

The Ugly Truth

August 8, 2009 | [Guard Wife](#)

This post has been riding with me for awhile. I've rolled this around, considered not posting it, considered curbing some of the truths, and then became comfortable enough with the truth that I determined I could handle whatever comments people may want to lob my way.

As a military wife of the National Guard variety, I do not have the benefit of an active duty, post centered support network. I have forged, through sheer curiosity and necessity, a core group of military spouses, from various branches of service and numerous States. Our relationship is primarily technology based. We do see each other occasionally, but we mostly communicate through our computers, our telephones and even snail mail.

I have a family who, while supportive, cannot possibly understand that chilling effect that hearing the words "deployment" have upon my heart and my mind. How absolutely exhausted I can become contemplating the hundreds and hundreds of days between now and when I lay eyes on my husband's physical person again. How easily it is to become angry and resentful over this overriding, overbearing, inanimate, but very much living entity smack in the middle of our lives known as ARMY.

Most of the time, I can put up with ARMY. I can put up with the absences, the training, the utter lack of ability of any one hand to know what the other hand is doing and plan accordingly, the uncanny talent of ARMY booking things for the only weekend we have anything even remotely interesting to do. As an adult, I understand what it is to commit to something. As an attorney, I understand what it is to feel duty bound to do something and to do it in a particular fashion. As a mother, I understand the quality and character of the individuals who serve and how wonderful it is to be able to raise people like that.

As a wife, though, I teeter between uber supportive superwoman and raging-against-the-machine whiner. There is no better time to see this vacillation than

the time immediately preceding a deployment. Those final weeks before my husband boards a plane, I can no longer deny what is about to happen nor the reality of what could happen, and I. Am. MAD. Mostly, because there is not a damned thing I can do to stop, change, like or otherwise deal with what is happening.

If ARMY were another woman, I'd hunt her down and whoop her good. Period. I mean, how *dare* she? Who does she think she is anyway? Yep. Definitely would reach back to my roots and remember how to adjust her attitude in a hurry. But, Army isn't another woman. And, frankly, after all these years of marriage, if Army *were* another woman, and my husband couldn't walk away, I'd toss his clothes out our bedroom window onto our driveway, throw him his keys and tell him to get off my lawn.

For the record, I love my husband. I have been connected to him in one way or another for the better part of twenty years. And, before that, I definitely knew who he was and what he was about. When he is gone, there are very often times where the feelings of loss are so great, I cannot breathe. The weight of it just sits on my chest and crushes every bit of air from my lungs. The vacuum within the space he leaves overpowers and draws me closer. I cannot shake that cone of silence that follows me around. It is the constant, uneasy feeling that I'm forgetting something or something is out of place. Knowing, rationally, exactly what that is, but my subconscious mind refusing to just let it be.

I spend the early days needing to hear his voice and coming up empty.

Of course, it isn't like you know this the first go 'round. Before my husband left for Kosovo a few years ago, I could not even contemplate the year ahead of me. Two very young children who were constantly sick. Working full-time. No sleep. It was horrendous. I didn't have my military wife friends then. I just kept hearing, "Single mothers do this every day and their houses are clean, their laundry is done, they take care of themselves. Get with the program."

But single mothers do not have in the back of their mind that their soul mate is a world away, strapped with pounds of equipment, braving the elements, remaining

vigilant against danger and only being able to contact home sometimes. They have their own sets of fears and worries I can't contemplate anymore and I am in awe of those who hold it all together. For me, being in this spot doesn't really make for a pleasant experience.

This time, my husband wasn't going someplace where people wanted each other dead and he just needed to stay out of the way. This time, he's where people would just as soon he be dead as anyone and he needs to stay out of the way and then some. You want to present a scenario like that to a control freak like me and expect it to go over with my spontaneous combustion? Good. Luck.

My husband and I had many conversations. Much of the really bad moments, however, came directly before I went to see him on his final pass in June. By that point, he was sassy himself and not at all interested, routinely, in what my damage was. It couldn't help talking to some people about how I felt.

I realize now, looking back, that I should have saved the very darkest of my thoughts and feelings to share with those who would absolutely, 100% get it without holding it against me, thinking I'm off-center, or deciding I didn't deserve a husband like mine and that I needed psychiatric intervention. The appropriate audience would have been my fellow military spouses who have lived this dance before, know how badly it sucks and who would listen without judgment.

