SHE SERVED MAGAZINE

Celebrating Women Veterans



JOHNS CREEK VETERANS ASSOCIATION

15 MILITARY WOMEN VETERANS SHARE THEIR STORIES

INSIDE ISSUE 9:

FIRST FEMALE JOHNS CREEK VETERANS ASSOCIATION MEMBERS JANICE HIERS AND JOANNE MELEAR AND CENTENARIAN AND NAVY WAVE DONNA BIEDACK



DON'T WAIT ANOTHER DAY TO CALL AND ASK FOR HELP.

VA Resources for Women

Women Veterans Call Center:
855-VA-WOMEN

Veteran Crisis Hotline:
988 (press 1)

Caregiver Support Line:
855-260-3274

VA Benefits Hotline:
1-800-827-1000

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JOHNS CREEK VETERANS ASSOCIATION

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HOST A VETERAN PHOTO SHOOT

To host a **She Served** event visit:
www.sheservedinitiative.org.



General criteria: The space needs to be indoors, and approximately 20x20' in size, with at least an 8' ceiling height (preferably 10') with electrical outlets.

Photoshoot Details: Photoshoots are reserved for female veterans only. Each Veteran will get a 30-minute professional photoshoot. They can bring props or mementos to be used during the session.

As the host you should be aware that each Veteran that wants to participate will need to fill out an intake form of basic information, provide a short biography of their military career and post military life, and provide a clear photo of themselves in uniform (their official service photo is best, but other photos of them in uniform are acceptable if it is clear and in focus so that their face is recognizable). I can comfortably accommodate approximately 10 women a day if the timeslots are scheduled in advance.

Expenses: I do not charge the Veteran or the host a photoshoot fee. However, as you can imagine I do have expenses. I ask the host to provide suitable lodging, air fare and/or reimbursement for gas, and my meals during the photoshoot. Visit https://sheservedinitiative.org/hosting/ for all the details then contact us to be a host!



This year, I had the honor of organizing a photo shoot for *She Served Magazine* —a powerful moment that brought together women Veterans from the Johns Creek Veterans Association (JCVA) and the broader local community. As the founder of the *She Served Initiative* and Executive Vice President of JCVA, this was more than just a photo opportunity. It was a celebration of pride, connection, and sisterhood.

Seeing these incredible women stand tall, smile wide, and represent generations of service reminded me why organizations like JCVA and the *She Served Initiative* matter so deeply. It was a visual testament to our strength and shared history.

I'll admit—joining JCVA didn't come easily for me. Like many other women Veterans, I hesitated. I had concerns: Would I be welcomed in what seemed like a male-dominated space? Would my experiences be understood, my voice valued? Past negative experiences, different needs, and unhealed trauma had me questioning whether I would truly belong. But once I took that first step, everything changed. I wasn't just welcomed—I was encouraged to lead, to connect, and to serve. I found camaraderie, purpose, and a strong support system. Within a year, I was deeply honored to be voted in as Executive Vice President.

For any woman Veteran seeking connection, recognition, and renewed purpose, joining a Veterans organization can be a transformative experience. These communities amplify voices, offer meaningful support, and open doors to continued leadership.

As both the founder of *She Served* and EVP of JCVA, I wholeheartedly invite you to explore these opportunities. Your story matters. Your service is honored. And your contributions are still shaping our communities.

In this special edition, you'll meet an extraordinary group of women Veterans—from a 100-year-old Navy WAVE to Vietnam-era nurses and women who served in more recent conflicts. We are incredibly proud to share their stories.

Be sure to check out page 24 for a message from JCVA President Keith Bogle, who highlights the programs JCVA offers to support our local veteran community. And don't miss the story of Janice and Joanne—two women who met through JCVA, became close friends, and helped pave the way for others to feel welcomed and empowered.

Martina Schmidt



HELP US LOCATE AND PAY HOMMAGE TO MORE WOMEN VETERANS

We invite you to join us in honoring and paying tribute to the invaluable service of women veterans from World War II, the Korean War and Vietnam. Your support is crucial in recognizing their dedication and contributions to our nation's history. Together, let's express our gratitude for their sacrifices and celebrate their remarkable service.

If you, or someone you know, would like to be featured email martina@sheservedinitiative.org

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https://sheservedinitiative.org

Donna

BY MARTINA SCHMIDT

Donna Biedak, now a centenarian, reflects with pride on her service in the United States Navy during World War II as part of the pioneering Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES) program. From 1945 to 1946, she was stationed in Jacksonville, Florida, where she served as a Naval Seaman First Class. In her role, Donna was responsible for overseeing the barracks that housed nurses preparing for overseas deployment. She ensured their needs were met, maintained order, and enforced dormitory regulations, playing a vital behind-the-scenes role during a historic time for women in the military.

Beyond barracks duties, she also contributed to the war effort by monitoring Jacksonville's shores for unusual ship activity, keeping a watchful eye for enemy submarines.

Donna's decision to enlist was inspired by the absence of men in her family during wartime. Before joining the Navy, she worked at Boeing, where she polished aircraft as part of the nation's war production effort. However, she felt called to do more.

While in Jacksonville, Donna met her husband, Ted Biedak, an Army soldier, while working in the base's canteen and industrial cafeteria. Their meeting sparked a love story that led to marriage and a family of four children, whom they raised in Chicago. Unlike her husband, who often recounted his war stories, Donna kept her experiences more private. "She was never in a position of physical harm," her daughter said, "but she was always open to the new, and in that era, women served because the nation needed everyone."

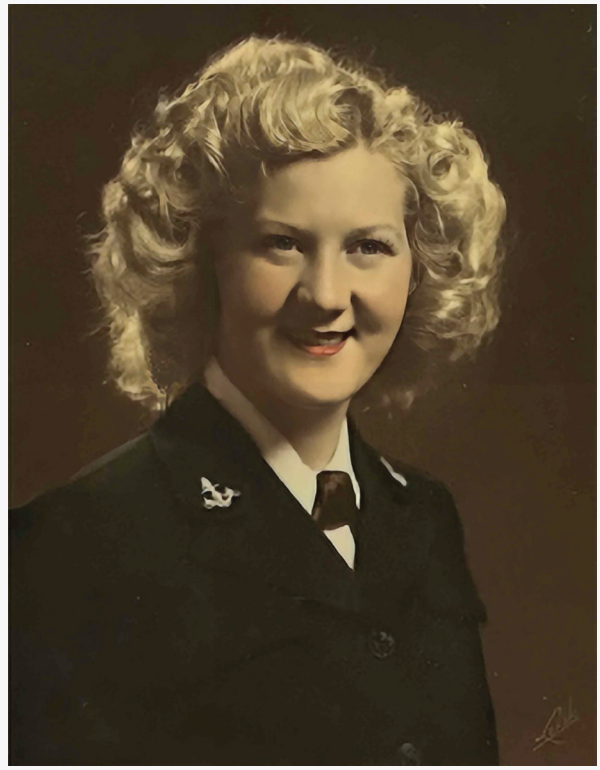
Now retired and widowed, Donna finds her greatest joy in her faith and her family. She remains actively engaged with loved ones, calling each family member regularly to offer words of encouragement.

