



█ couple recalls life-altering sexual assault and recovery

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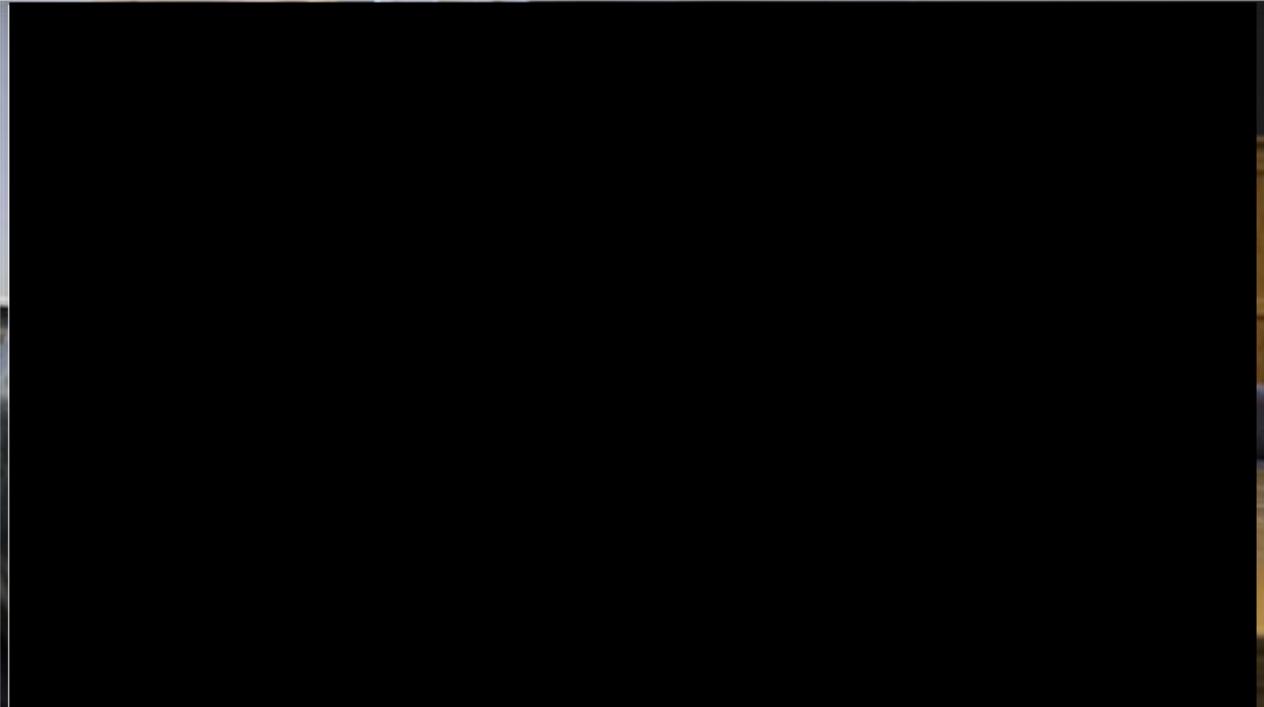


Image by: BRIANA SCROGGINS/Standard-Examin
█ and her husband, █ spoke out about the rape and assault Ali was a victim to while █ was deployed in South East Asia. █ plead guilty to rape by threat or fear, sodomy, assault consummated by a battery, burglary and communicating a threat on the attack that happened on August 9, 2013 at █. The married couple of five years told their story in a conference room at the █ on Wednesday, May 6, 2015.

