

FIRST OF TWO PARTS: Husbands and wives in two military families share their experiences

FAMILIES IN A TIME OF WAR

By PRISCILLA MORRILL
Monadnock Ledger-Transcript

Kale Sawyer, 29, grew up in Rindge. From a young age, Sawyer said Monday from his home near Fort Gordon in Augusta, Ga., he knew that he wanted to serve in the U.S. military. Since May of 2004, Sawyer has been deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq four times, first for 18 months in Afghanistan and then for a total of 42 months in Iraq during three separate deployments.

As a communications specialist and commissioned captain for the U.S. Army, Sawyer works an average of 15 hours a day, seven days a week when he is in the Middle East, making decisions in an office that affect soldiers, civilians and the fate of military missions there.

Still, he said, it's his family at home in the U.S. that has the harder job.

"I give huge credit to all military families and the sacrifices they have to endure," Sawyer said. "I think it's harder on them."

Sawyer, the son of Kevin and Deborah Sawyer of Rindge, and his wife, Kristen Sawyer, the daughter of Mike and Sue McCarthy of Jaffrey, met at Conant High School. He graduated in 2000 and went on to Norwich University, a military school in Vermont, on a full scholarship from the Army. She graduated from Conant in 2002 and studied nursing at the University of New Hampshire. A little more than four months after graduating from Norwich in 2004, Kale was deployed to Afghanistan. The couple married in 2008 and made a home in Tennessee near Fort Campbell in Kentucky, where Kale was stationed through his last deployment in Iraq from which he returned on Oct. 31, 2010.

While Kale was deployed in 2010, Kristen continued working as a registered nurse for the first five months of pregnancy with their first child. She later sold their house in Clarksville, Tenn., just days before giving birth. She was preparing for their latest move to Georgia where Kale is currently training for six months. Kale returned from Iraq the day before the birth of their child, Colin, in August of 2010, but he had to return almost immediately.

"She's had the harder job, I think — double. Hers is twice as difficult as mine," Sawyer said. "Hands down, I would rather have my job than hers. It's my career; but when the Army tells me I'm going to move to a new assignment, she doesn't have a say. ... That's what we're going through right now."

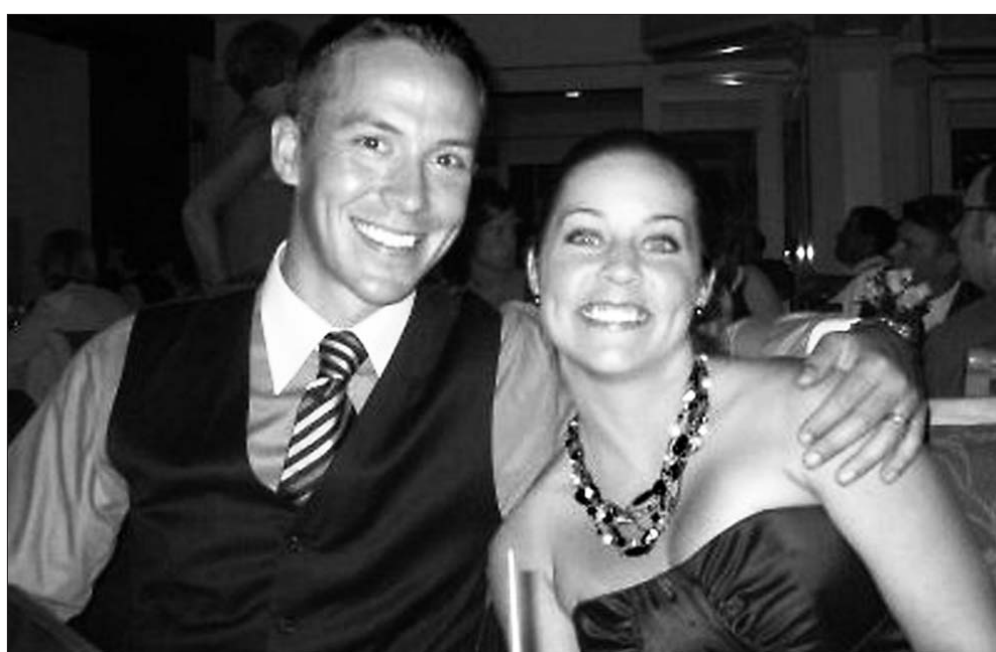
The couple is currently waiting for orders for Sawyer's next semi-permanent Army post, which will mean the family moves once again to somewhere yet to be determined.

"Every two to three years, we're going to be moving for the rest of my career," he said. "I really have no plans of getting out."

Sawyer said he believes in the U.S. military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq and trusts his leaders.

