



In 2012, Captain Tara Robertson (right) took command of the Minnesota National Guard's 849th Mobility Augmentation Company and was the first woman to command the previously all-male unit. She was awarded a Bronze Star Medal as well as a Combat Action Badge following her deployment to Afghanistan.

Female Citizen Soldiers and Airmen

Key Contributors to Worldwide Peace and Security

BY FRANK GRASS

Women's entrance into the National Guard in 1950 was an historic moment in America's military history. From that moment on, women have been instrumental in building the National Guard into what it is today: a ready, accessible, and capable force that is an invaluable combat reserve for the active Army and Air Force. Women in the National Guard are essential to defending the nation, supporting our communities, and building partnership capacity. They exemplify our government's commitment to integrating women into defense, development, and diplomatic efforts.

Last fall, I passed the milestone of having served 46 years in our military. It has been an incredible journey, beginning with my enlistment in the Missouri National Guard in 1969 to my current position as the Chief of the National Guard Bureau and a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Over the years, I have witnessed extraordinary change in the National Guard, particularly since 9/11 and the long period of war which followed. The National Guard has transformed from a strategic reserve to an operational force, requiring the skill sets of both women and men to maintain the high operations tempo while ensuring mission success. The need to organize, equip, and train for two wars while protecting the homeland has required the National Guard to be at its highest readiness state in history.

During my time in service, I believe one of the most important accomplishments in becoming a more ready force is by providing greater opportunities for our female Guardsmen. These opportunities have not occurred by chance, but rather, through a concerted effort of societal forces that recognized the need for inclusion of women combined with the passage of a series of resolutions, statutes, and policies that recognize the contributions that female service members can make to the military.

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Thomas P.M. Barnett noted that when we look around the world the most successful and secure societies are those that do not marginalize women—those that allow for their economic and political participation.¹ Nations that embrace women in all aspects of their society participate fully in our era of globalization, political freedom, and international human rights. Whether it is in business, science, education, or politics, we have seen women creating, innovating, and leading our nation into the 21st century. It is accurate to say that without women’s contributions to our society, we would only be tapping into half of our nation’s reservoir of talent. Thus, I believe women serving in the military, expanding their roles in the military, and leading our military, are ideas that are natural and logical.

Since 1951, the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services has been providing recommendations to the Secretary of Defense on women’s issues in the service; its efforts have contributed greatly to the advances we have made in the promotion and advancement of females serving in the military. These improvements led to a landmark moment in 1991, when Congress began lifting the ban on women serving in combat by allowing female pilots to fly in war zones.

In 2000, the United Nations Security Council met and passed UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) which recognized the nexus between gender and security. The Security Council recognized that women play an important role in bringing about peace and stability, whether serving as leaders in conflict mediation or as members of the security forces helping bring about a secure environment for women and their associated communities.

Measures such as the 2011 U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) illustrate our nation’s awareness that, “[d]eadly conflicts can be more effectively avoided, and peace can be best forged and sustained, when women become equal partners in all aspects of peacebuilding and conflict prevention, when their lives are protected, their experiences considered, and their voices heard.” In line with this principle, then Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta announced in 2013 a plan that would continue to evolve the role of female service members by allowing them to serve in combat with ground forces by “[eliminating] all unnecessary gender-based barriers to service.”² In the 2015 National Security Strategy, the United States reaffirmed its commitment to the inclusion of women in all aspects of the nation’s defense by acknowledging that a society will not succeed, “if it does not draw on the potential of all its people.” In December 2015, Defense Secretary Ashton Carter announced that the Pentagon would open all combat jobs to women, without exception.

Today, women comprise nearly 17 percent of the 455,000 total National Guard force, while approximately 11 percent of 5,420 Army and Air National Guard command positions are occupied by females. The women of the National Guard are part of nearly every mission set that we have. Within the Army and the Air Force, the National Guard continues its efforts to better integrate with the active component and provide the capabilities necessary at a time when active duty forces are drawing down. The National Guard’s female citizen soldiers and airmen are key contributors to this effort.

