

# Duty to country, duty to family ...

Story and photos by Capt. Kim Garbett  
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She sat amidst toys at baby Samantha's day care center, laughing and smiling. She is the epitome of "mother." In just a few short days, however, Capt. Rebecca Hendrix, a KC-10 aircraft commander with the 6th Air Refueling Squadron, will be deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom for the first time.

Hendrix has a six-month-old baby that she will leave at home with her husband, Andrew, who is Deputy Sheriff for Solano County. She knows she has a job to do and loves doing it.

At the same time, leaving baby Samantha for the first time will be a heart-wrenching endeavor. As a mom leaving her first born for an extended period of time so young, there is the balance of duty to country and duty to family that becomes the battleground. "I am excited about flying again. I've flown the KC-10 for about three years now, and have been flying for seven years. It is one of few air refuelers in the Department of Defense. We have the capability to refuel not only all the U.S. Armed Forces aircraft, but we refuel allied aircraft as well."

Rebecca went on to explain that in a landlocked campaign, airlift and air refueling are critical elements. "Our main job with our KC-10s is to create an air bridge that allows aircraft to travel greater distances without having to stop for fuel on the ground," she said. "This is especially important to the bombers and fighters heading in for the air strikes and bombings in Afghanistan. Without fuel, they would not be able to make it out of enemy territory."

Rebecca plays similar roles many other women do today. However, her primary roles as mother, wife, daughter and career woman can be more challenging due to the nature of her chosen career as a military pilot.

A father leaving his family for military deployments is not an uncommon facet of military life. A mother deploying and leaving her husband and baby behind is in this day and age not unheard of, however, it still is a lesser-seen reality.

Rebecca said that she understands now how hard it is for a deploying father to leave his family, let alone a very new mother. "I know I need to go and do my duty. The aviator in me wants to go. I still really enjoy flying and enjoy serving my country in this capacity. I will definitely miss my baby while I'm gone. But I know that she and my husband will survive and be just fine, and we'll all be stronger for this experience."

Rebecca's husband, Andrew, has been extremely supportive, she said. "My husband reminds me this is a great way to show Samantha my commitment to work and to my country. He reminds me on the tougher days that it is going to be an incredible experience to contribute to such a great cause as this (OEF). And this will be a great opportunity for him and Samantha to bond and for him to really learn his role as a dad."

Rebecca will face the challenges many deployed troops have experienced at other forward operating locations. But she'll face other challenges as well.

In order to be better prepared for these challenges, Rebecca enrolled in the New Parents Support Program offered by David Grant Medical Center's Family Advocacy Program. According to Kirsten Clary, the Family Advocacy nurse Rebecca has been working with, the New Parents' Support Program is designed to keep healthy families on track by helping active-duty families face the additional challenges that come with having a young family and rather unpredictable career schedule.



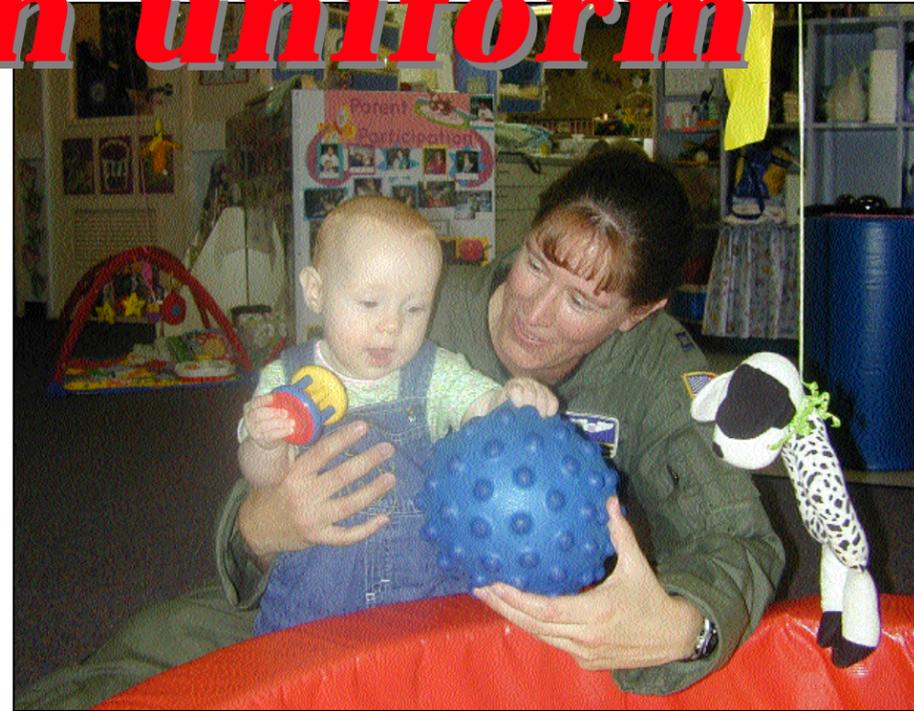
Capt. Rebecca Hendrix, 6th Air Refueling Squadron aircraft commander, plays with daughter Samantha at Travis Child Development Center 1. Hendrix and Samantha sometimes participate in the playgrounds posted at the base.

Rebecca's new role as mom has involved a lot of learning experiences and changes. "She's learned about child growth, development, breastfeeding, communication, sharing of responsibilities in the household and how to handle her upcoming first deployment and first lengthy separation from her baby," Clary said.

"Rebecca has really stepped up to the plate with her new role as a mother," Clary said. "She's been very conscientious and is constantly exploring options that are best for her baby and husband while she's gone. We've talked through some of the more difficult concerns about bonding and breastfeeding, so when she will be deployed, she will be able to be completely focused on her job and not worry about things at home."

Clary said though it will be hard, the challenges

## Mom in uniform



(Top left and right), Hendrix and Samantha engage in various play activities at CDC 1. Hendrix and 6-month-old Samantha have a strong bond. Samantha will spend the next few months with her father Andrew while Hendrix is deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. (Left), Mother and daughter enjoy one of Samantha's favorite places to play in front of the mirror.

Rebecca faces are positive. One important advantage is that, Andrew is a very supportive husband and father. "And we know how indispensable fathers are in the life of a child, especially in a relationship where both parents work," she said.

Rebecca said that Clary and the guidance she's received through the New Parents' Support Program has been "outstanding." "I wouldn't even be able to say enough about the program and how beneficial it has been for me and my family," she said.

In the meantime, Rebecca can almost always be found spending most of her lunches - when she isn't flying or deployed - at the Child Day Care Center visiting Samantha and playing with toys as planes take off and land overhead.