

ABSTRACT

This study addressed the question, “What is the lived experience of and meaning held by military officers’ spouses/partners regarding multiple, year-long or longer deployments of their active duty military wife/partner in the post-9/11 era?” A literature review indicated a paucity of information about this relatively new phenomenon and that the impact on spouses/partners warranted investigation. Study findings provide insight for health professionals about the stressors experienced and coping mechanisms utilized by military officer spouses/partners during repeated year-long or longer deployment. The findings afford an in-depth understanding of the complex and emerging issues faced by these individuals.

The researcher used Max van Manen’s approach to hermeneutic phenomenology to guide the study. This approach focused on employing individuals’ reflections on their experiences to reach an understanding of the deeper meaning of the experience. The essence of the experience was ambiguous loss and resilience. The researcher used purposive sampling to recruit seven participants who were spouses of military officer spouses for five and seventeen years and who experienced between two and six spousal/partner deployments. Strategies to address study credibility included methodological congruence, triangulation, thick description, prolonged engagement in the field, continuing search for disconfirming evidence, verbatim transcription, engagement in reflexivity, maintenance of an audit trail, and data saturation. Data were coded and analyzed for patterns and themes in an effort to identify the essence of participants’ lived experience.

THE MEANING AND LIVED EXPERIENCE OF DEPLOYMENT AS PERCEIVED BY
MILITARY OFFICERS' SPOUSES/PARTNERS

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to the seven brave women who came forth to bare their heart and souls so that others might catch a glimmer of the military officer's spouse world in the Post-9/11 era. It was an honor and privilege to work with all of you. The role that you fill may be somewhat invisible to the rest of society, but you must trust that some do truly "get it." Thank you for the sacrifices you make day after day after day.

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To Drs. Burke, Johnson and Prividera: Thank you for the countless hours you spent reading my manuscript, offering helpful suggestions, and most importantly, for your belief that this topic was worthy of qualitative research efforts. To Dr. Knight: Thank you just doesn't seem enough. I'm grateful for your wise guidance through this tedious process, gentle nudging to produce better work, and words of encouragement when I didn't think I was "scholarly enough" to continue. It has been a privilege to navigate this journey with you as my guide.

To my children: Never again will you have to hear me say, "Just a minute, Honey, I'm working on my paper!" Let's celebrate! And, last but not least, to my husband: Thank you for supporting me through this process. I love you.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

The research literature is replete with articles concerning military personnel and their families in the time since the terrorist bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001 (Post-9/11 era). The research review conducted for this study revealed an increased incidence of several health-related issues. These issues include, but are not limited to, increasing suicide rates of military personnel (Burton, Farley, and Rhea, 2009; Chapin, 2009; Demers, 2009; Eaton, Hoge, Messer, Whitt, Cabrera, McGurk, Cox and Castro, 2008); increasing rates of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Burton et al., 2009; Demers, 2009; Eaton et al., 2008; Morris & Age, 2009); increasing divorce rates across military ranks (Burton et al., 2009; Chapin, 2009; Demers, 2009; Dimiceli, Steinhardt, and Smith, 2009; Engel, Gallagher, and Lyle, 2008; Mansfield, Kaufman, Marshall, Gaynes, Morrissey, and Engel, 2010; Spera, 2008; SteelFisher, Zaslavsky, and Blendon, 2008); increase in the occurrence of mental illness in military personnel and their family members, including children (Burton et al., 2009; Chapin, 2009; Demers, 2009; Dimiceli et al., 2009; Eaton et al., 2008; Huebner, Mancini, Wilcox, Grass, and Grass, 2007; Mansfield et al., 2010; Morris & Age, 2009; Pittman, Kerpelman, and McFadyen, 2004; SteelFisher et al., 2008; Tollefson, 2008); and increasing rates of separation from the military due to family stressors (Burton et al., 2009; Chapin, 2009; Demers, 2009; Dimiceli et al., 2009; Eaton et al., 2008; Hosek & Mantorell, 2009; Mansfield et al., 2010; Spera, 2008; SteelFisher et al., 2008; Westhuis, Fafara, and Ouellette, 2006).

In addition to an increase in many health-related issues, the literature review for this study also revealed an increase in the demand for programming to help military organizations address these complex issues (Burton, et al., 2009; Castaneda & Harrell, 2007; Chapin, 2009; Demers, 2009; Dimiceli et al., 2009; Eaton et al., 2008; Huebner et al., 2007; Mansfield et al., 2010; Morris & Age, 2009; Pittman et al., 2004; Savych, 2008; Spera, 2008; SteelFisher et al., 2008; Tollefson, 2008; Westhuis et al., 2006). A paucity of qualitative research that focused on how military officer spouses/partners of active duty military personnel experience and make

meaning of separation due to frequent and long-lasting deployments existed at the time of this study.

Three mixed methods studies identified in the literature review (Castaneda & Harrell, 2007; Demers, 2009; Dimiceli et al., 2009) reported findings that deployments negatively affected spouses and that spouses struggled to cope with deployments in the Post-9/11 era. Dimiceli et al. reported that spouses identified deployment as their most stressful life experience and noted that, prior to their study, no one had researched the coping strategies used by wives of military servicemen since the Vietnam War (Dimiceli et al., 2009).

The researcher identified four qualitative studies in the literature review. One of these studies was conducted in 1995, prior to the September 11, 2001 World Trade Center bombing (Wood, Scarville, and Gravino, 1995). Another study focused only on US National Guard and Reserves members (Tollefson, 2008). A third qualitative study focused specifically on applying McCubbin's Family Resilience Model to the unique demands placed on military families due to military deployments (Chapin, 2009). A fourth qualitative study focused solely on senior (rank of General officer) spouses (McGowan, 2008). The researcher did not identify any qualitative studies that focused on the lived experience of and meaning held by military officer spouses/partners regarding deployments in the Post-9/11 era.

The military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have been the longest military engagements since the Vietnam War and are, according to some experts, the most severe test to date for the nation's all-volunteer military force (Burton et al., 2009; Demers, 2009; Engel et al., 2008; Hosek & Martorell, 2009; Mansfield et al., 2010; Morris & Age, 2009; Spera, 2008; Tollefson, 2008). More than 1.8 million soldiers have been deployed since 2002, many of them more than once (Burton et al., 2009; Chapin, 2009; Demers, 2009; Dimiceli et al., 2009; Eaton et al., 2008; Hosek & Martorell, 2009; Mansfield et al., 2010; Morris & Age, 2009; Spera, 2008; SteelFisher et al., 2008; Westhuis et al., 2006). The fast pace of deployment has taken emotional, physical, and mental tolls on all soldiers, regardless of rank or branch of service

(Burton et al., 2009; Chapin, 2009; Demers, 2009; Dimiceli et al., 2009; Eaton et al., 2008; Hosek & Mantorell, 2009; Mansfield et al., 2010; Morris & Age, 2009; Spera, 2008; SteelFisher et al., 2008; Westhuis et al., 2006). It has been most heavily experienced by the U.S. Army because these men and women have deployed for longer periods of time than the other branches of service (Hosek & Mantorell, 2009). Marines have typically deployed for seven months. Navy and Air Force have usually deployed for three to six month tours, but Army soldiers have typically deployed for at least one year since early 2003 (Hosek & Mantorell, 2009).

In early 2007, U.S. Army officials announced a plan to change from routine twelve-month deployments to fifteen-month deployments (Garamone, 2007). As a result, some units stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan experienced an extended stay of an additional three months. Most subsequent deploying units have left their home bases knowing they would be gone from home for approximately fifteen months. Although an effort has been made to revert deployment times to twelve months, the units deployed at the time of this study continued to remain in war zones for duration of approximately twelve to fifteen months.

In September, 2007, U.S. Army Chief of Staff, George W. Casey, the Army's senior military officer, informed Congress that the Army was stretched too thin (Bender, 2007; Garamone, 2007). He surmised at that point in time that one of the many side effects of the deployment extensions would be a significant demand for, and increases in, health and other benefits for Army personnel and families coping with the deployments of loved ones (Bender, 2007; Garamone, 2007). Four years later, twelve to fifteen month deployments have continued across the Army and many soldiers have deployed more than once for one year or longer (Burton et al., 2009; Demers, 2009; Hosek & Mantorell, 2009; Mansfield et al., 2010; Spera, 2008; SteelFisher et al., 2008).

Statement of the Problem

Researchers have raised questions about how military personnel, their spouses/partners and their families have fared in response to multiple, long-term separations (Burton et al., 2009; Castaneda & Harrell, 2007; Chapin, 2009; Demers, 2009; Dimiceli et al, 2009; Eaton et al., 2008; Engel et al., 2008; Hosek & Mantorell, 2009; Huebner et al., 2007; Mansfield et al., 2010; Morris & Age, 2009; Pittman et al., 2004; Savych, 2008; Spera, 2008; SteelFisher et al., 2008; Tollefson, 2008; Westhuis et al., 2006). A review of the literature for the present study revealed several quantitative and mixed methods studies which focused on the impact of sustained, long-term deployments to soldiers and their families, but few qualitative research studies that enabled insight into how military spouses experience repeated deployments were discussed.

Several studies have concluded that separation and reunion impacted military lifestyles (Castaneda & Harrell, 2007; Chapin, 2009; Demers, 2009; Dimiceli, 2009; Eaton et al., 2008; Engel et al., 2008; Hiew, 1992; Huebner et al., 2007; McGowan, 2008; Mansfield et al., 2010; Morris & Age, 2009; Pittman et al., 2004; Spera, 2008; SteelFisher et al., 2008; Tollefson, 2008; Westhuis et al., 2006; Wood et al, 1995). Wood et al. (1995) indicated that separation and reunion were two of the most challenging facets of Army life with which soldiers and their families must cope. Dimiceli, et al. (2009) concluded that military spouses ranked deployments as the most stressful life situation they have encountered. This phenomenological qualitative study sought to contribute new information to the literature by focusing specifically on providing insight into military officer spouses/partners' meaning and lived experiences of frequent, long-lasting deployments.

Purpose of the Study

This phenomenological qualitative study explored how military officer spouses/partners experienced deployments and what those deployments meant to them, particularly in terms of their personal health and well-being. The study offers insight into the stressors that participants experienced and the coping mechanisms that they utilized. The study focused on

military officer spouses/partners who were women that had experienced at least two deployments of at least one year in duration and who also parented children during the deployments. The findings associated with this study afforded an in-depth understanding of the complex and emerging issues faced by spouses/partners of those experiencing prolonged, multiple military deployments. The researcher anticipated that hearing the voices of the study participants and providing insight into the essence of the lived experience of military officer spouses/partners in an era of terrorism-related wars will benefit those seeking to provide support to military personnel, spouses/partners, and families both at the present time and in the future.

Research Question

This qualitative study addressed the question, “What is the lived experience of and meaning held by military officer spouses/partners regarding multiple yearlong or longer deployments of their active duty military officer spouse/partner in the Post-9/11 era?”

Researcher’s Capabilities and Assumptions

The researcher prepared to conduct this study by successfully completing a graduate-level qualitative research methods course which involved the conduct of a pilot study for this work. She has been the spouse of an active duty military officer for thirteen years. The researcher brought personal biases and assumptions to the study due, in part, to having experienced her spouse’s three deployments within a period of seven years, each of which lasted at least six months but no more than fifteen months. She was aware that the emergent nature of qualitative research might evoke more biases throughout the course of the study and thus took steps to address this issue.

Some of the biases/assumptions the researcher recognized at the onset of the study included the belief that military deployments required significant coping skills on the part of spouses/partners. Because the researcher has experienced multiple, frequent deployments on the

part of her spouse, she believed she would be considered an “insider” by those who voluntarily chose to participate in her study. She assumed her insider status would more enable her to effectively develop rapport with participants than would have been possible for researchers who had not had a similar experience. She believed that unless someone had experienced a spouse’s long military deployment, one could not understand the meaning or experience associated with multiple deployments and thus could not obtain access to, and insight from, participants who had directly experienced this phenomenon.

The researcher acknowledged that she believed that the additional role of parenting added to the stress of the deployment, thus making the experience harder to endure than it was for those women who were not engaged in caring for children. However, she believed that deriving support from friends, family, and spiritual resources, and engagement in a healthy lifestyle such as good eating habits, a healthy sleep pattern, and a regular exercise routine improve military spouses’ coping abilities.

Engaging in reflexivity led the researcher to realize that she believed that multiple deployments were harder to cope with than a single deployment. She also believed that when military officer families faced multiple deployments, a shorter amount of time between the deployments created higher levels of stress and made coping more difficult. For example, she believed that having the soldier spouse/partner home for three months between fifteen-month deployments created a more stressful home environment and required greater coping skills than did having the soldier home for a year between each fifteen-month deployment. She also believed longer deployments created more stress for the spouse/partner. For example, she considered six-month deployments to be easier to cope with than fifteen-month deployments. Furthermore, she believed that a deployment did not become easier as the separation from her spouse lengthened; rather, the deployment continued to cause stress and demanded better coping skills as time went on. In this instance, the researcher believed that the eighth month of a deployment was not any easier than the third month.

The researcher believed that the military was scrambling to keep up with the increased demands for mental health services and other family assistance resources and programs. Although the programs existed, she believed that many of these programs were under-utilized by officers' spouses/partners. She believed this was because of an unwritten code of conduct and a silent expectation that the military officer spouses/partners should keep quiet, rise above the stress of military life, and "keep it all together" in public. The researcher believed that this expectation has been exaggerated during deployments because officers' spouses/partners are looked to by others for leadership and Family Readiness Group guidance and nurturing, and that it would be unacceptable if she herself needed help. The researcher believes that this unwritten code of conduct presents barriers to officers' spouses/partners seeking help for mental health concerns and adopting successful coping strategies.

The researcher believed that officers' spouses/partners were, in subtle ways, taught within their military social circles that the outside world should not see a true picture of the stress occurring within herself and her family. She believed that this expectation affected the way officers' spouses/partners interacted with one another, the unit Family Readiness Group (FRG), the military base officers' spouses club, and the military community at large. She also believed failure of the spouse to follow the unwritten code of conduct could affect her husband's career. The researcher felt she was not alone in this thinking.

The researcher's engagement in journal writing, reflexivity, and bracketing helped her to continue to recognize, acknowledge, and set aside personal biases and assumptions that arose during the course of the study. She perceived that using these tools allowed her to set aside personal biases and assumptions so that she could be fully present and open to the perceptions and experiences of the study participants. The researcher intended to address how military officer spouses/partners coped with multiple year or longer deployments by clearly and accurately portraying the voices of participants. She believed that the essence of life as a

military officer spouse/partner who experienced multiple, long-lasting deployments would become more vivid and be better understood as a result of this study.

Limitations

Although the use of a purposively selected, small sample in this study limited the generalizability of findings, this study focused on transferability of findings rather than generalizability. Qualitative studies typically do not involve large samples due to efforts to attain depth of insight. As with qualitative research in general, the intention is to explain a smaller number of specific experiences related to deployment in extensive detail (Creswell, 2007). The researcher used thick description as a means of providing readers with an opportunity to evaluate the sample and setting of the current study, and the potential for transferability of findings to what they assessed to be a similar sample and setting. Thick description provides the reader with an opportunity to experience the detail, context, emotion, and voices of participants (Creswell, 2007). It also helps to convey the essence of multiple, long-lasting deployments. Qualitative research is accepted as a legitimate, albeit interpretive, research approach that uses systematic, rigorous processes. (Creswell, 2007).

The researcher's personal experience as a military spouse served as both an asset and challenge in the conduct of the study. The researcher's personal bias had to be acknowledged and set aside in order to avoid the imposition of her personal perspectives on the data analysis process. The researcher believes her insider status facilitated her access to study participants who might have otherwise declined participation in the study. Roland & Wicks (2009) identified a potential difficulty with insider research as over-rapport between researcher and informant. In contrast, Hockey (1993) contended that, as an insider, the researcher benefited by enhanced rapport with the participant, an ability to assess the accuracy of participants' responses to questions, and the tendency of participants to view the researcher as empathetic. Roland & Wicks concluded that insider status can be more of a help than a limitation (2009).

A recognized limitation when employing interviews as a data collection strategy is the possibility that some participants may have self-censored their comments or provided socially acceptable or politically correct responses during the interview process (Creswell, 2007). Moreover, potential limitations may be associated with participants' inaccurate recall of events, the reactivity that can occur between participant and researcher, and the possibility of self-serving responses on the part of study participants (Patton, 2002).

Finally, the use of telephone interviews limited the researcher's direct visual observations of five participants and their physical reactions, facial expressions, and gestures during the course of the interviews. Two of the interviews were conducted via Skype™, which allowed the researcher to make direct visual observations of those participants. The use of the telephone and Skype™, however, afforded the researcher an opportunity to obtain the perspectives of participants who lived in various areas of the United States. Although the researcher was not able to engage every participant with face-to-face interaction, which may have impeded informal participant-researcher communication during the interview (Creswell, 2007), the researcher was particularly attentive to subtle changes in speech that signaled issues or communicated insight.

Definition of Terms

Back-to-back deployments: The military defined, "back-to-back," as a soldier returning from an operational deployment of at least 180 consecutive days (six months) or a twelve month dependent restricted tour who is then reassigned to a unit scheduled for an operational deployment or a dependent restricted tour for 12 months following a return from deployment date (United States Army, Human Resources Command, 2003).

Comfort Care Team: The term "Comfort Care Team" was defined in this study as an all-volunteer team comprised of military spouses who were carefully selected, trained, and certified to provide emergency assistance in the event of a tragedy in a military unit. The tragedy may be a casualty, an accident, or a family catastrophe of any sort which affects the military family. In

the event of a tragedy, resources would be provided to family members in need 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Assistance provided may include meals, transportation, childcare, home cleaning, telephone answering or any other direct or indirect care requested by the family members.

Deployment: The term “deployment” was defined in this study as the assignment of an active duty military officer, unaccompanied by his or her dependents, to a geographical location outside the United States for the purpose of defending the United States while at war for a period of 180 days or longer (United States Army, Human Resources Command, 2003).

Dwell time: In this study, the term “dwell time” was defined as the time frame between deployments in which a soldier or military unit was preparing for the next deployment.

Family Readiness Group (FRG): For this study, the term “FRG” was defined by Army Command Policy (United States Army, Army Community Service, 2006). This definition included, but was not limited to, the following statement: “The FRG is an official Army program established pursuant to AR 600-20, Army Command Policy. Unit commanders at all levels are expected to establish and/or support FRG operations.” FRGs are typically established at the company level with guidance and support from the battalion commander and his/her staff. As a company level operation, the FRG is a command-sponsored organization that involves all assigned soldiers (married and single), Department of the Army civilians, volunteers and their families (immediate and extended) that together provide mutual support and assistance and a network of communications among the family members, the chain of command, and community resources. While all of these individuals are automatically considered to be members of the FRG, participation is voluntary (United States Army Family and Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Command, 2010).

Multiple, long-lasting deployments: This term was defined in this study as the assignment of an active duty military officer, unaccompanied by his or her dependents, to a geographical location outside the United States for a period of time lasting one year or longer, followed by a second or

third similar deployment. The time between the deployments varied, depending on the officer's assignment history.

Pre-deployment: The term "pre-deployment" was defined in this study as the period of time preceding the soldier's departure to a war zone, where he was still physically present in the family unit but was preparing to leave the family unit for a military mission for a prolonged period of time.

Post or base: The term "post" or "base" was defined as a facility directly-owned and operated by the military. The facility generally shelters military equipment and personnel and provides a place for training and operations. The area usually offers such things as a food commissary, gas station, fitness center, hospital or medical office, and housing. The terms "post" and "base" are used interchangeably. The term "post" is used primarily when referring to Army facilities. The term "base" is most often used in reference to other branches of service.

Reintegration: The term "reintegration" was defined in this study as the period of time following a deployment when the soldier has returned home, experienced an extensive (longer than one year) break in the deployment cycle, and started to regain active membership within the family unit. The researcher used the term to describe the fourth phase of deployment.

Return: The researcher defined the term "return" as the third phase of the deployment cycle. It was characterized as the time in which the husband had returned home from the war zone, but had not yet reintegrated with the family. In other words, the soldier was, "Home but not in the house."

Spouse/Partner: The term "spouse/partner" was defined as a woman cohabitating with an active duty military member. The legality of the union and gender of the other person involved was not relevant in this study.

CHAPTER II- REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A dramatic increase in the operational tempo of the Armed Forces occurred as a result of the horrific act of terrorism that occurred on U.S. soil on September 11, 2001 (Burton et al., 2009). The rate of military deployments and back-to-back deployments was at an all-time high and more than one million troops had deployed to combat areas from September, 2001 to the time the study was conducted (Benjamin, 2005; Burton et al., 2009; Hosek & Mantorell, 2009). As evidenced by numerous studies, military deployments took a toll on service members, their spouses and their families (Burton et al., 2009; Castaneda & Harrell, 2007; Chapin, 2009; Demers, 2009; Dimiceli et al., 2009; Eaton et al., 2008; Engel et al., 2008; Hosek & Mantorell, 2009; Huebner et al., 2007; Mansfield et al., 2010; Morris & Age, 2009; Pittman et al., 2004; Savych, 2008; Spera, 2008; SteelFisher et al., 2008; Tollefson, 2008; Westhuis et al., 2006).

Studies focusing on how soldiers coped with the effects of the up-tempo in troop deployment and the increased demands with deployment have indicated increased mental health problems among soldiers (Burton et al., 2009; Chapin, 2009; Demers, 2009; Dimiceli et al., 2009; Eaton et al., 2008; Huebner et al., 2007; Mansfield et al., 2010; Morris & Age, 2009; Pittman et al., 2004; SteelFisher et al., 2008; Tollefson, 2008); a higher incidence of suicides among active duty military members (Burton et al., 2009; Chapin, 2009; Demers, 2009; Eaton et al., 2008); a higher prevalence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Burton et al., 2009; Demers, 2009; Eaton et al., 2008; Morris & Age, 2009); increased divorce rates in military families (Burton et al., 2009; Chapin, 2009; Demers, 2009; Dimiceli et al., 2009; Engel et al., 2008; Mansfield et al., 2010; Spera, 2008; SteelFisher et al., 2008); and reduced military reenlistments due to family-related problems (Burton et al., 2009; Chapin, 2009; Demers, 2009; Dimiceli et al., 2009; Eaton et al., 2008; Hosek & Mantorell, 2009; Mansfield et al., 2010; Spera, 2008; SteelFisher et al., 2008; Westhuis, 2006).

