

SERVING ON THE HOMEFRONT:  
THE IMPACT OF DEPLOYMENT ON NATIONAL GUARD SPOUSES VIEWED  
THROUGH THEIR STRENGTHS, SUPPORTS, AND STORIES

BY

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DISSERTATION

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## **ABSTRACT**

Since September 11, 2001 the United States has entered a period of increased military action. Over 2.5 million service members have been deployed to the Middle East, with the National Guard playing an increasingly large role in the military interventions. The spouses of these men and women had to learn to navigate lengthy combat deployments. The purpose of this study is to understand the experience of deployment from the perspective of a National Guard spouse.

This study uses qualitative methods to explore how they construct their realities about this time. We focus on the meaning-making of these experiences and use the strengths perspective as a framework for the study. Nine National Guard spouses were interviewed. All were partnered during at least one deployment. Semi-structured interviews focused on their essential deployment narratives: the challenges they faced and strengths and support systems they utilized. Quantitative measures were used to reinforce these findings. Data was analyzed for common themes and coded.

The narratives revealed the external difficulties they experienced throughout the deployment cycle. Major themes included external and internal challenges and fear of death of the National Guard member. Personal strengths and external supports were explored for their benefit during deployment events. Independence and resilience were found to allow these women to navigate periods of separation. However, additional traits, such as stubbornness and the reluctance to seek help, may have made deployments more difficult. Helpful support networks included their deployed spouse, and children. Friends and extended family varied in terms of supportiveness. Systems like the National Guard Family services also varied in helpfulness during this time and tended to be seen as less

effective. Specifically, Family Readiness Groups were largely seen as unhelpful. Suggestions to improve the deployment experience were gathered. Common themes focused on methods to facilitate connections to people, information, and resources.

The findings of this study are important in that there is very little empirical data and no outcome studies on National Guard spouses, especially from this most current war. These results have the ability to better inform civilian and military systems about how to provide services and support to this group of military spouses and families. Implications for policy and practice are discussed.

To all the military spouses and partners who serve stateside, thank you

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It has been said, “It takes a village to raise a child”. The same could be said about a doctoral education and this dissertation. I know this is true for me. I did not arrive at this place alone. It is through the example and support of many that I am here today with this amazing product. I want to take time here to thank them.

I come from a line of indomitable women. I am not the only “doctor” in the family. There is one other. My grandfather’s aunt Mary Sagner earned her M.D. around 1904 and worked as a medical doctor for 26 years in a time when very few women were even attending college. She died after contracting pneumonia while out on a call in winter. She was the only doctor in her small town and was mourned by many. I want to thank her for breaking the trail for me. Both of my grandmothers, Dorothy Stage and Eleanor Cleeland were very strong women. They worked hard in and out of the home to make a good life for their families. Dorothy graduated high school early and at 15 went to Chicago during the depression to make money to send home to her family. At a time when many women did not work outside the home, Eleanor worked to help support her family. I want to thank them for their example of love, hard work, and dedication to family.

I want to thank my committee members. Terry Ostler, thank you for helping me dig into these women’s words and look for the deeper meaning. You helped me see the power and importance in their stories. Your support and encouragement has been invaluable. Michael Kral, thank you for inviting me into the Cultural Studio. You have shown me how to create research spaces that value creativity and qualitative work. Your encouragement and input has helped me feel confident in my research. Janet Carter-Black, thank you for bringing me back into SW300. I learned so much from you during

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To the women who agreed to participate in this research, thank you. Your independence and tenacity have shown me the meaning of true strength. I want to thank you and all the other women who “serve on the homefront” during times of war. Your stories often go untold, and I appreciate your trust in allowing me to tell them.

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To Terry Denison and Pat Sample, you saw in this clinical social worker a possible academic and scholar. I thank you for seeing the potential in me and encouraging me on. There are some days I rue the day you suggested I do this, but I love this new life and am excited about my new adventure as a researcher and educator.

Now to thank my family... To my brother Bill who is always up for a game of Cards Against Humanity or discussion about politics or TV shows, thank you for always having my back. I love collaborating with you and hope we can do it more. You have accomplished so much, and I am very proud of you. You are the best brother anyone could ask for, and I am honored to call you my friend.

And to my mom and dad, you are the best parents ever. Period. You never made Bill or me take lessons or join teams we did not want to freeing us up to follow our passions. The only exception was school. Remember how I hated to go to school? Who would have thought that little girl who ran crying from her kindergarten classroom chasing after her mom would grow up and earn her doctorate? You always believe in me and support me in everything I do. You have let me walk my own path with no judgment

or disappointment. You both have a piece of this. It has been over 100 years since someone in the family could be called doctor, and you made this happen. I am so blessed and grateful that you are my parents. I love you both so much. Thank you.



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## **PROLOGUE**

### **How did I Arrive Here?**

As a qualitative researcher it is important to contextualize ourselves with our research and our data. We need to be aware of our inherent biases and perspectives. We need to also be transparent about them in our research. I below tell the story of how I connected with military and veteran issues and it begins with my connection to the field of social work.

### **My History with Social Work**

“Few will have the greatness to bend history itself; but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total; of all those acts will be written the history of this generation.”

Anyone who has taken a class with me has seen this Robert Kennedy quote. I think it shows what we can do as social workers. It is what inspires me on in the field. I may not have the ability to “bend history”, but through my teaching and research I can contribute to making a more just world.

When I chose social work as my major, I wanted to make a difference and help people. I earned my BSW and my MSW and worked in the field for over 10 years. I always chose difficult jobs and tough cases. I worked with HIV and AIDS before there were viable treatments. I went on to work with kids who were on the autism spectrum facilitating respite to avoid out of home placements. I worked with special needs adoption with children and youth who had experienced severe abuse and neglect. When I decided to return to school to pursue my doctoral degree, I knew I would need a focus area. I also knew I would choose an area that had great need, and my mind was drawn to soldiers and veterans.

## **My History with the Military**

My dad was in the military. This is both true and not true. He was in the military and is a veteran. He was a member of the Army Reserves and finished his commitment to them before I can remember. There is a story I have been told my whole life about how he was away at summer camp when I was born. He had to ask for a leave and got on a train from Granite City Army Depot outside of St. Louis and rushed to my mother's side. He made it just in time.

It was not until years later that I learned about the reason my dad joined the reserves. Vietnam was an unpopular and deadly war. Most soldiers were drafted rather than enlisted. The Vietnam War was in full force in the late 1960's when my parents were dating and my dad had a low draft number. My grandparents knew what this meant and saw the course the war was taking. They looked for a way out for him. While they were working class they knew one person who might help. A local politician was friends with my grandfather and gave my dad the option of joining the Army Reserves. The Reserves were unlikely to be deployed. Many men sidestepped the draft to avoid Vietnam by joining the Reserves.

I have many ancestors who have served in the military. My grandfather joined the Army Air Force during World War II only to be discharged after a nearly fatal battle with pneumonia. Family lore says at one point three "David Cleelands" served in Vietnam. One, my dad's cousin, did not make it back. When I visited Washington DC I found his name on the Vietnam Wall.

Figure 1. Personal Photo of Vietnam Veterans Memorial



I have had friends and loved ones who served in the military. I saw young men I knew leave for boot camp and return changed. When I began to work in the field of social work I worked with many Vietnam veterans. Even 20 or 30 years later some were still fighting the impact the war waged on their lives. We had a lesson to learn from Vietnam and when I decided to change my career, this was my inspiration for wanting to work with the military and veterans.

When I applied to the University of Illinois, I knew I wanted to focus my research on veterans and the military. I worked to learn more about the population and their needs. I quickly discovered that we learned some lessons from Vietnam, but we had not learned nearly enough. The men and women returning from Afghanistan and Iraq are battling a wide array of needs and issues. Now that I had education I sought a point of entry with them.

An opportunity arose to work with two National Guard officers to collaborate on their research and analyze data. This was the beginning of my collaboration with Colonel

Tom Zubik and work with military spouses. We worked on an initial study that looked at retention and reenlistment in the National Guard. I established trust over the year we worked on analyzing data and writing up our findings. I was transparent with them about my desire to find a population for my dissertation at some point during our work. Over lunch one day, Colonel Zubik and I discussed my options. He suggested I study National Guard spouses and partners. As a therapist and graduate of the University of Illinois himself, he saw what a tremendous need there was in this population.

My research focus with veterans, military members, and those connected to the military is several fold. First, as I said, I am drawn to groups that are at the most risk. We have seen the level of need these new veterans and their families have and I want to work to help address those needs. I also want to explore and share their stories. I believe we need to give voice to those who are not heard. Some of these stories have never been shared and there is value in sharing them. I also believe if we continue to send soldiers into harm's way, we need to know the true ramifications of those actions.

I see my separation from military systems as a benefit to this study. I am not connected to any military systems and can avoid any perceptions by my participants of bias. I also avoid the issue of having military approval before I submit my results, which can occur in some collaboration with the Department of Defense, Veterans Association, and other military units. I am not formally connected to the military and am not a veteran. This distance allows me to look at the data and hear these stories without that bias. Additionally, this outsider status allows me to establish trust with my participants that their identities are protected. That being said, I also need to establish collaborations with military members and conduct member checks to ensure I am interpreting the data correctly.

I also have extensive experience as a social work practitioner and therapist. While I am not a member of the military, I use my skills to establish rapport and facilitate conversation about difficult topics. I also use reflective listening to assure I am understanding the responses correctly. I see my research as an extension of my social work practice. I want to improve the lives of these women and men who partner with deployed service members.

As a practitioner who espouses the Strengths Perspective, I focused on the strengths of my clients. I believe these women are formidable and it is amazing in how well they managed difficult situations. To ensure I understand the entire story, I have also woven into my study what the challenges were and what could have gone better in various situations. I can use my therapeutic skills to maintain a neutral affect to encourage any response. This way I also hope to draw out, not just the positive, but what went wrong and where they struggled.

I also believe in the power of personal narrative. Sharing stories can lead to transformation on the individual, group, and national levels. I also believe in the importance of stories that are untold. I want to be an ear to hear their stories and give them a voice.

All of this has led me to this population and more specifically to these nine women who were willing to share their stories.

## Language

In this paper I will use the term “spouse” which applies to all committed partners living under one roof. It does not apply to girlfriends who do not live under the same roof, even if they are co-parenting. If a study includes a more focused definition of spouse

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

September 11, 2001, changed many people's lives. Few lives were more impacted than those who serve in the United States military and their loved ones. The United States military system changed dramatically as well. The National Guard and Reserves were activated in record numbers; both the service members and their families had to adjust their connection to the military and identities. Gone were the "weekend warriors" who became civilian soldiers sent on combat deployments often multiple times. Their spouses experienced lengthy separations for training and oversea missions. Active military spouses expect overseas deployments and understand the potential risk of a combat deployment, but National Guard spouses did not. Many experienced a huge shift in identity and life circumstances. The historical context of this war coupled with the unprecedented use of the National Guard make this war and its challenges unique.

This study will look at this shift and these challenges and will examine how these women and men adjusted to this dramatic change in their primarily civilian lives, viewing their challenges through a lens of strengths and looking at the qualities that helped these spouses navigate periods of deployment and reunification. I will also explore their utilization of and need for support systems. Finally, I will look at personal stories they associate with the deployment event and soldier's return home. This study aims to shed light on an understudied group whose stories remain largely untold.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

After 9-11, soldiers were deployed almost immediately, higher security levels were implanted, and as the country moved to react to the terror attacks, spouses and families of the soldiers began to enter a new era of heightened military action. As a result

of the need for an immediate increase of our fighting force, the decision was made to activate a large number of the members of the National Guard and Reserves and ready them for deployment. The National Guard was deployed to combat missions in record numbers, and their spouses had to make an adjustment.

Of the 2.5 million service members who have been deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq, 28% are in the National Guard, which has been deployed to combat missions in record numbers and, for many, on multiple deployments (O'Neil, 2012). They have been exposed to the same combat trauma as the active component of members of the regular armed forces;<sup>1</sup> 1 in 10 troops killed in action since 2001 was a member of the National Guard. This combination of factors created the optimal scenario for high levels of mental illness and disabling physical injury for Guard members, and created a high level of difficulty adjusting to life stateside for Guardsmen after serving in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). The limited research that has been done indicates that National Guard troops are possibly at even higher risk than the active component for combat related mental illness; a landmark longitudinal study found Reservists and National Guard members' prevalence of PTSD at higher rates at 4-10 months post-deployment (12.7%-24.5%) than active duty soldiers from other military branches deployed to the same conflict (Milliken, Auchterlonie, & Hoge, 2007). This may be due to the dual life these soldiers lead, partially in the military and partially in civilian life, making the processing of the trauma of war and reintegration into civilian life more difficult.

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<sup>1</sup> I will refer to the members of the regular armed forces deployed or ready to be deployed into combat duty as "the active component."



As of 2012, the number of Guard members who had been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan over the course of the war was 379,736 individuals; 37% of these Guard members were deployed multiple times, and even when stateside their training schedule was increased substantially (2012 Demographics, 2012). National Guard members (NGMs) no longer were merely serving one weekend a month and two weeks a year. Now Guard members could expect longer deployments and a rigorous training schedule that included 4 day monthly trainings and a specialized month-long annual training to prepare for combat missions (Verdeli, Baily, Voursora, Belser, Phil, Signala, and Manos, 2011).

At the same time that National Guard Service Members had to adjust to a new paradigm in their role in the military, their families and spouses had to adjust as well. Prior to 9-11, it was rare for a National Guard unit to deploy to combat for a prolonged period; from 2001-2013 National Guard spouses had to learn to adjust to new roles in relation to their civilian/military lives. Many National Guard spouses do not identify themselves as military spouses and are less integrated into the military community, as they most often live far from the nearest base and outside military culture (Booth, Segal, & Bell, 2007; Verdeli et al., 2011).

Now the National Guard is emerging from what has been called “The New Protracted Conflict” (Hoffman, 2005). Meeting the demands of the OEF/IOF conflict has significantly strained both the active military and the National Guard and Reserves. This unprecedented convergence of factors has created a level of combat and resulting physical and emotional trauma previously unseen in the U.S in the late twentieth century. Since the demands of war are currently less urgent and allow greater access to personnel,

now is a most effective moment to study the ramification this war has had on the National Guard, their spouses, and their families.

### **Research and Intervention Needs for National Guard Spouses**

It is essential, then, that we take a deeper, more purposeful look at the National Guard spouses and families that are left home to maintain their lives stateside. This new paradigm for the use of the National Guard as a deployable combat force resulting in long periods of training and deployment has created a multilayered set of problems that have not been experienced by the National Guard in their history. Additionally, these challenges are unique to those forces that serve in a reserve capacity such as the National Guard as opposed to active duty soldiers and spouses. Furthermore, there is very little in the literature about National Guard spouses and it is even more limited when it is focused on their experiences post 9-11. This study seeks to contribute to the literature on NGMs deployed to combat and their families, and to look for the unique strengths, supports, and stories of the spouses who serve the Guard on the home front.

Furthermore, it is more likely for National Guard service members and their spouses to seek help outside the military system (Erbes et al., 2012; Savitsky et al., 2009), but due to the lack of scholarly and professional literature to inform civilian providers, many of their needs are not being met. Education about the military system, deployment stages and stresses, and the special needs and strengths of those in the National Guard is essential to providing quality care and interventions with this population. Unfortunately, the research on National Guard spouses and families, beyond being limited, lacks any outcome or controlled studies to determine effective interventions. There is thus a need for more research on the impact of the deployment experience on National Guard spouses and families (Sheppard, Malatras, & Israel, 2010; Presidential Task Force on Military

Deployments, 2007; Tollefson, 2008). Moreover, rather than only focusing on traumas and problems, further research needs to focus on the understudied strengths, needs, and psychological issues of the active duty and National Guard spouses (Mansfield, 2010, Sheppard, Malatras, & Israel, 2010).

Finally, the limited research on this population has largely been funded by or conducted in collaboration with the Department of Defense, Veteran's Administration, National Guard, or other military organizations, and there is a need for research conducted outside the military system, since members of the National Guard and their families do not live entirely within military culture. Because of the context of its production, data produced during research or treatment of Guard members by military organizations might be accessible by the military, and participants might well suspect that their answers are not truly confidential, thus resulting in self-censoring. In initial discussions about this study with members of the National Guard community, they brought the issue up repeatedly. In order to assure that answers are not impacted by the fear of repercussions, research from outside the military that can assure confidentiality and security is needed.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theories informing this study are drawn from military scholarship and from social work theories to create a foundation of understanding with this population. Most military literature and the resulting theories focus on active-duty service members and their spouses, which have to be adapted to look at the challenges created by combat deployments and the resulting strengths and coping methods used by National Guard spouses to maintain their daily lives and family units. I will discuss each theory separately and then discuss how they interact to create a new theoretical framework for

the time of deployment and how it impacts National Guard spouses' identities and conception of place in the world (Figure 3).

### **Deployment Theory**

Deployment is a standard part of life for service members and their families. Since September 11<sup>th</sup>, deployment to combat zones or areas of unrest around the world has become even more commonplace. Deployments involve a several step process and are always a time of increased stress for service members, their spouses, and families. There are 5 stages: Pre-deployment, Deployment, Sustainment, Re-deployment, and Post-deployment (Pincus, House, Christenson, & Adler, 2001; Booth, Segal, & Bell, 2007). Families have varying levels of stress and adjustments that must take place at each of these stages. Pre-deployment is a time of high stress when the couple or family learns when the separation will occur. Often this leads to a higher level of training for the service member, with the spouse needing to plan how to manage the separation.

Deployment is another time of high stress with the service member having left and the family members renegotiating their roles. Spouses need to adjust to life as a single parent and take over tasks previously met by the deployed service member. The deployed service members must learn new ways to be present for their spouses and families from a distance. If there has been a previous deployment, couples will often reuse what worked and change what did not. If the couple has not experienced deployment before, there can be extra stress and adjustment, as each spouse needs to establish how to navigate the unknown during the next six to eighteen months. Sustainment is reached once the reformulation of roles is set and the family or couple is functioning again during the member's deployment. Stress may be relatively low during this time as a routine is established.

Re-deployment is the time directly prior to the soldier's return home. This can be a time of high emotions and concern about the transition back to life stateside. Post-deployment has the duality of excitement to have the service member at home, coupled with the need to renegotiate roles and deal with the impact of the deployment directly on the service member and indirectly on the rest of the family unit. Often this time will also have a "honeymoon period" of six months or even longer before the full ramifications of the deployment experience can be seen and begin to be addressed (Knobloch & Theiss, 2012). Couples report highest stress during initial and middle stages of deployment with 25% to 29% of families stating that this was the most stressful time (Cycles of Deployment, 2006). The stage of deployment the spouse or family is experiencing and its accompanying stressors are important factors for a practitioner to consider that might impact their ability to seek services or impact a therapeutic intervention.

Once the process of deployment begins, it is likely similar for National Guard spouses and families, with the significant distinction that many initially did not know their spouse would be deployed at all until the full military ramifications of 9-11 unfolded. This need to deal with acceptance of deployment adds a complicating layer to the deployment experience. The present study also explores this process and how it is similar to and different from this active military theory.

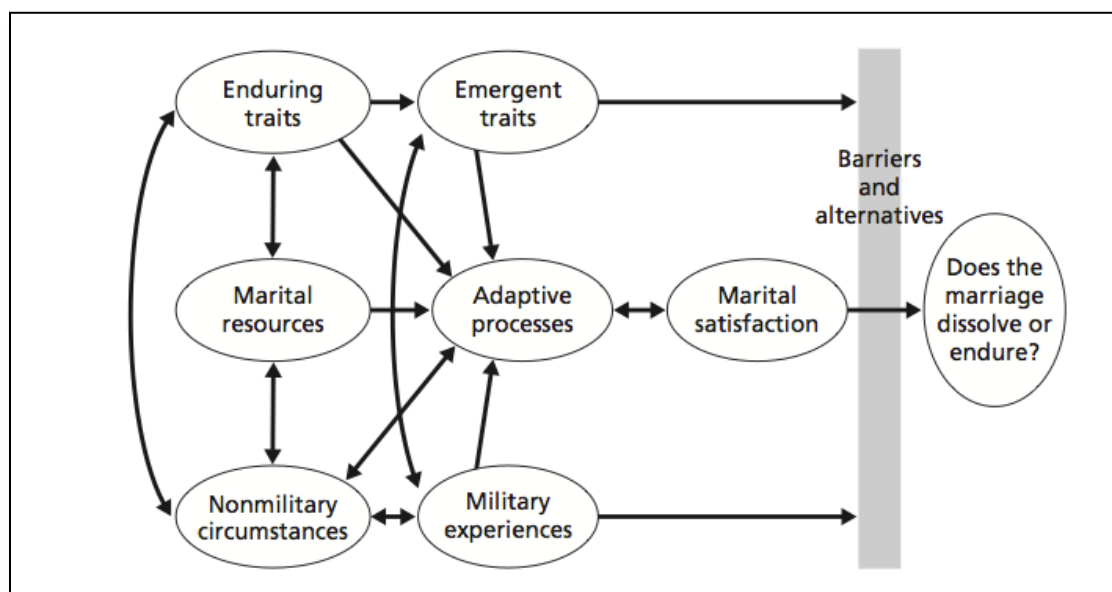
### **Military Marriage Theory**

There is a critical need to formulate a comprehensive model of military marriages in order to direct the formation of policy, programs, and practices for military couples and families (Orthner & Bowen, 1990). Many current models focus only on either dissolution or satisfaction as an outcome. The civilian Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Theory (Reis & Sprecher, 2009), has been adapted to form the Military Marriage Theory

below (Figure 1). The Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation perspective looks at the mechanisms for marital change, based on the assumption that marital quality changes as the result of the impact from experiences and reactions to these experiences. Stressful events impact the adaptive process and this is further influenced by the person's own enduring vulnerabilities. These interacting factors have a direct impact on the individual's perception of marital quality and stability.

Karney and Crown adapted this theory adding the process of relationship evolution that occurs while a service member is deployed. Their theory accounts for how the personal characteristics and vulnerability of each partner may impact the level of functioning of each in the relationship. This functioning also interacts with external military and civilian stressors, which trigger adaptive processes thus causing the relationship to evolve. These processes can be positive or negative and may be cyclic. Positive reactions can lead to more stability and more positive views of the marriage, while negative experiences can accumulate and lead to future negative reactions. This is made even more complex when considering the family in the military milieu. The characteristics of military life including deployment, trainings, and other events that add stress and put demands on marriages add an extra layer of intervening factors that can lead to marital dissatisfaction and contributed to ultimately whether the marriage continues or dissolves.

Figure 2. Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Theory Adapted for Military Marriages



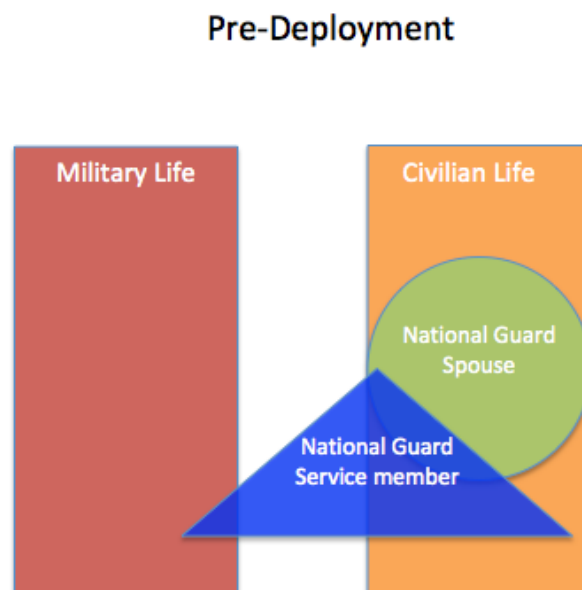
In Figure 2 (from Karney & Crown, 2007), we can see how the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Theory is expanded to include military and non-military interactions. These impact both the characteristics of each family member as well as their adaptive processes. While this model may represent the active-duty marriage, some adjustment needs to be made to reflect accurately the marriages of the National Guards members and their spouses. Since Guard members experience the military sporadically, varying in intensity between monthly two-day trainings to eighteen-month combat deployments, military experiences might take a more varied or complex role in the marital process than is shown in this model.

The military model (Figure 2) misses a key component for those in the National Guard, which Figures 3 and 4 capture, to show how in this study I am theorizing that there is a change during deployment in the emotional and conceptual spaces the National

Guard service members and their spouses inhabit from their pre-deployment lives.

Figure 2 represents how Guard members live the majority of their lives in the civilian world, but keep a foot in the military through training and job requirements. In contrast, the spouse lives in and identifies with the civilian world. This represents how Guard members and their spouses live during normal operations with absences for training one weekend a month and two weeks a year.

Figure 3 Spaces National Guard Spouses' Inhabit Pre-Deployment

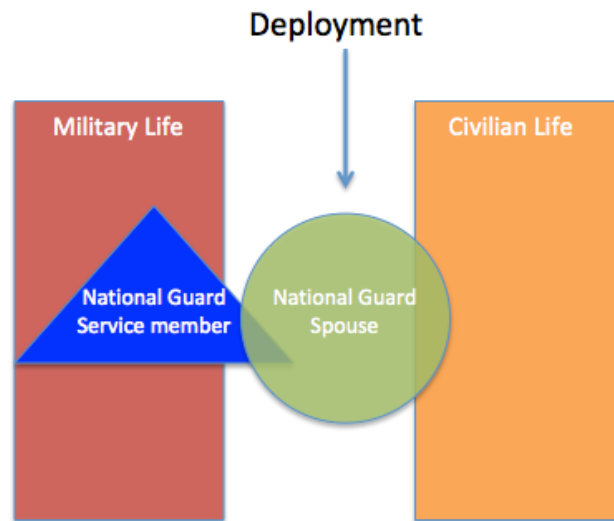


When training levels are increased and frequent combat deployments become commonplace, NGMs and their families are shifted to a zone that is in mostly between the military and civilian worlds (Figure 4). Training time for Guard members and eventual deployment draws them even more deeply into the military realm, and, at the same time, spouses are also pulled from life in the civilian world closer to the military sphere. However, while the deployed Guard members are experiencing a life surrounded by the military system, spouses become fixed in a space between both worlds. They



continue to live their civilian lives, but inhabit a space that is not quite military, but is no longer the civilian world they experienced before.

Figure 4. Spaces National Guard Spouses inhabit during deployment



For these spouses, this identity and process may be challenging and isolating. It is the unique experience of these women and men — the strengths gained, the challenges met, and the needs not met — that is the focus of this study. Even while we are presently returning to standard operations in the National Guard, the success of utilizing this constantly ready supplemental fighting force in combat is likely to occur again. We need to look to the experiences of National Guard spouses during this prolonged period of military conflict and learn their distinct stories, so that we can better meet their needs now and in the future.

### **Strengths Perspective**

The strengths perspective is a paradigm that has been used in the field of social work as a response to the medical model and other models that pathologize clients. The focus is shifted from deficits to an emphasis on clients' strengths (Saleebey, 2009). It has

been adopted by United States military in programming and educational materials in large part due to its emphasis on solutions and resiliency. The strengths perspective focuses on positive internal qualities and positive client behaviors, and enhances or elicits them in order to address life's major issues, problems, and concerns (Glicklen, 2004). By looking at strengths rather than deficits or problems it aligns with core values that are often shared by those in the military, those of focusing on strengths and on solutions (Weiss, Coll, Gerbauer, Smiley, & Carillo, 2010); "you focus on the possibility in the thickest trauma, pain, and trouble," in this case during deployment, and "you see blooms of hope and transformation" (Saleebey, 2009 p.1). A strengths perspective also avoids issues like the stigmatization of mental illness. The focus uses reliance, or the "ability to successfully adapt in the face of adversity" (Saleebey, 2009, p. 202), to better emphasize strengths and protective factors rather than deficits (Greene & Lee, 2011). People incorporate the way they are viewed into their own self-concept. In situations of military separation, this can also be imposed on the spouses and families, especially those living off base in civilian communities, like those in the National Guard. They are then impacted by how friends, family, churches, and the community and media view their situation and the war. As seen in the Vietnam War, for some this can have lifelong detrimental effects on both the soldier and the family. Even in today's culture where people are more sympathetic to military families, civilians have not had the experience of military life and deployments, and thus don't understand sufficiently to necessarily support the strength of returning soldiers' families. The strengths perspective also encourages empowerment (Greene & Lee, 2011), which is essential in situations like combat deployment where so much is outside the locus of the spouses' and families' control.

It is important to note that not every impact of deployment is negative; Newby et al.'s (2005) study found soldiers reporting both positive and negative consequences. Over three quarters of the returning soldiers (77%), reported some positive effects of deployment compared to 63% reporting some negative effects. Slightly under half, 47%, reported both (Newby, McCarroll, Ursano, Zizhong, Shigemura, & Tucker-Harris, 2005). These positive effects may be an important aspect in helping families and couples navigate multiple deployments. Additionally, this ability to draw positive qualities out of difficult situations further reinforces the benefits of this study and its focus on the strengths inherent in this population and how those strengths were utilized during the deployment process.

