

ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

BRITTNEY MILLER

An interview conducted on

March 1, 2018

Interviewer: Regina Saucedo

Angelo State University

West Texas Collection

“War Stories: West Texans and the Experience of War, World War I to the Present”

LEGAL STATUS: The oral memoirs of Brittney Miller are unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on March 1, 2018.

This interview was conducted as a course assignment for a class in the Department of History at Angelo State University in collaboration with the *War Stories* Project.

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The electronic file and complete transcript of this interview were processed in the Department of History at Angelo State University and are available at the Dr. Ralph R. Chase West Texas Collection, Angelo State University, San Angelo, Texas.

SAUCEDO: All right. So, my name is Regina Saucedo. It is February 28, 2018.

MILLER: It's actually March 1st.

SAUCEDO: March 1st, there we go. [Laughs] March 1st, 2018. If you don't mind just stating your name for me, please.

MILLER: Sure, Brittney Miller.

SAUCEDO: All right, we can go ahead and get started. First question: when and where were you born?

MILLER: I was born in San Angelo in 1989.

SAUCEDO: Have you lived here your whole life?

MILLER: I mean, basically. I've left a couple of times, so . . . but I've always come back.

SAUCEDO: You've always found your way back.

MILLER: Yeah. [Laughs]

SAUCEDO: And then, what is the name of the relative who served in the armed forces?

MILLER: Caleb.

SAUCEDO: Caleb . . . all right. How would you define West Texas? Like, where does it begin for you, and end?

MILLER: Geographically?

SAUCEDO: Yes.

MILLER: Huh! Honestly, I start it with San Angelo, and then everything else is West.

SAUCEDO: Yeah.

MILLER: So, West Texas to me starts with us and, like, Midland, Odessa, and then all the way out to El Paso. So, I always describe San Angelo as the last major city before you kind of get in the middle of nowhere.

SAUCEDO: Yeah. And then how would you . . . or what do you think is difference between West Texans and Texans from other regions of the state?

MILLER: Oh, my goodness. Uh, we have a different culture here for sure. I think it's much more of a good old system down here, but I also think that it's a really hardworking culture. That's not

to say that all Texans aren't hardworking, but I feel like that there is an expectation in West Texas that you will work and you will pull your weight. So, I think that makes it a little bit different from other areas of the state, because I do think it's expected that if you're going to be here, you're going to do your job and you're going to do it well. So . . .

SAUCEDO: That's something I did notice, a lot of oil fields and wind . . .

MILLER: Wind turbines, things like that. And I mean, I'm not saying that other parts of Texas don't experience that, but I do feel like here, regardless of gender or age, like if you're going to be involved in something, you're kind of expected to give it your full, one hundred percent. And so . . .

SAUCEDO: How would you characterize West Texans' relationship with the military?

MILLER: Oh, we have very strong relationships with the military. There are a lot of Texans . . . there are a lot of Texans in the Marine Corps out at Camp Pendleton. So, I think that we're real military friendly. I think that a lot of our . . . a lot of our people feel it's kind of almost a duty to serve the country. I think that whether they stay in for the full commitment, for career, or if they just do four years, I think a lot of people feel that it's never a bad thing to serve.

SAUCEDO: Yeah, and then you said it was Caleb . . . is that your husband?

MILLER: Yeah, he's my husband. He is my husband, but my dad . . . was also a marine.

SAUCEDO: Was he?

MILLER: Yeah, so . . .

SAUCEDO: And then, when did your husband enlist in the armed forces?

MILLER: Two-thousand eleven . . . 2011, yeah.

SAUCEDO: And what branch did he serve in?

MILLER: Marine Corps.

SAUCEDO: Marine Corps. And then, what years were they in service?

MILLER: Two-thousand eleven to 2015.

SAUCEDO: Oh, wow.

MILLER: Yeah, he did four years.

SAUCEDO: Did he partake in any significant military conflict or anything?

MILLER: He deployed, but it was not a conflict deployment; it was a humanitarian deployment.

SAUCEDO: Oh, really? Wow.

MILLER: So, yeah. But no, he never saw combat, thank God.

SAUCEDO: Did he ever tell you why he enlisted in the Marine Corps?