Research focused on how families had coped during this era provided evidence of the negative impact that deployments have had on military children and on the atmosphere within

the family home (Chapin, 2009; Demers, 2009; Dimiceli et al., 2009; Engel et al., 2008; Hiew, 1992; Huebner et al., 2007; Morris & Age, 2009 and Warner et al., 2009). Specifically, a study by Engel et al., concluded that teenagers in military families suffered academically while a parent was deployed. The longer and more often the deployed parent was gone from the home, the more the student dropped in his or her academic standing (2008). Another study reported that children often did not cope well in the absence of a deployed parent, especially if the mother of the family was not coping well (Morris & Age, 2009).

A search of the literature regarding how military officer spouses/partners coped during deployments revealed a lack of studies that focused on military officer spouses/partners alone. The few studies that have been conducted were almost all quantitative in nature (Burton et al., 2009; Eaton et al., 2008; Mansfield et al., 2010; Savych, 2008; Spera, 2008; SteelFisher et al., 2008; Warner, Appenzeller, Warner, and Geiger, 2009 and Westhuis, 2006). All of the studies concluded that the increased demand placed on military spouses/partners had a negative effect on their health and well-being (Burton et al., 2009; Eaton et al., 2008; Mansfield et al., 2010; Morris & Age, 2009; Savych, 2008; Spera, 2008; SteelFisher et al., 2008; Westhuis, 2006). Eaton et al. (2008) highlighted the observation that the life of a military spouse, in general, had unique concerns. In addition to deployments, the issues noted to be stressors for military spouses were adjustment to frequent relocations and sometimes to overseas duty assignments; isolation from the civilian community and extended family who do not understand many facets of military life; adjustment to nuances of military life; and worries about their job, parenting children, and household responsibilities (Dimiceli et al., 2010; Eaton et al., 2008). This study concluded that, during times of separation, the military spouse experienced an increase in such demands made upon them (Eaton et al., 2008).

Warner et al. (2009) determined that ninety percent of the subjects in their study reported feelings of loneliness and concerns about the safety of their deployed spouse as primary sources of stress during the deployment. They also determined that the time leading up to the

deployment, (referred to in this study as pre-deployment), was a very stressful time. Mansfield et al. recognized similar findings, but focused on the development of mental health problems related to these stressors (2010). Mansfield et al. (2010) found that increased stress among military family members during the pre-deployment, deployment, and redeployment phases was a potential catalyst for developing mental health problems such as depression, substance use and abuse, and bi-polar disorder, although at the time of this study these problems were well documented but not well studied in military families.

A quantitative study by Padden, Connors, and Agazio (2011) focused on stress, coping, and well-being of military spouses during deployments. The literature review conducted for the study revealed that, despite the frequency and number of deployments among military personnel, current research and literature has not adequately addressed the relationship between deployment-related stress, coping, and general well-being of military spouses (Padden, et al., 2011). Although the study by Padden et al. was similar in topic to this study, this researcher had concerns about the methodology used to acquire the quantitative data. She thus had concern about whether the findings of the study appropriately reflected the true picture of stress and coping of military spouses. The researcher believed that the sole use of Family Readiness Group meetings for data collection could have resulted in skewed findings.

A focused search for qualitative studies revealed three studies that were conducted using a mixed methods approach (Castaneda & Harrell, 2007; Demers, 2009; and Dimiceli et al., 2009). Dimiceli et al. (2009) found that military spouses named deployments as their most stressful life experience due to the increased demands of caring for their children as a single parent and the persistent worrying about the death or injury of their own husbands, especially when they witnessed the death or injury by a friend's spouse/partner or other soldiers in the unit. The spouses interviewed also indicated that the lack of support provided to them while their husband was away added to the stress of deployment (Dimiceli et al., 2009). Study participants mentioned other events such as illness or death of a parent, flooding or other natural disaster,

involvement in a car accident, or giving birth without their husband present as particularly stressful (Dimiceli et al., 2009). Spouses interviewed for the study felt that when these events occurred congruently they felt an even higher level of stress (Dimiceli et al, 2009).

Demers (2009) also conducted a mixed methods study of military families' reactions to deployment. She determined that spouses and other family members were negatively impacted by deployments, struggled to cope with the increased demands placed on the family unit, and experienced a lack of resources for support (Demers, 2009). Demers (2009) concluded there was a need for further research.

Of the four qualitative studies that were identified, one was conducted in 1995 (Wood et al., 1995) and two involved U.S. National Guard and Reserve spouses (Tollefson, 2008; Wheeler & Torres Stone, 2010). One qualitative research study applied McCubbin's Family Resilience Model to the unique demands of military deployments (Chapin, 2009). Considerable stress accompanied separations, according to Wood et al. (1995). The stressors identified included marital strain, the role of single parenting, childcare difficulties, dealing with children's behavioral and emotional difficulties, handling home and car repairs, financial difficulties, and problems accessing military services (Wood et al., 1995). Family members experienced feelings of loneliness, anger, and depression (Wood et al., 1995). The researcher identified no prior qualitative study that addressed the experiences and meanings that military officer spouses/partners ascribed to multiple, long-term deployments.

Wheeler & Torres Stone (2010) found that National Guard spouses used coping strategies such as expressive activities like journaling, keeping busy by spending time with family and friends, focusing on spiritual aspects of life, and using technology to keep in touch with their deployed spouse. A number of the women interviewed for the study also mentioned that they used some type of avoidance strategy to assist in their coping. One example provided by the women was a participant who "threw [herself] into her work" (Wheeler & Torres Stone, 2010). The study revealed that while National Guard spouses differed in many ways from active duty

spouses, the patterns of stress and coping with deployments mirrored the patterns exhibited by their active duty counterparts (Chapin, 2009; Wood et al., 1995).

The researcher located one qualitative dissertation that focused on the lived meaning of military experience by senior military officers' wives (McGowan, 2008). Although the study did not focus specifically on deployments, the topic of deployments was included in McGowan's phenomenological study. The dissertation advanced the literature by sharing the voices of eight General officers' spouses who were interviewed one-on-one by McGowan who was herself an insider (McGowan, 2008). The lived experiences and perceived meanings of the expectations and numerous demands and roles placed on them were due in part to their husband's rank of General. The study provided evidence that the pressures of an officer's wife, "never let up" (McGowan, 2008, p.5). McGowan provided data which offered insight into the increased responsibility that an officer's wife feels when her husband is deployed to a war zone (McGowan, 2008).

The participant's in McGowan's study revealed that they feel responsible not only for their family, but for the needs of all families who are under their husband's command (2008). One participant shared with McGowan that despite assuring others, repeatedly, that she was "doing okay," she "silently wondered if she would implode when (her husband) came home" (McGowan, 2008, p. 89). Although only senior military spouses were interviewed, the study confirmed the existence of unique demands and expectations placed on an officer's spouse as a result of their husband's rank and position in the military (McGowan, 2008).

Mixed method investigations revealed that coping strategies that enabled the individuals to deal effectively with conflict or stress increased the likelihood of achieving a productive outcome (Beutler, Moos, and Lane, 2003; Frydenberg, 2004). Pittman et al. (2004) expressed the need for more qualitative research, however. These researchers contended that such research would enhance the ability of the Army to evaluate the links between experience and outcome, as well as the avenues by which Army support services could beneficially intervene (2004).

As reflected in the literature review, research findings indicated that increased deployments have not had a positive effect on the United States military or its family members. Further qualitative research can help tell the story of the lived experiences of military officer spouses/partners and the meaning they ascribe to their experiences and provide others with insight into how they are coping at home while their spouses/partners are at war.

CHAPTER THREE- METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to address the question, “What is the lived experience of and meaning held by military officers’ spouses/partners regarding multiple, yearlong or longer deployments of their active duty military spouse/partner in the Post-9/11 era?” A literature review that focused on military spouse/partner experiences of multiple, yearlong or longer deployments indicated that little is known about this relatively new phenomenon and its impact on spouses or partners and suggested that the voices of military spouses needed to be heard (Burton, 2009; Castaneda & Harrell, 2007; Chapin, 2009; Demers, 2009; Dimiceli et al., 2009; Eaton et al., 2008; Morris & Age, 2009; Pittman et al., 2004; Spera, 2008; SteelFisher et al., 2008; Tollefson, 2008; Westhuis et al., 2006; Wood et al., 1995).

Rationale for a Qualitative Approach

Research questions that seek to address new and complex phenomenon are best suited for qualitative research methods (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Crosby, DiClemente, and Salazar, 2006; Richards & Morse, 2007; Ulin, Robinson, and Tolley, 2005). A number of studies had suggested a need for qualitative research regarding how military spouses or partners were affected by the increased number and frequency of deployments experienced by military personnel since September 11, 2001 (Burton, 2009; Castaneda & Harrell, 2007; Chapin, 2009; Creswell, 2007; Demers, 2009; Dimiceli et al., 2009; Eaton et al., 2008; Morris & Age, 2009; Pittman et al., 2004; Spera, 2008; SteelFisher et al., 2008; Tollefson, 2008; Westhuis et al., 2006; Wood et al., 1995). Additionally, the researcher’s use of a qualitative approach was appropriate because such an approach provides a complex, detailed understanding of multiple, yearlong or longer deployments (Creswell, 2007). Finally, the open-ended nature and focus of the research question was a key factor in identifying qualitative inquiry as the appropriate approach (Creswell, 2007).

Using a qualitative method allowed the researcher to use a naturalistic approach to provide descriptive written data (as opposed to numerical data) obtained from in-depth

interviews and letters (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Crosby et al., 2006; Richards & Morse, 2007; Ulin et al., 2005). A qualitative research method also allowed the researcher to focus on the process of how military officers' spouses or partners experience multiple deployments rather than focusing on the outcome of multiple, yearlong or longer deployments (Crosby et al., 2006). Such methods enabled the researcher to use inductive logic while conducting the research instead of deductive logic, which would have employed quantitative methods to test a specific hypothesis (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Crosby et al., 2006; Richards & Morse, 2007; Ulin et al., 2005). Using a qualitative method also assisted the researcher in her search to understand the meaning of multiple, yearlong or longer deployments as perceived by military officers' spouses or partners (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Crosby et al., 2006; Richards & Morse, 2007; Ulin et al., 2005). Research that was naturalistic in setting; inductive; concerned with process rather than outcome(s); provided thick, descriptive data; and had understanding meaning as its goal was best suited for this qualitative inquiry (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Crosby et al., 2006; Richards & Morse, 2007; Ulin et al., 2005).

Theoretical Orientation

The researcher used an emergently designed phenomenological theoretical orientation. Specifically, she used van Manen's approach to hermeneutic phenomenology to guide the study (van Manen, 1990). This phenomenological research approach focused on employing individuals' reflections on their experiences in order to reach an understanding of the deeper meaning of the experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; van Manen, 1990). In this study, a phenomenological orientation focused on the researcher gaining a deeper understanding of the meaning and lived experience of multiple deployments as perceived by military officer spouses/partners. The researcher was constantly mindful of the research question and oriented to the lived experience that made it possible to ask the, "What is it like?" question advocated by van Manen (1990, p.43). As van Manen suggested, the researcher not only asked the question, but

also interrogated it from the center of her being and attempted to live the question (van Manen, 1990). In doing so, the researcher was able to provide insights which revealed something of the essential nature of multiple deployments to military officers' spouses or partners (van Manen, 1990), thus yielding findings that reflected the essence and nature of the officers' spouses' or partners' lived experience (Creswell, 2007).

In the phenomenological description, the researcher "pulls the reader into the question" in such a way that the reader begins to actually question how military officers' spouses or partners experience multiple deployments (van Manen, 1990, p.44). The researcher was then able to provide the reader with insight into the full significance of the meaning of multiple, yearlong or longer deployments from the perspective of study participants (van Manen, 1990). Being "pulled into the question" (van Manen, 1990, p. 44), hearing the voices of the participants, and identifying the essence of the lived experience of military officers' spouses/partners deployments in an age of terrorism-related wars benefited those seeking to provide support to military personnel, partners, and families both currently and in the future (Demers, 2009).

The main goal of this study was not just to tell the participants' stories for the sake of being able to report on their perspective, but rather to ask the question of what is the nature of the experience of multiple, yearlong or longer deployments as an essentially human experience (van Manen, 1990). This goal is indicative of all phenomenological research (Creswell, 2007; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Richards & Morse, 2007; van Manen, 1990). Phenomenological research of this nature always seeks to ask: How is this (deployment) experienced? Is this what it means to (experience multiple, yearlong or longer deployments as a military officers' spouse or partner)? Is this what the (multiple deployment) experience is like? (van Manen, 1990).

To address the main goal of the study and to answer the research questions, the researcher used six research activities consistent with the use of hermeneutic phenomenological research as the guiding orientation of the study. First, the research centered on a phenomenon that seriously interests the researcher. van Manen stated that turning to a phenomenon that seriously interested

the researcher was vital to phenomenologically-based human science research (van Manen, 1990). The researcher sought to provide one interpretation of the meaning and lived experience of military officers' spouses or partners who experienced multiple, yearlong or longer deployments (van Manen, 1990). Second, the researcher investigated the experience as participants' lived it rather than as she conceptualized it. To do this, the researcher followed the guidance of van Manen and tried to "stand in the fullness" of the lived experience and take in all aspects of the experience as she spent time in the field with her participants and sought to share insight into the meaning of multiple, long-term deployments (van Manen, 1990). Third, the researcher reflected on the essential themes that were identified in the data collection process which characterized the phenomenon of multiple yearlong or longer deployments (van Manen, 1990). She used two primary methods of data collection: a) audio recorded in-depth, open-ended interviews with handwritten field notes taken during each interview, and b) a letter written by each participant to a theoretical other partner or spouse of a frequently deployed military officer.

Fourth, the researcher described the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting (van Manen, 1990). The process of writing and rewriting has, to borrow from van Manen's (1990) phrase, "brought to speech" the essence of multiple, yearlong or longer deployments (p. 32). Fifth, the method helped the researcher to focus on maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon of multiple, yearlong or longer deployments (van Manen, 1990). The researcher remained steadfast in her pursuit of answering the research question, "What is the lived experience of and meaning held by military officer spouses/partners regarding multiple, yearlong or longer deployments of their active duty military spouse/partner in the Post-9/11 era?" There were many temptations to get sidetracked by preconceived opinions or self-indulgent preoccupations but the researcher focused on her pursuit for answers to the research question (van Manen, 1990). Finally, the researcher balanced the research context by considering both the parts and the whole (van Manen, 1990). She aimed to not get so lost in the

writing that she lost focus, but instead made every effort to step back and look at the total picture and see how the parts contributed to the entire study (van Manen, 1990).

Sampling

The researcher used purposive sampling for this phenomenological study. She recruited female participants who had experienced multiple, yearlong or longer deployments of their military officer spouses or partners, since selecting participants who had experienced the phenomenon being studied was crucial to phenomenological qualitative research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Crosby et al., 2006; Richards & Morse, 2007; Ulin et al., 2005; van Manen, 1990). All of the participants were active duty military officers' spouses or partners. None were members of the military themselves. All participants were mothers.

The researcher recruited seven participants for this study. Morse & Field (1995) suggested recruiting at least six participants when conducting phenomenological research. According to Creswell (2007), a narrow range of participants (six to twelve) was acceptable as long as all participants had experienced the phenomenon. Many experts have agreed about the appropriateness of this numerical range if the researcher was able to obtain data saturation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Crosby et al., 2006; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Richards & Morse, 2007; Ulin et al., 2005). The researcher identified data saturation by obtaining data that were rich and thick, reaching a point where no new data was being added to the study, experiencing data redundancy, and noting the repetition of consistent themes (Crosby et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007; Richards & Morse, 2007; Ulin et al., 2005). After the researcher noted data saturation had been achieved, she then conducted one additional interview that confirmed the presence of data saturation.

The researcher identified potential participants through personal connections with military officer spouses/partners. She used a snowball purposive sampling strategy that involved her personal connections with military officer spouses/partners that she contacted. This strategy involved the identification of potential participants by people who were not themselves able to

participate or chose not to participate, but who knew people who were possibly interested in participating in the study. In addition, she queried participants who were selected for study participation about other people who they suggested who may be eligible and possibly willing to participate (Creswell, 2007; Richards & Morse, 2007). This was a useful technique for this study because participants who had experienced multiple deployments could easily identify others who had also experienced multiple deployments.

One issue associated with sample recruitment was the potential impediment imposed by fear of public exposure on the part of military officers' spouses or partners (Ulin et al., 2005). The researcher experienced this limitation during the pilot study after some participants expressed their concerns regarding several issues, including the negative effect that participating in the study could have on their spouse's careers, fears about anonymity, and fears of reprisal by other spouses/partners. The researcher hoped that these fears and concerns could be alleviated by initially involving participants known to her and then identifying additional participants by snowball sampling. Given the sensitivity of study participation, she used verbal agreement to the informed consent document and not a written signature, as approved by the University and Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB). Additionally, she made adjustments to the sampling plan for this study that is described below.

The researcher contacted military spouses or partners via email to ascertain their interest in participating in the study and provided her name and email address to each person contacted in the event they wished to refer someone to her. If any individual contacted was not interested in study participation, the researcher used a snowball sampling strategy and inquired about anyone they would recommend for possible participation in the study. The researcher initially requested that the individual offering the recommendation get in touch with the person they were referring in order to have the person contact the researcher. The researcher also requested the names and email addresses of the spouse/partner referrals so that she could contact them directly if the individual did not initiate contact within a 10-day period of time.

As the researcher identified potential military officers' spouses/partners, she contacted each of the potential participants by telephone in an effort to share the purpose of the study and answered any initial questions they had about the study. The researcher then used email and re-contacted those spouses/partners who agreed to participate in the study. The email interaction provided a means to select a date and time to speak, to further explain the study, provide information about informed consent, and answer any additional questions that arose.

Research Design

The research design for this study is consistent with a research question that invites qualitative approach informed by a phenomenological theoretical orientation. The researcher used purposive sampling and individual interviews as the primary data collection method and incorporated design strategies that contributed to credible study findings. She aimed to discover the essence of the lived experience of military officers' spouses/partners. The researcher sought to describe how participants perceived, judged, described, and remembered the lived experience of multiple, yearlong or longer deployments of their spouses/partners (Patton, 2002).

In order to address credibility in the study design (van Manen, 1990) she used the following strategies: methodological congruence (Creswell, 2007; Richards & Morse, 2007), triangulation (Creswell, 2007; Crosby et al., 2006; Richards & Morse, 2007; van Manen, 1990), thick description (Creswell, 2007; Crosby et al., 2006; Richards & Morse, 2007; Ulin et al., 2005), prolonged engagement in the field (Creswell, 2007; Crosby et al., 2006; Ulin et al., 2005), continuing search for disconfirming evidence (Creswell, 2007), engagement in reflexivity (Creswell, 2007; Ulin et al., 2005, van Manen, 1990), maintenance of an audit trail (Creswell, 2007; Richards & Morse, 2007; Ulin et al., 2004; Wolf, 2003), and data saturation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Crosby et al., 2006; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Richards & Morse, 2007; Ulin et al., 2005). She has detailed each strategy in the following section.

Methodological Congruence. The researcher and committee members reviewed the method, research question, data sources, data types, and data analysis to ensure methodological

congruence. All elements were congruent with one another and reflected a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach. The use of a hermeneutic phenomenological approach in this study led to understanding “multiple yearlong or longer deployments” from the perspective of individuals’ lived experience (van Manen, 1990). The study did not simply reveal themes related to this phenomenon, but also provided an in-depth, “from the heart,” (van Manen, 1990, p.43) essence of the meaning and lived experience of the topic.

The focus of the research question was consistent with a phenomenological orientation in that it inquired, “What is the lived experience of and meaning held by military officer spouses/partners regarding multiple, yearlong or longer deployments of their active duty military spouse/partner in the Post-9/11 era?” In this study, the data sources were active duty military officers’ spouses/partners and the researcher. Participants provided a description of their experiences and the meanings they had associated with multiple yearlong or longer deployments. The inclusion of the researcher as a data source was consistent with van Manen’s belief that hermeneutic phenomenological research was a search for the “fullness of living” (1990). By this phrase, van Manen meant that the ultimate aim of this study was to become more fully aware of who the spouses/partners of repeatedly deployed military officers were as human beings. This extended to the researcher in that she needed to strive to be connected and intimately related to the research experience (van Manen, 1990). Van Manen (1990) stated that the research experience and collected data were not considered strong or rigorous without the researcher being intimately involved in the project and serving as a scholar of the work (van Manen, 1990).

The data types that were included in the study were audio recorded, in-depth interviews and letters written by participants. These data types were consistent with hermeneutic phenomenological research because the interviews were used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material (van Manen, 1990). The interviews served as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). In-

depth interviews were also used as a vehicle to develop conversational relationship with participants about the meanings of their experiences (Patton, 2002; van Manen, 199). Interviews captured insights into the lived experience of deployments and meaning held by the participants that were not possible for the researcher to directly observe (Patton, 2002; van Manen, 1990). As van Manen suggested, the researcher used patience or silence to help participants gather their recollections and proceed with their stories (van Manen, 1990). The researcher repeated the last sentence or thought in a questioning tone back to the participant as a means of encouraging each participant to continue sharing her story (van Manen, 1990).

A letter written by each participant was the second data type used for the study. This data collection strategy afforded additional insight into the phenomenon and served as a means of providing data triangulation for the study (Patton, 2002). The use of letters written by participants was consistent with van Manen's suggestion to use life histories or diaries to add to the hermeneutic phenomenological research experience. He stated that such data types added phenomenological value to the study (van Manen, 1990).

Finally, hermeneutic phenomenological method guided the data analysis. A thematic analysis was used (van Manen, 1990). The researcher repeatedly read the data that she had transcribed verbatim. She kept in mind the data as a whole, while searching for words, phrases, or statements that captured the fundamental meaning of the text. She repeatedly listened to the audio taped interviews and read and re-read the transcripts, searching for statements or phrases that were enlightening or particularly essential to the meaning and experience of multiple deployments. Finally, she looked at every single sentence in the transcripts and asked what each sentence revealed about the experience the participant had described (van Manen, 1990). This process revealed incidental and essential themes (van Manen, 1990). Incidental themes were those themes that emerged through data analysis that could be found in other phenomena as well as the one being studied. They were not unique to just the phenomenon in question. Essential themes were those themes that the researcher considered to be unique to the phenomenon being

studied which, in this instance, was multiple, long-lasting deployments. Without the identification of essential themes, the description of the phenomenon would be incomplete (van Manen, 1990).