### **Research Questions**

I am looking at the changes in the Operational Tempo or OPTEMPO of the National Guard and the impact more frequent, lengthy, and repeated combat deployments have had on their spouses and families. I am interesting in learning about these spouses' deployment experience and the stories they tell about these times. I will be looking specifically at the following questions: 1. What are the challenges National Guard spouses face during deployments? 2. What strengths do National Guard spouses possess and what support systems do they use to help them navigate deployment challenges? 3. What would have helped make the deployment experience better?

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **The Impact of September 11 on the United States Military**

9-11 radically impacted the United States in many ways. No element of the country was more affected than the US military. Almost immediately, US armed forces were pressed into service, and within the month were sent overseas to begin what would be termed the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Since the US was emerging from a prolonged period of relative peace, rapid and significant changes were made to how the military functions. The military entered a period of high “operational tempo” (OPTEMPO), that is, an increased training and deployment schedule with the length of deployments extended up to 18 months, the longest since World War II (Sheppard, Malatras, & Israel, 2010). The National Guard was central to these changes and entered an increased OPTEMPO with units being deployed before the end of 2001 (O’Neil, 2012). Because of this war’s placement in our country’s ongoing history and its unique characteristics, it warrants continued research.

#### **The Use of the National Guard Post 9-11**

The National Guard is part of the larger Reserve forces and is the oldest component of any branch of the military in the United States (About the Guard, n.d.). The National Guard has a duality of roles and may be called up for service on both the state and federal levels. Each state has its own National Guard branch and, at the state level, governors may mobilize members of the National Guard in time of domestic emergencies or need (State Mission, 2014). The National Guard’s state mission is perhaps the most well known. News reports frequently show Guard units responding to fight fires or helping communities deal with floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, snowstorms or

other emergency situations. Historically, in times of civil unrest we have seen the Guard dispatched to maintain order. Even when not activated, the Army National Guard's federal mandate requires they are trained and equipped for quick mobilization for war or domestic emergency. The National Guard has been seen as a pool of trained soldiers that could be moved more quickly and economically into combat, thus their service in bringing active military to adequate levels after September 11<sup>th</sup> in OEF in Afghanistan and later in OIF in Iraq.

The National Guard may also be activated on a federal level (Federal Mission, 2014.), primarily for overseas missions, trainings, and, most commonly in recent years, war. The National Guard has served in one capacity or another during many conflicts throughout US history. However, National Guard members traditionally have been known as "weekend warriors" with a commitment to service limited to drill trainings one weekend a month and a longer 2 week annual training (O'Neil, 2012). Occasionally throughout US history and in a limited capacity, the National Guard has been utilized as a fighting force, but, in response to OEF/OIF, the National Guard was activated to federal service and deployed to combat missions in record numbers.

It is important to differentiate the terminology used regarding these varied missions. In the National Guard, the term "deployment" denotes an overseas mission lasting 6-18 months. This deployment is often to combat in a war zone and will be differentiated from a "mobilization" which is usually shorter in duration, non-combat related, and usually within the United States. A mobilization is treated differently than a deployment in that a deployment requires a rigorous training schedule, whereas, in contrast, the Guard maintains a readiness for response to mobilizations through their standard trainings and drills.

## **Unique Elements of the Global War on Terror**

The conditions of this conflict have been unprecedented since World War II. Military conflicts since Vietnam have been short in duration, conducted mainly from the air and sea, and have had a relatively low death count. In contrast, the hallmarks of the OEF/OIF conflicts are a high level of insurgent combat, roadside bombs, suicide bombers, heightened exposure to physical violence and to death, and dealing with dead bodies (Hoge, Auchterlonie, & Milliken, 2006). In addition to exposure to this high level of trauma, many soldiers in this war are experiencing multiple deployments (O'Neil, 2012), which compounds the impact and increases the likelihood of psychological distress and impairment for service members and their families (Jumper, Evers, Cole, Raezer, Joyner, and Pike, 2006; Lester, 2010; Kline, Falca-Dodson, Sussner, Ciccone, Chandler, Callahan, & Losonczy 2010).

An increase in the use of the National Guard in a combat capacity began in the early 1990's (About the Guard, n.d.). In Operation Desert Storm the conflict was relatively short, involved limited ground activity, and sustained much less loss of life. For example, Operation Desert Storm and Operation Desert Shield from 1990-1991 incurred 293 US casualties (Operation Desert/Shield Timeline, 1991), compared to the 11 years and 6,207 US casualties during OEF and OIF (2012 Demographics, 2012). The success of the use of Operations Desert Storm and Shield set the stage to the dramatic increase in use of the Guard post 9-11.

This is a unique place and time in the recent history of the United States military and the National Guard. The Guard has been deployed in record numbers to some of the most difficult combat conditions we have seen since Vietnam. Many were deployed multiple times and the physical and psychological impact of the combat and trauma are

resulting in an increase of issues such as homelessness, suicide, substance abuse, physical injury and disability, mental illness, and domestic abuse. The country has taken steps to meet the tremendous needs presented by the men and women who are returning to life stateside and trying to integrate back into their lives, but the system is overloaded, and, beyond that, lacks research in essential areas to assure evidence-based quality interventions. Our study is designed to focus on this distinct war event and how the myriad issues impact National Guard families.

### **Characteristics of Military Spouses and Families**

Even without the threat of war, military life places stress on families and spouses (Karney & Crown, 2007). The risk of injury or death, geographic mobility, periodic separation of the family unit and the service member, long working hours, residence in foreign countries, and pressures controlling behavior outside of work time, can all be present in daily military life, impacting the family unit. Other professions share similar work characteristics, but this particular constellation of stressors is unique to the military (Segal & Segal, 2006). The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have placed even higher levels of stress on military spouses (Allen, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2010). Additionally, elements like extended periods of separation and long working hours common to military service may constrain the ability of spouses to maintain closeness and intimacy in their marriages (Karney & Crown, 2007).

While war can impact the service member, it also can leave lasting impacts on the family and spouse, and even the strongest relationship may be challenged by deployment and reintegration; even so, military couples are more likely to marry and age of marriage is earlier than in the general population. This is due in part to incentives put in place by the military and support to couples. This may lead to more vulnerable couples getting

married, which leads to divorce (Karney and Crown, 2007). Additionally, the stress of military life leads to higher rates of marital dissolution for military families when compared to their civilian marriages (Hogan & Seifert, 2010). Even when age of first marriage was accounted for, couples with over two years of military service had a significantly higher divorce rate than civilian couples. This is exacerbated by extended service and lengthy multiple deployments. Additionally, military wives report a strong belief that military stress contributes to divorce (Martin, Rosen, & Sparacino, 2000). This belief could create additional discord and risk for the couple, especially in times of high stress like deployment and separation. This is possibly an even higher risk for spouses of deployed National Guard soldiers. I plan to explore the risks and stresses, complexities of deployment for these spouses.

### **Characteristics of National Guard Spouses and Families**

Members of the National Guard and Reserve forces display many of the same characteristics as the active duty component, especially during times of war. However, it is important to note there are critical differences due to their lives consisting primarily of being civilians in the civilian world. The challenges and demographics of the National Guard differ from active members of the regular military. Guard members are, on average, slightly older and more likely to be married, compared to their active duty counterparts (32/28 years, 47%/36.6%), and are less likely to have children (33.7%/43.7%) (2010 Deployment, 2012).

For this current generation of the Guard, the higher levels of engagement in war have led to an influx of new concerns and issues. Spouses and families of members of the National Guard have never had to experience lengthy multiple deployments necessitating adjustment to long periods of separation and having to navigate life on their



own. From single parenting to taking over household tasks they find unfamiliar or difficult, they have learned to manage their shared lives alone, many finding pride in their independence and others struggling and needing more support than is available (Karney & Crown, 2007). Our study seeks to learn the characteristics and experiences of this newly created population of military spouses.

### **National Guard Services for Spouses and Families**

An important distinction between the National Guard and the active military is the presence and distribution of institutional supports, services, and benefits. While active members of the regular military and their families have lived on or have access to bases and are surrounded by supportive services and programs, those of members of the National Guard do not. Prior to deployment and during training periods the services available to Guard members and their families are limited, even if a Guard soldier's deployment triggers access to more programs and services. Indeed, this is one of the primary reasons stated for joining the National Guard, and their benefits can provide support and services for their spouses and families while the service member is deployed (Zubik, Hastings, & Glisson, 2014). While they are not as comprehensive as the benefits in the active component military, the National Guard member has the option of buying health insurance (TRICARE), retirement after 20 years service, educational assistance, and the access to VA loans (Summary of VA Benefits, 2014). More services are available once the Guard member has been activated, including free access to Family Resource Groups and Family Assistance Centers, TRICARE, National Guard Military Child and Youth Program, Military OneSource, Red Cross, and the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (Service Member, Family, and Employer Support Programs, 2014).

These services become accessible if the activation is longer than 30 days in duration (Your Benefits, 2014), and in these situations the benefits increase and extend to the family. “Family” as defined by the Department of Defense consists of legal dependents of a reserve component member including spouse, unmarried children under 21 or full time students under the age of 23, or a child with a severe mental or physical handicap (Illinois National Guard Readiness Guide, 2013). These benefits begin day one of the soldier’s activation and end usually 30-60 days after deactivation. The period of eligibility may extend up to 180 days with enrollment in the Temporary Assistance Management Program (TAMP) (TRICARE Choices, 2014). If Guard members have civilian jobs to which they are returning, they may transition back to those benefits, but if they are unemployed or have lost their employment, then they have to purchase health care, with tremendous local variations

Two of the programs most frequently utilized by spouses during deployment are the Family Readiness Groups, which are educational support groups and TRICARE, the military’s health care program (Castaneda et al., 2009). Even with this array of services, spouses and families of deployed members of the National Guard indicate that important needs remain to be met effectively.

### **National Guard Family Program (Family Readiness Groups)**

The National Guard Family Programs were established in 2005 in an effort to meet the needs of spouses and families of deployed Guard members (J. Horsley, personal communication, March 2014). Each state has its own program that follows the national Family Program mission “To establish and facilitate ongoing communication, involvement, support and recognition between National Guard families and the National Guard in a partnership that promotes the best in both” (Family Program Mission, 2014).

The Family Program offers a wide array of services and programs: ID cards, financial assistance, grants, youth services, counseling (financial and psychological to service members and family members), re-integration, pre-mobilization briefings, family briefings, volunteer services and reimbursement, holiday events, Family Readiness Group training and assistance, regulation monitoring and assistance for various programs, referrals, and any other assistance required (Service Member, Family, and Employer Support Programs, 2014).

There are two major components of the Family Programs that can help National Guard spouses and families during and after the deployment experience. The first is the Family Assistance Centers (FAC). These centers are a centralized location to access the many services and programs. These centers are open to all military members and their families. In Illinois there are 7 FACs located throughout the state.

The second is the Family Readiness Groups (FRG). FRG's are comprised of anyone who has a family member or loved one who is deployed, usually spouses, but it can include parents, siblings, and friends (J. Horsley, personal communication, 2014). FRG's focus is on educating these family members about deployment and combat duty, and providing support and community to these women and men who are in the lives of deployed service members. FRG's hold regular support group meetings, provide educational materials about deployment-related topics, and organize events for the day of deployment and redeployment back home. Every Guard unit must to have a FRG associated with it, with a leader appointed by commander, who can be a spouse from the unit or a National Guard member who is not deployed. While FRG leaders are trained by the Guard, there are no hiring criteria or specific qualifications for the position, which

creates a wide variety in the effectiveness and benefit spouses may receive from the group, particularly under the much greater stresses of recent combat experiences.

## **TRICARE**

When members of the National Guard are deployed to a contingency operation or overseas combat deployment, they automatically qualify for TRICARE, the military health care system, either TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Remote. A wide variety of health care services are available through TRICARE including dental, pharmaceutical, and mental health services. Mental health services may be accessed at military hospitals or clinics, when available, but require prior referral and approval in order to receive health care from civilian providers (TRICARE Choices, 2014). In order to access services, service members are automatically enrolled, but need to register their family with Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) (TRICARE Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System, 2014), from which they receive ID cards that provide access to other military services, such as use of commissaries on bases and other services. All TRICARE services are free to the Guard member and most services are free or at minimal cost to eligible family members, and can be accessed through a military base or at remote approved locations. This can be extremely helpful for families that may not have access to the service member's civilian insurance during the deployment, but is not without challenges and gaps in services.

## **Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program**

Department of Defense offers a wide group of services and events that are aimed at improving the well-being of National Guard and Reserve members and their families (Yellow Ribbon Program, n.d.). Education is provided through webinars and at events on a variety of topics including healthcare, employment and financial and legal benefits.

They referral to services throughout the deployment process, but many target reintegration of the service member home. They provide information to aid the reunification of couples and families. The Air Guard has recently been offering a Couple's Enrichment Program, aimed at providing education to couples to build and maintain healthy unions (Yellow Ribbon Program, n.d.). Other educational events have been offered to other areas of the Guard including marriage retreats after the service member returns from deployment.

### **American Red Cross**

The American Red Cross offers members of the military and their families confidential referral to local, state, and national services (Red Cross, n.d.). They are housed at military locations globally, or through 1-877-272-7337. Additionally, they offer emergency services 24 hours a day 7 days a week. Service members, their spouses, and families can contact the Red Cross if there is a family emergency. They also can contact the Red Cross if they are worried about the mental state of a deployed service member. They then connect that soldier to services.

### **Gaps and Issues with National Guard Programs and Services**

A common critique of the National Guard has been the lack of services and programs for spouses and families of Guard members (Figley, 1997). Due to these concerns regarding access and availability of services during the increase in OPTEMPO, a task force was set up in 2006 to determine if the available resources for service members and their families were adequate and meeting their needs (Verdeli et al., 2011). This report found gaps and barriers to care for military spouses, especially relating to mental health care, caused by the influx of returning service members, which had overloaded the system, resulting in long delays or referral to outside civilian resources

that may not be familiar with the unique issues and most effective interventions for military specific experiences (Presidential Task Force on Military Deployment Services, 2007). Even today the ramifications of an overloaded Veteran's Association (VA) system can be seen in a recent investigation conducted into whether waiting lists are prohibitively long, allowing veterans to die before receiving treatment (Bronstein & Griffin, 2014).

Guard and Reserve families are more at risk than active military troops who leave their families on bases that provide legal counseling, medical care, and other wraparound services and support (Hall, 2008). Even though steps have been taken to add additional programming and services, there are still gaps in services and areas that need restructuring or improvement. A significant issue is the geographic distribution of the FAC's and FRG's; for example, the seven Illinois National Guard FAC's, are dispersed throughout the state, such that spouses and families often live several hours from the nearest one (J. Horsely, personal communication, March 28, 2014). This geographical aspect dramatically limits the accessibility of the centers for many spouses. Furthermore, while there are 98 FRGs in Illinois, because group assignment is tied to the service member's unit and not to geographic proximity to their home, the group assigned may not be the closest. While this helps to create a cohesive experience for the group members, assignment to a group many hours away from home makes it difficult to attend meetings. Between finding childcare, money for transportation, and extensive travel time, trips to distant FRGs is unrealistic.

Additionally, enrollment in TRICARE is often characterized by delays in accessing military health care and mental health services (Kuehn BM, 2009; Gorman et al., 2011). Not only are these delays frustrating for service members and families, but

they can also detrimentally affect their physical and mental health if acute conditions are not treated. Since deployments are times of increased stress and carry with them higher incidences of mental illness, delays can put the families at risk without providing options for adequate care, both because of delays in enrollment and because of prohibitive distances. There are also complicating factors with TRICARE REMOTE, which was created for use by the active members of the regular service who are stationed on bases with easy access to military hospitals and clinics, so receiving the same level of care in locations more than fifty miles from a base can be difficult. A National Guard spouse who needs to access TRICARE for insurance, but lives outside the catchment area is assigned the nearest primary care physician, sometimes hours away, even in another state. This program operates much like an HMO, and a physical visit to this primary care physician is needed for any referral, even if appropriate medical care is available closer (J. Horsely, personal communication, March 28, 2014). This lack of access to military support networks and resources can add to the feeling of isolation and leave ongoing needs unmet (Lapp, Taft, Tollefson, Hoepner, Moore, & Divyak, 2010).

An additional concern with these programs and services is the issue of confidentiality. While many of the services state their services are confidential, this may not mean confidential from the military.

These compounding barriers and gaps in officially-provided resources have prompted us to question what services and supports Guard families are actually accessing during times of deployment. That is, I seek to gather knowledge about what formal and informal supports are being used by Guard spouses during and after deployments. Additionally, I seek to determine the perceived helpfulness these services provide to spouses and families, any gaps in both military and civilian services, and unmet needs the

spouses and families experience during this time. Soldiers are concerned with losing their rank or command. Spouses do not want to harm the NGMs' careers. This lessens the likelihood that either party will seek mental health help from these sources.

### **Research with Military Spouses**

While the majority of the studies conducted in the past 13 years have been directed at returning soldiers, some few have been aimed at the programs, services, and interventions for military spouses. One study found that the partners of soldiers were experiencing their own primary trauma, especially re-experiencing and arousal symptoms from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which impacted marital satisfaction (Hamilton, Nelson Goff, Crow, & Reisbig, 2009). It is thus important to consider the spouse not only in terms of secondary traumatization, but also in terms of their primary traumatic experiences from deployment and reintegration.

Yet another study found fewer than 20% of wives who reported PTSD symptoms attributed them completely to their husband's military experiences (Renshaw, Rhoades, Allen, Blais, Markman, & Stanley, 2011). Factors outside the experience of living with a spouse diagnosed with PTSD may cause traumatic stress in the lives of military spouses and these outlying reasons need to be determined. Rosen found that 70% of Army spouses experienced some mental health symptomology during deployment, but 40% report being "recovered" by the time of redeployment (Rosen, 1995); further, the longer the deployment the higher rate of diagnosis in families and spouses (Mansfield et al., 2010). Deployment, then, is a time of high stress and mental health risk for the military spouse and family as well as the soldier. While emphasis may be on the deployed soldier and concerns for their welfare, there is also a significant need for therapeutic intervention for the own unique issues of spouses and families during this time. Furthermore, since



30% of spouses remain symptomatic upon the service member's return, it is clear that all mental health and stress related issues do not resolve upon reunification.

### **Research on National Guard Spouses**

The research on National Guard spouses is even more limited than that on active duty military spouses, and there are no outcome studies on mental health interventions specific to National Guard spouses. Even though studies have shown a higher risk for mental health issues with National Guard soldiers who have experienced combat than their active duty counterparts (O'Neil, 2012), it is the National Guard spouses who may be at the most risk. One study found higher levels of depression and social impairment for Guard spouses than their partners (Erbes, Meis, Polusny, & Arbisi, 2012). In line with active component data, National Guard spouses of OIF veterans saw a relationship between greater symptom severity in the spouses when a high symptom severity was perceived in the soldiers (Renshaw, Rodrigues, & Jones, 2008).

In practice, if one partner is considered high risk, the other is likely to be as well, although this may be mitigated if the spouse associates PTSD symptoms with the service member's sacrifice. When they perceived the service member was experiencing high levels of combat there was no association between symptom severity and spouses' marital satisfaction, but when the spouse perceived that the soldier experienced low levels of combat activity while deployed, marital satisfaction was only associated with higher symptom severity. This indicates that perception is an important factor in maintaining National Guard marriages (Caska & Renshaw, 2011).

Additionally, National Guard spouses may experience more stress than regular service members' spouses (Wheeler & Stone, 2010). They are more likely to experience an unexpected deployment, have financial issues, be more isolated, have less access to

resources, and a higher level of difficulty adjusting to a deployment due to living most of their lives in a civilian setting.

Multiple deployments occurred with increased frequency in the National Guard during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. How National Guard spouses react to these multiple deployment is different than those in the active component. These Guard spouses are well aware of the difference. They use varied coping strategies to manage these separations (Patzel, McBride, Bunting, and Anno, 2015).

It is also important to consider the time of reentry into civilian life and reengagement with the family as another time of crisis and stress. Sometimes mental health issues do not arise until 6 months or later after return (Knobloch & Theiss, 2012) and this can be a time of risk for both partners. This is true of National Guard and Reserve spouses as well. Even though they may be relieved to have their partner home from deployment, to be able to share the responsibilities of parenting, and to not deal with physical distance, there is still a period of readjustment in order for the family to again stabilize (Lapp et al., 2010). While providing services to all spouses and families of deployed National Guard members would be ideal, resources are limited, and it is important to identify and target those at higher risk such as those who have no previous military or deployment experience, those who have recently moved or are otherwise isolated, those experiencing marital difficulties prior to deployment, and those who are experiencing a loss of a substantial portion of their income (Messecar & Kendall, 1998).

Even the minimal literature that exists on National Guard spouses reveals a wide variety of stress-related needs and risks in terms of mental health and marital satisfaction, and it is essential to study this population more closely in order to better understand their needs and to assure development of the most effective interventions and services.

## **Intervention Research with Military Families**

While there may be a dearth of intervention literature on Guard spouses, there is a body of outcome studies looking at the active component of soldiers, that clearly shows that interventions with members of the military, their spouses, and families require different considerations than the general population (Karney & Crown, 2007; Hall, 2008). The nature of life within the military system creates a distinct culture within which these men, women, and children live and navigate. Military families' issues differ from the general population because of frequent moves, potential for deployment and other separations, geographic isolation, and a high likelihood of having young children at home. Strengthening the family unit helps manage times of heightened stress (Black, 1993) that make it difficult to achieve a work-home balance (Savitsky, Illingworth, & DuLaney, 2009). In recent years, high incidences of substance abuse, domestic violence, suicide, mental illness, unemployment, and divorce have become apparent in veterans of OEF/OIF. As opposed to the civilian sector, the impact of substance abuse, mental and physical illness, and marital discord factor into the determination if a soldier is fit to serve (Verdeli et al., 2011). This leads to not only a stigmatization around seeking help, but also a need to hide symptomology from superiors, friends, and even family members. Additionally, those spouses and families dealing with the ramifications of deployment can experience heightened stressors that impact the entire family unit.

L. K. Hall's *Counseling Military Families* (2008) suggests myriad interventions that may help military families, ranging across cognitive behavioral, narrative, and family systems methods. It is important to strengthen the family system so family members can better respond to stress (Black, 1993). Family-centered therapy has also been shown to be effective in addressing the multiple arrays of traumas impacting the lives of military

families (Collins & Kennedy, 2008). Family Systems interventions, which work well in military culture (Hall, 2008), allow the therapist to look beyond the family unit to all the interlocking systems that are impacting the family such as the military itself, extended family, civilian work and friends, and church (Keith & Whitaker, 1984). Additionally, developing resiliency can combat issues raised by military separations (Van Breda, 1999). The therapeutic focus on flexibility and preparedness helps families maintain a positive perspective on these separations. Building resiliency has also been shown to be effective with military families in an intervention that used genograms and a solution focused approach to assess strengths and protective factors as well as areas for risk (Weiss et al., 2010).

The deployment itself and the impact it has on the family unit is often an important jumping-off point for therapy at the point of reintegration. Many times the returning parent or spouse wants to make up for lost time, but reestablishment in this new and adjusted situation can take six to eight weeks or even longer if there are additional issues and problems that must be addressed (Hall, 2008).

Another common therapeutic intervention with military families is Cognitive-Behavior Therapy (Hall, 2008). It may be used with other interventions, but is well researched and found to be effective (Foa et al, 2008; Schurr, et al, 2006 ) for veterans with combat experience and those who have experienced trauma, although there is little evidence in the literature of its use with military families. Additionally, Solution-Focused Brief Therapy has been effective with military families and allows for a focus on success and isolating identifiable problems which are then solved, and also aligning well with the military view and philosophy (Iveson, 2002).

Almost all of this research discusses the impact of deployment on the family unit. Again, the lack of such outcome-based research on National Guard families and spouses highlights a need that this study fills by contributing to the body of knowledge that can lead to development of National Guard specific research and interventions.

### **Impact of Deployment on Military Spouses and Families**

Even though deployment poses a large risk to military couples and families, most military families are successful in navigating the deployment experience (Wiens & Boss, 2006). Military spouses play an integral role in maintaining the home and family functioning while a service member is deployed (Verdeli et al., 2011), dealing with the impact on both the deployed service member and the spouse and family. As with mental health research on military spouses, the effect of deployment on military spouses is largely unstudied (Mansfield, et al., 2010), although Mansfield et al. have shown that military wives who have husbands deployed for periods up to eleven months are more often diagnosed with depression, sleep disorder, anxiety, acute stress reaction, and adjustment disorder when compared to non-deployed military spouses (Mansfield et al., 2010), and these diagnoses increase with multiple deployments.

In addition, deployment can impact families in a variety of ways, mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression being the most frequent. Rates of PTSD for military members range from 4%-31% and depression 3%-25% (Kline et al., 2010). National Guard troops seem to be more frequently diagnosed with mental health issues following deployment with 35.5% showing symptoms of mental illness when compared to 27.1% in the active component. Of even more concern is that 59% of previously deployed soldiers who had screened positive for PTSD said they did not report symptoms after deployment to avoid a medical hold. Most screening

in the military system for PTSD and other mental illnesses requires self-reporting of symptomology. Considering the issues inherent with self-reporting, coupled with the continuing stigma surrounding mental illness in the military culture, it is quite possible that such issues are under reported and under represented.

Deployment can also impact the relationship between deployed service members and their spouses. Military wives have been found to have an association between the husband's PTSD, negative communication, and lower marital satisfaction scores (Allen et al., 2010), indicating that the presence of PTSD can lead to poor communication and less marital satisfaction. Furthermore, there was an association between PTSD and elevated psychological distress in the non-military spouse (Caska & Renshaw, 2011).

Additionally, repeated parental deployment may have a cumulative effect on children and families (Lester et al., 2010), including increases in psychological distress and mental health issues.

Deployment impacts military spouses and families in complex ways. The impact of the family's separation from the National Guard service member is just beginning to be examined, and the need for additional research on the impact of these twenty-first-century conflicts is ongoing and the psychological, marital, and familial ramifications are still being felt.

### **Impact of Deployment on National Guard Spouses and Families**

Since extensive and multiple combat deployments are a relatively recent development in the operational structure of the National Guard, there is also very little research on the deployment experience from this perspective. While Guard members, their spouses, and families face issues similar to those in the active component, it is complicated by their part-time military status and geographic dispersal. A higher level of

mental health issues may also impact National Guard spouses similar to the higher rates of their Guard service member spouses (Faber, Willerton, Clymer, MacDermid, & Weiss, 2008). One study of 212 National Guard spouses completed during a mandatory reunification workshop indicated that 22% met criteria for minor or major depression, 17% met screening criteria for PTSD, and 10% reported suicidal ideation (Gorman, Blow, Ames, & Reed, 2011).

Additionally, there is an extra layer of planning involved with navigating civilian employment upon redeployment. Despite the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA)'s protections, Guard service members still report issues such as job loss, no access to benefits, and difficulty receiving promotions and raises (Hall, 2008). For some spouses it is important that they have access to military services, especially health care during deployment since they may lack coverage from their National Guard's civilian job. These few studies begin to shine a light on the potential problems Guard families and spouses encounter as a result of deployments, further data needs to be gathered to understand the full ramification of deployment in the National Guard, a process that this study begins.

### **Intervention Research with Military Spouses Dealing with Deployment**

Intervention with military spouses has its own set of distinctive issues and considerations. Almost all the literature on military spouses relies on survey and secondary-data analysis and there are few outcome studies on the most effective interventions for military spouses. What minimal information exists primarily draws inferences from studies on the service members themselves or their interaction as couples rather than on the spouse as a separate individual. However, couples, especially those dealing with the stress and hardship of deployment, may not reveal all their needs and

issues to one another. Some spouses may set aside their own mental health issues to care for physically or emotionally traumatized military partners. As with all service and intervention research it is important to study the person in need directly to determine the variety and range of services needed and the best types of intervention. Additionally, as the military focuses funding and services on evidence-based practices, it is important for research to focus directly on military spouses to better inform this process.

The impact of PTSD on the military couple is substantial. When compared to civilian spouses with a PTSD diagnosed partner, wives of active-duty soldiers show a strong correlation between the presence of PTSD and a lower level of marital satisfaction (Allen et al., 2010). An association between deployment in the past year and active PTSD symptoms was also connected to marital dissatisfaction. Further, the combination of deployment separation and then PTSD symptomology during reunification led to less confidence in the relationship and more negative communication. Additionally, stress for these spouses also is correlated with higher level of psychological symptomology (Burton, Farley, & Rhea, 2009), with even some being diagnosed at similar rates for mental health problems as their military partners (Eaton, Karen M. Eaton, Hoge, Messer, Whitt, Cabrera, McGurk, Cox, Castro, 2008). This strong relationship between PTSD and marital dissatisfaction should be considered when working with military spouses and couples and even service members. It is likely that if one member of the family is suffering then others may be suffering as well. Relationships are impacted and this creates a time of potential crisis for the family. Practitioners should be aware of this risk and monitor the family for other issues beyond the presenting problem of PTSD.