"Atrocities are being committed, so I don't really need a reason to make the world a better place. It's not a sacrifice for me," he said. "The threat of terrorism is really all I need to justify what I do."

Sawyer has an internal drive, he said, to serve his country in the armed services and he's not sure where it comes from. He didn't grow up in a military family, although his father served in the U.S. Air Force for a few years, Sawyer said.



COURTESY PHOTOS

Tim and Jennifer Hopper at Tim's cousin's wedding in June of 2009. Tim was home on leave from his deployment to South Korea to attend the wedding. Jennifer grew up in Jaffrey and Tim hails from Lunenburg, Mass.

"Someone's gotta' do it and I would rather it be me than my son, or my friend or another family member. I would rather do it," he said. "I guess that's who I am."

He's not the only one. Sawyer said he's been moved by the thousands of military servicemen and women, as well as U.S. government employees and civilians supporting war efforts in the Middle East, putting their lives' on the line.

"The willingness to sacrifice for someone you don't know is huge," he said.

He's also learned about the resiliency of the Afghan and Iraqi people who have endured so much and, yet, life goes on for them.

Kristen, 27, said taking a stance on the war isn't her place.

"I feel like as a military spouse, it's not really my job to feel anything about it. It's my husband's job," she said. "I think it's naive to believe we can live in a world where we don't have to make a sacrifice like this."

Her role is to support her husband, other soldiers and other military families, she said.

Kristen said the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, were a defining moment in her generation. She was 18 at the time.

"There were a lot of people who wanted to join [the military]. There were a lot of people rushing to be a part of it," she said.

In the military communities she's lived in Tennessee and now Georgia, Kristen said, she is surrounded by families going through the same things.

"There are a lot of resources, especially when we were at Fort Campbell," she said, referring to the time they lived in Tennessee near the Army post in Kentucky, including wives and family support groups. "We're kind of sheltered, too, where we are. ... We have great job security."

Moving a lot can be hard, she said, but it's also an adventure that she's grown used to. Learning to adjust to military life, something she and her husband did not grow up with, is an ongoing learning process.

Kale's first deployment to the Middle East was more anxiety producing than the subsequent ones, she said. They hadn't yet honed



First Lt. Medical Corps Officer Tim Hopper, in a photo was taken in Afghanistan in the fall of 2010.

their communication skills and Kristen was also still learning to cope with the unknowns of having a loved one on a wartime deployment. Kristen said tuning out the news on television when her husband is deployed is one of the ways she gets through it.

"We count the days. I tell Kale, 'Sometimes, I feel like I'm counting the years away,'" she said. "I don't think people have any idea what our life is like."

During Kale's first deployment between 2004 and 2006 the couple communicated by e-mail and by phone, but the calls would often get dropped Kale noted. Over the years since then, the U.S. military communications system in the Middle East has grown.

"This last time we were able to use a Webcam, which was nice," Kale said, as well as a phone line in his office. "No more buying calling cards."

Packages for soldiers sent from Jaffrey and elsewhere have helped to support American troops as well as the Afghani and Iraqi civilians soldiers share them with, Kale said. The packages were especially helpful in

the earlier years of the wars, he recalled.

"Every couple of weeks it seems, there's boxes coming from the drives they're doing in one hometown or another," he said.

These days, Jennifer Hopper, Kristen's sister, who lives in Tennessee near Fort Campbell, relies on her Blackberry to send messages to her husband, Tim Hopper, who has been in Afghanistan since June 2010. The couple met at Northeastern University in Boston, where Tim, who is from Lunenburg, Mass., was in an Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps program. They married in 2008.

"The role of technology has been limitless in this war," Jennifer said, noting there are opportunities to e-mail, Skype and talk on the phone. "There are times we don't get to talk, but it's for a good reason and not because of the technology."

Jennifer said communication blackouts occur when there's an injury or death because the Army wants to ensure the families are officially notified before word leaks out.

Tim, a first lieutenant medical corps officer, is currently filling a void in his battalion by serving as an Army platoon leader, which puts him in harms way more than ever, Jennifer said. He normally is involved in medical administration work, she said, and spent a year doing that in South Korea between October 2008 and October 2009.

"It's the most difficult thing we've done, but it's also brought us closer together. You find out how strong you are and how strong your relationship is when you go through a deployment like this," she said. "We've had about six months together in the last three years."

It takes a strong, independent person to be a military spouse, she said.

"You make a big sacrifice, but it just helps to remember [the soldiers] are making a bigger sacrifice and, whatever you are going through, they are going through a lot more," she said.