MILLER: Yeah, he did. Let's see. Well, he wanted to be . . . he started off wanting to be a Navy SEAL, and then as, like, he started looking into different things, he decided the Marine Corps was the branch for him for what he wanted to do. He's an engineer, and so he went into the Marines, and I think it was to serve. I think he felt like he needed to give back. You know, he decided not to stay in a career a couple years through, that he wanted to go back to school and get his degree. But I do think it was more, like, . . . at first, it started out as like, "This is what I want to do with my life," and then it became, "Well, this is what I'm going to do because it's going to get me to where I want to be later." So yeah, I don't know if he actually ever told me why the military. I'm trying to think . . . we talked about it a ton, but I honestly don't know if there was like a specific need for it. Somebody's interviewing him, so let me know what his answer is because I'll be really curious about that. [Laughs]

SAUCEDO: Did he ever explain, like, his desire to serve, or was it just him wanting to give back?

MILLER: Yeah, I think he . . . yeah, he definitely did tell me that, you know, he felt like it was—not like a duty; duty sounds really dramatic and it wasn't that dramatic. But I do think that he felt the . . . like, he was able to serve. He could serve, and so there was that passion and that drive to do so. And then when he got in and saw it, and you know, he . . . we did fine. It was fine. We both really liked it, but then what it could do for him outside of the military, like coming back to school, and the experience that it gave him . . . yeah, it worked out really well.

SAUCEDO: That's awesome. What were your thoughts about your . . . like, his desire to serve or his decision to?

MILLER: Oh, there's always some . . . it scared me for sure. Especially now, because I didn't . . . I mean, you don't know when he goes in, and we were dating at that time so I just . . . we didn't get married until midway through. But there was always that fear of, "Okay, is he going to go into a combat zone and potentially be in," you know, "danger?" So, that . . . that was definitely the first one. There was a lot of worry; I think any military spouse will tell you that. It's . . . fret with worry. But then there was . . . I mean, there was excitement too. It was something new. It was, um . . . but it was . . . it was . . . it was scary at the beginning for sure, yeah. A lot of uncertainties not being married, you know. "Are we going to stay together through this?" uh because we had been dating two years before he went in. So, there was a foundation there. It was like, "Okay, how is this long distance going to work?" A lot of uncertainty.

SAUCEDO: You guys made it through, though.

MILLER: We did, yeah. We did two years long distance before we got married. So, yeah, it's hard, [laughs] I won't lie. But it can be done. But, it takes a lot of work. [Laughs]

SAUCEDO: What were other hopes and concerns that you had about his service?

MILLER: Well, I wanted him to like it. I wanted him to succeed at it. I thought he would, but you know, there's always that hope that he finds success . . . I don't know. I guess I wanted it, for him. It was a really good opportunity to see the world and to see outside of Texas, and things like that. And so, I think that that was . . . that was really good for him. But, yeah.

SAUCEDO: Is he also from the San Angelo area?

MILLER: No, he's from Dallas originally, but he moved here young and enlisted out of here. So, he claims San Angelo, but he was born in the Dallas area.

SAUCEDO: Was he ever deployed overseas while he was deployed?

MILLER: Yeah.

SAUCEDO: And for a humanitarian . . . ?

MILLER: Yeah, it was a MEU¹. M-E-U, A Marine Expedary Unit, so he was attached to the Navy. So, he was on a ship for a for eight months. Yeah.

SAUCEDO: What was your conception of the United States at the time of your family member's service?

MILLER: Like, my view of the United States? [Laughs] Let's see. So, Obama was in . . . that's a tough question. [Laughs] I mean like, when he went in . . . let's see. Obama got in in 2008, so we had kind of the . . . the conflict had significantly reduced in Iraq and Afghanistan at that point. There was that . . . like, that peace I guess. So, it was okay, but ISIS was also coming up, and what are we doing about that? I watch our politics. I'm very involved in it, but I don't know. I was an Obama fan, [laughs] so I don't want anybody to freak out about that. So, I was . . . I was okay at that moment with our Commander in Chief. I trusted him a lot, which I thought was cool, with him being his commander. And so, yeah. I was completely fine on a political standpoint at that particular point.

SAUCEDO: What were your most vivid memories of your family member's time in service?

MILLER: Homecoming, the very first one; the day he came home. It was a great day. I remember a lot of the, like, unit events. This is going to sound . . . and I don't mean to sound sad, but I was by myself a lot, so I remember that. But you know, it forced me to come out of my comfort zone. I was really introverted before the military, and then it was like, "I don't want to sit at home by myself all day. I'm going to go out and meet people." And so, I made new friends;

¹ Marine Expeditionary Unit

friendships are something that definitely stick out from there, because of that. You form a bond with other spouses that you connect with. That's very different from other friendships because you're both experiencing something very similar. The deployment is a big memory, the conversations we got to have and communicating that way. But, yeah, homecoming is by far the best memory.