While there are shared characteristics between the deployment experience of active military couples and National Guard couples, there remain some important



differences as well, a gap in our knowledge that this study redresses, aiming to better inform future interventions with National Guard spouses and families.

### **Intervention Barriers and Gaps for Military Spouses**

The “Presidential Report on Military Deployments” was one of the first reports to highlight the lack of systematic research on the psychological consequences of OIF/OEF deployments on both service members and their families (Presidential Task Force on Military Deployment Services, 2007). The lack of interventions tailored to military personnel led to a great variability in the quality of care for the spouses and families of those service members. This is especially troubling when it is clear from the minimal research that spouses are being diagnosed at similar and sometimes higher rates than their deployed partner. Compounding the problem is the persistent stigma of seeking help that is an issue for spouses as well as for the service member. While spouses will seek help for mental health concerns more frequently than their military partners, 20% of spouses and 41% of service members still reported that it was too embarrassing to seek help despite having mental health concerns and symptoms (Eaton et al, 2008). Additionally, there remains the legitimate concern about the lack of confidentiality in the military system, and about the negative impact on the partner’s promotions or service after receiving treatment for mental health issues (Rushenberg, 2007).

### **Resilience during Deployments**

It is important to reiterate that not all effects of deployment that are reported are negative. Research has reported that some spouses reported the separations allowed for personal growth, independence, and development of new friendships (Wood, Scarville, & Gravino, 1995), but it should also be noted that this study looked at a six month deployment to a support mission in 1987 to the Middle East. This deployment is

markedly different from the deployments experienced by military spouses in the past 12 years. Again, relatively little data exists on the positive aspects and benefits of deployments, and our study will look at the total experience of National Guard spouses before, during, and after deployment, including positive aspects. It will also go further asking specifically about spouses' own strengths and their own role in deployment and reunification with their spouses.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Research Questions**

My research methods and design are guided by my study aims and research questions. 1. What are the challenges National Guard spouses face during deployments? 2. What strengths do National Guard spouses possess and what support systems do they use to help them navigate deployment challenges? 3. What would have helped make the deployment experience better?

#### **Methodological Approach**

We have established there exists substantial gaps in the research on the population of National Guard Spouses. There is even less research on this population using qualitative methods. It is the interest of this study to create a deep, rich analysis of the experiences National Guard Spouses face during periods of deployment and the reunification with the deployed soldiers. In order to access this level of “meaning-making,” qualitative methods of inquiry will be used for the purpose of this study. Qualitative data will be analyzed primarily with quantitative data reinforcing and supporting the qualitative findings. Qualitative research is most appropriate for this study because it uses “interpretive practices to make the world visible” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). It examines the multi-layered and varied meanings people can ascribe to events in their lives (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative tools illuminate the “routine and problematic moments and meanings in individual’s lives” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003 p. 5). These researchers use the variety of qualitative methods to examine the “meaning-making” people ascribe to these events. These methods allow for the unearthing of the experiences and stories often untold and help to shed light on people’s lives.

There are four philosophical assumptions a researcher should consider when conducting qualitative research which are vital components of this research study (Creswell, 2012). First, the ontological issue discusses the nature of reality and the multiple realities people may experience. This constructivist viewpoint aligns with my own research paradigm discussed later. Additionally, it allows for the multiple reactions and responses that the National Guard spouses will likely have to the deployment event and its aftermath. I then will adopt an open attitude allowing for my interviewees to present their own potentially varied responses.

Second, the epistemological issue requires the researcher to get “as close as possible” to the participants and the data (Creswell, 2012 p. 20). The emphasis to get out in the field and spend time with the participants will be accomplished whenever possible by going directly to the participants in their own communities, environments, and even homes. This is especially important when researchers do not share the same experiences as their subjects. I am not a spouse of a National Guard member, although I am the daughter of someone who served in the Army Reserves. Even so, it was important to also seek out the places and people who interact with these spouses, which was accomplished with Key Informant interviews. Additionally, immersion and closeness is essential with the data. It is important to use quotes and stay close to the actual words and meanings used. I accomplish this by including direct quotes and longer verbatim stories to reflect more clearly their experiences.

Third, the researcher needs to be aware of the biases and values they hold which can impact the process of research, otherwise known as the axiological issue. (Creswell, 2012). Personal values can impact a study by allowing their own perspectives to impact the research. This requires the researcher to be transparent about these values and express

then in both the field and in the writing. My belief as a practitioner in the essential role of strengths in individuals' lives has informed the construction of this study, but also impacts my work with them in the field.

Finally, the methodology interacts with the study and data in an inductive way, from the ground up (Creswell, 2012). Rather than begin with a theory to prove, it is important that the study is informed and changed by the process and the data. I read and reread the data and made adjustments as the study proceeded when necessary. The true nature of the questions is honed and emerges from the data and the research.

### **Paradigm**

This study uses a constructivist paradigm. This view looks for understanding and multiple layered meanings from participants (Creswell, 2013). Reality is believed to be constructed socially and mentally and may contain multiple realities rather than one essential understandable "truth" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reality is situated in and formed through historical context. It is in flux and varied between people. Constructivists seek to make sense of the world and search for meaning others have about the world (Creswell, 2013). It is this sense of meaning making shaped by historical context and individual perspective that this study seeks to ascertain. This perspective may seem to be in contrast to the firm, authoritarian perspective of the United States military system. However, National Guard soldiers and especially their spouses do not fit the traditional characteristics of military families and are varied in terms of family dynamics and composition, living situation, and views of the military system. The population of National Guard members and their spouses work in a wide variety of civilian jobs and come from diverse backgrounds. Some may identify more strongly with the military, but others may not consider themselves members of military at all. The open and wide net of

a constructivist view allows for variation in the truths that will emerge from this study. Additionally, the reliance on the participants' own points of view is essential to allow for this research to be shaped by them (Creswell, 2013). This study seeks to understand the experiences and perspectives of these spouses and allow this to continue to inform the direction and focus.

### **Selection of Participants**

*Duration:* The interview portion of this study lasted for 36 months. This time frame takes into consideration the difficulty of recruitment of participants and the large geographic area that may need to be covered in order to complete the interviews. It was extended due to the difficulty to recruit nature of this population. Furthermore, the ability to conduct interviews via the phone was implemented to include a participant that lived outside the state. The sample covered a widespread geographic area. Eight of the participants were in Illinois and ranged in location from the Northwest region, Chicago and the suburbs, to south/central Illinois. One participant lives in Alabama.

*Sample:* Nine women participated in the study. Based on the difficulty recruiting this is in line with previous published qualitative studies (Messecar & Kendall, 1998; Wheeler & Torres, 2010; Lapp et al., 2010; Patzel, et al., 2015). Due to the length of the interviews and the information provided including repletion and not eliciting new data this sample was enough to achieve saturation (Morse, 1995; Bowen, 2008).

*Recruitment Procedure:* Recruitment occurred in four steps. All participants were assured that their participation is completely voluntary, especially those recruited by my military collaborator. This was important to distance this study from military on several levels, but in this case to avoid any issues with the perception of coercion.

Step 1 in the recruitment process Thomas Zubik, a former lieutenant colonel in the Illinois National Guard and current colonel in the Army Reserves, reached out to his contacts in the National Guard and informed them about this study. He sent emails and posted fliers about the study. The emails and fliers had my contact information and the spouses could contact me directly if there were interested. Colonel Zubik had no direct access to who decided to participate in the study, their recordings, or any other data in order to maintain confidentiality and the privacy of my participants. This was the most successful recruitment technique recruiting seven participants through his contacts.

Step 2 in the recruitment process utilized snowball sampling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by allowing participants to recruit in new members. This type of sampling is often used with hidden populations or difficult to recruit groups (Beck, Bryman, and Liao, 2004). It also is appropriate for use with exploratory studies such as this. I asked participants at the end of each interview if they know anyone whom they believe would want to participate in the study. All were positive about the study and wanted to recruit more participants. This technique was successful recruiting two participants. Even though they were enthusiastic about recruiting new members and one even hung fliers from several local armories, they were unsuccessful because of the stand down in deployments and lack of active FRG's to access. Most participants believed it would be easier to recruit during an active deployment. The process was the same as for recruitment as previously stated with Colonel Zubik. They were given my contact information and emailed me to state their interested in participating in the study.

When I received an email or phone call from an interested participant, I explained the nature of the study and what their participation would be. If they were still interested, I set up a day and time for our interview. Except for one participant, I drove to their

location and interviewed them at a private location of their choice. These locations ranged from their house to a back room at a coffee shop. My recruitment rate was 100% with all spouses who expressed interest becoming study participants.

In Step 3 in the recruitment process I cast the net wider, and a National Guard sergeant major, two participants, and I distributed flyers. Flyers were hung in facilities that serve veterans and their families such as National Guard Armories and Veteran Support Centers. This was not ideal since it is rare the spouses will ever frequent these places and was unsuccessful. This is another technique that would be more successful if it was used during a deployment since spouses are more likely to be accessing services at that time.

Finally in Step 4, I used less traditional sources such as Twitter, Facebook, and created a website to recruit participants. I was able to see that these methods increased the visibility of the study through “views” and “hits”, but ultimately did not recruit participants from these methods.

In order to further add engagement and closeness needed in this qualitative study, I met with several key informants. I met with a Family Readiness or FRG leader, a National Guard officer who had experienced a deployment, and the state of Illinois manager of Family Services for the National Guard. They provided information that helped me to tailor my questions and inform my analysis of the data.

*Inclusion criteria:*

(1) No specific race or gender was targeted for selection. All potential interested interviewees were interviewed without regard to race, ethnicity, or gender. Due to the difficulty to recruit nature of this population, everyone who expressed interest and met the inclusion criteria was interviewed.



(2) Anyone older than the age of 18 who are spouses, significant others or former spouses of member of National Guard. Current and former members of the National Guard who are spouses of National Guards members may be included.

(3) All participants had to be in a committed relationship with the National Guard member while they were deployed overseas. The focus of this study is to look at the impact of deployments on National Guard spouses who experience a deployment. It is more likely the impact of deployment will be greater if they were in a relationship of substance with the Guard member. While it is not necessary for the relationship to be legal, it is essential they had lived with and had regular contact with the service member prior to deployment.

(4) All participants need to be English speaking and without observable cognitive problems so they would be able to participate in an oral interview.

(5) Willingness to allow audio recording, was required. All participants were offered the option to have the recorder shut off at any time.

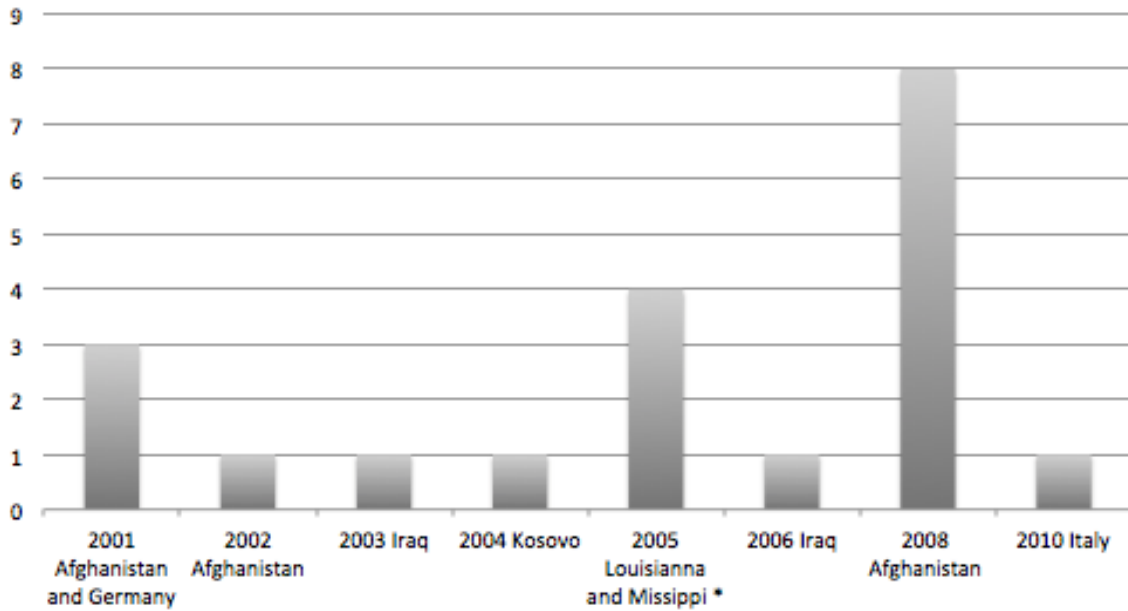
(6) Age and inclusion criteria were screened during the pre-interview phone call.

### **Participants**

The National Guard spouses I interviewed shared some characteristics. All were female and non-Hispanic white. All were married to the National Guard member and at the time of the interview. All were married to officers (mean = 77.8%) or noncommissioned officers (NCO) (mean = 66.7%). A higher rank allows for a better financial situation during deployments. This allowed many of the couples in my study to get out of debt or make improvements to their homes or other expenditures they would not have been able to otherwise. However, a higher rank also means more responsibility in the Guard. Officers and noncommissioned officers spend more time planning trainings

and deployments. They are often the first to leave and one of the last to return from a deployment. For example, one study participant was deployed to central Illinois three months earlier than the rest of his unit while he planned the deployment. The higher rank means longer deployments and more frequent separations when home.

Figure 5. Number of Deployed NGM by Year and Location



\*Hurricane Katrina and Mississippi flooding

This chart shows at the locations of deployments and the number of deployed NGMs who participated in each. For example, we can see from 2001 to 2006 there is variety in the locations of the deployments. The 2005 deployments to Louisiana and Mississippi for the flooding after Hurricane Katrina were noted because of their length. One NGM was deployed for 20 months to the area around New Orleans. This changes dramatically in 2008 when we see 8 of the NGMs, all members of the Illinois National Guard, were deployed to Afghanistan. This coincides with the United States' ramp up of troops to the area.

Marriages tended to be mostly long (mean 10.3 years), but ranged from 5 to 21 years. The ages of the participants (mean=41.2 years) and their husbands (mean = 44.7) tended to be older than lower ranking enlisted couples. Almost all of the women had some degree of higher education (89%). Most of the women had children (78%), but two did not. A total of three did not have children during a deployment. Several are teachers, and most were employed outside the home. Almost all had experienced multiple deployments and one participant was deployed herself. Two had experienced deployment from the perspective of a girlfriend rather than a wife. We will discuss later how different this experience is from the experience of a legal spouse.

It is important to note that most of the women I spoke to in this study told me stories they had never shared their stories before. Their husbands were asked to share their experiences with the deployments, but no one asked them. Their stories are an important and unheard element of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. It is my honor to be able to hear them and share them.

Table 1. Demographic Information for Study Participants

Name	Age	Veteran	Education	Children	Years Married	Age NGM	Years in Guard	Number of Deployments	Rank of NGM
Tammy	45	Y	HSD	5	7	36	24	1	Major
Jenny	44	N	JDLLM	0	15	46	25	2	Colonel
Carol	41	N	BS	2	8	43	25	3**	CSM
Leslie	40	Y	BS	3 <sup>^</sup>	15	44	25	2/2*	Major
Kara	35	N	BS	0	5	37	21	2**	1 <sup>st</sup> Sgt.
Sarah	41	N	BS	3	13	39	22	2	Major
Christina	45	N	2 - MEd	4 <sup>^</sup>	18	52	32	2	Colonel
Peggy	32	N	MEd	3 <sup>^</sup>	8	50	31	2	CSM
Nancy	48	N	Msw	2	21	55	32	3	LTC

\* Participant Leslie was also deployed twice

\*\*One deployment was when they were not yet married

<sup>^</sup> Includes one foster or step child

While these women share similarities and differences, they also have their own unique lives and experiences. In order to help bring them to life for the reader, I have created mini-biographies. It is my hope this will help inform our discussion of their stories later on and clarify who is who. This is after all their story. I have changed the names of all the participants in order to preserve confidentiality. I start each mini-biography with the story of how they met. This was my prompt, “*How did you meet?*”

### **Participant Biographies**

#### **Tammy**

*(chuckles) I seriously don't tell a whole lot of people, because people frown upon it sometimes. But we met online. After. It was actually shortly after, 3 months after my divorce was final.*

Tammy wasn't looking for a boyfriend, but was lonely after her divorce and wanted to meet someone to hang out with. She never believed in love at first sight, but felt an instant connection with her husband when she talked to him on the phone. She still tried to resist taking the relationship further. When they met in person her feelings changed.

*And yet I still... I became a firm believer when I saw him for the first time. It was like that it was a click. That's how it all started... I didn't marry him because he was a talker. I didn't marry him because he was gonna mingle with my family. I married him because I loved him for who he is. For you know... All the faults and all the pluses because I loved him, who he was, as himself. You know. Are there faults that he has that I wish would be different? Sure. Are there faults that I have that I'm sure he wishes would be different? Absolutely. You know, but you (pause) that's what makes it work.*

Tammy is a 45 year old with a high school diploma and served 18 years in the Air Force. She has been married three times and has 5 children, her most recent child is with

her current husband. She is 9 years older than her husband and wanted to have a child with him. She currently works in customer service with Blue Cross Blue Shield. Her husband was deployed once, and he left after they had been married for three years before he was deployed. Her husband works full time for the National Guard and has no civilian employment. She said she fears another deployment. She is a straight shooter and did not mince words. When I called to set up the interview she told me she did not have any stories to tell. After we talked for 2 hours at the end of the interview I reflected that she had a lot to say. She agreed.

### **Jenny**

*“In school, in law school.”*

Jenny is more reserved and was the most reticent person I interviewed. This is reflected in her “story” about how she met her husband. She did not recall the deployment as a positive experience and had issues with the services provided by the Guard. She is 44 years old and works for the federal government. She loves her job and does it well. She is close with her family, but sometimes her relationship with her husband’s family is strained.

She expressed concerns about confidentiality. She said she was worried what she said would go back to the Guard and could negatively impact her husband’s position with them. Initially she gave short clipped answers, but after I reassured her she eased into the interview. Some of the survey questions troubled her as they talked about children and “family.” I later learned she and her husband struggled with infertility. They have two Jack Russell terriers and we shared stories about our dogs.

Her husband was just promoted to the rank of Colonel in the Guard. He experienced two combat deployments and a mobilization to Mississippi before they were married to deal with flooding. They are both lawyers. He is considering retiring from the Guard when he reaches 25 years, but she worries what he will do with his free time. She knows he loves the work he does for them and is good at it.

### **Carol**

*So, he was working on his masters. That's why I asked you about your Ph.D. cause he's got 3 masters now he's talking about going to back to school. And I'm like are you going to get your PhD and he was like I don't want to do all that research, I'll just get another masters. I'm like "you're collecting masters, that's ridiculous." Yeah, he was at U of I getting his masters and I was um... we were home in summer break we grew up in the same town. And actually [had] gone to the same grade school same church our whole lives, and met one summer through mutual friends so...*

Carol is 41 years old with a bachelor's degree in Computer and Business Management. She has completed some graduate school and has worked as a computer consultant. She is the mother to 15 month old twin boys and is taking time off from work to be a stay at home mom. She has been with her husband for 20 years, and married for 8. She experienced his first deployment as his girlfriend, which was a difficult experience. She experienced a lot of loss when he was deployed, she lost her job and her dog died. To keep herself busy, she volunteered as a FRG leader. She thinks the National Guard handled some programs well, but also made mishandled information and services during over the time her husband has served. She was a valuable resource for me about the services the National Guard offers. She even shared with me documents they use to train FRG leaders. She enjoyed talking, but had to stop the interview to get home to her children.

## Leslie

*We met in the military, well through military friends I guess. He was actually at the time dating my roommate and we were all in the Guard. There was like three of us girls, we were all in the Guard. We were all roommates and he was dating her and um so then he and I became friends and we were friends for like eight years and then hadn't really seen each other but had talked on the phone a lot. You know he was like that. He would call me or I would call him and be like do you know what this guy just did or whatever. We were just really good friends. We lived far apart so we just talked on the phone then um we hadn't seen each other for about a year. We went to a party and um... er it was a Christmas party for Camp in [central IL] and um so that night we kind of made plans to get together around New Years and, you know, go out for New Years, and then the next day it was all me. I guess we talked for about four hours. We did that... that was... December 16th was when the party was and the 26th was our first date and by January 3rd we were engaged. And we got married in May and we've been married for 18 years.*

Leslie is the only participant who served in the Guard herself. She was an officer and not only served, but also experience two combat deployments. Her deployments were difficult. She was first deployed within a month after September 11<sup>th</sup>. She experienced a lot of exposure to trauma being stationed in a medical center. She had a lot of exposure to death and still experiences some symptoms of PTSD. She had to leave her children when she was deployed and talked about the difficulty leaving them.

She has the perspective of deployment from two sides. She served in the Guard for 22 years and has two children and one foster child. She has her bachelor's degree and is working as a legal secretary, but she wants to become a social worker. She describes her husband as a "work-a-holic" and they had marital trouble before and during each deployment. He also was mobilized to Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina for a year. There continue to be frequent separations due to his position with the Guard. Their relationship remains tense and she is unsure of the future.



## **Kara**

*We meet at college, [we were] two years apart and he was working on his second degree and we had gone out a couple of times and then just lost contact for 3 years. There was no bad breakup or emotional thing, it was just 3 years later he had just gotten done with school. He earned his degree but he did not walk the stage because of military school. He called me years later because he had graduated from the military school and apparently under the sleep deprivation and food deprivation, he had mental clarity, he felt bad we drifted apart all those years ago. And so that is how it started and then he invited me to hang out with him and his brother, his brother lived in downtown we hung out and the rest is history.*

Kara is 35 years old and has a bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice. She currently is working as a leader and recruiter for Weight Watchers. They have been married for 5 years last May. They have no children. She thinks it is unlikely they will have children, but has not ruled it out. Her husband is a police officer, but has a lot of specialized training from the military and National Guard. He was mobilized to Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina, and deployed to Germany when they were dating. When he received his deployment orders to Afghanistan, they had to change the date of their wedding. She says the National Guard "ruined her wedding." She can laugh at it now, but she also remembers how hard it was for her at the time.

## **Sarah**

**Sarah:** *We were both teaching at the time*

**Leah:** *Oh what were you teaching?*

**Sarah:** *I was teaching 5th and he at the time was teaching 8th. So yeah, well cause I actually am from [central IL]. So my parents and my family is in [central IL]. So I moved here cause I was actually dating someone else who was going to college. So then I happened to start working with my husband and then...*

**Leah:** *Ah...*

**Sarah:** *One thing led to another (pauses and smiles) but it all worked out*

**Leah:** *Yeah very interesting*

**Sarah:** *Yea I am still friends with my ex. To this day. So it's it all worked out. Definitely*

Sarah is a 41 year old with a bachelor's degree. She worked in real estate and now is a stay at home mom. She has been married for 13 years to her husband and they have three daughters. Her husband worked as a financial analyst, but has not been released by the Guard since his 2008-2009 deployment. His civilian job did not keep his position. Guard members' civilian jobs are protected by law. While Sarah and her husband could have taken them to court, but he found he liked his desk job with the Guard overseas. He has been deployed to Italy since 2010 and the family visits him regularly. They hope for him to get a permanent position and the family would join him in Italy full time.

### **Christina**

*“(Laughs), In a bar (laughs). Isn't that awesome, a great story for our kids?”*

Christina was working in central Illinois, but lost her job, so she was going to relocate to Chicago. Before her job started she went to a bar with her cousin who was visiting.

*Well, he was there, it's so funny. We walked in and my cousin had just recently gotten through a divorce and so just joking or whatever, we see this guy in the distance. And I said” phew, that dork?” (Laughs). All I could see was from behind and he had this whatever, but that was my first impression. And then later on he came over and started talking to us because this other guy was drunk off his butt and he started talking to us. Asking if we were from [central Illinois], and I said yah, but I just recently moved up to [Chicago suburb], and he used to work right near where I'd moved. He said I'll have to show you around sometime and I was like “Okay whatever” (laughs). I just thought he was so weird for even offering. And then when we left somehow I was talking to someone else and he had given my cousin his phone number...*

*[her husband pipes in from the next room]*

**Husband<sup>2</sup>:** *You asked for my phone number.*

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<sup>2</sup> Christina's husband was present for the demographic information and left before we began the semi-structured interview.

*Okay whatever, and so like a week later, I go I don't care if he's Jack the Ripper, I don't know anybody I don't know my way around, I'm so bored to death. So I called him and the rest is history. Here we are.*

Christina is a 45-year-old special education teacher with 2 masters degrees. She has been married for 18 years and has three children. She is a very hard worker. She describes herself as stubborn and determined sometimes to her own detriment. Her husband has been deployed twice, but the deployments were extra long due to his high rank. For example, if a deployment is a year long he will leave several months earlier to plan for the deployment, and while he is still in the country, they are still separated. He also was always the last person to return home and as a result has never had a return home ceremony. She feels bad for him because of this, but also for their children. They never had that closure and celebration that she has seen other soldiers and families experience.

### **Peggy**

*My brother just retired last year. He's in the military and they [her brother and her husband] have been friends forever, you know soldier buddies or battle buddies or whatever for a long time. So after they had come back from Louisiana my brother had a birthday party for his son and had it in [northern IL] where my mom lives and his wife's family lives. So he came and you know and just hello in passing and then as my brother was walking him back out the car he said, "Hey can I have your sister's number?" (she laughs) and my brother was like, "Dude, that's my sister." (more laughter) So [her future husband] is 15 years older than I am, so my brother calls me and he's like, "You know that guy, he really wants your number but if you don't want him to have it I'll just say, 'you know, it's my sister you're not going to talk to her.' So I said "that's fine." So we went on a few dates and got engaged within a month of dating. (laughs). Um, got married 10 months after, but by the time we got married we were 3 months pregnant, so it was just a very fast. Everything just happened...*

Peggy is a 32 year old teacher with a master's degree. She has two sons and she has a stepdaughter who is 21 and lives with her grandparents. Peggy participated in basic

training when she was 17, but decided the military was not for her. Her family has a long connection with the military. Her husband works for the state government. His current position in the Guard requires him to be away from home 2-3 weekends a month. He was deployed to Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina and then to Afghanistan in 2009.

### **Nancy**

*In 1990 we had moved to the same apartment complex in [city] each of us separately had been transferred by employers and had moved into the same complex within a few weeks of each other. And I had put a card up in the mailbox area I was looking for people to play tennis with. And he responded to that. You know the first time I had any meeting with him he expressed he was interested in a romantic relationship which I sort of quashed at the time. I'd gone to court to get divorced on the same day I moved to [city]. So I sort of (pause) I think (pause) it wasn't that I wasn't interested, but I think I knew had we dated immediately I think that would have screwed everything up. I think it was a good thing we were friends without being lovers first for the first two and a half years. So it was casual but it was very nice. He was like my best friend.*

Nancy is 48 years old and working on her graduate degree. She is the only interviewee who is living in another state. Her husband is also the only one who is retired from the National Guard. He was a member of the Air National Guard and worked for an oil pipeline before being laid off. For a while they experienced financial difficulties, but after September 11<sup>th</sup>, the National Guard had more opportunities for him to work. He made his living by taking any opportunities they had to make money. They have a son and a daughter. Her son is in college and her daughter will leave for college in two years. They have had many separations not only through deployments, but also because his armory is in a city 100 miles away. His parents live in this city and need a lot of additional care from him. He would spend the weekend with them when he drilled. Even though he is retired he continues to spend many weekends there helping care for his mother. Nancy is considering taking a job that would require her to move out of the state.

Once her children are in college, she is looking to make a move. It may or may not include her husband.

### **Data Sources and Data Collection**

Methodological tools for this study consist of primarily qualitative measures with supplementary quantitative measures serving several purposes outlined below. The primary source of data was gathered through a semi-structured interview that aligns with the research design, methodology, and research paradigm. Additionally, several quantitative instruments will serve two functions. They were administered to gather factual data such as demographic information, rank, and family structure. The short battery of instruments looks at support systems used by the individuals and families which will support the data gathered in the interviews. Furthermore, these initial instruments served as a sort of “ice breaker” or way to ease into interview process. By following an easy to more difficult subject trajectory for the questions and allowed me to establish some rapport and comfort in the interview before discussing more difficult or personal topics (Jacob & Ferguson, 2012). Additionally, often the instruments would “jump start” the women to talk about a story or event that related to one of the questions. Those stories and longer utterances were included in the qualitative analysis.