"She is relentless when it comes to God and her family," her daughter said. "I think that is why she is still alive. She says, 'I can't leave until I know they will all be in heaven with me.'"

For younger generations of women Veterans, Donna offers simple but profound wisdom: Move forward, embrace faith, and focus on family. She and her husband never "nursed and rehearsed" past regrets, choosing instead to place one foot in front of the other and build a fulfilling life.

Though she may not have been on the frontlines, Donna's service, dedication, and faith left a lasting impact. She represents an era of women who stepped forward when the nation called, serving selflessly and paving the way for future generations.







WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"Go to the church with the Power. Believe and you receive, doubt and you're out!"



WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"We are not invisible. We served too. We put our trousers on one leg at a time just like you — and some of us did our jobs better." And when she meets another woman, veteran or not, she offers a simple, radiant affirmation: "Hello, Beautiful."

LaVeda

BY MARTINA SCHMIDT

LaVeda Bennett served in the United States Marine Corps from 1978 to 1998. A trailblazer and lifelong servant, Bennett made history as the first African American woman armorer at New River Air Station in North Carolina, expertly maintaining weapons used in global conflicts.

Later in her career, she transitioned to administrative and postal roles, managing pay, mail, and training reports for more than 3,500 Marines. While not in direct combat, her work supported key operations in Somalia and Desert Storm in the Middle East. Her dedication earned her numerous awards, including the Meritorious Unit Commendation and National Defense Service Medal.

Born in Chicago to renowned guitarist Wayne Bennett and Evangelist Pravella Washington, Bennett's early life was marked by constant relocation and hardship. After attending 15 high schools in various cities, she ultimately graduated in Atlanta — while navigating homelessness. She found refuge through family friend Rev. Hosea Williams, an experience that shaped her lifelong commitment to service. Inspired by helping children with special needs, she made a bold decision to join the Marine Corps just before her 20th birthday, launching a career defined by perseverance and purpose.

Following her retirement, Bennett's mission only deepened. She became a passionate advocate for women veterans, helped launch the Women's Wellness Clinic at the Atlanta VA Medical Center. As the only original volunteer committee member still serving, she has remained a steadfast voice for women who served, working alongside local and state leaders to gain public recognition for their contributions.

LaVeda Bennett remained committed to service, volunteering more than 100,000 hours with groups like Soldiers Angels, Disabled American Veterans, and the Women Marines Association. Through programs like "Watch Me Grow" and "Carey's Garden," she teaches gardening to children, veterans, and seniors, encouraging food security and independence.

A devoted mother, grandmother of nine, and great-grandmother of one, Bennett also cares for her special needs grandson. Yet, she still prepares and distributes care packages to homeless veterans across Atlanta. Her tireless service has earned her numerous honors, including four Presidential Lifetime Achievement Awards, several veterans of the year recognitions, and a proclamation declaring June 21, 2024, as "LaVeda Bennett Day" in Atlanta. LaVeda was also the first veteran to receive the International Trailblazer award in 2016.

Today, LaVeda continues her work as a women veterans advocate while serving as a mentor, speaker, and driving force behind countless community efforts. Her advice to fellow women veterans is grounded in compassion and clarity: "Set your transitional plan in motion. Check out all resources available to you. Don't be afraid to ask for help."





Sisterhood in Service

Two nurses who shaped the future of women at the Johns Creek Veterans Association

BY MARTINA SCHMIDT

When Joanne and Janice first met at a Johns Creek Veterans Association (JCVA) meeting in 2017, they didn't know their friendship would spark a movement. As the very first female members of what had been an all-male veterans group, the two military nurses not only found a bond in shared service—they helped reshape the organization's future.

Joanne, a Navy nurse veteran, was first introduced to JCVA by a neighbor. She initially joined for the camaraderie she had been missing since retirement. But she quickly stepped into leadership, becoming Director of Health and later founding the 11th Hour Squadron, a compassionate initiative that provides comfort to dying veterans during their final moments. "Only other veterans understand that kind of connection," she shared.

Janice, a retired Air Force nurse, was invited by then-president Mike Mizell. With a long history of involvement in military organizations, she eagerly embraced the opportunity to build something new. She accepted a board position focused on recruiting and supporting women veterans. Under her leadership, JCVA's women membership has grown from just two to over 20. She now serves as President of Women Veterans Programs and has played a key role in organizing Women in Service day ceremonies and encouraging female veterans to join the organization.

For both women, joining JCVA was never about fitting in—it was about lifting others up. "The men have been incredibly receptive," said Janice. "They've supported our growth every step of the way." Joanne echoed the sentiment, noting that their efforts have helped transform JCVA from a social club into a service-driven community.

Their shared background as military nurses forged a powerful bond. "It's like when two submariners meet—there's instant understanding," said Joanne. Janice added, "We just clicked. Joanne is a mentor, a friend, and a pillar of this organization." When Janice faced one of the greatest battles of her life—breast cancer—Joanne was right there beside her. "Joanne has been by my side every step of the way," Janice says. "She's more than a friend—she's my rock."

When asked what they wish more people understood about women veterans, Joann and Janice offered powerful reflections rooted in experience and pride. Joann emphasized the need for greater awareness and education about the immense contributions and unique sacrifices women have made in the military. She pointed out that over the past 50 years, the number of women serving has steadily grown—and every single one of them volunteered. Janice's response spoke to the deep bond shared among women who serve: "Women veterans is a sisterhood," she said, highlighting the enduring connection, mutual support, and unspoken understanding that binds them together across generations.

When asked what their friendship's theme song would be, they laughed and offered two titles: "This Little Light of Mine" and, of course, the theme from *M*A*S*H*—a nod to their shared sense of humor and enduring service.

Their story is a testament to what happens when women veterans not only take a seat at the table—but bring others with them. Through their leadership, compassion, and unwavering support of one another, Joanne and Janice have helped build a stronger, more inclusive JCVA—one sister at a time.

IN JOANNE'S WORDS

"I HAD BEEN MISSING THAT CAMARADERIE ONLY OTHER VETERANS UNDERSTAND."

"WOMEN VETERANS ARE A SISTERHOOD."

IN JANICE'S WORDS

"JOANNE IS MORE THAN A FRIEND — SHE'S BEEN MY ROCK."

"THE MEN HAVE BEEN INCREDIBLY RECEPTIVE AND SUPPORTIVE EVERY STEP OF THE WAY."



Janice (Sipple) Hiers (left) and Joanne G. Melear.

Janice

BY MARTINA SCHMIDT

Janice (Sipple) Hiers, served for over 20 years in the United States Air Force Nurse Corps. Her military journey began at Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas, for officer training, followed by assignments at Kincheloe AFB, Michigan; Ellsworth AFB, South Dakota; Ramstein AB, Germany; Peterson AFB, Colorado; and Scott AFB, Illinois.

During Desert Storm, Janice was activated with the 9019th Air Reserve Personnel Center and served at Wilford Hall Medical Center, a 1,000-bed trauma hospital in San Antonio, Texas. She worked 12-hour shifts on a medical, orthopedic surgical ward, caring for wounded soldiers with head injuries, burns, and amputations. Her efforts extended beyond patient care, as she played a pivotal role in establishing the Scott AFB Case Management Department, earning commendation from the Air Force.