SAUCEDO: Were you able to talk to him while he was away?

MILLER: We were, yeah, but it was a lot of email. So, I didn't talk to him a lot. He could only talk while he was in port and if he could be on wi-fi. There were a lot of, you know, determining factors there. So, it was a lot of email; we didn't have a lot of verbal communication. But, it was better than most. So, you know . . .

SAUCEDO: Do you still have some of those bonds with the other spouses?

MILLER: I do, yeah. I have three or four that I still really keep up with. So, they're all still in, so they move all over. But, yeah, I still go to San Diego and see a lot of people out there. So, yeah.

SAUCEDO: He wasn't wounded or anything out there was he?

MILLER: He was not. No. Nope. [Laughs]

SAUCEDO: Oh, good. What were your fears about your family member when he returned home?

MILLER: Returned home? Uh, getting back into a routine, absolutely. Being apart for eight months is a long time, even though you're talking. You're leading completely different lives on a deployment because he is doing his own thing; I was doing my own thing. We didn't have kids, so that was good. So, it was really just he and I. But, yeah. What was the question again?

SAUCEDO: What were your fears about your family member returning home?

MILLER: Yeah. So, definitely communication was a fear. Being in the same space together again was a fear.

SAUCEDO: Was it hard for you guys to reconnect after he came back?

MILLER: Eh . . . there's always an adjustment period. I actually wrote my graduate thesis on this, so . . . but uh, homecoming is great. It lasts three or four days, maybe a week. Like to me, ours was about a week and then there was a three-week period of just kind of like, not hard out fighting, but like, frustration, trying to get back into that routine again. Like, okay, we were both doing our own dinner plans. Now, it's like, "Oh, we need to get home and think of dinner again." Things like that. So, it wasn't super hard to reconnect, it was just really hard to establish that normalcy again. I was super glad to have him back. I think he was super glad to be home, but there were some communication struggles. I think there were times when he and I both just wanted our own space. We had gone from eight months of it . . . and he was sharing a room with

a ton of guys, but like, it's different, you know. He was essentially on his own. I was on my own. I was getting to go see my friends whenever I wanted, you know, we were making plans, and then that kind of ceased to exist. All the friends that we had made and all the stuff that we were doing . . . we had these weekly things planned, and that stopped. That was more the frustration that came out of it. But he and I, as far as a couple, I think we did pretty good about . . . but we were lucky we got to email a lot. I know a lot of spouses, depending on the ship . . . he was on the ship that had good comms. Some of the other ships did not. And so, you know, I heard from him three or four times a week, and that helped tremendously. There weren't these huge gaps of like, "So, tell me what's happened this past month," and being like, "Well, let me think. Where do I start?" And so, . . . but, yeah. I would definitely think that the struggle coming in was just getting back into that routine and finding a sense of normalcy again.

SAUCEDO: Do you think that constant communication that you had with him truly helped?

MILLER: Yes. Yeah. Some of my friends would go a month without hearing . . . and then when they did hear them, it would be super short, like, more just like a check-in. You know, and he and I were really able to keep in touch on everything that was happening with my job, with his job, with friends, you know, through email. I mean, our emails were long. I still have all of them on my drive; I don't want to delete them. That's like a prominent eight months of our life that's in writing, just talking. And you know, uh, we probably got to talk more than a lot of people too, but it just wasn't as much. But every port—and he usually ported once a month. So, I talked to him once a month, and then everything else would be via email. But, definitely, communication absolutely helps. But I know some spouses think otherwise. Some spouses would almost feel better about not hearing anything because it makes it more obvious that they're not there, but I was not like that. I definitely needed that, like, what's going on in life. I mean, I know you're living on a ship but, I mean, like, you know? And there would be times my emails to him would be significantly longer than his emails to me because, I mean, I was in San Diego, California, working, and doing all this stuff, whereas he's on a boat. [Laughs] So, you know, there were times that I think my emails were more in depth, but he told me everything that he could. So, yeah.

SAUCEDO: Did your husband ever face any difficulties or challenges coming back to civilian life? Other than that frustration you guys mentioned, did he have any problems adjusting?