Triangulation. Triangulation was described by Richards and Morse (2007) as strategies to gain multiple perspectives on a topic by using multiple data sources (study participants and researchers) and data types (interviews and letters). The researcher addressed triangulation in this study through the use of individual, in-depth interviews and letters written by participants to theoretical other military officer spouses/partners. The use of triangulation added rigor to this qualitative study (Creswell, 2007; van Manen, 1990) and allowed the researcher to obtain a multidimensional view of multiple, yearlong or longer deployments (Crosby et al., 2006).

Thick Description. The researcher used thick description in an effort to develop a rich, in-depth account of the phenomenon (Crosby et al., 2006; Richards & Morse, 2007). This type of description was one which provided not only detailed description of the lived experience but also as Schwandt stated (2001, p. 255), the “circumstances, meanings, intentions, strategies, motivations, and so on that characterize(d) a particular episode.” Holloway added to the definition by stating that the use of thick description, “aims to give readers a sense of emotions, thoughts, and perceptions that research participants experience” (1997, p.154).

The use of thick description was essential to these qualitative findings in that such detailed description represented an effort to eliminate vagueness and reduce obvious bias (Creswell, 2007; Ulin et al., 2005) related to the data. The researcher aimed for thick description when writing findings in an effort to add depth and detail to the narrative. Doing so allowed the researcher to capture the audio context of the data (Creswell, 2007). Thick description not only added credibility to the study, but also enabled the presentation of a contextual understanding of the essence of the experience and assisted readers in determining whether study findings could be translated to other similar samples and settings (Creswell, 2007).

Prolonged Engagement in the Field. Prolonged time in the field with participants allowed the researcher to present the participants' meanings and lived experiences with accuracy. The researcher and her participants worked as collaborators in this study. Working together in a relaxed and comfortable setting aided in generating data by enabling participants to speak freely about their lives and experiences (Ulin et al., 2005).

Rapport Building. Collecting information-rich data required that the researcher have mental agility, sensitivity, and practice (Ulin et al., 2005). Spending time developing rapport during the interviewing process helped participants feel at ease with the researcher and helped to facilitate collection of an in-depth understanding of how the participants experienced deployments (Crosby et al., 2007). The researcher worked to establish trust with participants from initial contact and throughout the data collection process. Higher levels of trust resulted in the collection of rich data and add credibility to the research (Creswell, 2007). The experiences she had as a military spouse who had personally experienced multiple deployments contributed to rapport building.

Continuing Search for Disconfirming Evidence. When the researcher analyzed the data, she looked for any insights that seemed to fall outside of the identified data pattern of responses. She tried to identify disconfirming evidence in order to add credibility to the consistent, recurring themes she ultimately identified (Creswell, 2007). When she identified disconfirming evidence, she explored further the data that stood out as different or data that did not fit with the rest of the data collected. The researcher returned to the transcripts and reviewed them repeatedly in an effort to seek an explanation for that which did not fit. She conducted additional interviews until the disconfirming evidence had been carefully re-visited and explained. Going back and reviewing disconfirming evidence ensured that the researcher was not missing any themes or outlying material that had yet to be uncovered (Creswell, 2007).

Engagement in Reflexivity. The researcher participated in reflexivity about her biases and assumptions related to all aspects of the study since the onset of the pilot study. She maintained

a personal journal from February 2, 2010 to the present time. She noted that ongoing engagement in reflexivity was a vital process in hermeneutic phenomenological research (van Manen, 1990). Reflexivity allowed her to question and observe herself as she listened to the participants. Her presence was a vital component of the qualitative research process because she entered into partnership with participants and because she served as the key research instrument (Ulin et al., 2005; van Manen, 1990). She aimed to be continually aware of her biases, assumptions, reactions, beliefs, and values and attempted to set such issues aside so she could be more fully present to the participants (Patton, 2002). She recognized self-examination as part of an iterative process of interpretation and revision that helped move the data collection toward its goal (Ulin et al., 2005). The researcher followed van Manen's (1990) suggestion that, before she asked others to furnish her with a lived-experience description, she should try to describe the phenomenon herself. She discovered that this exercise provided a more precise sense of what she was trying to obtain from her participants (van Manen, 1990).

Maintenance of an Audit Trail. The researcher maintained an audit trail in an effort to establish the rigor of a study by providing the details of data analysis and decision points that ultimately led to findings (Wolf, 2003). The audit trail, sometimes referred to as a confirmability audit, provided evidence that recorded raw data had undergone a process of analysis, reduction, and synthesis (Wolf, 2003). The audit trail she maintained could be used to trace the textual sources of data (transcribed interviews, responses to questions, field notes, document analysis, letter analysis, personal notes, and the reflexive journal) back and forth with her interpretations of the data (Wolf, 2003). Since the researcher was a beginning qualitative researcher, the audit trail helped to establish study dependability and allowed others to assess the quality of her work (Wolf, 2003). The audit trail outlined the research process and evolution of codes, categories, and theory and added accountability to the study (Creswell, 2007).

The researcher's audit trail consisted of the following documents: A timed and dated research log (Appendix B), a researcher's personal journal (Appendix C), and interpretation and

analysis memos (Appendix C). The researcher maintained each of these documents since the inception of a pilot study in February, 2010. She used the research log to record all events, decision points, and actions related to the research process. The research log contained a dated, chronological list of all research activities associated with the study. The researcher's personal journal consisted of a chronological account of all of the researcher's personal thoughts and feelings related to the research study, including her on-going engagement in reflexivity. She used analysis and interpretation memos to record her analytic ideas and activities, including her coding efforts (Creswell, 2007). Maintaining these handwritten documents added to the accountability of the study, verified the rigor of the researcher's work, and enhanced the confirmability of the data collected (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). The audit trail also assisted the researcher in minimizing her biases and assumptions, and maximized the accuracy of the insights provided to the reader instead of simply sharing her own personal perspectives about the research question (Patton, 2002).

Data Saturation. The researcher continued data collection and analysis until data saturation was achieved. At this point she recognized that as she was adding no new data to the study, the data had begun to be redundant, and she noted the consistent repetition of themes (Crosby et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007; Richards & Morse, 2007; Ulin et al., 2005). When the researcher believed she had reached the saturation point, at interview six, she conducted an additional interview to confirm her belief. When no new data were uncovered during interview seven, the researcher ceased data collection and noted the attainment of saturation (Crosby et al., 2007).

Research setting

The researcher conducted individual interviews via computer and telephone with participants whose geographical location was too distant to enable a face-to-face interview. The researcher asked participants to select their preferred method of communication for the

interview. The computer-aided interviews were conducted over a secure Skype™ connection. The researcher and the participant were in their respective homes at the time of the interview.

The researcher recognized that Skype™ usage might elicit some security concerns for the participant. To address these concerns, the researcher spoke with each participant about the Skype™ privacy policy (Skype™, 2010). The researcher directed each participant to the policy page on the Skype™ website and reviewed ways in which the participant could decrease the likelihood of any security breach prior to the scheduled interview (Skype™, 2010). These actions included such things as: setting up a Skype™ account specifically for the research study; using a pseudonym account name known only to the participant and the researcher; limiting public access by choosing the most conservative privacy settings; and deleting the account and all cookies attached to the account at the completion of the interview (Skype™, 2010). The researcher verbally guided each of two participants who selected this option through each one of these steps.

Since the computer-aided interview was not preferred by five study participants, the researcher encouraged these participants to use the telephone option. She conducted the telephone interviews from her private home and with each participant's located at a site she preferred. The researcher encouraged participants to choose a private location during the interview phone call so that she could feel comfortable to speak freely throughout the interview. The researcher aimed to assure participants of confidentiality regardless of location of the interview.

Sources of Data

Study participants were female adults aged 18 years or older who had directly experienced the repeated deployment of their military officer spouses or partners. They met the following criteria: a) current relationship status as a spouse or partner (in a committed relationship but not legally married) of an active duty military officer; b) personally not an active duty member of the military; c) experienced separation from their active duty military officer

spouse/partner due to at least two military deployments; and d) parenting children during the deployments. Additionally, the deployment was required to be at least twelve months in duration.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout the study, the researcher was sensitive to ethical considerations. The researcher embraced an ethical approach as she attempted to protect the identity of study participants and ensure the ethical nature of the study. She was mindful of ethical concerns while providing informed consent, collecting data, analyzing data, and writing results (Ulin et al., 2005). The researcher stayed true to her personal ethical standard of conducting the research with utmost integrity, professionalism, and respect to participants as well as the professional ethical standards of health educators (Ulin et al., 2005).

The current study received approval from the East Carolina University Medical and Institutional Review Board (Appendix A). The researcher provided an approved informed consent form to all participants prior to starting the interview. The informed consent document included the important explanations of possible risks and benefits, voluntary participation, assurance of anonymity, the purpose of the research, participant selection, data collection procedures, and who to contact with any questions or concerns (Ulin et al., 2005) (Appendix E). During the initial contact with potential participants, the researcher made it clear that she would strive to maintain participants' privacy and anonymity.

The researcher used several methods to address ethical issues, including privacy and anonymity. First, the researcher assigned a pseudonym to each participant she then used for all data collection, analysis, and reporting purposes. She also used the pseudonyms during the interview, transcription, and reporting process. Second, she changed or deleted all personally identifying information from the transcripts. Third, the researcher personally conducted the face-to-face, computer-aided Skype®, and telephone interviews associated with this study. Fourth, she conducted the interviews via a secure Skype® connection or via the telephone. The

researcher conducted interviews via Skype® by using a personal user account that remains password protected and known only to the participant. Additionally, she addressed security concerns associated with using Skype® on a case-by-case basis by referencing the Skype® privacy policy (Skype®, 2010). She conducted telephone interviews in a private, confidential setting. Fifth, prior to each interview, the researcher obtained oral consent in response to the informed consent document by first reading the document aloud to the participant, addressing any issues or concerns that were voiced by the participant, and then inviting the participant to verbally acknowledge her or his endorsement of informed consent. Sixth, after receiving each participant's approval for audio-recording, the researcher personally transcribed the audio-recorded interview. Seventh, the researcher retained all raw and transcribed data in a locked cabinet to which others would have no access. Eighth, she stored all electronic files were stored on a password protected computer. These eight strategies enabled the researcher to address participant protection in this study.

When writing the results of the study, the researcher aimed for balance and accuracy. She made a valid attempt to assure that no harm came to the participants as a result of their participation in her study. At the conclusion of each interview, the researcher provided the participant with a list of resources in the event that involvement in the interview resulted in the need for a referral for mental health or other assistance (Appendix H). She endeavored to offer a public voice by sharing participants' own words in the findings, but presented the data using pseudonyms and changed or deleted any personally identifying information. Furthermore, she described the context of her interactions and disclosed her role in the study (Ulin et al., 2005). Making these choices enabled the researcher to address ethical issues associated with this study. She assured that all participants were treated equally and, she questioned her own moral assumptions, and carefully considered political and ethical implications of study participation (Creswell, 2007).

Data Collection Strategies

The researcher used two primary data collection strategies in this study. She conducted individual, in-depth, open-ended interviews with each participant by means of a telephone or a computer connection via Skype®. The vehicle for interviewer-interviewee interaction depended on the researcher's accessibility to the participant and the participant's preference. In addition, the researcher invited participants to write letters to theoretical other spouses/partners experiencing multiple deployments.

In-depth Interviews. For a phenomenological study, the process of data collection primarily involved in-depth interviews (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). Consistent with hermeneutic phenomenological research, the interview served two very specific purposes. It was used as a means for exploring and gathering data that served as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a phenomenon, such as multiple, yearlong or longer deployments (van Manen, 1990). The interview also served as a vehicle for developing a conversational relationship with participants about the meaning of their deployment-related experiences (van Manen, 1990).

The focus of the interviews, in this study, was to assist participants in describing their lived experience of and meanings they held about multiple yearlong or longer deployments of their active duty military officer spouses/partners in the Post-9/11 era. The interview was also used to provide insight into how others in a similar situation might best maintain high levels of health and well-being. The researcher held the assumption that the perspective of the participants was meaningful and able to be explicit (Patton, 2002). She used the interview to capture the insight needed to answer the research question. The researcher collected participants' realities of their lived experience that she could not directly observe. She then interpreted their responses in light of the research question (Patton, 2002; Richards & Morse, 2007).

Prior to each interview, the researcher reviewed the purpose of the study and the length of time anticipated for the interview (approximately one hour). The researcher informed the

participant that she would provide a copy of a summary of the findings to them. She also offered to forward a copy of any published manuscripts from the study to each participant. The researcher also obtained the participants' permission to audio record the interview.

The researcher used an interview guide during the one-on-one interviews (Appendix F). The interview guide listed the questions to be explored during the course of the interview. She used the guide in an effort to maintain consistency of questioning across participants (Patton, 2002). During each interview, the researcher asked each participant to share how long she had been a military spouse, how she would describe her experience as a military spouse, and what her deployment experience had been like. Following these questions, the researcher continued to use her interview guide but tailored the order of questions to the individual participant. Being flexible in the interview allowed the researcher to examine and probe the participant in order to capture further insight into the phenomenon being explored (Patton, 2002). Using the interview guide allowed the researcher to make the most of her time with each participant since the guide assisted her in keeping each interview systematic and helped her to make decisions about which information to pursue in greater depth (Patton, 2002). When possible, the researcher transcribed the data immediately following the interview.

Letter. In addition to the interview, the researcher asked each participant to write a letter to a theoretical spouse who was just beginning her husband's second deployment. She asked participants to think about their own personal experiences and offer advice or other information that would be helpful for individuals in circumstances similar to their own. All recollections of experiences, reflections on experiences, descriptions of experiences, taped interviews about experiences, or transcribed conversations about experiences served to reflect transformations of those experiences (van Manen, 1990). These transformations allowed the researcher to provide a hermeneutic phenomenological view of the lived experience of and meaning held by military officer spouses/partners regarding multiple, yearlong or longer deployments of their active duty military spouse/partner in the Post-9/11 era (van Manen, 1990). The researcher provided

instructions to each participant in an effort to maintain consistency of type of data collected from them (Appendix G). One participant did not follow the directions and wrote the letter to a spouse starting her first yearlong deployment. The information was used for the study, as the data were still applicable to the study.

The researcher requested completion of the letter one week prior to the interview with the researcher. However, two participants provided their letters to the researcher after the interview was completed. After receiving participants' letters via email, the researcher repeatedly read, coded, and analyzed the letters separately from the in-depth interview data in order to enable the letters to serve as a means of data triangulation and thus contribute to the credibility to the study (Creswell, 2007). All files and letters will be stored for three years. The researcher placed hard copies of the letters in a locked file cabinet and stored electronic copies on a password-protected computer owned by the researcher.

After the researcher transcribed the in-depth, open-ended interviews verbatim, she read each interview transcript and theoretical letter repeatedly as a whole, in order to immerse herself in the data and reflectively ask herself, "What is it that constitutes the nature of this lived experience?" (van Manen, 1990, p. 32). The researcher repeated this process with each of the letters. Secondly, the researcher repeated the reading process using hard copies of the transcripts and letters, this time using a pencil to circle phrases, highlighting what she deemed to be essential statements, and writing notes in the margins of the transcripts and letters as thoughts about meaning and lived experience intuitively surfaced in her mind. She developed a working codebook as she began to develop and refine codes or labels for various data segments (Appendix I) and applied the refined codes to all data. Finally, she scrutinized the narrative text line-by-line, word-by-word, coding or recoding the data where needed. After all data were coded, she physically cut out words or sentences that were similarly coded, pasted the similarly coded data segments onto one or more sheets of paper so that she could review all similarly coded data in total. She was then able to discern nuances of difference and similarity among

similarly coded data. Van Manen (1990) recommended the aforementioned steps in uncovering themes within the narrative data and ultimately identifying the phenomenological essence within the data.

As suggested by Creswell (2007), the researcher used components of the data analysis spiral to manage a large amount of rich data through a process of organization, classification, and interpretation. The data collected through interviews and letters totaled 127 single spaced pages of text. The average amount of text collected per participant was eighteen pages. Segments of text containing meaningful statements referenced to their original sources were placed into files labeled by code. At the same time, while working with and thinking about the data, the researcher continuously engaged in writing interpretation and analysis memos. This process resulted in identifying, expanding or categorizing codes, and then “winnowing” the data (Creswell, 2007, p. 152) in order to create an essence of the meaning and lived experience of multiple deployments as experienced by military officers’ spouses.

The researcher searched for meaning within and among each code category in order to develop final meaning in the form of themes. Themes emerged as data analysis and interpretation continued over and over again. The analysis and interpretation focused on participant’s words in order to offer the reader a true essence of the participant’s experience (van Manen, 1990).

Data analysis centered on hermeneutic phenomenological reflection. The purpose of this type of reflection was to try to grasp the essential meaning of the phenomenon being studied (van Manen, 1990). In this study, the focus was on understanding the lived experience of and meanings held by military officers’ spouses/partners regarding multiple, yearlong or longer deployments of their active duty military spouse/partner in the Post-9/11 era. Insight into the essence of this phenomenon involved a process of reflectively appropriating, clarifying, and making explicit the meaning of such lived experience (van Manen, 1990). The researcher aimed to reflect on the data phenomenologically, not as a researcher, but from the participants’

perspective as a military officers' spouse who has experienced multiple, yearlong or longer deployments after September 2001. She included themes that emerged from the data in the analysis portion of the research study instead of offering a singular particular description or answer to the research question (van Manen, 1990).

She used a confirmatory analysis to strengthen the reliability of the study (Creswell, 2007) in that an experienced independent researcher served as an independent data analyst. This researcher reviewed the transcripts and the analysis to examine whether the themes, interpretations, and conclusions drawn by the researcher were supported by data (Creswell, 2007). The independent researcher's analytical findings were consistent with the researcher's findings.

Phenomenological themes can be described as "the structures of the experience" (van Manen, p. 79, 1990). Themes reflect the experiences of meaning and forms of capturing the phenomenon that the researcher was seeking to understand (van Manen, 1990). After identifying themes, the researcher reflected on them and wrote a description of the phenomenon she studied (Creswell, 2007). She attempted to maintain a strong connection to participants' lived experience and meaning and sought to balance the parts obtained from each of the participants with the writing of a whole theme which contributed insight to the research question (Creswell, 2007).

The researcher sought to understand the difference between essential themes and incidental themes (van Manen, 1990). She tried to look at the data as a whole and asked herself the question: "If the themes were removed from the phenomenon, could the phenomenon stand without the defining theme?" When the themes were analyzed according to van Manen's (1990) method of "free imaginative variation" (p. 107), the researcher was able to verify essential themes associated with the phenomenon. For example, when reviewing themes related to the general stressors of military life, the researcher asked herself, "Could this stressor exist outside the military world for a civilian spouse?" Seeing that the answer was, "no," the researcher could

determine it to be an essential part of the lived experience for military spouses. Interpretation required abstraction from the themes containing the participant's words to meanings that were derived while looking at the themes as a whole. This final abstraction yielded the true essence of the lived experience of and meaning held by military officer spouses/partners regarding multiple yearlong or longer deployments of their active duty military officer spouse/partner in the Post-9/11 era (van Manen, 1990). This process of abstraction will make the data meaningful to those wishing to pursue further research and to provide mental health and other assistance to military officers' spouses.

Researcher's Background, Biases and Assumptions

van Manen (1990) suggested that before the researcher asked others to share their lived experience with multiple, yearlong or longer deployments, the researcher should first try to write such a description herself. The researcher has been a military officer's partner and spouse for fourteen years. She carried personal biases and assumptions to the study due, in part, to having experienced her own spouse's three deployments since 9/11.

Consistent with van Manen's recommendations, the researcher engaged in describing her own meaning and lived experience of multiple, yearlong or longer deployments as she remembers living through it (van Manen, 1990). He encourages each researcher to describe the experience from the inside, almost like a state of mind. Following this guidance, the researcher sought to avoid beautifying her account with fancy phrases, but instead focused on a particular example of the experience, highlighting what stood out, and how things felt. In the following section of this chapter, the researcher will share how she recalled the experience as it was true to her lived sense of it (van Manen, 1990). The following is an account of her experience:

In the late winter of 2006, my husband deployed to Afghanistan for fifteen months. He had returned home three months prior from his second deployment to Iraq. We had recently relocated back to a previous military base. The move in-between had lasted just nine months. It was just enough time to give birth to a

baby and the move again. We drove across the country with my C-section staples still in place.

When my husband left for the third time, I felt numb. I was literally exhausted. I was facing my third deployment with an infant and a preschooler, and during the short time that my husband was home, I became pregnant again. I miscarried shortly after he deployed. Looking back, I see this as a blessing. At the time, it was incredibly stressful. I had given birth to a stillborn baby prior to the birth of our infant son and the grief was still fresh in my mind. This time, my parents traveled from the Midwest to help take care of the children while I “recovered.” They stayed for two days.

Looking back, I realize there are moments that I really don’t even remember. I kept our home immaculately clean. I kept the kids well-dressed, clean, rested, healthy, and happy. I ran about 5 miles every single day while pushing a double jog stroller. I volunteered at the church, at the preschool, and of course, for the Army. As a senior officer’s spouse, I had many FRG (Family Readiness Group) responsibilities. I imagine I spent about 35 hours a week volunteering. I hired a babysitter whenever my Army obligations required for me to do something sans kids. She was a God-send and remains a dear friend.

During our third deployment, we were blessed to have the BEST neighbor ever. He was a retired senior military officer who looked in on the kids and me on a daily basis. One day he told me, “Once upon a time, someone looked after my wife and our two kids while I was gone. Now it’s my time to look after you.” He wept when my son would reach up his arms to be held by “Mr. Sam” during his daily visits. He wept on the day that my husband left after his two week “R&R” (vacation) ten months through our fifteen months of separation.

The kids and I were outside shortly after my husband left. Mr. Sam was home for lunch. He saw us outside and came out to see if we were doing okay. As he walked across the yard and our eyes met, I began to feel tears in my eyes. I had begun to see Mr. Sam as a father figure and I so appreciated his daily visits. He slowly walked over to me, giving both kids a big hug along the way, and said, “Well, kid, how are you doing?” Through tears, I replied, “I’m fine...The first day is just always the hardest.” As I looked up from the ground, our eyes met and I could see the tears forming on his eyes. He replied back to me, “I hate it that you’ve done this so many times that you already know what to expect.”

