

FAMILY

FROM PAGE 1
ed the same barracks that housed soldiers during World War II. Over time the base developed, and Mary's job flying utility helicopters turned out to be more exciting than she expected. The traffic control job meant Mary spent much of her time jumping out of planes. And though she planned to step out of her position to focus on

being a mother, the children were longer in coming than both Chris and Mary expected. This gave Mary the opportunity to fly longer than anticipated. She later would say her air traffic control job was the best she's ever had. Even after Mary was sidelined by a 1990 car accident, she returned to fly planes, which she could more feasibly manage after sustaining back injuries in the wreck.

Flying "fixed-wing" as opposed to "rotary-wing" also happened to be a higher-profile job. "Helicopters take you to a tent in the woods; airplanes take you to the Holiday Inn," Mary said. "And tents sound good when you're young, but the Holiday Inn sounds a lot better when you're 40." Mary flew fixed-wing on active duty during the Persian Gulf War but was stationed at Fort Bragg and did not leave the country. After

the war she immediately stepped down from active duty and into the National Guard. Matthew, the first of three children, followed in 1995, and Mary began her career as a mom. Meanwhile, Chris was still busy working full time for the National Guard, flying Apache helicopters, which are attack helicopter models. In 1996 he switched to piloting Kiowa Warriors, an older model designed for armed scout missions. Whereas Apaches fly missions nearly every time they take flight, Kiowas often are used for pilot training and drug search missions. Chris's role will keep him home — and without the support of a full-time wife.

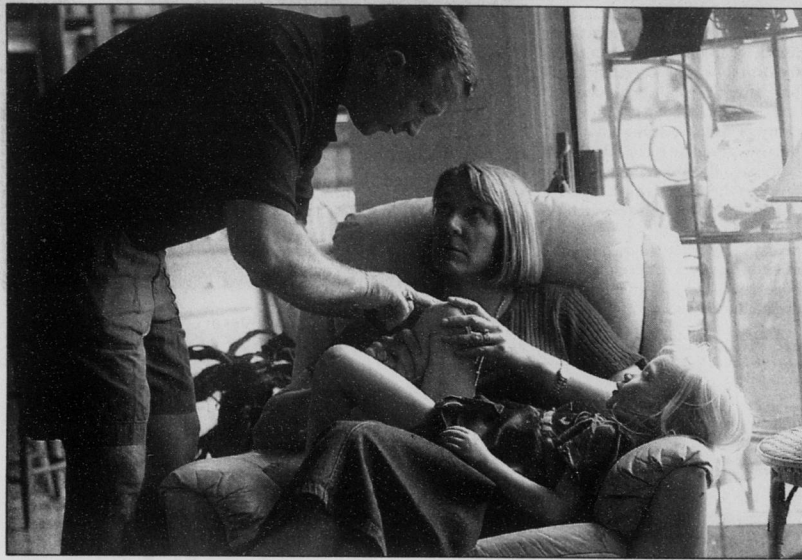
This means he has been getting his own share of training from ballet practices, doing laundry and paying bills. Mary has come home from Fort Bragg to visit her husband and children about once a week since being activated the first week in February. But she says signals from her superiors indicate that the 30th Corps Support Group — of which she is the commanding officer — likely will fly out of Pope Air Force Base for the Middle East by Wednesday. After a prolonged seven-week period of gas mask checks, gun range certification tests and seemingly endless vaccinations, the 30th CSG finally finished its validation process at Fort Bragg on Friday. Troops in the 30th CSG have been able to see their families only on a limited basis for the last seven weeks, but all of them had the weekend off for what they expect-

ed would be their last goodbyes for as long as 10 months. The unit was activated for a one-year period, which will bring them home sometime before next February. Mary noted that when she has been home to visit over the last two months, the boys — Matthew and Alex — have been rowdier and her 3-year-old daughter, Claire, has been more "clingy."

In one display of her newly developed monkey skills at the family's home Sunday, Claire was climbing on her father only to fall and skin her knee. Chris went to get a washcloth and ice for Claire's knee, but Mary teased him for not realizing he needed to dampen the cloth so the ice would make it cold. "Mommy's got the 'mommy drug,' and Daddy doesn't," Mary teased, soothing Claire. Chris grinned and conceded, "When Claire wakes up in the morning she says 'Daddy, come here. ... Where's Mommy?'" Mary said she has had a wonderful life as a housewife. And that is part of what makes it strangely

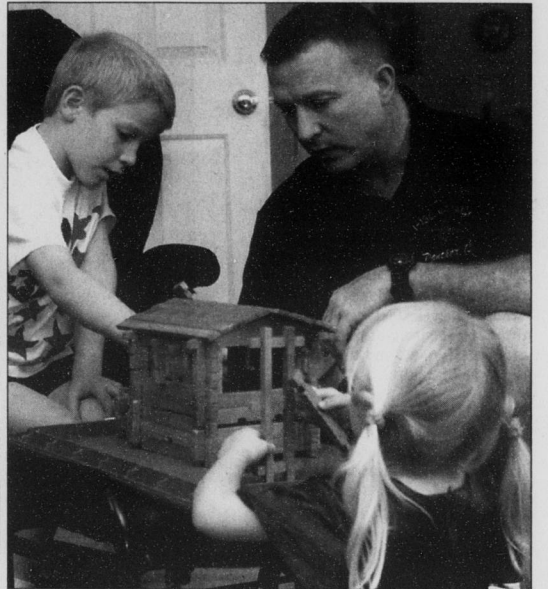
coincidental that she is being deployed for her first time. For the last four years, Mary had been part of a unit in the N.C. National Guard that was undeployable — one that had her working in an office, typing alerts for activations of other units around the state. Late last year she told her commanding officers that she wanted a chance to work in the field in a more active role. She was transferred to the 30th CSG about the turn of the year. A superior officer from her old unit convinced Mary to do some part-time work typing the increasing number of activation alerts. One day in late January, a fellow officer handed her a black notebook containing the information for a unit's activation. "I went to take it from her, and she wouldn't let me take it," Mary said. "I asked her 'Who's it for?' and she just stared at me. 'It's for the 30th CSG isn't it?' I said. ... And I broke down."

Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.



Chris applies a bandage to Claire's knee while Mary comforts her after a fall. Although Claire now spends more time with her father, she still seeks Mary's assistance when her mother comes home from Fort Bragg.

DTH/BRIAN CASSELLA



Alex and Claire play with Lincoln Logs with their father. Since Mary's mobilization, Chris has spent more time with the children at night.

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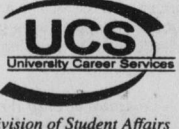
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