One of Janice's most cherished memories from military service is the opportunity to serve alongside highly educated and dedicated professionals. She reflects fondly on the camaraderie and lifelong friendships she built across the world. "The military gave me friends worldwide," she said. Janice retired as a lieutenant colonel and continued to serve in nursing for a total of 45 years. In recognition of her service, she is proudly listed with the Women's Military Memorial in Washington, DC.

Janice remains an advocate for women Veterans, serving as the Johns Creek Veterans Association's Director at Large for Women Veteran Programs and maintaining membership in organizations such as the Society of Air Force Nurses, Military Officers Association of America, and the American Legion.

Janice, born in Oshkosh Wisconsin, comes from a proud military family. Her father, the late CWO4 Clarence Sipple, served in the Army National Guard's 32nd Red Arrow Division. She is married to Army veteran Tony Hiers and has a daughter, Ann Gambill, a son-in-law, Navy veteran Joshua Gambill, and two grandsons, Payne and Harry Gambill. She is blessed with a bonus family—Robin, Scott, and her granddaughter Jenifer—with whom she shares many hobbies and joyful moments. Janice is also a breast cancer survivor, a testament to her resilience and strength.

Janice is passionate about supporting women Veterans, emphasizing the strength of their sisterhood. Her advice to others is to utilize leadership and human relations skills, and be a friend.







WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"No one can see the seeds of friendship, but they grow into something special."
~ Winnie the Pooh



WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"I can do all things
through Christ who
strengthens me."
~ Philippians 4:13

Joanne

BY SHERYL BINETTI

Joanne G. Melear served in the United States Navy from September 1966–March 1971. She was a wartime nurse during the Vietnam Era. She began at Balboa Naval Hospital in San Diego. For two years, she carried out both medical-surgical and intensive care duties, providing critical care to fellow service members.

Eager to continue serving, Joanne extended her enlistment and accepted orders to the USS Sanctuary, which was stationed off the shore of Vietnam in 1969. However, those orders were later changed, and she completed her second and final tour at the U.S. Naval Hospital in Taipei, Taiwan.

Joanne reflects on her military service as the most rewarding experience of her 52-year nursing career. She shares, “It is noble and very rewarding to offer your time and talent to something more significant than yourself. I learned that it truly is in giving that we receive—and that shaped the rest of my life.”

Today, Joanne is 80 years old, retired, and living a full life as a widow, mother of four, grandmother of three. She is deeply grateful that her entire family remains close, all living in the metro-Atlanta, Georgia, area.

Since 2016, she has been an active member of the Johns Creek Veteran Association, a group she holds close to her heart. In December 2022, she became their director of health. Just three months later, seeing a vital need, Joanne founded the 11th Hour Squadron—a group of more than 30 volunteers who sit with dying Veterans, primarily at night, to give their families a chance to rest. These moments offer the Veteran an opportunity to speak freely and find peace in the presence of someone who understands. For the volunteers, it is a chance to regain purpose, connection, and healing through service.

Joannes greatest passions reflect her priorities in life: God, family, country, Boston terriers, and football—in that order. Born and raised in Canton, Ohio, the home of the NFL Hall of Fame, Joanne is a devoted fan of University of Georgia football and cheers for the Philadelphia Eagles, thanks to their many “Philly Dawgs.”

To those who may not realize it, women Veterans are strong, principled, capable, loyal, adaptable, and punctual. Joanne goes on to insist that women Veterans are exceptional multi-taskers. Most want to continue being of service to others, having learned that it truly is in giving that we receive.”

“Joanne implores her fellow women Veterans: ‘Be both humble and courageous enough to ask for help. There is a lot available today, but you must ask for it."





Charlotte

BY MARTINA SCHMIDT

Charlotte Whitaker dedicated more than four decades to the United States Army, serving from May 5, 1978, to Sept. 3, 2003. As a unit supply specialist, she played a key role in Army logistics, managing equipment distribution for new enlistees, overseeing weapons and ammunition logistics, and implementing asset accountability systems for medical and aviation units.

Charlotte also served two tours as a drill sergeant from 1984 to 1991, shaping the next generation of soldiers through leadership, discipline, and mentorship. During Operation Desert Storm, she was selected to return stateside to support soldiers' families, demonstrating her leadership and compassion. Beyond her primary duties, Charlottefostered morale by coaching sports teams and writing and directing a Commanding General's Holiday Safety play.

Reflecting on her time in service, Charlotte said her greatest takeaway is the importance of personal accountability. "When we make mistakes, the consequences can be far-reaching, impacting not just ourselves but others as well," she said. "Adhering to systems and rules is essential to preventing harm and ensuring direct authoritative leadership."

Today, Charlotte continues to make a difference in her community. She is passionate about network marketing, helping individuals build successful businesses through product and service sharing. Her efforts have empowered many to achieve significant financial milestones. She shares resources and opportunities through her website, **http://www.mayfeelbetter.com**.

Charlotte's commitment to service continues in her civilian life. She cared for her sister Pinkie Mayo for 12 years and volunteered with organizations like Meals on Wheels and the Atlanta Safehouse, where she cooked monthly meals for hundreds. She also crafted handmade flowers to brighten the lives of seniors.

Family remains central to Whitaker's life. She is married to Christopher Whitaker, is the proud mother of Major Phillip Wooden (Ret.) and Kenya Wooden-Teague, and a loving stepmother to Shatema and Ashanti Whitaker, with many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Passionate about nurturing youth, Charlotte has welcomed 14 young people into her home since 1999 and currently cares for three boys. In her free time, she enjoys sewing, cooking, and traveling.

She encourages fellow women Veterans adjusting to civilian life to stay proactive and connected. "Keep moving forward, stay healthy, and stay connected," she advised. "Joining women veterans' groups can help you find camaraderie and purpose. Your contributions matter, and the world benefits from your experience and perspective."







WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"It's never too late to pursue your dreams, rediscover your passions, or start anew. Every moment is an opportunity to shape your future."

WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"...we, too, will be remembered not for victories or defeats in battle or in politics, but for our contribution to the human spirit."
~ John F. Kennedy



Jeannie

BY MARTINA SCHMIDT

For nearly three decades, **Jeannie Comlish** dedicated her life to the United States Navy, serving from Sept. 28, 1990 to Nov. 30, 2018. A registered nurse specializing in emergency and critical care, Jeannie not only cared for the wounded but rose through the ranks to become a senior nurse executive, executive officer, and commanding officer of naval hospitals.



Early in her career, Jeannie deployed to Zagreb during Operation Provide Promise, delivering life-saving care to wounded United Nations soldiers. She was one of only four nurses trained for helicopter transport under dangerous conditions. Following the Sept. 11 attacks, she was the sole nurse assigned to the USS Carl Vinson (CVN-70) during its launch into Operation Enduring Freedom.

Her leadership continued aboard the USNS Mercy, where she served as chief nurse during humanitarian missions following the 2004 Southeast Asia tsunami and in the Philippines, Bangladesh, and East Timor. She also acted as a liaison officer to U.S. embassies in Jakarta and Dili. As commanding officer of Naval Hospital Guam, Jeannie led the facility through more than 15 major inspections, earning the prestigious Legion of Merit medal.

