SHE SERVED MAGAZINE

Celebrating Women Veterans



★ ***SPECIAL FEATURES:***

TWO NAVY VETERANS REUNITED AFTER YEARS APART

A MOTHER & DAUGHTER'S LEGACY OF SERVICE

SHE SERVED ISSUE 13:

HOPE 4 VETERANS VOICES FOR VALOR EDITION

21 WOMEN VETERANS TELL THEIR STORIES

MILITARY WOMEN
Hope 4 Veterans
STRONG



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



This was our second opportunity to partner with Hope 4 Veterans, and once again, it was an unforgettable experience. This time, we were honored to be part of **Hope 4 Veterans' special event, Voices for Valor.**

The Voices for Her Valor project was created to ensure that military women, spouses, caregivers, and military youth have a space where they can be seen, heard, and celebrated. As these stories continue to unfold, they reveal a powerful common thread: strength is often passed from one woman to another.

One of the inspiring stories we captured was that of a mother and daughter who both served in the military during different generations. Their shared commitment to service has created a unique and lasting bond. You can read more about their story on page 54.

During the evening recognition program hosted by Hope 4 Veterans, two Navy Veterans, Rose and Laquita, got quite a surprise when they reunited after more than 20 years. The pair had served together aboard the SS John F. Kennedy (CV-67) and hadn't crossed paths since their Navy days. Their chance meeting quickly became one of the most memorable moments of the event, filled with stories, laughter, and plenty of catching up. Read their story on page 24.

The women featured in this special edition were energetic, talented, and a joy to photograph. It was clear that they shared a special bond through Hope 4 Veterans, creating a welcoming atmosphere filled with support, encouragement, and friendship. As we got to know these remarkable women, we also discovered four talented authors among them. We couldn't pass up the opportunity to feature their work and introduce readers to their incredible books. Their collective talents span military history, poetry, children's literature, fantasy, romance, and inspiring stories of resilience. Be sure to turn to page 58 to learn more about their books and literary journeys.

As always, a special thank-you goes to Hope 4 Veterans Founder and President, Lynn Geiser. Her hospitality, generosity, and dedication to serving veterans are truly remarkable. Once again, she made us feel right at home, and we thoroughly enjoyed connecting with the incredible women of Hope 4 Veterans. Thank you, Lynn, for another memorable experience!

We would also like to extend a special thank-you to RE/MAX Blue Coast and ComForCare Home Care for generously allowing the She Served Initiative and Hope 4 Veterans to use their office space for this photoshoot. Their support helped create a comfortable and welcoming environment for the women featured in this special edition, and we greatly appreciate their partnership.

Martina Schmidt



Photograph courtesy of Torophoto at Torophoto.co

VOICES FOR VALOR:
A Legacy of Strength Across Generations

WRITTEN BY HOPE 4 VETERANS

What does strength look like? Sometimes strength looks like a grandmother raising her right hand and becoming the first woman in her family to serve her country. Sometimes strength looks like a daughter following in her mother's footsteps and choosing military service. Sometimes strength looks like a granddaughter discovering her voice through art, storytelling and creative expression. At Hope 4 Veterans, we call this a Generation of Strength.



For more than a decade, Hope4Veterans has supported military women, Veterans, military spouses, caregivers, and their families through peer support, therapeutic art programs, health literacy education, resource navigation, emergency assistance and community connection. Our mission is rooted in reducing isolation, homelessness and suicide while helping military women discover their purpose, build supportive relationships and access the resources they have earned through service.

Through our programs, we have witnessed firsthand the power of women supporting women. We have seen military sisters become mentors, caregivers become advocates, and women who once felt isolated become leaders in their communities. Most importantly, we have seen how strength, resilience, and wisdom are often passed from one generation to the next.

Hope 4 Veterans began noticing a common theme among participants: Women Veterans were eager to share stories of military service, resilience and overcoming challenges. At the same time, young women from military-connected families were looking for creative ways to express themselves, tell their stories, and connect with others who understood their experiences.

We asked a simple question: What would happen if we brought these generations together? This simple question led to the creation of The Voices for Valor Pilot Program. The Voices for Valor pilot program ran for two months, meeting every Saturday and creating a dedicated space for participants to connect, create and share their experiences. The program began at Third Space Improv in St. Augustine and later received support from the Elks Lodge of St. Augustine, which generously provided space for participants to gather and continue their work. During the program, Veterans and community members developed and shared their Voices for Valor stories, which were transformed into original works of art for public display. The initiative was made possible through funding from the Tommy Bledsoe Art Grant in St. Augustine, helping bring these powerful stories to life through creative expression and community engagement.

The Voices for Valor Pilot Program brought together eight women Veterans and three female youth participants in a small-group setting where art, storytelling and connection became tools for healing, learning and growth. The three youth participants explored creative storytelling and artistic expression, while women Veterans shared lessons learned through military service and life experiences.

What emerged was much more than an art project. It became a space where generations listened to one another, learned from one another and discovered that their stories were connected.

Whether through therapeutic art programs, Women Veteran Recognition events, health literacy workshops, peer support groups, storytelling projects, photography initiatives, family events or emergency assistance, our goal is to create spaces where military women feel seen, heard, valued and connected.

Voices for Valor represents that mission in action. The program demonstrates that every generation has wisdom to share and something new to learn. It shows that art can open doors to meaningful conversations, storytelling can inspire healing, and connection can reduce the isolation that so many military families experience. Voices for Valor is a celebration of military women, military families, and the generations of strength that continue to shape our communities. Because when one woman tells her story, another finds the courage to tell hers. And when generations come together, their voices become something even more powerful—a legacy that will inspire the next generation of leaders, dreamers and changemakers for years to come.


SPIRES


THE WAR WITHIN




HOPE4VETERANS


SHE BUILDS
SHE INSPIRES

Nicole

MARTINA SCHMIDT

Nicole Jordan, who served in the United States Army from 1989 to 2009, said her decision to join the military began with a candid conversation with her mother. She was encouraged to enlist because the Army could offer opportunities beyond what was available at home. Although she did not initially understand the differences between branches, she knew one thing clearly:If sacrifice was required, she wanted to serve on the ground. That conviction made the U.S. Army her only choice. Nicole built a 20-year career defined by leadership, technical expertise and a lasting commitment to the people she served alongside.

During her service, Nicole worked as a communications and secure-equipment maintenance manager, overseeing advanced systems critical to secure military operations. She managed maintenance programs, supervised personnel and ensured communication systems remained reliable and mission-ready. Her responsibilities included advising leadership on technical issues that directly affected operational readiness.

Nicole earned recognition throughout her career for both her leadership and innovation. She received an on-the-spot award for developing a training program that achieved a 100 percent success rate, a milestone unmatched across her division.

She later served as a drill sergeant, where she trained and mentored new soldiers preparing for military service. Known for her professionalism and fairness, Nicole was recognized during workplace climate assessments and selected to represent the Army in local high schools to support recruitment.

While deployed to Iraq, Nicole independently managed communications and electronic support functions typically handled by multiple senior leaders. She ensured all systems remained secure, operational and fully mission-ready, contributing to her receiving a Meritorious Service Medal for her performance.

For Nicole, the most meaningful part of her service is the impact she had on others. Former soldiers have approached her years later to express gratitude, thanking her for her leadership and support. She considers those moments her greatest legacy.

Now retired, Nicole continues to pursue creative passions. She is the author of Poistry, a collection of poems that blends verse with historical content, and she has directed and performed in stage productions. A mother of four, she remains dedicated to creativity through writing, design and artistic expression.

Nicole hopes the public better understands the strength required of women Veterans. “We stand shoulder to shoulder,” she said, emphasizing their equal commitment and the balance many maintain between service and family. Her advice to fellow women Veterans transitioning to civilian life is to seek support, build community and allow space for growth.





WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"This is a man's world.
But it wouldn't be nothin',
nothin' without a woman
or a girl."