The semi-structured main participant interview ranged from 2 - 4½ hours in duration. All interviews were audio recorded for and transcribed verbatim. A research assistant transcribed five of the interviews and I transcribed the remaining four. After transcription was complete I reviewed all the recordings and transcripts for accuracy. Interviews followed this protocol: explanation and completion of the informed consent, demographic information, Family Functioning battery of scales (Appendix B) which

include the Family Functioning Style Scale, (FFSS), Family Resource Scale (FRS), Family Support Scale (FSS) and the Support Functions Scale (SFS) and conduct Semi-Structured Interview Questions. (Appendix C)

The interview started with the Informed Consent main points of which will be explained by the interviewer and signed by the participant. Basic demographic information was collected next including race, gender, and family member, but also included information about the number and type of deployments experienced and the rank and civilian jobs of soldier and the spouse. At this point the audio recording was started to protect the privacy of identifying information. The FFSS battery of scales were completed next. Answer Cards were used to make the answering of questionnaires progress easily and quickly. First was the FFSS, a valid and reliable 26 question Likert type scale that measures family functioning (Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1988). It assesses information about the use of family systems, and strengths in relation to how their family functions in their daily lives on a scale from “not at all like my family” to “almost always like my family”. It was administered with the prompt to “think about how your family usually operates”. The FRS is a valid and reliable 31 question Likert type scale that assesses the participant’s access to adequate resources to meet family needs (Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1988). The prompt was given to “think of the needs you and your husband or family experienced during the time of deployment” The scale ranges from “not at all adequate” to “almost always adequate”. The FSS, is a valid and reliable 20 question Likert-type scale that measures the helpfulness of people and systems for families. It was used to assess the supports accessed by the spouse or family on a scale from “not at all helpful” to extremely helpful”, and also was anchored to supports used

during the time of deployment. Questions 19 and 20 were adapted for this study. Questions 19 was adapted to include Family Resource Groups and Question 20 was adapted in include the National Guard in general. The SFS is a 20 question Likert type scale that examines types of assistance people sometimes find helpful and how often they needed it on a scale from “never” to “quite often”. This scale was also anchored to the needs experienced during deployment.

After the initial quantitative instruments, the Semi-Structured interview questions were asked. These questions directly address the study aims and research questions. This part of the interview sought to illicit information about the couple from their initial meeting through deployment or deployments and the reunification process. Specifically I asked about the challenges of the deployment and reunification processes and what strengths and supports the spouses accessed to navigate these times. Additionally, if not shared previously, the spouse was asked to share a story that stands out from each time. These stories will shed additional light on their experiences and perspective of these times in their lives. I additionally asked what would have made the deployment process better or easier.

At the end of the interview, I asked the women if they knew of any other spouses who would potentially like to participate. All of the participants said they would try to think of someone. One participant referred in another participant who did join the study. Since none of the participants were experiencing a deployment, this could have contributed to the lack of additional referrals. Most of the participants stated that they were not in contact with other National Guard spouses post deployment. I even interviewed an FRG leader and she even said she was not in regular contact with other

spouses. She said that it is very difficult to get spouses to attend their groups once a deployment has ended.

As a form of thank you, a gift certificate of minimal monetary value (limit \$5.00) was sent to all participants one-week post interview with a thank you note. Most of the spouses said this was not necessary, but wanted to participate to help others.

Due to physical distance I conducted one phone interview. I had been discussing my study at an academic conference and one of the attendees is a National Guard spouse and expressed interest. I contacted her once the conference was over and explained the study as I had with other interested participants.

The only difference in protocol between the phone interview and the face-to-face interviews was the consent process. I began recording the interview after I told the participant I needed to record the consent process. I read to her and filled out the Phone Consent Form (Appendix F) and will record the process including a “verbal consent” to participate. I then proceeded as I did in the face-to-face interviews. I turned off the recorder while I gathered the demographic information to insure confidentiality. I also received her approval to mail her a copy of the Informed Consent. She agreed and it was sent after the interview was completed along with the thank you note and a \$5.00 gift certificate.

Detailed field notes were taken at the end of each interview and throughout the research process. These field notes documented information observed during the interview. To maintain the flow and rapport with the participant these observations were written down later when I was alone. I often recorded my field notes on the drive home from the interview and then transcribed them. Field notes contain: (1) the physical



location and atmosphere of the interview site, (2) important non-verbal events during the interview process not captured in the recording, (3) issues that arose and how they might be lessened or removed in the future, (4) observation of patterns, initial thoughts, impressions, and questions raised by the interview.

### **Data Security and Ethical Considerations**

All data collected were kept private from the National Guard to ensure privacy and anonymity of participants. My research assistant and I were the only ones who had access to the data. While I accessed then Lt. Col. Zubik for initial recruitment, I provided him no information about who eventually participated in the study. All quotes were de-identified and all participants were given code names.

While it was offered, none of the participants asked to stop the recording during the interviews. All instruments and data are kept blind to study participant's names. A single "matching file" that matches client names to study ID numbers is kept and managed by me. It is password protected. Furthermore, all study materials with identifying information on them such as the informed consents and demographic information sheet, are kept in a separate locked cabinet on campus and will not contain the code number. A separate "data file" was created and all the forms and instruments are stored in them are tracked via the code number.

All study data and recorders will be kept secure either in a locked briefcase, trunk, or other locked device when being transported from the interview location to the study office or other locked location.

All audio recordings are stored using only a client identification number and date of interview and no identifying information will be included in the audio recordings

beyond the participant's voice. No identifiable participant information is included in audiotape file names. Further, when tapes are transcribed, proper names were edited out and either a code name or other general notation was substituted. For example, if the person referred to the spouse by name, we put [husband] in brackets where they referred to them by name. When research staff listened to recordings it occurred in private locations, and if computers were unattended they were locked.

Most data is stored on password-protected computers and on the University of Illinois' secured server or other password-protected computer.

Prior to filing, all data files will be stripped of all forms containing identifiable information (informed consent, demographic information form). The folder with identifiable information will not contain the code number and the data file will not contain any identifiable information. Both are stored in separate locked cabinets.

Digital recorders that have recordings on them prior to uploading into password-protected networks will be stored in locking file cabinets or locking briefcases.

We anticipated and were correct that we did not need to use our suicide protocol during this study.

The women stated they wanted to participate to help others. They believe the National Guard will be utilized again on extended combat missions and wanted to improve things for future Guard spouses. While some initially stated they did not believe they had a story to tell, the interviews were all quite lengthy and they provided rich information. They also disclosed that they had never been asked to tell their story. Many of the stories I heard were ones they had never shared with anyone. During the interviews we connected well and they seemed to enjoy the opportunity to share them with me.

## **Data Analysis**

The quantitative data was entered into and analyzed using SPSS. The demographic data was examined using descriptive statistics. This data mainly focuses on the race, age, family structure, and other descriptive categories and mean data and ranges is reported. The FFSS battery was also analyzed using frequencies and means and was compared to the qualitative themes and codes. The Family Functioning Style Scale and the Family Support Scales were found to be the most closely tied to the themes in the study and are included as a method of triangulation and support of the qualitative data.

The semi-structured interviews were be transcribed verbatim initially into Microsoft Word. All recordings were listened to again and transcriptions were reviewed by me to assure accuracy. Since I conducted all the interviews, this step results in a double check for both me and my research assistant for accuracy and also to continue to keep me close to the data. They were uploaded into N-Vivo software for coding. Interview transcripts were read throughout the research process multiple times looking for emerging themes and patterns in the data (Sandelowski, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Savin-Badin & Major, 2013) and allowed the data to inform the research process. Themes and patterns were identified by my research assistant and then by me separately at first and then were discussed after repeated reading of the transcripts and field notes. Once initial themes were identified they were coded in N-Vivo into nodes (or codes). These nodes were then broken down until no further subcategory is possible (Corbin & Strauss, 2013). Node frequencies were used to further reinforce the most discussed codes within and among the participants. A total of 56 nodes were compiled in 5 major thematic

categories: Challenges, Strengths, Support, What would have helped, and Communication.

## **Evaluation**

### **Strategies to ensure trustworthiness of the study.**

In order to increase rigor, several strategies were used to ensure the credibility of the findings and interpretation. These strategies include prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking, thick description, and saturation (Maxwell, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Bowen, 2008). Prolonged engagement, or allowing enough time in the field to learn about the culture thoroughly and establish trust (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This population does not allow for an ethnographic engagement due to their wide spread geographic distribution, however my engagement with the National Guard has taken place over the past four years. I interacted with my collaborator and another Colonel on a previous study. I interviewed key informants and participants for over 2 years. This sustained connection to the community allowed me to establish trust to be established and increased my level of understanding of this unique culture.

Additionally, I was able to recruit participants from a wide geographic location throughout Illinois and one from Alabama. This helps to increase the variety in my sample as I had participants from rural, suburban, and metro locations. This distinguishes my study from other similar National Guard spouse studies which had more homogeneity in the location of their participants.

I used triangulation by including a variety of methods aimed at increasing the credibility of the findings (Maxwell, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The mixture of demographic information, in-depth participant interviews, key informant interviews, and

quantitative survey data has provided depth and richness to the information I was able to gather. Additionally, the variety of data sources informs and supports one another thus reinforcing the credibility of the conclusions and results.

Peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was used to further enhance credibility. My research assistant and I read transcripts to help determine themes and resulting codes. We reached agreement assuring the findings are a valid representation of the data. Additionally, collaborator and key informant, Colonel Zubik was consulted to define terminology and review initial themes and conclusion for accuracy related to the military milieu.

Member checking was also used after data analysis was completed. This step was dependent on the willingness and availability of the participants. Two women were able to be reached and were willing to participate. In a phone call I discussed a summary of their interviews and our initial codes and themes. They agreed that our interpretations accurately reflected their perspectives. This step was helpful and reinforced our coding and analysis. It also served to ensure any biases and personal values of the research staff did not impact the analysis.

An additional step to assure trustworthiness in this study will be increasing the validity through thick description (Geertz, 1973; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thick description moves beyond superficial recording to include the full range of “circumstances, meanings, intentions, and strategies, motivations that characterize a particular episode” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 296). It is not merely the relation of a wide variety of facts, but rather the way this breadth of knowledge is interpreted that creates thickness.

Finally, the study attempted to reach saturation with the data (Bowen, 2008). This process is used in qualitative data to insure a full breadth of views, ideas, and perspectives within the population are represented in the study. The process of recruitment was impacted by the difficult nature to recruit participants. The number of participants is in line with other qualitative studies of National Guard spouses. While the size may have contributed to a limitation in this area, the length of the interviews and breadth of the information provided, it is believed in most areas saturation was achieved.

Additionally, there are several qualities intrinsic in the design of the study that make it unique and increase the trustworthiness of the findings. As stated previously, all previous research on this population had some affiliation with the National Guard, Department of Defense, Department of Veteran's Affairs, or other military related organization. Even outside companies, like RAND Corporation, which has conducted at least one large-scale phone study on military spouses received funding from the DoD. This study's neutrality, separation, confidentiality, and privacy of data makes this study unique. It created a challenge in terms of access to participants, as this study has not been given a list of National Guard spouses. However, this buffer and independence should be viewed as a methodological strength. That is, it is possible previous results were skewed due to the participants' fears that their answers would be connected back to their military involved spouses. While conducting this study both National Guard members and spouses saw this as a benefit. Many discussed their past reluctance to share honest views through military channels for apprehension of career repercussions. I was asked by several of the women if the National Guard, or even their spouse had access to

their answers. All were very relieved and this protection allowed them to be completely honest in our interviews.

In addition, this “outsider” status can be viewed as both a challenge and as a benefit. Some spouses may have viewed me with some suspicion and my lack of shared experience might limit my ability to fully understand them. However, I believe this “outsider-ness” worked as a strength in this study. Not only could I rely on my ability to keep their information confidential, as outlined above, but I also held no expectations for how they “should have” navigated deployment. I approached these women with an openness and curiosity to gathering knowledge about their experiences and stories. I made it clear that they are experts in their own lives. I also sought only to learn and possibly access information that will improve services for women who experience future deployments. I was able to use my experience as a therapist to establish rapport, but also to remain non-judgmental about how they coped with deployment. As a result they disclosed deeply personal stories about their relationships and families. Two women discussed the potential for divorce, both in the past and currently. This level of comfort and disclosure may in part be due to my therapeutic skills, but also could be due to my lack of a position as a stakeholder.

#### **Limitations of the study.**

There are limitations that should be discussed in this study. One limitation involves the size of the study. Though I used many methods of recruitment, I was able to recruit just 9 participants. While this is consistent with the few qualitative studies conducted on this population, it is still a small size. Size is mitigated to some extent by triangulation and saturation, concerns cannot be eliminated entirely and it impacts

generalizability. That being said, the main focus of this study to develop a deeper understanding of how National Guard spouses navigate deployment and reunification and shedding never before seen light onto their stories and experiences does not need high numbers to accomplish.

Another limitation related to sample size is the recruitment processes used may not have generated enough variation in the sample group. The initial use of a primary referral entity, Colonel Zubik, and additional snowball sampling seems to have resulted in a skewed group of participants. While I attempted to access lower ranking enlisted spouses, the study participants and Colonel Zubik had no connections to that population. Since all the participants were white officers' and noncommissioned officers' wives, this needs to be considered when interpreting the data.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### FROM HOUSE REPAIRS TO FEARS OF DEATH: THE CHALLENGES FACED BY STATESIDE SPOUSES DURING DEPLOYMENTS

*“Come on Baby, ...don’t fear the reaper”*, (Dharma, 1976)

Periodic separations are a way of life for National Guard members (NGMs) and their spouses. These separations may be the normal weekend and yearly trainings and periodic short mobilizations to domestic emergencies. Since September 11<sup>th</sup>, there has also been the addition of longer combat deployments overseas. Combat deployments are by their nature a time of stress. A service member is taken from their families and placed in a war zone with risk of injury, trauma, and even death. The family left stateside has to re-form and function without that person. Challenges and stressors arise, some are anticipated and some unexpected. The spouse who remains at home has to learn how to negotiate them.

In this chapter I will discuss the challenges these women experienced during their husbands’ deployments. We will see the way external and internal sources make deployments more difficult. We will also see relationships tested by divorce. Finally we will discuss the role the fear of the death plays in the deployment process.

#### **From the Outside**

Problems emerging outside the couple or family unit bring their own set of challenges. The start of these stresses came after September 11<sup>th</sup>.

*Sarah: Oh yeah. You know. Everything changed at that point that’s (pause) The Guard, the Reserves, their whole role in the military changed September 2001.*

Sarah reflects a sentiment many of the spouses shared, the change in the Guard after September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Since many of my participants were in long standing

relationships with their husbands, either married or unmarried, they had a deep familiarity with how the National Guard worked. That all changed after 9-11, the National Guard was pressed into service in record numbers and year long combat deployments became status quo.

For many of the spouses there is a line of demarcation separating the time before and the time after September 11<sup>th</sup>. Nancy and her husband were going through a rough time after he lost his job and was looking for work to make ends meet. He had found work in a new job where he spent a lot of time on the road traveling. Even though they were dealing with long separations, initially things were looking up for them.

*Nancy: Then he left for a month. Then in the late part of the summer, I joined him and we had fun, we came back on the 3rd of September of '01. We thought we would have some time off. And we came home on the 3rd and the towers fell on the 11th and our whole world changed again.*

### **Anticipation of deployment**

Often deployments are planned by the military years in advance and the soldier is told up to a year in advance. While having time to plan for the separation is helpful, it can also be a stressful time. Each holiday is marked as it could be their last, even if only for a while.

*Carol: [It's like] "Oh next Christmas he won't be here. Oh next Easter he won't be here. Oh next Valentines"... it's hard to be in the moment and enjoy where you are at 'cause you know what is coming down the road.*

The stress of his upcoming departure prevented Carol from enjoying the time before her husband left. The temporary separation was not the only issue, it also was an underlying thought that possibly this would be the last Christmas ever they would celebrate.

The military is a force that wields considerable control over their lives in ways

they had never anticipated before the war. When couples heard about possible deployments they had to make adjustments and change plans. Major life events were changed or delayed.

*Carol: We put off having kids at that point. We made a lot of life decisions now that we knew that it was coming. Certainly I would want him to be there. If it was a shorter notice and we still were trying to have kids, you know, that would have been disappointing, so maybe it was a good thing, but it literally added 3 years wait time...so preparing for the deployment was really hard.*

Carol and her husband ended up waiting three years to have children. They eventually got pregnant and had twins, but this decision changed the course of their lives.

Kara had just finished a long-term relationship with someone in the Army when she met her future husband. She was relieved he was in the National Guard because they did not usually get deployed and seemed safer. Once they were notified of his impending deployment, major events had to be rearranged.

*Leah “And then so then you guys got married...”*

*Kara: “(laughs) thank you to the military for this one. Uh we were supposed to be married August of ‘08 [during the 2008-2009 deployment].”*

*Leah: “Ohhh...”*

*Kara: “Yes. August 15 they deployed. So he came home somewhere around January-ish time frame. And said ‘we need to talk’ and that was when he told me he was being deployed.”*

*Leah: “Ah...”*

*Kara: “So we had to move our entire wedding 4 months earlier. We wanted to make sure we had time for our honeymoon and everything. So that is how I ended up getting married in May. It ticked me off because I had to change the colors (laughs).”*

*Leah: “(laughs) Oh..”*

*Kara: “But uh so we were married for four months before he was deployed.”*

*Leah: “But you been you been together for a while, but not married.”*

*Kara: “4 and half years.”*

*Leah: “Oh, well that is a long time.”*

*Kara: “Yes it is.”*

*Leah: "Yeah, yeah. So the military intervened to get you together and then it just kind of messed up..."*

*Kara: "Then it **ruined** my wedding plans. But luckily people had pity on us and yeah..."*

While she was kidding when she talked about this, it was also clear this made an imprint on her. It changed the course of her life.

### **Isolation and Disconnection**

As stated earlier, very few NGMs and their families live on bases. They are disconnected from the services and programs available on a base, but also miss the community of understanding that comes from being surrounded by people also experiencing deployments. Additionally, people today are less likely to know or communicate with their neighbors (Putnam, 1995). This is in contrast to World War II when the country was more connected to each other and if you did not have a family member who was in the war you knew someone who was. The combination of current times and distance from bases, create a feeling of isolation for these spouses.

*Carol: They do now but um I do think that is a challenge for as we talked about earlier National Guard families. You are going to integrate with non-military family. I think the statistic I read recently, I think the statistic was .01% of people in the country serves...but in the 40s and 50s where the percentage was much higher. So everybody would know somebody, you know, maybe not in their immediate family but "I know so and so from down the block" or "I know so and so from the store or the church" um... now its few and far between you know that people might not understand or comprehend what the sacrifices are for the soldiers, let alone their family unless you know a military family.*

Carol goes on to explain how this disconnection from her neighbors added to the stress of the deployment. She wondered what they thought had happened between her and her husband. Did they think he had left her? Why was she suddenly living in this new house alone?

***Carol:** We were just building a house. Because we had just moved it's not like our neighbors knew us. They didn't know who he was and that he was deployed to Afghanistan. So, I'm just this crazy woman living in this giant house all by myself. Um and yeah and we got an acre lot that we live on and um... we didn't have at this time a riding lawn mover. So I would be outside every week just pushing my little push mower. I asked my neighbors, who are my friends now, did you just look at me and be like "what is wrong with her?" They were like, "you did look really pitiful and we were wondering where your husband was?"*

Even when the service member is stateside, long separations can occur due to the location of where they train and drill. The National Guard stopped placing soldiers at the nearest base or armory, but sent them according to their skills and rank. Often soldiers' home armory is a distance from where they live. This can cause long separations from family and their civilian job even when they are not deployed.

***Jenny:** I felt like I was on my own... He's been everywhere except whatever's close it's kind of funny, um... the last when he went the last deployment was out of [downstate IL] that was like a 5 hour drive for him just to go to drill. So he had to leave on Friday and then get home like you know after midnight on Sunday.*

Jenny's husband's home base was never closer than 2 hours away. This means even without deployment, he is spending a lot of time away from home. This increases the amount of separation experienced by both spouses. In addition, he is a commander and spends more time planning drills and training. Officers and noncommissioned officers experience more separation than lower ranking enlisted Guard members due to the nature of their rank.

For Christina the isolation did not occur until the second deployment. She has the support of an informal military community during the first deployment. She was able to find local support from local military spouses that were experiencing similar situations. Losing that support made the second deployment more difficult even though she had

more support from her civilian family and friends.

*Christina: The second [deployment] I had more family and friends support, but they didn't understand. They didn't under... (pause) so for me, that first deployment I had more because I knew people who were living the same life I was and even if our situations were different.*

This distinction is important to note, it is less the quantity of support and more the type of support that is essential. We will see this throughout this study; the geographic location of NGMs and their families away from military systems is a large challenge that needs to be overcome when deployments occur.

Two of the women in the study were not married to their future husbands during the earliest deployment. Unmarried partners are not considered “next of kin” by the Guard and as a result receive very little communication from the Guard about their partners during a deployment. This extends to unmarried partners with children. As a FRG leader, Kara invited these partners into her group and shared as much information with them as she could, but often this fell short.

*Kara: Probably one of the most frustrating things for me was seeing what girlfriends went through. Um, I got information because I was a spouse and it also just so happens that I am really good with telling my in-laws and my parents about what is going on. But if you are a girlfriend you get nothing you get no information what so ever. I get the fact that yes maybe the guy found the girl a week before he was deployed. But we also had some girlfriends and fiancés that had even been with the soldiers for a couple years that got not information but the military wouldn't really tell them anything.*

This lack of communication for unmarried partners can make deployments even more stressful. Information in these situations is usually filtered to the soldier's parents who may or may not pass it along to the fiancé or partner.

## From the Inside

While outside issues brought stressors into the deployment experience, there also were internal factors that challenged the spouses. Roles were renegotiated and women were taking on tasks with their house and in their families they had never anticipated. Some tried to plan, but often issues arose that were unanticipated.

### Personal Stresses

The time of deployment can be the most stressful time in the spouse of a Guard member. Women in my study discussed the ways these stressors manifested themselves. Kara worked to keep herself distracted and busy. She realized this was just a way to escape the way she was feeling.

*Kara: I would just work 12-14 hours a day, just so. It wasn't pretty it wasn't pretty. Um. Probably if I talked to somebody they would tell me I was depressed I never did. [I spent] a lot of time on the couch.*

Kara never sought counseling and chose to shroud herself in work. She also turned to food for comfort and eventually joined Weight Watchers and became a counselor herself after the war ended.

Nancy had mental health issues for most of her adult life. She talks about how the deployment exacerbated her own existing struggles. She believes she was possibly at a higher risk because of the stress she experienced.

*Nancy: I was very adaptable and resourceful during those separations, but I have mood disorder issues like anxiety. I don't know if being emotionally sensitive person and intelligent person goes along with being easily depressed or sort of an anxious person. And in response to stress I feel a lot. I have a lot of strengths I think I've worried I was being a good mother, but looking back I think I was a good mother.*

Christina worked a full time job and had three children, but found a way to pursue a masters' degree while her husband was deployed. She talks about how it was harder

than she thought it would be to be a single parent, work full time and pursue a degree in the evening.

*Christina: Because you know you can't start your studying or reading until they're in bed, so at 10pm at night once lunches were made and dishes were done, everything was done. Even though they went to bed at 8:00 or 8:30, it still took me that much time afterwards. I would sit at the kitchen table reading out loud otherwise I would fall asleep. Seriously, I had to read out loud most of the time. You know I'm up until midnight the night before typing my paper of what I'd read all week long.*

### **Role Change and the Creation of a New Normal**

When the deployment occurs all spouses experience some sort of adjustment. Often this includes the adjustment of roles and household responsibilities. When a partner leaves, their roles or tasks need to be absorbed by those who remain at home. The stateside spouse needs to either take on those roles or figure out a way to manage them. For some, this means they may need to learn new household tasks or carry on as a single parent. For each woman in the study this manifested itself slightly differently, but all had to take on aspects of their husbands' roles.

#### **House care.**

One of the most frequent responses regarding role change was caring for the house. Some of the women had never lived independently and when a furnace quit or basement flooded, they needed to learn skills they had never obtained. For others, these were merely household jobs that they were happy to abdicate to the NGM. Regardless of their experience, they all had to care for the maintenance their homes their own.

For Jenny it was a renegotiation of time. She has many extra responsibilities her husband took care of that she had to now fell to her. It was less a burden and more of a reminder that he was not there to do them. The added work at home was just another task



for her that took away from getting work done at their business.

***Jenny:** I guess I was most worried about not having help around the house that was a big that was a big, uh, problem. Not a problem but not that I didn't do anything before, but we would. You know, He would always take the garbage out. It was stupid and then shoveling the drive way, and then mowing the lawn, that kind of stuff so that change so I had less time to do things 'cause I had a lot more to do at home.*

Kara had never lived by herself, and this adjustment had a steep learning curve. She had to learn all the skills of homeownership, but that was intermixed with jobs she could only imagine her husband doing. By fantasizing about never taking out the trash, she tried to avoid the reality of her situation.

***Kara:** We just bought a house. It was a little bit nutty and I was still living with my parents. I went from just right from living with my parents to moving to my own house and then he left. [I thought] "Wait a minute who is going to take out the trash? I don't do that. Who takes out the trash?" And then I honestly thought to myself what would be the worst case scenario, if I just let it pile up in the garage? I don't want to role that can to the end of the driveway. It's not like we have a long drive way or anything. I just didn't want to do it.*

Most of the women managed the daily household duties well. Many mentioned some emergency event that happened to them during a deployment. This again upset the achieved stasis. Christina reached out to her neighbor when her furnace started to go out. She learned how to care for the cantankerous machine and she even taught her husband new skills when he returned.

***Christina:** The first time it happened I really freaked out, and the first time it happened it was New Year's Eve. He was in Afghanistan, and I thought it's really cold in here. I remember thinking "holy cow!" So I panicked immediately and I called my brother and he's like "call your neighbor", if it wasn't for our neighbor, God only know what would happen if it wasn't for him. And um so he came over and helped me change [it]. Our old furnace was hard, so I had to do it all the time, go back and re-light the pilot light. It would just go out. First time it happens when [husband] comes home he's like I can't remember how to restart the pilot light. I said, "Come here honey, I'll show you. (Laughs) Come on, come with me."*

*He's like "dang! [impressed]"*

### **Single parenthood.**

In addition to house care one of the largest challenges and role adjustments faced by the spouses is transition to single parenthood. As I mentioned, some delay childbearing around deployments, but others either already had children, or figured out how to manage on their own. This meant caring for daily needs like school, meals, laundry, and after school activities. This also could be an everyday problem that can unfold while their spouse is deployed. It is not only extra work. It is also a reminder of his absence and the void he has left in their lives.

*Christina: I was emailing him one night during the first deployment, and um I heard [older son] upstairs coughing or something. He had thrown up everywhere, that's [husband's] job. We would tag team; I cleaned the kid while he cleaned the vomit. And I went back and said [makes typing gesture] "You son-of-a-bitch where are you? You were supposed to be here."*

### **Unexpected Major Life Events**

When deployments happen life does not stop. Several women mentioned unanticipated events that happened during the deployment. Peggy and her husband are planners. Preparing for deployment, he filled a binder with all the tasks he did around the house. However despite all this planning, sometimes during the deployment unanticipated events occur. When her husband finally left the country for his year deployment, the mother of her stepdaughter sued for custody. This not only increased her stress having to deal with the custody battle in court, but she was concerned about the distraction it would be to her husband overseas. Unfortunately, this was out of her control.

*Peggy: She lived with us, yeah. Until he got deployed and then all hell broke loose. (Laughs) Didn't see it coming, we were completely blindsided which is very unfair. Because he couldn't do anything, he was out of*

*country. I didn't want to... They always say to try and keep everything here calm because you don't want them worrying about home when they're there, but...(shrugs)*

### **Internal Challenges When He Returned**

The deployment is stressful, but when the NGM returns home there is readjustment and additional stress. All of the women discussed how this time of reunification was difficult. Leslie, a veteran, talks about the difficulties of reuniting after deployment. She talks about the tension between how the returning service member wants to be received. He or she wants to be seen as the returning hero. This is contrasted by a spouse who has been doing both of their jobs for the entire year and wants some appreciation as well.

***Leslie:** I think the hardest thing about being apart is when you get back together. It is... because that period of time its like... very hard. You know... the person coming home is like feeling like I'm home I'm a hero. I should be a person of honor. The person at home is like "you better be kissing my butt. Because you've been gone for all this time and I've been doing everything." Why don't you get on the mower and mow the grass?"*

Tammy echoes the same sentiment. She was proud of how she maintained their life while he was gone and wanted recognition.

***Tammy:** Oh darn right. (laughs) You might have been there getting shot at but I was down here holding down the base. And so you need to feel that they appreciated it. It's the biggest piece of advice that I could think of.*

### **They come back different.**

The women all described a change in their husbands when they returned home. Some experience the physical impact of the war like bad backs and knees. There also were emotional issues ranging from trouble sleeping to a reluctance to be in large crowds. While most stopped short of saying their husbands suffered from PTSD, they all named symptoms related to this condition. While the men would accept help for the physical

issues, all but one refused mental health intervention.