█
Reporter

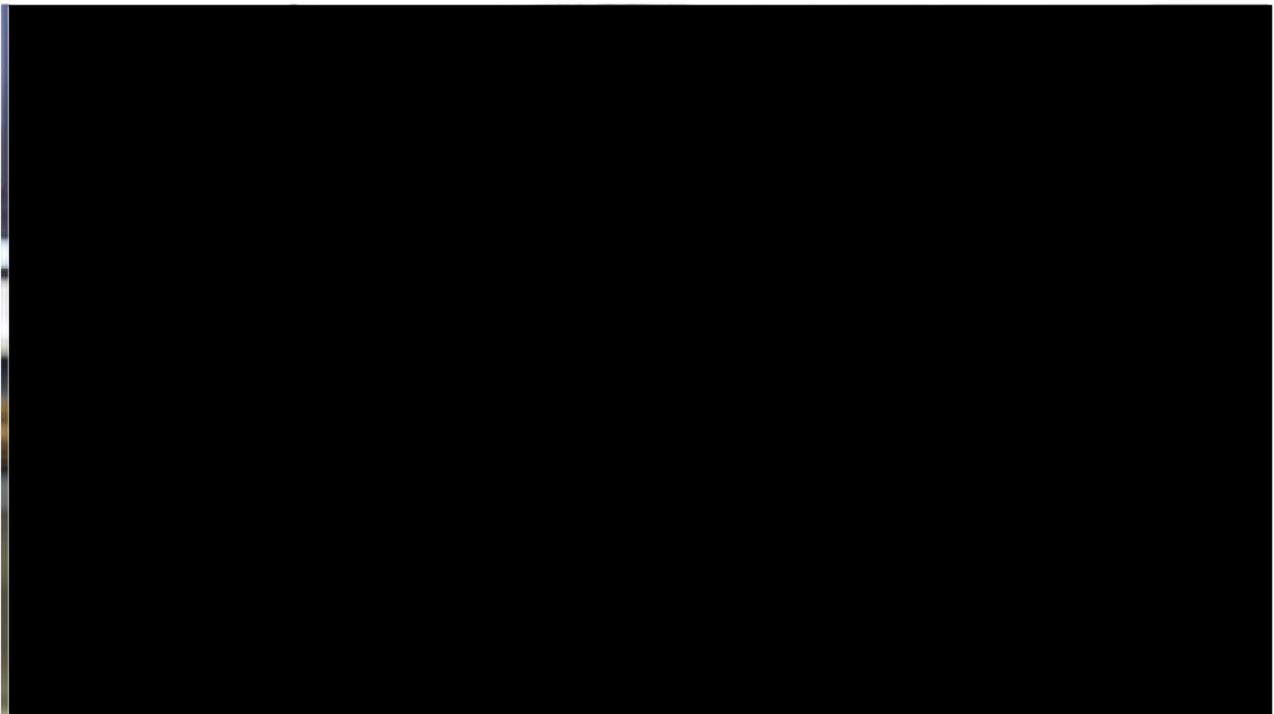
HILL AIR FORCE BASE — Just a little less than two years ago, during the most terrifying and lonely hours of her life, █ lost the ability to tell her then-2-year-old daughter that monsters don't exist.

How could she give her daughter the same comforting assurance millions of other parents give their children when she knew it was a lie?

This monster analogy was used by Air Force prosecutors in court to drive home the point that the sexual assault [REDACTED] endured on an August night in 2013 had widespread and far-reaching impacts that will be felt for years to come, by several different people.

On the evening of August 9 and into the early morning hours of August 10, 2013, while her Air Force husband was stationed thousands of miles away in Southwest Asia, [REDACTED] was raped repeatedly by a man who forced his way inside her home.

The man's name is [REDACTED]. He now resides inside the unforgiving walls of the Leavenworth Penitentiary in Kansas, but in 2013, he lived in the [REDACTED] neighborhood and spent most of his days working within just a few feet of [REDACTED] husband, [REDACTED].



[REDACTED] and his wife's assailant were both active-duty airmen at [REDACTED], in [REDACTED]. They worked in the same unit, they lived in the same on-base housing unit, supposedly part of the same Air Force family. It was this proximity that allowed [REDACTED] to have firsthand knowledge that aside from her daughter, [REDACTED] was home alone and helpless on the night he raped her.

The [REDACTED] story involves many layers, but in the end, it's ultimately a tale of courage and even defiance. The couple, now stationed at [REDACTED], says they haven't completely "healed" or "recovered" but they are refusing to let the actions of another person control their lives.