MILLER: Uh, PTSD-wise? No. I do remember when we came . . . I picked him up, and I was like, "Where do you want to go eat?" And he was like, "Oh, God, I don't know!" And so, we went to Smashburger. I don't know if you've heard of Smashburger; I don't know where you're from. We don't have one here. I wish we did. [Laughs] "I'd love just like a burger and fries." I was like, "Oh, I've found this restaurant," and we hadn't found it before he left. And I took him to Smashburger, and we went to Wal-Mart, and he was a little overloaded in Wal-Mart. It was like, a ton of people, tons of traffic because it's San Diego. Just getting used to being back, I do think there was a little, like . . . "God, I don't know." We still . . . now, to this day, we'll talk about movies and he's like, "When did that come out?" It must've been while he was gone. He didn't know about music, movies, stuff like that. There may have been a little bit of re-entry for him, but like, nothing too crazy. I do remember him being a little on edge in the Wal-Mart, and I said, "Do you want to go?" He said, "yeah." And I was like, "Yep, no big deal." I don't

remember what we went in for, or if we even bought it. I think we may have just turned around and left. But yeah, it was completely understandable.

SAUCEDO: Did your family member feel his status as a native Texan shaped his career in the military?

MILLER: He'll probably tell you yes. [Laughs] There are a lot of Texan marines. Lots of Marines from Texas. So, yeah, I think there was a certain amount of pride that got brought in from that. You know, we say "y'all," we have good manners. And people always commented—whether we were at the dry cleaners for his uniform or whatever—he and I both always said "yes ma'am," "yes sir." You're raised like that; that's what you say. And they'd always be like, "Are you from Texas?" And we'd be like "yes," or whatever. So, I do think there was some pride that came from it, from being from Texas.

SAUCEDO: Was this when you guys were living in San Diego?

MILLER: Yeah. So, probably a little bit . . . I can't give you a specific instance where it was like "oh, Texas!" but I do think being from here carried a different weight than not.

SAUCEDO: Did your family member's time spent in the military change your conception of Texas in any way?

MILLER: No . . . I don't know. For me, living here, and having so many family members here who were Marines, Army, Navy, Air Force—I had them all—I . . . I just feel like it's not an abnormality to serve here. So, I don't think that it . . . I like the way Texas treats the vets. I like the way he's treated here. I like that walking down the river, he still wears his hair in military regulation. He has facial hair, but his hair is still . . . they always say thank you for his service, like . . . and I like that. I like ASU's treatment of vets. I love the Vet Center, oh my God. They're amazing for using his G.I. Bill here. Texas also has the Hazelwood Act, which is an additional benefit that is specific for Texas military. So, yeah. I like the way that we treat them. To me, I'm obviously biased, but I think they deserve it. I mean, I don't want to go out and put myself on the line like that for other people, and they do it without blinking an eye. And so, I think our vets deserve every bit of things they get. I do think Texas is a really good leader in that; I think that they really value a veteran.

SAUCEDO: I've noticed that. I'm not from Texas, but I did notice that just coming down here, there's so much pride in doing the right thing, pride in your work ethic. And I can see it carried through to the veterans.

MILLER: Yeah, so I guess to answer your question, I guess it made it better, but I always knew that we were very military-friendly. Then being part of it, and coming back to it, it was like, "Wow. Yeah, this is really something." It's really cool. So, yeah. I don't really think he looks much like a Marine anymore, but if we're at restaurant, people will ask, "Did you serve?" Or, "Are you a service member?" And he's like, "Oh, not anymore," and they thank him for his service. They know. They can tell. And really, we get talked to all the time by people. It's cool. So, where are you from?

SAUCEDO: I was born in Chicago.

MILLER: Okay, yeah. I'm not knocking on other states.

SAUCEDO: Oh, not at all.

MILLER: I loved California, but I do think there's a difference here in the way that we have . . . but I think it is because we have so many guys enlist. It's not uncommon for people to have military backgrounds of some sort, either a close family, or they served. And so, I think it's like a built-in part of our culture.

SAUCEDO: After his time in the military did your conceptions of the U.S. change at all?

MILLER: No. In 2016 they did, but that was well after our time. [Laughs] It had nothing to do with . . . but, no.

SAUCEDO: Did you feel that his time serving . . . did it change him at all?