Tammy saw this with her husband. In Afghanistan he was the commander and had to keep going. He was in charge and people were relying on him. He kept his emotions in check and if something hurt he took an Advil and “kept on trucking”. When he returned home, there was a relief and she could see the impact of his deployment on his body and personality.

***Tammy:** He’s never been treated for PTSD. The PTSD thing he’s never been treated for that. I do know that he has a lot of that problem. Uh. And I believe that a lot of it started over there and you know he tried to put it [seeking help] off a lot, you know that kind of thing, which to me probably aggravated it more than anything. So when he was able to be home and now able to focus on what really hurt. They are trying to get the um what do you call that... Um... disability. They are trying to get that for him because a lot of his back problems had started over there. He still sees a chiropractor now.*

Sarah had mental health concerns for her husband that started while he was deployed. He was able to seek help overseas and when he returned she could see those issues persisted. He did not seek help stateside and wanted the Guard to consider him cured.

***Sarah:** But when he got back from Afghanistan it was hard. That was the hardest um...he was depressed. um... and that.. that was definitely a very hard patch and I was pregnant then with our second. So it was a lot going on just with getting back and then being pregnant and then at a job. When he was at CTA [his civilian job] he was not happy and so lot of stress I guess.*

A surprising change these women observed was the initial disengagement of the NGM from their former roles and duties. While they learned this behavior is quite common, none of the women expected it of their husbands. All describe their husbands as very active and take charge men, to have them return home and lay around on the couch was a surprise.

*Christina: (pause) Interesting... at first, one of the things I had done while he was gone. I had gone with a few people from the FRG to go to a seminar about what to expect when the soldier returns. And they had kind of said in there "don't be surprised if they don't do anything, you've had all the responsibility for a year, don't be surprised if they don't do anything." And I thought, no he's not going to be like that. Um, yeah, he was, for a month he didn't take out the garbage he didn't do anything and I think I expected you'd come back and you'd come back into your role and it wasn't like that. And a lot of sitting and watching TV and, you know, but still then he didn't sleep well, because any noise [set him on edge], you know, it was a transition.*

Jenny's husband was drinking more after his first deployment. She did not notice a problem at first, but then started to find bottles of alcohol hidden around the house. Like many of the couples, they worked out the issues together.

*Jenny: The first time was bad. He um... it was fine at first but then I... he was really withdrawn and he was like... drinking but it's funny because we both drink but he was like hiding [the bottles]. It was weird like I think he was he had I think he had a drinking problem and I didn't know it right away but we kind of figured it out.*

### **Relationship readjustment.**

During the re-assimilation relationships need to be renegotiated. This can take time once the excitement of being reunited has subsided. The transition back into the family needs to be gradual. Also, there was a new order in place and this new normal worked. In some cases, it worked even better than before the deployment.

*Leslie: It's just got to be baby steps or otherwise...I mean it's, come on you've been gone a year and I've been doing this myself. And I didn't kill the kids and the house didn't burn down or fall down or whatever you know so... I can manage.*

*Leah: Yeah things have gone relatively well.*

*Leslie: Just because it is not the way you would do it doesn't mean it's not right.*

While Christina's husband was impressed with her furnace repair skills, Peggy worried her husband might be more threatened by hers. The concept of who is in charge

at home is raised and some returning service members struggled with the “new guard” being in charge at home.

**Peggy:** *(Sighs) Um, I think any time that you're making all the decisions for yourself and doing things the way you want. And that's definitely my personality I'm a perfectionist I like things done in a certain way and then somebody comes back in and now they want things done their way and it's the transfer of responsibility. And I kind of felt like well now I'm kind of in charge because I've been doing this and the parenting thing, like let me handle it, we have a routine and we know what we are...I think that was difficult and it took some time. To kind of figure out where his place was in our lives again because our lives became "our lives." It's kind of like a break up almost and then, you know, the person comes back.* (Laughs).

**Leah:** *And things were working*

**Peggy:** *and they were working **my** way.* (Laughs)

Peggy paused and asked me a question.

**Peggy:** *(Laughs and pauses) Now he's not going to know anything I said [in the study]?* (Laughs again)

**Leah:** *No, (Laughs). No one in the National Guard has access, it's just me and my advisor. So it's very private.*

**Peggy:** *I just don't want him to know that I think I'm in charge.* (Laughs)

Tammy discusses how rocky this road to reconnection can be. Her husband returned even less social and she started to take offense at seemingly small miscommunications. Reconnecting was a difficult process for both of them. Tammy knows things have permanently changed and she cannot fix it.

**Tammy:** *You're home put it behind you and I know that's not always the easiest thing for them to do. Sometimes it is impossible for them too. They just have to learn to live with it, but not incorporate it in their daily lives...I feel selfish at times that I don't want him to behave this way, I want him to behave the way he was before he left... and yet at the same time I feel... very um... sorry for him. I guess in another way. Because I can't fix what happened to him over there. I can't fix the experience he went through over there. I can't make it go away.*

For some it is reestablishing intimacy and their own relationship as a couple.

Leslie talks about this happening when her husband returned from his first deployment.

*Leslie: um.... I mean you know it is... it's a high stress time. I don't see my husband in like nine months or something when he got home. And I was taking a shower. And now we haven't really seen each other. But we only talked a little bit you know? And um... I was like "I'm going to take a shower and we'll whatever" and so I was in the shower. Well he came in and was going to the bathroom you know. And I'm like "get out of here!" And he was like "what are you doing?" and I was like "I don't know, quit looking at me" because.... we kind of have to date again, you know? Like I don't even. "You are my husband and I love you but... we haven't seen each other in like 5 months" you know? And he was offended. He was offended and then I was like, "ok I'm sorry." You know I mean what do you want me to do you know? Like, like it was that was that was weird I didn't expect that, I didn't expect my...*

*Leah: Yeah your own reaction yeah.*

*Leslie: My own reaction...*

*Leah: Yeah yeah well it is a long time.*

*Leslie: Yeah*

*Leah: And...*

*Leslie: But it is like you just have to be like you're dating. As far as everything goes, really. And like I said you need to be a guest in your own house.*

Kara reaction was at the other end of the spectrum. She missed the physical contact with her husband and feared she would want too much from him.

*Kara: You can sort of try to put it into words but not having gone through what he did and me not going through what he did. You know so um... ... but I told him I said if you want me, if I am ever too clingy because of course when he comes home I just want to like hug him all the time. Nobody hugged me for a year.*

### **Divorce and marital conflict**

Despite the challenges they faced during deployments and ongoing separations, most of the women reported their marriages to be strong and cohesive. Two women shared difficulties and disconnection they experienced in their marriages that was exacerbated by the deployments.

Leslie was a veteran and had also experienced deployment, but when her husband

was deployed she felt a disconnection from him and her marriage suffered.

*Leslie: I mean a lot of people have feelings like where they have marital problems and stuff. And it's not... it's not because we're...I'm unfaithful and stuff like that. What it comes down to essentially is the person is um... you can become very emotionless when they are gone. You just shut down because thinking about it feeling about it is hard. You miss them and love them. And care about them when they are not there. You don't have anyone caring about you.*

Communication between them became more and more infrequent. He was working all the time when he was deployed and she had taken to others at his base to ask how he was doing. She knew he worked hard, but had not considered he would cut off communication with her.

*Leslie: I mean um... not in the negative way. You just you learn... I mean my husband is a work-a-holic. But um... you just learn that (pause) learn more about them because (pause) things maybe you didn't know. Like, I didn't know he was not going to call me for like weeks at a time.*

When he was offered a leave home and did not take it, this was her breaking point. She reached out to him in the only way she could. She asked him for a divorce.

*Leslie: "Well... I don't like the way we felt, but... my husband and I decided we didn't want to be married anymore."*

*Leah: "Oh..."*

*Leslie: "While he was gone. And um... so we um... that's why he came home so we could file for divorce, and so we filed for legal separation and then... I went on and um... He came home to actually file, and we decided to file for divorce, and we decided then to try and work it out. You know"*

*Leah: "Sure."*

*Leslie: "'Cause I missed him."*

*Leah: "Yeah."*

*Leslie: "And he missed me. And he wasn't a jerk and I wasn't that other word and so..."*

*Leah: "Yeah."*

*Leslie: "So we worked it out and obviously we are where we are now and so... I don't know what else to say about that time."*



While they did not divorce, after we finished the interview I asked her how things were now. She thought about it and hesitated. She said they were continuing to address the same issues they had when he was deployed. She is making changes in her career and said “time will tell” in regards to their future.

### **Death**

Sometimes the most interesting information that emerges from an interview is not what was not probed for, but insisted itself into the narrative. I did not probe for stories about death. In my interviews my question about challenges were framed, “What could have gone better [during the deployment]?” Often when I used this prompt I received stories that related back to the topic of death and loss. None of the women I interview had lost a spouse in combat. Some of the stories were about deaths of loved ones or other soldiers. However many of the stories were stories about the fear of the NGM’s death while deployed. Almost every woman I interviewed had some sort of story or event that related back to death. I did not notice this initially, but as I began to read and reread the interview transcripts, it became clear that death was an important presence in this study. In hindsight it seems obvious.

### **Death**

For Leslie the realities of war were all too real. She was deployed within a month after September 11<sup>th</sup> and stationed in a military hospital. She saw first hand the realities of war and did not need to imagine what could happen to her husband. She knew. This was only increased by the infrequency of his phone calls home.

*Leslie: I’ve been in the military myself and so (pause) in my first deployment I did casualty reporting, so I worked in a hospital, every single soldier was dead or dying.*

*Leah Oh wow...*

*Leslie* You know. I mean and I had to talk to them and find out where they were what had happened. Was it hostile non-hostile. Basically did the enemy do it or did you trip or you know? Or whatever and um... seeing all those people like every time they would go. Like for a period of time I wouldn't hear from [her husband and] I mean I would start replaying all of that. And God. And they were so far north in Afghanistan that they didn't even have air support. You know. So if something happened they would almost certainly die, because they didn't have proper medical evacuation stuff.

The National Guard attempted to help families by providing groups for information and support. One informational session at the start of a deployment addressed the possibility of death in the most direct manner. Many of the parents and spouses who attended became emotional. It was not a surprise, they knew their child or spouse was going into harm's way. It was the way they were slapped in the face with the reality.

*Kara:* And I think that the chaplain, one of the briefings before they left all the family members were just sitting there because we are were all required to be there. And the chaplain I kid you not, he says "the reality is folks 3000 people are being deployed and some of them are coming back in body bags" Oh my gosh. And I'm looking around and here's my mother-in-law tears straight down her face. And I was like "oh why did he just say that? Why did he just say that?" Here I'm like...I think that perhaps the message could have been tailored to family members versus soldiers versus you know. I think like you said we know the reality of it I don't think anybody was. But to hear it right off the bat from a chaplain. It was one of the first sessions we had that morning too. I was like "Oh my gosh!" I think information could be handled better with the military.

### **Fear of NGM's Death**

During deployment, the fear of death of the NGM was never far from their minds. Sarah was concerned about her husband's mental health. While the military has made strides to try and lesson the stigma around seeking help for services, many still resist seeking care due to the risk to their career. Sarah reached out to the Red Cross about her

husband when he was deployed and despite having her concerns validated, she continues to question her actions. There are ramifications to seeking mental health services in the military. On the surface the National Guard and other military branches encourage service members to seek help, but there are underlying issues. Unit commanders and officers can lose their commissions if it is decided they are “unfit to command”. Additionally, there remains a stigma against mental illness and receiving care. That being said, Sarah knew her husband was depressed and was concerned he could become suicidal.

***Sarah:** Well, he was in Iraq. I was really worried about him. I knew, because he’s normally a very happy easy go lucky person, and he wasn’t and I could tell that he was depressed. Um... and that was very, very worrying. In fact I did end up going to the Red Cross at one point which to this day I still question it. If that was the right decision or not. Um... but you know...I was worried I don’t know if I thought he was going to kill himself but I was just worried.*

The level of worry aligned with the type or location of the deployment. The women talk about Germany like it was a vacation. No one worried about a spouses dying in Germany. The distance was still there, and there were hardships at home, but the worry was less. This was the same with any domestic mobilizations. Even though several of the husbands in my study were deployed for long periods after Hurricane Katrina, the worry was less.

***Kara:** You know, I mean, we had not been through an overseas deployment minus Germany but that was. They like us in Germany so you know...*

***Leah:** Yes*

***Kara:** It wasn’t. His parents weren’t afraid of him, you know, dying in Germany.*

Christina shared several of these death stories. Throughout her long marriage she

has experienced two deployments and ongoing separations from her husband. She shares a story that distills this fear so many of the women held: men in uniforms showing up at their doors.

***Christina:** So one of my biggest fears, both deployments, but definitively the second deployment was a knock on my door and see someone in uniform. That was my fear all the time and um so that next week I knew that he was en route into the country and it can take days and um so it had snowed that morning and our secretary called, do you have coverage in your room? Is there someone in there besides you? I said yes. I need you to come to the office and I was okay. And I didn't think anything of it until I got to my door and then my heart dropped and I said "Oh my God" and it was not even a long walk from my classroom to the office and in the office you could see inside and into the principal's office and I couldn't see anyone there and I knew I would see someone in a uniform. And there was nobody. And I thought they're in her office, they're in her office. I was scared to death. And so when I walked in she made some comment like "Oh you had a hard time getting to work this morning because of the snow. Nurse Patty has something that can help you." And I look in the nurse's office and there is my husband standing there. And there I am thinking someone is going to tell me he's dead. She never understood what she did, to her it was funny, but [I looked shocked and seeing my expression] Exactly! It just... it was like the longest walk of my life to that office. That was not even a long walk, because that's what I thought was going to happen. It was a great thing, but (laughs), but at the same time I was so freaked out that I couldn't even enjoy that moment as much as I would have.*

The fear of death of the deployed husband extended to the children as well. This story Christina tells about her son illustrates how despite her efforts to help him navigate the separation from his father, the possibility of his dying was still on his mind.

***Christina:** The second time (deployment), I had found more resources online like books and things where I hadn't the first time. And so I read this book to [her son] about a father being deployed. And so we read it and I think [her son] was 6 and he said "what if daddy doesn't... You know how daddy is supposed to come home?", and I said "yes", and he said "what if he doesn't?" And I said "he'll come home, he'll come home, honey". But he said, "what if he doesn't?" Then it clicked what he meant, and I asked, "What do you mean?" And he said "what if he gets shot" Should a 6 year old have to worry about that? You know it killed me. And I know police officers and fire department kids have to worry about these*

*things too once they understand the danger. But how sad that my 6 year old has to think of that? And you don't make a promise [that he will be fine], so I said, "that's why we pray everyday and every night for his safety. And we don't know what will happen. We pray they are all safe, not just daddy."*

### **Death of other soldiers**

Some deployments were seen as easier than others. Deployments to Germany worried family less. Some Iraq and Afghanistan deployments had more loss of life than others. Eight of the ten soldiers<sup>3</sup> in this study were part of the 2008-2009 Afghanistan deployment. The women report this deployment was large and incurred more loss of life than other deployments. Almost every soldier in my study who was deployed during that time knew someone who died. One spouse reported her husband lost three from his unit of ten.

Hearing about the loss of life during these deployments on the news and from other sources added to the stress of the deployment and kept the fear of death ever present.

*Carol: There was a lot of things these guys went through, they saw a lot of people die. Um. In my husband's case they were all in a combat heavy zone. So uh you know there's a transition period, a new normal we used to call it.*

Additionally, Carol attempted deal with death of some of the men in her husband's unit even more directly. Here she and her husband reach out to the families of the soldiers he knew that died.

*Carol: I think for him it was really hard. For me I think it was nice to meet all the guys that he was with on a day-to-day basis. Since they weren't from Illinois. And um... certainly brought a even closer reality to... Yeah, I mean it was nice for me to meet everybody I think for him it was hard, cause he had to process all of that all over again um... you know without sounding mean.*

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<sup>3</sup> Leslie was also a soldier.

This was hard on her husband and brought back the death he has observed while deployed. For Carol, it brought the reality of death and deployment closer to home.

### **Discussion**

In order to begin to understand the deployment experience for National Guard spouses, it is essential to examine what made this time difficult. Deployments are by their nature very hard because of the disruption of the family unit and the separation. Combat deployments are even more challenging. It is not surprising the difficulties play such a large role in my interviews. Some of the challenges, like fear for the NGM, and increased responsibilities at home are consistent with the literature (Lapp et al. 2010). Some of these stories came in response to my semi-structured interview questions. We discuss external and internal factors, relationship changes, and the role death plays in the deployment experience.

However, there were also unexpected results and issues that had not been found in previous studies. Two spouses discussed the possibility of divorce and the toll of disconnection. The Department of Defense reports 20% of military marriages end within the first two years of deployment (Military One Source, 2010). This is further increased when the deployment is long and “hostile<sup>4</sup>” (Castaneda, et al., 2009).

An unexpected but unsurprising finding is the theme of death in my interviews. It was not a topic I probed although for active component spouses, it is a common stress (Karney & Crown). The fear of the death of their spouse and the deaths of other Guard members were topics that were raised repeatedly.

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<sup>4</sup> This refers to the active component.

We know the cycle of deployment brings with it stressors (Cycles of Deployment, 2006). Seeing this echoed in my study was then not a surprise. The stress from the deployment may start as early as a year prior to the actual separation. This adds pressure onto a marriage that often is not discussed because the service member is still at home.

Another problematic factor is the geographical location of National Guard spouses. This is an ongoing issue for NGMs and their families. It makes sense that we would see this disconnection from military systems due to their location. It also supports the theory that the space inhabited by National Guard spouses during deployments is not a military space (Figure 5). Furthermore, recent studies show being a part of a military community is one of the factors in a successful deployment for active component spouses (Wang, Nyutu, Tran & Spears, 2015). These women find a unique set of challenges that keep them in a space that is distant from military systems. This distance may contribute to the challenges they face. Some of these challenges can involve access to health care, childcare, or the support offered by the FRG or others in the military community.

While access to services is important, we need to consider all the advantages of a supportive community. There is a benefit from being able to find support even as close as your next-door neighbor. That being said, knowing that if you have a problem there are people queued up to help would impact many of these challenges. If we accept the importance of community in the deployment experience, then it is important to find ways to create this in the lives of National Guard spouses. This discussion will be continued in the Chapter 6, where we discuss the effectiveness of support people and groups in the lives of these women.

We also see challenges arose inside the family system. The removal of their

partners created a vacuum in their homes and family systems that needed to be filled. The spouse who remained at home had to work to fill the hole: they took over their roles as caretaker of the home and for those who had children, they became both parents. These new roles create challenges and a feeling of vulnerability with these women. They found various ways to fill that gap. This might have been a difficult adjustment for some, but it also brought with it a sense of accomplishment. For some of the women they not only embraced the changes they made, but they preferred them to the way life had been before the deployment.

Another stressful time is when the deployed spouse returns home. The primary emotions when their spouses returned were happiness and relief. This “honeymoon” period was followed by concern about role renegotiation and issues that might arise when their husbands transitioned back into the home. Many however, experienced another surprising challenge between the initial return and their spouses reengaging in their old roles. This reluctance to reengage could be tied to some of the PTSD symptomology and physical injuries with which their husbands had returned. Eventually, in most situations, the family systems returned to their pre-war status. However, it is one example how the deployment was carried home.

Reunification was also a time of renegotiation of the relationship between the couple. All of the spouses reported missing their husbands, however reuniting was not easy. While some needed to take their reunifications slow, others wanted to smother them with affection. For some intimacy took time to reestablish. This may be due in part to the level of connection or disconnection the couple experienced during their time apart.

When a deployment occurs, the distance created some level of disconnection



between the spouses. This may be just physical, or the disconnection may have a longer reach. Many couples kept their connections strong with phone calls, Skype, emails, and period leaves home. We will talk about how this connection acted as a source of support for some couples. Maintaining this connection may have allowed them to transition more easily when they returned.

Discovering the theme of death interspersed throughout all of my interviews was unexpected, but not surprising. I interviewed military spouses about combat deployments that occurred during wars with high casualties and extensive ground combat. In retrospect, it seems obvious this would become a theme. Some women discussed the losses the war brought. This might be the physical presence of their spouse, albeit temporarily, or the death of their husbands' military friends. Even in a pre-deployment seminar, a military chaplain was harshly blunt about the potential for the death of their loved ones. The thread of death and loss ran through my interviews. The potential for the loss of their husbands was very real. The 2008-2009 Afghanistan deployment experienced a high loss of life. 472 soldiers lost their lives in during those two years, or 21% of the entire loss of life in the entire Afghanistan war (iCasualties.org, 2015). Seven of the nine NGM's experienced that deployment, so these fears were very real. The fear of a uniformed officer arriving at your house to make a notification simmered in their subconscious and was allowed to surface only occasionally. The stress of living with that fear made an imprint on their lives and changed them permanently.

*Christina: But I think our family is much different than it would have been. Maybe not much, but we're different people because of the experiences we've had you know? We've had to come together more at times for things.*

She is not necessarily describing this as negative, but still the family is forever

changed. I noticed at some point in almost every interview the women would become emotional, with tears in their eyes, about a difficult situation or event that occurred during the deployment. This shows the lasting mark this experience left on their lives. Even though each husband returned, those feelings are still very fresh and present.

Over the course of our next two chapters we will look at the elements in these women's lives, the personal strengths and the outside supports that helped them traverse the deployments.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### WOMEN ARE STRONG AS HELL: THE PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF NATIONAL GUARD SPOUSES USED DURING DEPLOYMENTS

*“At first I was afraid I was petrified, kept thinking I could never live without you by my side...(but) I grew strong, and I learned how to get along”, (Perren and Fekaris, 1978).*

Navigating the challenge of separations during marriages takes strength.

Separations due to deployments, especially lengthy combat deployments, carry with them even more challenges and obstacles to overcome. Certain qualities can make these situations more manageable. The women in my study are a formidable group. They average 10.3 years of marriage with the longest marriage being 21 years. All of the husbands were already in the National Guard when they married. They all experienced periods of separation from their spouses through, monthly and annual trainings and shorter mobilizations to areas around the United States. However, it was not until after September, 11<sup>th</sup> that they began to experience long combat deployments overseas. Additionally, the NGMs' statuses as officers required them to spend more time organizing trainings and drills. They were often the first to leave and the last to return from deployments. The women in this study successfully navigated these long and for some ongoing periods of separation. While divorce rates rise during deployments, these marriages persevered. The question remains, how?

As a researcher and practitioner I use the Strengths Perspective as and framework for my research and practice (Saleebey, 2009). I was interested in the qualities that these women possessed that make the separations manageable. We will look at the personal qualities these women have that help them during these times. Many of these strengths

are interconnected with one another. Some of the women saw a duality to their strengths, and wondered if they may have made the deployments more difficult.

### **Innate Characteristics**

#### **Strength**

When asked to describe their strengths, many of the women described themselves as “strong” either directly or told a story that showed strength. For some it was being strong for others, Kara talks about being strong for her husband’s mom.

*Kara: She was taking it hard. I was strong for her. Um...And that is hard to when you are trying to be strong for other people. When I just want to be in the corner.*

Many of the women tried to be strong for their mothers in-law. For Kara this was another thing she had to persevere through. We will talk later about how being strong for others helped the National Guard spouse as well.

#### **Independent**

Independence was the most frequently mentioned characteristic when I asked about strengths. Every women in the study said they were independent and felt it contributed to their ability to withstand these long separations.

Tammy is veteran of the Air Force and worked in the military police. She sees herself as someone who can get things done. When she learned her husband was going to be deployed, she dealt with it in the same way she deals with any issue, head on.

*Tammy: I’m just like I said independent. Go with it. And I just take it and run with it. So I made it work.*

Jenny also described herself as independent. Over the years of being married to an officer in the Guard, she has learned to live with separations. Even stateside, officers spend more time away from their families preparing for trainings and deployments. This

can mean an extra day or two on weekend trainings, or can mean several months if a deployment is imminent. These frequent separations helped Jenny get used to him being gone.

*Jenny: I guess I feel like I'm pretty independent. Like I'm used to him being gone a lot so... I guess to me that's a strength.*

Leslie, despite being former Guard member herself being deployed twice, saw her husband's deployment as very hard. For her, independence was developed from an early age.

*Leslie: Which really helps, because when they are at war you really can't call. I mean you learn a lot about yourself because you change as a person. Like before even though I was always a strong woman and very independent. I always was. You know I never asked my parents for a dime. I moved out when I was 19. And that I take care of myself and all that. Not that I couldn't ask them I just refused. I never needed to I guess. But um... I...I don't, it was kind of hard. It's hard to be the one at home taking care of everything. It's a tremendous amount of stress. And um... and that's it's ok to ask for help. But for me for a long time was hard.*

She still experiences PTSD symptomology from her own deployments, yet also sees the stress in being the spouse who stays home. The strength and independence of these women did not eliminate the difficulty of the deployment.

## **Commitment**

Another strength mentioned frequently was commitment. These deployments were part of the package and they needed to make it work. Leslie has taken a friend's child and discusses her commitment to taking care of her regardless of the time and effort it will take.

*Leslie: I am very caring I do care a lot about others. And uh I feel like I...I always want the best for... whatever is the best for everybody, you know, like the lady said to me when I was doing the guardianship with [foster child]. She said "well this was for a year" and I said "well [foster child] is with us until she doesn't need to be". And she said "that's really great*

*because most people are like I'll take care of her as long as I have to". And she said "you said she's with us until she doesn't need to be." [and she said] "You care about her" and I'm like "absolutely". So that's kind of that's how I am.*

While identifying the story as a caring moment, it also shows strength and stubbornness that will allow her to fiercely protect this child who has been put in her care. When she cares about someone she goes into it completely and will stay the course until that person no longer needs her.

### **Maturity**

The women sample tended to be older (mean = 41.2 years) and were married longer (mean = 10.3 years), than lower ranking enlisted Guard members. They were experienced in the regular separations and several had experienced mobilizations within the United States. Through this time and experiences they had developed knowledge and skills. Several of the women saw this as a strength.

Kara and her husband got married relatively quickly before he was deployed, but they had a strong foundation when he was deployed. She saw other couples who were younger and less prepared for the long separation struggle and in some cases split apart.

***Kara:** I think a lot of it helps with the fact that we were a little bit older. We got married at 32. And I think that helped I think the fact that we were engaged for little over a year. And we have been dating before that. I think all of that helped. I think we went into that with a more mature look into the reality of situations and we talked about it. And there were certain couples that didn't really talk about it that avoided the situation. It was harder for them because they weren't ready for the reality for when the reality happened. And there was heartbreak and tears and pain in addition in dealing with an actual deployment.*

Carol too saw age as being a strength. They were older and a solid couple before and the deployment did not change their relationship. The issues she had were related to the timing.

***Carol:** Yeah I mean we. Again maybe it was we were older than the older soldier or I don't know. We certainly dealt with a lot, we were fine before the deployment and we would be fine if there wasn't the deployment. Everything was fine. It was really because this deployment was happening and the timing of it and like I said we were just building a house.*

It follows that a strong relationship is more likely to do well during a deployment, while relationship that are struggling may fail.

### **Keeping Life Normal**

Some women in the study said they were able to keep their homes and families as “normal as possible.” This helped to minimize the change at least in some ways. Kara’s ability to keep things normal helped with the deployment process and his return home.

***Kara:** [We kept it] as normal as we could, before we (pause) that definitely helped. We tried to go back to as normal as possible.*

### **No Choice**

The reality of military life means part of your life is out of your control. None of the study participants would have chosen to have the separations occur, especially to a combat zone. This requires the women to be flexible and acquiesce control to the Guard. They had to maintain the status quo; life did not stop for the deployments. There was no time for relaxing, laughing, or crying. There was a lot to do and you just had to get things done.

***Christina:** I don't have time to lay around (laughs), you know, you are just running. You come out running. And um so I think of it that way, you know from when they were young and during his first deployment and up until now. Now it's no big deal, you know I work, I take care of the house, I would cook. I mean I don't have as much time, but once I'm back at work, whereas during the summer I don't work in the summer. I think with age and experience you find out “oh wow, that isn't that bad” and I can do it.*

As time went on and there were more separations and other deployments, she had those successes and she knew she could take care of their shared life on her own.

Peggy describes herself as “going with the flow”. She sees her positivity as a way to keep her life moving no matter the obstacle. She keeps her life moving and feels that it will turn out well.

***Peggy:** My strengths, personally? Um (pause) I don't know how to word it I guess. I'm very strong, I think, I'm very go with the flow. [I'm]Positive, that helps. We deal with whatever we get and it's going to be fine. And I can handle anything other than fixing a toilet and stuff like that I have to call my mom. (laughs) But I think that's my strength personally I don't let things get to me, I'm not into drama and I don't you know. It is what it is and it's going to be fine and um that's that. I don't hold a grudge I don't have animosity it's not in my personality.*

Her ability to deal with whatever the military or her life threw at her, allow her to overcome difficulties. This positivity and ability to bounce back from problems is part of another characteristic, resilience.