THE ASSAULT

██████████, who is 24 now, said that leading up to the assault, her day and evening had been completely typical. She went through her normal routine of speaking with ██████████ and putting her daughter to bed.

“I went to bed just like any other day,” ██████████ said. “(██████████ and I) video chatted just like any other night and I went to bed. My daughter was in her bedroom. Everything was normal.” But as the evening grew darker, that normalcy would give way to the most awful kind of chaos and confusion ██████████ had ever experienced.

According to court documents provided by the Air Force, ██████████ was drunk the night he assaulted ██████████. He had attended an on-base party where he “consumed beer and vodka and became rambunctious,” the court documents say. Seeing that he was obviously too drunk to get home on his own, a fellow airman at the party arranged for ██████████ to give ██████████ a courtesy ride to his on-base home shortly after midnight.

Security Forces took ██████████ home, but he didn’t stay there for long. After he was dropped off at his home, ██████████ soon left. He went directly to the ██████████ home and broke in through a kitchen window. Court documents say he knew exactly where the house was and had even been there several months earlier to help move furniture. He also knew ██████████ was overseas, thousands of miles away.

After he broke through the kitchen window, ██████████ made his way upstairs to the master bedroom where he stood by the bed, leering over ██████████ as she slept.

“I was exhausted and the minute my head hit the pillow, I was out,” ██████████ said. “The next thing I knew, I was waking up because somebody was standing over me in my bedroom. I didn’t hear anything and I don’t even know what woke me up. I just woke up and there was a figure.”

At first, ██████████ thought she was having a nightmare. As she gradually came out of her slumber, she realized that although this was indeed a nightmare, she wasn’t dreaming.

“The more I woke up, the more I started to scream things like, ‘Who are you? What are you doing?’,” she said. “He never said a word to me. He never replied, never said anything. He just started to punch me in the face.”

In the dark of the night, with blackout curtains in the bedroom, ██████████ had no idea who the perpetrator was, or even what he looked like.

“I had no idea who was in my bed,” she said. “It was pitch black and I could barely see enough to make out shapes.”

As ██████████ continued to strike ██████████, she begged him to stop, but he continued. Court documents say he eventually removed her clothes and his pants and he yelled that he’d kill her if she didn’t have sexual intercourse with him. ██████████ said in the face of such complete fear and shock, she froze.

“I was a freezer — I didn’t fight him,” [REDACTED] said. “At the time I didn’t have a choice, but the way society is today, sometimes I would look back on it and say, ‘why didn’t I fight him?’ But when I don’t let anyone else get into my head, I know I didn’t have a choice. Our 2-year-old daughter was downstairs and I didn’t know who he was, what he was capable of, if he had a weapon.”

During the rape, which [REDACTED] describes as “a very long process,” her only thoughts were on staying alive for her daughter. Throughout the assault, [REDACTED] made repeated threats, vulgar comments and asked [REDACTED] odd questions. He talked about suicide and asked her what her preferred choice of death would be.

“He asked me if I could choose a way to die, what would I choose,” [REDACTED] said. “I was convinced he was going to kill me, but all I could think of was that I didn’t want to die. I kept thinking, ‘My daughter is downstairs and nobody is going to find us, nobody is going to know what’s going to happen to her. I can’t die, because who’s going to protect her?’”

Finally, at about 3 a.m. [REDACTED] said, [REDACTED] jumped out of bed and left.

“It was weird,” she said. “He just kind of got up all of a sudden and walked out.”



[REDACTED] immediately contacted law enforcement and her husband. Although she couldn’t identify her attacker, the little information she had, along with information Security Forces had about him from earlier in the night, led investigators directly to [REDACTED]. Biological evidence that was collected during a sexual assault examination was later matched to [REDACTED].

When the couple found out [REDACTED] was the perpetrator, they were both shocked.

“It took me another month or two to believe it was him,” [REDACTED] said. “That’s how unassuming this guy was.”

[REDACTED] said he and [REDACTED] sat within a few feet of each other at work and talked often.

”I couldn’t believe it was him at first,” [REDACTED] said. ”But now I realize that he targeted my family and used the information he had gained over the course of our relationship to his advantage.”

