



# Home Fires Burning: Married to the Military-for Better or Worse

*Karen Houppert*

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## **Home Fires Burning: Married to the Military-for Better or Worse** Karen Houppert

As taps echoes across the cookie-cutter housing areas of upstate New York's Fort Drum, the wives turn on the evening news, both hoping for and dreading word of their husbands overseas. It's a ritual played out on military bases across the nation as the waiting wives of Karen Houppert's extraordinary new book endure a long, lonely, and difficult year with their husbands far from home. Houppert, a prize winning journalist, spent a year among these women, joining them as they had babies, raised families, ran Cub Scout troops, coached soccer—and went to funerals.

The waiting wives include Lauren, twenty-six, whose Navy SEAL husband was killed in Afghanistan; Heidi, peace activist and Army wife whose life is a daily struggle with her conscience; Crystal, a nineteen-year-old raising two babies on a shoestring while her husband fights in the Middle East; Tabitha, who becomes the alleged victim of murderous domestic violence at the hands of her Special Operations boyfriend; and Danette, once an Army brat and now a devoted Air Force wife, who teaches, raises two teens, and fills her days with endless volunteer work.

Houppert shows that these women make some of the same sacrifices of their personal liberties as their husbands do and yet garner none of the respect accorded their spouses. Today, these military wives find themselves torn between an entrenched tradition that would keep them in a Leave It to Beaver family ideal and a modern social climate suggesting that women are entitled to more—a career of their own, self-determination, and a true parenting partner.

Meanwhile, the military concocts family-friendly policies and spends millions on new programs designed to appease military wives—and to maintain them as staunch supporters who will encourage their husbands' reenlistment. The Army likes to say that it "recruits soldiers, but retains families." And indeed, the future of the all-volunteer force hinges on the success of *this* mission. Though Army brass speak glowingly of the "Army Family Team," this team is often deeply divided over strategy—and even goals.

A gritty, behind-the-scenes look at the tour of duty from the domestic front, *Home Fires Burning* provides a fascinating, fresh look at an enormous American institution and the families that live in its shadow.

*From the Hardcover edition.*

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