~ James Brown and
Betty Jean Newsome





WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"People will never
forget how you
made them feel."
~ Maya Angelou

Marla

BY SHERYL BINETTI

Marla J. Albertie, Ph. D., served in the United States Navy from 1995 to 1998 as a Ship Serviceman, supervising shipboard retail operations while managing inventory, financial accountability, logistics and customer service for hundreds of sailors during deployment. Eager to see the world and pay for her education, she entered military service ready to embrace both opportunity and responsibility.

Serving as a young petty officer, Marla supervised the ship's retail store and quickly stepped into a leadership role that demanded precision, maturity and strong organizational skills. Her commitment to operational excellence earned her the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal, recognizing superior performance and dedication to mission readiness during her service in the Gulf War era.

One of Marla's most lasting lessons from military service is that leadership begins with serving others. She credits the Navy with teaching her discipline, accountability and resilience under pressure, while reinforcing that mission success depends on trust, teamwork and leaders who genuinely care for their people.

Today, Marla is an industrial-organizational psychologist, assistant professor, entrepreneur, author and professional speaker specializing in leadership development, workplace autonomy and workforce training. She teaches at Colorado Technical University and Southern New Hampshire University. She is also the founder and CEO of several mission-driven organizations, including Marla J. Albertie, LLC and I/O For Teens Inc., both focused on developing leaders and expanding opportunities for future generations.



Family remains central to Marla's life. She is supported by her fiancé and treasures her role as a parent and grandparent. She now has the honor of raising her grandson, a responsibility that has deepened her sense of purpose and strengthened her commitment to building a future grounded in love, stability and opportunity.

A strong believer in visibility and connection, Marla wants the public to know that women Veterans are not invisible. She believes their strength, resilience and leadership deserve to be seen, valued and honored.

Marla advises women transitioning into civilian life to accept fear, because courage is moving forward despite it. Uncertain steps still build strength, even when it is not yet visible. She stresses choosing supportive relationships, since the people around you influence your direction and opportunities. Most importantly, she reminds women Veterans to make room for fun—because life after service is not only about rebuilding, but also rediscovering joy and creating a meaningful, happy life.





Darlene BY SHERYL BINETTI

Darlene Allmaras served in the United States Navy from 1991 to 1995 as a radioman. At 17, with graduation approaching and no clear plan ahead, Darlene found an unexpected direction after seeing a group of sailors in uniform while walking through her hometown.

After enlisting, Darlene trained as a radioman, a communications specialist responsible for sending, receiving and managing critical information between ships, aircraft and command centers. After completing A School in San Diego, she was flown directly to Bahrain to join her ship during the Gulf War. Serving overseas at 18 years old required maturity and adaptability, and Darlene quickly learned the pace and responsibility that came with military operations in an active conflict environment.

Among the honors earned during service, Darlene is especially proud of receiving the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal for exemplary performance. While stationed in Guam she worked with the Special Olympics, teaching children with special needs how to swim and compete in relay events.

One of Darlene's strongest takeaways from military life is the lasting sense of family created through service; the friendships formed during deployment and shared responsibility remain deeply important. Military service also allowed her to visit 11 countries, broadening her perspective early in adulthood.

Today, Darlene lives in Neptune Beach, Florida, where she works as a benefits compliance specialist for an insurance broker. She helps clients remain aligned with Internal Revenue Service regulations and reporting requirements.

At the heart of Darlene's life is her family, which continues to shape her priorities and purpose. She has been married for 23 years, has two children, and takes pride in seeing her daughter established in Nashville while her son attends Florida Atlantic University.

Darlene serves on the board of Mayport Navy League and remains active with the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars. She is passionate about supporting Veterans and spends Saturdays golfing in an American Legion league.

Darlene wants the public to understand that women Veterans have served with equal commitment, skill and sacrifice across every area of military service.

To fellow women Veterans, Darlene encourages patience, connection and the wisdom to seek help when needed.





WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams."
~ Eleanor Roosevelt



WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"Life is too short to be anything but happy."
~ José N. Harris



Amanda BY SHERYL BINETTI

Amanda Damasiewicz served in the United States Navy from 1997 to 2019 as a personnel specialist, following in the footsteps of her two grandfathers, both Navy Veterans. Inspired by their service, she built a military career centered on supporting sailors through administrative precision, personnel accountability, and financial readiness.

As a personnel specialist, Amanda reviewed pay accounts, maintained service records, and ensured personnel information remained accurate and current—work essential to supporting military readiness and daily operations. Her role required trust, consistency, and close attention to detail while helping service members manage important career and financial matters.

During her career, Amanda supported operations connected to the Global War on Terrorism and earned numerous commendations, including the Afghanistan Campaign Medal, Joint Service Commendation Medal, Joint Service Achievement Medal, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Medal, three Presidential Unit Citations, the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, and the Meritorious Unit Commendation.

One of Amanda's strongest lessons from military service is that trauma affects every Veteran differently. She believes that while many may share similar symptoms, each person processes difficult experiences in their own way and deserves patience and understanding.

Today, Amanda is retired and enjoying the opportunity to focus on personal goals while exploring her next professional chapter. Family remains a source of pride, especially her 21-year-old daughter, a business major at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and a member of the National Society of Leadership and Success.

Amanda also serves as an ambassador for K9s For Warriors, supporting a mission that reflects her passion for helping Veterans facing mental health challenges. She enjoys staying active and values the discipline and balance that fitness brings to daily life.

As for the public, Amanda wants them to understand that every woman Veteran served and now carries her own experiences and trauma from military life.

Her advice to fellow women Veterans is simple: be patient and never be afraid to ask for help. Her chosen reminder is, "Life is too short to be anything but happy."





Diana

BY SHERYL BINETTI

Drawn to military service by a desire for structure, purpose and meaningful impact, **Diana Chaves Fraga** built a Navy career centered on caring for others in some of their most vulnerable moments. Serving in the United States Navy from 2013 to 2022 as a hospital corpsman, she provided medical support to service members and civilians across clinical and operational settings.

At Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, Diana cared for elderly Cuban nationals who had been granted asylum decades earlier after serving the U.S. Navy. as civilian support. Many required full-time support because of age-related conditions, including dementia. Her work included bathing, feeding, mobility assistance, emergency response, and remaining with patients during urgent medical situations, including repeated CPR interventions. The physical demands of that role contributed to a long-term brachial plexus injury affecting her dominant hand.

Later, while stationed in Spain, Diana worked closely with surgical teams and trained as an anesthesia technician. She also served as a translator and patient advocate, helping American service members navigate medical care in Spanish hospitals during childbirth and surgical procedures. Known for her reliability, she at one point managed 19 additional duties while supporting pre-operative care and post-anesthesia recovery.

One of Diana's strongest lessons from military service is that strength is not only physical, but emotional, mental, and deeply human. She learned how to remain steady during high-stress moments while caring for others at their most vulnerable, while also recognizing the importance of protecting her own well-being.

Today, Diana continues serving through advocacy and service to Veterans by helping them to navigate the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability claims process. She also serves as an office manager for a mental health counseling practice, where she supports both providers and clients dealing with trauma, anxiety and life transitions.

As a mother of two, Diana says her children remain her greatest motivation. Her three dogs also bring comfort and structure to daily life, especially Kali, her goldendoodle, currently training as a service dog.

Diana wants the public to understand that women Veterans carry stories of strength, sacrifice, resilience and survival that are often unseen.

Her advice to fellow women Veterans is to give themselves grace during transition, take life one step at a time, and remember that military service does not define them but rather strengthens who they already are.







WORDS TO LIVE BY:

““Try not to become a person of success, but rather a person of value.”

