

Former Imperial resident headed overseas on second deployment



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When Candace Hayes enlisted in the Army National Guard in early 2001, the chances of her ever being deployed overseas were very minimal. The Guard was an opportunity for her to get good benefits for college.

Now, eight years later, she has been deployed for the second time. And this time it's a whole new ballgame.

A 2001 graduate of Chase County High School in Imperial, Candace joined the Army while still in high school. She was the only member of her class to do so.

She started out as a mechanic, and did that job for five and a half years. She now serves as a truck driver with the 1195th Transportation Company out of Kearney, Lexington and McCook. Candace has been deployed once, to Kuwait. But at that time, it was just her.

In January 2009, Candace was married to Lance Coon of Broken Bow. She is also the mother of nine-month-old Jonathen.

Earlier this month her unit headed to Georgia for one to two months of training, before heading overseas. A send-off for the unit was held May 12 in Kearney, where family members bid a tearful farewell to the soldiers.

She will be deployed for one year, during which time she will only get a two-week leave to come home and see her family.

"I have a son now that I have to leave behind," says an emotional Candace. "I will miss his first steps. Being married this time makes it harder too; having someone here that I want to come home to every night."

She pauses in thought, then adds, "I will also miss his first birthday."

To help maintain contact with her family while she is away, Candace purchased a new laptop computer with web cam. This will allow her to talk to her husband and son regularly, so Jonathen does not forget her voice or what she looks like.

She recently got a taste of life apart from her family when the unit was sent to California for two weeks of training.

"It was rough being away from my family for that long," says Candace. "With the long training days and the time change it was hard to find time to even talk on the phone."

While it is difficult to leave the family for deployments, Candace says "the military gives us lots of great benefits." She has four years remaining on her current enlistment, and says she would definitely recommend the military to young people just graduating who may not know for sure what they want to do.

"It teaches you a lot of discipline," she says.

Though Candace does not come from a strong military family, she married into one. Her mother-in-law, Peggy Coon, says the family tree can be traced back to the Revolutionary War, with military descendants all the way through.

It is a family heritage that will continue to Jonathen, through his mother.