

Dear Mom and Dad,

We sincerely hope that this book is helpful to you and your child. We have seen numerous deployments ourselves and have come to find that the simple things can make a world of difference.

In the pages that follow, you will find a few ideas that have helped our children through the struggles that deployments bring. We have gathered these ideas from our friends, through word of mouth--passed on from military spouses over the last few years--and a few we have stumbled upon ourselves over the course of multiple deployments. We have found that giving children an active part in the countdown process, and a visual reminder that their parent will be coming home, helps with some of the issues that our kids are facing.

Take the time to talk to your child and let him share his feelings and thoughts no matter what they may be. If they are mad, sad, or even glad, we need to let them know that it is OK to feel what they are feeling. There is no guidebook to tell us what we or our kids are supposed to feel. All we can do is help them and be there for them during this confusing time.

We thank you for all you do every day to support your family and your service member.

Sincerely,

Christina and Melissa

Helpful Tips and Ideas

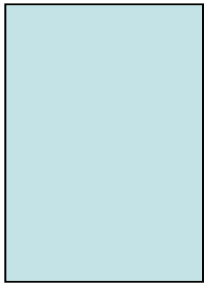
Countdown ideas for deployments:

- Make a deployment chain with little notes on each link to take off every day and read. Don't forget to make some extra links because of changes in return dates.
- Turn a cookie jar into a kiss and hug jar. Use Hershey chocolates and the child gets to get a hug or a kiss every day until her parent returns. It can also be used to count down and is easy to adjust to changing dates.
- Make a calendar of big events or holidays to happen before the return of your service member and mark them off as they pass. I linked the events into a path and removed each event as we went. (Holidays, a vacation, EML, birthdays,)
- Plant a garden and count down by the seasons. As certain plants bloom, the child can see the passage of time as you get closer to your service member coming home.
- Use sticky notes and have your service member write a little note to your child. Every day he or she will get a special message.
- Daddy Dolls! They give the child something to hold onto or to pinpoint his frustrations. Daddydolls.com

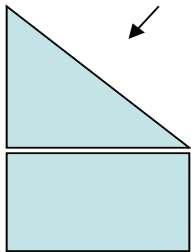
Helpful Tips and Ideas

Helping to relieve fears and worries:

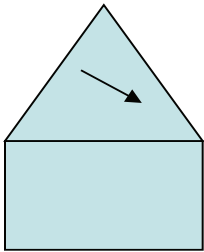
- Get a suitcase and have the child pack his worries and concerns in there. Then have the child give you the suitcase and let him know that you are the grown-up and it is your job to take care of the worries and that it is his job to be a kid. You can offer to give the suitcase back when he is 18 years old. Also tell him that anytime more worries appear to let you know and you can pack them away.
- Blow up a balloon and put the worries in there and pop it.
- Have the child draw or even scribble her frustrations until they pass. You can talk to her about what she is feeling while she colors.
- Have a worry box to drop in the concerns. Agree to talk about them, or not to.
- Get a heart-shaped balloon and take it into the bath to wash her heart out. Talk about all the things the child wants to wash away: worries, concerns, anger, and fears.
- Write the concern or worry on a rock and throw it into a lake, river, or off a mountain.
- Don't forget to bend down and talk to your child on his level.



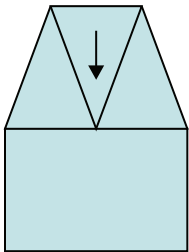
Trick Airplane To airmail notes overseas.



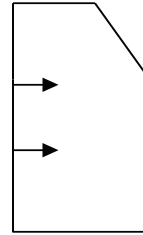
1. Fold top right corner down to the left and match sides.



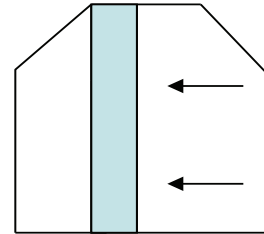
2. Fold point down to the right. Match opposite edge.



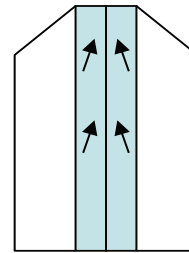
3. Fold top tip down to the midline fold.



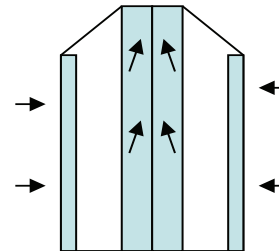
4. Fold in half.



5. Fold down wings.



6. There should be about a $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of the body running the length of the paper.