The ugly truth is--I needed to fall apart before he left so I could be unwavering once he was gone. I needed to scream and cry and be angry before he ever got on that plane, so I could handle all our business once he was headed overseas. The idea that I could just blithely shrug my shoulders, say "Oh, well! See you in a year! Love ya! Bye!" is ludicrous. Maybe some people do it. God bless 'em. I'm not one of those folks. I needed to mourn the loss of yet another year of our family being intact before I could be the kind of mom who makes things feel almost normal.

I needed to think the horrible thoughts about what happens if he hurts himself just enough that he can't work his civilian job anymore all the way up to, what happens if people show up at my door in their Class A's? I needed to say it out

loud and I needed also to hear myself say that I didn't know why I should believe we would be fortunate enough to miss out on that kind of crap sandwich. I needed to say out loud that I had *absolutely* no say in any of this. It wasn't my choice. I didn't enlist. I'm here against my will. I needed to make it known that if any of this horribleness did come to call, I *tried* to warn people. I tried to tell ya and yet, ya went ahead and raised your damn hand anyhow...because that's how you roll.

How I roll is I get really mad and then I move on. I've been that way since I was a child. I say things I absolutely do not mean, plot things I absolutely never would carry out, and do both at such a decibel level, it's scary. But then, like any other kid who has a tantrum over her favorite thing being taken away against her will, I'm wrung out. There is no other way to describe it. I have no coping mechanism for having zero control. I'm not a child anymore and yet, I have to reach WAY back to find a scenario in my life where I could not control at least a portion of what is happening.

Please don't tell me I have the power to control my reaction to things. I know that. I'm doing that now. I'll continue to do it for the next YEAR and, likely, even more than that. As a worrier, when you do your best to live in the moment, you cannot do that unless you are in heavy denial. Denial must come to an end, though, and when it does, it isn't pretty. And, for the next year, I will sometimes have to decide between doing a load of laundry or going to bed before 1 a.m., unloading the dishwasher or talking to my husband on IM, or scrubbing a toilet and watching a movie with my kids. I don't have a maid, so get over it--these decisions are no-brainers.

That's the ugly truth. My husband and I are fine with all that. He knows I needed to do and say those things, get them off my chest and then come back to center. He knows that the house is usually in better shape (eventually) when he's gone than when he's home, but that it takes me time to find a routine. He's had his moments too; don't let his stoic face in all our photos fool you. We did what we had to do and continue to do what needs done and are simply stronger for it. That's a military marriage from my vantage point.

Maybe it's different for other people and that's okay. But, I'm done apologizing or feeling unbalanced for what I needed to do to be able to send him off with a kiss

and a smile. It was what it was--an ugly, crying, snot flying, curse screaming, holy hell of a rage. And, it's over.
That's the honest truth.

Post adapted from version posted at Guard Wife's personal blog, Most Certainly Not.

[Technorati Tags: dealing with deployment, deployment, SpouseBuzz](#)
[Comments \(28\)](#) | [Newsletter Signup](#) | [Bookmark or Share](#)

Comments

I have no idea why you think you would get any un-supportive comments for that post, especially here, in this forum.

I think you just put into words what a lot of us are living.

As a matter of fact, with your permission, and full credit, I may just either link to this or copy and paste sections of it into an e-mail to select friends and family.

Posted by: Basinah | [08/08/2009 at 14:58](#)

Basinah, Thank you. :) You share any/all links or portions with whomever you wish. This post has been awhile in coming; had to let it percolate a little.

Posted by: Guard Wife | [08/08/2009 at 15:00](#)

Been there, done that, got the tshirt and shrank it in the laundry. Hooah! We get it.