Despite my exhaustion, the demands of raising my children, and my own obsession with losing my baby weight and getting my daily “adrenaline rush” from running, I always put my best foot forward when I went out in public. I was always very positive to other moms at preschool, to families at our church, to the participants who attended my fitness classes, and most importantly, to other Army wives; especially those in our unit. I found myself as a helper to the battalion commander’s wife and the other company-level FRG leaders.

In our unit, the battalion commander’s wife was in charge of all FRG proceedings. The weight of this responsibility was very stressful for her and her stress was evident for many to see. There were numerous times when she would swear at us, throw her papers at us during FRG meetings, and more than once, she made spouses cry. Since we were all just volunteers, this made for additional stress for us all. In addition to trying to help reduce her stress level, I also tried to help other unit spouses with unit problems and also served as a trained Casualty Comfort Care Team volunteer for our military base. As a result, in addition to working with the spouses of our unit, I worked intimately with spouses and children who had just lost their soldier to the war. The workload of the demands

expected of me as an Army volunteer made for a long 15 months. It added a great amount of stress to my life.

Sadly, many of my friends were experiencing similar situations but none of us talked about it in public. We would wait for our “Girl’s Nights Out” when we all could get babysitters and spend the night unloading on each other about the “craziness” of our life situations. In some ways it was a “Bet you can’t beat my story” sort of evening. We laughed together, cried together, and kept each other sane. Those women will be my friends for life.

We celebrated our children’s birthdays together, called one another on our anniversaries, took care of one another’s kids when someone couldn’t find a sitter or was sick, fixed broken air conditioners and broken down cars, and came to the rescue for each other when geckos got in the house. Some would run around with oven mitts on their hands trying to catch the little critters while the others and our kids stood on chairs screaming. Without these women, I would have lost my mind. But thanks to them and my ability to cope, however “half-heartedly” it might have been, we made it. Our kids survived, our friendships grew, and our “hooah” husbands were able to excel at their jobs without worrying about what was happening at home. In the end, that’s what the Army teaches us to do. It teaches us to keep our heads held high and “keep it all together” so that the soldier isn’t bothered by a stressed out wife at home. After all, the old saying goes, “If the Army wanted you to have a wife, they would have issued you one.”

The researcher believes that through consistent journal writing and bracketing, she was able to continue to acknowledge and set aside her personal biases and assumptions and, as a result, was fully present to the perceptions and experiences of the study participants. Learning about the lived experiences and meaning of multiple, yearlong or longer deployments enabled the researcher to analyze and interpret themes.

These themes helped to describe the essence of life as a military officer's spouse/partner who has experienced multiple yearlong or longer spousal/partner deployments. This complex phenomenon can now be more fully understood by those who seek to provide assistance to such individuals. The researcher was able to offer recommendations for further research on this phenomenon.

Summary

This study addressed the question, "What is the lived experience of and meaning held by military officers' spouses/partners regarding multiple, yearlong or longer deployments of their active duty military spouse/partner in the Post-9/11 era?" A literature review indicated that little information was known about this relatively new phenomenon, but that the suspected impact on spouses or partners needed to be explored. The study provides insight for health professionals regarding the stressors that are experienced and the coping mechanisms that are utilized by military officer spouses/partners who have experienced at least two deployments of at least one year in duration and who also fill the role of mother. The findings afford an in-depth understanding of the complex and emerging issues faced by military officers' spouses/partners of those experiencing prolonged, multiple military deployments and provides valuable insight for future research.

The researcher used Max van Manen's approach to hermeneutic phenomenology to guide the study. This approach focused on employing individuals' reflections on their experiences in order to reach an understanding of the deeper meaning of the experience. The researcher identified several essential themes through the data collection and analysis process. She used two primary methods of data collection: a) audio recorded in-depth, open-ended interviews with handwritten field notes taken during each interview, and b) letters written by each participant to a theoretical other partner or spouse of a frequently deployed military officer.

The researcher used purposive sampling to recruit seven participants who have been military officer spouses between five and seventeen years and have experienced between two and six deployments. Saturation of the data was achieved. Credibility in the study design was addressed through the use of methodological congruence, triangulation, thick description, prolonged engagement in the field, continuing search for disconfirming evidence, engagement in reflexivity, maintenance of an audit trail, and data saturation. The researcher discovered the essence of the lived experience of military officers' spouses/partners. The researcher can now offer a description of how participants perceived, judged, described, and remembered their lived experience of multiple, yearlong or longer deployments of their spouses/partners.

CHAPTER 4 - FINDINGS

The researcher used a hermeneutic phenomenological approach in this study to describe the lived experiences of and meanings held by military officer spouses/partners regarding multiple yearlong or longer deployments of their active duty military officer spouse/partner in the Post-9/11 era. The researcher interviewed study participants and transcribed verbatim, coded, and analyzed interview transcripts and letters theoretical to others in order to develop emerging essential themes. Data analysis began concurrently with data collection. Interpretation and analysis memo writing also occurred during the data collection phase. The researcher could intuitively sense the emergence of primary themes and sought to capture those thoughts on paper through memo writing. The researcher found that data collection, data analysis, and reporting writing were not distinct steps in this study, but instead occurred simultaneously. Other qualitative studies have noted this synchronization (Creswell, 2007).

The findings from this qualitative research study are presented in this chapter. In the presentation of findings, the researcher has provided evidence for her descriptions or interpretations of the data in the form of participants' verbatim quotations. The researcher provided parenthetical information within participants' quotations to provide clarification of the narrative. She added bracketed information within quotations to offer an element of thick description and additional insight into the way in which the data were stated to the researcher. The researcher has added ellipses to quotations in an effort to provide the reader with the data which provided insight into the spouses' experience.

Study Participants

Seven military officers' spouses who resided across the United States participated in the study. Their experience as a military spouse ranged in duration from five to seventeen and one-

half years. All participants were active duty military officers' spouses. All participants experienced at least two deployments of one year or longer in duration since September 11, 2001. Several spouses experienced more than two deployments during their time as a military spouse. The greatest number of deployments experienced by participants was six, although, for one participant, one of those deployments occurred prior to September 11, 2001. Participants' husbands were deployed primarily to the Middle and Far East. Six of the participants were married to soldiers who currently or previously served in command positions. All participants were mothers who parented their children during at least two spousal deployments.

Overview of Findings

The researcher collected data through two means. The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews and participants wrote letters to theoretical other women whose husbands were embarking on a second deployment. Several essential themes emerged from the data. Spouses perceived the military world to be different from the civilian world. Participants were impacted by general challenges and stressors related to their role as a military officer's spouse, as evidenced in the data. Nonetheless, they perceived their overall experience as a military spouse to be positive.

Findings from this study revealed that spouses experienced cyclical stress throughout what emerged from the data to be four phases of deployments: pre-deployment, deployment, return, and reintegration. Multiple sources of stress characterized each phase of deployment. The stressors originated from within the spouse herself and from her husband, children, immediate family, other families within the military unit, and from the circumstance of war which placed her husband and the soldiers in his unit in harm's way.

Study findings indicated that coping was required to face these many forms of stress during each phase of deployment. Spouses offered insight into numerous coping mechanisms which were readily accessible to them. Many resources were offered through military channels. Other resources were found to be external to the military world, but still readily accessible. Spouses felt that the military had done a tremendous job in providing resources to help them cope, but believed such resources to be underutilized.

Finally, findings indicated that spouses experienced an intrapersonal transformation through their Post-9/11 deployment experiences. Data analysis revealed that spouses perceived there to be several benefits from experiencing multiple yearlong or longer deployments. They viewed themselves, their marriage relationship, and sometimes their children, as being stronger as a consequence of the multiple deployment experience. This study offers insight into the meaning and lived experience of multiple, yearlong or longer deployments and contributes to the knowledge base regarding this experience. Figure 1 provides an overview of the essence, themes, and sub-themes that the researcher will address in this Chapter.

Figure 1. Essence of multiple deployment experience for military officers' spouses:

Ambiguous Loss and Resiliency

General Stressors

Demands of the Job, Geographical Relocation, Maintaining Appearances

Post-9/11 Transformation

Positive Affiliation

Deployment Stressors

*Deployment Phase Stressors: Pre-Deployment; Deployment;
Return: "Home but not in the House"; Reintegration*

Marriage Relationship

Death of a Family Member

Length and Order of Deployment

Coping with Deployment

The Nature of Deployment: "No Two Alike"

Support Seeking: Reaching Out to Peers

Military Girlfriends as Key Supports Who "Get it"

The Toll of Repeated Deployments on Support Seeking

Self Care

Military Resources for Support

Available but Underutilized, Need for Tailored Resources

Other Coping Strategies

Helping Family Members Cope

Children's Coping, Husband's Coping

Deployment Benefits

Personal Independence, Self-Assurance, and Improved Coping Skills

Strengthened Effect on Marriage

Opportunities for Personal Growth

General Challenges and Stressors

Study participants voiced several aspects of military life that presented challenges for them or that served as stressors. The demands of their husbands' careers could be daunting in terms of physical time away from the family. In addition, frequent geographical relocations could be stressful, particularly when the site of the relocation offered few or no resources for support. Participants also perceived that the military world held officers' wives to high standards in terms of keeping up appearances regardless of their true emotional state. A discussion of each of these general challenges or stressors follows.

Demands of the Job. Participants in this study revealed that being a military officer's spouse could be a stressful experience, even during peacetime. Depending on the military officer's rank and specific job assignment, spouses shared with the researcher that the demands of their soldier's job could be immense and time-consuming for him. One spouse stated, "He was still away all the time, even while he was home." This experience was echoed by another spouse who stated, "Depending on the job, you still may never see him, even when he's home." Thus one of the potential challenges of military life to a military spouse was her husband's commitment to duty that impeded his stable presence in the family and on-going engagement in family life.

Geographical Relocation. The researcher identified repeated relocations as being stressful for military spouses to experience. Repeated relocations were accepted as a way of life for these spouses. As one participant stated, "We have moved four times in five years." Some spouses experienced such relocations during their husband's deployment as illustrated by the

following comment by a study participant: “After I sold our house, I moved myself on to post housing (during a deployment). That was stressful.”

Relocation stress was mediated by the frequency and location of the moves, as well as access to support for the family offered by the military at the new location. One spouse pointed out that she and her family lived overseas during her experience as a military spouse. The family was challenged by a lack of family support typically afforded by access to a military installation:

There is no base there like we are used to, like a base for families and stuff so it was a struggle every day. We’re in a little town and nobody speaks English. It was just a struggle. Every day it was a pep talk to yourself.

Maintaining Appearances. The participants in this study relayed the existence of unwritten expectations of military officers’ spouses to present a positive image of themselves and the military at all times. Spouses perceived that these expectations needed to be followed in their everyday lives during times of war and peacetime. In sharing her perspectives about the standards to which military wives were held, one spouse commented,

Well, yeah, if your husband is an O-6, (Colonel) you better look good on Facebook, and everywhere else! I think the military community has progressed in the last twenty years in letting people be a little more real, but there’s still some definite expectations.

In keeping with expectations about silence regarding problems or issues, participation in this study was noted as a concern by two spouses. They were concerned due to their perceptions of unwritten expectations held by others in the military and civilian world. One participant revealed, “Girl (referring to the researcher), you know I wouldn’t share this with anyone else.

But I love you and I wanna help you, girl. I'm so nervous! If I say something and I don't want it down, can I say, 'I take it back?'"

Of special concern to one participant was the researcher's insider status and the perceived risk the researcher was taking in conducting a study that openly explored the perspectives of other military officers' spouses. The participant declared, "I think you are really going out on a limb here, but I am so proud of you and I'm so glad to help you." These participants' concerns related to the impact that their own or the researcher's actions could have on their husband's careers and the potential negative consequences they both might experience as a consequence of her speaking about the realities of military life.

The general challenges and stressors found to affect military officers' spouses were the demands felt by them as a result of their husband's job and his commitment to duty which impeded his stable presence in the family, repeated relocations of her family, and maintaining appearances to present a positive image of themselves and the military at all times. Study findings suggested that these general stressors consistently affected the officer's spouse in all circumstances, including during deployment.

Post 9/11 Transformation Experience

A theme that emerged from the data was the transformation that occurred in the Post 9/11 era regarding the demands made of the military in general. Post 9-11, participants faced the onset and continuation of war and consequent repeated, prolonged deployments. Accompanying the deployment-related demands on officers' wives and families, were changes in expectations related to fulfilling the role of "officer spouse." Findings from this study indicated a wholly different lived experience for those military officers' spouses whose husbands joined the military

prior to September 11, 2001 (Pre-9/11 era), compared to those whose husbands joined the military after September 11, 2001 (Post-9/11 era). This study included participants from both eras.

The onset of war in the Post 9/11 era imposed heavy emotional demands on military officers' spouses since the women faced not only repeated spousal deployments, but also spousal deployments into harm's way. Moreover, women who had spouses stationed in war zones in command positions had to personally cope with the daily reality of possible spousal injury or death as well as the injuries or deaths of soldiers under their spouse's command. Experiencing repeated deployments over time tended to deplete the emotional and physical reserve of spouses and families, making them less likely to fulfill the traditional officer's wife's role of leader, support person, and coordinator of families in their husband's unit. The following findings relate to the study participants' different experiences and perspectives Pre and Post 9/11.

The researcher observed that women who had been military spouses for at least ten years ("Pre 9/11") spoke differently about their lived experience than did spouses who had been, in the words of one participant, "married to the Army" for less than ten years ("Post 9/11"). Spouses who became acculturated to the Army before 9/11 were more reflective about their experience than those whose experience with the Army began after that time. One of the factors that impacted on this difference was what one participant called the increased "tempo" of military deployments. The period following September 11, 2011 marked a transition in the Army to multiple, long deployments. Another factor was the changing role and aspirations of women in American society in general. As a "Pre-9/11" spouse observed,

A 'Post-9/11' spouse would be more apt to stay where they are from, not come to the duty station, live at home, finish school, continue school, stay in their job. While the 'Pre-9/11' woman, spouse. There you go! You get people like me; they are making cupcakes, decorating lunch bags to send to soldiers. Asking, 'What are we going to do for the soldiers downrange?' Asking this, gathering that. That sort of thing.

Spouses whose husbands entered the military "Pre-9/11" thus observed what they perceived to be a generational difference among officers' spouses, particularly in the role that military officers' spouses played within their husband's unit. Unlike the "Post 9/11" spouses, the "Pre 9/11" generation of officers' spouses played an active role in interacting with one another, volunteering on behalf of the families associated with their husband's unit and, for those whose husbands served as commanders, planning for and coordinating resources and support groups (called FRGs or Family Resource Groups) intended to address the well-being of the women and families in their husbands' unit. Regarding women whose Army experience was limited to "Post 9/11," for example, a "Pre 9/11" spouse commented, "There was a company commander's wife that I did not even SEE for an entire year. Never knew who she was!" Another "Pre-9/11" spouse stated that she was very involved in a role typically reserved only for spouses even before she and her husband were married. "Before we were married, (my husband's) battalion commander's wife left him and (my husband) came home with a box and was like, 'You're the new FRG Leader!' so I was a battalion FRG leader when (he) was in company command."

A third "Pre-9/11" spouse stated,

The young wives don't know anything different than this (current tempo of the military forces)! Back in 1995, when the biggest thing was you might go to the field for six

weeks, or NTC (National Training Center), or JRTC (Joint Readiness Training Center) for six weeks and we thought that was the end of the world, you know? We would have special FRG meetings if they were going to NTC. And now we like use those times to test our system in place. It's laughable!

A fourth "Pre-9/11" spouse openly shared her opinion related to her observations of generational differences among spouses specifically during deployments,

I think with these multiple deployments, it's forcing the spouse to choose. You either accept and participate or you shy and stay away from Army activities. And the bedrock of the Family Readiness is gone. The backbone, that we used to call the backbone of the Army, they're tired. They're exhausted. It's too much! We, you, can't maintain that tempo and have expectations of people of "old." The expectations of an Army spouse of "old" cannot be maintained. I'll say it because most people don't.

There was a, back in the day, not too long before my time; there was a line on the OER (Officer Evaluation Record) for spousal participation. And within two or three years of me being a lieutenant's wife, in the beginning, it changed. The world changed and the (military) is always slow to follow. But, the attendance, your attendance at things, your participation, as well as assisting with programs, those are things of "old." NOW?

There are days, there were times I didn't SEE company commander's spouses. Things have changed a lot. The young captain's wives that know the military from Post-9/11, they have a [emphasizing word] COMPLETELY different frame of reference than myself. [Emphasizing word] COMPLETELY.

One of the consequences for spouses associated with the “Post 9/11” change was a loss of camaraderie among women with shared experience and the loss of access to experienced other women who would have assisted in their military acculturation process. Two participants stated that being a brand new military wife (representing the “Post-9/11” era spouse in this study), and experiencing the current tempo of military life was stressful. One woman stated that her husband deployed five weeks after they married. Another stated that being forced to navigate the military system alone was very stressful:

‘Cuz I was a new military wife and I did not know the military at all. I didn’t know the nuances of military life. Just trying to navigate the military stuff was very difficult for me. For a civilian who had never been a part of the Army, because even when we dated, we dated long distance, so I’d never been with soldiers with my husband. For me it was just getting to know all the nuances of the Army, all those little strange things, like units. And what the numbers mean, I never under(stood), that took me the longest time. It was always like, ‘I don’t understand. What’s the difference between 1-8-7 and 2-8-7?’ I don’t know. You get it.

Another “Post-9/11” spouse who was a military officer’s wife of five years echoed the sentiment shared by the previous participant about the difficulty of learning the military culture. “Learning the nuances, acronyms, rank, that sort of thing. That was really stressful for me. I’m still not sure I have it figured out!”

Positive affiliation. Despite the stress and expectations that were perceived by participants in this study, the spouses who participated in this study shared several positive aspects of their affiliation with the military. They affirmed that a sense of adventure, opportunity

for new experiences afforded by travel, and exposure to new people presented by repeated relocations were particularly positive aspects of military life. Even those who mentioned something negative followed their comment with something positive. For example, one participant stated,

I think it (being a military spouse) has been a big adventure and that includes both the challenges and stress and all the things that go along with that but it's also given us so many opportunities to go places and see things, and meet people that we never would have otherwise. So it's been a very rich experience overall and I would not undo it if I had the choice.

Five spouses had positive comments to share about their military experience as reflected by comments such as, "I've loved every minute of it!" and, "very rewarding!" All of the spouses commented about the opportunities that were available to military families, including such things as travel, meeting "incredible people who will be our lifelong friends," and "experiencing things most people don't." In addition, an element that contributed to their positive experiences included pride in their husbands' contributions or performance. As one participant shared, "I'm so proud of (my husband), that carries me through the hardships." Another participant commented, "It's been the hardest thing, the hardest thing I never knew I could get through at times, but then, I really can't imagine my life any other way."

The Post-9/11 transformation experience emerged as a theme during data analysis and indicated a wholly different lived experience for those military officers' spouses whose husbands joined the military prior to September 11, 2001 (Pre-9/11 era), compared to those whose husbands joined that military after September 11, 2001 (Post-9/11 era). Experiencing repeated

deployments over time tended to deplete the emotional and physical reserve of spouses and families of the Pre-9/11 era differently than those from the Post-9/11 era. As a result, there was a difference in the perception of the role expectations of “officer’s spouse” of the Pre-9/11 era and the Post-9/11 era.

Deployment Stressors

After speaking with participants about their experiences and perspectives as military officers’ spouses in general, the researcher invited participants to share their perspectives specific to deployments. Four distinct phases of each deployment cycle emerged from data that included the pre-deployment, deployment, return, and reintegration phases. Data analysis revealed that participants universally experienced deployment as stressful. Both internal and external stressors characterized each phase of the deployment cycle, with some stressors specifically associated with a particular phase of deployment. Internal stressors refer to sources of stress which originated from within the individual. External stressors refer to sources of stress which the spouse felt originated from an outside source. In this segment of the chapter, the data findings will be presented in the context of each of the four deployment phases identified in the study.

Pre-deployment. During the initial pre-deployment phase, participants perceived deployment-related stress started sooner than the day the soldier deployed, “It (the stress) started six months before he left for us,” one participant shared. The stressors of pre-deployment weighed on the minds of the spouses as they prepared for their husbands departures, especially after they had experienced more than one deployment. Spouses began to worry about their husbands’ safety, the effect the deployment would have on their children, the anticipated

problems with consistent communication, and the inevitability of his departure. One spouse revealed the following,

I know for me, I might, I don't know if I really pull away from my husband, I might. I try not to, I try to be conscious of not doing that, but it's almost like a dance you do, you know, you start and you know, okay, this is comin' and so you start focusing on getting ready for the deployment and that sort of thing. I'm not sure if you actually get better at feeling it or hiding it (after experiencing multiple deployments), I'm not sure. I don't know, for me, which one it is.

When the researcher probed for more insight by stating, "At hiding it to [PAUSE]," the participant explained through tears,

Maybe your children, you just get used to it. You know the drill. You know what's going to happen. You know what's going to go on, and each time it's different because each deployment is different in terms of how much you're going to get to talk, or have that communication, whether you're going to have communication, whether you have email or whether you're going to get lucky and have Skype, or will you get a phone call once a week or once a month, or you know, that sort of thing.

The unknowns regarding consistent communication were stressful for spouses to experience during pre-deployment. Spouses realized they would not be able to just pick up the phone and call their soldier whenever they desired. Instead, in most instances, the soldier needed to initiate the communication. While a spouse had the ability to send emails, the soldier may or may not have been able to receive or respond to them regularly or consistently. They realized that he may be facing any of several issues. He could be on a mission and away from his

computer or satellite phone; depending on his physical location, he might not have had good access to communication; he might have experienced weather-related conditions that impeded communication; he might have chosen, depending on his rank or job position, to enable less senior soldiers call home more frequently; and his personality and/or marriage relationship might have been such that calling as often as his spouse desired was not his preference. The worry related to these inconsistent communication concerns affected the spouse as early as pre-deployment.

In addition to internal stress felt during pre-deployment, study participants also spoke of external stress resulting from events such as pre-deployment briefings. The military offered these often mandatory, unit-sponsored briefings to soldiers and their families as an intentionally helpful preparation for deployment. The education and guidance offered, however, elicited in some study participants feelings such as anger, frustration, and stress.

