

## Emily Hunter Fertitta

Spouse of 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Valentine Fertitta

I am honored to be nominated to serve on the Office of the Secretary of Defense Military Family Readiness Council. As a Military Spouse I have experiences with both Active Duty and Reserve service. Through my husband's career as both an Enlisted Marine and Officer I have experienced the rigors and hardship of Combat and non-combat deployments, training schools and exercises. I believe that Family Readiness is critical to the success of our military. Military families must be given support so that they are fortified to face the challenges of military life. My husband and I have had great success and happiness throughout his military career; we've made lifelong friends, and achieved financial security all while having great adventures. I wish the same for all military families. I am proud to be a military spouse and I am passionate about ensuring families are given the support they deserve.

My experience with the military started before my husband. My paternal grandfather served our country by fighting for the United States Army in France during WWII. My father followed in his footsteps to become a 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant in the United States Army serving our country in Vietnam. My father did not have the benefit of the popular support of his country but he did have the unwavering support of his family. As I accompany my husband on his journey with the United States Marine Corps Reserves I've learned just how vital family support is to those serving in the military. I have been by my husband's side through four involuntary recalls to active service with three combat deployments, reserve Drill weekends, and numerous schools including Officer Candidate School (OCS) and The Basic School (TBS). I have seen my husband work from Corporal to Sergeant to then become a commissioned officer.

The military reserves offer its own set of challenges including living away from a military installation and the centralized benefits located on base, and being isolated from other military families. The often unpredictable cycle of activity of the reserves calls for frequent stops and starts of civilian employment for training and deployment and planning family life around Drill weekends. To say our life has been affected by the military would be an understatement. We planned our wedding in less than 10 days so that we could be wed before my husband's second deployment to Iraq. We planned our family so that our daughter could be born while my husband was in the country and were lucky enough to welcome her on the 235th birthday of the United States Marine Corps.

My husband and I have spent just as much time apart as we have spent together due to the demands of his military career. In his absence, my role includes: caring for our growing family and animals, managing our finances, and maintaining our home and land. I know that because his family is well taken care of, his mind is at ease, and he is better able to serve his country in the capacity demanded of him. My husband is proud to have an independent wife that successfully meets the challenges of the military life.

I understand the importance of continued Family Readiness. My husband was given two weeks official notice for his second deployment and just 48 hours official notice before reporting for his third

deployment. Family Readiness must be constant to be effective. It cannot be something that is only implemented immediately prior to deployment, since families need to be prepared for the stresses of deployment in advance. I believe my husband and I have met the challenges a military life requires and are stronger because of it. Over the years we improved our communication, learned to be flexible and have learned how to support each other and build a strong family. I've learned when to reach out to the military community for help, and to take action when I see others who need assistance.

When my husband was involuntarily recalled to serve at a training command in Virginia Beach I was able to experience the full military life including moving to an area where I knew no one but my husband. I worked part time as a contractor at the training center to gain a new perspective and learn more about my husband's job. I met other military spouses at the joint Navy Marine Corps command and encouraged them to build their careers and to get to know each other for support by organizing dinners and events. While my husband attended OCS and TBS, our house became the weekend retreat for those who did not have their family nearby. We sponsored a member of the German military and hosted Marines every weekend so that they could have a home away from home and family-like support. On my husband's current deployment to Afghanistan I have served as an unofficial contact for the families and have been able to assist the spouses and parents of the Marines in my husband's detachment. I took the initiative to contact all of the families and make myself available. I am in the process of becoming appointed as an official Family Readiness Assistant.

While I have fully supported my husband's career, I have learned to balance a career of my own. I built my career as a federal employee at the Social Security Administration and am fortunate to work at an agency that supports veterans, those who serve, and their families. I am a GS-13 analyst on the project management team for one of the Agency's largest information technology initiatives. I work with multiple components including state components to increase communication about our project and document project risks. My experiences as an analyst allows me evaluate issues and consider a range of perspectives.

Military life is demanding and family members deserve the best support possible. I have seen Family Readiness progress over the years and I want to be a part of the continued improvement. I have experienced deployment with and without external Family Readiness support, and deployments are much less stressful on the family with the help of Family Readiness Program. I believe the military could make several small changes that would cost little to implement but would have a large impact on families.