~ Albert Einstein

WORDS TO LIVE BY:

"I am the place where God shines through,
For He and I are one, not two.
He wants me where, and as I am,
I need not fret, nor fear, nor plan.
If I will be relaxed and free
He'll carry out his work through me.
~ Author unknown



Anna BY JULIE MILLER

Anna Irby served in the United States Army from 2000 to 2012. After graduating from high school, recruiters arrived at her front door and presented opportunities that felt more promising than anything available at the time. Anna signed her contract and left for basic training almost immediately, a decision she now considers one of the best she ever made.

Anna began in military intelligence as an imagery analyst, working to transform visual intelligence into operational understanding for military leaders and units on the ground. As drone technology entered combat operations, Anna saw its early use during service in Kosovo and later became a drone platoon leader, helping provide overhead security for troops in combat. Her work centered on using imagery intelligence to help tell the battlefield story in ways commanders could act on quickly and effectively.

Anna supported operations in Kosovo and Macedonia during 2001 and later served with the 297th Military Intelligence Battalion during the Iraq invasion in 2003. She participated in providing intelligence support from the rear so that brigade combat team structures could shift intelligence assets forward. After becoming an officer, Anna deployed to Afghanistan with the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team in 2008, 2009, and 2010. She considers becoming a paratrooper and serving with the 173rd among the proudest chapters of her military career.

One of the most lasting lessons Anna carries from military service was learning the value of following operational timelines, a discipline she says became easier with maturity and ultimately shaped how she approached life beyond the Army.

Today, Anna's military medical retirement allows full attention to family life and community work. As the mother of two autistic children, she dedicates much of her time to helping create spaces where children with social and communication challenges can build friendships and confidence. She helped launch Jax Social Skills Playgroup in Jacksonville, Fla., and founded Spectrum Alliance, a nonprofit created to strengthen families navigating similar experiences.

Anna enjoys home improvement projects and creating environments that bring joy to her family, including a wonderful special needs community that has sprung up around her where she discovered her true passion, providing a safe haven for children in need.

To fellow women Veterans, Anna encourages giving yourself grace during transition, allowing room to grieve the loss of military identity while trusting that the next chapter will unfold in its own time.





Jacqueline

BY SHERYL BINETTI

Jacqueline Dublin was inspired by a recruitment poster. She became determined to show the men in her family that she, too, could be part of the best. She served in the United States Marine Corps from 1978 to 1988 as a supply and administration specialist, supporting operational readiness through logistics, procurement, and command-level administrative support. She managed supply operations at multiple duty stations. She also worked in the field alongside infantry units.



In addition to her logistics responsibilities, Jacqueline served as an administrative clerk for commanding officers at various duty stations, balancing operational demands with command support. She also traveled on temporary duty assignments during several joint missions, where she was entrusted with supply accountability for specialized operations.

Among her proudest accomplishments, Jacqueline was recognized as Marine of the Quarter and received a special commendation after identifying improved vendors for truck engines and critical supply equipment, saving the Marine Corps money while strengthening procurement efficiency.

One of Jacqueline's lasting lessons from her military service is the value of structure, discipline and teamwork. She learned that mission success depends on people performing at their best while protecting one another and maintaining readiness. She also values working alongside people from many backgrounds.

Today, Jacqueline is medically retired. She remains actively involved with Hope 4 Veterans, where she volunteers in multiple capacities and co-teaches a therapeutic art program designed to support healing and connection. Jacqueline treasures time with her daughter and grandchildren and values the deep bond they have built over the years through love, support, and shared experiences.

Jacqueline is passionate about helping women Veterans find safe spaces, stronger resources and genuine sisterhood. She believes many women Veterans need places where they can speak openly, feel understood and strengthen their mental health and self-care.

The public, Jacqueline believes, needs to see that many women Veterans carry experiences others may never fully understand. These women deserve grace, patience, and respect, rather than minimizing feelings or dismissing challenges. For Jacqueline, acknowledgment and understanding can make a lasting difference.

For fellow women Veterans adjusting to civilian life, Jacqueline's message is clear: no question is the wrong question, and asking for help is a sign of strength. She encourages women to take the first step toward support, knowing there are sisters, organizations, and safe spaces ready to help without judgment. Her reminder is that no matter what stage of life a woman is in, she does not have to navigate it alone.

WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"Little by little, a little becomes a lot."
~ Tanzanian proverb



WORDS TO LIVE BY:

"The way to get started is to quit talking and begin doing."
~ Walt Disney



Jessica BY SHERYL BINETTI

Jessica Johnson served in the United States Air Force from 2005 to 2007 as a Security Forces Airman, supporting military readiness through administrative operations during the Iraq War era. Inspired to serve after witnessing events of the September 11 attacks, she joined the Civil Air Patrol as a high school freshman, an experience that strengthened her desire to enter military service and ultimately led her into the Air Force.

Although Security Forces are often associated with military police duties, Jessica spent much of her service supporting squadron operations behind the scenes. Her responsibilities included preparing passport paperwork for deploying personnel, processing administrative records, editing awards and decorations, and assisting both the commander and first sergeant with daily operational needs. She also helped new squadron members settle into base life and supported service members completing out-processing requirements.

While she did not deploy, Jessica served during the Iraq War and played an important role in supporting those preparing to leave and those returning home. One of her strongest takeaways from military service is that no matter how long someone serves, military life leaves a lasting impact both physically and personally.

Today, Jessica works as a freelance graphic designer and independent author, creating branding, logos, advertisements and company marketing materials for a variety of clients. Her creative work includes logo development for media personalities and small businesses, while her writing career includes publishing both a New Adult romance novel and the first of two books in a fantasy series. She independently designs and formats covers, writes, edits, and manages marketing through self-publishing platforms, including Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing.

Jessica also supports Hope 4 Veterans by helping design books for the organization and for fellow authors connected to its mission.
Family remains central to Jessica's life. She and her husband, now both in second marriages, first dated in high school before military distance sent them in different directions. Today they share life with their 17-year-old daughter, who plans to pursue aerospace engineering, along with their two beloved Alaskan Klee Kai dogs.

Jessica wants the public to know that women Veterans exist, carry trauma and injuries, and deserve recognition equal to their male counterparts.

Her advice to fellow women Veterans is to hang in there, even when others criticize or do not understand military life. Jessica believes there are people who will support you, even without fully understanding your experience, and that in time you will find your people.





A Friendship Anchored by Service:

Two Navy Veterans reunite after more than 20 years

WRITTEN BY JULIE MILLER

More than two decades had passed since Laquita and Rose last stood side by side, but when they reunited at the Voices for Valor recognition dinner, the time seemed to disappear.

The two women first met in 2001 aboard the USS John F. Kennedy (CV-67), known to sailors simply as the USS JFK. Both were in their early 20s, serving as undesignated seamen during a period marked by uncertainty, sacrifice and national service following the events of the September 11 attacks. From 2001 to 2004, they served together during Operation Enduring Freedom, navigating both the demands of military life and the friendships that often become family at sea.

Assigned to different divisions—Laquita in 2nd Division and Rose in 3rd Division—the two crossed paths aboard the massive aircraft carrier. Even among thousands of sailors serving onboard, hundreds of them women, genuine friendship had a way of finding its footing. Rose remembers that despite the ship's size, sailors naturally gravitated toward people who understood their experiences, creating bonds that lasted long after military service ended. For Laquita, it was Rose's demeanor that first drew her in.

The last time Laquita and Rose saw each other was in 2003. Life moved on. Careers changed, families grew, and the years quietly slipped by. Yet neither woman forgot the friendship they built while serving together. Both had thought about reconnecting over the years, wondering where life had taken the other. ***Then came the reunion.***

The moment they embraced, memories came flooding back—long days at sea, underway replenishments, shared meals, and time spent together during port visits in Bahrain. Seeing her friend instantly transported each woman back aboard the USS JFK, as if they had just stepped off the ship the day before. "I was ecstatic," Laquita recalled of seeing Rose again after more than 20 years. Rose said it felt as though no time had passed at all. Laquita agreed.

