

WHAT GOES THROUGH MEN'S MINDS...



WHEN THEY'RE IN THE ARMY

Cosmo asks some of Britain's finest to tell us how they cope on the front line in the armed forces

They're in the news every day – but what's life really like for the men who fight for our country? And how does it affect their relationships? This month, our four men are in the British Army, and have served in Iraq, Northern Ireland and Afghanistan. All in their late twenties or early thirties, two are married, one's separated and one's single. They are currently stationed in Dorset.

What do you miss most when you're away?

Gareth*: "My family. I've been married for five years."

Dan: "My fiancée – there can be two or three weeks between each visit."

Aaron: "My brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews. I miss having my own time, too."

Gareth: "Privacy. You have to share a room with someone, and there's always someone else in the communal shower."

Tom: "I miss going down the pub. At home, if you've had a stressful day you can have a couple of pints and wind down. But when you're on tour you haven't got that option."

Aaron: "You miss the simple creature comforts, like having fresh milk in your tea."

Gareth: "When I'm away from home I even miss being nagged at!"

What keeps you going?

Tom: "Letters are like gold dust, even if they're just about a rainy day."

Aaron: "They're much better than emails. Someone's taken the trouble to write it."

Gareth: "My wife wrote me one in a spiral. You had to keep turning the page to read it. It took me half an hour but it was great."

Dan: "The littlest things can make you happy – like getting a bag of Haribo."

What home comforts do you take away with you?

Aaron: "You get a box to pack luxuries in,

like a TV, game console and duvet."

Dan: "It's an iPod for me. I take loads of music so I can go off in my own little world."

Aaron: "I was in a serious relationship the last time I was away, so I took the teddy she'd given me and a bottle of her perfume. I'm never going to live this one down!"

Dan: "He's still got the teddy – it's just her that's gone!"

Sweet! Do you get lonely?

Tom: "You don't really have time to get lonely, but when you're not hearing much from back home your morale goes down."

Aaron: "It's when you're relaxing in the evening that your imagination goes into overdrive: 'What's she up to now? Who's she with?' That can drive you insane."

Dan: "Even if she's 100% trustworthy, that's not what's going through your head."

Aaron: "If someone finds out their partner's cheated, it spreads like mental wildfire."

Do you get sexually frustrated?

Aaron: "Of course you do – you just have to relieve yourself regularly!" >

Tom: "Seeing good-looking women soldiers will trigger it. But pretty much any female starts to look good as the tour goes on."

Should more women be on the front line?

Aaron: "No."

Dan: "Your natural reaction is to want to protect a woman. You'd worry about keeping her out of trouble instead of concentrating on what you should be doing."

Is it hard to sustain a relationship with a civilian?

Dan: "When you have to cancel plans, a lot of women will say you've let them down, even though you can't do anything about it."

Tom: "The Army is good at keeping wives up to date with what's going on, but girlfriends don't get the same support."

Are there aspects of your job you don't talk about with your partner?



THE FIRST TIME I CAME HOME WITH MY UNIFORM ON, MY FIANCÉE GOT ALL EXCITED, BUT THE NOVELTY WEARS OFF EVENTUALLY

Gareth: "It depends on what you've seen."
Tom: "You come home to get away from it. My wife always wanted me to share things, but I didn't want to talk about it."

Is there something romantic about being parted for a long time?

Aaron: "When I get home I make an effort with rose petals on the bed, candles and taking her out. You have to make up for the fact that you'll only last two minutes in bed!"
Gareth: "For me, it's more about ripping each other's clothes off..."

Dan: "It makes you appreciate the time you've got at home more, because you know you'll have to go away again."
Tom: "When you're away for six months, your partner gets into her own routine. Coming home disrupts it and can cause arguments."

Dan: "And you want to go out all the time, as you haven't had a beer in ages. But the break helps your sex life massively – it's like getting together for the first time again."

Have you ever been dumped while away?

Aaron: "My girlfriend didn't want to dump me over the phone, so she waited and told me as soon as I got home. Everything I'd been looking forward to was ruined."

Gareth: "I heard a girl I was seeing had cheated. She denied it, but three months

later she was pregnant, and we hadn't even seen each other!"

What's the first thing you do when you get home?

Dan: "I get that first-time sex out of the way – then have a Big Mac."

Tom: "If I get home late at night I just want to go to bed."

Gareth: "It's important being back in your own bed, especially if you've been sleeping in a cot [collapsible bed]."

Dan: "It's nice to get a cuddle."

Aaron: "Once you've seen your partner, the first thing you want to do is catch up with what everybody's been doing. After 24 hours it feels like you haven't been away."

Are your girlfriends always happy to see you when you get back?

All: "Definitely."

Aaron: "Women hide their emotions when you're leaving, so when you return there's a big release. It's quite special."

Does being a soldier attract the ladies?

Aaron: "In our job we're prepared to make the ultimate

sacrifice – what's more manly than that?"

Gareth: "It does have a 'wobbly knee' effect on women. If you walk through town with your uniform on, you'll get looked at."

Aaron: "I doubt there's a woman out there who doesn't like a man in uniform."

Dan: "The first time I came home with it on, my fiancée got all excited. But the novelty eventually wears off."

Aaron: "You get civilians who are jealous because you attract the women."

Out of uniform, do you put extra effort into your appearance?

Aaron: "Some men take a couple of hours getting ready. I actually wanted to iron my jeans before meeting Cosmo!"

Dan: "I don't like waiting two hours for my partner to get ready, let alone you, Aaron!"

How have your relationships changed with people back home?

Dan: "You grow apart from civilian friends. They've not had the same life experiences."

Gareth: "We have our own language, too. My partner understands, but the rest of her family wonder what on earth I'm on about."

Aaron: "Hanging around with your Army mates means you swear more, too, and you forget to say please and thank you."

Are there things you miss when you're away from the front line?

Aaron: "I miss the camaraderie."

Gareth: "Pretty much everyone in the Army has the same ethos. It's all about the guy next to you, rather than 'Queen and country.'"

Dan: "You think about looking after him rather than yourself."

Aaron: "The bloke next to you is everything."

What is your biggest fear?

Aaron: "Being responsible for my friends losing their lives."

Tom: "Something happening to my children."

Gareth: "My kids being without a dad."

Do you ever think of the families of the men you're fighting?

Aaron: "My staff sergeant said, 'If you have to shoot someone, there's nothing wrong if you cry about it afterwards.'"

Dan: "You can't think, 'He's got a mum too!'"

Tom: "Soldiers cry. They're human."

And so Undercover Man waves goodbye to our brave Cosmo soldiers. Meanwhile, he could be heading to a town near you.

YOUR SAY: WHAT IT'S LIKE TO DATE A SOLDIER

Here's what you had to say on www.cosmopolitan.co.uk

"I don't know how I cope, really – I'm not sure I would without my friends Ben and Jerry! I think it helps that I'm quite an independent person, but it does feel lonely some nights." *Miss Querty*

"Keeping busy when he's away helps. I'm busy with college work at the moment, which takes my mind off how much I miss him." *npamh*

"To be with a man in the armed forces requires immense patience, compromise and strength. We deserve a pat on the back for testing

relationships to the extreme – but the uniform is the icing on the cake!" *sophieh1991*

"My mum loves my boyfriend, but I can tell she wishes I'd find someone who isn't in the Army. I get to talk to him on the phone about twice a week, though, which gives both of us a boost." *sha90*

"I hate going to bed without him beside me, but in a way it's a test of our commitment to each other – and so far, so good." *glamgurl3*

• If you'd like to be a penfriend to someone in the forces, visit www.forcespenpals.co.uk.