Jennifer graduated from Conant in 2003 and Northeastern University in 2007. She works full-time as a property manager in Clarksville. Work and spending time with friends and family are what help make the time her husband is away go by, she said.

"The most important thing is I keep myself very busy with work and friends," she said. "I get enough support down here in Tennessee that I don't feel like I'm missing [support from] back home."

Jennifer said that it doesn't bother her that some people are against the wars in the Middle East.

"I do wonder what the reaction will be and how all this will end up after the war. I can only hope it doesn't go like Vietnam," she said, about the war's legacy. "I do believe in what we're doing to assist the Afghani citizens."

Although she doesn't look for support from the general public, Jennifer said, if she could ask one thing from people it would be to keep an open mind.

"I guess I would just want them to know that every situation is unique," she said. "And, not to make broad assumptions about the military and the war."

She also said military wives are open to sharing their experiences.

"Sometimes talking about it helps alleviate the stress," she said. "It's very easy to get isolated in this lifestyle. ... I don't necessarily expect others to understand. They didn't sign up for this."

CONVAL



COURTESY PHOTO

Scholars of German

From left, ConVal students Heather Tourgee, Aidan Holding, Stephanie Demetry, Sarah Heissenberger, Loretta Donelan, Charlotte Fressilli, Jacob MacKay, Ian MacKay, Chloe Kipka and Elsa Lindgren celebrate after receiving the results for the National German Exam. Along with fellow student Rosaleigh Blackmer, they gained national recognition by scoring above the 90th percentile on the test, with three scores in the 99th percentile and two students receiving perfect scores. They now have the opportunity to compete in 15-minute interviews, conducted entirely in German, to gain the nomination of the Northern New England District of the AATG to represent it at the national level.

CONVAL

Scholarship foundation names board member

William Groff, recently retired after 23 years as a N.H. Superior Court judge, has been elected to the ConVal Community Scholarship Foundation Board of Directors. Groff and his wife, Susan, have lived in Peterborough for the last 16 years, following 14 years in Temple. Their three daughters are graduates of ConVal High School. Groff has chosen to serve on the CVCSF board in order to participate actively in this organization's work in giving financial and mentoring assistance to ConVal High School students who without this support might otherwise not have post-secondary education opportunities.

Wesley Maggs, a professional photographer who also runs a merchants services business has joined the CVCSF team as a volunteer to manage its scholarship collection jar campaign which, in 2009 and 2010, has funded a two-year scholarships for one student each year.

Internet
SERVING KEENE
Unlimited Hours, No Contracts!
\$9.95 /mo. (No Credit Card Required)
• FREE Technical Support
• Instant Messaging - keep your buddy list
• 10 e-mail addresses with Webmail
• Custom Start Page - news, weather & more!
Express
Surf up to **10x faster!** (just 13 more)
Sign Up Online! www.LocalNet.com
LocalNet **357-1412**
924-9845
Reliable Internet Access Since 1994

It's the Year of the Rabbit!
We Have Everything For Your Asian Cooking Needs!
Your Kitchen Store AND MORE
20 Main Street
Keene, NH • 352-1626
www.yourkitchenstore.com

Romeril Tax & Accounting LLC
Tax returns for individuals and business entities. Conveniently located at 949 Turnpike Road New Ipswich, NH 03071
Call for an appointment. **603-878-5388**
Carol Romeril EA MBA
www.romeriltax.com
Federally authorized Tax Practitioner

1-hour Pet Mini-Makeover - \$20
Basic Package
• Shampoo
• Trim Nails • Clean Ears
• Dry as time will allow
Deluxe Packages up to \$30
Basic Package plus:
• Specialized shampoo
• Additional conditioner
• Minor Trimming (Sanitary, Around Eyes, Feet, etc)
Offered only **Friday & Saturday**
February 25th and 26th
PEARLY POND PET SALON • RINDGE, NH
Call us at **603-899-9663** for details.

J.P. STEPHENS Restaurant & Tavern
Grand Opening
Celebrating One Year!
Saturday, February 26th
from 6-9:00pm with **KRock 101.9**
Grand Prize **2 Free Celtic Tickets**
KRock 101.9 is going to be hosting JP Stephens' Grand Opening Celebration with the KRock Girls
• Magician Ed Bilodeau 6:30pm - 8:30pm
• Beer and wine tasting - try our new wines!
• Samples of food
• Several Prizes and Give Aways
Tues & Wed 11:30am - 9:00pm
Thurs-Sat 11:30am - 11:00pm
Sunday: Brunch 10am - 3pm
Dinner 11:30am - 8pm
CLOSED MONDAYS
For Reservations or Information **(603) 899-3322**
Route 202, Rindge, NH
www.jpstephensrestaurant.com