Data revealed that spouses worried during pre-deployment about impending unknowns regarding consistent communication that they would have (or not have) with their husband. This worry caused negative feelings to erupt when she processed some of the information provided during the pre-deployment brief. One source of anger and frustration for the women were suggestions regarding how much information they should share with their soldier about the negative or stressful things they were experiencing back at home. When telling about the experience of attending a pre-deployment briefing one participant stated,

And the one (suggestion) I couldn't stand, God I couldn't stand it, was 'Don't tell your husband about all your troubles and tribulation (when he calls home)!' You know, 'SHUT THE HELL UP!' Yeah, you know, I'm not going to sit there and go, 'I need

you! Wah, wah, wah,’ but I’m sorry. He needed to hear that this week, I had to eh-eh-eh-eh-eh. And I know, men are “fixers” but, I know, ‘I probably shouldn’t be telling you this, but I just gotta say that I had a shitty week and okay?’ and, ‘Now, I’m done.’

Another spouse revealed the following,

And, I’m also not one of those wives where I know something and I’m not going to tell him and just hide it, I’m not going to, and I can’t help it. I tell him everything and it doesn’t matter what’s going on, in the middle of a war zone or not, I’ve never been able to keep things from him and whether that’s a good or bad thing for us, or for him when he’s gone, I pretty much blab everything to him.

Spouses conveyed the feeling that they experienced a sense of relief when the pre-deployment phase ended. One spouse stated in her letter,

In my experience the build up to the actual deployment becomes so stressful that there is actually a little bit of relief when we actually drop him off to leave. That may sound strange to you, but I’m usually grateful to have just gotten through that part.

Deployment. While study participants found the phase of pre-deployment to be stressful, they shared with the researcher that the second phase of deployment, the actual departure and absence of their spouse, was chronically stressful. Worry for their soldier’s safety, fear of the unknown consequences that might befall him or the soldiers in his unit, and the many challenges involved with keeping the family unit functioning during his absence created stress for the spouse. When sharing her deployment experience, for example, one spouse referred to the physical and emotional consequences of military service in a war zone by stating, “I mean, you know what the possibilities are. You know what could happen. You’ve seen it happen to your

friend's husbands and things like that." Another spouse reported a, "feeling of anxiety. Not like a huge anxiety but of an unsettled feeling. Being worried, or afraid [CRYING]. You know, for your husband's safety or the safety of others."

In addition to the worry and concern for their husbands, many of the internal stressors were related to the additional roles they had to assume after their husbands' departure. Their significant new roles included those of "Mother and Father," and "Civilian Family Readiness Group (FRG) Leader." Other sources of stress that affected spouses during the second phase of deployment included deployment length and order number, the effects of deployments on her husband, her marriage relationship and her family, and other stressors such as the death of a family member.

Role of "Mother and Father." The expectation to fill the roles of both "Mother" and "Father" to the children in the family was a stressor voiced by every participant. "I have to be mom and dad and caretaker," one spouse stated. The stress of the role of single parent appeared daunting to some. "We have to be everything while they are gone," stated one spouse. A third spouse stated, "Being the sole leader of our family is very stressful." Another spouse summed her feelings regarding the cumulative effect of smaller stressors associated with her "Mother and Father" role as,

So probably those most stressful parts were those individual moments where something would happen and I'd say (to myself), 'How am I going to get this sick kid to the doctor while this other kid has this other thing and I'm thinking they won't let me bring a baby?' and just those moments where you need two parents and you only have one. For me, it's

those little moments that probably added up to the most stress than the big picture part of my husband being deployed.

The physical absence of the soldier during this phase of deployment required that the spouse had to become the sole family decision maker. A husband's absence, combined with infrequent communication, forced the spouse to make decisions alone and was perceived as stressful. "Making decisions without being able to consult my "team," that was a significant stressor for me," stated one spouse. "Not being able to communicate (with my husband) when needed was really hard," explained one spouse. Adding to this finding, another spouse stated, "That's the most difficult thing, is to face things alone that you would normally face together." Adding further insight, one spouse stated, "I think we have a lot on our plate. It's really hard to fit all you need to say in a five-to-ten minute phone call that might come once a week, once a month." The responsibility of serving as sole decision-making further inflated her reality of being "mother and father." A fifth participant stated,

When things go wrong, you just feel so alone to do anything to fix them or make them better or I mean, it can be something as simple as a vehicle that doesn't work, or one of my children was struggling in school, or there was just this helpless feeling or feeling alone, when he and I would normally face something together.

The absence of the spouse and expanded role of "Mother and Father" was acutely felt by women who experienced pregnancy and newborn parenting during deployments. Two participants stated that these circumstances were particularly stressful. One spouse stated, "The stress of having your first child and preparing for that. Not just being pregnant, but having a newborn to take care of every day and being solely responsible for that while he's gone."

Another spouse experienced two pregnancies and births without her husband present. In her letter she stated,

My husband's record on being present for baby births is 2 and 2. The first two (deployments), I had a baby while my husband was gone, so that was probably the most stressful part. Not just having a baby while he was gone, that wasn't the worst part for me, it was more having a newborn and other kids and all the things involved with doing that as a single parent.

Findings from the study revealed that spouses believed that the role of "Mother and Father" was stressful not only when parenting newborns, but also when parenting children of any age. One spouse stated:

And so for me it's that last part of the day where I just really feel the burden of being the only one. So you know, the kids are driving me crazy while I'm cooking dinner and then after dinner I'm taking care of the kids and getting them to bed and so then when it's 8:00 and I'd really like to sit down, [emphasizing word] THEN I get to come back to the kitchen and you know, dinner is still on the dining room table and the kitchen is a total disaster. And so those are the moments that I always felt the weight of the deployment the most, was probably at the end of the day.

Two of the participants who were parenting teenagers perceived that teenaged children added stress to their role of "Mother and Father." Typical adolescent issues such as communication challenges between mother and teenager and the transition from elementary to middle school created additional stress for the mother who did not have the presence of her

husband to help her parent. One participant stated, “And, so I needed to get my teenager in counseling because we just (did) not communicate well.” Another stated,

My oldest one really struggled (with the deployment). She was transitional between elementary and middle school and what really turns out to be only about three weeks of transition, in my mind, it felt like eight months. Internally, it REALLY tore up our house. (...) I’m sure that (my daughter) felt my reaction to her reaction and not having any other place, other than the treadmill or my bike, to put that stress, and I held on to it and looking back, I probably kept recycling it internally in the house.

Role of “Civilian Family Readiness Group (FRG) Leader.” Stress associated with the women’s engagement in the additional role of “Civilian Family Readiness Group Leader” also occurred in the second phase of the deployment. The Family Readiness Group (FRG) refers to “an organization of family members, volunteers, soldiers, and civilian employees belonging to a unit/organization who together provide an avenue of mutual support and assistance and a network of communication among the members, the chain of command, and community resources.” Unit-led FRGs consist of all married and single soldiers assigned or attached to the unit, including their spouses, and children. Membership in the FRG is automatic and participation is voluntary. The membership is open to extended family members, fiancées, boy/girlfriends, retirees, and even interested community members (U.S. Army Family and Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Command, 2011).

According to U.S. Army regulations, the unit commander is responsible for establishing and supporting the unit FRG (U.S. Army Family and Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Command, 2011). FRG goals cannot be met by the commander alone. Therefore, commanders

must identify capable spouse leadership and delegate clear responsibilities and the authority that goes with them to the spouse volunteers. The commander must delegate these responsibilities because soldiers often deploy with the unit, necessitating that spouses receive training for FRG leadership positions. The FRG is a volunteer membership, therefore military decision makers believe members will relate better to a volunteer leader such as a soldier's spouse. In addition, due to the nature of the military, soldiers do not want other soldiers giving orders to their spouses and children. Military commanders believe that FRG members are served best in a friendly, informal environment that is facilitated by a commander's spouse (U.S. Army Family and Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Command, 2011). Often, but not always, the FRG leader is the commander's spouse because the commander believes his/her spouse can best relate to the family readiness goals (U.S. Army Family and Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Command, 2011). Findings from this study indicated that when the commander's spouse accepted this added role and all of the accompanying responsibilities of the position, she experienced additional stress in her deployment experience.

The husbands of six of the spouses interviewed served in the role of company commander at some point during their military careers. Three of the spouses interviewed had husbands who became the battalion commander. "With rank comes responsibility," stated one spouse referring to the responsibilities associated with the role of commander being felt not only by the military officer, but equally by the spouse. One woman stated,

I took on the role to personally feel responsible for 475 other families, at the same time (as taking care of my own.) And it was incredibly challenging and stressful to be at the helm of that on the civilian side. (Those times are) really emotionally draining. (FRG leadership) is not something everybody has to do, but something I chose to do, to help.

And I felt a lot of pressure to make sure everybody's needs were met and I, I probably took it on too much. But, (my husband) and I, as a team, when he took on this job, wanted to do the best for the families as possible, to be ready, for all circumstances. And in doing so, for me, in the position I volunteered for, it was a whole lotta work. At brigade level, at battalion level, and even in bringing it back down to the company level. I felt personally responsible for 475+ other families.

Another spouse remarked, "We had a lot of families to take care of and that was stressful" because, as another spouse revealed, "I felt as though I had to make sure (all of the families in the unit's) needs are met."

Four participants stated that they spent several hours each day working on Family Readiness Group activities. "We are OVERvolunteered," stated one spouse. The sentiment shared by two different women was that, "basically all of my spare time (was) spent working on FRG stuff." Two spouses reported that FRG meetings and responsibilities filled the majority of their free time. The comments of two spouses lent insight into FRG responsibilities:

So, after breakfast we'd either go to preschool, and drop (the children) off for a couple of hours, and then I would go on and do FRG things, or I would run errands. That was usually my time to do that, go to the commissary, or do whatever I needed to do, or work on FRG stuff, that was kind of my big time. Then I would pick them up at about 1, go home, and they would take naps, and I would usually try and figure out what we were going to do when they woke up, or work on FRG stuff, that was, it was always FRG stuff.

(After sending the kids to school and exercising), then I would probably be heading out to post to have a meeting of some capacity. Within the FRG at some level. Either battalion

level, company level, or brigade level. And then, probably a commissary run, class six (military-operated beverage store) run, and then I'm home in time to get the small one off the bus.

The experience of soldiers, in the unit or brigade, being killed or injured in the war placed greater demands placed on the Family Readiness Group leadership and Comfort Care Teams. Such increased demands were felt personally by not only the commander, but also equally by his spouse. One spouse talked about this experience:

The last deployment we went to a, we had a monthly memorial service every month, and I went [emphasizing word] NINE months in a row, and our unit had lost one or more soldiers every month. I would go to every one of those memorial services and you sort of just, you just take on everybody's feelings too. And the losses were [emphasizing word] HUGE. And my husband's job, and definitely feeling responsible for and wanting to reach out and help people. Help other spouses back home. Just interacting with the families that have lost the soldiers, whether it's a spouse or their parents. I'll never forget the looks in their eyes and I'll never forget their faces and I'll carry that with me.

One spouse emphasized the stress that volunteer-exclusive Comfort Care Teams (CCT) brought to the officer's spouse, even though such teams were in place to provide assistance with coping after a tragedy occurred in a unit. One spouse reflected on her stressful experience with Comfort Care Teams:

Care Teams within the Readiness Group was stressful for me. The stress of bringing volunteers into that situation, which I felt for the girls (other spouses), putting them in that situation, but yet I was so thankful for them to be willing to participate. I was really,

I really wore two hats in that I just didn't want anybody to have to think about it, but yet I wanted everybody to be prepared. I was really fortunate that I had a great group of volunteers, ladies that stepped forward and understood the complications in preparing and the stress of practicing, unfortunately, but when it happened, and we needed it, it worked like clockwork and I, I was incredibly thankful for them. Oh, I'm getting choked up thinking about it!

Return: "Home but not in the house." The third phase of the deployment, or redeployment, was a period of time in which the officer physically returned home from the war zone to the family but was still very busy with the demands of his work. When spouses discussed the stress they felt when their soldier returned home they alluded to this phase. As a spouse reported,

It's very hard for people (outside the military) to understand. People don't understand when you giggle when they like, 'Sooooo, what's it like when they're home?' Because, you know, it's like, 'You're home!' (...) So it's kind of hard to readjust to them being home every day. You know. When they come home, that give and take, and that working it through and all that other stuff.

For many study participants, this phase could perhaps best be described as, "Home but not in the house." As one spouse stated,

This past deployment, we, because of the job my husband had, we didn't have a lot of time together even when he was home (dwell time). So I feel like our marriage was tested more, and, lots of times the communication between us wasn't, even when we talked it wasn't, I don't think that either of us thought it was what it should be.

Reintegration. Spouses perceived the fourth phase of deployment, termed “reintegration” in this study, as stressful. However, spouses who had not experienced a break in the cycle of deployment/redeployment since September 11, 2001 did not comment on the stress that came along with reintegration. This finding suggests that perhaps these spouses moved from the return phase straight into the pre-deployment phase. Study findings suggested that their husbands returned home, were physically present for one year (called dwell time) but remained busy at work, and shortly after they returned home, started to prepare for the next deployment. When this happened, data analysis showed the spouse started to feel pre-deployment stress instead of ever reaching the fourth phase of reintegration.

One spouse provided the following insight to functioning within the cycle of pre-deployment, deployment, return, pre-deployment, deployment, and return without ever reaching the fourth reintegration phase. Her experience of a three- rather than four-phase cycle changed not only the stress she experienced and how she coped, but also how she as a person changed as a result of multiple repetitions of the three phase cycle. As she commented,

And it’s not just the standard deployment, this is how you work a deployment situation and then redeployment and then this is how we function in redeployment and then this is how we work together and blah, blah, blah. And then, okay, use those same skills for number two and redeployment number two. And then three. And then you start dragging your feet and you’re like, ‘Damn!’ And then four. Here we go [emphasizing word] FIVE! And you become a different person. All those things that you learned and all those coping skills that you learned for deployment number one and redeployment number one are kind of; there’s different things happening there. There’s just something extra that starts to happen because that’s the way you live. That’s your way of life now,

is deployment, redeployment, deployment, redeployment, and those are the cycles of your life like eating, sleeping, eating, sleeping. You become that little robot to get through those things, I think.

Two other spouses who experienced multiple deployments without any break longer than the mandatory one year dwell time, added insight into the meaning of what they perceived to be a new “normal” way of functioning. “I just feel like we (we)re constantly in that cycle. I don’t think there (wa)s any difference,” stated one spouse. Another participant commented, “I just couldn’t imagine having him home and not having him getting ready to go someplace again.”

The participants who were interviewed who had experienced a break longer than the mandatory dwell time of one year during the deployment/redeployment cycle commented on the stress related to newly discovered stress found in the reintegration phase. One spouse proposed, “Post-120 days, that’s where it gets rough.” While another commented, “It has taken us four years to get out of the darkness from our first deployment.” A third spouse pointed out,

For the last five years, I’ve been the parent. I’ve had to answer to nobody. And now, he’s got a job where he’s actually around. It’s never been heard of! He’s home for dinner and participatory, and that has thrown me for a loop. And I have found it challenging and I have to step back and let him parent. Keep to myself, I should say, that he’s not doing it right. And this is the first time I’ve experienced that, because usually he jumps right into something else (another job) and the tempo is the same. He’s been in (this specific military setting) for so long that the tempo never stops. And now, he’s over (in a different area) and they don’t have a tempo apparently. I find reintegration challenging.

A fourth participant stated similar feelings in these terms: “This is definitely a test in retirement. A lot of togetherness. You’re like, ‘OH! Are you home [emphasizing word] AGAIN????!!!”

Marriage relationship

Findings from this study suggested that the marriage relationship is impacted throughout all phases of the multiple deployment experience. “You know what (the military deployment-readiness professionals) say, ‘If your marriage is in trouble before he deploys, it’s only going to get worse,’” cited one participant. Another stated,

When I think about what we’ve went through. We really had a tough time between when he got home from the first deployment (to the Middle East) up until the time he left (the second time) and I would say that we almost gave up on us and our marriage. Inside, we both knew that we weren’t where we needed to be at that time, in our marriage at that point and so it was just hard to start that (second) deployment in that place in our marriage.”

One participant mentioned dealing with the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) on her husband and the effect it had on the marriage relationship as a severe stressor. She stated, “(After his first yearlong deployment) he just seemed very depressed. He seemed very angry. He just seemed very heavy. Like you could physically see the heaviness on him. He was like livin’ with Jekyll and Hyde.” In addition to the psychological effects on her husband, the marriage relationship was tested through extramarital affairs, the husband’s pornography addiction, and his dissatisfaction with several aspects of his career. When speaking of the compounding stressors and the effect it had on her and her marriage, the spouse stated, “I couldn’t function. I was completely non-functioning. We fought every single day.”

Death of a Family Member – External Stressor

One external stressor experienced by participants was the death of an immediate family member. One participant, for instance, experienced the loss of her husband's relative due to suicide. "It was very hard on him and very hard for us to deal with because he was getting ready to deploy." Another participant suffered through the loss of her father during her sixth deployment experience, while her husband was absent from the family. This loss affected her personal coping and was identified by the participant as a stressor. She stated, "I used to rely a lot on my father. He's passed away now, but he was a major sounding board for me. Completely safe and non-judgmental."

Length and Order of Deployment

In addition to internal stressors, data analysis revealed that external stressors also affected the military officer's spouse during deployments. Participants identified deployments that lasted more than one year in length as being noteworthy. Participants also noted the second deployment experience as being noteworthy.

One spouse shared the timeline of five deployments and then stated, "We recently finished, it was a year long, or I don't know if you want to be that technical, it was 13 months and a few days. Oh, I keep track!" The researcher commented back, "And you survived!" The participant exclaimed, "And we made it! We're here to tell about it!" while laughing.

When explaining her deployment timeline one spouse paused, remembering a shorter six-month deployment, and then nonchalantly stated, "He left again for six months, just something real quick." On the contrary, three spouses experienced deployments of longer than one-year duration. All three stated that this length of time was stressful for them. One spouse stated, "My

husband (was) deployed to (the Middle East), which was intended to be a twelve month deployment, and two days before he came home, it was extended to an additional four months. So that was really stressful.” Another participant stated that a prolonged deployment experience was stressful due to lost shared family events. She offered insight into this finding:

It was really hard for me to get over that when they are gone more than a year, they are going to miss a couple of things twice. And that was just a really big deal in my mind. It was a really big deal because he missed (daughter’s) first and second birthday and that just really bothered me.

In addition to length of time of the deployment being stressful, it also became apparent during the data analysis process that the order number of the deployment was relevant. All of the spouses identified their second deployment as being the most stressful, regardless of how many subsequent deployments they had experienced. “You know all the challenges of being apart,” stated one participant. “It (the second deployment) was the absolute worst time of my entire life,” stated another. This sentiment resounded not only in the interviews, but also in the written letters. “I send my heartfelt condolences as well as my warmest congratulations. You are embarking on your soldier’s second deployment. It is hard, sad, and frustrating to have to say good-bye to your loved one yet again,” started the first line of one participant’s letter.

To summarize, study findings showed participants felt unique deployment stressors during each of four phases of deployment. The researcher named those phases pre-deployment, deployment, return, and reintegration. An explanation of each term was included in the Definition of Terms in Chapter One. Participants indicated that all four phases were universally stressful. Stressors felt during pre-deployment included worries about the safety of their spouse,

the effect the deployment would have on their children, inconsistent communication with their spouse, and the inevitability of his departure. Spouses indicated they felt a sense of relief when their husband actually deployed.

Stressors felt during the deployment phase included continued worries about his safety and well-being, fear of unknown consequences of his deployment and worries about future effects on her husband, her marriage and her children, challenges of keeping the family unit fully-functioning in his absence, fulfilling the roles of “Mother and Father” and “Civilian FRG Leader.” If the spouse chose to become involved in the Family Readiness Group leadership, findings showed that she felt responsibility that she perceived to be equal to that of her husband, regarding taking care of other families in the unit. When units experienced loss of life or seriously injured soldiers, the stress felt by the officer’s spouse increased. Preparation for these tragic events was found to be “very stressful.” The length of the deployment was also a factor in the stress felt during the deployment phase. All of the spouses who participated in the study indicated that considering all deployments, their second deployment was the most difficult to experience. Being impacted by stressors completely outside of military life, such as the death of a family member, was also a factor mentioned by several spouses.

The third phase of deployment, return, was a period of time in which the officer physically returned home from the deployment but was still very busy with the demands of his work. Participants shared that he was still not frequently in the house with his family. This “home but not in the house” phase was stressful for spouses to experience. Findings indicated that when a soldier returned home and immediately began preparing for the next deployment, the spouse moved from the return phase directly to the pre-deployment phase, skipping the next phase of reintegration phase altogether.

Reintegration, the fourth phase of the deployment cycle, was mentioned only by spouses whose husbands had encountered a longer than one year break for dwell time. If dwell time was only one year, findings indicated that they did not experience reintegration. Findings showed that reintegration was a stressful experience, especially when repeated deployment cycles had previously prevented it from happening.

Throughout these phases, the marriage relationship was tested. Events such as the death of a family member added even more stress to the deployment experience. The ways in which study participants coped with stressors are discussed in the following section.

Coping With Deployments

After the researcher asked each participant about the challenges they faced during deployments, the researcher inquired about their inevitably mentioned stress by asking, “How do you cope with the stress?” and “How do you feel you have coped with these multiple deployments?” From these questions and subsequent probes, the researcher was able to gain further insight into coping, including participants’ personal experiences with coping and the coping strategies they used and suggested for others who experienced the phenomenon.

The Nature of Deployment: No Two Alike. Participants characterized every deployment with similar structure, but observed that each deployment was clearly unique. After the onset of the second deployment, participants recognized the contrast between deployment experiences. Thus, the prospect of applying the personal insight and skills gained from one deployment to an upcoming or current deployment was, in the main, unrealistic.

Due to on-going, life changes that had occurred in the interim between deployments, including changes within family members, the immediate environment and larger world, as well

as in the changing context of war, the women ultimately had to face and cope with each deployment as a wholly new experience. The letter that one participant wrote revealed insights into the changes that contributed to differing deployment experiences:

My first bit of advice to you is to remember that no two deployments are ever alike.

Things have changed since your soldier last deployed; you have changed, the war has changed, your children have grown, and technology has advanced.

The words of two other participants reiterated the element of change and underscored spouses' inability to rely on a prior deployment experience to help them through a subsequent deployment. Their comments infer the necessity for different coping strategies with each deployment.