MILLER: Yes, but for the better. I don't think it was a bad change at all. He's seen more of the world than me now; he's been all over. I mean, he did a deployment, but he did countless work-ups up to that deployment. Before we were married, he would sign up for the thirty-day kind of mission. He's been all over the world. I think it has changed his mind set for the better. I love hearing his experiences. I mean, there's no way he could possibly tell me everything that happened, but then like, when it comes up, he'll mention his past, and I'll say, "Oh, I didn't know that!" You know, and so, I think it just made him more aware of the fact that there are a lot of people on this planet, and . . . just try to do good and be a good person, work hard. He was a good marine, a really good marine. And, yeah . . . but no, I think it changed him for the better. Not that I didn't like him before, obviously. [Laughs] I think that the experience he gained—both in experiences and just general knowledge—made him a really fantastic person and real worldly, able to provide an opinion on a lot of things, and have some knowledge backing it. Whereas I feel like, used to, he was very on the path . . . now, you know, there's a lot coming in. I think it's great for him. I don't regret it at all, for him or for me.

SAUCEDO: Did his time ever change you in any way?

MILLER: Yes. I became an extrovert. [Both laugh] I was painfully shy before. Doing something like this, I would've been like, "Oh, my God!!" Then I saw Dr. Lamberson's emails for this, and I was like, "Oh, yeah! I'll talk to somebody. Give them my name!" Yeah, I became much more extroverted. I became much more willing to kind of put myself out there, both professionally and personally, in any type of relationship. I came back here, some of my friends had commented and they said I was so different. I don't think they meant it in a bad way, but I am. I'm much more willing to join things without knowing somebody; I'll go by myself and be completely fine. So yeah. Again, I don't regret that either.

SAUCEDO: Do you have advice for families of young men and women who join the service?

MILLER: My big one is . . . well, everyone is different. I know this blanket statement isn't applied to everyone, but accept the military for what it is. There are going to be times when you hate the decision that is made. That only happened to me once, truly, where I got very angry at the command for something that I just thought was a stupid idea. But other than that, he signed up—or she—they knew what they were signing up for. If you married them while they were in, you knew what they are signing up for too. I'm not saying it's not an adjustment; it's an adjustment. But there are times—in this instance, I'll gender it because it's my husband—he has to do what they say. It doesn't really matter if I like it or not. That is his job, and he signed up. I think the reason it went so well for us was because I knew what we were getting into. I knew there were going to be times where he was going to call me—and this happened a couple of times—where I was at work, and he called and I missed the call. And he was in town, but he'd be like, "I just got told that I'm going out to the fields for five days. I'm going home now to pack up my stuff, but I won't see you for five days." Like, that happens. And yeah, it sucks. It's not like a voicemail you want to get, but it's not his fault, and you just have to kind of roll with it. I know that's way easier said than done, because I had moments—especially looking back in hindsight—I had moments where I didn't do that well, where I did not roll with it well. But I think for the most part, I knew what I was getting into. I knew that there were going to be times where I was going to be third, fourth, or fifth on the list compared to the Marines and everything.

That is my advice. Try to not get mad at them when something happens. It's not their fault; they're taking orders. So, that would be my advice: know what you're getting into, think long and hard about it before you do, and then decide, "Okay, if you're going to do this, then I'm going to do this." I also think it's good . . . my other advice would be to try and meet people. That's not necessarily the military spouses. A lot of my friends, too, were locals not affiliated with the military. That's okay too. Let yourself experience the place you're living in even though he's not there, especially San Diego! It's a beautiful city. I don't want to sit at home and not get to enjoy it. My biggest piece of advice would be to try to just roll with the punches as best you can. A lot of the times, it's completely out of both your and his control.

SAUCEDO: Yeah. Was it ever difficult for you to find ways to cope with those hard moments?

MILLER: Oh, absolutely. It got easier when I made some friends that were military spouses that I could vent to. A lot of times, what would happen is my non-military friends wouldn't understand because that's so not an area that they have to worry about. You know? So, yeah, there were definitely times of frustration. We . . . there would be times when I'd be angry about a situation, like when I got that call. And I mean, it's like, what are you going to do? Like, tell him no? That won't go well. So, yeah. But I definitely think that's where having a couple military spouse friends that you can relate with, and you can blow steam off, and they totally understand where you're coming from. Because a lot of times, civilians will be like, "Well, you did sign up!" I understand that 360 other days in the year, but today I want to be upset! Plans just got completely changed. And I mean, we bought tickets to see Bruno Mars in Las Vegas and he got sent to the field that week. So like, he didn't go! I called my sister and she flew in, and we went and it was fine, but you know, something like that we had planned for—what?—three months? But field op came up, and he couldn't go. So, you know, it happens.