## **Resilience**

Resilience is a quality that in many ways can include many of the other traits we discussed earlier. Two women in the study identified as resilient. As a member of the military Leslie participated in resilience training. She believed this was a strength she used not only during the deployments, but also at her civilian job.

***Leslie:** I... really know people. Like I um... have more than one time over the past couple years, people have told me that like I'm (pause) and I think my resilience training in the army has been really helpful too, learn how to deal with other personalities and all that stuff but yea I um... even my boss tells me “you may not know how to file motions but you definitely know how to handle people and I appreciate that” because we have some difficult clients.*



As a graduate student in social work, Nancy learned about resilience and saw it as a characteristic he had that helped her during the deployments.

*Nancy: I could soldier on if I need to I may get down, but never out. I don't completely flip out or run away, I have a lot of determination and um I would describe myself as resilient. We are a resilient family.*

She bounces back and moves on. She and her family are not impeded by the separations. In fact, it is possible the separations mitigated the problems Nancy and her husband were having with their marriage.

### **Hard Worker**

Another common strength was the ability to be a hard worker. We have already seen in Chapter 4 how these women overcame challenges during deployments.

Christina's story about having to read out loud to stay away is only one example. When asked about strengths, many identified as being willing to work hard. Leslie talks about how this is a family trait.

*Leslie: Well we are all hard workers [in her family], that's one thing. So everybody kind of... when we have the time you know everybody really works hard and help me. And my daughter she's a workhorse. I tell her that all the time.*

## **Developed**

### **Adaptability**

Some spouses had the ability to adapt and change depending on their needs from one deployment to the next. For the first deployment, Jenny was living in a small town in central Illinois, away from her friends and family. While his family was close, they were not helpful during the deployment. She also was disconnected from services. During the first deployment she was covered by the military health system, TRICARE, and found their services cumbersome and geographically problematic. Jenny learned from those

experiences and decided to make a change when she learned about his next deployment. She said people advised her against making any big changes, but she quit working for his parents, packed up their house, and moved to another city.

*Jenny: My friends think it is a funny story, but basically he was leaving so I left too so you know. I didn't want to be in [city] during the second deployment. Yes, yes I needed to be with my family mostly um yeah. His family wasn't exactly helpful and um and that's how... I missed the city, I'm from here. And um didn't get to see my family very much and we had a big old house well we still own it but um it was too much work for me to stay there.*

She knew what she needed and was not afraid to pursue it, even against what logically made more sense. Her experience during the second deployment was much better. She had the resources, supports, and a good job all in place and that helped her.

### **Didn't Know They Had**

While many of the women in the study self identify as strong, independent women, some felt this independence was developed. Sarah has broken off a relationship due to the fear to his being deployed, and when she and her husband first dated, this fear continued. However, over the course of their marriage and his several deployments and now stationing in Italy, she has learned to become independent. She works in real estate, is a quasi-single mom to her three children, and sees her ability to navigate these separations as a point of pride.

*Sarah: I... I mean for me personally I think independence and accomplishment and... uh just... pride and I mean I think, oh yeah, I mean (pause) if you had asked me 13 years ago if I would be able to do this, no I wouldn't have not at all... um and I...I...I don't think you can do it if you are not at least fairly independent. I think you have to be fairly independent to be honest.*

Kara was also unaware of her inner strength. When her husband was stateside, he managed the majority of their home care and other tasks. When he left there was a hole and her capabilities were able to emerge.

***Kara:** Well... the inner strength that I didn't know I had. Sounds kind of weird um... I never really considered myself a strong person physically or otherwise. I kind of left that to my husband. That's his thing to do. And when he left. "Wow nobody is going to do this stuff for me." Whether it was stupid takin' the trash out, or anything really. Making the phones calls to have somebody service the heaters. Nobody did it for me. If I am going to find out what I am made of on a day to day basis. Day by day, I'm going to do it.*

For Tammy the process was transformative. She already knew she had strength and independence, but having to stay positive and calm without her husband as ballast, she felt like a superhero.

***Tammy:** And so... Where I felt that I had to be independent before I felt like superwoman because I am independent so I won't reach out for a lot of things. Even though emotional whatever I needed when he was not available for that. I had to be calm superwoman kind of thing. Where it didn't make a difference what had to be done I just had to do it. So it just made me a stronger person.*

However, while most of these women clearly had these strengths that were part their nature, some were not sure if the qualities were part of their nature or developed. Which came first the separations or the strengths? Christina raises this interesting question. Which came first her independence or the necessity of being married to a man in the Guard? Was her independence innate or did it develop because she was in this situation?

***Christina:** I'm an independent person. And it's good I'm an independent person. But maybe it made me a more independent person being married to him?*

## Double-Edged Swords

On several occasions when I asked about their strengths, the women hesitated or qualified their answers. They said some of what they considered strengths could be both positive and negative. Stubbornness, intense privacy, and a reluctance to ask for help, are the main qualities they felt helped them during deployments, but also may have created problems for them as well.

We have established that Christina is a very hard-working woman. She has three children, works at a full time job and earned two masters degrees while her husband was deployed. When I asked about her strengths, Christina discussed them, but also was aware of their duality.

***Christina:** So I'm definitely independent but stubborn. And I just prefer to do things my way, (laughs) I don't know. Maybe that's not a good quality, I don't know. It works for me but maybe not others.*

***Leah:** Have you ever considered it a strength?*

***Christina:** I do, if it weren't for my persistence with things... I mean I was first breast-feeding [eldest child] when she was born it was the most painful thing I'd ever experienced. "Oh my Lord did it hurt", you know. And I was like "I'm not letting this get the best of me, I'm not, I don't care", and within 4 weeks it was better, but it took 4 weeks of every 4 hours of feeding [thinking] "Dear God, I just wanted to die." I cringed when I knew it was close and I wouldn't give up. I was like, "how stupid are you woman?" (laughs) And then when I had the other two, I went through the exact same thing. It was no different. At least then I knew it was going to end, but I wasn't going to give it up," **Nope!** It's not getting the best of me." (laughs)*

Christina is a determined woman who lets very little, including two deployments and ongoing separations take her or her family down. She is still very proud of this determination, but knows her path is not for everyone.

While Leslie describes caring for others as one of her positive traits, Tammy sees the potential downside to being so caring.

***Tammy:** I'm gonna put two of them right next to each other and that would be my independence and my willingness to drop everything for someone else, which I guess could be a fault. Some people look at that as a fault, because I am forever "I won't do this. Somebody else wants this. Somebody else wants that." Um... they always know me to be the giving person even if it hurts. To some people that's a strength a lot of people say "that's your worst... your worst enemy. Don't do that." But yet I'm proud of that because I like to... I like to see people happy and I do it to a fault. And I know I do. And my husband "well why'd you let yourself get screwed like that?" well I did... you know. "it's what they needed" "I know but"... so my... independence and willingness to help somebody even though some people see that as a fault.*

Christina reiterates this duality and how reluctant she is to seek help.

***Christina:** [I am] totally hugely stubborn, which explains a lot as to why I say if [his family] had asked to help I probably wouldn't have accepted it...even my good friend, she gets mad, "why don't you ask me, why don't you ask for help?" And if it weren't for them pushing me to ask for help I probably wouldn't have as much as I did.*

It is easy to see how refusing help may make situations more difficult. Even though she wanted his family to have offered to help after the flood, she probably would have turned them down. It took Christina's friends pushing her to get her to reach out even occasionally.

## **Discussion**

We have already discussed the deployment challenges experienced by the women in this study. We now see how their personal strengths helped these women to overcome difficulties. A Strengths Perspective looks at these qualities and their transformative ability even in difficult times. We will discuss these personality trends and how they impact deployment experiences. We will see how these findings were reinforced with the

data from the Family Functioning Scale. Many of these strengths are positive, but some have duality that may have helped and hurt the process.

The ability to successfully navigate these long separations takes strength. All of the women in the study made it through the deployment with their marriages intact. Even though they experienced many difficulties during the deployment, they have all moved on with their lives. While they are changed by the experience, they have seemingly few lasting negative effects. In order to understand how they were able to successfully navigate these deployments I looked at the qualities they identified as personal strengths.

There should be noted a distinction between a “strength” and just being strong. Many women in the study espoused being strong. They then went on to link strength with other qualities like the ability to be alone or carry on. Strength as a characteristic seems to be connected to other qualities that illustrate it. We will discuss areas of these women’s strength in terms of how it is shown through the other characteristics.

Independence is one of the hallmark qualities that almost all the women ascribed to themselves. Independence seems to be essential to being married to a NGM, especially during times of deployment. They talked about how their independence helped them to feel more comfortable enduring separations from their spouse. National Guard spouses experience many separations even in times of peace. The wives of officers and NCOs have to experience even more time apart. Even aside from the combat deployments after September 11<sup>th</sup>, these women had experienced shorter mobilizations to Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina, and other natural disasters. They have long-standing marriages and have much experience with separations. In Chapter 6 we will see some scoffed their civilian friends because they could not endure even a short time apart from their partners. This

was mentioned with a sense of pride. They had the capacity to manage their lives and did not need their husbands present. Even the women who were nervous when their husbands left, became proud of their capabilities over time.

Other qualities like the “ability to carry” on or “keep life normal” were discussed as a strength. This is similar to another study that found multiple deployments were managed with an attitude of “Life Goes on” (Patzel et al., 2015). To them frequent separations have become normal. They cannot live their lives in constant upheaval and have learned how to maintain the home base and float in and out of marital partnership. When the NGM leaves they assume the vacant role. They do not allow themselves the luxury of breaking down or curling up in a corner. They persevere and go on.

Even though all of the women identified strengths, sometimes they mentioned them with a caveat. They would identify a strength that had helped them through the deployment, but then said it may not have been a strength. Several even called these qualities “double edged swords”. They all felt these were positive attributes and contributed to their ability to deal with deployments and other difficulties. However, in hindsight, they also see how at times these characteristics may have made them more difficult. They also see how these qualities may not benefit some people. Stubbornness and the inability to ask for help were two of the qualities mentioned the most. Sometimes the focus on maintaining their lives, and the pride of being independent would prohibit them from asking for help.

An instrument that captured this some of this duality was the Family Functioning Style Scale. While this scale looked at how the family functions, there were some parallels with how the women identified these dual functioning strengths (Table 2). We

can see the scores for “asking for help” (mean = 2.00 , SD =1.22) or just “forgetting their problems” (mean = 2.44 , SD =1.42) are lower and in the direction we would anticipate. These coping styles as well as “talking about the different ways they solve problems” (mean = 2.89, SD =1.05), show how the families tend to deal with situations head on. Furthermore, every women in the study ranked the “We try to solve our problems first before asking others for help” as a 4, or “Almost always like my family”.

Table 2. Family Functioning Style Scale

	M (SD)
It is worth making personal sacrifices, if it benefits our family	3.78 (.67)
We take pride in even the smallest accomplishments of family members	3.78 (.44)
No matter how difficult things get, our family sticks together	4.00 (.00)
We generally ask for help from persons outside our family if we cannot do things ourselves	2.00 (1.22)
When we have a problem or concern, we are able to make decisions about what to do	3.78 (.44)
In our family we can depend upon the support of one another whenever something goes wrong	3.89 (.33)
We enjoy time together even if it is just doing household chores	3.78 (.44)
If we have a problem or concern that seems overwhelming we try to forget it for a while	2.44 (1.42)
We generally talk about the different ways we deal with problems of concerns	2.89 (1.05)
We can depend upon one another to help out when something unexpected comes up	3.89 (.33)
We try to solve our problems first before asking others to help	4.00 (.00)

1 Prompt “Indicate the extent to which this is true for your family”

2 Range from 0= not at all like my family to 4 = Almost always like my family

Whether these are family qualities or personal ones, they support the idea that this group of women tends to take charge of their own problems and are less likely to seek help.

Many of the women describe themselves as private and proud. They are want to resolve situations and problems on their own. They do not like to inconvenience people or make more work for others. They perceive the deployment as something they can and should do on their own. An important distinction should be made, they often will accept help if it is offered. Some of their most happy stories were of unexpected help. We will see how those offers of help impacted their deployment experience when we discuss the supportive factors in Chapter 6.



Some women did not know they had these strengths until they had to use them during a deployment. Christina raised the question of which came first, the strength or the experience of needing the strength? Are these strong women, or is the strength and independence developed by being married to a soldier who is absent often? If these qualities are developed then they may be seen as resilience.

While only two members of the study identified as resilient, many of the qualities they mentioned lead in that direction. Resilience is the “ability to bounce back after experiencing personal stress” (Meadows, Beckett, Bowling, Golinelli, Fisher, Martin, & Osilla, 2015). Resilience considers people’s ability to thrive and “be well” in the face of adversity (Ryff & Singer, 2003), or “successfully adapt under adverse conditions” (Luthar & Zigler, 1991). It combines the impact of stressful events or adverse conditions with the presence of protective factors that provide protection and allow the person to return to normal functioning (Norman, 2000). Additionally, it aligns well with a strengths perspective. It moves the focus from deficits or problems to a discovery of strengths and protective factors (Luther, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Patterson, 2002). All of these women’s abilities to keep their lives on track during the upheaval and stress of a deployment shows their resilience and the ability to adapt to difficult situations. This resilience does not mean they do not experience the trauma. These events were still very vivid in their minds. Even years later they became emotional discussing this time. However this resilience has allowed them to find a way to persevere through and endure despite the hardships. Resilience also can be learned. The DoD currently has 26 policies related to family resilience (Meadows et al., 2015). Recent studies on military spouses

have found resilience to be important for the psychological well-being of active component spouses (Wang et al., 2015).

Furthermore, if we see the strengths emerging from the deployment process this may be considered post-traumatic growth (PTG). PTG sheds light onto the question that Christina raises about which came first, the strength or the situation. PTG shows that trauma can be a facilitator of personal strengths and growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). PTG would say the deployment trauma could lead to positive personal changes that could benefit them in many ways. It is possible the trauma of deployment leads to a period of growth. They women may develop abilities and uncover unrevealed skills through this process. Neither having resilience or PTG mean the deployment was a positive experience; they merely reframe the effects for some as beneficial.

Regardless if these characteristics were innate or developed by the deployments, these resilient women used them to successfully manage deployments. Despite their independence, they did not do it alone. All of the women received help. We will discuss those people and groups that these women reached out to for support and how helpful these entities were to them in Chapter 6.

## CHAPTER SIX

### YOU BUILD ME UP: THE PEOPLE AND GROUPS NATIONAL GUARD SPOUSES ACCESSED FOR SUPPORT DURING DEPLOYMENTS

*“Lean on me, when you’re not strong and I’ll be your friend, I’ll help you carry on.”  
(Withers, 1972)*

We have discussed the challenges these spouses faced during deployments. We also looked at the personal strengths that helped these women during difficult times. Now we will look externally at the people and systems they considered supports. There were few entities that all the women agreed were helpful. Many people and groups were helpful for some and less helpful for others. There also were groups that were created to be a support for National Guard families, which in reality were not helpful during deployments. I will be looking at each of these systems and discussing this dichotomy. We will look at the contributing factors as to why they either did not help or were not consistently helpful to all the women.

#### Supports that Generally Helped

##### National Guard Member

Most women in the study consistently said their husbands were a source of support during deployments. The only exception was the two women who experienced marital discord. Support came via phone conversations, visits home, emails, and sometimes the support came through what was not said.

Tammy talks about how her husband smoothed the transition and kept her fears at bay even though sometimes this quality bothers her.

***Tammy:** I really do give the majority of the credit to him...It sounds corny but he is the calm to my storm. And sometimes it infuriates me. It’s like I have to be on this tidal wave and he sees me getting you know frustrated, irritated, whatever. He tries to bring me down a little bit. I might come*

*down, but then it dawns on me that he's calm and cool about this while I wanna be mad about this.*

### **Communication.**

Most often NGM support came via a cell phone, Skype, or email. Being able to be in touch with the NGM helped ease the separation. The frequency of the contacts varied considerably. Some couples were in contact several times a week, and some more sporadically. However the frequency or length of the contacts was less important than the content of their conversations or emails. It was most important that the contacts met the stateside spouses' needs.

Kara and her husband were in communication frequently. His efforts to stay in touch helped by letting her know, at least right then he was all right.

***Leah:** About how often were you in communication?*

***Kara:** 3-4 times a week probably it was pretty good*

***Leah:** Oh wow. Oh yeah?*

***Kara:** He was actually pretty good about it. I wasn't expecting a whole lot out of it when he left. Just because I knew of the nature of what they were doing wasn't, you know, "I'm going to go out every morning at 8AM or we're going to check in." I knew that [calling] was going to be kind of whenever they got time to. So I was impressed. Every minute or every chance he got to make a phone call or send an email or something I said as long as it is a little time. Ok. I'm fine. I'll stop worrying for a little bit?*

Sarah needed support with her children and even though her husband is still deployed, they have found a way to co-parent.

***Leah:** So you stay in very close communication*

***Sarah:** Yeah and in fact even when I am having a hard time with the kids. I don't care if he is sleeping or not. 'You wake up and you talk'*

***Leah:** You get on **our** schedule*

***Sarah:** You help **me**. Yeah, so he is good about that.*

Several couples entered counseling or participated in classes to improve their relationships. They were able to use these skills during deployment.

*Carol: I think we just tried to employ the communication techniques that we had learned and he was especially after going to Rhode Island he was more open about some of the details about what happened.*

Carol and her husband took a trip to Rhode Island after he returned from Afghanistan. During this trip he opened up to her about many aspects of his deployment that he had not shared. This was common; the NGM would return from deployment and then share what really happened. This process is what I am calling “Protective Withholding”

### **Protective Withholding.**

While many of the couples had good communication, the content of their conversations was not always complete. Many of the husbands chose to omit the level of risk they were in or life-threatening events that occurred during the deployment. We have seen how the concern for their safety was foremost in these women’s minds. This support was shown by not sharing how real those concerns might be and thus protecting them from the reality of war.

*Tammy: He did because... because every time he reassured me every time. “Oh honey no we’re so far away from that. It sounds like it’s close. No, we’re not anywhere near that. We’re safe as safe is gonna get. Cause nothing’s gonna get to us where we are at.” I believed him. Maybe it’s because I wanted to believe him. And so it was easy to believe him. You know maybe he wasn’t lying as best he could but it was so easy because it was what I needed to hear. He’s great at it. I didn’t know any of the crap he was in [Afghanistan].*

Tammy goes on to describe a story he told her when he returned that told her the real situation he was in while deployed.

*Tammy: Little did I know ‘til he got home literally on the last night they were there, they were laying in the bunkers, the bunks and [she makes the sound ‘whoosh!'] there went one thing right between two bunks literally it went between the top and the second bunk and right through the walls. And so. Yeah, I can breathe and then low and behold eventually it works*

*out but had he not been that calm and nonchalant about it when we would talk on the phone. Or on Skype, I would probably have lost it*

Kara describes a similar experience. She asked her husband to take pictures as a memory of his time overseas. One day her mother was looking at the pictures he brought back on his phone. She said it was filled with really “cool pictures” of the schools and children he had helped.

***Kara:** And she’s flipping through and all of a sudden I see her say “Oh!” Of course I look up and I hadn’t looked at the photos. And she says “what is this?” So he goes over to look and he says “that’s a video you can play the video if you want.” So she plays the video and she says “Oh my god!” [Kara says] “Give it to me, I want to see it.” It turns out in January he had been in roll over crash and did not tell me. Mind you every time I am on the phone with him... [she reenacts a typical phone call]*

***Kara:** “What’s happening?”*

***Her Husband:** “Oh it’s so boring, never do anything. We go out. Nothing ever happens”.*

***Kara:** “Are you getting shot at?”*

***Husband:** “No.”*

***Kara:** “Are you shooting?”*

***Husband:** “No, just going through these town.”*

***Kara:** “Oh ok.”*

She continues her story.

***Kara:** So here I am like an idiot believing it, but he’s been in this roll over crash. He was purple, black, blue, in the whole set [of pictures]. The video was one of these the [says sarcastically] lovely people he was with, taping him. Like you push on his eyelid and his eye would pop out. And I was like, “You got to be kidding me!” And I said “Never again am I going to believe anything you say when I call “how’s it going?. Nothing it’s boring. I mean seriously.” [He said] “I didn’t want you to worry.” Now I am going to worry because I’m not going to believe anything you say. But that that’s the story I remember that he did not tell me. He’s got this video. ‘Cause the guys thought it was so funny. And if he blew his nose his eyes would pop a little bit. They thought it was hysterical.*

***Leah** Yeah well...*

***Kara:** Me, not so much, but them...*

## Children

While being moved into sudden single parenthood was an additional responsibility, some of the women also received support from their children. This was especially true for older children. Tammy talks about her close relationship with her daughter and how she helped her through.

*Tammy: And the only other person to come through for me when I was having a kind of a down day would be my daughter, she would always. She has always been even to this day. When I am having a really crappy day and I don't feel like I can talk to him about it and I would go to her, as bad as that sounds. Why would you go to your own daughter? But she's always been. She and I have been on a lot of levels best friends as well as mother and daughter. There were a lot of times where I would go and talk to her and like "Oh no mommy it's fine it's just blah blah blah" and having her being that level headed when [husband] wouldn't be available, she was my support. So yea she still is... is... she still is quite, quite effectively the rock around here. She's definitely my girl.*

Peggy and her son formed a tight unit during the deployment. She describes them as a "little team." When I asked her to tell me a story about the time of deployment, she tells of a time when she received support from her son.

*Peggy: Like the one thing that I always remember (tearing up) It's kind of sad. (Laughs) One time, I'm very strong and very... If he was going on another deployment I'd be like "fine I can handle this", but every now and then you have your moments when, you know, breaking down. So little [son] was 2 and I was crying and sitting on the couch. (tearing up again) and see now I'm going to start again just because...so (she sighs), hold on. (she gets a tissue). It's just kind of a sweet moment. So he crawls over and gets on my lap and hugs me. It was just cute. He had no idea, but it was just that comfort.*

## Counseling and marriage enrichment

As I mentioned earlier, some couples sought out marriage counseling or educational groups to improve their communication. Carol and her husband began

counseling during year prior to his deployment. The stress had made the countdown to his leaving very difficult. She continued to see this counselor during the deployment.

*Carol: Um... so as I said we had the family counselor. So um. In the beginning I probably went every 2 weeks and then probably in the middle of the deployment I was going once a month. And then when he came home we probably went a couple times together. But you know again it's and this is part of why. [this deployment has a year lead time it was hard on the family] And it just...I mean it put an entire cloud over that whole year and that was part of why I was like "we need to do something." And that is when we found the family counselor. 'Cause I was... like this was just driving me crazy.*

Christina and her husband also sought professional help prior to his first deployment. It helped their marriage, but also gave them skills they used during the their time apart.

*Christina: Um, and we actually hit a couple of low points before he left. (pause) And then we went to, um, it was called World Wide Marriage encounter, through our church. We went in February and he left in May and um I think that saved our marriage. I really do, I remember telling him that when you're gone it's going to be easier.*

She went on to tell how the first deployment was better than the second. She believes this is in part due to way their skills had lapsed over the years.

*Christina: And so it brought us so much closer together, even though he was gone that deployment, it was so much better for us. So um I think it helped us to be apart. It helped our separation, it helped us in our relationship during the separation I mean. Um, so that was a big huge thing for us, that was a turning point more so than the deployment itself, but he had told me that a lot of people had gotten the "Dear John" letters while they were gone, or things didn't work out [in their relationships]. Marriages ended while they were gone and stuff like that. For us, I think we were stronger during that first deployment.*



## Supports with Mixed Help

### Friends

As I mentioned, some sources of support were helpful for some spouses and not for others. Friends were one of the categories with much variation. Some civilian friends were helpful and others served as another reminder of their isolation.

#### **Helpful civilian friends.**

While Christina is fiercely independent and does not like to reach out for help, that does not mean she does not appreciate it once it is given. She told a story about her husband's first deployment. It was nearing Christmas and one of her friends came over and offered to babysit so she could do some Christmas shopping. The friend said, "Go out and have a good time."

*Christina: So I was out for a few hours and then I came home and the outside of my house was decorated. And she has come over and some of the people from my high school had arrange that they would come over and decorate. Um, but I wouldn't have done any decorations. And when he was in Afghanistan [during the second deployment], we had nothing because it was like "whatever. I'm not doing it, that's [her husband's] job." But um, they were so thoughtful and so sweet. So definitely helpful and always supportive.*

Nancy found support from a group of civilian friends who allowed her to reengage with a part of herself and a sport she thought she had given up.

*Nancy: I was in a tennis club in my 20's and when we moved out to the sticks and I had a baby. I didn't play tennis for 9 years, but when we moved back into [city] in 2001 well I was working full time, after 9-11 and after I quit my job. I began to play tennis again. So now I'm 39 and I had gained a lot of weight and wasn't sure I could still play tennis, but that turned into my big connection to the community. My son was in school and so there were the parents of his friends and the tennis community. That became my social milieu.*

For Nancy this was a reclaiming of her sense of identity. It was her diversion from worries about the war or her children. When her husband was deployed, money was not an issue. Her fear of losing that part of herself was relinquished and she not only began to play, but she began to thrive.

While initially distant from her neighbors, Carol slowly got to know her neighbors and they were very supportive. They pitch in when he is gone.

*Carol: Everybody is great on our block we love them all. They are good people. Since then [when they learned her husband was deployed] they take care of me. They'll snowplow my driveway. I'll get a text like "Is he off saving everybody?" I'm like "yeah." They are like, "I'm sending the boys, they will do your driveway."*

#### **Less helpful civilian friends.**

While civilian friends mean well, they cannot offer the type of support these women truly need. Their lack of experience with the military and deployments makes them less effective than military friends.

Kara articulated the issues with civilian friends very well. They are too far removed from the military and what deployments are like. They just do not understand.

*Kara: I'm not a group person as far as I'm not seeking [them] out. My friends are awesome. They had no clue what I was going through. None of them have spouses in the military or anybody in the military. That was kind of hard to do.*

There were times when civilian friends made the situation worse. Attempts at empathy often felt like pity. Several women discussed how they felt pitied by co-workers or civilian friends and these strong independent women reacted with increased sadness or anger. They often chose to remove themselves from those situations.

*Kara: My friends, they had well... they had no clue what I was going through. And I almost got to a point. My co-workers same thing. They would come in and they would look at me with pity and I would really hate*

*that. Because I don't want to be pitied. Because then it would make me think about how sad I am. And why would you do that? But they didn't know any better. They hadn't gone through it, they're spouses hadn't been through it. I understand that you know. So it's kind of like. It's easier not to deal with them on a regular basis.*

One issue civilians seem to not understand is the amount of separation the couples experience in the National Guard and how successful they are at navigating them. The women all wished they could be with their husbands more and do not enjoy the separations. However, many of these couples are used to them and accept them as part of their married life. They do not fall apart when their spouses leaves and this is hard for some civilian spouses to understand. This again creates another distance between National Guard spouses and the civilian world (Figure 4). Sarah's husband has been deployed for the last few years in Italy. This is the reality of her situation and she has come to terms with it, her nonmilitary friends have not.

***Sarah:** Um but that is one of my biggest pet peeves is [someone else saying] "you've been apart so much you know you guys need to be together" and you know kind of that...*

***Leah** Hearing that from other people*

***Sarah:** I hate hearing it, I hate it. I don't need to hear it. I don't want to hear it. I don't feel that way. I feel like I understand you know is it our first choice to be together? Of course. But do I think it's life or death what we are doing right now? No, I think there could be much worse situations.*

Christina also has a long history of ongoing separations from her husband and had a similar experience with her friends.

***Christina:** I have a friend who is a stay at home mom. Her husband is an assistant principal, so he never goes out of town, he's never not home. There are several nights he doesn't get home until 9 or 10pm and she like, "I don't know, how you do it?" I'm like really? One night? It's one night, you know? You have no idea.*

Christina's husband regularly is deployed to Korea for month long mini-deployments. She is far removed from these civilian friends lives and situations. Those separations are now easy for her.

*Christina: And even when I tell people, he's leaving for Korea, he'll be gone for a month. "Oh you poor thing." I'm like really? It's only a month. They're like "what?" My attitude is so different than others. To them a couple of days is long or a week, is long. To me it's...(shrugs).*

Some women in the study had family or friends who lived on military bases and they saw the benefit from it. Christina and Sarah had experience living on a base. They saw first hand the advantages to having a military community. They experienced the accessibility of support and services. Sarah does not fault her civilian friends for not being able to provide this same level of support, but she sees the contrast.

*Sarah: I mean I guess just trying to....ummm talk to their spouses and how few people that you can relate to. You know it's hard because everybody has their own life. And after being on a [military base] I see how nice it would be to have a base. And just trying to learn how to ask for help which is hard even now. I try, but it's hard.*

### **Military friends and communities**

While civilian friends struggled, and living on a base was not an option, many women connected informally with other military people as support. They understood the issues and separations. They could feel an instant camaraderie with them and it was even easier to access support. The National Guard saw this need and created their Family Programs, which includes FRGs. We will discuss those groups later, but here we look not at the military connected groups, but rather the naturally occurring groups that formed. These informal friendships could also be a great sense of support. They were able to step in when family or other friends could not.