I learned, the hard way, on my second deployment, in the first 90 days, that it's not the same. It, the backbone of the deployment is tangentially going to be the same, but every experience, every deployment is different. You can't treat them similarly and you can't rely on those experiences to, from each deployment.

You know, my benchmarks (for successful coping) changed with each deployment.

First, because the kids get older and second, because I change. And when I change and he's gone and he changes and the kids are changing, you gotta change your benchmarks.

I think you have to have different tools in your toolbox.

Since, as a fourth spouse contended, "You have to treat every deployment as different or you'll go insane," coping with repeated deployments presented significant challenges.

Participants cited as a major challenge the need for peer support in coping with the inevitable crises with which each spouse would have to contend during deployment.

Support Seeking: Reaching Out to Peers. Participants recognized the need to connect with others, particularly with other women undergoing similar experiences. It was these women who were perceived to be most likely to understand the challenges of military life and deployment, offer the potential for meaningful relationships, and provide invaluable support during tough times. One participant with a deployed spouse, for example, initially moved back to her parent's home in order to be closer to family and long-time friends. She returned to her military home base after three months. She shared her lived experience as follows:

'Cuz that was the thing about when I stayed with my parents for the first few months of the deployment, we would go out with my old friends, but their daddies would be around and so that was hard for my kids, and that was hard for me, too. That, just seeing couples interacting was very difficult, much more difficult than I thought it was going to be. Just little things like my girlfriends complaining about their husbands watching too much football on a Sunday. Would just, oh, that would just anger me. I would get so hurt and upset. But how could they complain about their husbands watching three hours of football, when my husband's at war?! You know, don't complain about those things to me. So, it was good to be with people who were going through the same things as we were, and still have similar interests and similar lifestyles.

Study participants were adamant that spouses of deployed soldiers avoid social withdrawal and personal isolation. "Don't stay cooped up in the house. You'll go stir crazy!" wrote one participant in her letter. Another participant offered the following recommendation:

I often tell military women that if they stay at home all day and never make the effort to get out and connect with others, they will just build a place of loneliness. When crises

come (and they always do!), there will be no one to call. So make the effort – push through the initial awkward moments at a Family Readiness Group meeting, PTO (Parent Teacher Organization) gathering, or a chapel function. The (military) community is full of women who want to make friends quickly, because we all need each other!

In addition to support, another participant wrote in her letter about the value of connecting with others to provide a respite from the challenges they faced.

I look forward to our monthly ladies night out to have some fun! I can help you out with a babysitter when we get together to let our hair down. I think we have a lot on our plate and that will encourage the time to go by a little faster, we hope.

Another participant commented about seeking social support as a family need. In her words,

That really, that was probably the best thing to help us (the participant and her children) out. Finding a group that [emphasizing word] WE fit into, that was just mothers parenting similarly and we all had similar interests and kids about the same age. That was the best thing for us. No matter who was around or who wasn't, there was always somebody. And that helped keep us occupied and keep us going and keep us thinking of other things other than Daddy being gone.

Military Girlfriends as Key Supports Who “Get it.” Spouses who participated in this study underscored the importance of establishing not only support networks with peers but also close friendships with women in the networks. Study participants stated that they placed the necessity for military girlfriends above that of family members and other non-military girlfriends

because of the empathy and understanding reciprocated between girlfriends who had experienced the military world.

Spouses shared the importance of having a supportive girlfriend in their lives, especially one who “get’s it” and for whom additional explanations are not necessary. As one spouse shared, “I feel like I can just call a (military) friend and say, ‘Hey!’ And in one sentence they totally get what’s going on, they get it.” Another spouse stated, “Sometimes there are things you can only tell a military spouse because they get it.” An additional spouse indicated, “I think I choose, a lot of times, I choose (military) spouses even before family to call on, just because they understand before, I feel like I have to explain myself a little more when I’m talking to my family or my closest friends that are not military.” A fourth participant stated, “Oh my gosh, (military) girlfriends! That’s how I went through stressful situations. I have a best girlfriend who I call my ‘other husband.’”

The Toll of Repeated Deployments on Support Seeking. Number and frequency of deployments influenced the women’s desire for and the energy they could marshal to reach out to women in their immediate environment for support. Spouses with years of military experience as well as repeated deployment experience recognized that efforts to connect with other military spouses were not always fruitful or helpful in meeting their needs. Moreover, some who had experienced many deployments grew less open to both forging new relationships and social activities that had initially engaged them. As a long-time military spouse commented,

The early deployments, I had a lot of friends, and I got together with a lot of people that were in my same situation, and that really carried me through, and as time’s gone on, and I’ve gotten older and my children need me, I have actually probably kept more to myself.

I mean, I would want that (camaraderie), but that's not really what I've had, even in my attempts to seek it out, either it doesn't work or it wasn't (what was needed).

In addition, frequent relocations of military families or other circumstances may result in the repeated loss of the physical presence of close, supportive friends. Some deployment-weary women were older and their needs for support or willingness to garner such support had changed. The same aforementioned participant shared her experience as follows:

I know a lot of people and I've got a lot of acquaintances and I would say I've got friends, but all of my good friends, true friends, or people I could count on, or friends I could say anything to, they don't live here. They don't live near me now so, I mean, they still get me through it, don't get me wrong, but I know I could still pick up the phone but there's just a different dynamic of when I was, eight years ago or so and I was all about getting together on the weekends or Friday night or Supper Clubs and let's do this and let's do that and let's get through and now, I'm a little more of a loner, I guess you could say.

Another spouse added this insight:

You move to a new place and you search out new friends so you can have a book club, so you can have somebody to go to coffee with. You find the gym. You immediately start doing these things, because you [emphasizing word] KNOW it's (the next deployment) going to happen. Check. Check. Check. Check. Check. You know? And they work, they're great. But I think there is something else psychologically, emotionally, after this many times (experiencing a long deployment).

Forging relationships with other women in similar circumstances who were willing to connect quickly with one another afforded these military officers' spouses immediate and ongoing access to a peer support network of acquaintances during deployment. The physical proximity to close friendships with girlfriends who "get it" helped to nurture, support, and sustain them in their husbands' absence. Over time and multiple deployments, however, the transience of military families and other circumstances resulted in the inevitable loss of physically and emotionally present girlfriends. With repeated deployments some women became less inclined to continually develop new, close friendships and, instead, returned to now distant girlfriends for support. The women then became more vulnerable to what they and their peers warned each other about: loneliness and isolation that could compound the impact of their husband's absence and potentially reduce their ability to cope.

Self-Care

Participants identified self-care measures as critical to the mental health and continuing effectiveness of spouses in the roles they played during deployment. They conveyed in their letters recognition of the level of responsibility shouldered by their peers and the necessity of periodic scheduled breaks from their normal daily routines. As one woman wrote,

You are the sole leader of the family while your spouse is deployed and you will be the one responsible for waking up every day and providing your family with guidance. If you are not properly supported, spiritually, financially, emotionally, and physically, you will not be able to provide that type of support to your children or your soldier. You will need to find a way to have a break.

They reassured the women that a break was not only necessary but also deserved. One spouse indicated in her letter that,

Things will break; you'll be exhausted and frustrated at times. Do something at least once a week that's just for you! It's really important to have a couple hours a week at minimum to take a deep breath and indulge yourself. Remember you deserve this time.

Another spouse echoed those thoughts in her letter,

Don't forget to take time for yourself. You're going to be the Chief, Cook, and Bottle Washer for the next 12+ months and you're going to need a break every now and again. Don't feel guilty!!! It's going to give you time to recharge your batteries! Grab a book and read, take a long hot bath, go to the spa, WHATEVER it is!!! Just do it!!! Your kids will thank you; your husband will thank you and YOU will feel much better for it!

Military Resources for Support

All of the spouses who participated in this study believed that the military had done a tremendous job in providing many resources to facilitate spousal and family positive coping with deployment. Among the helpful military programs repeatedly named by participants were the: Family Readiness Groups (FRG), Military Family Life Consultants (MFLC), Army Family Team Building (AFTB) programs, Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) programs, Army Community Service (ACS), Comfort Care Teams, Military OneSource, and the free childcare hours offered each month to spouses of deployed military personnel. They recognized two issues related to such programs, however. The programs were readily available but underutilized and spouses who experienced six or more deployments needed programs specifically tailored to meet their needs.

Available but Underutilized. Six spouses stated that they felt these military programs were not utilized as much as was potentially possible, although they found them to be very helpful.

I know taking advantage of the free childcare this last deployment was a [emphasizing word] HUGE improvement for me but that was very much due to circumstance. It wasn't available for the first two deployments and it was for the third. I look around at the women around me who don't use it and I think, 'WHY NOT?!?'

Another participant enthusiastically endorsed efforts made by the military but voiced concerns over the lack of utilization of the MFLCs:

[Emphasizing word] TREMENDOUSLY underutilized! We were practically begging people to talk to them! [Emphasizing word] WONDERFUL people! Wonderful people. They're available, free. Free counseling. And it's anonymous. They'll meet you off post, on post, anywhere. You don't have to even give them your name. And you can sit down with them and have counseling (in person or by) phone 24 hours. The (military) has really stepped up. And they were everywhere in the FRGs. They came to events. They made themselves known. They are a really great commodity for these multiple deployments.

Need for Tailored Resources. One spouse commented that she hoped that military program planners would continue to modify and adapt resources and support programs to meet the changing needs of women who were experiencing their third or more deployments:

They were doing really well for the one and two deployments. But I think there's a different dynamic when you're talking about three, four, five, six. Your family is

different. It's a different way to function. Your needs change and they need to adapt programs to (deployment) number seven and eight.

Other Coping Strategies

In addition to “staying busy with friends and activities” and taking advantage of the many resources available within the context of military life, participants in this study identified several other generally recognized resources that were beneficial in helping them cope. Activities such as, “exercising,” “nutritious eating,” “leisure reading,” “journaling,” and participating in faith-based programs and activities like “Bible study,” “church,” and “PWOC (Protestant Women of the Chapel)” were frequently mentioned by participants. As one spouse stated, “All those things and all those skills we all learned in our first deployment and our first redeployment (return).” Other suggestions for coping included establishing, “a daily routine” for the family to follow; “learning to ask for help when it’s needed,” including “seek(ing) counseling” when necessary; and “hiring a babysitter to help out with the children.”

Helping Family Members Cope

Spouses of deployed officers engaged in helping themselves as well as their children and sometimes their husbands cope with the deployment experience. The ability of their children to cope effectively with deployment was a particular concern for the women in this study.

Children’s Coping. All of the study participants reported that, in addition to themselves, their children required the development of successful coping strategies in response to the deployment experience. As one spouse commented in reference to the father’s absence during deployment, “I needed to help my kids cope, too, you know? I hate it for them.” Another spouse shared the following example of a coping strategy she used.

We made a paper chain with different colors for the holidays so they could have a visual of the time until Dad came home. I could sneak on a few links here or there if I needed to if the time (for his redeployment) changed.

Communication via the postal service, Internet, or telephone could be a particularly important, though challenging way to maintain connections between children and their fathers. The participants recognized limitations in communication as reflected by the statement, “It’s very stressful not to be able to communicate and hard to fit it all into a five to ten minute phone call.” One participant addressed the need for father-child communication in her letter: “Keep kids connected with Dad as much as you can. Skype™ is awesome! He can see them growing up and kids can see him too. It helps more than you know.”

Husband’s Coping. Three spouses stated that they took measures to help their husbands cope with multiple yearlong or longer deployments. Spouses suggested, for example, that it was important to “send care packages” to their deployed husbands. “I tried to send him an email every night just to give him a snapshot of our day,” stated another participant.

One spouse who married shortly before her husband deployed shared that both her and her spouse gained new roles while away and needed to cope with being apart. Both partners in the relationship sometimes faced significant adjustments to changed family circumstances when the husband returned from deployment. Husbands sometimes returned to many changes in what they envisioned as family or home.” As this spouse recounted,

I bought a house while he was deployed, and I had a baby while he was deployed, and he came home to being a homeowner, a dad, and a husband, which he wasn’t prior to the deployment really. So that was a big adjustment for him.

One of the major challenges participants faced in coping with spousal deployment was the unique quality of each deployment that disallowed the generalization of coping strategies across deployments. Among the primary coping strategies the women recommended was peer-provided social support, though the perceived value of and efforts to garner such support differed among women depending, in part, on the number of deployments they had experienced. Participants also advocated that spouses engage in self-care efforts, use the resources provided to them by the military and other outlets, and continue to cope by using, as one participant stated, “elementary” coping skills such as “exercising,” “nutritious eating,” “leisure reading,” “journaling,” and participating in faith-based activities. Another major challenge participants faced in coping with spousal deployment was the perceived need to also help their children and spouse cope. Participants suggested that need for tailored programming in order to continue to cope with multiple, yearlong or longer deployments.

Deployment Benefits

Although the spouses who participated in this study stated that they experienced many stressors which required coping with the experience of multiple yearlong or longer deployments, participants also identified benefits. Three benefits were identified which related to their own personal development and, for some, that of their children. The benefits they cited included increased personal independence, self-assurance, and coping capabilities. One benefit relating to the value of the spouse’s marriage relationship emerged. A fifth benefit related to the opportunities that spouses were able to seize due to their husband’s absence. These opportunities were available not only to the spouse, but for some, to their children. Although the absence was identified as a stressor, it was jointly identified as an opportunity.

Personal Independence, Self-Assurance and Improved Coping Skills. Six participants indicated increased personal self-sufficiency as a benefit derived from their husband's deployment. This was reflected by one woman's assertion that she was "more independent," as a consequence of being apart from her husband during deployments. Associated with independence was increased self-assurance that included feelings of personal strength and capability. "You will be stronger than when you started," wrote one participant in her letter.

The following comments by different participants highlighted some of the benefits of deployment: "My girls and I are stronger," "I think I'm a better person altogether," "I'm wiser, smarter," "I'm able to take care of myself and not depend on other people to get things done," "I can fix things and not freak out." Two participants stated that they felt their coping skills had improved as a consequent of their husband's deployments. "I'm able to focus on more than just my own survival [during deployments] now- I can help others too." The other stated, "My coping skills are a [emphasizing word] LOT better!"

Strengthened Effect on Marriage. Another benefit that emerged from data analysis was that the military officer spouses perceived a strengthening effect on their marriage relationship. Three spouses echoed one woman's comment, "I really appreciate it when he is home," by remarking, "We don't take each other for granted anymore." One participant shared the notions of feeling increased self-assurance and appreciating her spouse more:

"I feel stronger. I think our marriage is stronger because of it. I feel like we make the most of our time, and I don't know compared to someone that lives in the civilian world, I don't know that, but I know for us that a free Saturday is so, just family time in general, we just don't take it for granted. We just don't take it for granted, since the last couple of

long deployments. We just try to make it count, especially with the kids. And even for us.”

Later in the interview she continued,

I do feel like I want to take care of my marriage and I try not to take it for granted and I, it does make me want to try to work on it and make it better and there’s definitely not good days, but I know it is something fragile and something that we have to take care of.

Opportunities. A fifth benefit participants identified was that deployments provided opportunities for military wives and children that they may not have otherwise had. Examples of these opportunities included such things as a chance to focus on accomplishing personal goals such as weight loss or home projects. “While my husband was away, I had an opportunity to lose my baby weight. That was a good goal for me,” stated one participant. Another participant stated that she felt the deployments provided an opportunity to help their children build a larger world perspective. She explained,

“I think it helps, too, with the kids. It gives you a lot of chances that you might not otherwise take to kind of help build a perspective in them on not just what their dad’s doing, but kind of a bigger world view. My kids are like most kids. Their world is what they can see in front of them, and when their dad’s overseas, we put up the big map on the wall that shows the Middle East and we talk about the countries that are over there and the kind of people that are over there and when my husband was deployed last year during the month of Ramadan we had a little booklet that helped us pray for all sorts of different people all around the world that participate in Ramadan. So every night we’d talk about a different group of people who were participating in Ramadan and we would

pray for those people and stuff like that. So I think there's opportunities like that, that wouldn't occur otherwise."

The benefits experienced by spouses included feelings of increased independence, increased self-assurance, improved coping abilities, sensing a higher value placed on one's marriage relationship, and a notion that deployments present opportunities for the spouse and, for some, their children. These newly exposed benefits provide beneficial data to the current literature and provide previously elusive insight which can now be used in future research.

The essence of the experience of multiple, yearlong or longer deployments for military officers' spouses was ambiguous loss and resiliency (Boss, 2010). Repeated separations from their husband resulted repeated uncertainty about his health and well-being. The uncertainty was out of their control and was perceived as relentless in nature. Study findings indicated spouses experienced multi-sourced stress and were forced to cope in new ways with each passing deployment. Despite the layers of perceived stress, spouses indicated perceived benefits, or resiliency, which resulted from the experience.

CHAPTER 5- INTERPRETATION

Researchers have raised questions about how military personnel, their spouses/partners and their families are faring in response to multiple, long-term separations (Burton et al., 2009; Castaneda & Harrell, 2007; Chapin, 2009; Demers, 2009; Dimiceli et al., 2009; Eaton et al., 2008; Engel et al., 2008; Hosek & Mantorell, 2009; Huebner et al., 2007; Mansfield et al., 2010; Morris & Age, 2009; Pittman et al., 2004; Savych, 2008; Spera, 2008; SteelFisher et al., 2008; Tollefson, 2008; Westhuis et al., 2006). A review of the literature for the present study revealed several quantitative and mixed methods studies focusing on the impact of deployments and concluded that separation and reunion impacted the lives of the military family (Castaneda & Harrell, 2007; Chapin, 2009; Demers, 2009; Dimiceli, 2009; Eaton et al., 2008; Engel et al., 2008; Hiew, 1992; Huebner et al., 2007; McGowan, 2008; Mansfield et al., 2010; Morris & Age, 2009; Pittman et al., 2004; Spera, 2008; SteelFisher et al., 2008; Tollefson, 2008; Westhuis et al., 2006; Wood et al., 1995). Some of these studies were focused on military children or the family unit (Chapin, 2009; Demers, 2009; Engel et al., 2008; Huebner et al., 2007; Pittman et al., 2004). Other studies focused on military spouses of both enlisted and officer service members (Burton et al., 2009; Castaneda & Harrell, 2007; Dimiceli et al., 2009; Eaton et al., 2008; Mansfield et al., 2010; Spera, 2008; SteelFisher et al., 2008; Tollefson, 2008; Warner, 2009; Westhuis et al., 2006; Wood et al., 1995).

Many quantitative and mixed methods studies of military spouses focused on how deployments affected spouses' health and well-being (Burton et al., 2009; Dimiceli et al., 2009; Eaton et al., 2008; Spera, 2008; SteelFisher et al., 2008; Tollefson, 2008; Wood et al., 1995). Dimiceli et al. (2009) conducted a study with military spouses from the 4th Infantry Division at Fort Hood, Texas. A convenience sample of seventy-seven spouses were surveyed and found to represent the composition of the U.S. Army (Dimiceli et al., 2009). The spouses ranked deployments as the most stressful life situation they had encountered.

Qualitative insight was limited to one study published in the literature regarding how military spouses experienced deployment. The study provided insight but was limited to General's wives (McGowan, 2008). It included the aspect of deployment, but deployment was not the focus of the study. The current phenomenological qualitative study sought to contribute new information to the literature by focusing specifically on providing insight into military officer spouses/partners' meaning and lived experiences of frequent, long-lasting deployments.

The researcher used Max van Manen's approach to hermeneutic phenomenology to guide the study. This approach focused on employing individuals' reflections on their experiences in order to reach an understanding of the deeper meaning of the experience. Purposive sampling resulted in the recruitment of seven participants who had been military officer spouses for periods of between five and seventeen years and had experienced between two and six spousal deployments.

An important facet of this study was the researcher's status as a military officer's spouse. She believed that participation by other officers' spouses' in this study was primarily facilitated by her status as an "insider," and also by her assurances of anonymity, engagement in establishing rapport, and by her role as an active, non-judgmental listener with whom participants could openly share their perspectives and experiences.

The researcher learned, by means of her efforts, in identifying participants for the initial pilot study, that a barrier to study participation was spouses' concerns about anonymity and confidentiality. These women believed that communication with anyone about the negative aspects of military life could adversely affect their husband's careers and their relationships with their husbands. Changes made for this study that involved oral rather than written informed consent and the involvement of two participants known to the researcher. These changes resulted in more spouses being willing to share their experiences, despite concerns about the implications of study participation for themselves and their husbands.

In this phenomenology, the researcher collected qualitative data by means of audio-recorded in-depth, open-ended interviews over the computer (Skype™) or telephone. In addition, in an effort to gain additional insight and to address data triangulation as a contributor to study credibility, participants also wrote letters to other theoretical military officers' spouses who were beginning their second yearlong or longer deployment. The use of triangulation added rigor to the study and allowed the researcher to obtain a multidimensional view of yearlong or longer deployments. In addition to triangulation, the researcher addressed study credibility using several strategies, including methodological congruence, thick description, prolonged engagement in the field, continuing search for disconfirming evidence, engagement in reflexivity, maintenance of an audit trail, inter-rater confirmability analysis, and data saturation.

The researcher analyzed the transcribed and coded data, identifying categories and themes that emerged from the officers' spouses' data. In response to the research question, "What is the lived experience of and meaning held by military officer spouses/partners regarding multiple yearlong or longer deployments of their active duty military officer spouse/partner in the Post-9/11 era?" she described how participants perceived, judged, described, and remembered their lived experience. She then presented her insight into the essence of the lived experience of military officers' spouses/partners.

In this chapter, the researcher will present an overview of study findings, discuss the findings in the context of the research literature, and present conclusions regarding the findings. In addition, she will present implications for health education and for further research.

Overview of Findings

The researcher determined that essence of the lived experience of deployments for military officers' spouses was ambiguous loss. For these women, the only thing which appeared to be consistent about the experience of repeated deployments of their spouse was uncertainty. A previous mixed-methods study with military youth revealed a similar finding (Huebner et al., 2007). The current study showed that despite or as a consequence of the experience of repeated

ambiguous loss, spouses developed resilience. Frydenberg stated that resilience could be defined as, “the capacity to bounce back in the face of adversity, to deal with conflict situations” (2004, p. 18). The military officers’ spouses in this study experienced repeated cycles of multi-sourced stress and used varied coping mechanisms, but all reported perceived increased feelings of independence and self-assurance as benefits of the repeated deployment experience and thus experienced a greater capacity to cope with adversity.