At its core, the National Guard is a reflection of the communities we serve. Rather than

seeing inclusion and diversity as abstract goals, these characteristics are woven into the fabric of the National Guard and are what make us strong. I believe no other military organization is better equipped to implement our nation's inclusion policies within its primary mission sets than the National Guard. Female leaders in our communities are the same individuals who lead our Guard. They work in communities and understand the issues and concerns of women. In our overseas missions, the women of the National Guard bring unique skill sets that are utilized within the framework of our strategic efforts to strengthen our relationships with our allies. The National Guard's three primary missions—our mission triad—is built upon the *Warfight* abroad, securing and defending the *Homeland*, and building enduring and strategic *Partnerships*. Within each

mission set, the women of the National Guard serve capably and with distinction.

Minuteman

The Minuteman is the symbol of the National Guard's most valuable resource, the women and men who serve. The National Guard's origins date back to December 13, 1636, when the mission was the protection of the colonial settlements as a militia with Minutemen. Minutemen were non-professional soldiers during the American Revolutionary War, trained for rapid deployment in a minute's notice.³

Separate from the active component, the traditional Guardsman brings skill sets from civilian employment that balance well with military duties. Guardsmen who are airline pilots, attorneys, doctors, dentists, nurses, schoolteachers, corporate executives,



Staff Sgt. Mitchell Miller, U.S. Army National Guard

Army 1st Lt. Demetria N. Elosiebo, the first female African-American rotary wing pilot in the D.C. Army National Guard

investment bankers, and information-technology and cyber specialists can transfer and apply their valuable civilian expertise to their military specialties.

By fully utilizing these skills, the National Guard has proactively sought to increase opportunities for women over the last 65 years. The mission sets within the National Guard promote diversity and have empowered women in the National Guard to rise from the enlisted ranks to serving as Adjutants General (known as TAGs) for the 54 states, territories, and the District of Columbia.⁴ The Adjutants General are responsible for the command, control, and supervision of the Army and Air National Guard units in their respective states, reporting to the Governor for state missions and/or the President for federal missions. The National Guard has had seven female Adjutants General to date, with four currently serving in the position in Alaska, Maryland, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Major General (Ret.) Jessica L. Wright is a great example of the National Guard promoting female leaders within its ranks. General Wright enlisted in 1975 with the Pennsylvania National Guard and later graduated from Officer Candidate School and the Rotary Wing Aviator Course at Fort Rucker, becoming the Army National Guard's first female aviator. Throughout her stellar career, she held many leadership positions, in Public Affairs, Recruiting and Retention, Flight Operations, as an Assistant Professor of Military Science, and in a variety of other headquarter, field, and staff assignments. She was also the first female maneuver brigade commander in the United States Army (28th Combat Aviation Brigade, 28th Infantry Division), and Pennsylvania's first female Adjutant General.

Until the recent announcement of her retirement, the Honorable Jessica L. Wright was a leader in the Department of Defense as the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. In this position, she was the principal staff assistant and advisor to the Secretary of Defense for Total Force Management as it relates to readiness; National Guard and Reserve component affairs; health affairs; training; and personnel requirements and management, including equal opportunity, morale, welfare, recreation, and quality of life matters.⁵

Senator Joni Ernst from Iowa is another former Guardsman who exemplifies the diverse background of our leaders in the National Guard. She was elected to the United States Senate in November 2014 and is the first female from Iowa voted into Congress, and the first female combat veteran to serve in the U.S. Senate. Prior to her recent retirement at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, Senator Ernst served over 23 years in the U.S. Army Reserves and the Iowa Army National Guard, previously serving as the commander of the 185th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, which is the largest battalion in the Iowa Army National Guard. In 2003, she spent 14 months serving as a company commander leading 150 Guardsmen in Kuwait and Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom.⁶

Through her years of experience in the National Guard and in combat, Senator Ernst brings a unique perspective to her role as a legislator, understanding the sacrifices and commitment of our service members. She carries this experience and knowledge as she serves in the Senate and on her assigned committees, including the influential Armed Services Committee which is empowered with legislative oversight of the nation's military.⁷

She also serves on the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, and the Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities.

Senator Ernst and Major General Wright both exemplify the National Guard's efforts to provide opportunities for our female Guardsmen to excel. They are just two of the many women who serve in the most difficult and challenging positions that help provide peace and security throughout the world.

Warfight

The military I entered in 1969 is in stark contrast to the one that I see today. I joined a force engaged in Vietnam and concurrently under the specter of conflict with our Cold War adversary, the Soviet Union. While the United States fought in Vietnam and faced the threat of bilateral nuclear engagement, the attitude and policies of the day on the appropriate role for women in the forces created many barriers to service and promotion.