Their story speaks to a truth understood by many Veterans: shared service creates bonds unlike any other. Through deployments, challenges and moments of uncertainty, service members develop a camaraderie built on trust, resilience, and mutual understanding. "It's a bond that you can't share with others," Laquita said.

Today, both women hope their reunion serves as a reminder to cherish old friendships and stay connected. Life moves quickly, and time is never guaranteed. "Stay connected," Laquita said. "Time is short. Let's spend it well."

Their reunion also highlights the importance of preserving and celebrating the stories of women Veterans. These friendships are more than personal memories; they are part of military history. They reflect the resilience, sacrifice, and support systems that helped countless women navigate military service and life beyond the uniform.

More than 20 years after serving together aboard the USS John F. Kennedy, Laquita and Rose's friendship remains anchored by the same thing that first brought them together: service, sisterhood and a bond that time could not erase.



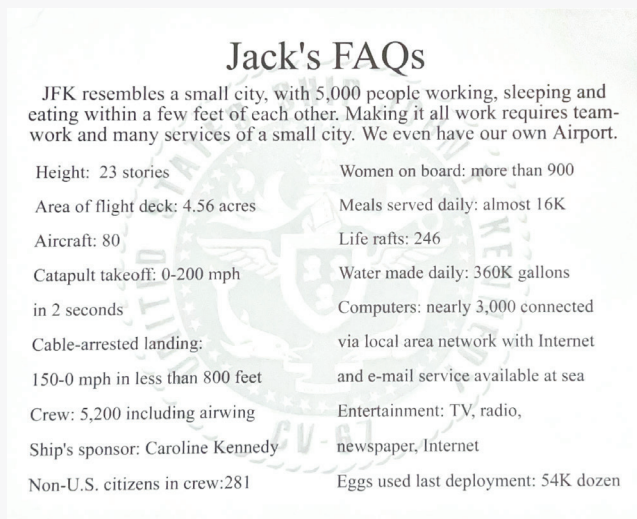


Photo Credits: USS John F. Kennedy (CV-67) Naval History and Heritage Command photograph, NH 106553-KN.


USS John F. Kennedy
CV 67
OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM
"...let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend or oppose any foe to assure the survival and success of liberty."
–President John Fitzgerald Kennedy

Rose

BY SHERYL BINETTI

From the deck of a Navy ship to the halls of higher education, **Rose Morisseau-Moise** has built a life centered on service, and community impact.

For Rose, the events of Sept. 11, 2001, were more than a national tragedy. Growing up in Brooklyn, New York, she witnessed firsthand the attacks that changed the nation and inspired her to serve.

Motivated by a commitment to service and country, Rose joined the United States Navy in October 2001. She served until 2004 as a Boatswain's Mate Third Class Petty Officer. During her service, Rose supported shipboard operations, coordinated personnel, and helped maintain operational readiness. Her duties required strong communication skills and attention to detail to ensure missions were completed safely and efficiently. She also supported operations during the Global War on Terrorism.

For her contributions, Rose earned the National Defense Service Medal, Good Conduct Medal, Sea Service Deployment Ribbon and Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal.

After leaving the Navy in 2004, Rose focused on education, family and a career dedicated to helping others. She earned a master's degree and went on to serve in several impactful roles. Her career has included work in public health with the Florida Department of Health, helping students connect with resources at St. Johns River State College, and contributing to Alzheimer's research at both the University of North Florida and the University of South Florida. Today, she continues that work as a clinical researcher.

Rose enjoys cooking and spending time with family and friends. As a mother of four, she takes pride in supporting her children's achievements. One child serves as a naval officer, another recently completed an undergraduate degree, and her two younger children remain active in academics, sports and music.

Rose said, "My military service showed me that strength is not only about endurance but also about compassion, teamwork and perseverance through difficult moments."

Rose credits the Navy with providing lifelong friendships and a strong sense of community that continues to influence her life.

She hopes the public recognizes the lasting contributions women veterans make long after their military service ends. "Women veterans have served with strength, dedication, and sacrifice across every generation and every branch of service," she said. "They continue to make a lasting impact both in and out of uniform."

To women Veterans entering civilian life Rose says "the structure may change, but your leadership, discipline, resilience, and ability to adapt will always stay with you.





WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"Success is liking yourself, liking what you do, and liking how you do it."
~ Maya Angelou





WORDS TO LIVE BY:

"A strong woman knows she has strength enough for the journey, but a woman of strength knows it is in the journey where she will become strong."
~ Luke Easter

LaQuita

BY SHERYL BINETTI

LaQuita Redic-Mack served in the United States Navy from 2001 to 2004 as a postal clerk, entering military life as a single mother determined to build stability and opportunity for her child. For her, joining the Navy was both a career decision and a commitment to creating a stronger future through service, discipline and personal growth.

LaQuita worked in postal operations, supporting front-end mail services and customer transactions within military postal systems. Her responsibilities included processing mail, assisting service members with postal needs, and ensuring reliable distribution in an environment where communication from home often carried enormous emotional value. Though the work required precision and consistency, it also carried personal significance because dependable mail service connected deployed personnel to families during periods of separation. During her service, LaQuita supported both Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, contributing during a period when military operations placed increased importance on dependable logistics and communication systems. One of her strongest takeaways from military life was learning resilience and adaptability under pressure. LaQuita credits military service with strengthening self-discipline, accountability, and attention to detail, while also teaching the value of teamwork and trust in demanding environments.

Today, LaQuita works as a medical support and authorization coordinator, helping patients receive insurance approval for medical services before treatment begins. In that role, she coordinates authorizations, helps patients navigate administrative requirements, and supports access to care through detailed communication with providers and insurers.

Family remains central to LaQuita's life. She has been married to her husband, Tyrone, for 21 years, and together they have three children, including two adult children and one teenager still in high school. They are also grandparents to five grandchildren. Military service remains part of the family legacy, with both older children having also served in the U.S. Army.

LaQuita volunteers at her church, caring for nursery-aged children, and supports Hope 4 Veterans by facilitating therapeutic arts classes designed to help participants manage stress and life challenges through creative expression. Beyond her professional work, LaQuita is especially passionate about helping others recognize their strength and potential, believing one moment of encouragement can change a life. Her hobbies include swimming, hiking, nature trail walks, learning, traveling and spontaneous drives.

LaQuita wants the public to understand that women Veterans often feel overlooked in civilian life, despite serving and sacrificing equally alongside their male counterparts.





A Legacy of Stre
Across Generatio



The women, families, and supporters gathered here represent the heart of the military and
celebration of service, sacrifice, and perseverance. Their collective stories reflect the enduring b
they embody the mission of Hope 4 Veterans: creating a future where every military woman a

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ns



Veteran community. Veterans, spouses, caregivers, children and advocates stand together in onds that connect generations and the shared commitment to uplifting one another. Together, nd her family feel seen, valued, and supported. *Photograph courtesy of Torophoto at Torophoto.co*

Nikki

BY SHERYL BINETTI

Nikki Abernathy served briefly in the United States Army in 1995, influenced by a strong family tradition of military service. She grew up hearing about her grandfather's World War II Navy service in the South Pacific aboard the USS Ringgold DD-500. Drawn to hands-on work, she entered military service intending to become an aviation mechanic working on the Apache AH-64 helicopter.

During in-processing, Nikki's training path changed when bomb threats affecting Military Entrance Processing Stations delayed reporting schedules following the Oklahoma City bombing. The delay pushed her training date beyond the available window, causing her aviation specialty assignment to be dropped. Offered administrative reclassification instead, she chose to return home rather than move into a field that did not fit her strengths.

Life soon brought Nikki back into military culture when she met her future husband, who was serving as a Navy recruiter. That connection began decades of continued military involvement as a Navy spouse, mother of three, grandmother of two, and steady supporter of service families. She also spent nearly 12 years serving as a massage therapist aboard Naval Station Mayport.