While Peggy did not use an FRG, she comes from a military family and found other spouses to find support from. When I asked her if she had a group she found support from she talks about it. Most of the women found some informal group of military connected women who they met with that helped during the deployment.

*Peggy: Yeah... yup [with] some other spouses, we did our own thing. We would meet for dinner a couple times, But I wasn't involved in any um formal at all.*

Leslie was in the Guard herself, so she has an even closer connection to other military families.

*Leslie: And then I have some close friends you know that I can rely on. Um... one or two, you know. And most of my close friends are military families. Some people I have met in the Army that are also soldiers or married soldiers or whatever. And we all help each other.*

She also lives in an area that has a heavy concentration of military Guard members due to several units being located around her town. This created, not only a built in group of military connected friends, but also other supports. This created for her a sort of ersatz base where she had access to friends and services that were easier to trust.

*Leslie: There's a large, large number of National Guard in this area. [For example] I actually have a baby sitter that I interviewed. I didn't know this but she was at the Guard at the time. So when I interviewed her and she was like "Well I am in the National Guard." And so we started talking and I was like, "Well you are hired."*

## **Family**

For the women in this study, family played a large roll in regards to support during the deployment process. Almost all reported their own families as a strong source of support during deployments. Their families played a large role in providing emotional support, but also pitched in and helped with household tasks to chores that usually fell to the deployed husband. They also pitched in when there were emergencies.

## **Her family.**

Sarah found her husband the most supportive, but right behind him came her parents and close family.

***Sarah:** Um I mean... him first. And um and then after that I would say like my parents and my siblings or my sister in particular and then friends and his family.*

Carol was newly married and living in a brand new house. She would just stay with her parents and found it hard to find a reason to leave. They continued to provide her support and helped her forget her situation even temporarily.

***Carol:** So I would go especially the weekend I would stay at my parents' house for a couple days and one day I think it was over Christmas, my mom was home for a week and a half for work. And I was like "I don't want to shovel. Can I just stay here until the snow melts?" So I stayed for two or 3 days and he came out to see us. And he was like "you need to go home eventually." "I don't want to shovel." And he was like I'll go with you and we'll go shovel. By the time he came out the snow had just melted. I did at moments tried to ignore my problems. But my parents were incredible, I definitely I would say that I couldn't gotten by with out them.*

As independent as Christina is, she accepted help from her family. She also would reach out to her family if she needed help, especially with the logistics of ferrying her 3 children to activities. We begin to see some of the dichotomy between her family versus her husband's family.

***Christina:** But I have a close friend now, I didn't have anybody when he was in Kosovo that was that close to me. My brother lives in [city] so they would help out some, but the rest and [her husband's' family] was always here, but they never called. His parents would call, like say "hi how are you doing?", but [rely] another good friend of mine now. So I call on her when I need help. If I need help I ask, if I don't need help, I'm not going to inconvenience someone else to make my day a little easier. So, but yeah definitely we solve it ourselves before we ask.*

By "help" Christina means that she physically cannot be in two places at once.

She cannot be working late if a child needs to be at hockey at the same time. She does not

ask for help to ease the situation or give herself a break. We see here the reluctance of the women to ask for help being played out.

Peggy is extremely close to her parents, especially her mother. Her family lives in a small town a few miles away and it was easy for her to get help from them, both emotionally and practically.

*Peggy: My parents were extremely supportive, my mother and I are best friends.*

*Leah: and they are close?*

*Peggy: Yes. Not far. So they're always... they've always been huge supporters. When our toilet broke one time, when he was gone, my mom came over and fixed it. She's one of those people who can do anything Very strong, emotionally and everything so. If I didn't have her it would have fallen apart.*

### **His family**

While the women reported a high level of support from their own families, when they discussed the supportiveness of their spouse's family the results were more complicated. Some reported having help from his family and how beneficial it was during separations. For others help was either not offered, was rare and under used, or in some cases was even harmful.

Carol's in-laws wanted to be more helpful than they actually were in reality. However, it was her sister-in-law who stepped in as a main source of support.

*Carol: My husband's parents wanted to be incredible, but they would come out once a week uh to see me at dinner. We had dinner and play some cards and um...*

*Um... my sister in law is amazing. She will bend over backwards for us.*

Leslie also felt very supported by her husband's family especially her sister-in-law. She could rely on her for anything, especially childcare, which helped since Leslie was still in the National Guard and not keeping a regular schedule. This relationship is

still strong. We conducted our interview in the backroom of her sister-in-law's restaurant. When I asked her if she was worried about privacy she said "Oh she knows it all already".

*Leslie: My husband's brother's wife. um... she babysits the kids for me since the time they were born. She just always really been helpful and so much now, that the kids are older, when they were really young she would um drop them off at 4 in the morning and, you know, before when we were on our way to work and she would keep them until 6:30 at night and you know, odd schedules. And even now I mean I think if we needed her car, she just dropped it and do it because. But we all help each other. So his family helps because we are here. And that is why we've stay here because his family is such a huge support.*

While some of the NGM's family was supportive, more often the support was varied. They might provide help, but maybe not in the way that was needed. We have seen these women are reluctant to ask for help, and this extends to the NGM's family. However, if the NGM's family does not offer to help it can cause tension and removes them from a source of support.

Sarah lives close to her husband's family, and knows they can be helpful, but never reach out to offer help.

*Sarah: I mean his family is here. Um.. they can be helpful but they are not always initiating help. And that bothers me even, even now. Like never have has his parents volunteered to take the girls and they just called and said "Do you want us to take one of them or all of them?" or whatever. They have never ever done that and that really bothers me. But if I ask 8 out of 10 times they will try to help me.*

Christina has a complicated relationship with her in-laws. They are older and she did not ask them for help, but they had a good relationship. This changed after an accident occurred during her husband's last deployment. She became distracted when filling a pool and as a result ended up flooding her basement. She was shocked and



embarrassed by her mistake. Her husband would have been her main support and she called him overseas. He encouraged her to call her brother who came and helped.

*Christina: And when I went a week later to the 4th of July with his family, [their response] was sarcasm, it was to make fun of me. Not one person called and asked me [if she needed help]. His cousin was a few miles away. Never once did anybody call and say "Is there anything you need, How can I help you?" Nothing. That was not like the whole thing, there was other things as well, but other than his mom and dad, I would say no. His sister would have [helped] if I had called, but nobody called. My brother came, but of course I called him, but you know, [I was] in tears. He was like here as soon as he could.*

She was humiliated by their reaction and became very angry. It was not the lack of help so much as the way they laughed at her and did not check on her. When her husband returned she explained what happened and told him her reaction.

*Christina: I told [husband], "If something happened to you and you didn't come home, I don't know if I would have continued a relationship with your family" I was that hurt by them.*

Jenny also talks about the difference between her family and his family. During the first deployment, she lived in her husband's hometown and was several hours from her family. There were problems with the family business that added stress during his deployment. She reassessed where she wanted to live for the second deployment. She changed course and moved to be closer to her family and friends.

*Jenny: Yes, I needed to be with my family mostly, um yea. His family wasn't exactly helpful and um and that's how... You know, it's just I'd rather be... I missed the city, I'm from here. And um didn't get to see my family very much and we had a big old house well we still own it but um it was too much work for me to stay there.*

### **Being strong for his family.**

While the supportiveness of in-laws varied, there was another element in these relationships which some found supportive. Another trend that emerged was the benefit

of providing support to others. Some women had to stay strong for other people in their lives and this helped keep them calm too. Most often the person who needed support was the mother of the deployed service member. Being the spouse or even child of a service member who is deployed to a combat zone is difficult, being the mother of a child deployed to combat is more difficult.

Tammy received support from her child and her husband. She then also found some strength in passing that support to her in-laws.

*Tammy: Um... I think... his mother. I would have to say [she was] the biggest one because she kept apprised of the news. So was his grandmother, she's elderly and she was always on edge. So I felt confident, the strong one. I had to keep them leveled headed because [he has said] it's not a big deal he's fine where he's at. So he gave me the calm to pass onto them so I felt like that rock in the middle. She was kind of my support and yet kind of not. Just because her coming to me with "Oh my gosh oh my gosh" was enough to you know... now you know you got to keep the calm. It kept me in a sense level-headed as well.*

### **Military Services**

As we discussed, the National Guard offers benefits and services for the families of deployed soldiers. The effectiveness and accessibility of these services varies greatly. Some women used the services and were happy with them. However, the majority either found the services inaccessible or created more drama than help.

### **Red Cross**

Two women in the study utilized the Red Cross mental health counseling services. As discussed earlier, Sarah reached out to them when she was concerned about her husband's depression while he was deployed. Tammy's father-in-law committed suicide soon after her husband was deployed. This was a tremendous stress for Tammy and her husband. She accessed the support services offered by the Red Cross when she

learned about his death. When she got a phone call from her mother in law saying that her husband's father had committed suicide. She initially was unsure of who to contact, but eventually she was connected to the right person.

*Tammy: And it was like it was lit on fire. Bam! Everything went like it was suppose to. Just like dominos. Oh God that was hard. But I was not being in the frame of mind to remember what you were supposed to do. And somebody was there to pick up the pieces and say here. Here we go. Call this number and I did and everything fell in line. So. You know it's there and it works if you need it. If you need it, it works. And like I said had I'd been in the frame of mind to come back and say to the person that you know initially started the falling of the dominos I would've said thank you very much for your help. I appreciated it. I would not have been able to get things done that you were.*

### **National Guard Family Program**

The National Guard began offering more services due to the increased frequency and duration of deployments. Some of these programs provided basic information, but others offered retreats for couples. Many couples went on the Yellow Ribbon Reunification sponsored retreats. Sarah and her husband utilized this and several other services.

*Sarah: We've done... um... the retreats I can't remember what they are called right now. We did that one time and that was really nice that was good. That was very, very (pause). I mean 'cause they pay for you to do really awesome stuff. So um... and then that's another thing but... the military there are so many benefits to being in the military and from that to... our flights to Italy to the military discounts I mean all across the board there are so many benefits and then you know. Being able to go on base once he's retired. Just cool stuff.*

Jenny also accessed the educational services with the Guard. They provided information on what the reunification process is like and what to expect from her husband when he returned.

*Jenny: I think I went to a class or something. And they said that there are going to be levels, there was really great anticipation and then you have to*

*be careful because things don't always end up the way, you expect them to you know, your soldier might not be um... all happy right away you just have to kind of be ready for whatever you know so. I thought that was helpful but I... I remember hearing things through that class that I didn't have to experience that I didn't have to worry about. I don't think he had...[the symptoms they discussed].*

Kara explained some of the issues with the services the Guard provides. She was aware the National Guard was trying to create services for an unprecedented deployment and the 2008-2009 deployment to Afghanistan was especially large in scope. This was really a process with a steep learning curve. She began getting phone calls from other spouses in Kansas checking on her wellbeing. This was jarring to be contacted by strangers.

***Kara:** I don't want to say bad things about the military the [brigade] did what it could and... they had not had this scale of a deployment before, this was the biggest. So [there were] a lot of people and a lot of things in this deployment. We learned a lot about what we do with Family Readiness Groups and um. They learned a lot about what they do with the deployments and so. [She began to get calls from the rear detachment<sup>5</sup> in Kansas where she knew no one] Nobody from Illinois [called]. It might have been nice to have that closer type of thing but the reality of the situation is you are probably not going to get it with the National Guard, you're just not.*

## **FRGs**

The Family Readiness Groups also provided mixed support. Some women had a positive experience with the groups, although these women tended to be the group leaders. It is possible they saw the groups as beneficial since they were responsible for their content. Sarah benefitted from her FRG experience.

***Sarah:** I'd say the FRG I mean we usually have monthly, I think it was monthly meetings. And that was good and um... Yeah I tried that a little bit with another one I don't know in [large city in Illinois], because it was*

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<sup>5</sup> A rear detachment provides support and information to families during deployments.

*such a large deployment in the military. So I tried going to a couple of their FRG meetings and some other events.*

**Leah:** *“And you found that helpful?”*

**Sarah:** *“Yeah, I think they are helpful.”*

This however was not the norm. Most of the comments about the FRGs were at least partially negative. FRGs are tied to the location of the NGM’s unit and many women lived hours away from their assigned group. Jenny experienced several issues with her FRG. Location was one of those issues.

**Jenny:** *First of all it was too far away from me. It was like 3 hours from here and... and I felt like I had to be involved because of my husband's role in the deployment.*

Despite the issue with distance, Jenny tried to make the group work. However, there were issues with the group leadership as well.

**Jenny:** *And then my friend and I um started to try to fix things or help and get more involved. And we wanted to kind of oust that leader (laughs) and then we got the chaplain involved at that time um and then it turned out that we just... It turned out to be not... um, I... it was more beneficial for me to stay out of it than it was for me to actually use it so that's what happened. And that's basically why I didn't I didn't remember if there was a FRG for the second deployment cause I don't remember.*

Like many women in the study, Jenny decided the distance coupled with the problems within the group was too much. She disconnected from the group, but as I discussed earlier, kept the friends she made and they helped through the rest of the deployment.

Carol, a former leader, explains how the change in the structure of the National Guard contributed to the issue they face with distance from services.

**Carol:** *Because the soldiers had to be with a fifty mile radius [of their home unit] but now several years ago the army changed the rules that you could now go to any unit that has the position that you were looking for. So that was created a difficulty for us because we had soldiers living all over the place. I had one guy in Iowa, his wife was in Iowa. So again that*

*goes back to how good are those FRG leaders across the state and how well are they gathering that information.*

Distance from services was a persistent theme throughout our discussions. The increased flexibility in unit assignments, created situations where spouses were further isolated from the military community. They were disconnected from their assigned FRG and limited in their ability to access other Guard and military services.

Since distance is an issue, some spouses attempted to join groups that were closer. The problem with attending a group from another unit is the experiences vary greatly across deployments. Deployments to places like Germany are viewed as much easier than combat deployments to “hot zones”.

**Jenny:** *That's exactly how it would be with the soldiers too. Like... You have some soldiers in a good place with their experience but then you have other people who aren't and then... uh yeah... so it's, it's similar in that regard. 'Cause you don't want to hear about... You know... so “Susie's” soldier is, you know, all butterflies and flowers and then... you know and then the other one's living with the “spider person.”*<sup>6</sup>

Christina had similar issues, the distance was too far and the closer group did not meet her needs.

**Christina:** *For the first one they were out of Chicago, for the second one I think I went once or twice because they were so far away [central Illinois]. Yeah, you know it was just something to do with it as well. But the support, there was nobody at the second one. Like I said, because it was with the brigade and the woman who ran it wasn't even in our group, her husband was a wounded warrior. It was too big, it wasn't her fault. People were gone at different times, everyone didn't go at the same time.*

Kara clarifies the military is very good at getting some information disseminated, but this does not always filter down to the FRG. They focus on the soldiers and have not worked out consistently getting that information to the spouses and loved ones.

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<sup>6</sup> Jenny did not clarify what “spider person” meant, but inferred it was a bad situation.

**Kara:** *They are very good with getting information to the soldiers. That is their job obviously. But when you are dealing with a deployment on this level. I think the information is really important and we were really relying on the commanders telling the FRG leaders, um which again, if it's the first thought on their heads is to call the FRG leaders "hey look you know I've heard it from all the guys are ok". If it's not then... I mean there was some there was some people waiting for information that didn't get information.*

Carol found solace and support volunteering with her own FRG. She also was proud of her accomplishments such as planning return ceremonies and parades. However, she echoes other perspectives that the National Guard's services were incredibly variable and in many cases needed to be improved.

**Carol:** *So when I lost my job I threw myself into the FRG and volunteer stuff, the structure from the state was very poor. And I think... Not only was it very poor and its still I think a lot of times to this day. I don't even know how to say this nicely so I'm just going to say it. The perception outside of Springfield for the rest of the families in the state of Illinois is that Springfield is just about Springfield. And it is a power struggle down there. And people are just going to grab what they can for their little fiefdom and they don't do what is really best for their families. Even the regulations that are written they don't follow the spirit that it was intended to do they do what they do to meet a requirement. And it is a part of my frustration when I was working for them and it is part of the reason I don't go back after I had kids. 'Cause I was like "I don't need this."*

## **Discussion**

While their internal strengths were essential to the women's ability to navigate a deployment, they were equally clear about the benefit of additional supports and services.

Having a supportive husband seemed to be a factor that helped almost all the women during deployment. This is consistent with what we have seen on other studies (Melvin, Wenzel, & Jennings, 2014; Wheeler & Stone, 2010;). For some that was being a presence either on the phone or Skype when they needed them. The frequency was less important than being able to have the type of connection the women needed. It is then

the connection that is more important than the quantity. It is more meeting the unique needs of the recipient and less a formula that can be applied to everyone. Jenny who describes herself as happily married, chose less contact while Kara spoke to her husband several times a week. Sarah needed him to be in contact “as needed” no matter what time it is in his location. So despite their distance these husbands were able to be a supportive presence in their lives.

We also see the impact when communication does not meet their needs. Leslie and Nancy both felt a disconnection from their husbands. Leslie needed more frequency in their contacts, while Nancy wanted more depth during their calls. The difficulty in their marriages created extra stress and did not allow them this support. These were the only women who mentioned divorce during the interview.

It is also important to emphasize the content of the interactions was not necessarily important. Often the conversations were kept superficial on purpose to keep life as normal as possible. To this end, sometimes serious subjects were omitted. Almost every woman had a story about the NGM omitted or lying about the risk to their lives while deployed. I am calling this behavior “Protective Withholding” and see it as a way the NGM supported their spouse by giving them some reassurance about their situation. Some omitted stories of traumatic events. Others lied and told their spouses they were “bored” most of the time. Tammy wondered if the military told them to do this to keep things calm at home. Peggy mentioned the Guard encouraged them to not upset the NGM in phone calls during deployments so they could stay focused. While I found no evidence of this policy, it is possible it exists or is an informal suggestion.



When they returned, the realities of their deployments were shared. The spouses who had only experienced one deployment, said they would fear another deployment even more, now that they knew the truth. It should be noted that this strategy was not completely effective. We have already seen how prevalent the “fear of death” was with the spouses regardless of the number of deployments. While the realities of war in picture or video might bring more clarity to the risks, the concern and fear is still an omnipresent fixture of a combat deployment.

The remainder of the areas of support had a great amount of variation. Some civilian friends were supportive and some could not understand. It is possible part of this rift is due to the type of support being provided. For example, anyone could string Christmas lights. Not everyone understands the unique issues faced when your husband is away for 12 months in a combat zone.

Military connected friends were more helpful than civilians. Many women in the study sought out support from military connected friends. In addition two spouses had experience living on a military base. There they saw how much easier deployments could be if you lived on a base. Bases surround military members and their spouses with wraparound services that are easily accessible. Your neighbors are others in the military and often are going through the same deployment. However, in the Guard it takes effort and time to seek out these relationships. This is also the type of immersive environment that by its nature the National Guard can never provide. We will discuss how they attempted to replicate this sort of support, but in this current system it is not possible.

Families were another source of variable help. Almost all the women stated their families were helpful during the deployment. Their families were able to help take the

place of the deployed spouse and share in the responsibilities. Many of the women said they could not have managed without their families. Children also could be a sense of emotional support. Even though they carried extra responsibility as sole caregivers, some still found comfort from their children when needed.

The supportiveness of the NGM's families was more varied. For some women supporting their in-laws helped them maintain stability. Other members of the NGM's extended family were emergency resources much like their own families were during the deployment. However, it was more common for the NGM's family to be either absent from helping or a source of stress. Many women did not reach out to their in-laws because, as we discussed, this is not in their personalities. They chose to try to persevere on their own. Their own families often could break down this barrier, but unless they had a strong relationship, the in-laws could not. Furthermore, several women discussed how their in-laws actually made the deployment more difficult.

The services provided by the National Guard to the spouses and family members also varied in helpfulness. As we discussed earlier, these services were created after September 11<sup>th</sup> and deployments had begun. The most prevalent problem is distance from National Guard services. Isolation and disconnection are persistent themes in this study. The distance many NGM live from these services can impact their family's access to medical care and support.

One consistently helpful service was the Yellow Ribbon program offering education and retreats for military couples. All the women that used their services spoke highly of them and recommended them to others. These programs that provided skills helped them learn communication techniques they could use during the deployments.

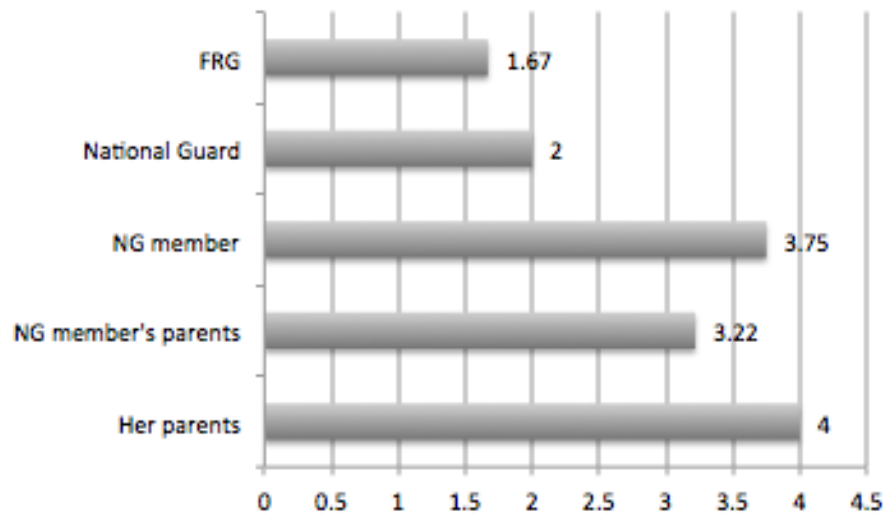
However, the most beneficial service was the couples retreats offered post-deployment. Almost every woman talked about the benefit of spending time alone with the husbands once they returned. This time allowed them to come back together as a couple and begin their post-deployment lives.

When the Guard set up the FRG's in 2005, they hoped they could provide support like a spouse may receive on a base from other military spouses. Each unit has their own FRG, yet very few of the women in my study said they found them a source of support. In fact, the only spouses who said they benefitted were the ones running the groups. Even those women had issues with how the groups were run and the program was organized.

One main issue was location. In my study it was rare for the NGM to be deployed out of a base or armory near their home. They often have to travel, sometimes 5 hours to reach where their unit is located. This creates an often insurmountable travel barrier for these women. It is possible for the women to join FRG's closer to their home. This however raises issues with a disconnection between their experiences. There is a wide variation between what one unit encounters during deployment and another. This disrupts the natural connection group members would have within the same unit. The cohesive element is the shared experience of their deployed spouses. If all group members have partners in combat, they all share the same fears. When the spouses attended groups that were physically closer to their homes but unconnected to their husband's unit there was a disconnection. Those women were less likely to return to those groups.

These trends were echoed in the data provided in the Family Support Scale (Figure 6). I anchored this measure to the time of deployment to see what supports were more effective for these spouses and families.

Figure 6. Family Support Scale



I have included the sources the women endorsed at being most helpful and least helpful, with higher numbers being more helpful. We see the findings from my interviews being supported by these instruments. On average, most women found their parents “very helpful” (mean = 4.0, SD = 1.3), and found his parents less helpful (mean = 3.22, SD = 1.6). Their husbands’ levels of helpfulness were almost as high as the parents (mean =3.75, SD = 1.3) reinforcing their level of helpfulness. These findings support what we have seen about the supportiveness of families.

Interestingly the perceived supportiveness of the National Guard and the FRG’s were much lower than I had initially anticipated. They perceived the National Guard in general as “sometimes helpful” (mean = 2.0, SD = 1.6), and the FRG between “sometimes” and not at all helpful” (mean = 1.67,1.0). During deployments the National

Guard exerts much control over their lives. Despite this control, they do not see what services are being provided as supportive. This makes sense since this is also the organization that makes unilateral decisions about the timing and length of deployments. The position the Guard has in their life is authoritarian, so it may also follow they do not see them in general as being helpful. Also, other services they offer then must not be seen as beneficial enough to overcome what lowered this score.

However, FRGs were created with the express purpose of being a support for these stateside spouses. For the FRGs to score so low, reinforces the women's perspective that these services are not working. Whether it is due to issues of accessibility or problems with the group leaders, these services need to change in order to be seen as true support during deployments.

These women successfully traversed their spouses' deployments. It was not easy. They used their own strengths and the supports in their lives to help them meet the challenges they faced. That does not mean there were not areas they wished could have been improved. They all made suggestions as to what would have helped. We will look at the patterns of their suggestions in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### WISHES: DREAMING OF A BETTER DEPLOYMENT

*“You may say I’m a dreamer, But I’m not the only one.” (Lennon, 1971).*

The focus of this study is to gather a deeper understanding of the unique deployment experience of National Guard spouses. While this is an exploratory study, my hopes are to expand it and one day develop an intervention or program or online application to ease the deployment process. I focused one interview question to learn from the women directly what would have helped the deployment? What would have made it better? These women had clearly thought about this. They wanted to make suggestions that would help the next generation of Guard spouses. The answers varied around certain themes. The women mostly wanted better connections. They wanted a better connection to information, support, and services.

#### **The Fantasy**

When I posed this question, almost every woman said what would make the deployment better was to have their husbands with them. Some even became emotional when considering it. It seemed to be an unspoken wish they were now sharing. Deployments are by their nature, separations, so this is not a realistic suggestion. However it was said so often, it deserves mentioning. They knew this would not be possible, but still voiced it.

***Tammy:** (sighs). It be... the only logical answer that comes to my head is him. And, you know, he’s overseas so he’s not here.*

And

***Christina:** But um otherwise, him I wish I had him there.*

When they brought the conversation back to more realistic options, length of

deployments and time in between deployments were discussed.

## **The Reality**

### **Less time apart.**

While being physically with their partners is not possible during a deployment, some other options were discussed that would limit time apart.

*Jenny: Um... and shorter [time away]? That would be one thing to make an improvement cause like the... I think it's the Air Guard people they go for four months at a time like... and I guess with army though they have a mission so they have to train and then they...it kind of be a waste of money for them to have to keep coming back, but if there was a way to let them come home or frequently. Or have a shorter deployment that would definitely. I mean a year and a half is a long time.*

Long separations can be very difficult for some couples. We have already discussed how the divorce rate rises during deployments. Jenny discusses one couple that struggled with the long time apart and wonders if lessening the time on deployments or extending the time between deployments would help these couples.

*Jenny: I know one couple split up but they are still seeing each other. Trying to think of like... I mean we didn't have like those problems um. And I asked, uh... I know that army's aware of that... I don't know what I guess having your spouse not gone so long would be helpful if they really want to um help with those situations. I think is the only way you could do it, is that make the deployment shorter or not so often or... I guess there's some sort of rule where they can't get deployed within 12 months or is it two years? I don't know there's some kind of timeline where once you come home. You're on a list where you can't be utilized again for a while maybe that needs to be longer.*

As we discussed in Chapter 4, Carol, struggled with a year lead-time between notification and deployment. Her suggestion was to decrease that time.

*Carol: As I said, I think that shorter I think a year out was. Was too much um and certainly we weren't the only. There were other families that I spoke to that were having similar stresses with the anticipation, plus you have every holiday leading up to it it's like oh next Christmas he won't be*

*here. Oh next Easter he won't be here. Oh next Valentines... like every, you can't unfortunately it's hard to be in the moment and enjoy where you are at cause you know what is coming down the road.*

## **Connections**

### **To community.**

Some spouses had the experience of living on a base. When they thought back to those times they could see the benefit and ease of living in a military community when the deployment happens.

*Leah: Is there anything you wished you had during the deployment that might have helped?*

*Christina: More sleep, um, more support during the second one, I wish and I know it doesn't happen in the National Guard at all I wish I had that military family close by where everyone understood. You know, especially with the second one.*

Peggy talks about the difference between the National Guard and active component in regards to living on or near a base. Although she never experienced base life, she imagines it would have helped.

*Peggy: (pause) I think it would have been nice, being in the Guard, there are so many changes that go through and I'm sure there are in the regular Army too, but when people live in a base they've got a community of people.*

In the National Guard there is less consistency than in the active military. You might have a friend who you are very close to and they move. This can happen in the active military too, but you are still left with an entire base of people who are in your community. Making those connections in the Guard takes effort and time, two commodities that often are in short supply during deployments.

*Peggy: And in the guard there are so much transition, where the people he was good friends with and were in our wedding and I was friends with their wife. They've moved since then and you lose contact so it's like you're... the people you're surrounded with constantly change it's hard to*



*get a hold of a group of people that have similar experiences or interests. And there's a few people that we have invited over for dinner, like soldiers and their families, but it's just everybody has their own lives and everybody is so far away that you don't have those people to ask questions or you know just to talk to about "what did you do"? There's not that support. Within the Army wives or army spouses community.*

Peggy also would like a way to make the connection process easier on a one-on-one basis.