Posted by: NG Wife | [08/08/2009 at 17:21](#)

I am so thankful you posted this. As a spouse who has done both NG and Active Duty it blows either way. I have had the same thoughts, frustrations and worries on both sides. I don't feel as if I have a safe place even here on post to speak my mind. We do it the weeks leading up to him leaving and it is hard on us both. The only difference we have is the house is in better shape when he is home than when he is gone. :)

Posted by: [Reasa](#) | [08/08/2009 at 21:44](#)

I SO GET YOU!!! I am going through my second deployment of 18 months as a NG mil spouse and I am MAD! MADDER than MAD!! I, unlike you, have not been able to shake it as easily this time around. I am getting better but I want to rip off

the heads of everyone associated with sending DH to the sandbox again! I am mad that we don't have kids because he isn't home long enough between deployments to try and I am mad that I am living what is supposed to be a couples life alone.

But god made us strong....Army wife strong :)

Posted by: Beth | [08/08/2009 at 22:17](#)

Thank you for posting this... It says what I have been feeling, but have not been able to put into words that make sense. I too might copy and paste for a few others... cause no one here quite gets it. Thank you for being you...

Posted by: tad's tibbit | [08/08/2009 at 23:07](#)

I wish all my civilian work friends could read this. Then maybe I would not get the stupid questions. I have been there twice and it sucks. I am also afraid of the unk and when I first hear he is leaving I do not take it well. Stay strong you will survive. ps Hire a house keeper and or gardner if you can.

Posted by: phyllis | [08/09/2009 at 11:45](#)

Finally. I needed to hear someone else say what's tearing my chest apart too.

Posted by: [Solitary Wind Chime](#) | [08/09/2009 at 16:09](#)

just be stronger it is not the end of the world ... you will be okay

Posted by: [ele](#) | [08/09/2009 at 17:23](#)

I know what you are talking about, just like the other spouses who admitted to feeling the same way. I just have to say that by breaking down and getting angry and crying and screaming, etc... THAT is the essence of strength.

Strength is not about always being happy, always having your house clean, your laundry done, always "being there" for others. Strength is about admitting when we feel defeated - whether we have control over the situation or not. Strength is about being vulnerable to our deepest emotions and allowing them to surface so we can experience the emotions and THEN we can move forward. BEEN THERE, DONE THAT!!!

SO go ahead and be MAD, sista! I give you major kudos for the courage it took for you to write this post. I've had some of these moments in my life and it's really hard to muster up the courage to let others know what we are going through.

Posted by: Joan D'Arc | [08/09/2009 at 21:47](#)

I can relate to your story. At times I thought that my heart was being torn out of my chest. I am a military wife of an awesome United States Soldier. We are active military, and we are celebrating our twentieth wedding anniversary this August.

However, before every deployment my husband and I would talk about what is expected of us while he is saving the universe and what is expected of me. I knew my husband's job was really putting him in harm's way. I held my temper, helped him pack up the things he would need, baked cookies and I baked a lot of cookies. Because the few batches of cookies were burnt to a crisp. I did cry, pray and barging and when I came back to the quite, still, and dark apartment I felt so very alone.

This is to all the ladies that are brave, beautiful and intelligent. You are not alone. I want to say that we are soldiers too. Our mission is to keep lines of communication open, make and do things that will honor yourself and your family. Go back to school, even if it's just one class.

My husband was deployed more than 10 times to places I can't even spell, but while he was busy saving the universe; I went back to school, graduated with dual MBAs and started an bought a house, two new vehicles, lost 100 pounds, started an in home business and was well into my second year of my Ph.D program. The sad part is that I lost my dad and brother during this time.

Both my brother and my dad were the best at what they did when I was hurt, or heart broken about things. We made things. Dad and I made cookies, garden and my brother and I made doll houses, dog houses and watched movies.

I do hope that my story will give some awesome military divas (MD), encouragement, hope and I hope that all of us to remember that people do not know what real women do when married to a soldier. Sometimes it is out of their

comphendion. We are unique, beautiful, intelligent, warriors with lipstick.

Please check out this website <http://www.societyawareness.com>

Posted by: WonderWife | [08/10/2009 at 03:11](#)

we all get it. :) As a NG wife, I also understand that it's hard living in two worlds. We didn't sign up for this and we're shoved in it..up to our eyeballs. And yet we're supposed to be happy about it. Well, it sucks. And it's ok to say it.

Posted by: Michelle | [08/10/2009 at 10:45](#)

The Thunder Run has linked to this post in the blog post

<http://www.thunderrun.us/2009/08/from-front-08102009.html>

Posted by: [David M](#) | [08/10/2009 at 10:47](#)

Thanks, Michelle. Hubby signed up after we were married so I was clueless about the military life. I had no idea what it would entail and it's something you can't know unless you're in it.