Today, Nikki owns At Ease Therapeutic Bodyworks & Wellness Inc., where she works as a neuromuscular massage therapist specializing in military members, Veterans, first responders and law enforcement professionals. Her understanding of military life allows her to connect with clients in ways that support both recovery and long-term physical wellness.

Community service continues to shape Nikki's work. She has volunteered at health fairs, Fleet and Family programs, Morale, Welfare, and Recreation activities, as well as youth outreach through PAL in Jacksonville.

One of Nikki's strongest takeaways from military life was learning how quickly teamwork overrides differences. She believes trust built between people under pressure matters far more than background, because the bond formed in difficult moments often carries people through doubt.

For the public, Nikki hopes women Veterans are recognized for the wide range of roles they have carried and the capabilities they continue to demonstrate.

To women Veterans, Nikki offers simple advice: never stop learning about yourself, your community or the world around you.






AT EASE
THERAPEUTIC BODYWORKS & WELLNESS INC
EST. 2019



WORDS TO LIVE BY:

““Life rarely goes as planned, but somehow the detours usually teach you the most.”

~ Glen Powell

Ashton

BY SHERYL BINETTI

Ashton Kroner served in the United States Marine Corps from 2007 to 2015. By doing so, she fulfilled a goal that began in childhood after seeing military commercials and imagining service as the ultimate challenge. Her early interest deepened after the September 11 attacks; she developed a stronger sense of purpose and decided the Marine Corps offered the kind of discipline, meaning and service she wanted to pursue.

Ashton began her military career as a field radio operator, responsible for maintaining communication between Marine units during training and operations. Her work required setting up, operating, and troubleshooting radio systems so units could relay information, maintain command and control in unpredictable environments where communication failures could quickly affect mission success.

During deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, Ashton experienced defining moments of service. In Iraq, she served with Team Lioness, where female Marines worked with Iraqi women during operations requiring female personnel because of cultural restrictions. The assignment allowed her to serve in ways few women had experienced while gaining exposure to a different culture.

In Afghanistan, Ashton took part in dignified transfers for those killed in action. That experience permanently shaped her understanding of sacrifice and the weight carried by military families. Later in her career, she transitioned into recruiting, where she mentored and guided young men and women through the enlistment process.

One of Ashton's strongest takeaways from military life is how deeply it accelerated her growth as a person. The Marine Corps taught discipline, accountability, resilience, and leadership; those values continued shaping adulthood long after active duty ended.

Today, Ashton co-leads Veteran Cancer Network, a nonprofit advancing early detection, education, and support for Veterans and military families through advocacy and partnerships.

Family remains central to Ashton's life. She and her husband, Casey, also a Marine Corps Veteran, have been married 16 years and are raising two children, Kaydence and CJ.

Ashton also helps lead Pedal for Impact, a long-distance advocacy bicycle ride raising awareness about cancer risks affecting Veterans and military families through her non-profit VeteranCancerNetwork.org. It's important to Ashton that the public understands that women Veterans have served in serious roles, carried responsibility, and continue leading long after their military service ends.

To fellow women Veterans, Ashton encourages patience during transition and trusting that the values built in uniform remain the foundation for what comes next.





Amber BY SHERYL BINETTI

Amber Kulesza served in the United States Air Force from 2007 to 2019, answering what she describes as a calling from God to step forward in faith and serve.

Early on, Amber worked in aircraft maintenance scheduled and unscheduled. She also performed inspections, troubleshooting and repairs on A-10 and F-16 airframes to ensure flight safety and operational readiness. Later, she maintained ground vehicles supporting daily base operations, managed official mail processing and distribution and contributed to cybersecurity efforts that protected communications and information systems. Among the accomplishments she values most are improving corrosion-prevention processes, increasing efficiency by 80 percent, saving more than 100 labor hours, extending equipment life by more than five years, and helping avoid an estimated $2 million to $3 million in replacement costs.

During assignments supporting Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation New Dawn, Amber served in Japan, South Korea and Southwest Asia. She earned the Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal after completing more than 500 hours of volunteer service beyond military duties. Her efforts included equine therapy support for the Exceptional Family Member Program, volunteering with the United Service Organizations, beach cleanups and organizing cultural events. A strong takeaway that she gained from military life is the knowledge that no matter where life leads, she will always belong to the enduring sisterhood and brotherhood of Veterans.

Today, Amber serves as an ambassador for American Corporate Partners, helping connect Veterans and military families with career mentorship, education and wellness opportunities. She also founded AmbersAdventures, LLC, where she shares accessible travel resources and adaptive opportunities for Veterans and military families, drawing from her own experiences navigating post-service life.

Family connection remains deeply important to Amber, especially in her role as what she proudly calls a “super auntie,” making time to stay present in the lives of nieces and nephews across the globe despite years of military separation.

Amber wants the public to understand that women Veterans met the same standards, carried the same responsibilities and served alongside their brothers in uniform with equal commitment and professionalism. She encourages people not to assume what a woman Veteran did in service, but instead to ask and truly listen.

For women Veterans navigating civilian life, Amber often repeats the advice of a trusted mentor: do not count yourself out before you begin. Pursue opportunities boldly, apply before doubting yourself, and remember that military service has already proven you are capable.





WORDS TO LIVE BY:
““You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself in any direction you choose.”
~ Dr. Seuss



WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"No one's coming to save you, which means that no one is coming to stop you either."



Shalonda

BY JULIE MILLER

United States Air Force Veteran **Shalonda Mack** describes her military service as one of the most transformative chapters of her life, a journey that began with encouragement from her father, a former Navy servicemember.

After graduating high school, Shalonda said she lacked a clear sense of direction, despite earning good grades. Her father believed military service would provide structure and opportunity, but because she was his "baby girl," he would only support her joining the Air Force. That decision ultimately shaped the next decade of her life.

Shalonda served in the U.S. Air Force from 2008 to 2018 in cybersecurity and communications operations. Early in her career, she helped build communication networks from scratch for potential deployments to bare bases, combining technical problem-solving with hands-on equipment work.

Later, her responsibilities expanded into IT support, where she assisted fellow servicemembers directly in the field. One of her favorite assignments was serving as the base equipment custodian at Ramstein Air Base, overseeing accountability for equipment across the installation.

During her service, Shalonda supported missions connected to the Global War on Terror, including Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Inherent Resolve. While deployed to Al Dhafra Air Base, she managed communications operations supporting mission-critical systems and personnel throughout the region.

Though she did not receive valor-specific commendations, Shalonda said her service centered on consistency, leadership and supporting operations behind the scenes.

"Some of the most important roles in the military happen quietly," she said. "Precision, responsiveness and teamwork keep entire missions moving forward."

Today, she works in Veteran services and community outreach, helping Veterans and their families access housing, employment and supportive resources. She also recently completed massage therapy school, reflecting her passion for healing and wellness.

A proud mother of two, Shalonda said she is currently navigating a season of personal growth and rediscovery while building a life rooted in resilience and authenticity. Outside of work, she volunteers through United Way Volunteer Hub and enjoys adventurous activities such as skydiving.

Shalonda hopes the public recognizes the strength and complexity of women Veterans. "We are resilient, strong and deeply multidimensional," she said. "Women Veterans continue to prove that strength can be both powerful and nurturing at the same time."





Theresa

BY MARTINA SCHMIDT

Theresa Melton's path to military service began long before she put on a uniform. Growing up in San Diego, California, she was inspired by her father, a United States Navy Master Chief stationed at Naval Air Station North Island. Following in his footsteps felt natural, leading her to enlist in the United States Navy.

Theresa served from 1981 to 1987 as a personnelman (PN), a role focused on administrative and human resources functions that supported service members throughout their careers. Her work ensured that records, assignments and personnel needs were handled accurately and efficiently, helping maintain the readiness of her units.