General Stressors and Challenges

Every participant in this study spoke about the existence of general challenges related to being a military spouse. Frequent geographical relocation, demands of their husband’s job, and maintaining appearances were three general stressors frequently mentioned. The stress of geographical relocation was noted in previous studies (Dimiceli et al., 2010; Eaton et al., 2008; Mansfield et al., 2010).

Depending on the military officer’s rank and specific job assignment, spouses shared that the demands of their soldier’s job could be immense and time-consuming. This finding was similar to that of McGowan (2008), who completed a phenomenological dissertation on the lived experience of senior military wives (rank of General). One of the potential challenges of military life to a military spouse was her husband’s commitment to duty that impeded his stable presence in the family and on-going engagement in family life.

A third general stressor that participants frequently mentioned was the existence of unwritten expectations of military officers’ spouses. Some spouses shared that they felt pressure from others in the military to present a positive image of them and the military at all times. Although a study by McGowan focused solely on the spouses of military Generals, the findings in her study paralleled the findings in this study. McGowan’s study participants’ suggestion that the pressures of being an officer’s wife, “never let up,” (McGowan, 2008, p.5) was reflected in the officers’ spouses in this study.

Post-9/11 Transformation

A second theme which emerged from the study was the transformation that occurred in the Post- 9/11 era regarding the demands made of the military in general. Post-9/11, participants faced the onset and continuation of war and consequent repeated, prolonged deployments. The onset of war imposed heavy emotional demands on military officers' spouses since the women faced not only repeated spousal deployments, but also spousal deployments in harm's way and repeated cycles of ambiguous loss.

Providing new information to the literature, findings in this study indicated a wholly different lived experience for those military officers' spouses whose husband joined the military prior to September 11, 2001 (Pre-9/11 era), compared to those whose husbands joined the military after September 11, 2001 (Post-9/11 era). Experiencing repeated deployments over time tended to deplete the emotional and physical reserve of spouses and families of the "Pre-9/11" era. One of the consequences for spouses associated with the "Post-9/11" change was limited military acculturation due in part to the loss of access to experienced women who would have assisted in this process.

Four Phases of Deployment

Four distinct phases of each deployment cycle emerged from the data. These four cycles were named by the researcher as pre-deployment, deployment, return, and reintegration. All four phases of the deployment cycle contained elements of ambiguous loss and grief.

Worries characterized the pre-deployment phase. The spouse worried about her husband's safety, the effects the deployment might have on her children, inconsistent communication with her husband, and the inevitability of his upcoming departure. Warner et al. also determined that the time leading up to the deployment, or pre-deployment phase, was a very stressful time for the military family unit (2009). Study participants shared that stressors

affected their spouses long before they departed, though they did not identify a specific pre-deployment timeframe. When the pre-deployment ended and the second phase of the deployment, or the deployment itself started, spouses indicated they felt a sense of relief.

Spouses continued to worry about their husband's safety during the second deployment phase. They feared the unknown consequences of the deployment and faced challenges of single parenthood. Participants shared that they experienced feelings of loneliness and ambiguous loss during this stage. Participants also spoke about feeling increased demands related to parenting during this phase of the deployment and some stated that they had concerns about the effects of deployment on their children. These findings added confirmation to findings from previous studies (Burton et al., 2009; Castaneda & Harrell, 2007; Chapin, 2009; Demers, 2009; Dimiceli et al., 2009; Eaton et al., 2008; Engel et al., 2008; Hosek & Mantorell, 2009; Huebner et al., 2007; Mansfield et al., 2010; Morris & Age, 2009; Pittman et al., 2004; Savych, 2008; Spera, 2008; SteelFisher et al., 2008; Tollefson, 2008; Warner, 2009; Westhuis et al., 2006).

Findings from this study also suggested that spouses who accepted the role of "Civilian FRG Leader" felt increased responsibility to the soldiers and families in their husband's unit. These spouses perceived feeling a level of responsibility for the soldiers and families in the unit equal that was comparable to that of their husbands. This is new insight for the literature.

The third phase of deployment was a period of time in which the officer physically returned home from the war zone to his family, but was sometimes still busy with the demands of his work and not fully present within the family structure. This finding represents continued ambiguous loss for the spouse. Interpretation of this theme revealed to the researcher that this phase could perhaps be described as, "Home but not in the house." The findings indicated that some spouses had feelings of happiness, relief, and anxiety during this phase. Data suggested

that when the officer was home, but not “in the house,” however, the spouse experienced stress and a continuation of loss associated with the husband’s lack of presence in the relationship and the family.

The fourth and final phase identified through data analysis was reintegration. In this phase, the spouse had experienced a longer than one year break between deployments or had returned to a job or school that allowed for a significant decrease in tempo. Participants who had experienced the reintegration phase perceived it to be stressful. Data from this study suggested that the repeated absences of the husband had a cumulative effect on the spouse and their marital relationship.

Marriage relationship

The marriage relationship was impacted throughout all phases of the deployment experience. Findings from the previous literature confirmed that the resilience of the marriage relationship was tested during deployments with consequent increased divorce rates (Burton et al., 2009; Chapin, 2009; Demers, 2009; Dimiceli et al., 2009; Eaton et al., 2008; Hosek & Mantorell, 2009; Mansfield et al., 2010; Spera, 2008; SteelFisher et al., 2008; Westhuis, 2006). As was also found in other studies, this study revealed spousal concerns about their husband’s mental health problems, specifically those related to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Burton et al., 2009; Demers, 2009; Eaton et al., 2008; Morris & Age, 2009).

External stressors

Study findings confirmed that external stressors, such as the death of a family member affected the military officer’s spouse during deployment. One participant experienced the loss of her father during her sixth deployment experience. This finding was similar to the conclusions of other studies (Chapin, 2009; Dimiceli et al., 2009). Dimiceli et al. (2009), for example,

reported that when events such as illness or death of a parent, flooding or other natural disaster, or being involved in a car accident occurred concurrently with a deployment, the spouse felt an even higher level of stress.

Length and order of deployment

Deployments that lasted more than one year in length were noteworthy to spouses. Some spouses commented that it was particularly hard to experience their husband missing some aspect of family life, such as a child's birthday, more than once. All of the participants revealed that, of all deployments, their second deployment experience was their most difficult. Spouses indicated that factors affecting this perception included, but perhaps were not limited to, the magnitude of experiencing another year away from their husband and the realization that the coping mechanisms utilized during the first deployment were not transferable to the second deployment. This insight adds new information to the literature.

Coping with deployments

Participants shared personal experiences about coping and offered suggestions for others who, like themselves, were military officers' spouses. Findings confirmed other studies which suggested that deployments required the development of coping strategies on the part of family members who remained behind (Burton et al., 2009; Chapin, 2009; Demers, 2009; Dimiceli et al., 2009; Eaton et al., 2008; Hosek & Mantorell, 2009; Huebner et al., 2007; Mansfield et al., 2010; Morris & Age, 2009; Pittman, et al., 2004; Savych, 2008; Spera, 2008; SteelFisher et al., 2008; Tollefson, 2008; Westhuis, 2006; Wheeler & Torres Stone, 2010; Wood et al., 1995). This study found that spouses knew they should use general stress-reducing coping mechanisms such as "eating right," "getting enough sleep," and "exercising." However, study participants provided new insight into more specific aspects of deployment-related coping.

The researcher garnered several areas of new insight. The study showed that spouses perceived no two deployments to be alike. Due to on-going life changes that occurred in the interim between deployments, including changes within family members, the immediate environment and larger world, as well as in the changing context of war, the women ultimately had to face and cope with each deployment as a wholly new experience. This contributed to the uncertainty they faced with each deployment.

Participants provided clear examples of the need for military girlfriends who “get it.” It was these women who were perceived to be most likely to understand the challenges of military life and deployment, offer the potential for meaningful relationships, and provide invaluable support during tough times. Study participants stated that they placed the necessity for military girlfriends above that of family members and other non-military girlfriends because of the empathy and understanding reciprocated between girlfriends who have also experienced the military world.

Number and frequency of deployments influenced the women’s desire for and the energy they could marshal to reach out to women in their immediate environment for support. New insight showed that spouses with years of military experience including repeated deployment experience recognized that efforts to connect with other military spouses were not always fruitful or helpful in meeting their needs. Moreover, some who had experienced many deployments grew less open to both forging new relationships and social activities that had initially engaged them. In addition, frequent relocations of military families or other circumstances may result in the repeated loss of the physical presence of close, supportive friends. Some deployment-weary women were older and their needs for support or willingness to garner such support had changed.

Self Care. New insight into self-care was also obtained. Participants identified self-care measures as critical to their mental health when their husbands deployed. They conveyed in their letters recognition of the level of responsibility shouldered by their peers and the necessity of periodic scheduled breaks from their normal daily routines.

All of the spouses who participated in this study believed that the military had done a tremendous job in providing many resources to facilitate spousal and family positive coping with deployment. This finding differed from previous studies which suggested that more resources were needed (Burton, et al., 2009; Castaneda & Harrell, 2007; Chapin, 2009; Demers, 2009; Dimiceli et al., 2009; Eaton et al., 2008; Huebner et al., 2007; Mansfield et al., 2010; Morris & Age, 2009; Pittman et al., 2004; Savych, 2008; Spera, 2008; SteelFisher et al., 2008; Tollefson, 2008; Westhuis et al., 2006). However, participants believed these military programs, while helpful, were not utilized as much as was potentially possible. A contributing factor in the underutilization of resources may have been an unspoken message from the military that officers' spouses were leaders who should not need help with coping. Participants also believed a need existed to tailor the resources for spouses experiencing numerous, repeated deployments. Thus rather than new or more resources, these participants perceived a reluctance to use the existing resources that were available to them.

Spouses of deployed officers engaged in helping themselves as well as their children and sometimes their husbands cope with the deployment experience. The ability of their children to cope with deployment was a particular concern for the women in this study. These findings echo those of several other studies (Burton et al., 2009; Chapin, 2009; Demers, 2009; Dimiceli et al., 2009; Eaton et al., 2008; Engel et al., 2008; Hiew, 1992; Huebner et al., 2007; Mansfield et al., 2010; Morris & Age, 2009; Spera, 2008; SteelFisher et al., 2008; Warner et al., 2009).

The spouses who participated in this study identified benefits associated with deployment that had not been addressed in the research literature. Three benefits were identified which related to their own personal development and, for some, that of their children. The benefits cited included increased personal independence, self-assurance, and coping capabilities. One benefit relating to their personal valuing their marriage relationship emerged. A fifth benefit related to the opportunities that spouses were able to take advantage of due to their husband's absence. This finding shows that spouses gained resilience in the face of multiple, extended deployments.

Conclusions

Findings from this study offered insight into the essence of multiple yearlong or longer deployments. Ambiguous loss was repeatedly experienced by the military officers' spouses who participated in the study. Over time and experience with deployment, spouses tended to acquire some elements of resilience in response to the deployment experience. Spouses had become different people as a result of experiencing their spouses' multiple deployments.

The Post-9/11 era of multiple yearlong or longer deployments transformed the experience of being a military officer's spouse and led to increased challenges. Spouses from the "Pre-9/11" era were "tired," and "OVERvolunteered." Spouses from the "Post-9/11" era were more likely to continue in their chosen career fields and refrain from FRG experience at least until the time they became parents. They only knew the current high "tempo" of deployments. Spouses from the "Post-9/11" era did not have their husbands home to help them acculturate to the nuances of military life, and as a result, may have responded differently to their military officer spouse role.

This study helped to identify four phases of the deployment cycle as identified by military officers' spouses. All four phases of deployment were stressful and required the

development of coping strategies. This conclusion suggests that the spouse may repeat the cycle of grief and loss numerous times during the four phases of the deployment cycle.

When soldiers did not experience a dwell time of longer than one year, the military couple skipped the fourth stage, reintegration, and immediately cycled from the return phase back to the pre-deployment phase. Over time, repetition of the abbreviated cycle led to cumulative stress that the couple faced when and if they finally experienced the fourth stage of reintegration. Findings suggested the potential existence of thousands of couples who have yet to experience reintegration in year 2011, ten years after the start of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Deployments may have most deeply affected Army spouses compared to military spouses from other branches of the service, as Army deployments have frequently been one year or longer in duration for several deployment cycles.

The Army has recognized the issue of abbreviated deployment cycles. The researcher did not locate any published studies that provided insight into the conclusions made by General George Casey, U.S. Army Chief of Staff, who testified before the U.S. House Armed Services Committee in March, 2011. The findings from the current study, however, support his observation from a spouses' perspective that military studies had indicated that a one year dwell time for soldiers was not a long enough time period for the soldier to "fully recover mentally and physically from the rigors of a one year deployment" (U.S. House Armed Services Committee, 2011, p.6). As a result, the Army will soon start taking action to increase dwell time to at least two years for active duty and four years for National Guard service members (U.S. House Armed Services Committee, 2011).

Findings from this study support the idea that coping strategies were needed by the entire family unit during deployments. Spouses in this study were adamant that no two deployments

were alike and each deployment required unique coping strategies. Carry-over from one deployment to the next did not seem possible. Spouses coped more effectively when they were able to reach out to peers. Over time and multiple deployments, however, the transience of military families and other circumstances resulted in the inevitable loss of physically and emotionally present girlfriends. With repeated deployments some women became less inclined to continually develop new, close friendships and, instead, returned to distant girlfriends for support. The women then became more vulnerable to what they and their peers warned each other about: loneliness and isolation that could compound the impact of their husband's absence and reduce their ability to cope.

Military resources were perceived to be numerous and beneficial but were underutilized. They identified a need for tailored coping resources specific to those spouses experiencing three or more deployments and for programming unique to military officers' spouses. Tailored programming would foster improved coping capabilities.

Spouses perceived themselves to be more independent, more self-assured, and equipped with better coping skills after experiencing multiple deployments. Some also placed a higher value on their marriage relationship and believed that they were given many personal opportunities for growth which would not have been as readily accessible had they not experienced the deployments. Overall, despite the stressors, military officers' spouses developed resiliency during the experience and reported general enjoyment about the experience of being a military spouse, despite the many stressors associated with their husband's many deployments. Many stated they could not imagine their lives any other way.

Implications for Health Education

This study was exploratory in many respects, especially as it pertained to the essence of ambiguous loss and resulting resilience that characterized the deployment-related experiences of military spouses. The merits of these concepts were supported by many of the responses participants provided. Given that the sample was small and limited to officers' spouses, generalizability of findings was limited. Nevertheless, the stories of these spouses are consistent with related research on health-related aspects of deployment for military spouses in general (Burton et al., 2009; Dimiceli et al., 2009; Eaton et al., 2008; Spera, 2008; SteelFisher et al., 2008; Tollefson, 2008; Wood et al., 1995). This study added credibility to findings by Huebner et al. who suggested that deployment may be considered a special case of an ambiguous loss situation (2007). This study has not fully explored the notion of ambiguous loss, but offered valuable insight for future research efforts.

Ambiguous loss, the essence of the deployment experience, is a relational disorder (Boss, 2010). The theorist recognized two types of ambiguous loss (Boss, 2010). Type One occurred when there was a physical absence and psychological presence of the missing person (Boss, 2010). Examples included an absent parent due to divorce and giving a baby up for adoption. Type Two occurred when there was a physical presence but psychological absence (Boss, 2010). Examples included Alzheimer's disease, autism, or depression. Study findings suggested that Type One and Type Two could also be associated with various phases of the deployment cycle.

With ambiguous loss, the problem (deployment) experienced by the person (spouse) developed from outside context, not from within the individual's psyche (Boss, 2010). The theory suggested that the problem could be discussed in community with others (peers) to gain meaning and hope (Boss, 2010). Therefore, family and community-based interventions, as opposed to individual therapy, would possibly be less resisted and thus more effective. (Boss,

2010). This may provide a partial explanation as to why military officers' spouses believed that military coping resources were readily available but underutilized. The theory also suggested that when loved ones disappeared, as reflected by a deployment, the remaining family members yearned to stay together and sometimes resisted therapy if it meant more separation. This suggested that health educators should consider focus groups or other family interventions when planning health education and outreach programming.

Boss (2010) advanced a framework for helping individuals deal with ambiguous loss that centered on fostering resilience. The framework included helping individuals (a) find meaning, (b) temper mastery, (c) reconstruct identity, (d) normalize ambivalence, (e) revise attachment, and (f) discover hope. The researcher used this framework to inform participant responses to the areas of ambiguous loss explored in this study (i.e. perceptions of uncertainty and loss; changes over time; repeated cycles of spouse being a part of the family unit but not present).

Findings from this study offer health educators the information needed to develop mental health programming tailored to military officers' spouses who have experienced ambiguous loss as a result of repeated deployments. Consistent with findings from this study, Boss (2010) suggested that making meaning of such loss often comes from interactions with peers. Health educators' efforts in helping spouses develop close relationships with peers could be particularly useful. Advocating for recognition by military leaders of the need for support in families building coping strategies may ultimately lead to a change in spouses' reticence in availing themselves of the resources for support currently provided by the military.

Boundary ambiguity can result from experiencing changes in roles and responsibilities that in turn can relate to changes in identity (Boss, 2010). In relation to ambiguous loss, Boss defined identity as knowing not only who one is as a person, but also knowing what roles would

be played in relation to others in the family or community (2010). When the boundaries of the roles of spouses were ambiguous, they started to question the changes in their identity, which was stressful. Health educators could focus on helping spouses come to terms with expected changes in identity which occurred as a result of experiencing these role changes. Despite spouses' lack of control over many deployment aspects, health educators could help them recognize successful coping strategies and help them to build upon their personal strengths. Health educators could also help spouses prepare for future changes related to reintegration and relinquishing or modifying family roles that were required during deployment.

Findings further suggest civilian and military health educators should develop education and outreach programs tailored for military officers' spouses. Programs should teach positive coping skills, including commonly accepted stress management techniques for achieving holistic health and wellness. These techniques include such things as adopting a daily exercise program, creating healthy eating habits, and obtaining eight or more hours of sleep each night. Stress management techniques for challenges resulting from leadership in the military unit should also be developed. These programs should be open to all military officers' spouses, not solely for those whose husbands are in command positions.

Peer support services are also needed. Future health education efforts could also center on including family members and spouses. Additionally, mental health programming should be refined and taught before the heightened onset state of stress in the pre-deployment phase. Furthermore, health educators should focus on developing programming dealing with the stress of deployment number three and beyond. Because it can be anticipated that the entire family system will experience change, professional intervention should also be multilayered (Huebner et al., 2007). Programming could profitably focus on promoting self-help measures, allaying

relationship conflict within the marriage, reintegration of the father back into the family unit, and how spouses can help their children. The researcher also recommends education and programming for civilian health educators who desire to work with the military population. Gaining insight into commonly experienced issues and learning how to interact with the military spouse population may result in improved outcomes.

Implications for Future Research

This qualitative study offered qualitative insight into the new phenomenon of multiple, yearlong or longer deployments. Findings relate specifically to military officers' spouses but some may be generalized to all military spouses. Future research efforts are needed, particularly in the area of exploring the concept of ambiguous loss and its applicability in each of the phases of deployment. Answers would provide additional insight necessary for improved health education programming and outreach. Additional research is needed to explore the underutilization of military resources.

Future research is needed to examine the perception voiced by participants in this study that the second deployment is the most difficult of all deployments for spouses to experience. Insights into this issue would help health educators tailor programming for spouses who have yet to experience their second deployment and could possibly help mediate some of the stressors experienced during, what participants in this study believed was the "hardest" deployment. Future research could also center on exploring the generational differences in "Pre-9/11" and "Post-9/11" military officers' and their spouses. This study suggested the challenges faced and coping skills utilized by these two groups may differ. Insight would allow health educators to tailor programs specific to these groups.

Lastly, future research efforts should explore the often alluded to, but not often revealed, unwritten expectations of the military regarding the roles and responsibilities of the military officer's spouse. Qualitative insight could aid in understanding the somewhat hidden military world. Findings could be used by civilians to improve research related to military soldiers, spouses, and family members. Participants in this study suggested that the military world is different from the civilian world and that spouses may be unwilling to participate in research due to fears related to the unwritten military expectations of silence about personal issues or concerns. Learning how to gain entry into the military to conduct research would help researchers to explore important issues and obtain credible and valid research findings.

This study offered valuable insight into the lives of military officers' spouses who had experienced multiple yearlong or longer deployments. The study offered a first-time look into the somewhat hidden lives of women who stand quietly behind their husbands, who are often seen as heroes in the eyes of Americans and others around the world. This study suggested that despite repeated cycles of ambiguous loss, these courageous women should not be forgotten. They have proven themselves to be capable and resilient in the face of adversity and sacrifice. They stand proud, yet invisible, serving behind the scenes with their husbands whose unique career purpose is to courageously and selflessly protect our nation.