Posted by: NG Wife | [08/10/2009 at 10:57](#)

Thank you for this post! I'm an NG wife and we're at the tail end of our second deployment. Lately I feel as if all my blog posts are whiny and I come off sounding like I just can't handle this life. I worry sometimes people will judge me and/or tell me to suck it up, but like you said, it's the truth and I'm not going to be afraid to write the truth. This post totally speaks from the heart!

Posted by: [\(army\)Wife](#) | [08/10/2009 at 11:02](#)

My husband recently lost his job as a pilot and is seriously debating to join the military. Naturally, I am scared.

So from me to all you military wives: Is it worth it? What are the benefits of it? If you could, would you go back and change the decision your spouse made? Is there a division that is better then the others?

Thanks for your honest opinions.

Posted by: Joy | [08/10/2009 at 13:39](#)

Joy,

I wouldn't change my life for a second for two reasons: 1) if I weren't here, I

wouldn't be married to my husband and 2) if he weren't in the Nat'l Guard, he wouldn't be the man I fell in love with.

My husband joined the Guard years ago & when I married him, I knew he could be deployed, etc. The reality is different than what you think you know, but the alternative is not to be married to him. And, although it has its moments, I handle my business when it comes to deployment. After all, what choice do I really have but to do it and do it well?

I would never ask my husband not to do what he's doing because he feels so strongly about it. His decision was not one made for any other reason than that he wanted to serve his country, however. If it were for the education benefits or because of something else, I'm not sure his dedication to it would be as sincere and steadfast as it has been for the past 15 years.

Each branch of service has its own perks and quirks--I don't think any 'beat' any others on that. For every "Wow! You're so lucky!" perk, there is a "geez, that stinks" quirk.

My best advice is to go with your husband and talk to those who have the answers from each branch of service and see which options, if any, appeal to you. Maybe once you have more information, he'll decide he's not ready to commit or you'll decide you could take on the challenge.

Whatever happens, I wish you the best & you know we're always here if you need us.

Posted by: Guard Wife | [08/10/2009 at 13:48](#)

I can totally relate. It is not an easy life we live. I'll admit to being jealous sometimes of my friends that have full time (at home) spouses. But then I remind myself that don't have GI Joe, and I savor each moment I get with him. But it is not without its hard times.

Posted by: [Jessie](#) | [08/10/2009 at 13:59](#)

DAMN STRAIGHT.

But I have to admit that I have not been through a deployment... but thinking about one, my reaction is the same as yours is to a real one. I can totally see myself reacting the same way- the anger, the resentment- all of it.

And you're right. I don't think anyone other than another military spouse would get it.

Posted by: AFSister | [08/10/2009 at 14:46](#)

Thank you for the sharing of your honest and real feelings. No one could say it better, and although I'm not a military spouse I appreciate what you go through. Thank you for your pain and love to our country. God Bless you and your family and all of our military families.

Posted by: Cindy | [08/10/2009 at 17:13](#)

I hear you. My hubby is in Korea for a year and it used to be that a military member would maybe step foot in that country once in their career, but this is his second bachelor tour. And unlike the first I have two little ones, a house, and cats who depend on me. He is not in the war zone, but that still hasn't stopped me from cursing and putting a fist in the wall with frustration.---And I was a born and bred military brat, before I became a spouse. It never gets easy. Don't apologize...we wouldn't be coping if we weren't angry, sad, crying, laughing and just being spouses who love their other halves.

Posted by: Xtna | [08/10/2009 at 20:45](#)

I am in the NG. I hear you and its just as hard for us when we leave. God Bless

Posted by: rmurphy | [08/10/2009 at 22:43](#)

Thanks for this post. My husband is just about to leave for his first long deployment, and I'm sharing similar feelings for sure. It's good to hear from someone who can relate -- we're also an NG family, so we don't have other military families around who understand!

Posted by: april | [08/11/2009 at 00:07](#)

First of all thank you for writing this, it was a "must read" for me. Secondly I have a question and would like your honest answers.