SAUCEDO: Did any of that ever take a toll on you? You said you were together for—what?—two years before? Did any of that ever take a toll, or did you feel like you had a good foundation?

MILLER: It was much harder when we were not together than when I got there. I think when I got married and I got there, I could see the schedule, and I could, like, understand the flow. Yeah, it got easier. There are times . . . I think that military spouses just have a lot of stress in their relationships; I do. Just from everything else. So, yeah, there were definitely times when there was frustration. But I do think—and again, I'd love to see his and see his reaction; I'm assuming you're asking the same questions—I do think I tried really hard to not get mad at him. Like, there were times when he'd get home and I'd be like, "Oh my gosh!" and I'd go off about a decision that was made, and he'd be nodding his head. But I tried really hard not to get angry at him and sometimes, I knew I messed up. I'm not going to say I didn't do that all the time. I know I'd get frustrated sometimes, but you know, when I thought about it, I'd calm down, I'd say sorry, I know it's not him. And he'd say, "I know it's frustrating." Because I do think . . . and we were older, too, so that helps—I say older but like, when a lot of the spouses in his unit . . . we're talking twenty years old, him and I were older. And I know that doesn't sound like a big difference, but it's a big difference. And so, I do think there was that understanding from both parties. I think Caleb was just as understanding as me at the toll it was taking on me, and vice versa. I don't think either one of us just thought, "Oh, woe is me." I think both of us were very conscious of how the other person was feeling in the same situation.

SAUCEDO: Do you think the dynamic changed once you guys got married? Were you more secure?

MILLER: It is from the military standpoint, yes, because when you're not married, I couldn't really be listed as anything. Even though I was long-time girlfriend—fiancé even—his parents were his emergency contacts. So, if anything ever happened to him, they were going to get the call and I was going to have to get the call from them, and I was not okay with that. But like, there was nothing I could do. But I mean, we didn't rush to get married. I think that's also a mistake; it can be wrong sometimes. So, we decided to get married, and decided we would get married before the deployment. Because we did talk about maybe waiting until he got back, and I was like, "No, I don't want to do that. Let's do it before that." It got immensely easier because then I was listed on every document there was as spouse. They had all my information, God knows, and you know, it became a little easier. As far as just like, if something happens, they're going to call me and I'm going to be able to do what needs to be done.

But as far as relationship-wise? No. Getting married . . . it's weird. Even if you date—we dated for four years—like, and you think you know the person, that first year girl, let me tell you. You find out so much about each other and you're like, "How did I miss it?" [Laughs] Because you're living together now, you have weird living quirks that you didn't even realize were weird until you're living with somebody else who wonders why you do that! I don't know. So . . . but no, I think just as far as from a military side, yes, it made me feel better because then I knew that I was the person. It was a little more pressure too, because the chance that he does get hurt, a marine is calling me or they're at my door, and that was always a fear, especially while he was gone. I'd go a week or two without hearing from him while they were out of range or whatever. There were those times that I'd be like, what would it be like if I drove home and there was an

officer waiting there to tell me some bad news. What would I do? How would I react? I'm out in California by myself, all our family is out here. Who would I call first? Would I call anybody first? Would I have to, like, decompress? It's a lot.

SAUCEDO: Were those thoughts always in the back of your head?

MILLER: Kind of. You try really hard not to think about it, but again, he wasn't in combat. Those combat spouses . . . I don't even know how it would have been. I do think I would've been a nervous wreck. I had a much easier deployment because of that. There was always . . . like when he got into the Middle East—because he spent some time in the Middle East—I was more nervous during that stint just because of what was going on in the world. That was when Syria started to pick up too. I was just like, if any type of disaster happened, they're the first ones. I was just like . . . okay, you know . . . and it got to where I stopped watching the news when he was gone. I was like, "you know what? I really don't want to know."

When he was in Korea, it was his last stop before coming home. North Korea sent a test missile into the Korean Sea, I think it is, while he was in South Korea, and it was literally thirty-two days before he was supposed to be home. And you know, they have orders up for a year and he could've been extended. They can extend them and drag it longer. I like how they always tell you, "It's only orders for a year." If you needed him for longer than a year, you would just draft new orders! But anyway, I saw that and I was like . . . oh, my God. We're almost done, and they're going to make him stay or something! But they didn't. It was just, you know, the typical kind of thing that happens over there. But there was that. I thought, "He's going to get extended." I did stop watching the news. Two weeks in was when Syria really started picking up and I could feel my anxiety, and I thought, "You can't do this to yourself for eight months. It is too long." And you know, I don't know if that was a really bad thing. I took all the apps off my phone. I never looked at CNN, BBC; I didn't look at anything. I was like, "I'm going to be blissfully unaware for eight months," which was so not me. I'm usually very into most of that.