THE AFTERMATH

With the mountain of DNA evidence stacked against him, [REDACTED] pleaded guilty to the rape. In mid-January 2014, he was sentenced to 34 years in prison, but will be required to serve only 20 years of that sentence because of a pre-trial agreement he made with the Air Force.

In exchange for the 20-year sentence cap, [REDACTED] agreed to plead guilty to all charges filed against him, which included rape by threat or fear; sodomy; assault consummated by a battery; burglary; and communicating a threat.

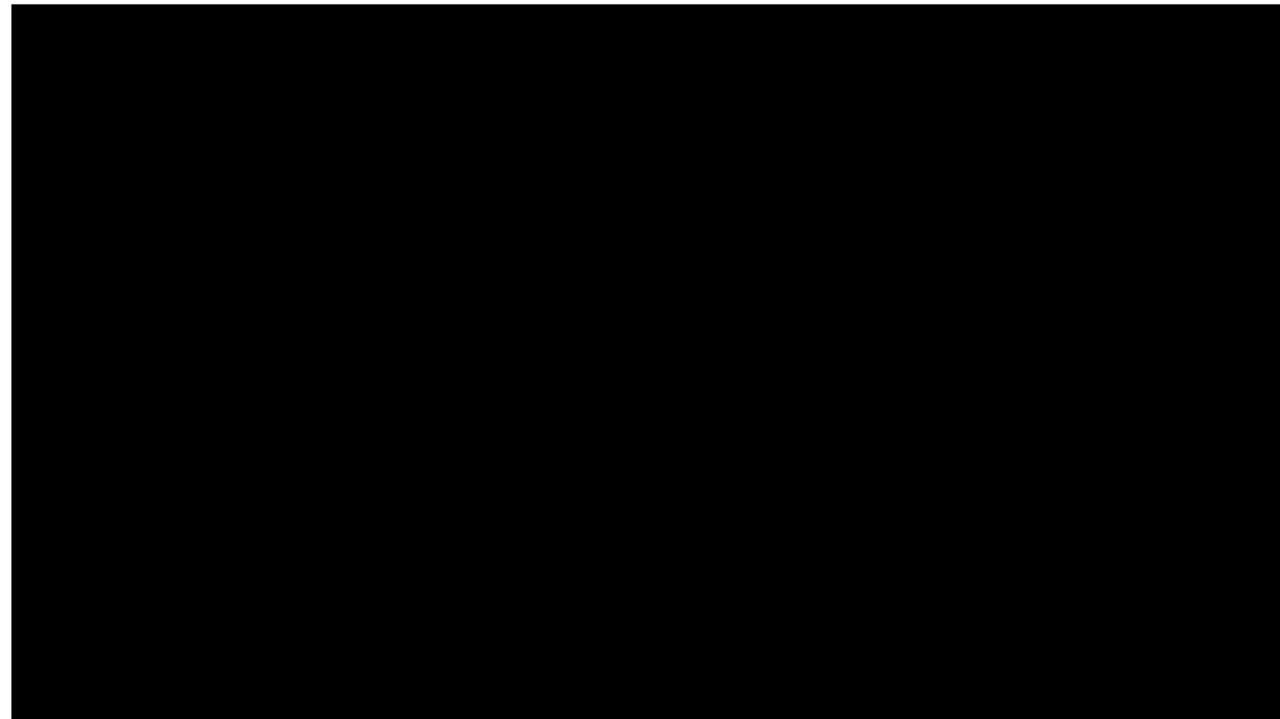
A [REDACTED] press release on the sentencing says Air Force military judge [REDACTED] also sentenced [REDACTED] to a dishonorable discharge, forfeiture of all pay and allowances and reduction in rank in the general court-martial. Hodge was also required to register as a sex offender.

Leading up to sentencing, [REDACTED] remained in pre-trial confinement until the trial. While the judicial process moved forward, the [REDACTED] life remained in disarray. Soon after [REDACTED] was arrested, rumors began circulating around base and on social media.

“Wives’ groups gossiped about me on their Facebook pages,” [REDACTED] said. “One of the (women) actually posted my address. They were cruel.”