7. Fold tips of wings up about a $\frac{1}{4}$ inch.

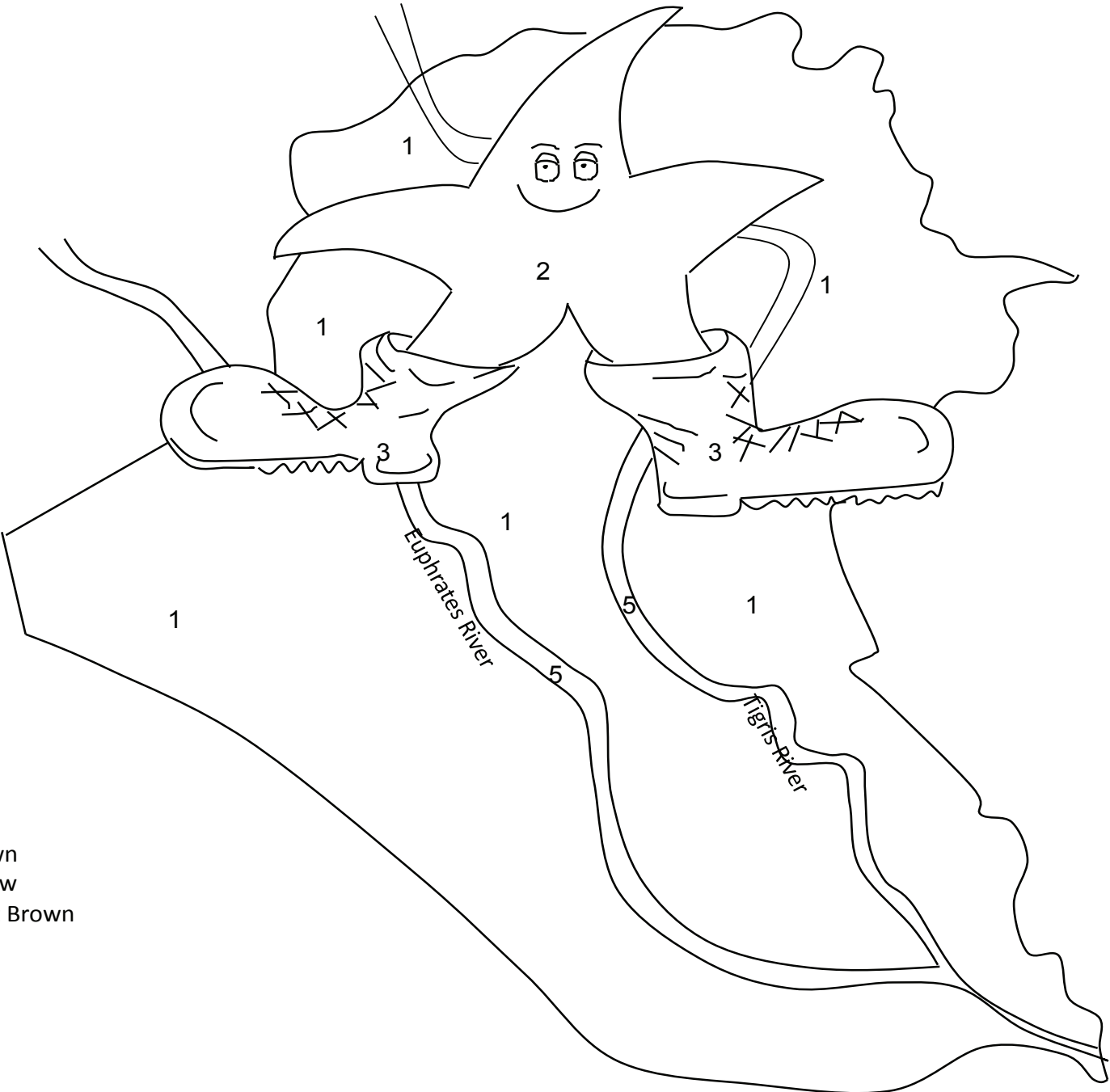
Use to write a letter on or color and send it overseas.