Her first duty station was Naval Air Station Memphis, where she initially worked in security before transitioning into personnel responsibilities. After active duty, she continued her service in the Navy Reserve, drilling at Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Florida and Naval Air Station Miramar, California, where she was assigned to a squadron. Theresa said her experience shaped her in lasting ways. "The most significant takeaway is discipline and responsibility, along with a strong sense of being an American," she said. She also credits her service with strengthening her determination to help break barriers for women entering the military. Some habits, she noted, never fade, including finishing meals in under 20 minutes.

After leaving the Navy, Theresa built a 33-year career in the mortgage financial industry, working with major banks, credit unions and brokers. She held a variety of roles and found purpose in helping others achieve homeownership.

Now fully retired, Theresa remains deeply involved in her community, particularly in supporting fellow Veterans. She is active in multiple Veteran-focused organizations and served as a finalist in the 2021 Ms. Veteran America competition, where her advocacy efforts expanded. She also serves in leadership roles supporting women Veterans and local initiatives including Gamma Eta Alpha Sorority.

In addition, Theresa has pursued a longtime personal goal by becoming a licensed nail technician. Through her business, she focuses on serving women 55 and older, including those in assisted living and nursing homes, helping them feel cared for and confident.

A mother of two, grandmother and great-grandmother, Theresa continues to lead with purpose. "We are strong, beautiful, intelligent," she said, reflecting on women Veterans. "We are more than the military uniform."

Her advice to other women transitioning to civilian life is to prepare early, seek support and learn how to translate military experience into civilian terms.





WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"When they go low,
we go high."
~ Michelle Obama



WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"She turns our
pain into power,
her struggles into
success."
~ Sherri Nelson



Sherri

BY JULIE MILLER

Sherri Nelson enlisted in the United States Air Force in 1987, motivated by a desire to fund her education, travel and build a career. Over the course of three decades, she served in law enforcement, security and personnel operations, supporting missions tied to Operation Desert Storm, Operation Noble Eagle and Operation Enduring Freedom.

During her military career, Sherri provided security for aircraft, runways and restricted areas while also managing law enforcement duties at base entry points. Later in her career, she worked on a general officer's staff and eventually became superintendent of personnel customer service, overseeing support operations for service members and their families.

After serving 30 years in the United States Air Force, Sherri transitioned from military service to entrepreneurship and community leadership, continuing her mission of supporting others through Veteran advocacy work. Her years of service shaped her leadership style and reinforced her belief in the value women Veterans bring to their communities.

After retiring from the Air Force in 2017, Sherri earned her real estate license and built a small family-run real estate team with her husband, Kerry, their son and administrative staff. The couple also owns High Tide Gallery on St. George Street in St. Augustine and operates a short-term vacation rental known as The Mermaid's Tale.

Along with her busy professional life, Sherri remains dedicated to Veteran advocacy. She serves as a board member for Hope 4 Veterans, where she helps expand programs supporting military-connected women throughout St. Johns County.

Outside of work and volunteer service, Sherri enjoys spending time on the water. She loves the beach, kayaking, paddle boarding and riding jet skis along the St. Johns River. She also values time with her family, including her husband, adult children and 17-year-old Shih Tzu, Jolly.

She credits strong relationships with fellow women Veterans as essential to a successful transition into civilian life. Her message to other women Veterans is rooted in resilience and empowerment: "Surround yourself with a strong support system of military women," she said. "They understand where you come from and what you've been through."

Sherri wants the public to know that women Veterans offer a unique skillset. "They win with influence," she said, "not with power."





Tara

BY SHERYL BINETTI

Tara Octaviano served in the United States Army and United States Air Force from 1994 to 2011, beginning her military career as a dental specialist before later serving as a human resources officer. Inspired by her stepfather, a World War II pilot, and her Marine helicopter pilot stepbrother, Tara grew up admiring their courage, patriotism, and dedication to service, knowing she wanted to follow the same path.

She began as an enlisted private first class and entered the Simultaneous Membership Program while participating in Army ROTC at the University of Arizona. She later earned her commission and served on active duty until medically retired. Her military responsibilities included planning parades, award ceremonies, and change-of-command events while overseeing logistics, transportation, safety, and acquisitions. During an assignment in Argentina, Tara used her Spanish language skills to communicate with military officials while also helping provide dental services to the local community.

Tara supported Operation Desert Storm, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Her military awards include the Meritorious Service Medal, three Army Commendation Medals, the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award, the National Defense Service Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, and the Overseas Service Medal.

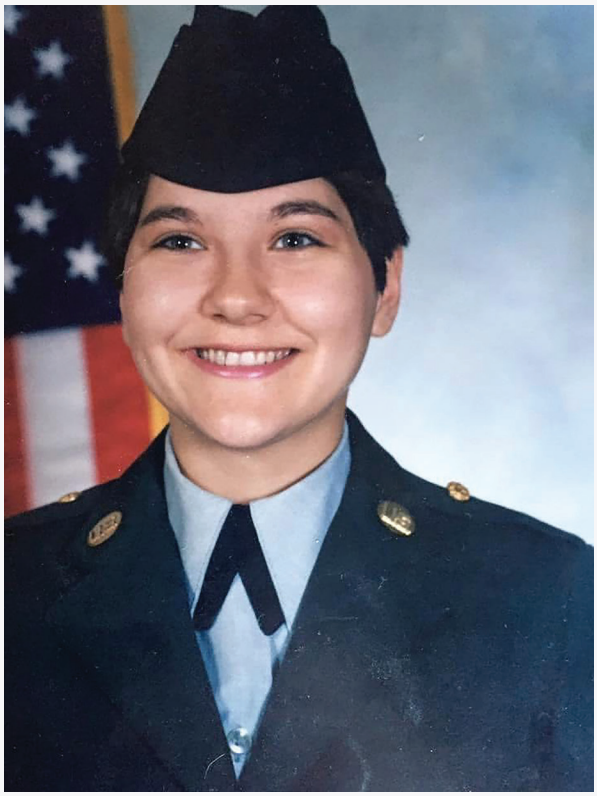
One of Tara's strongest takeaways from military life was the importance of caring for both service members and their families. She believes making Soldiers feel supported and valued was one of the most meaningful parts of her service and remains deeply grateful for the opportunity to serve her country.

Today, Tara volunteers with Hope 4 Veterans as a facilitator and peer support specialist, continuing to support fellow Veterans through encouragement and shared experience. She also serves in music ministry and remains active in her church community. Before dedicating more time to volunteer work, she spent 10 years substitute teaching kindergarten through 12th graders.

Family remains central to Tara's life. Her 23-year-old daughter is currently in veterinary graduate school in New Zealand and grew up understanding military sacrifice as a child, participating in Veterans Day parades, placing American flags on graves, and honoring fallen service members.

Tara wants the public to know that women Veterans continue serving long after military life ends, often through mentorship, non-profit work, faith communities and public service. Her advice to fellow women Veterans is to remember that their mission did not end when military service ended; it simply evolved. She encourages women to stay connected, seek out Veteran communities, and never carry life's weight alone.





WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"She fought through what tried to break her, and by God's grace she became unshakable."



WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"The greatest accomplishment in my existence is SELF AWARENESS."
~ Eli' Robinson



Eli'

BY JULIE MILLER

At 19 years old, **Eli' Robinson** saw the military as a chance to leave home, see the world and begin building a life on her own terms. That decision led her to serve in the United States Navy from 1998 to 2003, where she became a Boatswain's Mate aboard an aircraft carrier during a pivotal period in American military history.

Initially entering the Navy with an undesignated assignment, Eli' had hoped to become a Navy journalist before learning the position was unavailable. Determined to find her path, she chose to become a Boatswain's Mate, one of the ship's most demanding and versatile occupations.

Boatswain's Mates are responsible for ship maintenance, deck operations, cargo handling, replenishment missions and crane operations. Robinson described them as the "lifeblood" of the ship, trusted with keeping operations moving efficiently at sea.

Among her proudest accomplishments was earning her Surface Warfare qualification, a distinction recognizing sailors who demonstrate broad operational knowledge of shipboard duties. She also became certified as a 5-ton cargo boom operator, crane operator and fuel operator.

