficulties in adjusting to the traumatic absence of the captured men. Normal patterns of coping with the absence of the head of the household were disturbed by the indeterminate length of separation (McCubbin, Hunter, & Dahl, 1975). Progressive psychological and psychophysiological symptoms were experienced by some wives (Hall & Simmons, 1973; McCubbin, Hunter, & Metres, 1974). In particular, wives suffered from the lack of companionship, loneliness, a lack of suitable social outlets, concern for their own health, and feelings of guilt (Brown, et al., 1973; Gallagher, 1972; McCubbin & Dahl, 1976; McCubbin, Hunter, & Metres, 1974). Moreover, the increased use of tranquilizers, alcohol, and tobacco, as well as fluctuations in body weight were reported (Brown, et al., 1973; McCubbin, Hunter, & Metres, 1974). Significant legal problems were also encountered (McCubbin, Hunter, & Metres, 1974; Nelson, 1974; Stewart, 1975). Marital relationships were especially vulnerable to

the stresses of separation (Hall & Malone, 1975ab; Hall & Simmons, 1973; Hunter, 1977; McCubbin, 1975; McCubbin, Hunter, & Metres, 1974; Metres, 1975; Nelson, 1974; Nice, McDonald & McMillian, 1980). Moreover, the absence of the husband necessitated an oftentimes stressful modification of family roles, with the wife assuming the unfamiliar role of head of household (Gallagher, 1972; Hunter, 1977; Webster, Hunter, & Palermo, 1977).

#### THE FAMILIES OF THE MISSING IN ACTION DURING VIETNAM

Families of servicemen missing in action exhibited what appears to be an even more intensified reaction to the husband's casualty status than that of POW wives. These MIA wives were required to cope not only with the ambiguity of the husbands' status, but also with the very real fear that the husband would never come back. Understandably, MIA wives reported significantly more health problems than any of the other groups of waiting wives; e.g., POW wives, wives of men killed in action (KIA) and wives in a carefully matched comparison group of wives of active duty men who had not become POWs (Hunter, 1980).

Just as POW wives went through a process of grieving, so too did these MIA wives. The responses exhibited by MIA wives were similar to those responses found in any response to loss. Anticipatory grief, that is, a grief reaction exhibited by persons experiencing separation under the threat of death, was found to be a facilitative aspect of the grieving response of MIA wives which appeared to set the stage for eventual adjustment to the loss (Spolyar, 1974). The loss required that coping and adaptation be flexible; rigidity and dysfunction in the family system were found more likely to occur when the maintenance of the father's role was incongruent with the reality of his status, and also, when the absence had persisted for a protracted time. High degrees of control and organization appeared dysfunctional when the family was not able to reconcile the fact that the father might never return (Boss, 1975; 1980); that is, the family maintained high "psychological father presence." On the other hand, psychological father presence was reported to promote adjustment when the father's role was maintained,

but the family environment encouraged expressiveness, achievement, and family cohesiveness (Boss, Hunter, & Lester, 1977). Moreover, the wife's ability to assimilate the situation emotionally and cognitively and get on with living enabled the family to adapt to the crisis successfully (Price-Bonham, 1972).

Benson and associates (1974) categorized MIA wives into three groups, which represented the progressive stage that they typically went through in adjusting to loss. The "old timers" had endured the husband's unknown status for the longest amount of time and appeared to have successfully resolved their grief. Those wives were more politically active and had often started a new life for their families. The MIA wife "in transition" was viewed to be still in the process of adjusting to the loss, but she was gradually becoming more confident with the dual mother/father role which she had been forced to assume. These wives were seen as struggling to cope with being independent, but had not actually started a new lifestyle. Lastly, wives of the "new shoot-downs", on the other hand, had recently lost their husbands and were seen as being in the initial stages of the grief cycle. They appeared to be more committed to waiting and maintaining hope than the other two categories of wives. Overall, MIA wives demonstrated a laudable ability to cope with the stress of separation. One study indicated that MIA wives scored high on traits that tend to facilitate coping (Hamlin, 1977), and various coping styles utilized by these families were identified by McCubbin and associates (1976). The faith, strength, and perseverance demonstrated by the MIA families studied by Hamlin (1977) led that investigator to conclude that the MIA families had evolved into highly functional single-parent units.