The congressional legislation of 1991 and the Department of Defense policy of 2013 opened the door to allow women to be key participants in combat operations. From flying effective and decisive combat sorties in fighter, airlift, refueling, and helicopter aircraft, to serving on the ground with their male counterparts in the protracted conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Guard's mission sets allow our female Guardsmen the opportunity to serve and demonstrate the courage and patriotism that uphold the finest traditions of our military.

Sergeant Leigh Ann Hester is just one example. In March 2005, Sergeant Hester was serving in Iraq with the 617th Military Police Company out of Richmond, Kentucky. When her squad was shadowing a supply convoy, the

convoy was ambushed by insurgents. After a fierce firefight, her unit killed 27 insurgents, wounded 6 and captured 1. For her heroic combat actions, Sergeant Hester was awarded the Silver Star Medal—the first woman to receive the Silver Star medal since World War II and the first bestowed for close combat. Her military training saved her life and the lives of many of her fellow soldiers. On receiving her medal, Sergeant Hester said, "It really doesn't have anything to do with being a female, [i]t's about the duties I performed that day as a soldier....Your training kicks in and the soldier kicks in....You've got a job to do—protecting yourself and your fellow comrades."⁸ Sergeant Hester is one of a countless number of female heroes who have made incredible sacrifices for our nation and national security. Her heroic actions illustrate that courage is a trait that is not gender-specific.

As the role of American women in combat continues to increase and as the National Guard continues to develop mission sets that harness the unique capabilities of women, I believe women in certain parts of the world will be empowered as a result of this evolution.

Female Engagement Teams (FETs) are one example of how the National Guard operationalizes the unique aspects that women can bring to the Warfight in places such as Afghanistan and Iraq. FETs have been very successful in gaining information and winning the trust of females in Iraq and Afghanistan who are not permitted to converse with men outside their families.⁹ These units are deployed to interact with local women and gain a better understanding of their concerns.¹⁰ FETs support the objectives of the 2000 UNSCR 1325 and the 2011 U.S. National Action Plan for the inclusion and

empowerment of women by listening to these Afghan and Iraqi women on the ground, encouraging the rule of law, and allowing the women to feel more secure by decreasing the chances of violence through accountability.¹¹

Homeland

Americans now realize that geography is no longer an obstacle for our adversaries. As a result, our security strategy in the homeland has evolved to defy and prevent dynamic and asymmetric threats. The skill sets developed from our complex operations in the Warfight and the civilian capacity that part-time Guardsmen bring to their military positions has carried over into our homeland missions, enabling an enhanced capability. Women in the National Guard play a large role within our homeland mission. Women assigned to missions such as the Aerospace Control Alert that protects our skies and Ballistic Missile Defense are part of a critical component of maintaining and advancing national security and stability for our nation.

Lieutenant Heather “Lucky” Penney was serving a typical day in the 121st Fighter Squadron on September 11, 2001, until she was informed that the twin towers in New York City had been struck by two different airliners. Immediately after the Pentagon was hit, the Washington, D.C. Air National Guard was ordered to launch two F-16 fighter aircraft to intercept a possible fourth airliner being hijacked and on a vector for Washington, D.C. (possibly for the White House or the U.S. Capitol). The assigned flight lead chose Lieutenant Penney to be his wingman and prepare for an immediate takeoff. The 121st Fighter Squadron just returned from an exercise and therefore the aircraft were not loaded with weapons (no missiles, bullets, or bombs). The

flight lead told Lieutenant Penney that he would fly his F-16 into the cockpit of the hijacked airliner and she would strike the tail. Since terrorists were using an American airliner as a weapon, Lieutenant Penney and her flight lead had no choice but to use their F-16s in direct response. In the end, they could not find Flight 93 because the brave American passengers onboard rushed the cockpit to take back control of the aircraft, crashing into a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Regardless, young Lieutenant Penney was prepared to give her life to defend her country and preserve, guard, and sustain national security. Penney stated, “Our duty was clear—to protect and defend.”¹²

Today, Major Penney continues to serve in an airlift squadron in the Air National Guard, flying distinguished visitors around the world.¹³ Outside of the National Guard, she is an executive with a major defense corporation and also leads an independent group that specifically researches female officer retention and recruiting for the military services. Major Penney’s exemplary contributions are part of the National Guard’s evolving homeland mission sets that include women in almost every capacity for consequence management and homeland defense.