The [REDACTED] say they found out through friends the rumor mill was also running wild on base, hearing that members of the [REDACTED] team and some in [REDACTED] immediate chain of command contributed to it.

“They were saying things like, ‘Oh, she’s just trying to cheat on her husband and get away with it,’” [REDACTED] said. “I felt like they were saying I wanted to be sexually assaulted, or that I deserved it or I wanted it. It makes me think, how much worse is it for people where the situation is not as clear? Something a little more convoluted, like if they were both drunk at a party. How much worse is the victim blaming for them?”



Both [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] say the [REDACTED] sexual assault response team, the Office of Special Investigations and basically all of those involved in the legal work performed exceptionally and worked diligently and effectively throughout the process. But they both say they have some significant issues with how [REDACTED] immediate command acted during the whole ordeal. The couple says the command offered little help during their crisis and [REDACTED] was even asked to take over work that [REDACTED] himself once performed.

”Obviously, I wasn’t comfortable with that,” [REDACTED] said. ”They told me to do it. There was no asking. When I told them I was uncomfortable, they basically said you’ll do what we’ve told you to do and if you bring this up again, were going to take it to leadership and you’re going to get (disciplined).“

The couple said once the [REDACTED] legal team caught wind of this, they intervened immediately.

”They basically said, ’You will move him to a new shop right now.’ And that’s what happened,” [REDACTED] said. ”But my supervision made it sound like I wasn’t getting moved because I was having problems, but because it was just time to move. They were trying to save face.“

When they tried to recruit [REDACTED] immediate supervision to help quell the rumors and gossiping that was circulating around the base, the couple says they ran into another wall.

”([REDACTED]) commander basically told us that we just need to move on with our lives, that it doesn’t matter what people say,” [REDACTED] said. ”But I am telling you right now that gossip matters. It made me as a victim feel like I should have never come forward.“

As tends to be the case during the legal process, [REDACTED] was also forced to relive the awful crime over and over again. She had to do extensive testing for pregnancy and possible sexually transmitted diseases.

”I had a panel of STD tests,“ she said. ”And it’s like, those lab techs don’t know why I’m there. They don’t know I was sexually assaulted. All they know is that I’m coming back regularly. It was horrible.“

[REDACTED] has also been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. She says she’s making strides, but the initial phases of the disorder were debilitating.

”I didn’t sleep. I didn’t even get up to go to the bathroom. I was snapping awake all the time,“ she said. “[REDACTED] had to check the house all the time.”

[REDACTED] said she was uncomfortable even around her husband.

”Nothing about our relationship was the same any more,“ she said. ”It’s taken us a long time to even get close to getting back to normal again. [REDACTED] couldn’t touch me without me having flashbacks. It was bad.”

THE SECONDARY VICTIM

[REDACTED] was working a night shift in his deployed location and had just gotten off work when [REDACTED] called him, telling him of the assault. He immediately called his supervisors at his deployed location and told them of the attack. He got on a plane that night and he was home the next afternoon.

When [REDACTED] came home, his life, much like his wife’s, immediately changed.

”I have an extremely huge issue trusting people,“ he said. ”Ever since the assault happened, I haven’t had any time away from my family, and it’s been by choice. I don’t go hang out with the guys, I don’t invite people to my house. I really don’t know how to get over the trust thing. I don’t think I ever will.“

He also suffered a crisis of faith. The [REDACTED] are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

According to court documents, [REDACTED] ”placed a(n) (LDS) blessing on his home before he deployed so it could be ’a place where the spirit of Christ dwells, a place of peace and a place of comfort’ and also blessed his family so they would be protected in his absence.“

After the assault, [REDACTED] felt ”betrayed by [his] Heavenly Father,“ court documents say, and he stopped going to church. [REDACTED] told attorneys that the assault made him feel toward [REDACTED] that ”he didn’t have a right to be sexually attracted to her anymore, because it wasn’t fair that someone had forced themselves onto her.”

”When this happened, my attitude to everything changed,“ [REDACTED] said.