SAUCEDO: Do you think that helped you though?

MILLER: Yes, absolutely. That's also some advice I'd give to spouses too. If they're deployed, somewhere where you know there's unrest, don't watch it. The media's going to give their opinions, but they don't know; they're just talking. It's not like they got their words from the general or . . . you know what I mean? So yeah, I'd recommend that. If you're involved with combat, don't watch. It makes your life a lot easier. It saves you a lot of worrying because there's always a little bit of worrying even though, like . . . ah, I know in the back of my mind there was always this small bit of like, "I don't know what he's doing today. God, I hope he's okay." Especially those times when you don't hear for a week or two at a time.

SAUCEDO: Did you personally find any other ways to cope with that? I know you mentioned you've reached out to other military spouses and not watching news. Is there anything that you did personally that helped you a lot?

MILLER: I ran. Uh, I became a runner in California. I'd go out for runs, on the beach usually. I also volunteered a lot. I volunteered with the family readiness team on base. Each unit has their own family readiness assistant, and so . . . or, family readiness officer, a FRO, as the military

loves their acronyms. That's what they are. And I became a FRA, a family readiness assistant, to her, and that I think was really good because I felt like I knew a lot of what was happening because she would hear from command, sometimes, just checking in. And so, getting to have that knowledge of like, "Oh they're fine; they checked in." You know? If somebody heard from their partner, I was completely cool because the ship was still floating. [Laughs] You know what I mean? It was usually whenever everybody hadn't heard for like a week or two where I could feel myself getting a little more worried.

But I really . . . I really don't . . . like, not to sound super . . . I'm not sounding cocky, but I think I handled the deployment pretty well. But we knew it was coming. I had eight months to prepare for an eight-month deployment. They did a lot of prep classes for us before he left of, like . . . there was like ten that I think they did on Saturdays. I would go to all of them because I wanted to know, like, this is what it's going to be like. This is what it could be like. It's never like what they say it's going to be like. His deployment was supposed to be seven months; he was gone for two weeks, and they said it was going to be eight. I mean, like . . . you know? Within two weeks of him being gone, it had already been extended a month. You know what I mean? And so . . . but no. I would run. Whenever I could feel myself getting super antsy or anxious, I'd go for runs. And then just being involved, I just felt like I knew what was going on.

SAUCEDO: Did you ever feel like you could've been a support system for those other spouses as well? Like, personally?

MILLER: I do. I think the group I ended up really connecting with and being part of, I think we were that for each other. We all had different strengths. We all had different backgrounds. I was the only one who didn't have children, and I'm completely open to saying that their deployment experience was completely different from mine because at the end of the day, I only had to worry about me, and I can do that. I've been out on my own. I had lived on my own, you know. But for those families with kids, it's different. And I completely acknowledge that. When, you know, one of my friends would be, like, talking to me, I wouldn't offer advice because I can't possibly feel what you're feeling, having two children asking where their dad is. Like, I can't relate to that. But I do think that . . . well, I worked full time while I was out there. That was rare, and I think a lot of spouses were like, "What are you doing?" But I'd do it. What are you going to do, stay home all day? Like, go find something you like to do, you know? I wouldn't . . . I made group of friends about half way through. They really . . . I didn't realize that the deployment wasn't going well until I met them and it got so much better. Like, those first few months were a lot harder whenever I was looking back at month five with that group of friends and being like, "What was I doing before I met these women?" And like, hanging out with them. So, the last half of the deployment was significantly better. But I made a group of like four or five of us who . . . we met up weekly. We'd go do stuff together. We'd go to the festivals together. We checked in on each other, and it got a lot better.

SAUCEDO: Did they all have family members in the same . . . ?

MILLER: Yes. They were all the same deployment. Now, different jobs within it, but most of them—I think two were on the same ship, which was rare. It was usually three ships, and most of the . . . I think all but one, we were all on the same ship. That was the same thing. If one of them

heard from their spouse, it'd be like, "Okay, good. Ship's fine." So, yeah, I'm really thankful for those women.