#### CHILDREN OF POW/MIAs

Children were also found to be vulnerable to the stresses of family separation due to the captivity/loss of the father. These children were reported to have suffered a panoply of problems: separation anxiety, role distortion, sleep disturbances (Hall & Simmons, 1973; Seplin, 1952), adjustment problems in the areas of social and family responsibilities, conflicts with other children in school, and frustrations over coping

with prolonged father absence (Dahl, McCubbin, & Lester, 1975; McCubbin, Hunter, & Metres, 1974). The effects of father absence upon POW/MIA children were mediated by the mother's definition of the situation, her attitude towards life in general, and her social and family role adjustment. More specifically, the following factors were found to be the best predictors of child adjustment: (1) mother's independence, (2) mother's ability to manage the home, (3) mother's involvement in social activities, and (4) the closeness of the father/child relationship before the separation occurred (McCubbin & Dahl, 1976; McCubbin, et al., 1976). Hence, a reciprocal relationship existed. Children's adjustment and their ability to cope depended primarily on the mother's adjustment. Conversely, the children's problems intensified pressures on the mother's wellbeing (Hunter, 1977b; McCubbin, Hunter, & Metres, 1974; McCubbin, et al., 1976; Plag, 1976).

#### **FAMILY REUNION/REINTEGRATION**

Just as separation brings stress to the military family, when the father returns, the family members experience still more stresses. The few articles published prior to 1955 on the topic of family reunion/reintegration, for the most part, explored the readjustment experiences of World War II veterans and their families. The overall conclusion was that the return of the husband represented a significant stress for all family members (Boulding, 1950; Griffith, 1944; Hill, 1945, 1949; Schuetz, 1945; Stolz, 1954).

The returning veteran had to face many unexpected changes that had taken place during his absence that made reintegration problematic. Accepting his wife's new found independence was very difficult. His children had grown older and were now unfamiliar. He sometimes found the lack of discipline and precision in the home irritating (Cuber, 1945; Finesinger & Lindemann, 1945; Hill, 1945). Marital difficulties were a common occurrence (Cuber, 1945; Rogers, 1945; Thomas, 1945). Moreover, personal maladjustment of the veteran himself was likely to hinder successful reintegration (Cuber, 1945; Finesinger

& Lindeman, 1945; Simon & Holzberg, 1946; Thomas, 1945). Consequently, many returning veterans found the obligations of family life to be overwhelming (Cuber, 1945). Moreover, the family needed to adjust to the changes that had taken place in the husband (Griffith, 1944; Schuetz, 1945; Stolz, 1954).

Hill (1945) in his classic WWII study of family adjustment to war separation and reunion, examined factors which differentiated families that had adjusted successfully to reunion from those that had not. He found that successfully adjusting families: (1) utilized open family communication patterns, (2) demonstrated high degrees of affection among family members, (3) exhibited good marital adjustment prior to separation, (4) easily redistributed family roles upon reunion, (5) shared a mutuality of interests and satisfactions, (6) communicated often during separation, (7) planned to meet the husband upon his return, (8) had fewer children, and (9) had successfully adjusted during separation. Hill concluded that successful adjustment to reunion required that the needs of individual family members be subordinated to the best interests of the family.

There is little doubt that the family plays an instrumental role in facilitating the reintegration of the husband (Bennett, 1945). It has been suggested that the returning veteran be dealt with in a supportive and sympathetic manner in order to help ease him back into civilian life (Brown, 1944).

#### Routine Separations and Reunions

Just as routine separations have the potential to precipitate family crises, so can the husband's return (Gonzalez, 1970). During the separation period, everyone has changed to some extent (SAM, 1980). The children have grown older and appear more attached to the mother and more distant from the father (SAM, 1980; Lester, 1976). Family roles have been adjusted to compensate for the husband's absence (Baker, et al., 1968; Jones, 1977; SAM, 1980; Stanley & Stanley, 1978). Moreover, the wife has become more independent

due to her experiences of assuming the head-of-household role (Jones, 1977; SAM, 1980). Consequently, an impending reunion can evoke anxiety, fear, and unexpressed anger and worry in the wife. There may be anticipation over what the husband's reaction will be to the changes that have taken place in his absence (Jones, 1977).