Later, at the Pentagon, she served as director of the Military Health System Governance Office, helping to shape health policy at the highest levels.



Reflecting on her 28 years of service, Jeannie said her greatest takeaway is the resilience and family-like bonds formed among those who serve. “Service to our country is such an honor and privilege,” she said. “The people with whom you work and deploy become like family.”

Today, Jeannie continues to champion healthcare quality and patient safety as a registered nurse surveyor for The Joint Commission, auditing hospitals across the nation. Her passion for service remains strong. She volunteers with the 11th Hour Squadron, sitting vigil beside dying veterans when families need rest, and supports the Johns Creek Veterans Association, helping Veterans in crisis access housing and benefits.

Jeannie is also a proud mother. Her son, Andrew, is following in her footsteps of service and is currently in his third year at the United States Naval Academy, preparing to become an officer in either the United States Marine Corps or the United States Navy. Outside of her professional and volunteer commitments, Jeannie enjoys traveling the world, exploring new cultures, and hiking.

“Stay strong and flexible. Use your resources. Connect with your fellow Veterans — and if there’s no local network for women Vets, start one,” she said. She also reminds the public that women veterans, while a small percentage of the overall veteran population, serve with equal sacrifice and deserve equal access to benefits, healthcare, and support networks.

Sabrina

BY SHERYL BINETTI

Sabrina Bradley served in the United States Army from March 1975 to December 2005, Initially, she worked as an aircraft maintenance technician until she was commissioned as a second lieutenant. As an officer, her career started in the medical service corps as a battalion aviation motor pool officer. Throughout her career, Sabrina held many critical roles, including: medical logistics officer, environmental science officer, and unit commander, leading a medical supply company during the Gulf War.

Sabrina served as a company commander during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, providing vital medical logistics support throughout the theater of operations. She received numerous commendations, including the Army Service Ribbon, National Defense Service Medal, Army Achievement Medal, Army Commendation Medal, and the Southwest Asia Service Medal with Bronze Service Star. A significant takeaway from her military service was the comprehension that she has the ability to achieve/accomplish anything that she truly commits herself to as long as she stays the course.

After retiring from the military, Sabrina began another career as a Department of Transportation Federal Investigator, where she conducted hazardous materials investigations until her retirement in 2021.

Sabrina's a proud mother of three daughters and one son, seven grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren. She's also deeply connected to her four amazing brothers, two beautiful sisters, and a wide circle of cousins she considers close family. Still striving to serve others, Sabrina volunteers within her community and with Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve. She's also involved with the National Association of Black Military Women, Disabled American Veterans, Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, and Georgia Military Women.

Sabrina loves spending time with family, friends, and fellow Veterans. Her hobbies include hiking, kayaking, cycling, 5K runs, glamping, arts/crafts, traveling, cruising, and relaxing at the beach which is her favorite place to unwind.

Sabrina would like the public to know that "Women Veterans have gallantly served in our armed forces since the Civil War—Harriet Tubman even led a combat regiment. To this day, we continue to serve and are an integral part of the strength and success of the United States Armed Forces."

"Take a moment to assess what you want for yourself now that your military service is done. Set your goals, seek out support programs, and don't forget to add in fun, relaxation, self-care, and joy."





WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"Once a job has first begun, never quit until it's done. Be it labor big or small, do it right or not at all."
~ Quincy Jones




WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"The fears we don't
face become
our limits."
~ Robin Sharma.

Katherine

BY MARTINA SCHMIDT

Katherine Lorio served in the United States Navy and Navy Reserves from July 1990 to November 2010. She began her military career as an avionics technician, repairing military aircraft on flight lines, aircraft carriers, and in specialized workshops. Her transition into the role of an intelligence analyst, supporting Operations Noble Eagle and Enduring Freedom, marked a significant milestone. This shift allowed her to contribute to critical anti-terrorism and anti-piracy efforts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Eastern Horn of Africa.

Katherine served during pivotal moments, particularly in the post-9/11 period, where her efforts directly impacted missions related to international security. She was awarded the Joint Service Commendation Medal and the NATO Medal for her work in locating and detaining war criminals sought by the International Criminal Court in The Hague. Additionally, she received Armed Forces Expeditionary Medals for her contributions in Somalia and the former Yugoslavia, as well as a Sea Service Ribbon following the repeal of the combat exclusion law for women.

Her most significant take away from her military service is that leadership and advocacy are lifelong journeys that have profoundly shaped her as both a person and a leader.

Now residing in Decatur, Georgia, Katherine is married to a fellow veteran. Together, they have a six-year-old son. She is a high school social studies teacher, a path inspired by her military travels and the deep connections she formed with various cultures, people, and places. She supports her community as a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) volunteer and also mentors members of Alateen and Al-Anon Family Groups.

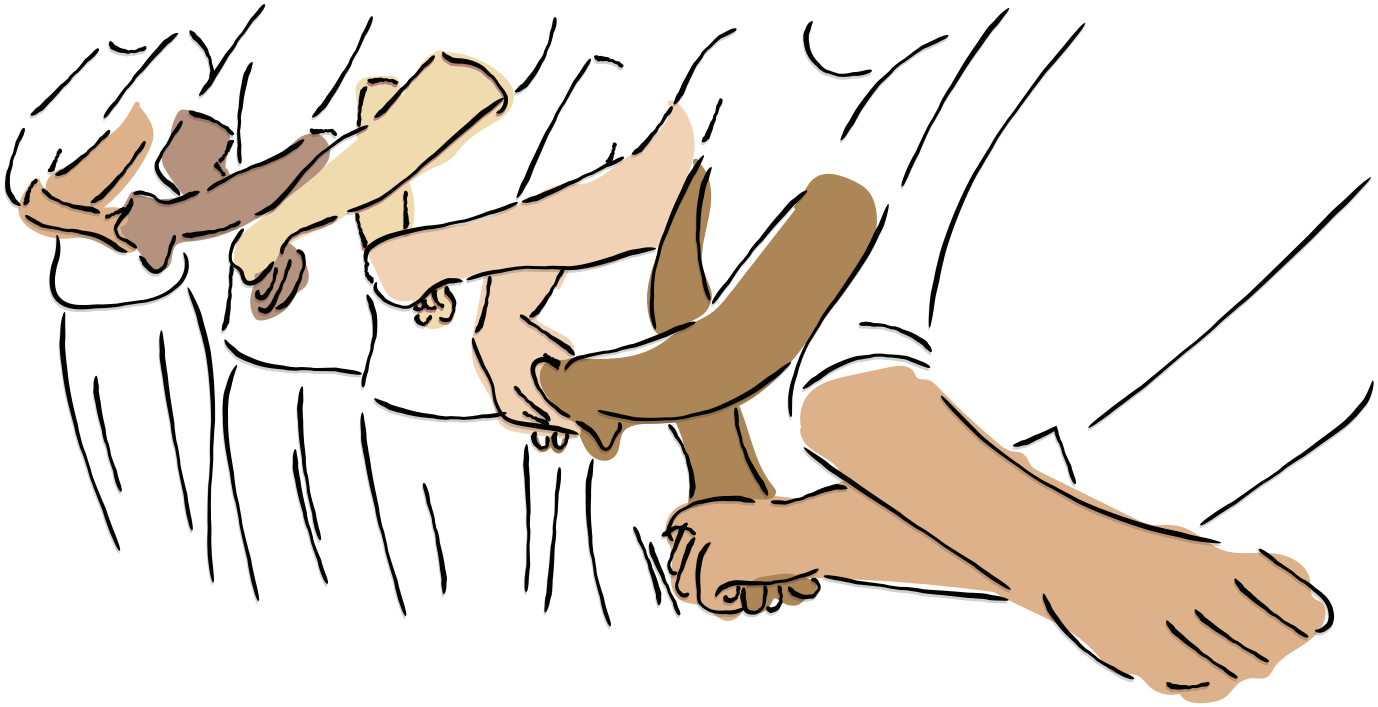
Passionate about nature, hiking, yoga, and self-care, Katherine finds joy in small but meaningful hobbies, such as doing her own manicures and pedicures. She also enjoys creating cloth-covered boxes for tea, jewelry, or gifting. Her favorite boxes are made using batik cloth from West Africa—reflecting her love for unique textiles and cultural connections.

