

## **G.I.'S NEWEST BATTLE. ARMY VET & KIDS FACE DEPORT FOR GREEN CARD GOOF**

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### **Body**

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THE COUNTRY that Army veteran David DeJong enlisted to serve is now trying to deport him.

DeJong, 30, a Farmingville resident who moved to Long Island from Canada when he was 13, joined the Army following his graduation from Sachem High School.

He stayed in Germany after his military career ended in 1998 to keep his son - who was born there with a heart condition - under his wife's health insurance. By doing that, DeJong unknowingly violated the terms of his green card.

"If somebody is making that commitment, and willing to make the ultimate sacrifice, there is no time that the country should be saying, 'Thanks for whatever you did, but you can leave,' " DeJong said.

When reached for comment on the case, Mark Thorn, a spokesman for the New York office of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, said, "We're looking into it."

Upon his return last summer to Farmingville, where he is now living with his mother and studying to become a teacher, DeJong said he was advised to get Canadian citizenship for his children to expedite filing for permanent residency for them. A divorce left him with custody of his three sons: Markus, 6, who was born with a faulty heart valve, and twins Sean and Lukas, 5.

Returning from Canada on Sept. 29 after filing the paperwork, however, DeJong was stopped by immigration officials at the border after a computer check showed that he had stayed in Germany too long.

DeJong said he was forced to sign a waiver abandoning his permanent residency status to be allowed to return to his children in Farmingville.

"I was literally in tears," DeJong said. "I'm the father of these children and I had to get to them, so I signed it."

Lawyers for Immigration and Customs Enforcement are now trying to expel him and his children, who are German citizens.

"I was appalled and outraged as a legislator, as a resident and as a Vietnam veteran," said Suffolk County Legislator Jack Eddington, who organized a press conference on the subject yesterday.

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DeJong's next hearing, before an immigration judge in Manhattan, will be on Sept. 26. Of more immediate concern to DeJong is another heart operation on Markus scheduled for next month, coverage of which he hopes will not be jeopardized by his legal situation.

"This is my home," DeJong said. "This is now the home of my children. I want them to grow up here, like I did."

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## Graphic

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CHRISTIE M. FARRIELLA David DeJong with his sons Markus (in his arms) and twins Lukas and Sean (r.) outside their Farmingville home. DeJong, who was born in Canada, and his sons, who are German citizens, may be **deported** if the government has its way.

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