



## 15 Years of War: How the Longest War in U.S. History Affected a Military Family in Love, Loss, and the Cost Of Service

**Kristine Schellhaas**

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*This is a potent reminder of the sacrifices and struggles that dedicated men and women make on behalf of their nations.*

In the tough-minded but open-hearted memoir *15 Years of War*, the wife of a US Marine shows what it takes to build and maintain a strong family life with a soldier whose life and body are always on call for military deployment.

Kristine and Ross Schellhaas married in May 2002. He was a lieutenant in the US Marine Corps, fresh out of training, and the timing of their wedding guaranteed that their married life would involve long periods of separation during which he would be thousands of miles away in Iraq or Afghanistan, facing combat and the constant threat of ambush, while she dealt with the difficulties of life on the home front.

Though most of the text belongs to Kristine, around a third of it is derived from her husband and involves his firsthand accounts of his experiences in training and on the battlefield. In alternating chapters, the couple relate the high and low points they experienced separately and together. Both are brutally honest about the difficulties they have encountered. In Ross's chapters, combat casualties are described with ruthless clarity. So is the searing regret he feels when a moment of inattention leads to an unexpected tragedy at home. In Kristine's, the frustrations of dealing with the limitations of spartan, sometimes dilapidated military base facilities are added to the day-to-day difficulties of raising children, working with uncooperative relatives, and dealing with personal grief and loneliness while "her Marine" is on the other side of the world. The love they feel for each other is tangible in their emails and other communications; so is the deep frustration and longing caused by separation.

It's also evident throughout the book how much strength and support both of the Schellhaases drew, during their periods of involuntary separation, from the comrades and neighbors who were their everyday companions. For him, battlefield camaraderie not only relieved loneliness but increased the chances for personal survival and the successful completion of his unit's missions. For her, participation in family volunteer organizations such as the Key Volunteer Network provided a sense of personal involvement and emotional support. Later, Schellhaas created the website USMCLife.com to continue providing guidance and support to military families facing the same situations she and her husband had faced.

*15 Years of War* is a frank description of what it takes for a spouse and family to support a soldier. The Schellhaases' story is deeply personal and unique, but it will resonate with other families, both civilian and military. For young military families, *15 Years of War* offers a road map to military life, and for those who do not have a family member in military service, it is a potent reminder of the sacrifices and struggles that dedicated men and women make on our behalf.

BRADLEY A. SCOTT (August 3, 2016)

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