Marital readjustment difficulties are a common occurrence following reunion and can hinder successful reintegration (den Dulk, 1980). Upon the husband's return, many wives must deal with the significant emotional upheaval they experienced due to sexual and emotional loss during the separation (Jones, 1977). There may be questions about the husband's faithfulness during the separation period (den Dulk, 1980; SAM, 1980). Moreover, the wives may struggle to maintain the new autonomy and authority gained during the separation period if the father moves too quickly to assume his former position (Jones, 1977; SAM, 1980).

McCubbin (1978; 1980) differentiated those families that reintegrate successfully from those that have a more difficult time. He found that the wives' adjustment during separation and efforts to be both a mother and father to the children while maintaining the father's role facilitated reintegration. In addition, the wife's belief that the military had their husband's best interests in mind helped to mitigate the stress associated with reunion. On the other hand, in families where the wife achieved self reliance at the expense of fostering and maintaining family cohesion during separation, the stresses of reunion were much greater.

The wife plays a crucial role in facilitating husband/wife reintegration (McCubbin, 1980). It was found that the wife's efforts during separation to (1) trust and build relationships with the husband and supportive others, (2) maintain family integration and stability, (3) exercise religious beliefs, (4) be actively involved in hobbies and other interests, and (5) accept the role of military wife and the demands of military life, assisted couples in achieving successful reintegration.

Several suggestions were offered in the literature regarding ways to minimize the stress of reintegration. Open family communica-

tion has been found to be an essential prerequisite to good reunion adjustment. Spouses should expect marital readjustment problems, as well as adverse reactions in the children (den Dulk, 1980; Lester, 1976). Although the same rules applying to the children should remain intact, fathers should, to some extent, expect to have to win back their children's affections (Lester, 1976). Finally, the family needs to be patient, understanding, show they care, and remember that family separations and reunion are difficult for everybody (SAM, 1980).

#### The Return of the Submariner

In the submarine population, reunification is but a part of a predictable cycle which plays an essential role in the maladaptive reactions of wives (Snyder, 1978b). Depression was reported to occur during the reunion period because of the wife's sudden loss of certain gratifications gained during separation, such as the resumption of parental dependency, the assumption of traditionally masculine and/or previously shared responsibilities, and the avoidance of emotional and physical intimacy with the husband (Isay, 1968). The emotional and physical deprivations, as well as the imposition of familial control led to the idealization of the husband during the separation period. This oftentimes resulted in disappointment and disillusionment after reunification (Snyder, 1978a). On the other hand, it was reported elsewhere that the return of the husband was found to relieve the wife's bouts of depression and reduced the incidence of physical illness (Beckman, Marsella, & Finney, 1977; Snyder, 1978c).

#### Family Disruption During Vietnam

The Vietnam conflict spurred a considerable amount of research activity related to family reunion and reintegration, the vast majority related to the prisoner of war experience. The impending return of the Vietnam veterans was reported to engender a multitude

of emotions and issues in their wives (Bey & Lange, 1974). Ambivalence, marked by feelings of excitement and elation, as well as increased tension and anxiety, were commonly reported by wives. They anticipated that the frustrations, isolation, and loneliness experienced during the husbands' absence would be relieved. At the same time, they were fearful of their husbands' reactions to the changes that had taken place in them and in the family. As a consequence, many wives reported that they had engaged in purposeless activity and anticipated the worst. They also experienced difficulty concentrating immediately prior to reunification. The wives' anxiety and suspicions were sometimes warranted (Bey & Lange, 1974). Their husbands returned with idealized expectations of what reunion would be like and often became disillusioned. The wives' own idealized expectations were disappointed in turn. Wives resented their husbands' demands that they immediately abdicate the authority they had assumed and that they renounce their independence. Moreover, the discipline of the children was an area of conflict in the initial phases of reunification. It appeared as if the returning veteran was disrupting the normal routine of the family.