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APPENDIX A- APPROVED IRB FORM

UMCIRB #:

UNIVERSITY AND MEDICAL CENTER INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD REVISION FORM

RECEIVED
SEP 02 2010

UMCIRB #: 10-0170 Date this form was completed: 8/30/2010
Title of research: "The Meaning and Lived Experiences of Deployment as Perceived by Military Officer Spouses/Partners"
Principal Investigator: Marcy Bitner
Sponsor: Dr. Sharon Knight, Thesis Chair, College of Health Education and Promotion, East Carolina University

Fund number for IRB fee collection (applies to all for-profit, private industry or pharmaceutical company sponsored project revisions requiring review by the convened UMCIRB committee):

Fund	Organization	Account	Program	Activity (optional)
		73059		

Version of the most currently approved protocol: 3/29/10 Attached
Version of the most currently approved consent document: 4/8/10 Attached

CHECK ALL INSTITUTIONS OR SITES WHERE THIS RESEARCH STUDY WILL BE CONDUCTED:

- ☒ East Carolina University
☐ Pitt County Memorial Hospital, Inc
☐ Heritage Hospital
☐ Other
- ☐ Beaufort County Hospital
☐ Carteret General Hospital
☐ Boice-Willis Clinic

The following items are being submitted for review and approval:

- ☒ Protocol: version or date 8/25/10
☒ Consent: version or date 8/29/10, Version date 9-2-10
☒ Additional material: version or date Interview Guide

Complete the following:

- Level of IRB review required by sponsor: ☐ full ☒ expedited
- Revision effects on risk analysis: ☐ increased ☐ no change ☒ decreased
- Provide an explanation if there has been a greater than 60 day delay in the submission of this revision to the UMCIRB. Previous approval was for a pilot study conducted during Sprint, 2010 for coursework related to HLTH 6700 course. I am seeking revision now as I wish to start a thesis project during the Fall 2010 semester.
- Does this revision add any procedures, tests or medications? ☐ yes ☒ no If yes, describe the additional information:
- Have participants been locally enrolled in this research study? ☐ yes ☒ no
- Will the revision require previously enrolled participants to sign a new consent document? ☐ yes ☒ no

Briefly describe and provide a rationale for this revision

- Title change: I would like my thesis study to more accurately reflect a phenomenological approach. Request to change title from "Qualitative Study on Coping Abilities of Military Spouses/Partners during Deployments" to "The Meaning and Lived Experiences of Deployment as Perceived by Military Officer Spouses/Partners."
- Protocol change: Study will involve only military officer spouses/partners instead of any military spouse/partner. After completing the pilot study for HLTH 6700, I would like to narrow the focus of the study.
- Under "Research Questions, Question #10.
Part a) The Army Community Service office at Schinnen, the Netherlands will no longer be used as we have moved to the St. Louis area over the summer. The primary method of recruitment will be through personal contacts due to the sensitive nature of the project and due to experience during the pilot project with not being able to recruit enough participants due to their concerns about the sensitive nature of the study.
Part b) Instead of 15-20 potential participants, I will seek only 15.
Part c) Number of projected participants changed from 3-10 to 6-10 because the pilot study was not as large as the study

UMCIRB #:

- related to my thesis.
Part d) I have clarified the criteria by adding "a), b), c) and d)" instead of just listing the criteria.
Part e) I have re-worded the sentence for better clarity. The essence of the sentence did not change.
4. Question 15 has changed to reflect that I have completed HLTH 6700 for a total of 18 credits.
 5. Question 16 has changed to reflect that I am no longer living in the Netherlands but will still conduct the interviews at a public library or via SKYPE.
 6. Question 21
Part a) Changed with the addition of "or a password protected computer file" after the word cabinet.
Part b) Added the last sentence "No written informed consent will be obtained in order to further protect the identity of the participants."
Part c) Added "and no identifiers will be included in the data transcribed or reported that would enable the identification of participants."
 7. Question 22
Part a) Changed to read, "The researcher will obtain verbal consent from each participant prior to initiating data collection. The Principal Investigator will forward a copy of the consent form to participants for review and will read the IRB approved consent form to the participant and ask for verbal confirmation of approval before proceeding. Written consent will not be obtained due to the sensitive nature of the research and due to participant concerns with absolute confidentiality and anonymity."
Part b). Last word changed from "signing" to "providing verbal consent."
 8. Question 24
The response has been changed from two paragraphs to one paragraph.
Part a) The first sentence has been changed to "The research literature is replete with articles concerning military personnel and their families in the post-9/11 era."
The addition of the year "(1995)," has been added after "Wood et al"
Part b) The research question has been changed to reflect a phenomenological approach. The research question is now, "What is the lived experience of and meaning held by military officer spouses/partners regarding multiple year-long or longer deployments of their active duty military officer spouses/partners in the post-9/11 era?"
Part c) The reference font has been decreased.
 9. Question 25
The paragraphs have been re-formatted to reflect proper APA format.
The location of the Netherlands has been removed from the explanation of the study protocol.
The answer has been re-written to accurately reflect the current proposed study.
 10. Page 7
The Department Chair has changed from Dr. Sharon Knight to Dr. Timothy Kelley
The Principal Investigator contact information has changed.

Marcy Matson Bitner MARCY MATSON BITNER 8/30/10
Principal Investigator Signature Print Date

Box for Office Use Only

The above revision has been reviewed by:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Full committee review on _____	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Expedited review on 9/3/10
The following action has been taken:	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Approval for period of 9/3/10 to 4/8/11 6,7	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Approval by expedited review according to category	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> See separate correspondence for further required action.	
<u>Susan McGannon</u>	<u>Susan McGannon</u> 9/3/10
Signature	Print Date

APPENDIX B – SAMPLE OF RESEARCH LOG

Research maintained handwritten log

Date	Time	Action/Decision	Comment	Plan
2/2/10	0800	Qualitative Project underway.	Topic about military spouses and multiple deployments	
			Need to start Literature Review for 6700 class. Start today!	
2/2/10	0915	Start of Literature Review	Terms I searched: Search terms I used today – JSTOR	
			military spouses AND deployments	
			deployment + military + qualitative research	
			military spouse + qualitative research	
			military spouse	
2/3/10	1030	Continue Literature Review	Search terms I used today –	
			Waiting wives	
			Army wives + qualitative research	
			Military spouses + qualitative research	
			Deployment + spouses + qualitative research	
			LEXIS/NEXIS – military spouse + qualitative research	
			EBSCO Host – All databases, 2000 – 2010/PR/Full text	
			Military spouses + qualitative research	
			Military spouses AND deployment	

2/4/10	1400	More Literature Review	EBSCO Host Military spouse + coping, 2000-2010, 1995-2010, PR, full text, all databases
			24 articles hit.
			Work with these articles to explore topic
			Will continue to transcribe from handwritten to electronic. My process improved over time!
8/25/10	0900		Email to committee thanking them, sent consent form Need 4 th Co member (Dr. Knight helping)
8/26/10	1300		Dr. Burke has scripts to send me for interview guide resource Read through, implement changes as needed
8/27/2010	0930		Thesis form submission Dr. Knight sent my thesis form and also electronic submission info Follow up with Grad School to see about getting PowerPoint presentation sent
8/28/10	0900	UMCIRB/Consent Form	Sent to committee for approval Wait for suggested changes
8/29/10	2130	Message from Dr. Burke with changes	Made changes Wait for Dr. Knight/Johnson
8/30/10	0830	Message from Dr. Johnson with comments	Wait for Dr. Knight
8/30/10	1000	Message from Dr. Knight – previous approval, need to only make changes	
			Call UMCIRB office
8/30/10	1300	Spoke with Kumar Kundan about the process of re-approval	Make changes
9/2/10	1000	Submit new UMCIRB form and Consent Form to Kumar	Await approval
9/7/10	1140	UMCIRB/Consent Form approval received	Let Dr. Knight know
9/13/10	0900	Thesis guidelines received from Dr. Knight	Need to format paper
9/20/10	1100	Dr. Knight has Bb site for us to use for thesis.	Upload docs to it

APPENDIX C – SAMPLE OF RESEARCHER’S JOURNAL

Researcher maintained handwritten journal

2/2/10 0900 After reading Module IV, I have a better grasp on the audit trail and bracketing so I'll start my files and handwritten records on this now. I want to combine/add my reflections from Assignments 1 & 2 at some point (they are electronic) because I can already see how far I have come in gaining knowledge about the subjects/concepts of qualitative research.

Search terms I used today – JSTOR

military spouses AND deployments

deployment + military + qualitative research

military spouse + qualitative research

military spouse

2/3/10 1030 The review of the existing literature is frustrating because I am rusty at working on the databases on the library site. Most of the info is either from 95-96 or really current but not really looking at coping. Still, I think it all gives validity to the need for research. I am speaking with Dr. Knight tonight about the info for 95-96 to see if it's too old.

Search terms I used today –

Waiting wives

Army wives + qualitative research

Military spouses + qualitative research

Deployment + spouses + qualitative research

LEXIS/NEXIS – military spouse + qualitative research

EBSCO Host – All databases, 2000 – 2010/PR/Full text

Military spouses + qualitative research

Military spouses AND deployment

2200 I spoke with Dr. Knight – no, 95-96 is not too old; adds validity to need for research, thinks I “sound” like a qualitative researcher. I LOVE THIS CLASS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

2/4/10 0900 The search continues....Search terms used today:

EBSCO Host Military spouse + coping, 2000-2010, 1995-2010, PR, full text, all databases

24 article hits. Literature review : make a persuasive argument for the need for your study

Reveal the need exists for this research.

2/8/10 1515 Today I reviewed the discussion board comments and all of a sudden there are tons! Everyone left it until the last minute and that's frustrating. Dr. Knight sent me a really positive feedback note, but still – this is why I hate discussion board work.

Today I am organizing myself and the audit trail files and then working on Module V. We have to submit our UMCIRB proposal and I am clueless!

Scanning my notes notebook and reflecting on the new lit review – based on what's already out there, not my own opinions/perceptions. Audio from Dr. Knight – Broad topic

In general: What is the problem I want to research? ?? Coping of military spouses during multiple, extended deployments. What's known? Not known? Thus, the reason for the study. Where to start? Statistics. You identify a gap where further study is needed. Why study it in the way I want to do the study? Qualitative will provide an inductive look at the coping of military spouses, not just a "check the block" answer.

9/16/10 10:40 am Emailing Dr. Knight today to see if I should be using "I" or "the researcher" in my paper. Seems like since it's qualitative the "I" would work but it seems less professional. Creswell book infers the use of "I" is fine.

1300 Dr. Knight says it's my preference. I'm going with "the researcher" now and will change if needed. I feel more comfortable with that.

9/21/10 2145 Emailed Dr. Knight to see if I could use an article without Army sources for new deployment numbers. David could get them for me but it's probably not legal.

2400 Dr. Knight emailed back to say see if I can find the source.

9/22/10 0800 I think I've maxed out my ability to do any more with Chapters 1 & 2 at this point. Going to send them to Dr. Knight and revise from there. They will get better as time goes on, but for now, I am at a standstill.

Reading Moustaka's book is like reading an encyclopedia written in Russian. I can't understand it.

9/29/10 0800 Wonder if I need to switch theories? Really got nothing out of Moustaka's book. I'm too dumb to do this, I think. Will email Dr. Knight to see what she suggests.

2300 – Dr. Knight thinks I should consider Max van Manen. I just ordered his book on Amazon.

10/1/10 0900 van Manen's book is here. Will read it, then try to improve and change Chapter 3.

10/2/10 0900 van Manen's book is WAY easier than the last guy. Love the Dutch connection. SO great! It's like it was made for me!

APPENDIX D – SAMPLE ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION MEMOS

<u>Date & Time</u>	<u>Analysis & Interpretation Memos</u>
------------------------	--

5/16/10	Segment taken from researcher's personal journal: "Realized today that my A & I memos and my journal are all running together. Not good for audit trail credibility. Need to revamp the process."
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1/6/11	Realized I never did this. I have the data all in my researcher's journal and will have to go back and divide it all up into two different pieces of work. I will include everything in the journal and then break out the A& I material for this document as I switch everything over from handwritten to electronic. :(Oops!!!
--------	---

2/25/11	As I read through all the interviews, themes are present. 2 nd deployment was hardest for everyone. Wonder why. Everyone is commenting that military spouses are an absolute necessity.
---------	--

2/26/11	Physically cutting up the interviews and letters to make piles for themes. Codes are okay, but need to separate out deployment codes from non-deployment related things. There are stressors that are unique to just the deployment and then stressors outside the deployment (deaths); there are internal stressors which the spouse feels and also external stressors from her husband, her kids, other military spouses, other military families, higher ranking spouses. Seems to depend on how long spouse has been married.
---------	---

2/27/11	Younger spouses definitely tell a different story than older spouses.
---------	---

3/1/11	Spouse can identify several benefits. Are there patterns in the benefits? Some relate to their children, as well. Spouse feels increased responsibility during deployments. They add a lot of roles. Mom+ dad to kids is a huge one. Military spouse role is very stressful, but they wouldn't change it. Drawing all of these out on paper. Codes are changing and emerging as I make piles. Multiple deployments are stressful.
--------	---

3/2/11	"Something psychologically/emotionally happens after repeated deployments" any insight anywhere else to this? Need to try to combine some of these codes
--------	--

3/3/11	Every deployment is different. Need different coping skills every time. What works for one doesn't work for others. Future research area??
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3/4/11	There are +/- ways to cope. Dr. Knight says "neutral" too. Need to look at that. Immediately line up coping mech when we move. Friends, book club, gym, start preparing right away.
--------	---

3/5/11	Spouses have really identified a lot of military resources. There are plenty; they are just not used enough. Data doesn't seem to say why – even the participants are puzzled. Any answers here? I think there are phases of deployment emerging.
--------	---

3/6/11	Girlfriends who are military are vital to successful coping.
--------	--

	Phases – pre-deployment, deployment, integration. The stressors are different for each one. Doesn't seem to be a set time frame for when pre-dep worry starts. What is the essence of this stressful experience? Loss/grief? Seems like a tornado to me. Whenever I draw out the stressors and coping; it's cyclical, never linear.
--	---

APPENDIX E- APPROVED INFORMED CONSENT



East Carolina University



Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Information to consider before taking part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

Title of Research Study: "The Meaning and Lived Experiences of Deployment as Perceived by Military Officer Spouses/Partners."

Principal Investigator: Marcy Matson Bitner

Institution/Department or Division: East Carolina University/Department of Health Education and Promotion

Address: 310 W Deer Creek Rd, O'Fallon, IL 62269

Telephone #: (618) 206-8763

Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) study problems in society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems and the human condition. Our goal is to try to find ways to improve the lives of you and others. To do this, we need the help of people who are willing to take part in research.

The person who is in charge of this research is called the Principal Investigator.

You may have questions that this form does not answer. If you do, feel free to ask the person explaining the study, as you go along. You may have questions later and you should ask those questions, as you think of them. There is no time limit for asking questions about this research.

You do not have to take part in this research. Take your time and think about the information that is provided. If you want, have a friend or family member go over this form with you before you decide. It is up to you. If you choose to be in the study, then you should sign the form when you are comfortable that you understand the information provided. If you do not want to take part in the study, you should not sign this form. That decision is yours and it is okay to decide not to volunteer.

Why is this research being done?

The Principal Investigator for the study, Marcy Bitner, is a graduate student in the Health Education and Promotion program master's program at East Carolina University. The purpose of this research is to learn more about how military officer spouses/partners experience deployments and what these deployments mean to them in terms of their health and well-being. For example, she would like to learn about the stressors military spouses experience while their spouse is deployed.

Marcy would like to interview military officer spouses/partners who have experienced at least two deployments that have lasted one year or longer. By doing this research, she hopes to learn what multiple deployments mean to spouses/partners of military officers and how they experience such deployments. These are stories that often go untold and are not commonly found in today's research, yet they are important and worthy to be shared.

UMCIRB Number: 10-0170

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Consent Version # or Date: 9-2-10

UMCIRB Version 2009.08.15

Participant's Initials

Title of Study:

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?

You are being invited to take part in this research because you have met the study criteria of being a military officer's spouse/partner who has experienced at least two deployments of your military spouse/partner, each of which lasted longer than one year in duration. If you volunteer to take part in this research, you will be one of about 6-10 people to do so.

What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?

You have the choice of not taking part in this research study. If you have a concern to share, but feel as though this research project is not the place to share it or if you feel you need additional help, Marcy will provide a referral for you.

Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?

Marcy will conduct the interviews in a private room at a local public library or via SKYPE. If you are using SKYPE, you will be interviewed from a location that best suits your computer needs. We will need to visit approximately two times for the study. Each of those visits will take about 60 minutes. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is about two hours over the next 6-8 months.

What will I be asked to do?

You are being asked to share your deployment experiences with Marcy Bitner through two individual interviews. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded. Only Marcy will have access to the recording. You will also be asked to write a letter to a theoretical military officer's spouse/partner who is facing a second deployment. The letters will not actually be mailed to anyone.

What possible harms or discomforts might I experience if I take part in the research?

There are always risks (the chance of harm) when taking part in research. It is possible that talking about your experiences or remembering your past experiences may cause you some emotional discomfort. However, the risks associated with this research are no more than what you would experience in normal life.

Due to the sensitive nature of this project, you will remain anonymous. You will be given a pseudonym (false name) for the project and all identifying information about you will be removed or changed. As the Principal Investigator for the study, Marcy understands the concerns of military officer spouses and will take every measure to protect you and your family's identity.

What are the possible benefits I may experience from taking part in this research?

It is Marcy's hope that this research might help us learn more about how military officer spouses/partners experience and derive meaning from multiple, extended deployments. You may benefit from having an opportunity to share your story and thus process your experience. In addition, this research may help others in the future.

Will I be paid for taking part in this research?

We will not be able to pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

What will it cost me to take part in this research?

It will not cost you any money to be part of the research.

How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?

A pseudonym (false name) will be assigned to you or you can select a pseudonym so that you will be able to participate anonymously in this study. In addition, Marcy Bitner will change or remove any identifying information about you

UMCIRB Number: 10-0170

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Consent Version # or Date: 9-2-10

UMCIRB Version 2009.08.15

Participant's Initials

Title of Study:

that you may share during the interview. Marcy Bitner will keep the transcripts and audio recordings in a locked file for three years and will be the only person with access to these files.

What if I decide I do not want to continue in this research?

If you decide you no longer want to be in this research after it has already started, you may stop at any time.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

The person conducting this study will be available to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator, Marcy Bitner, at 618-206-8763.

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the UMCIRB Office at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director of UMCIRB Office, at 252-744-1971.

I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?

The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should verbally agree to this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- I understand that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- By verbally agreeing to this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

Participant's Name (PRINT)

Verbal agreement recorded by

Date

Person Obtaining Informed Consent: I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above, and answered all of the person's questions about the research.

Principal Investigator (PRINT)

Signature

Date

UMCIRB Number: 10-0170

Consent Version # or Date: 9-2-10
UMCIRB Version 2009.08.15

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Participant's Initials

APPENDIX F – INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for participating in my study. I am excited about the work we are doing and look forward to learning from you.

Please tell me how long you've been a military spouse.

What has it been like to be a military spouse?

Probe: "You've mentioned stress-- I'd like to understand the meaning of the term, stress, from your perspective."

What has been your experience with deployments?

Probe: "You've mentioned coping – I'd like to understand the meaning of the term, coping, from your perspective."

What has it been like to experience multiple deployments?

Can you give me an example of what a typical day was like for you during one of the most recent deployments?

In thinking about your spouse/partner's deployments, please share the situations or issues that you have experienced.

- a) Family?
- b) Self?
- c) Relationships?

d) Other?

What would you describe as particularly stressful issues or situations associated with deployment?

How do things change, if at all, with the second or third or fourth deployment?

In what ways have you coped with deployments?

Probe: What has worked particularly well for you in coping with deployment, if anything?

Probe: What benefits to you/your family have emerged, if any, as a result of deployment?

Is there anything further you would like to add?

APPENDIX G – LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear (Participant),

Thank you so much for agreeing to take part in this research experience. I look forward to learning from you and look forward to working together. As I mentioned on the telephone, as part of our research project, I would like for you to write a letter to another officer's spouse who is experiencing her or his second deployment. I would like for you to share with this person any advice or "words of wisdom" which you feel may benefit him or her. You are welcome to share additional thoughts, as well. Please write from your heart and just try to put on paper whatever it is that comes to mind to share. At the end of the letter, please sign your name with a pretend name of your choosing. The use of this pseudonym will help to provide confidentiality to your participation in this research project.

When you are finished, please send the letter to me via email or through the U.S. Postal Service. My email address is: bitnerm07@students.ecu.edu. My home mailing address is: 310 W. Deer Creek Rd, O'Fallon, IL 62269. Please send me the letter **one week prior** to our scheduled interview date of _____, 2011.

Thank you so very much. I look forward to speaking with you again soon.

Sincerely,

Marcy Matson Bitner

APPENDIX H – RESOURCES FOR PARTICIPANTS

After participating in this research project, if you feel you need assistance in dealing with any emotions or feelings that may have surfaced during our interview, please consider using these resources for further assistance.

Military OneSource www.militaryonesource.com 1-800-342-9647

Army OneSource www.myarmyonesource.com 1-877-811-ARMY

Armed Forces Crossroads www.afcrossroads.com

From homepage there are several links to various Air Force specific sites.

Marine Corps Community Services <http://www.usmc-mccs.org/>

From homepage click on the “Deployment Support” tab and follow links to individual Marine bases or other Marine family resources, as needed.

Humana Military Healthcare Services

<http://www.humana-military.com/south/provider/tools-resources/Bulletins-Newsletters/I5-09/marriage-counseling-and-family-therapy.asp>

From the homepage follow the links to various marriage and individual counseling resources.

Tricare Insurance and Referral www.tricareonline.com 1-800-600-9332

APPENDIX I – CODEBOOK SAMPLE

Date	Code	Codes Description
2/5/11	TOG	Statements about sense of “all in it together” amongst spouses.
2/5/11	NECBREAK	Statements about spouses needing a break from routine, which then allowed for perceived better coping. Includes letter and transcription data.
2/5/11	USEMILRES	Statements about spouses’ perception that others should take advantage of military resources that are offered. Includes references to peers and military spouses in general. Includes only statements about resources offered by the military.
2/5/11	NONMILRES	Statements about non-military related coping mechanisms . Includes statements by spouses about stress management techniques which they perceived to be “elementary” coping skills such as healthy eating, exercise, partaking in religious activities.
2/5/11	EVERYDEPDIFF	Statements about how spouses believe every deployment is different. Excludes statements specific to a specific deployment (i.e. Deployment #1, #2, etc.).
2/5/11	GOODANDBAD	Statements about how spouses who experience multiple deployments believe there are both good and bad days during the experience. Includes statement about perceived benefits are also included here, also internal and external stressors.
2/8/11	EXTSTRESSORS	Things mentioned by the spouses that are stressors which they have no real control over but which they feel affected by; some are deployment related, others are completely external to the deployment, but nonetheless have had an effect of increased stress on her life.
2/8/11	INTSTRESSORS	Things mentioned by the spouses that are stressors they come from within themselves; pressures they feel, internal thoughts.
2/11/11	DEPLOY1	Statements unique and specific to Deployment #1
2/11/11	DEPLOY2	Statements unique and specific to Deployment #2
2/11/11	DEPLOY3+	Statements unique and specific to Deployment #3 and beyond

2/11/11	BENE	Statements about perceived benefits to having experienced multiple deployments
2/12/11	EXTSTSDEPREL	Statements about the external stressors which are deployment related. Excludes statements about stressors unrelated to deployment. Includes statements made about husband's job, demands of the military, unit stress.
2/12/11	INTSTSDEP	Statements made by spouses about the internal stressors they feel related to deployment
2/15/11	EXPCOPPOSNEU	Positive and neutral statements about the experience of coping with deployments
2/15/11	EXPCOPNEG	Negative statements about the experience of coping with deployment