SAUCEDO: Did your husband ever mention any support systems he had while he was deployed?

MILLER: Yeah, I loved his unit. As far as just like, other marines, they were all good guys. So many of them were so good. He was on the same ship as a lot of them. He also had the unit chaplain on his ship, which was really good. So, he was able to attend services with somebody that he knew and liked and was well acquainted with, and I think that helped tremendously. I do think . . . you know, we always talked about which was harder, to be the person leaving or to be the person staying behind. When you're leaving, the person staying behind is the hardest; the leaving is the easier part. I think when we got out there, you know, he's stuck on a ship. I would've been bored out of my mind. I don't know how he did it. He read a lot of books and watched a lot of television. Before he left, we bought the entire *Friends* series on DVD. [Laughs] We had to find it! Because at that point, Netflix was coming on really strong. We had to search for it, but that was like my going away gift for him, all ten seasons of *Friends*! And he said he'd space them out so they'd last him longer. I do think that sometimes it was harder on him. He was doing the same thing every day, not getting to go do stuff. I could tell a difference when he was in port and got to do something versus two or three weeks on the ship: going to the gym, watching television, doing some drills, maybe, and then going to bed. I would've been bored out of my mind. No way I could've done it.

SAUCEDO: What other things did you guys do to prepare for his deployment? You said you had eight months to prepare.

MILLER: So, personally . . . he had all sorts of work—they're called work ups—where he was going out to the ship for three weeks and coming back. And I think those were to prepare spouses, too. Instead of getting a big chunk at a time . . . personally, I hated those because he'd be gone three weeks and back for six days, then gone for a week, then back for two weeks. There was no routine. It was constantly just like, "What are you doing?" You know what I mean? So, he did work ups. They had the separation process for spouses. Like, here's the deployment. Here's what it could look like based off of other deployments. Obviously, I'd do anything that needed to be done. He and I talked a lot about it. We had a lot of really, I think, honest conversations. And then you talk about it, but like, the night before, I looked at him and was like, "But what if you have no communication?" Because they told us there'd be some comms, we just don't know how good they're going to be. I just remember that moment right before he left. "What if I don't hear from you for eight months?" He said he'd write me if he had to. "You'll hear from me, it'll be okay." There is that moment where it's like, even though I'm ready . . . because by the time the deployment got there, I was ready for it to come and get it going and done. The work ups were all over the place. We had been prepping and prepping. Now, it's like, "Let's do it and get this over with so we can be done with it." So, yeah, I think those were the main things that we did.

SAUCEDO: Was it helpful for you guys to spend that time together, like, knowing what you're getting into and knowing what to expect?

MILLER: Yeah, I think so. After the classes I'd go to, I'd go and talk to him about it. Yeah, we'd compare notes and said, "Are we getting the same information?" Most of the time, we were. I commend them for that, at least that unit. I don't know how all the units are. They were giving the exact same information to them that they were giving to us. There was never a grey area. Maybe it's different. You know what I mean?

SAUCEDO: Do you have any further remarks to make?

MILLER: I don't regret any of it. It was a good experience as a couple. We were married, got to be on our own [laughs]—truly on our own—for a couple years, and we both really enjoyed it. I honestly thought that we'd be in it still, but when he said he wanted to go to school, I was like, "Okay. I don't want to do a deployment again! I'll do it if that's what you want to do." I knew when I married him that it was possible. But yeah. I'm okay with that. "Let's see the world, it'll be fun." But when he said he was ready to get out, I was like, "Okay!" There was a lot of just, "Okay, cool." Neither of us regret that. And both of us actually . . . anytime we talk about it, it's always positive. It was really good for both of us, as a couple; I think we're stronger because of it. When you go through something like that, a deployment, there's a lot of trust that comes into it. And to have that trust built in the early part of your marriage like that was really good for us. I will say, though, that our first year of marriage, maybe we spent half of it together? Maybe. So, I never really count our first full year until he got out because the first two years was so much apart. When he did get back and started school, I went back for my master's and he started an engineering program here. Ah, it was like, "Oh wow! We'll actually be together full-time. I hope we don't kill each other!" [Laughs] A lot of times, you know, if we got annoyed, one of us was leaving at some point in the next week or so, since I had a job that I traveled a lot for, too. But, yeah, I don't regret it at all.

SAUCEDO: Well, we got everything on here.

MILLER: Cool!