#### The Vietnam Prisoner of War Experience

The return of the prisoners of war from Southeast Asia in 1973 offered researchers a unique opportunity to study extreme examples of the family's adjustment to reunion and reintegration. Tremendous research activity was spurred in this area. One of the purposes of the Center for Prisoner of War Studies, established in San Diego in 1972, was to examine the readjustment efforts of families and to determine if there were any residual effects of prolonged captivity which hindered family reintegration (Hunter & Plag, 1977; Plag, 1974).

In order to understand the extent of the adjustments the ex-captives and their families had to undergo, an examination of the degree of maltreatment the prisoners had endured while in captivity

was necessary. During that time, which averaged over five years, these POWs endured continuous physical and psychological trauma. The psychological stresses, which were reported to have the more enduring effects on post-return adjustment, involved the systematic stripping of all outward vestures of an identity through isolation, intimidation, fear, and humiliation (Ballard, 1973; Brown, et al., 1973). In light of the maltreatment sustained in captivity, Ballard (1973) observed that the longterm effects of captivity would be uncertain and unpredictable, and the psychological and social reintegration of the prisoners of war would in many cases be difficult and highly stressful.

The impact of prolonged captivity was evident in the behavior, thinking and affect of the POWs (Borus, 1973a; Hall & Malone, 1975ab). A number of the ex-POWs manifested a time disorientation, confusion, diminished visual-motor perception, and diminished memory and concentration capacities. The emotional manifestations included mood shifts, guilt, aggressiveness, depression, fatigue, paranoia, defense rituals, anxiety attacks, flashbacks, and intrusive thoughts about captivity experiences. Socially, the deterioration of social habit, inappropriate social behavior, and a fear of crowds were also reported by some. Clearly, their experiences had had a profound impact on every aspect of their orientation to reality.

The ex-captive was confronted with the changes his family had undergone in his absence (McCubbin, 1975). He had to adjust to the posture of independence and authority his wife had assumed during the prolonged absence (Guswiler, 1969; Hunter, 1978a; Sawyer, 1975; Webster, Hunter & Palermo, 1977; Westling, 1973). Significant changes had also taken place in the children due to the separation experience (Dahl & McCubbin, 1975; Dahl, McCubbin, & Lester, 1975; Dahl, et al., 1976; Dahl, McCubbin, & Ross, 1977; Hunter, 1978a; McCubbin, et al., 1977; Webster, Hunter, & Palermo, 1977; Westling, 1973). Consequently, the returned POW initially experienced feelings of being unneeded in the family and unimportant as father/husband (Webster, Hunter, & Palermo, 1977; Westling, 1973).

The ex-POW also had to adjust to the changes that had taken

place in American society (Ballard, 1973; Gallagher, 1972). He found that the public's attitudes toward the war had changed drastically. He found himself being scrutinized as an ex-prisoner of war by the public that had distorted perceptions of his experiences. This not only intensified the returnee's emotional reactions to his return, but also increased the anxiety felt within the family (Figley, et al., 1979).

The coping behaviors employed by returned prisoners of war ranged from being highly adaptive to very maladaptive (Borus, 1973b). They struggled to reconcile the changes that they perceived in their families and communities. They also faced conflicting responsibilities that produced inner turmoil, such as public demands and career objectives versus family needs (Borus, 1973a; McCubbin, 1975). It was found that the personal and social adjustments experienced by the returned POW influenced his perceptions of himself and his relationships with his family (Figley, et al., 1976). In light of these findings, it has been suggested that an increase in personal and social stress led to a concomitant increase in family-related anxieties.

The wife's expectations concerning the imminent reunion had little relation to subsequent satisfactions with the actual outcome (Pasternack, Robertson, & Metres, 1974). The wife had to cope with the effects of the captivity experience on her husband, as well as the husband's reactions to the changes that had taken place during his absence. In fact, it was found that the longer the length of time spent in captivity, the more difficult it was for the husband to adjust to the post-return period, and the less agreement there was between spouses as to who performed what family roles (Webster, Hunter, & Palermo, 1977).