- 1-Yellow
- 2-Green
- 3-Brown
- 4-Blue
- 5-Red
- 6-Dark Blue



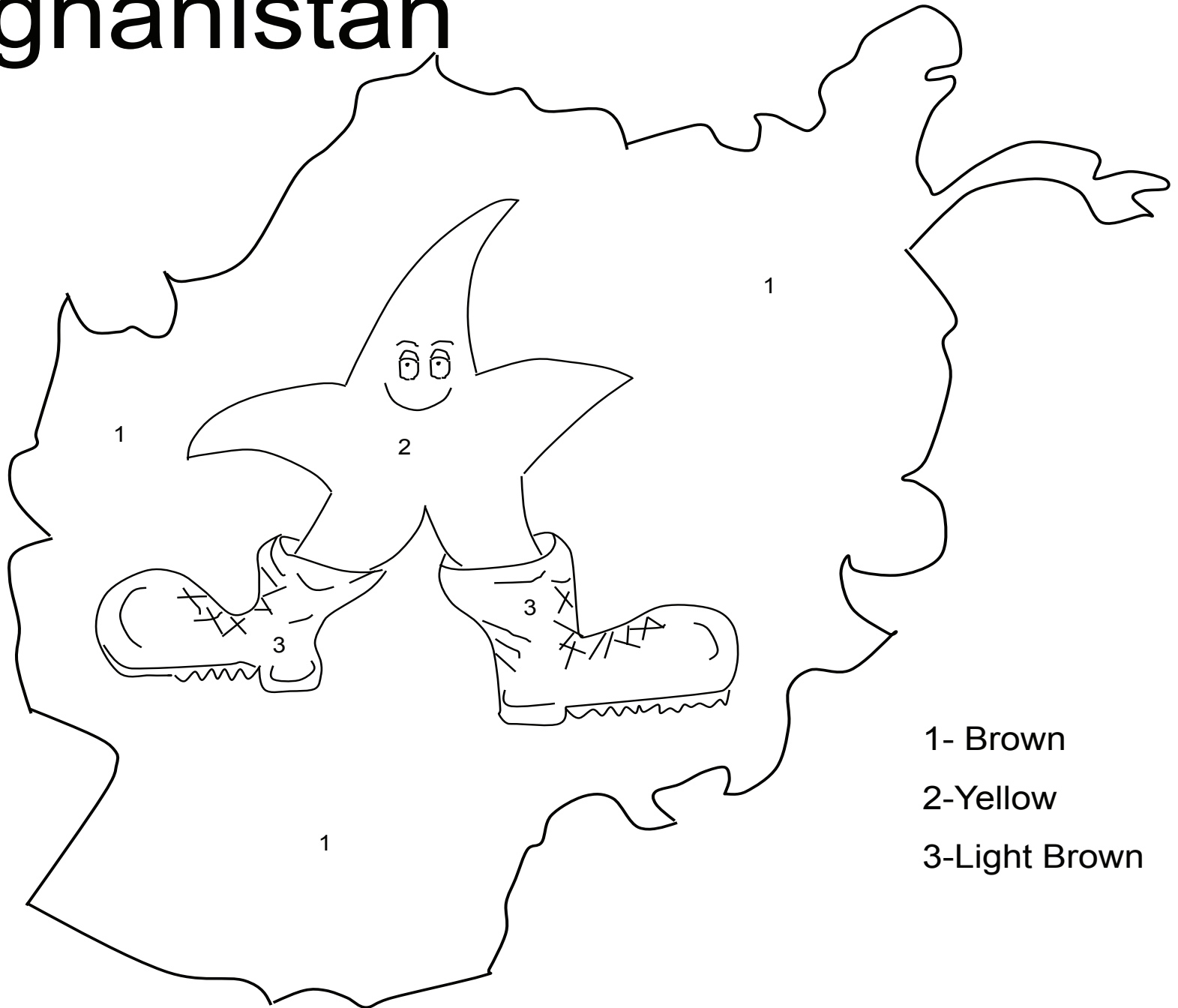
Write a message on the ribbon for the messenger star to deliver to your Daddy or Mommy.

Iraq



- 1 – Brown
- 2 – Yellow
- 3 – Light Brown
- 4 – Blue

Afghanistan



1- Brown

2- Yellow

3- Light Brown

Today I am excited because:

Today I am proud because:

Today I am happy because:

Today I am worried because:

Today I feel angry because:

Today I feel sad because:

Letter Template

Today Was Special

Dear _____,
(name)

I wanted to write you to let you know that today I _____.
(describe an accomplishment) I wasn't

sure if I would be able to do it, but I tried my best, just like you always tell me to, and I did it!

My friend, _____, said I am _____ for doing it.
(name) (description)

_____ said I should write you a letter to let you know how I feel. At first, I felt _____. But then, I
(name) (an emotion)

_____.
(description)

I am very _____ with myself, and I feel
(an emotion)

_____.
(an emotion)

I can't wait to see you, and I really look forward to _____ with
(describe an activity)

you. Do you remember when we _____ together? That day always makes me
(describe a memory)

_____ when I think about it.
(an emotion)

I love you, and I miss you. Make sure you _____ every night before you go to bed, and I will
(an activity)

_____ before I go to sleep.
(an activity)

I love you,

(child's name)

Magical Storytime

Dear _____,
(name)

Once upon a time, there was a _____ inside a
(describe a mythical creature)
great magical kingdom. Many people had tried to _____ the _____ but nothing had worked.
(an action) (mythical creature)

One day, a little _____ named _____ decided that _____ would be the very one to capture the
(noun) (name) (pronoun)
_____ and return it to
(mythical creature)

_____ from where it came.
(create an imaginary land)

The people of the kingdom thought _____ was very _____ for trying to capture the
(hero's name) (description)

_____. _____ didn't feel very _____, but _____ knew that the bravest battles sometimes come about from feeling
(creature) (hero's name) (description) (hero's name)
_____.
(an emotion)

So, when _____ finally _____ the _____, _____ said these very
(hero's name) (action) (creature) (hero's name)
magical words over and over again to find courage. "I can do anything as long as I believe I can. I can do anything as long as I believe I can." These magical
words gave _____ the _____ _____ needed to battle the
(hero's name) (emotion) (hero's name)
_____ who was never heard from again.
(creature)

When _____ returned to the kingdom, all the people _____.
(hero's name) (action/description)
_____ said, "I was only able to _____ because I believed that I could." From then on, the magical kingdom
(hero's name) (description)
changed its name to _____ in order to always remember the battle of
(name)

_____.
(hero's name)

The End.

Love,

(child's name)