I am soon to be engaged, and also soon to leave to Marine Corps OCS. I can tell that my future bride both supports me, like all of you do your spouses, but I can also see very vividly early stages of denial, like we can't even talk about the military... I've signed a "non-binding" contract with the Marines - that means I can choose to opt out if I choose to.

I've heard that joining the military isn't a choice, but a calling, and the more I think about it, the more I agree with that statement - I want to serve my country more than anything. On the other hand. I want to cherish and take care of my wife... I don't want her to go through all of those feelings, I mean I haven't even signed anything yet and It's killing her. So...

I guess I just want to get some advice, maybe I can share it with her, or just have her read this. We men can be fairly selfish sometimes (most of the time), and I just want to say that all of you military wives are warriors just the same, Men were born with a sort of calling, a calling to be in action, to serve, to be honorable, to make our families and mother's and father's of this country proud, but you... You wives are the Heroes.

Posted by: Future Marine | [08/11/2009 at 01:08](#)

I cannot tell you how accurately you summed up MY feelings in your statement. And you are correct, only us would understand it!

Posted by: HRPlotzke | [08/11/2009 at 01:13](#)

Thank you SO much for posting this. I can relate, but I wasn't sure if I was alone in my disability to cope. I'm kind of new to this. I read milspouse blogs and it sounds like all you amazing women deal with deployment so easily. I have no idea how.

My guy tells me there is a very good chance he will deploy soon. I don't even know if he will and I feel like I'm falling apart. The thing is, I've deployed myself. I know how hard that part of it is. And, when I came home from that deployment, my guy was in the sandbox still. It occurred to me that the whole situation sucked terribly, but I was so focused on how to readjust, I didn't really register how hard it was to be separated by war.

All that is just to say thank you for making me feel like I'm not insane, and I'm not unworthy of being a milspouse (well, I hope not anyway!)

Posted by: [AussieCoyote](#) | [08/11/2009 at 06:29](#)

Please forgive for commenting since I'm not a military spouse but a girlfriend of a retired military man who is over in Kabul, Afghanistan right now. I think it is bad enough being without him for 4-5 months and a time. I can't fathom how all you wonderful military spouses/girlfriends must feel. My heart goes out to you and your families. My prayers are with all of our Armed Forces and all of our contractors overseas. May God bring them all home in one piece.

Posted by: Cheryl Bracken | [08/11/2009 at 10:03](#)

Future Marine--

First, I am a complete and total stranger to you, so take my advice/feelings/words with a grain of salt if they don't fit with your framework of how you're running things, okay?

I think it's very mature of you to recognize the things that you've listed in your post. I can tell by your words that you care very much about your prospective bride.

If this is truly your calling (as I suspect it is b/c very few people join the Marines on a lark), then you will need to do it. Period. If you do not, I fear you will regret it to the point of feeling resentment later on, regardless of what you do in the future.

My husband, earlier in his Nat'l Guard career, had a relationship with a girl who simply refused to let him pursue his goals within the Guard. His giving in to her fears/jealousy/etc. cost him valuable experiences and chipped away at their relationship. I'm not saying I'm better than she--just different. I recognize how important this is to him and despite my feelings (b/c they are only 'sometimes' feelings anyway), I drive on.

When you say that this is 'killing her,' have you discussed where those feelings are truly coming from? Is it her fear for your safety, worrying about future deployments, etc. or is it the beginning of a steadfast refusal to be married to a

Marine? I suspect it's fear as you say that she has been supportive of you. That's perfectly natural and normal, in my book. Even the most gung ho of us (and I can be pretty gung ho), recognize that this is not a lifestyle for the faint of heart.

Your future bride will learn more about herself and dig deeper within than she ever has by becoming a military spouse.

I think the key is to be open and honest. Allow her to communicate openly with you and you do the same. You, obviously, seem to have a very sincere, very good heart. It's no wonder she wants to marry you! Then, either send her our way (so we can connect her with some Marine wives) or reach out in your local community to find Marine wives for her to ask questions and see how they do what they do.

I know the Marines have a very large, very tight community, and the ones here at SB are terrific and willing to reach out.

I wish you the best as you navigate all this. I think all this thought up front makes for stronger and more enriching marriages, so good on you for thinking ahead.

Posted by: Guard Wife | [08/11/2009 at 10:55](#)