Kathrine underscores the importance of shifting public perception—she wants people to see women veterans as powerful forces, not just in body, but in spirit and mind. Women have long stood on the frontlines of our nation's defense, and their impact continues to shape the future of military service.

Katherine hopes to inspire more women to embrace leadership roles in the military and raise awareness of the unique challenges they face. Her commitment to breaking barriers and fostering a "can-do" attitude reflects her belief in the importance of diversity, in the military and in all areas of life.







On a mission to serve

BY KEITH E. BOGLE, PRESIDENT, JOHNS CREEK VETERANS ASSOCIATION | CAPTAIN, JCVA COLOR GUARD

The Johns Creek Veterans Association (JCVA) was established in 2012 and charterd with the mission "to promote the welfare of Veterans and their families and to provide outreach services to returning Veterans." One of the initial goals was the creation of a Veterans Memorial Walk to honor all who have served.

With the addition of the Wall That Heals, a replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., the Veterans Memorial Walk is the second-largest privately funded Veterans memorial in the country, outside of Washington, D.C. One of the first steps taken after the founding of the JCVA was the formation of the JCVA Color Guard. Since its inception, the JCVA Color Guard has been, in many respects, the public face of the organization.

Over the past 13 years, the Color Guard has participated in 35 to 45 events a year—except for the COVID-19 year of 2020, when there were only 15 events. The Color Guard has been invited to participate in a wide range of events, many of which have become annual commitments. These include civic, charitable, military/Veteran and community events.

Additionally, during the year, various ceremonies are held at the Veterans Memorial Walk to commemorate military events, such as March 29—Vietnam War Veterans Day—where the recent 50th anniversary of the removal of the last combat troops and the release of the last known POWs was remembered. Another example is Aug. 26 and the Kabul 13—the date when 12 U.S. Marines and one Navy corpsman were killed during the withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Veterans of every conflict from World War I through Afghanistan and Iraq are honored with a plaza dedicated to each. In addition, there are plazas honoring Women in Service, the Order of the Purple Heart, and POWs/MIAs. Friends and family may also honor their veterans with personally inscribed pavers placed in the plaza of their choosing. Upon completion of the Veterans Memorial Walk, the focus of the JCVA was recommitted to directly supporting the local Veteran community.

11th Hour Squadron

This effort was founded after a dear friend and selfless JCVA member, "Submarine Mike" Kotler, died alone at midnight in a local rehabilitation center. Mike was a decorated United States Navy Veteran who had served in multiple theaters. The 11th Hour Squadron was founded on the credo: *"No veteran should die alone."*

In association with Emory Johns Creek Hospital, a team of volunteers has been trained to assist and comfort Veterans and their families during their final days.

Our volunteers serve at the pleasure of the family as an extension of them—not as part of the medical team. The 11th Hour Squadron volunteers provide companionship and emotional support during the final stages of life. They offer a comforting presence and a listening ear to alleviate feelings of loneliness and fear, fostering a safe environment for Veterans to share their stories and reflections.

Veterans Assistance

The JCVA works with local churches, communities and Veteran-centric support groups to identify Veterans in need and provide for those needs. This aid may take many forms—from providing funds to meet unexpected expenses to significant efforts like offering transportation or home repairs.

.... continued on page 26






NAVY


WOMEN IN SERVICE


VIETNAM VETERAN

The JCVA collaborates with other groups in support of veterans. One such group is Operation Rally Point. Founded and operated by combat veterans who served in Afghanistan and Iraq, this organization addresses veteran homelessness. Operation Rally Point helps get veterans off the street, into secure housing, and into jobs. Once employment is secured, transportation is often needed—donated by various sources.

VetBuds, another group of Veterans united in supporting their fellow veterans, assists by providing donated vehicles. When a vehicle is donated, a member of VetBuds, who owns a towing company—Patriot Towing—picks up the vehicle. It is taken to Christian Brothers Automotive, a shop owned by another VetBuds member, for necessary repairs. Once repairs are completed, JCVA, VetBuds and others contribute funds to cover the costs, and the repaired vehicle is delivered to the Veteran. These combined efforts change lives.

Another program supported by the JCVA is the Veterans Home Repair Program administered by Habitat for Humanity North Central Georgia. This program repairs and/or upgrades the homes of qualified Veterans. To qualify, a veteran must live in HFHNCG's service area (North Fulton, Cherokee, Forsyth and Dawson counties), be 65 or older, have some form of disability (not necessarily service-related), or be the caregiver of someone who does, and meet certain financial requirements.

While HFHNCG's funding comes from grants and foundations, these are sometimes insufficient. When that occurs, the JCVA's Veterans Assistance program and other partners help bridge the gap. These efforts, once again, change lives.

The JCVA offers guided, private tours of the Veterans Memorial Walk. A program is also being developed that incorporates photos and video of the Walk with tour scripts. These resulting videos will serve multiple purposes. A short version (5 to 10 minutes) will be shared with Rotary clubs, chambers of commerce, and local businesses to promote the City of Johns Creek and the Veterans Memorial Walk. A longer version (30 to 35 minutes) will be offered to local schools as a supplement to classroom history lessons, highlighting the contributions of our Veterans.

Membership

Like all service organizations, the JCVA depends on its membership. Without an active and involved membership, JCVA activities would be greatly limited. As such, the JCVA is always open and encouraging to new members—Veterans and those who support our nation's Veterans.

For more information about the Johns Creek Veterans Association please visit our website, **https://jcvets.org/**





HONORARY MEMBER

A MESSAGE FROM MARTINA SCHMIDT, JCVA EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

Johns Creek Veterans Association salutes Jerrie Badger

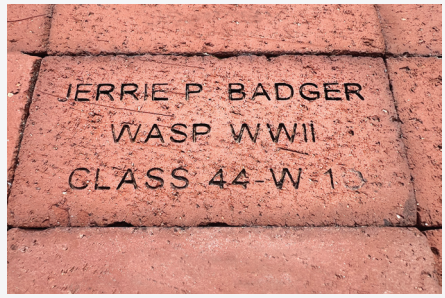
At the Johns Creek Veterans Association, we believe that honoring the service of women is essential to preserving the full legacy of our nation's military history. Women have long played critical roles in defense of our country, and their voices must be heard, respected, and remembered. We are committed to recognizing their contributions and inviting more women to join us—because their presence makes our mission stronger and more complete.

