

War casts shadow over couple's future plans

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

Ann Marie Rizzitano and Ken Butler got engaged in what is arguably one of the most romantic locations in the United States.

Butler popped the question when Rizzitano came to visit him in Hawaii last August.

But a shadow loomed over the couple even as Rizzitano answered "yes."

In response to Iraq's military occupation of Kuwait, President Bush had just ordered U.S. forces into the Persian Gulf. And Butler, an electrical technician stationed aboard the nuclear submarine the U.S.S. Bremerton, knew he faced the possibility of being sent to the gulf.

"I remember thinking to myself," Rizzitano recalled, "I hope he doesn't leave before I get to Hawaii."

War broke out Jan. 17, and thus far Butler — who is stationed at Pearl Harbor, near Honolulu — has not been sent to the gulf region. But his brother Chris, a U.S. Marine, is already serving in Saudi Arabia. If the war continues for many months, then Ken might be sent to the region as well.

"It just seems the longer this is dragging out, instead of a quick response when I ask him about it, he's saying, 'Oh, let's not worry about it,'" Rizzitano said. "He's just so close to the situation."

In the midst of worrying about the war, the couple is planning for their wedding, scheduled for Oct. 13, 1991, at St. Louis Church in Pittsford.

As part of their planning, Ann Marie and Ken must take marriage-preparation classes. They must attend separate classes, however, because of their circumstances.

Although the war in the Persian Gulf adds a certain urgency to Rizzitano and Butler's planning, their situation is not atypical. Every year, many couples are forced to attend marriage-preparation sessions in separate locations due to military service, work schedules or job training.

To meet the needs of couples who, for a variety of reasons, must attend marriage preparation sessions separately, the Rochester diocese offers preparation sessions for singles.

"It's best that a couple be together," noted Joe Federowicz, marriage-preparation coordinator for the Southern Tier Office of Social Ministry. "When you share from the heart, it's best if you are together. But on a positive side, there's no reason you can't be prepared here and (your fiancé) prepared there."

Rizzitano and Butler will separately undergo marriage preparation. Butler will work with a chaplain at his military base, while Rizzitano will be part of a singles' preparation group scheduled to meet later this month.



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer

Because of their circumstances, Ann Marie Rizzitano and her fiancé, Ken Butler, a sailor stationed aboard a nuclear submarine in Hawaii, will take special marriage-preparation classes for "single" couples.

Damian George and his wife, Joyce, have been leading singles' marriage-preparation sessions in the diocese for the past 15 years. Damian George noted that the singles' sessions "are the most difficult kind of pre-Cana because you don't have the interaction. You only get the response back from one person instead of two."

To help compensate for the couple being apart during marriage preparation, the Georges sometimes invite one of the partners to sessions with couples. This allows the person to hear discussion between couples and to gain some added insights, George said.

Joyce George noted that the partner often shares what he or she learned with their fiancé by phone, mail, or when they are next together.

Thus far in their relationship, Rizzitano

and Butler have established a pattern of communicating regularly.

"We talk to each other almost every night," Rizzitano said. "The phone bills are almost through the roof."

Butler was in Rochester at Christmas for two weeks, and the couple discussed wedding plans. In particular, they selected the date and site for the wedding. Since then, Rizzitano said, she has been planning additional wedding details with Butler away.

"Before I make any decisions, I check with him," she said.

When Rizzitano attends her marriage-preparation class in Rochester, she will deal with the same topics and issues that couples taking the classes together will consider. Those issues include money, children and dealing with in-laws.

Because individuals involved in the

singles' sessions are likely to move to where their future spouse is living, Joyce George observed, they are also likely to encounter a problem not faced by most couples: the possibility of isolation from family and friends.

"They face the realization that they will leave their families and friends and start a life totally on their own," she said. "That's a huge adjustment for them. In many cases, except for college, they've never been away from home. We ask them how they will be prepared for that."

Rizzitano and Butler are also preparing for the possibility of his being sent to the gulf before Oct. 13. "If he's sent to the gulf, he may not be back for the wedding," Rizzitano said.

Therefore, they are trying to complete

Continued on page 26

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