



Top: Dept. of Defense photo by: SSGT AARON D. ALLMON II, USAF  
Center: Photo provided by Kate Blaise

# A story of LOVE & WAR

By Melony Leazer  
Communication Specialist

## Alumna shares feelings about marriage, patriotism in vivid memoir

*When Mike and I fell in love in high school, we couldn't have predicted that we'd end up married to the military as well as to each other, or that world events would send our fates marching in new and dangerous directions. But we were soldiers, true to our country and true to each other.*

Kate Blaise  
Author, "The Heart of a Soldier"

Mike Blaise was a 6 foot, 220 pound defensive lineman facing the game of all games in his high school football career.

On an icy and rainy night in November 1992, the Macon Tigers met football giants Sainte Genevieve Dragons in one of Missouri's prominent high school semifinal championships. This was a monumental game for Macon, a growing small town of about 5,000 people. But the Tigers were out matched, and a hefty Mike Blaise left the field, rubbing tears from his eyes, yet trying to hold his head high.

That was the moment Kate Decker Blaise ('00), a straight A student, knew she wanted to be with him.

Five years later, the high school sweet hearts married and entered the military through the Army's Married Couples Program

Mike Blaise, a helicopter pilot who technically was required to salute his wife, Kate Blaise, an Army captain. Assigned to the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) at Fort Campbell, Ky., they were stationed, although separately, in Korea before being deployed to Iraq to fight in the war against terrorism.

Iraq is where Kate Blaise's life changed in so many ways yet drastically in one event. Just days before they were to return to the U.S., Mike Blaise's helicopter crashed in bad weather during a combat mission, instantly killing him and his co pilot.

Kate Blaise's love for her late husband and her country and her thoughts on being a female officer in today's military were the bricks and mortar for her first book, "The Heart of a Soldier," published in 2006 by Gotham Books. Through her printed story, rich with vivid accounts of the war in Iraq, and in this exclusive interview, she shares how she has started life over without her best friend and husband of nearly seven years.

"I'm not fully at peace with his death," says Kate Blaise, a devout Christian who admits she is not much of a crier. "I don't think you ever do get that way. It's just some thing you learn to say, 'This is my life.'

"I love him and I miss him."

## Putting it into words

While in Iraq, Kate Blaise learned how to play golf on a nine hole course dug out of the country's rocky, desert soil by one of the soldiers in her unit. Named TPC at Mosul, the makeshift course was recognized by the Professional Golf Association as an honorary site on its official course list.

In a story for Golf for Women magazine, she described how golf helped her and her fellow soldiers cope with the war that surrounded them. But the magazine's editor in chief, Susan Reed, said Blaise's writing made the soldier real.

"During the editing process, the editors at GFW felt as if we got to know Blaise, and we

all started hoping for her and her colleagues' safe return," Reed stated in the magazine's March/April 2004 issue.

Reed is a former literary agent who realized the soldier had a story to tell and set the pace for her to do just that. One thing that helped Kate Blaise make her book become reality was the advice her father, Steve Decker, offered in the last days before she left for Iraq:

*Keep a journal. You may not think it's important now, but it will mean a lot later...*

In her journal, Kate Blaise tracked the war's progress and her journey through it. In one particular entry, she wrote March 27, 2003: "I know many believe the Garden of Eden lies somewhere in Iraq. But it's hard to imagine." And her e-mails to and from her family also serve as a record of events:

*E mails, letters, you name it my laptop got a workout. In Iraq, I e mailed my family and friends several times a week or whenever I could get an Internet connection.*

However, despite having such handy resources for her memoir, it wasn't easy for Kate Blaise to pour out her feelings, thoughts and sacred memories into words, much less on paper.

"I'm a very private person," she says, her Southern accent strong. "My editors kept telling me, 'You've got to dig deeper,' but I didn't want to dig deep. They would reply, 'It's up to you to decide what you want to make of it.'

"I found writing this book overwhelming at times. There were several times when I asked myself, 'What's my goal?' I kept reminding myself that this was an opportunity to let people know about Mike."

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# A story of love and war

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## A woman in today's Army

In March 2007, Kate Blaise was the guest speaker at a Clarksville Area Chamber of Commerce luncheon celebrating Women's History Month. In addition to recalling memories of her service, she offered a glimpse of what it's like for a woman in today's U.S. military.

"Women are changing the world and forging new paths," she told a standing room only crowd. "In Iraq, we got just as dirty and smelly as the men." As she notes in her memoir: "Being a woman in the U.S. Army is far more nuanced than being a man and in some cases, not necessarily less dangerous."

Shortly after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attack on American soil, Kate Blaise was assigned to the 101st's logistical unit, 426th Forward Support Battalion, part of the Division Support Command. The 426th is responsible for providing medical, maintenance and supplies to a brigade combat team. As she says, the unit "covers everything it takes to keep the Army's soldiers and machines running." Without hesitation, she admits her pride in and love for the unit.

On Oct. 10, 2002, Congress approved the use of military force against Iraq. Five months later, the Blaises received orders to deploy to Kuwait to await war's beginning:

"We were heading into dangerous territory, and we didn't know when we'd see or even speak to each other next. We hoped we'd see each other in Kuwait, but there were no guarantees it could be a year before we set eyes on each other again."

For a year in Iraq, Kate Blaise encountered a mixture of "slow and busy nights," with "slow always best," she says. She struggled with finding the right blend of femininity in a male dominated culture. And, as a female soldier, she was "a point of interest among the local populace in Iraq." Regardless, she was a soldier, just like any other.

"With all the hardships, my time there was an exhilarating experience," she says.

## Kate's next chapter

In 2006, Kate Blaise remarried, to another Army helicopter pilot. Today, she is active in the National Guard. The new couple is awaiting assignment to Fort Rucker, Ala.

That means new experiences, challenges, triumphs and joys. Coupled with the knowledge she gained through her undergraduate

studies in military history at Austin Peay, she will have accumulated more than enough material for another book.

"Just because I can write one, that's not to say I can write two," Kate Blaise says, laughing at the hint of a new memoir. "But I am interested to see what's around the next corner."

No matter where she goes, Kate Blaise doesn't explore the future without taking with her the memories of the treasured relationship she had with Mike Blaise. Still today, a photo of the two together hangs from her Chevy Tahoe's rearview mirror. It is her favorite photo, taken in June 2003 nearly two years after 9/11. The couple is standing in a field outside Mosul, smiling, with rifles over their shoulders.

The photo reminds her that she was, for almost seven years, the wife of Mike Blaise, and together, they served America as soldiers. It's enough to carry her through the next chapters of her life.

As she best says at the end of her book: "For better or worse, no matter where I go, no matter what I do, I will always have the heart of a soldier." **AP**

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(first) (middle) (maiden) (last)

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City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ SSN \_\_\_\_\_ Grad Class \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address \_\_\_\_\_

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Personal News \_\_\_\_\_

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Employer \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Position \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

If retired, former occupation and retirement date \_\_\_\_\_

Colleges/universities attended (include undergraduate and professional schools even if degrees were not earned)

Institution \_\_\_\_\_

Major/Minor \_\_\_\_\_

Degree \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_

### Family Information

Spouse's Name \_\_\_\_\_

SSN \_\_\_\_\_ Did spouse attend APSU? \_\_\_\_\_ Grad Class \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse's Employer \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Position \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Children's names and ages \_\_\_\_\_

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