We are especially proud to count **Jerrie Badger**, a pioneering Women Airforce Service Pilot (WASP), among our honorary members. Her courage, determination, and groundbreaking service continue to inspire us all. Jerrie's story is not just a part of history—it's a powerful reminder of the impact women have made and continue to make in service to our nation. In June of 2016, JCVA was proud to recognize Jerrie's extraordinary contributions by naming her an honorary member. She was presented with a Certificate of Appreciation, and a commemorative paver was placed in her honor at the Women in Service Plaza—an enduring tribute to her legacy and pioneering spirit.











WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"At least one person is pleased and sees what you do."



Melissa

BY MARTINA SCHMIDT

Melissa Deane served in the United States Army from 1986 to 2013, dedicating nearly three decades to military service. As a clerical and administrative specialist, she played a vital role in maintaining soldiers' military records, issuing ID cards and dog tags, and ensuring that essential paperwork was properly processed throughout their careers.

Throughout her time in the Army, Melissa deployed three times, supporting key military operations. During Operation Desert Shield/Storm (1990–1991), she was stationed at Fort Stewart, Georgia, where her personnel unit processed soldiers for deployment to Saudi Arabia. She later served in Bosnia (1997–1998) during peacetime, maintaining service records, and deployed to Kuwait in 2003 in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

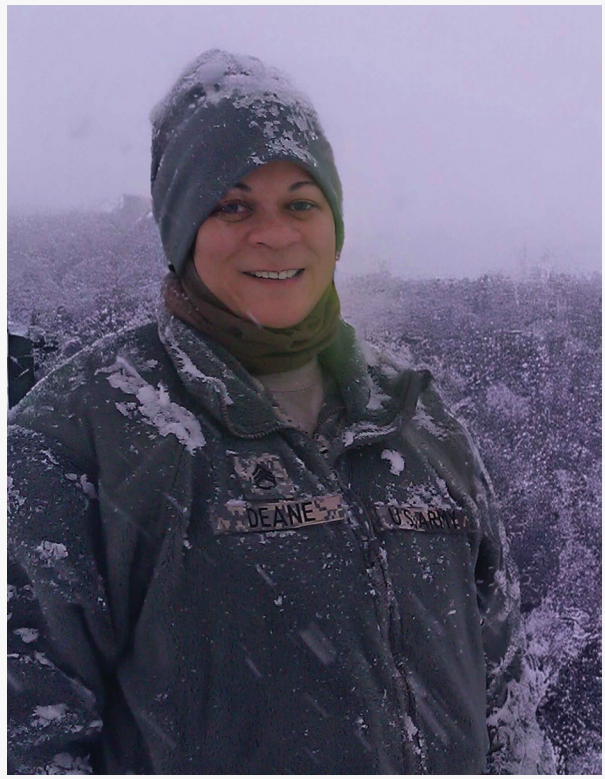
Melissa credits the Army with giving her job security and leadership skills, which have guided her through both military and civilian life. Now working for the United States Postal Service, Melissa ensures efficient mail processing by sorting letters and packages by zip code, preparing them for distribution. She remains deeply connected to the veteran community, volunteering with organizations such as the National Association of Black Military Women, Women Veterans Interactive Foundation, Veteran Upward Bound, and the Wounded Warrior Project. Through service, leadership, and community advocacy, Melissa continues to make a lasting impact beyond her military career.

Melissa is also a proud mother of a daughter who is currently in college and working. She lost her biggest supporters—her parents—but carries their legacy forward, along with her brother.

Her passion lies in supporting fellow veterans, connecting them with organizations, events, and networking opportunities to help them thrive. She wants the public to understand that "women veterans exist, and we're not going anywhere."

Melissa encourages fellow women Veterans to embrace their transition, advising,"Don't feel like you are broken or different. Come up with your own routine and seek help—it is okay.





Lisa

BY MARTINA SCHMIDT

Lisa Burns served in the United States Army from 1983 to 2008 as a personnel service specialist, dedicating 24 years to managing military personnel operations. Her duties included personnel administration, classification, manpower management, and office supervision. During the Gulf War, she played a critical role processing soldiers through an airbase in Germany, ensuring smooth transitions for deployments and returns. She also provided personnel support during Operation Enduring Freedom.

Throughout her career, Lisa earned the National Defense Service Medal and the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal. Her service reflected a deep commitment to helping others, and she cites selfless service as one of the most important values she carried with her from the military. Lisa retired with the rank of master sergeant.

Originally from a family that was unsure about her military path, Lisa won their full support as they witnessed her thrive in her role and serve with distinction. Today, she is retired from both military and federal government service. She is a proud mother of two adult children and a grandmother of two. Her eldest daughter was born in Germany during her time in service.

Lisa continues to support the Veteran community by attending Veteran-focused events and remaining active in support initiatives. While health reasons limit her hobbies, she enjoys spending time with family and cheering on her grandson at soccer games. She is passionate about encouraging other women veterans to embrace their strength and resilience.

When asked what she wants the public to know about women Veterans, Lisa says, “They are strong, capable, and resilient.”

Her advice to fellow women transitioning from military to civilian life is to “take each day individually, connect with other veterans, and never be afraid to express your thoughts and use your skills.”





WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"Nothing is impossible—it says 'I'm possible'!"





WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"A wise woman wishes
to be no one's enemy;
a wise woman refuses
to be anyone's victim."
~ Maya Angelou

Jacqueline

BY SHERYL BINETTI

Jacqueline Isabell proudly served in the United States Army Reserve for more than 26 years. As a human resource officer, she advised commanders on HR support for all personnel, maintained daily accountability and reporting, managed administrative duties, and oversaw all personnel actions.

During her career, she supported the Global War on Terrorism and the Iraq War. For her exemplary service in Iraq—where she managed the second-best post office in the country—Jacqueline was awarded the Bronze Star.

Her most significant takeaway from military service was a deeply rooted belief in holding fast to her values and self-respect, no matter the circumstances.

