

Military, civilians are increasingly divided

By David Zucchino and David S. Cloud, Los Angeles Times

Jovano Graves' parents begged him not to join the Army right out of high school in 2003, when U.S. troops were fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan.

But their son refused his parents' pleas to try college. He followed them both into the Army instead.

Last June, 11 years later, Staff Sgt. Jovano Graves returned home from Afghanistan, joining his mother, Chief Warrant Officer 4 Sonia Graves-Rivers, for duty here at Ft. Bragg.

"My family, going way, way back, has always felt so proud to be Americans," said Graves-Rivers, who comes from a family in which military service spans six generations, starting with her great-great-grandfather, Pfc. Marion Peeples, who served in a segregated black unit during World War I.

Her father, Cpl. Harvey Lee Peeples, fought in the Vietnam War. Her uncle, Henry Jones, was career Air Force. Another uncle, Sgt. 1st Class Robert Graves, spent 22 years in the Army. Her sister, Janice, served 24 years.

"In our family, there's a deep sense that being American means serving – showing gratitude by giving back to your country," Graves-Rivers said.

Multi-generational military families like the Graveses form the heart of the all-volunteer Army, which increasingly is drawing its ranks from the relatively small pool of Americans with historic family, cultural or geographic connections to military service.

Surveys suggest that as many as 80 percent of those who serve come from a family in which a parent or sibling is also in the military. They often live in relative isolation – behind the gates of military installations such as Ft. Bragg or in the deeply military communities like Fayetteville, N.C., that surround them.

The segregation is so pronounced that it can be traced on a map: About 49 percent of the 1.3 million active-duty service members in the U.S. are concentrated in just five states – California, Virginia, Texas, North Carolina and Georgia.

The U.S. military today is gradually becoming a separate warrior class, many analysts say, that is becoming increasingly distinct from the public it is charged with protecting.

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