During deployments supporting Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, Eli' supervised replenishment operations at sea while stationed in the United Arab Emirates. In a memorable moment during wartime operations, she was able to communicate with her husband through headsets while their ships operated alongside one another, even sending small packages across replenishment lines between vessels.

Eli' earned several commendations during her service, including the Coast Guard Unit Commendation Ribbon, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, two Sea Service Deployment Ribbons, two Navy Good Conduct Medals, the National Defense Service Medal and the Navy Unit Commendation Medal.

Today, Eli' channels her creativity into freelance work, natural hair care products, organic body butters, poetry and spoken word performances. She hopes to become a globally recognized healing speaker focused on hope, growth and resilience.
A mother of two daughters, Eli' describes her family as a "kaleidoscope family," reflecting creativity, color and strength.

She remains active in the Veteran community through organizations including Hope 4 Veterans, Women Veterans Ignited and Wounded Warrior Project.

To the public, Eli wants them to know that behind nearly every remarkable man, stable household, and thriving business stands a woman whose presence made a difference. The same is true throughout military history, behind every branch of service, every conflict endured, and every soldier who made it home, women were there, contributing, supporting, serving, and sacrificing alongside them.





Jasmine

BY MARTINA SCHMIDT

Jasmine White's path to military service began long before she enlisted in the United States Navy in 2002. Raised in a deeply rooted military family, she grew up surrounded by examples of service and sacrifice. Her father served 33 years in the Army, while her mother, stepfather and sister also served in the military.

"Military life shaped my childhood and taught me discipline, leadership, resilience and service before I ever raised my right hand," Jasmine said.

Before joining the Navy, Jasmine spent years in the Naval Sea Cadets program, where she learned military customs, teamwork and leadership. Although she originally planned to join the Coast Guard, she enlisted in the Navy shortly after the September 11 attacks and served from 2002 to 2022.

Jasmine began her 20-year career as a Cryptologic Technician Administrative, supporting classified intelligence and national security operations. In 2008, she cross-rated to yeoman, taking on responsibilities that included legal administration, personnel management, pay coordination and leadership support for hundreds of sailors.

Throughout her career, Jasmine also served as a Defense Travel System authorizing official and education services officer, helping sailors with career advancement and educational opportunities. One of her proudest assignments was supporting Navy SEALs and divers within the special warfare community.

"That experience gave me a deeper appreciation for teamwork, discipline, humility and leadership under pressure," she said.

Jasmine supported joint-service operations during the post-September 11 attacks era, working both stateside and overseas in intelligence environments. Another proud moment for Jasmine came during her assignment at the Office of Naval Intelligence in Suitland, Maryland, when she was selected by Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Jonathan Greenert for reenlistment and received a Chief of Naval Operations coin in recognition of her professionalism, dedication and service.

Today, Jasmine is the founder of Veteran Transition Success, a platform dedicated to helping Veterans navigate military transition and Department of Veterans Affairs disability claims. She is also a founder of the Melanated Collective of Shearwater in St. Augustine, Florida. A proud mother of two sons, Jasmine said motherhood after military service taught her the value of presence and peace.

"I want the public to know that women Veterans are woven into the foundation of the military story," she said. "Our wisdom, strength, sacrifice and leadership matter deeply."





WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"Success is not
only found in
accomplishments, but
in presence, peace
and purpose."
~ Jasmine White




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

Jennifer

BY SHERYL BINETTI

Jennifer Williams served in the United States Navy from 1985 to 1993 as a yeoman. She was inspired by her father's Navy service and her strong desire to leave Kentucky to see the world and serve her country. Patriotism and curiosity shaped Jennifer's decision. Military service quickly gave her the independence and the broader perspective she had hoped to find.

Jennifer's work centered on administration, beginning in directives control, where she managed official documents for command operations. She later advanced to supervise the mail room while assigned to the admiral of the U.S. Pacific Fleet. One of Jennifer's most memorable assignments came when she helped establish an entirely new division, overseeing office setup, furniture coordination, staffing and organization. That experience sparked the entrepreneurial instincts that would later define much of her civilian work.

During service, Jennifer also supported the Seabees during the Gulf War, providing administrative support in a demanding operational environment. She earned the Good Conduct Medal and considers the lasting camaraderie of military life one of her greatest takeaways. Jennifer values the lifelong friendships formed through service and believes the trust built in uniform continues long after separation.

In 2023, Jennifer founded GPS4VETS, a non-profit that advocates for military sexual trauma survivors, especially women with children. After identifying a growing need in the Tampa Bay, Florida, area, where few shelters accept mothers with children, GPS4VETS helped build transitional services and education for Veterans and military families including emergency housing, workforce development and community resources.

Jennifer remains deeply active in community leadership as a Rotary board member and collaborates with multiple Veteran organizations, crisis centers and workforce support agencies. She also serves on advisory councils and leads Veteran-focused efforts at the Hero Coalition at the Center Club in Tampa.

Family remains an important part of Jennifer's life. She is the mother of two adult children, Alexa and Kameron, and grandmother to Atticus and Giovanni. Although distance limits time together, Jennifer treasures every visit.

Jennifer is especially passionate about helping fellow Veterans build fulfilling lives and openly supports survivors of military sexual trauma through speaking engagements and peer connection. Her own military sexual trauma recovery journey was featured in Disabled American Veterans magazine in early 2024.

Jennifer wants the public to know that women Veterans are reliable, innovative and compassionate leaders who remain a force to be reckoned with.





Erika

BY JULIE MILLER

Just six months after high school, **Erika Bush** joined the United States Air Force, answering an early calling that began in a high school ROTC classroom and was reinforced by stories from relatives who served. "I just knew I was being called to be part of something greater than myself," Erika says.

Erika served from Jan. 25, 1997, to Aug. 1, 2004, beginning in supply management before cross-training into health services management. She eventually became the noncommissioned officer in charge of administrative services for a behavioral health flight, coordinating clinical and administrative support for medical teams and helping oversee care for more than 600 patients.

Her behind-the-scenes work enabled mental health providers to focus on crisis care, debriefings and walk-in support, critical services in the months after the September 11 attacks. Erika helped coordinate crisis intervention efforts during that period and supported Airmen through several wing tragedies. She also contributed to her fighter wing's Operational Readiness Inspection, which earned an "Excellent" rating.

Erika's awards include the Air Force Commendation Medal, Air Force Achievement Medal, Air Force Good Conduct Medal and the National Defense Service Medal. She was a distinguished graduate of Airman Leadership School and earned an academic achievement award. One meaningful recognition came while she oversaw administrative services in behavioral health: Her team achieved a 100 percent rating from the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, validating their efforts to provide timely, compassionate care during high-stress periods.

Now a chiropractor who has paused clinical practice to advocate for families of children with unique abilities, Erika is also a children's book author, wellness coach and caregiver advocate. She volunteers with Ainsley's Angels, Dreams Come True and local outreach efforts, and she is active on social media at instagram.com/dr.erika_b.

A proud mother of four, including a youngest child who lives with cerebral palsy, Erika urges recognition for all women Veterans, emphasizing that every woman who has worn the uniform made a contribution. To the public, Erika says, "Women Veterans are strong, mission-driven, and carry a deep sense of strength and purpose. When the uniform comes off, that doesn't stop. We continue to serve, whether it be as mothers, spouses, caregivers, leaders or advocates."

Erika's advice to women entering civilian life is, "You'll find your way. The experience and lessons you gained during your service didn't leave you. You carry them with you every day."







WORDS TO LIVE BY:
"Her favorite encouragement: "God is within her, she will not fall."
~ Psalm 46:5

From Navy Blues to Army Greens: A Mother-Daughter Story of Service, Strength and Perseverance

WRITTEN BY MARTINA SCHMIDT



Military service connected a mother and daughter long before either realized how much it would shape their lives. Pat joined the United States Navy in the late 1970s, serving at Fleet Operations Command Europe (FOCCEUR) when women were still fighting to be recognized as Veterans. Her daughter Anna continued that legacy in 2000, enlisting in the United States Army at 17. Though they served in different branches and generations, both answered the call to serve.