Another great example is Missouri Army National Guardsman Colonel Sharon Martin, Commander of the 110th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade. Prior to her current command, Colonel Martin was the Commander of the 70th Troop Command (largest Brigade in Missouri) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency Region VII Homeland Response Force. Her illustrious career includes experience as a Military Police Battalion Commander, service in critical roles in domestic natural disaster response, combat deployment, and completion of the Joint Task

Force Commander’s Training Course, which prepared her to coordinate military and federal responses to disasters—all in addition to her civilian job as a professional firefighter. Colonel Martin exhibits the finest traits of our citizen soldiers and airmen who serve our nation, our states, and our communities.

The National Guard is located throughout our nation and its members are leaders in their respective communities with strong ties to local and state officials and the community at large. Many times, the only military ties these communities have are with their local National Guard units. The unique abilities and talents that part-time Guardsmen bring from their civilian occupations are utilized in homeland missions. From assisting communities as first responders, to supporting state and federal missions responding to natural disasters and man-made threats, we are the first military

force to reach the scene. The inclusion, empowerment, and effectiveness of female Guardsmen in the role of homeland defense and security are crucial to our mission success. The National Guard ensures that those in its ranks reflect and understand the communities in which they serve.

Partnerships

The National Guard’s global, federal, state, and local partnerships have paid major dividends during times of crisis, disaster, and building partnership capacity for our national security. The local relationships that we forge provide daily benefits that improve the lives of our citizens. The National Guard also works closely with federal and state interagencies to forge a cohesive team in responding to singular and ongoing domestic missions. These partnerships have allowed the National Guard



U.S. National Guard Bureau

Colonel Sharon Martin in action.

to execute decisively and efficiently in supporting missions in the aftermath of disasters. With missions such as counternarcotics, the National Guard works closely with agency partners in interdiction and activities to combat illicit drugs, which impact the entire hemisphere and beyond.

On the global front, our State Partnership Program (SPP), established over 22 years ago, has evolved into lasting relationships with 76 partner nations that have a significant impact on building partnership capacity. These include partnerships with nations in all of our Geographic Combatant Commands—to include eight countries in the Asia-Pacific and eleven countries in Africa that are instrumental to the President’s rebalance objectives in the 2015 National Security Strategy.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, we began building long-term relationships with the nations of Eastern Europe, with the goal of encouraging military to military contacts with newly established democracies. The National Guard focused not only on traditional military to military contacts, but also included discussions and exchanges on disaster management, search and rescue, military education, civil-military relations, and senior leader visits. Joseph Nye, who introduced the term “smart power,” stated that “[b]y complementing its military and economic might with greater investments in its soft power, the United States can rebuild the framework it needs to tackle tough global challenges.”¹⁴ Today, the SPP encompasses nearly one-third of the nations in the world and provides our military with



1st Lt. Nicholas Mercuro, U.S. Air Force

The National Guard State Partnership Program has forged many promising relationships with partner nations, allowing successful exchanges of knowledge, techniques, and ideas. Here, the Iowa National Guard’s 734th Agribusiness Development Team and Afghan women from the Kunar Provincial Reconstruction Team gathered to celebrate Women’s Day.

the strategic reach that is required in an era where joint operations and interoperability are vital to achieving our national security strategy interests during austere times.

The SPP serves as an important vehicle for the inclusion of women in military and security issues. It provides a platform by which the Guard can engage women around the world, listen to their concerns, and better understand the complexities of local and regional histories. Beginning with the SPP selection process of partnering with nations that have common security cooperation goals, the National Guard can coordinate with partner nations to provide training and support to women in such things as security, medical, and civic matters. These engagements can lead to a more stable and secure region as women become more self-sufficient and become a part of the security process. For the National Guard, these exchanges provide a greater understanding of the region, which in turn leads to a more ready and operational Guard.

One focus area of these exchanges has been to promote the inclusion of women within the security forces of partner nations. For example, in April 2013, U.S. Africa Command sponsored a Traveling Contact Team from the North Carolina National Guard to hold a Women's Integration Working Group in Botswana. Participants discussed the integration of female enlisted personnel in the Botswana Defense Force (BDF) based on lessons learned from the previous integration of female officers in the BDF.

Members of the BDF and the North Carolina Army National Guard broke out in 6 working groups to discuss 15 topics surrounding women's integration and presented their recommendations to senior BDF leadership. The working group members gained significant

awareness of issues currently facing female BDF members, and identified the need for awareness training across the BDF and the adoption of policies and regulations in order to have known standards.