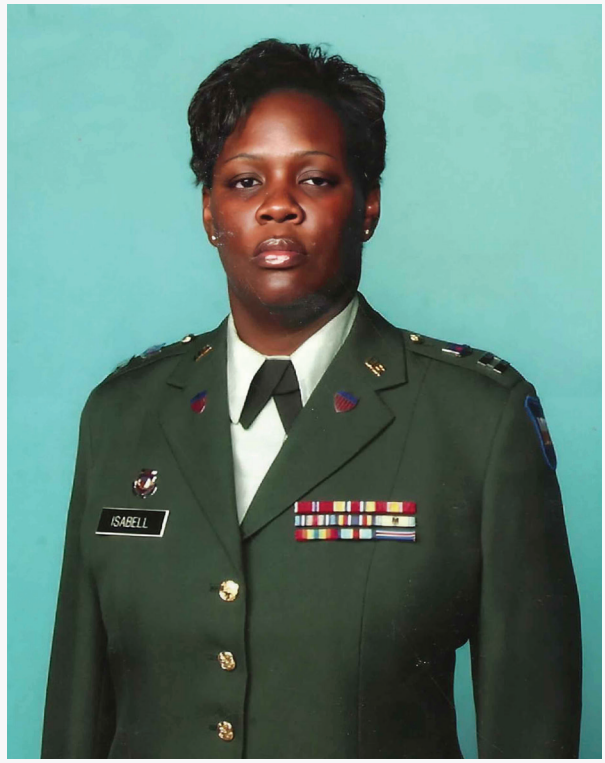
Today, Jacqueline is a proud mother to her daughter, Dallas, who is following in her footsteps and currently deployed with the Army Reserve. She is also a doting grandmother to her granddaughter, Zuri. Jacqueline now leads her own law firm—The Law Office of Jacqueline Isabell, LLC—where she handles probate issues, personal injury cases, contracts, and some criminal law. As an attorney, she continues to serve her community with the same dedication she brought to the military. Outside of work, Jacqueline gives back through Soldiers' Angels, helping distribute food to veterans. She's also active with the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and is a proud member of St. Philip's A.M.E. Church.

Her passions include spending time with her granddaughter, practicing yoga, reading, and watching crime series.

I would like the public to know that women veterans are not invisible. We stood shoulder to shoulder with our male counterparts, serving with strength, skill, and sacrifice. Our contributions are equally significant, and our stories deserve to be seen and heard. Please take the time to recognize the greatness and resilience of the women who have worn the uniform.

"My advice to fellow women Veterans is simple: find your community. Whether it's a women Veterans' group, a local VFW post, or an online network, connection is powerful. You are not alone—there's a whole sisterhood out here ready to support you."!





Tanya

BY MARTINA SCHMIDT

Tanya Corbett, a proud United States Navy Veteran, served from July 18, 2001, to March 16, 2007, as a Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class. During her military career, she worked in the surgical unit and recovery room at Portsmouth Naval Hospital, Virginia, deployed with the Fleet Hospital in Kuwait, and served aboard the USS Iwo Jima as a search and rescue corpsman.

Tanya participated in several Joint Task Force missions and was part of the search and recovery medical team on the USS Iwo Jima, which served as the flagship during Hurricane Katrina. She also supported Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom , gaining a broader perspective on life through her experiences in diverse cultures and environments.

Today, Tanya is the owner of Inner Harmony Wellness Center, where she continues her mission of service as a spiritual doula, licensed intuitive massage therapist, and certified practitioner of sound and vibration. She is also certified in Reiki and Karmetic Reiki, offering a supportive space for healing and personal growth.

A devoted mother of three and a new grandmother, Tanya cherishes time with her family. She is married to a fellow veteran, and together, they have built a life rooted in mutual respect and support.

Tanya is passionate about embodying positive energy, enjoying outdoor activities, traveling, and engaging with her community through her wellness center, Inner Harmony Wellness.

As a woman veteran, Tanya wants the world to recognize that women in the military live by a code of unwavering loyalty, even when faced with challenges that test their limits.

Her advice to fellow women Veterans adjusting to civilian life is clear: "It's perfectly okay to not be okay, and asking for help is a sign of strength. Remember, the most powerful thing you can do is to prioritize your own well-being."





WORDS TO LIVE BY:

"Embrace the strength of your intuition, for within you lies the wisdom of the ancients; let your heart be the compass that guides you through the storms of life, and rise like the moon, radiant and unapologetic in your luminous authenticity."





WORDS TO LIVE BY:
““Do not let life happen
to you—happen to it.”
~ frequently said by
her father

Jonette

BY SHERYL BINETTI

Jonette Bell proudly served in the United States Army Reserve from August 2000 to August 2004. Working in administration, she was deployed to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, assigned as a secretary to the 2125th Garrison Support Unit. She handled all information related to units preparing for overseas deployment, thereby supporting the war overseas.

Jonette continues to live by the significant lesson to never let anyone tell her that she can't do something due to a disability or a lack of intelligence. It is paramount to always know that she, and you, can be anyone or anything with the right amount of discipline.

Today, Jonette is a devoted single mother raising her 18-year-old son. Her son was recently accepted to Kennesaw State University upon his high school graduation this year.

Professionally, Jonette works as a behavioral health counselor at Lee Arrendale State Prison in Alto, Georgia. Prior to that, she worked as a support services coordinator for Head Start, supporting her district's educational programs.

Jonette is deeply involved in her community. She volunteers assisting with hunting and fishing events with Wounded Warrior. She also gives her time and talent tutoring school children at the Butler Center in Gainesville, Georgia, where she also supports events for Safari Club International Sports Club.

Hunting, fishing, painting, and creative arts bring Jonette joy and peace. These hobbies bring her a joyful peace while reflecting on her vibrant spirit and resilience.

To the public, Jonette wants to make one thing clear: "As women veterans, we are just people living our lives, and we deserve the same respect as everyone else."

She leaves fellow women Veterans with this message:"Do not be discouraged by anyone who says that you cannot or shouldn't do something because you are female. You are as capable as anyone else!"





Tonya

BY MARTINA SCHMIDT

Tonya Gage served in the United States Air Force from 1991 to 2001, as a dental assistant, later advancing to the role of dental hygienist. Her responsibilities included managing dental clinic operations, overseeing dental education programs, and ensuring compliance with medical standards. She held significant roles as the non-commissioned officer in charge (NCOIC) of both dental education and training and the hospital squadron's education and training department at Beale Air Force Base, Calif. One of the highlights of her career was her 1999 deployment to Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, for a humanitarian mission.

Tonya's military career instilled in her a deep sense of camaraderie and equipped her with an unmatched set of skills from her work in hospitals and clinics. After retiring from the Department of Veterans Affairs, where she served as a vocational rehabilitation counselor, she launched her own business, Dragonfly Training and Logistics, LLC. Her company is dedicated to providing training on veteran and beneficiary benefits, focusing on ensuring that no woman veteran is left behind.

Tonya is deeply committed to her community, serving as the Ambassador for the Military Women's Memorial representing Georgia and actively participating in the Georgia Military Women social networking group. She is also a valued volunteer with the She Served Initiative, where she leads as the Outreach Coordinator for the State of Georgia. In addition, Tonya holds a leadership position within Kappa Epsilon Psi Military Sorority, Incorporated, further demonstrating her dedication to service and sisterhood.

Walking local trails, traveling with friends, and cherishing time with her family are among Tonya's favorite activities. She enjoys moments with her beloved parents Jim and Lucy, her son Trevor, and her 7-year-old Rat Terrier, S'naya.

Tonya hopes the public will understand that women veterans are often overlooked despite being among the first to take on missions. For years, we've worked behind the scenes in decision-making roles, contributing frequently without receiving recognition. Today, we are changing that narrative, stepping into the spotlight to lead and influence every mission. All women veterans must be able to share their stories and leave their mark on history.