A Childhood Shaped by Service



Growing up, Anna knew her parents had met while her mother was serving in the Navy and working at the U.S. Embassy in London, but military service was rarely discussed.

"It wasn't something we talked about much," Anna recalls. "We knew that's how my mother met my father, but military service wasn't a regular topic in our household."

Today, Anna makes sure her own children know that part of their family history. "I make a point to talk about military service with my children," she says. "I want them to understand that part of our family's story."

Discovering a New Side of Mom

After becoming a Veteran herself, Anna discovered more about her mother's military legacy.

"Groups like Hope 4 Veterans and She Served shed light on a whole new side of my mother that I never knew," Anna says. "Watching her become an author, speak publicly, and share her knowledge has been incredible."

"I've never been more proud of her," Anna adds. "I think she's finally living her dream."

Following Her Own Path

Anna enlisted in the Army because she saw it as an opportunity. "There was no college fund and no career path waiting for me," she says. "When a recruiter showed up at our front door, I couldn't sign up fast enough."

Pat never pushed her daughter toward military service. "I wanted her to find her own path," she says. Looking back, Pat believes the values she learned in the Navy influenced Anna. "Discipline, perseverance, and service to others were part of our family culture."

Service Through Every Obstacle

Perseverance is the quality both women say defines them. "I think we've both experienced failures and disappointments," Anna says. "But we never quit."

Pat agrees. "Life has handed Anna challenges that would cause many people to give up. But she never does."

Anna says success was never about where they started. "There was always an understanding in our family that if you wanted something, you worked for it."

How Far Women Have Come



The military Anna entered looked very different from the one Pat joined. "When I served from 1976 to 1980, women were still proving they belonged," Pat says. "Combat roles were closed to us."

"The sense of equality has grown tremendously," Anna says. "I can imagine it was even harder during my mother's era."

Pat sees that progress as a shared achievement. "Each generation of women has built on the progress of those who came before them."

A Shared Legacy

Although they served in different decades and branches, many experiences remain the same—the pride of wearing the uniform, friendships forged through service, and the sacrifices made by military families.

"It gave us opportunities we wouldn't have had," Anna says. "We're both proud of our service."

Today, they hope their story encourages other women Veterans to share theirs.

"I hope women Veterans understand that their service matters and their stories deserve to be told," Pat says.

Anna agrees. "When we recognize common experiences in one another, it can be incredibly powerful."


MAGELLAN

BEHIND THE SCENES: Hope 4 Veterans - Voices for Valor edition















SAY CHEESE













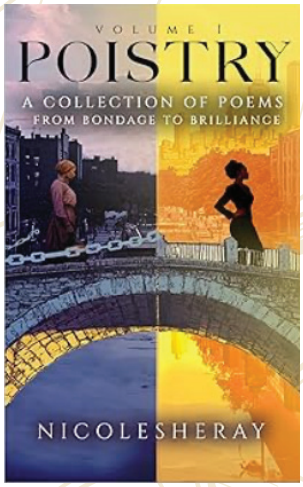






Recommended reading

At **She Served Magazine**, we have the privilege of sharing the stories of women who serve, lead, inspire, and create. This special Book Recommendation edition highlights another remarkable side of the women we've featured—their voices as authors. Drawing from their experiences, passions, and imaginations, these talented women have written books that educate, inspire, entertain, and empower readers of all ages. Their works span military history, poetry, children's literature, fantasy, romance, and stories of resilience, reflecting the diversity and strength of our community. We invite you to discover these outstanding books and celebrate the women behind them. Their stories deserve to be read, shared, and remembered.



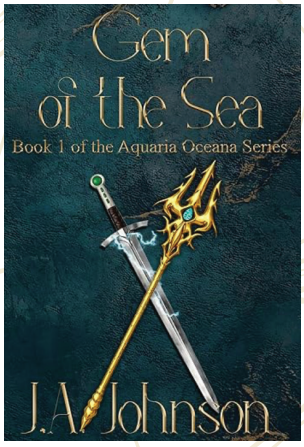
Nicole Jordan's ***Poistry*** is a powerful celebration of Black excellence, heritage and ancestral wisdom, weaving truth, history and rhythm into poetry that calls readers to remember their greatness and embrace their power. Featured on page 8.

https://books.by/nicole-sheray



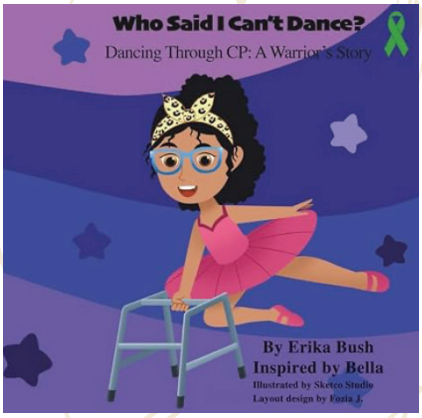
Pat Patten's ***Between War and Peace*** brings to life the extraordinary true story of Deborah Sampson, a courageous woman who disguised herself as a man to fight in the American Revolution, offering readers a compelling look at bravery, sacrifice and perseverance in the face of impossible odds. Featured on page 54.

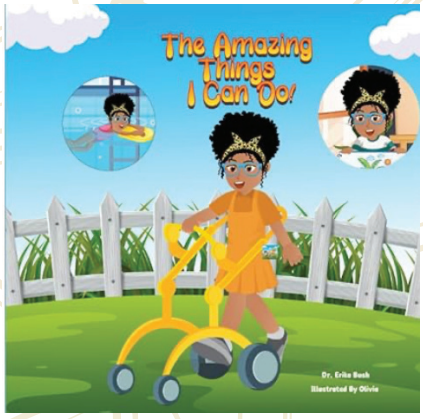
https://amzn.to/3PudjM2



J.A. Johnson invites readers into the enchanting world of ***Gem of the Sea: Aquaria Oceana***, where fantasy, adventure, destiny and romance collide in a captivating tale of a young woman discovering her true power while fighting for the life and love she desires. Featured on page 22

https://ja-johnson.com/j-a-johnson-books/





Erika Bush inspires young readers and families through books like ***The Amazing Things I Can Do!*** and ***Who Said I Can't Dance?***, uplifting stories that celebrate ability, self-confidence, inclusion and the limitless potential within every child. Featured on page52.

https://www.amazon.com/Amazing-Things-Can-Do/dp/B0C9KM8RT9

Host a *She Served* Veteran photo shoot

INTERESTED IN HOSTING A SHE SERVED EVENT?
Bring a powerful, one-of-a-kind experience to your community by honoring women Veterans through storytelling and portraiture. A She Served photoshoot is more than a session—it's a meaningful tribute that captures service, strength and legacy. If you're looking to host something memorable, impactful and deeply personal, this is a special opportunity to make it happen.

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Visit: **https://sheservedinitiative.org/**

PHOTOSHOOT EXPERIENCE
Exclusively for women Veterans, each participant receives a 30-minute professional photoshoot and is encouraged to bring personal props or mementos that reflect their story.

WHAT TO EXPECT AS A HOST
Participating Veterans will complete a brief intake form, share a short biography of their military and post-military life and provide a clear photo in uniform (official service photo preferred). With advance scheduling, about 10 Veterans can be accommodated per day during the photography session.

EXPENSES
There is no cost for Veterans or hosts to participate. Hosts are asked to assist with travel and hospitality, including lodging, airfare and/or mileage reimbursement and meals.

LEARN MORE AND CONNECT
Visit **https://sheservedinitiative.org/hosting/** for full details and to become a host.







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Discover more at:
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SCAN TO DONATE

*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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