**Peggy:** *That would be nice to have or even a list of phone numbers with the soldier's name the wives names and just so you could have somebody because unless your spouse is friends with that person. There's no way to talk to anybody [in the current system], you know?*

Having that connection and sense of community with the other spouses and even other military members who are not deployed would have helped. Jenny envisioned an online map that would show the location of other National Guard spouses in order to help facilitate connections.

**Jenny:** *Um so that might be like some kind of map like where all the people. It would be kind of helpful I would think or even demographics too, like you know, "This person has two kids at home and this person has no kids at home". Some kind of like 'hotspot community map' or something just to see*

**Leah:** *Yeah, hover the area, you can see who..*

**Jenny:** *Right, so maybe that would be helpful cause sometimes you just don't know... um and especially since everyone comes from all over the place so... yeah.*

**Leah:** *Like [the app] Who's near me?*

**Jenny:** *Right. 'Cause they have little missions all the time too. There's a group going to Afghanistan soon or something and my husband was on the short list for which he just told me about it. And I'm like ok.*

The ability to reach out on their own and find connections might be very appealing to spouses. If some demographic information was included they could find someone from their own units or even someone unconnected to them. Depending on what variables would be in the system, they could search by with or without children, or even

the ages of the children. If location was a priority, they could search by that as well. This would be a voluntary system and people would be allowed to choose what, if any, information they could provide. For private and independent people, like these women, accessing support on their own terms would be ideal.

Also, while the National Guard offers groups with their FRG programs, there are no programs that pair partners for support. This one on one support might be an option for those who are less comfortable sharing in groups. Tammy makes a point about how private and independent Guard spouses can be. Interventions should occur on their own terms.

*Tammy: I know maybe this support system's maybe for these independent private wives or husbands. Maybe we should connect with it. Maybe we should go to them and you know just ask to stop by for a visit to kind of you know. I don't know if somebody had done that for me I might have seen that as an interference I don't know if that's what the support services thought about or even thought of considering. But if they did the only thing I would caution is be careful with that because if somebody like me would see that as an intrusion. And you know the defense system kick up. So... Outside of that I appreciate that they are always reaching out and letting you know that they are there. But let me come to you if I need you is how I would look at that.*

### **To information.**

As we have discussed, communication and the distribution of information varies widely within the National Guard. It depends somewhat on the relationship status of the person and the National Guard member. Information is usually distributed only to “next of kin”: a wife, husband, or parents of an unmarried soldier. Unmarried partners often are excluded from receiving information directly from the Guard. Participating in a FRG can also increase the frequency and quality of the information provided to family members. However information in FRGs is inconsistent and depends on the quality of the leader.

**Carol:** *You know and certainly a communication stand point from the state and from the family programs. I mean again because I wasn't working I had the time and the energy and I am a little bit of a pit bull when I am looking for something, you know. But if you don't have somebody who is as resilient to do that you know the only ones that suffers are the family members that need that information.*

As a FRG leader Kara has more insight into the issues with information and the complexities the National Guard encountered during these unprecedented high levels of levels of troop deployment.

**Kara:** *I think information could be handled better with the military. They are very good with getting information to the soldiers. That is their job obviously.*

Kara talks about how slow information came from the Guard. This is fine when the deployment is to Germany, but when they were in Afghanistan often loved ones heard about casualties online faster. The military could not keep up. This was a problem.

**Kara:** *I don't know how you could better manage that this type of day and age where everything hits the news. I don't how to better to manage that so I don't know if I have any better answers but I think the information could be a little bit better managed.*

Many women felt it was important to tailor the information provided to spouses depending on need. Kara talks about attending educational sessions that focused on topics that she was already well versed in. For some, this information might be essential, but she was looking for something in more depth and more applicable to her life.

**Kara:** *You know whatever happens to me. I think they are probably do some different prep work with this. They did a lot of what is going to happen when they are deployed. I think we could have done stuff on financial planning that would have been relevant. We had a financial planner come in and talk about stuff that didn't... not really even matter, and stuff that we didn't understand. It was on such a higher level, and we need to break this down to how do we do a monthly budget. While they are gone what do we do with a monthly budget, that kind of thing.*

## **To services.**

Leslie experienced the benefit of participating in a couples' reintegration retreat offered through the Yellow Ribbon program. Leslie felt they waited too long before they participated in the program. She recommends couples use the service soon after the deployment.

*Leslie: Um.... they do this thing, you probably heard of it, what they do they um oh I know what its called now. It's like the Yellow Ribbon Program for couples go for the weekend what's that called? It needs to be mandatory they need to do it... or like we didn't go to it until we got back 7 months.*

*Leah: Like right away.*

*Leslie: Like, come home for a month and then. Everybody needs to go to that cause it if you are serious about it, it will help you. There we were joking around with it the whole time we were there but you know there was certain things that you are like "Oh crap I'm a jerk" or you know like I really realize that there are things that need to be changed. Or things you need to fix not change just work it out.*

Kara also saw the need for the spouses to access some sort of supportive system to pass along lessons they have learned and access to services.

*Kara: For people who have done it before you know there's some things that we might not need to... We know what we are going to do. Um. Maybe make it up I don't know make it optional to actually talk to someone. There were some woman that needed to talk to someone you know and might have been really helpful had they known that they could. And I think a lot of people still don't know. You know the ones most at risk with all the stuff. They had a lot of. We still don't know if that, that is out there and they have sessions and counselors.*

Many also hoped the NGM would seek counseling when they returned. Only one NGM received counseling. Christina was hoping her husband would have sought counseling after each deployment. It ended up not harming his career, but like almost all the other husbands in this study, he resisted it.

*Christina: Um, I would say, um both times I tried to get him to do the counseling, I tried and he didn't, that would have helped.*

Nancy wished she lived closer to people she trusted to secure safe childcare for her children during the deployment. She talks about finding her caregiver by posting a note on a bulletin board. When she looks back she cannot believe she thought that was safe.

*Nancy: I sure wish I had friends or family that were close by that could have [helped]. One thing I needed was better childcare and I'd like it to be more personal childcare.*

Leslie suggested an online resource to allow people to sign up to help and access providers. This would also give the Guard the ability to vet the people who sign up, so they are potentially more reliable than just cold calling people or services.

*Leslie: Stuff like that. And you know like its... but that's unless you have good close family around. I mean I always say you need to put together like a resource for the National Guard. Like an "Angie's List for the Guard". Kind of thing*

*Leah: Oh yeah*

*Leslie: 'Cause there might be people who would like to help, but we not everybody knows who to ask.*

*Leah: Absolutely*

*Leslie: I mean now the power of Facebook is... you know*

## **Discussion**

We have looked at the challenges raised by deployments and how these women met those challenges. Even though they were all proud of their ability to make it through a deployment, there were still gaps and unmet needs. I believe the strongest interventions and services emerge from the populations we want to help. This chapter was created with the participatory action research as an inspiration. I believe in the importance of collaborating with participants to make change (Baum, McDougal, & Smith, 2006). This

chapter was inspired by PAR and when I asked them “What would have made it better?”, they all had answers.

The first response many of the women had was what I called “the fantasy” to not have him leave at all. They realized this is not realistic of course, but that does not make it unimportant. No matter how well they met the challenges of the deployment, it was not a replacement for having their husbands home and safe. It is not just the presence of their spouse they are seeking. These are women who are used to ongoing separations in their marriages. They found many ways to fill the gaps left by their husbands. What they could not change was the risk they took in combat. They could not mitigate the fear they felt and this is possibly why this response was so emotional for them. Obviously if you have a deployment, the soldier must leave. However it is important to know this is what they really want. Even the marriages that were in jeopardy, the women were looking to strengthen their connection to their spouses. They wanted to be together.

This fantasy response moved quickly into real world solutions to this problem. If the goal is to increase the time the couple is together, they suggested to decrease the length of deployments. They also suggested increasing the time between deployments. The main goal behind both of the suggestions is to create more time at home. We could see from the effectiveness of leaves and time together during deployments, that this was something that worked for the women and helped make the deployments more manageable. However, we know by the nature of their high ranks, this would be unlikely to occur. Even if deployments were shortened, their husbands would still have more time away than the lower ranked enlisted soldier.

The other suggestions could be categorized under one umbrella theme: the need

for more connectedness or community. The women wished they had better connections in a variety of areas during the deployment. We know that due to the geographically dispersed nature of the Guard they experienced disconnectedness and isolation. They had difficulty accessing services and often felt the civilian community did not understand their experience. Again living on or having close access to a military base was suggested as the best possible solution by some. We have seen this is an important source of support during deployments for active component spouses. Having a wraparound community of people and services makes deployments less difficult. Christina talked about living on a base where she could walk her kids to school. It freed up time from her day when she would normally be driving her children to various schools. Jenny mentioned when something went wrong with your house there were other soldiers who would jump in and help out. The stress of trying to fix or find a repairperson was alleviated as well as the potential expense. These elements would eliminate or ease many of the challenges these women faced during the deployments.

With the Guard in its current composition, living on a physical base is not a feasible solution. The National Guard is a part time military unit. These men and women chose to hold civilian job and live in the civilian world. In peacetime and between deployments Guard activities only takes up a small portion of their lives. If they wanted a full time career they would join the active military. However, during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the National Guard was used more like a full time fighting force. It is possible this cannot be maintained for long periods. The Guard has already stood down. They decreased their OPTEMPO and returned to a schedule more closely resembling the “one weekend a month two weeks a year” model of the past.

While bases may not be a reasonable solution, there may be ways to decrease the distance from their units. One consideration may be to reconsider how soldiers are assigned to their units. It used to be that the National Guard member was placed in a unit closest to their home. This changed during the GWOT and soldiers were allowed to float according to their function in the Guard and the need of each unit. If soldiers could be located closer to home, this would help ease the time of separation during trainings and might also allow the spouses to access some services more easily. If the issue is to create a military community in today's technological age there are other ways this might be accomplished as well.

Some women suggested ideas to increase connections to people and services. To increase the connection to other military spouses they wanted to have some control over this process. These are women who resist seeking help and going to a support group may not be the best solution for some of them. However, if they had access to a list of names and information about spouses who would like to be connected to one another, they could make their own connections. One suggestion was a virtual map that allowed you to hover a cursor over your hometown and see all the National Guard spouses in the area and their contact information. Demographic information could be included such as if they had children, level of education, employment, and the deployment status of their spouse to target someone with a similar situation. This would help facilitate the natural pairings that occurred for some during other deployments. For example, they could arrange their own childcare co-op for working moms where they share the responsibility.

Another suggestion was an "Angie's List" for the Guard. This would be to create an online resource with vetted service providers and groups would be listed. Often the



concern is finding help for household tasks or emergency help that is reputable. To have access to this information would limit the vulnerability some of the women faced when managing new roles and tasks during the deployment.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CONCLUSION

Combat deployments are difficult by any measure. Even the glamorized Hollywood version of combat, we know there is a price paid through death and disability. We have seen these wars unfold on our television screens and computer monitors since the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Couples separated and some never reunited. Much has been written about the impact deployments take on soldiers. We are just beginning to understand the unique difficulties for their partners and families at home. Jenny sums up what many of the women felt.

*Leah: Ok um... can you think of anything that could have helped during the deployment that didn't happen?*

*Jenny: [tearing up] I think it's just a crappy situation, it's not like... I don't know how you can make it better, you know?*

Even if the soldier returns home, they are all changed by this experience. This is also true for their spouses and partners.

*Tammy: Oh darn right. (laughs) you might have been there getting shot at but I was down here holding down the base.*

We will discuss what the experience of “holding down the base” meant to these women and see what we have learned from their stories.

### Challenges During Deployments

While periodic separations are part of life in the National Guard, the change in the OPTEMPO after September 11<sup>th</sup> increased these separations substantially. The challenges took place throughout the deployment cycle, often starting as soon as the deployment was announced. Wedding dates were changed, decisions to have children

were delayed, and an overall sense of stress followed the couples for the entire time before the deployment.

Once the deployment begins there is a sense of isolation and disconnection that occurs. The geographic location of National Guard spouses within civilian communities is often away from bases and armories and this becomes an issue. They do not have access to their home FRG's and miss the support and connection active component spouses' experience.

Additionally issues arose from inside the home as well. The removal of the NGM left a hole that the stateside spouse had to fill. For some this was their first time living on their own and they needed to learn new roles or how to care for their children as a single parent. For some the NGM's absence is further reinforced by these new tasks. New skills are learned and some women believe their system works better than before.

When the NGM returns a renegotiation of roles begins again. While some NGM returned to their previous roles right away, many were slower to reengage with the home chores. When they did a tension could arise between the old way and the new. The women were sensitive to their husbands' feelings, but were proud of their accomplishments.

Relationships are also renegotiated once the deployment ends. The length of the separation created a distance between the couples that needed to be bridged, even by those who remained in close contact during the deployment. They might grow stronger because they know they can withstand such a difficult challenge. They might be pushed further apart due to the disconnection they feel. Traumatic events leave an imprint regardless.

*Christina: But I think our family is much different than it would have been. Maybe not much, but we're different people because of the experiences we've had you know? We've had to come together more at times for things.*

Death was always an uninvited houseguest who would not leave until the service member returned home. It revealed itself in many ways: through information provided, general topics in the home, worry of parents, spouses, and children, or the death of other NGMs. Living with the reality their husbands may not return is possibly the most fundamental challenge faced by these spouses.

### **Personal Strengths**

These women rose above these problems by utilizing their strengths. Some were innate. Independence is possibly the most important quality for a National Guard spouse to possess during deployments. The ability to navigate and manage their lives on their own is essential when your partner is frequently absent.

These women were committed to their relationships and determined to maintain life as normal. They often felt there was no choice. This was seen as a matter of fact more than hopeless. They would keep their shared lives functioning until the NGM returned.

Through the deployment process these women rose above the situation and survived. They experienced resilience through this process. They were able to successfully “bounce back” during these difficult times and maintain their lives. Some of these women are internally resilient and have the ability to manage whatever challenges life throws at them. Other women saw these qualities emerge during the process. Resilience can be taught or learned. We can see these women experiencing growth and change during the deployments. Even those who identified as independent and “strong”

were changed at the end. This period created Post-Traumatic Growth within these women.

Some of these qualities also had a duality. They felt stubbornness and independence were positive traits that helped them. We see this supported by the responses on the Family Functioning Scale. However, they also saw how being too independent or stubborn, but not asking for help could have made the deployment more difficult.

### **Supports Utilized**

While personal qualities may have helped them navigate the deployments, all the women accessed outside supports to help them. The actual helpfulness of the sources was varied. The women's own family and family of origin were seen as primarily helpful. The NGM was seen as a support, even at a distance for almost all the women. Additionally, they seem to support their spouses through Protective Withholding. By not sharing the true level of risk they are in, the NGM acts a modifier to the stress the stateside spouse is under. We already see the level of fear spouses have for the safety of the NGM, and by not sharing stories of trauma, injury, or death they shield them, even temporarily from giving basis for these fears. Children and the women's parents and siblings provided support as well.

To contrast the NGM's family was seen by most as either absent, in need of support, or a source of difficulty during the deployment. They found providing support to his family as a benefit that forced them to keep calm and not unravel. This was helpful. However, the lack of help or support from his family was primarily seen as another stressor. While the women would not ask for help from his family, the lack of an offer of

help still hurt. This relationship between the women and their in-laws is complex. We can only see their reaction to the lack of help or problems in the relationships. While they are experiencing the absence of their husbands, his family is dealing with the possible loss of their son in combat. The true nature of their reluctance to reach out is unclear. We can see the impact this reticence had on the women in this study. Their relationships are forever changed.

Support from friends was another source that had mixed results. Military friends were primarily seen as supportive. They could understand the stresses of deployment better than anyone. Civilian friends were helpful in some ways, but disconnected in others. When civilian friends help with childcare or provided help with a household task, they were effective. However, they seem to lack the experience and insights that military friends possess to provide emotional support.

The National Guard and military systems attempted to provide supports and services to the Guard families. Even though these services were created to provide support, they varied in effectiveness. The Red Cross and Yellow Ribbon programs were helpful. Other services, especially the FRGs were seen as less helpful. This was supported by the Family Support Scale. The primary factor in the ineffectiveness of these groups and services was the geographic distance and inaccessibility.

There was a reoccurring theme of a need for connection or community. While some of their support systems were effective, there were many essential supports that were lacking. If they did not have military friends or live close to an FRG, this unique type of support was nonexistent. These women did move from an almost completely

civilian space to one with a stronger military impact. However, their lives remain physically distant from military zones.

### **Suggestions for a Better Deployment**

When asked what would make the deployment better, initially many women said to have their husbands at home. Knowing this is unrealistic, they clarified by suggesting deployments should be reconfigured to be shorter in duration or occurring less frequently. This would allow for them to continue to be deployed, but then creating more time at home with their spouses and families.

As we discussed, many of the answers seemed to come back to a need for connection or community. This disconnected space they inhabited was viewed as a problem and they looked for ways to lessen it. Many of these needs would be met if they were in the active component and living on or near a military base.

Since this is not possible in the National Guard, they looked for other ways to improve connections to community, information, and services. Online sources were mentioned as a way to bridge these distances without changing the structure of the Guard. That being said, it is possible the National Guard is trying to bend a system into something it cannot support. That being said, these women know what needs to change and we only need to ask them.

### **Implications for Social Work Practice**

This study has important implications for social work practice. The field of military social work has been growing exponentially after September 11<sup>th</sup>. There are opportunities to work within the military and VA systems to help veterans and families reunite and process combat deployments. Additionally, many of the National Guard

service members and their spouses seek help outside the military systems. It is important to inform those practitioners who operate outside the military systems about the unique challenges these women and men face. Additionally, this can inform social workers' understanding the strengths National Guard spouses possess and the benefits and limitations of supportive groups they utilize. With this knowledge social workers can more effectively plan and implement treatment interventions. Furthermore, social workers can advocate for changes in policy regarding National Guard spouses and families. We can fight for better access to services. We can collaborate with the DoD, the Guard and the VA to improve the Family Services already available and tailor them to the needs we have seen. We can look for ways to fill the gaps in services in innovative ways.

### **Implications for the Military and the National Guard**

Considering the effectiveness and fiscal soundness of their utilization, it is likely the National Guard will be used in a similar manner in future military actions. It is then imperative for the military and the National Guard to look at how deployments impact this population. Possibly the most important distinction between active component and National Guard spouses is the immersion in a military community. If lengthy and reoccurring deployments are to continue, then the National Guard must look at how to create these communities within their system.

### **Next Steps**

If even independent women from strong marriages struggled with deployments, then how did more vulnerable partners and less solid unions fare? I plan on exploring these issues in my next step in this research. We need a complete picture of what



deployments are like for all spouses and partners of National Guard members. I plan to expand my study to look at the experiences of other groups within the National Guard. I need to increase the diversity of the sample and look at the experiences of unmarried and even former spouses. I also need to learn the experiences of the spouses of lower ranking enlisted Guard members. I had assumed that deployments would create a financial hardship on the National Guard spouses and families. I learned this is not true for officers or high ranking enlisted personnel. However, the participants thought this likely to be true for those in lower ranks.

My aims for this research are several fold. I want to understand the experience of these women and men in a deeper way. I have begun that process with this study. I want a comprehensive understanding of this group and the varied challenges they face and the factors that help them navigate deployments. I believe there is importance in telling their stories. These are often stories they have not shared with anyone. We ask from them a sacrifice. As Christina said, even a year separation leaves lifelong changes. There should be an account of what this sacrifice entails. Their voices should be heard and we should listen.

As a social worker I believe my research should inform practice and seek to improve people's lives. I hope to use this study to educate other practitioners about National Guard spouses so they can better meet their needs. I also want to allow this work to inform the National Guard. Before the Guard is pressed into this level of service again, programs can be adapted and changed to better meet the needs of this population.

I want to work on creating an intervention for Guard, partners, and families. I want to look at using resilience as a tool during times of separation for Guard spouses. It

is also possible merely the process of telling these stories has a therapeutic benefit. I would like to explore the possibility of as a narrative intervention with these women. I also want to create an app that expands on these women's suggestions. This could be a private geographically unrestrained method of providing connectivity and a sense of community for National Guard spouses and partners.

Through continued research and collaboration I will strive to shed light on these stories and find ways to improve services and supports to the women and men who serve on the homefront.

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## Appendix A

### GLOSSARY OF TERMS

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
CSM	Command Sargent Major
Deployment	Temporary mission, usually 12-18 months, overseas and may involve combat
DoD	Department of Defense
FRG	Family Readiness group, education/support groups formed by the National Guard
GWOT	Global War on Terror
LTC	Lieutenant Colonel
Mobilization	Temporary mission, usually short term and domestic
NGM	National Guard member, partner of the study participant
National Guard spouse	Wife, husband, or partner of National Guard member
NCO	Noncommissioned officer
NGM	National Guard member
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan)
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom (Iraq)
OPTEMPO	The cycle of training, deployment, and recovery for a military unit. This was increased during GWOT.
Red Cross	Organization that provides a wide range of referral services to soldiers and their families.
Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program	Program to improve the well-being of NGM's and their families throughout the deployment cycle, specifically reunification events and retreats.

## Appendix B

### FAMILY FUNCTIONING STYLE SCALES

#### Family Functioning Style Scale<sup>1</sup>

Angela G. Deal, Carol M. Trivette, & Carl J. Dunst

Respondent \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Recorder \_\_\_\_\_

#### DIRECTIONS

The scoring profile process is designed to facilitate accurate summation of responses on The Family Functioning Style Scale. The scoring sheet includes spaces for individual item scores, subscale scores, and category scores. The recorder should first enter the item score on the scoring sheet and then sum them to obtain the subscale score. The subscale and category scores from the scoring sheets are transferred to the profile form by simply circling the number corresponding to the scores. The circled numbers are then corrected by pencil or pen to depict a family's profile of strengths.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: C. J. Dunst, C. M. Trivette, and A. G. Deal (1988). *Enabling and empowering families: Principles and guidelines for practice*. Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books. May be reproduced.

FAMILY FUNCTIONING STYLE SCALE

Listed below are 26 statements about families. Please read each statement and indicate the extent to which it is true for your family. There are no right or wrong answers. Please give your honest opinion and feelings. Remember that no one family will be like all the statements given.

To what extent is each of the following statements like your family:	Not at All Like My Family	A Little Like My Family	Sometimes Like My Family	Generally Like My Family	Almost Always Like My Family
1. It is worth making personal sacrifices if it benefits our family	0	1	2	3	4
2. We generally agree about how family members are expected to behave	0	1	2	3	4
3. We believe that something good comes out of the worst situations	0	1	2	3	4
4. We take pride in even the smallest accomplishments of family members	0	1	2	3	4
5. We are able to share our concerns and feelings in productive ways	0	1	2	3	4
6. No matter how difficult things get, our family sticks together	0	1	2	3	4
7. We generally ask for help from persons outside our family if we cannot do things ourselves	0	1	2	3	4
8. We generally agree about the things that are important to our family	0	1	2	3	4
9. In our family we are always willing to "pitch in" and help one another	0	1	2	3	4
10. If something beyond our control is constantly upsetting to our family, we find things to do that keep our minds off our worries	0	1	2	3	4
11. No matter what happens in our family, we try to look "at the bright side of things"	0	1	2	3	4
12. Even in our busy schedules, we find time to be together	0	1	2	3	4
13. Everyone in our family understands the rules about acceptable ways to act	0	1	2	3	4
14. Friends and relatives are always willing to help whenever we have a problem or crisis	0	1	2	3	4
15. When we have a problem or concern, we are able to make decisions about what to do	0	1	2	3	4
16. We enjoy time together even if it is just doing household chores	0	1	2	3	4

Listed below are 26 statements about families. Please read each statement and indicate the extent to which it is true for your family. There are no right or wrong answers. Please give your honest opinion and feelings. Remember that no one family will be like all the statements given.

To what extent is each of the following statements like your family:	Not at All Like My Family	A Little Like My Family	Sometimes Like My Family	Generally Like My Family	Almost Always Like My Family
17. If we have a problem or concern that seems overwhelming, we try to forget it for awhile	0	1	2	3	4
18. Whenever we have disagreements, family members listen to "both sides of the story"	0	1	2	3	4
19. In our family, we make time to get things done that we all agree are important	0	1	2	3	4
20. In our family, we can depend upon the support of one another whenever something goes wrong	0	1	2	3	4
21. We generally talk about the different ways we deal with problems or concerns	0	1	2	3	4
22. In our family, our relationships will outlast our material possessions	0	1	2	3	4
23. Decisions like moving or changing jobs are based upon what is best for all family members	0	1	2	3	4
24. We can depend upon one another to help out when something unexpected comes up	0	1	2	3	4
25. In our family, we try not to take one another for granted	0	1	2	3	4
26. We try to solve our problems first before asking others to help	0	1	2	3	4

Please write down all things that you consider being the major strengths of your family. Don't overlook the little things that occur every day, which we often take for granted (e.g., sharing the responsibility of getting your child fed and to school).

SOURCE: C. J. Dunst, C. M. Trivette, and A. G. Deal (1988). *Enabling and empowering families: Principles and guidelines for practice*. Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books.  
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### Family Support Scale<sup>4</sup>

Carl J. Dunst, Vicki Jenkins, & Carol M. Trivette

Respondent \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Listed below are people and groups that often times are helpful to members of a family raising a young child. This questionnaire asks you to indicate how helpful each source is to your family.

Please circle the response the best describes how helpful the sources have been to your family during the past 3 to 6 months. If a source of help has not been available to your family during this period of time, circle the NA (Not Available) response.

How helpful has each of the following been to you in terms of raising your children?	Not Available	Not at All Helpful	Sometimes Helpful	Generally Helpful	Very Helpful	Extremely Helpful
1. My parents	NA	1	2	3	4	5
2. My spouse or partner's parents	NA	1	2	3	4	5
3. My relatives/kin	NA	1	2	3	4	5
4. My spouse or partner's relatives/kin	NA	1	2	3	4	5
5. Spouse or partner	NA	1	2	3	4	5
6. My friends	NA	1	2	3	4	5
7. My spouse or partner's friends	NA	1	2	3	4	5
8. My own children	NA	1	2	3	4	5
9. Other parents	NA	1	2	3	4	5
10. Co-workers	NA	1	2	3	4	5
11. Parent groups	NA	1	2	3	4	5
12. Social groups/clubs	NA	1	2	3	4	5
13. Church members/minister	NA	1	2	3	4	5
14. My family or child's physician	NA	1	2	3	4	5
15. Early childhood intervention program	NA	1	2	3	4	5

<sup>4</sup> Source: C.J. Dunst, C.M. Trivette, and A.G. Deal (1988). *Enabling and empowering families: Principles and guidelines for practice*. Cambridge, MA. Brookline Books. May be reproduced.



Listed below are people and groups that often times are helpful to members of a family raising a young child. This questionnaire asks you to indicate how helpful each source is to your family.

Please circle the response the best describes how helpful the sources have been to your family during the past 3 to 6 months. If a source of help has not been available to your family during this period of time, circle the NA (Not Available) response.

How helpful has each of the following been to you in terms of raising your children?	Not Available	Not at All Helpful	Sometimes Helpful	Generally Helpful	Very Helpful	Extremely Helpful
16. School/day-care center	NA	1	2	3	4	5
17. Professional helpers (social workers, therapists, teachers, etc.)	NA	1	2	3	4	5
18. Professional agencies (public health, social services, mental health, etc.)	NA	1	2	3	4	5
19. (if there are others, write in here)	NA	1	2	3	4	5
20. (if there are others, write in here)	NA	1	2	3	4	5

## APPENDIX C

### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Main Participant NG Spouse

Semi Structured Interview Questions

\*if no children “family” is changed to marriage or “you and your spouse/partner”

1. How did you hear about the study?
2. Tell me about your family?
  - a. How did you meet your spouse?
  - b. Children?
3. How did your family operate pre-deployment?
  - a. What worked well?
  - b. What could have worked better?
  - c. What are the support systems you had in place?
4. Tell me about deployment?
  - a. What changed?
  - b. How did it benefit you/your family?
    - i. In what way?
  - c. What could have worked better?
    - i. In what way?
  - d. How did your support systems change?
  - e. What are the most important things that helped during deployment?

If not previously disclosed:

- f. Tell me a story or situation that happened during deployment that stands out to you

5. What was it like when he/she first returned?
  - a. What was easier?
  - b. What was more challenging?
  - c. What was the most important things that helped during his/her reintegration into the family?

If not previously disclosed:

- d. Tell me a story or situation that happened when he/she returned that stands out to you

6. What are things like now?
  - a. Has time eased/made worse
7. What are your strengths?
  - a. How did they help you during deployment/did they help you?

- b. What do you wish you could have had during deployment that would have helped?
  - c. What do you wish you could have had on your spouse's return that would have helped?
- 8. Is there anything else I should be asking?
- 9. Do you know anyone else who might want to participate?