Her advice to fellow women transitioning to civilian life is simple yet profound: "Self-care is mandatory. Take care of your health, apply for your benefits, and always prioritize yourself."





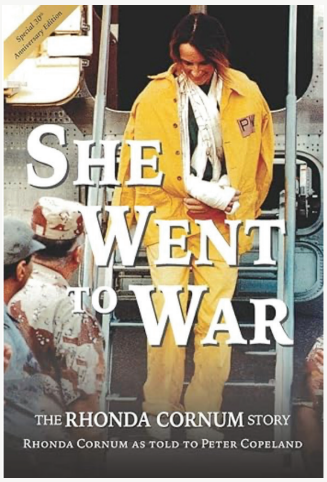
WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"It took me quite a long time to develop a voice, and now that I have it, I am not going to be silent."
~ Madeleine Albright



Recommended reading

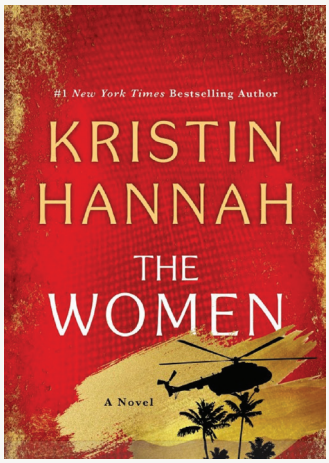
1

She Went to War
by Rhonda Cornum



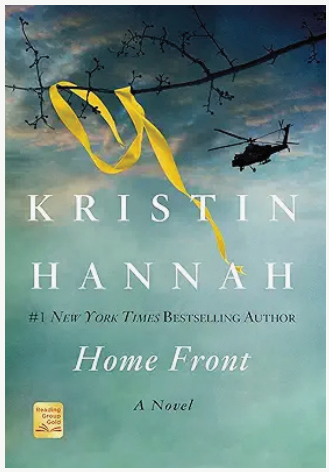
2

The Women
by Kristin Hannah



3

Home Front
By Kristin Hannah



Looking for books that spotlight the strength, sacrifice, and resilience of women in the military? Each of these books sheds light on different aspects of military women's experiences—raw, real, and unforgettable.

SHE WENT TO WAR | RECOMMENDED BY VETERAN JEANNIE COLMISH

A compelling firsthand account of U.S. Army Major Rhonda Cornum's experience as a flight surgeon during the Gulf War, her capture by Iraqi forces after her helicopter was shot down, and her harrowing time as a prisoner of war. The book details her resilience, courage, and professionalism in the face of physical injury, psychological trauma, and sexual assault. Cornum's story challenges stereotypes about women in combat and highlights the strength and capability of female service members under the most extreme conditions.

THE WOMEN | RECOMMENDED BY VETERAN JOANNE MELEAR

A powerful historical novel that follows the journey of Frances "Frankie" McGrath, a young nurse who volunteers to serve in the Vietnam War. As she confronts the brutal realities of combat and the emotional toll of caring for wounded soldiers, Frankie's life is transformed by both the horrors of war and the deep bonds she forms with fellow service members. Upon returning home, she faces a different kind of battle—one against societal indifference and the erasure of women's contributions to the war effort. The novel explores themes of courage, sisterhood, and the fight for recognition in a world that often overlooks women's sacrifices.

HOME FRONT | RECOMMENDED BY VETERAN MARTINA SCHMIDT

An emotional and thought-provoking novel that follows Jolene Zarkades, a National Guard helicopter pilot, wife, and mother, who is unexpectedly deployed to Iraq. As she navigates the dangers of war, her husband, Michael—a civilian and defense attorney—must take on the responsibilities of caring for their daughters alone, while grappling with his own inner struggles. The story explores the strain military service places on families, the challenges of reintegration after combat, and the emotional wounds that linger long after the battle ends. It's a poignant portrayal of love, duty, and resilience on both the front lines and the home front.

VETERAN BUSINESS DIRECTORY

SUPPORTING **WOMEN VETERAN-OWNED BUSINESSES** IS A CRUCIAL STEP TOWARD FOSTERING EQUALITY & EMPOWERMENT. WOMEN WHO HAVE SERVED IN THE MILITARY BRING UNIQUE SKILLS AND EXPERIENCES TO THE ENTREPRENEURIAL WORLD, AND BY SUPPORTING THEIR VENTURES, WE NOT ONLY ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR SACRIFICE BUT ALSO HARNESS THEIR POTENTIAL AS VALUABLE CONTRIBUTORS TO OUR ECONOMY.

THE VET™ Space

www.thevetspace.org



https://linktr.ee/jennifermcneill

HIVEPROMO

www.hivepromo.com

RALLY POINT GRILLE™

https://rallypointgrille.com

MILITARY WOMEN STRONG
Hope 4 Veterans

www.Hope4veterans.org

NEW U FITNESS

www.newufitnessjax.com

GI GREEN
VETERANS GROW TOGETHER

https://hope4veterans.org/board-of-directors/GIGreen.org



http://heavenonearthevents.com/

CHRISTOPHER BURKS
SCHOLARSHIP FOUNDATION INCORPORATED

https://christopherburksscholarshipfoundationinc.org

CONSCIOUSLY AWARE

www.consciouslyaware.com

ANCHORED FAMILY CHIROPRACTIC

https://anchoredchirojax.com/

Autumn Faith

www.autumnfaithcompany.com

Wildflower Massage
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https://linktr.ee/wildflower_massage

CJ Forward
MOVE IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

www.straightforwardhomesales.com

design conciege @Home

https://designconciergeathome.com

KIMBERLY MULLINS

www.kmullins.shop

Humble Warrior
WELLNESS & YOGA

humblewarrior.org/

Garden Believer
& Aquascaping

www.facebook.com/GardenBeliever/

VILLAGERS FOR VETERANS
HELPING VETERANS REGAIN THEIR INDEPENDENCE

www.villagersforveterans.org

HOPE
CENTER FOR VETERANS

https://hopecenterforveterans.org/

Georgia Military Women

www.facebook.com/georgiamilitarywomen/

Shon Barnwell EVENTS

www.barnwellevents.com/

FOOT SOLUTIONS

www.footsolutions.com/greenville

Inner Harmony
WELLNESS CENTER

https://www.innerharmonywellness.co/

The PEACH Pit
HORSES helping heal your heart and mind

https://thepeachpitgeorgia.org

BEHIND THE SCENES: JOHNS CREEK VETERANS ASSOCIATION















*Did you know **women** are the **fastest-growing** segment of the military and Veteran populations? That's just one of the reasons we bring you ...* ***She Served***.

*Every individual featured in this magazine is **unique**, yet they share **similar** experiences from active duty service to what happened in the days, months and years after She Served.*

*We hope the Veterans we featured in this issue of this magazine **inspired you** with examples of their leadership, resourcefulness, knowledge and sacrifice.*

Your generosity enables us to continue the She Served Initiative. Donations help us continue to tell the **amazing stories of our women Veterans.** Additionally, it furthers our mission to raise awareness that women served in the United States Military **and** are Veterans too.

You can make a donation on the website, **https://sheservedinitiative.org/donate** or scan the QR code.

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