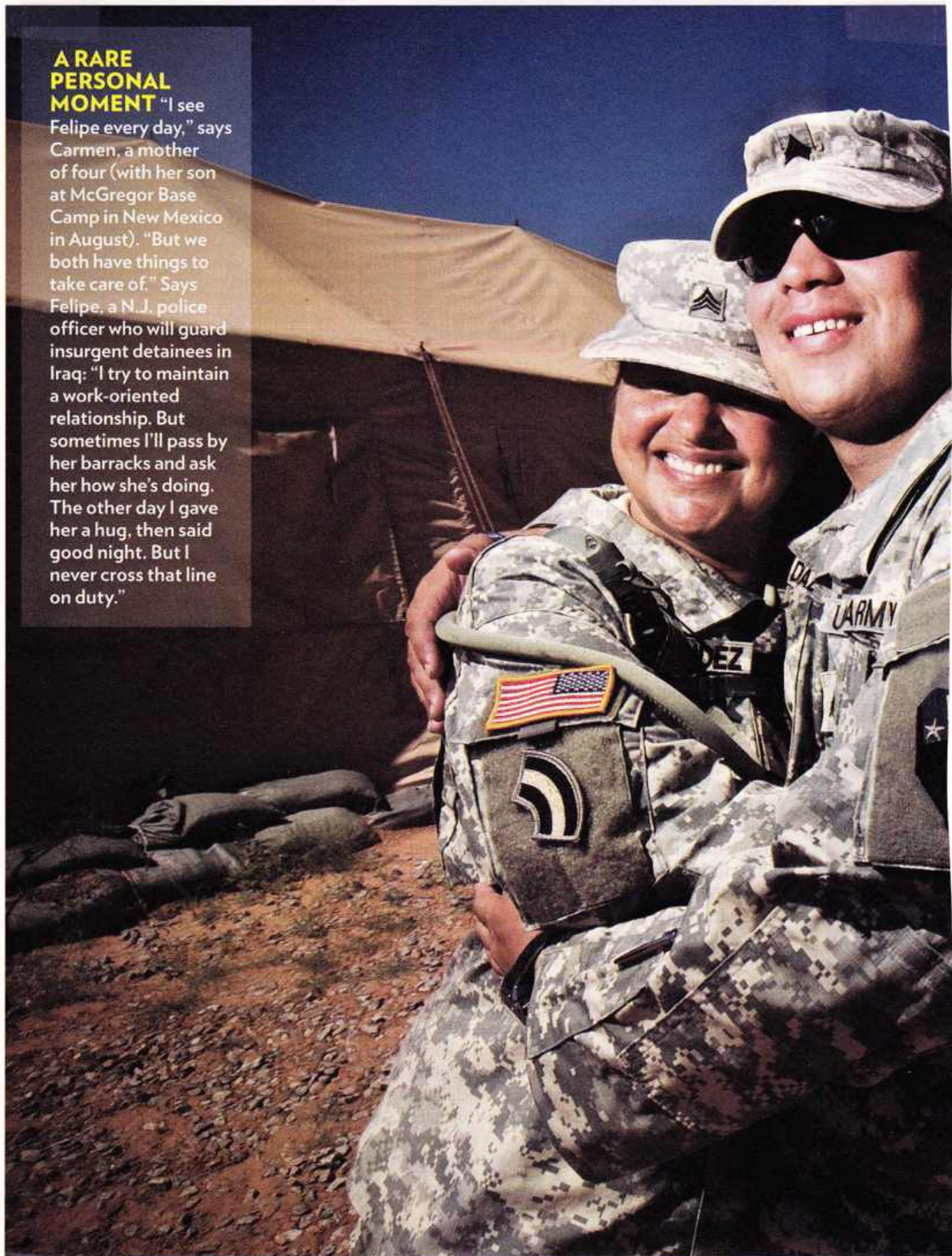


**A RARE
PERSONAL
MOMENT**

"I see Felipe every day," says Carmen, a mother of four (with her son at McGregor Base Camp in New Mexico in August). "But we both have things to take care of." Says Felipe, a N.J. police officer who will guard insurgent detainees in Iraq: "I try to maintain a work-oriented relationship. But sometimes I'll pass by her barracks and ask her how she's doing. The other day I gave her a hug, then said good night. But I never cross that line on duty."



A MOTHER AND SON PREPARE FOR WAR



AT 46, WITH A TOUR IN IRAQ BEHIND HER, NURSE CARMEN HERNANDEZ COULD HAVE LEFT THE NEW JERSEY NATIONAL GUARD. INSTEAD, SHE SIGNED ON FOR ANOTHER HITCH ALONGSIDE HER SON AND FELLOW SERGEANT FELIPE DIAZ, 29, AND GOT READY TO SHIP OUT AGAIN



Carmen with her kids: Felipe (left), baby Marcie and Shareen in 1984.

STILL HER BABY

"About the second week of training, I was on my way to dinner and I got a call," says Carmen (in a transport van). Felipe says, "Ma, I'm sick!" I died laughing. I had to tell the whole company, and they all laughed too. I took Tylenol to his door." Says Felipe: "I was trying not to cross the bridge of saying, 'Mom, I need you.' But everybody calls her when they feel sick."



FAMILY BACK HOME

Carmen savors a photo of her family: husband Victor, 49, a fellow N.J. National Guard sergeant, daughters Shareen, 26, and Marcie, 24, son Roberto, 19, and four grandkids. "One of the hardest things I've done was to leave for that first tour," she says. "This time is easier—maybe because of Felipe."



DEN MOTHER

"I have maternal feelings toward all soldiers in my unit," says Carmen (at lunch with her son). "My biggest challenge was making them know I'll take care of them as well as my son. Now they all call me Mom."

By Anne Lang and Nina Burleigh





“I’M HONORED TO SERVE
WITH FELIPE. HIS SOLDIERS
LOOK UP TO HIM”

--SGT. CARMEN HERNANDEZ

A LEADER TO HIS UNIT

In his 35-lb. Kevlar protective gear, Felipe (right) prepares to take his soldiers on live ammo maneuvers. “As far as what may happen—I’m a person who won’t talk about it,” he says. “My mom is more realistic.” Says Carmen, who will serve as a senior medic in the same unit as her son and expects to see him regularly: “I have a strong faith and I believe when it’s your turn to go, it’s your turn to go. You just have to make sure you’re ready.”

Subject: mom son

Date: Monday, September 8, 2008 7:58 AM

From: Westhoven, Kryn <Kryn.Westhoven@njdmava.state.nj.us>

To: Anne LANG <news@annelang.net>

Anne,

Just wanted to say Thank You for the wonderful photo story on SGTs Carmen Hernandez and Felipe Diaz. It was touching story on the mother and son pair and really appreciate the efforts of everyone at People to make this happen.

Kryn Peter Westhoven
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