Sergeant First Class Tera VandenHeuvel from the Kentucky Army National Guard serves as a fine example of female Guardsmen fostering valuable relationships abroad. Sergeant VandenHeuvel is serving on an active-duty tour representing the National Guard on the Joint Staff at U.S. Pacific Command in the Strategy and Policy Directorate. In her prominent role as the Women, Peace, and Security Program Manager, she is responsible for the implementation of the U.S. National Action Plan in U.S. Pacific Command's policy directives, and Theater Campaign and Security Cooperation Plans. Sergeant VandenHeuvel's involvement is central in encouraging partners to advance the WPS agenda.

The State Partnership Program is a valuable means for leveraging the opportunities of gender awareness with our partners, as a force multiplier in maintaining stability and security in our Combatant Command areas of responsibility.¹⁵ By leveraging the full capacity of the National Guard and our partner nations, we are better able to work with our allies in times of crisis and provide a more secure presence forward in these geographically important regions.

Key Contributors for National Security

Women serving in the National Guard have made tremendous contributions to our communities and to our national security. Female citizen soldiers and airmen are key contributors to the ready, accessible, and capable combat reserve that the National Guard is today for the active Army and Air Force.

In an era in which an increasingly smaller percentage of the population has served in the armed forces, our Guardsmen serve as that critical link between hometown America and the military. Women who serve in these units create a more representative force and serve as leaders and role models for their communities, our nation, and for women around the world. Within each set of our mission triad—the Warfight abroad, securing and defending the Homeland, and building enduring and strategic Partnerships—the women of the National Guard serve capably and with distinction.

As we continue to build on the tremendous gains we have made over the past several years, we must be steadfast in our dedication and respect for every citizen, soldier, and airman. I am certain that the future generation of women serving in the National Guard will continue our commitment to national security both at home and abroad. **PRISM**

Notes

*The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the National Defense University, the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government

¹ Thomas P.M. Barnett, *Blueprint for Action: A Future Worth Creating*. (New York, N.Y.: Berkley Books, 2006): 256-257.

² Claudette Roulo, "Defense Department Expands Women's Combat Role," *U.S. Department of Defense News*, January 24, 2013. <<http://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=119098>>.

³ The Free Dictionary, "The National Guard," <<http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/National+Guard>>.

⁴ The National Guard represents 54 separate states (50), territories (3: Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands and Guam) and Washington, District of Columbia (the D.C. National Guard has a Commanding General vice an Adjutant General).

⁵ Office of the Under Secretary for Personnel and Readiness, "Home Page," accessed on April 20, 2015. <<http://prhome.defense.gov/Home.aspx>>.

⁶ Joni Ernst, United States Senator for Iowa, "Meet Joni," <<http://www.ernst.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/meet-joni>>.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Sgt. Sara Wood, USA, "Woman Soldier Receives Silver Star for Valor in Iraq," *U.S. Department of Defense News*, June 16, 2005, <<http://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=16391>>.

⁹ SFC Tera Vandenheuvel, "United States Pacific Command Women, Peace, and Security" briefing slides (slide 9). USPACOM/J56, WPS Program Manager, April 24, 2015.

¹⁰ New York National Guard, "Women Soldiers to deploy as Afghanistan 'female engagement team'," June 7, 2011. <http://www.army.mil/article/59144/Women_Soldiers_to_deploy_as_Afghanistan_female_engagement_team_/>.

¹¹ White House, "United States National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security," (December 2011): 6. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/email-files/US_National_Action_Plan_on_Women_Peace_and_Security.pdf>.

¹² Bill Hewitt, "On 9/11, F-16 Pilot Heather Penney Was Prepared to Take Down United Flight 93," *Community Table*, September 6, 2014. <<http://communitytable.com/335417/billhewitt/>>

on-911-f-16-pilot-heather-penney-was-prepared-to-take-down-united-flight-93/>.

¹³ Author interview with Major Heather Penney.

¹⁴ Joseph S. Nye Jr., "Get Smart: Combining Hard and Soft Power," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2009. <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2009-07-01/get-smart>>.

¹⁵ SFC Tera Vandenneuvel, "United States Pacific Command Women, Peace, and Security" briefing slides (slide 2). USPACOM/J56, WPS Program Manager, 24 April 2015.