Problems which existed subsequent to reunion included: (1) feeling emotionally isolated from the husband, (2) feeling insignificant in the husband's eyes, (3) feeling prematurely old, (4) various difficulties with the father/child relation, (5) some trouble in sharing control of the children, (6) the children's emotional health, (7) sexual problems within the marital relationship, (8) social isolation, (9) role reversal compared with prior

relationship, (10) an apparent lack of interest between spouses, and (11) the husband's physical and emotional health (Cronkite-Johnson, 1975; Hall & Malone, 1975ab). Moreover, many wives experienced inner conflicts over having to give up the responsibilities and independence they had acquired during their husbands' absence (Webster, Hunter, & Palermo, 1977; Worthington, 1977).

Overall, family reintegration was gradually achieved (Nice, 1980; Westling, 1973). It appeared as though successful reintegration required the firm commitment of all family members to resolve the existing problems. Wives who partially closed out their husbands roles during the separation period found coping with the separation easier (Hunter, 1978b; McCubbin, 1975). Moreover, although the family played an important role in easing the adjustment of the husband, it was found that it was essential that he come to accept the changes that had taken place in his absence (Hall & Malone, 1973; McCubbin & Dahl, 1974; Worthington, 1977). The fact that three years after reunion the families still tended to be female-centered is evidence that the husband had adjusted his family role considerably (Hunter, 1977; 1978b). Research indicated that the longer, more stable marriages prior to captivity had the least difficulty reintegrating (Dahl, 1976; Dahl, McCubbin, & Lester, 1975; Dahl, et al., 1976a; Dahl, et al., 1976b; McCubbin, 1975; McCubbin, et al., 1975; Metres, 1975; 1976; Plag, 1977).

Open family communication, as well as spousal agreement over the performance of family tasks and roles, child rearing strategies, family philosophy, and the husbands' career plans were related to individual, marital, and career adjustment, along with family reintegration. Furthermore, open communication and the willingness and ability of the spouses to work out differences and to agree on the major points of family life were found to be the most potent forces in fostering reintegration (Hunter, 1978a).

Therapeutic intervention was often necessary to facilitate family reintegration because of the severity of the protracted separation experiences. In many cases, supportive group counseling was instrumental in helping wives cope during the separation period

and to prepare for reunification (Guswiler, 1969; Hall & Simmons, 1973; Zunin, 1974). Intervention strategies aimed at assisting the ex-captive process his captivity experiences, cope with current life events, prepare for possible delayed stress responses, and mobilize his action-oriented, problem-solving traits were utilized to foster individual adjustment (Ballard, 1973; Hall & Malone, 1975ab). Family therapy was utilized to assist family adjustment (Worthington, 1977). Follow-up supportive services which reached out to this population and provided direct services and the coordination of other services were helpful in facilitating family adjustment (Cronkite-Johnson, 1975). Moreover, the need for ongoing supportive services was emphasized (Hunter & Benson, 1977).

#### CONCLUSION

In years past, policies of the military organization regarding family separation and reunion have often been insensitive, if not antagonistic to the needs of the family. Separation was viewed as merely an accepted and unquestioned obligation of married service personnel. Family considerations were expected to play a subordinate role to operational demands, except in cases of dire hardship (McCubbin, Marsden, Durning, & Hunter, 1978). However, in recent years families are being afforded increasing supportive social services during separation and reunion, indicating that the military is beginning to recognize and attempt to meet the needs of separated families (Hunter, 1979; Family Program Branch, 1978).

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18. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES This report is the fourth in a series of reports which review the status of military family literature, and are based on <u>The Literature on Military Families 1980: An Annotated Bibliography</u> , USAFA-TR-80-11, DTIC#AD-A093-811, edited by E.J. Hunter, D. den Dulk, & J.W. Williams, 1980.		
19. KEY WORDS (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number)  military families                      military lifestyle separation                                submariner wives reunion                                    POW/MIA families		
20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) Military family separation invariably requires that the family adjust to change imposed by the absence of the parent. The resulting stress has often been reported in the literature. But just as separation brings stress to the military family, the members experience still added stresses when father returns. In the past policies of the military organization regarding family separation and reunion have been insensitive to the family's needs. However, in recent years families are being afforded increasing supportive social services during these periods of family disruption.		