

# AEROTECH NEWS



Journal of Aerospace, Defense Industry and Veteran News

*and Review*

WOMEN IN AEROSPACE AND THE MILITARY



Air Force photograph

*March is Women's History Month, and in this special issue we take a look at the role women have played in aerospace, aviation and the military — past, present and future.*

Four female pilots leaving their ship, Pistol Packin' Mama, at the four-engine school at Lockbourne AAF, Ohio, are members of a group of Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) who have been trained to ferry the B-17 Flying Fortresses. From left: Frances Green, Margaret (Peg) Kirchner, Ann Waldner and Blanche Osborn.



Air Force photograph by Senior Airman Reilly McGuire

Three pilots from the 40th Airlift Squadron walk to a C-130J Super Hercules on the Avenger Field tarmac in Sweetwater, Texas, during the 80th Women Airforce Service Pilot Homecoming, April 30, 2022. The 80th WASP Homecoming was held in conjunction with the Dyess Women's Summit in honor of the WASP program and to teach attendees about the contributions women have made to the U.S. military.



# Edwards' flight test engineer aims to inspire

by Larry Grooms

special to Aerotech News

**EDWARDS AFB, Calif.** — Girls from elementary, middle and high schools possibly unaware of the heroic contributions made by women in the advancement of aeronautics, have a new best friend and role model who lives just around the Aerospace Valley corner.

Jessica Peterson, a civilian flight test engineer and 412th Operations Group Technical Director, is taking on increasingly prominent roles as the face and voice encouraging and advocating to and for young women the nation needs in all aspects of aerospace activity.

Answering to call-sign "Sting," and generally appearing in a flight suit she wears in the backseat or right-hand seat of whatever aircraft she's evaluating, the lady projects serious professionalism.

Quoted as saying, "As a local, I'm passionate about reaching out to our community. The early exposure I got to engineering in middle school and high school still influences my career today."

Having addressed more than 250 students at Antelope Valley College in 2022, Peterson recalled that she, like them, "was a local kid who went to Quartz Hill Elementary, Joe Walker Middle School and Quartz Hill High, and never dreamed back then of becoming a flight test engineer who flew at twice the speed of sound and at altitudes 9/12 miles above ground level."

No, she didn't start out to be an engineer. She first thought of becoming a patents attorney, but an internship in a law office changed her mind. Drawn to mechanical engineering, she earned a BS degree at Cal Poly University San Luis Obispo, and a MS degree from the Naval Post Graduate School in Monterey. A civilian employee of the Defense Department, she wasn't in the Air Force. She well remembers her first flight in 2014, "and I was airsick."

She later learned to fly in civil aviation. Peterson says a big obstacle to be overcome in encouraging young women to pursue career studies in aerospace and technologies are lingering fears about gender barriers and prejudices, most of which no longer exist. Belief in your capabilities is the key to success for young women in pursuing an aerospace career, she advises. She says the need for young women in aerospace careers clearly outweighs any obstacles.

Although dedicated to student outreach as a personal mission, Jessica "Sting" Peterson's roles and activities grew more numerous and formal in the post-COVID year public comeback of 2022-23 as Edwards AFB presented the largest Science, Technology, Engineering & Math Show in history, and special presentations and events for all during the four-day return of the Edwards Flight Test Center Air Show and Open House.

Leading up to the long week of activity, Peterson's history of connecting to schools brought her aboard the base Public Affairs



Air Force photograph

Jessica Peterson was part of the 412th Operations Group team that attended the California Aeronautical University Aviation Career Day in Bakersfield, Calif., Feb. 3, 2023.

team activities, including planning and coordination of a special STEM flyover of six regional schools. Peterson was quoted as saying, "I reached out to schools to provide in-person presentations on Flight Test and Engineering. The goal was to connect students to the airplanes and aircrew they saw at the STEM outreach flyover and airshow."

The flyover route reached the California communities of Edwards, Boron, Helendale, Victorville, Hesperia, El Mirage, Lake Los Angeles, Palmdale, Quartz Hill, Lancaster, Rosamond, Tehachapi, Mojave and California City with dedicated points at schools ranging from kindergarten to college.

Jessica said, "In order to 'Break Tomorrow's Barriers Today', the theme of the AV Airshow, we need the next generation of scientists, engineers, pilots, and manufacturers excited and ready to take on the challenge. My intent was to encourage STEM education and awareness of STEM careers," she added.

Peterson worked with the 412th Test Wing public affairs office to create recorded content on the base website that featured an interactive STEM toolkit for students to view prior to the flyover.

"I wanted to be able to speak at all 50-plus schools, but since that wasn't feasible we created a page and recorded content to reach all the schools participating in the STEM outreach flyover," said Peterson.

The website features videos of several of the men and women of the EAFB Test mission, to teach students how they use STEM in their careers and how they ended up in the Aerospace Valley.

The website also includes videos aimed at elementary, middle, and high school levels explaining flight test engineering, STEM opportunities, Automatic Collision Avoidance Technology flight test, and the 75th anniversary of Supersonic Flight with Edwards AFB's unique role in the breaking of the sound barrier in 1945.

Brig. Gen. Matthew Higer, commander of the 412th Test Wing, commented after the Air Show and STEM event, "I'm so deeply humbled by the inspirational investment I witnessed by all the key players and volunteers that made the last 6 days happen; an investment that clearly resonated with kids ages 3 to 13, for they are the STEM future of our Nation;"

Now Technical Director of the 412th Operations Group at Edwards, and Flight Test Engineer Instructor at the U.S. Air Force Test Pilot School, she delivered a gripping narrative about her life's journey and the fulfillment that comes from developing new technologies that save the lives of pilots, aircrews and passengers.

She described in detail the challenges and risks faced by team members with whom she worked in developing and conducting the flight testing of two computer systems at Edwards. One, the Automatic Ground Collision Avoidance System (GCAS), was designed to prevent an aircraft from crashing to the ground when the pilot is unconscious. The other, the Automatic Collision Avoidance Technology (ACAT) is designed to prevent midair collisions between military aircraft.

Reminding the audience of her talk's title, "Flight Test Engineering and Saving Lives," Peterson reported that since the ground avoidance system was installed in the F-16 fighter aircraft, lives of the pilots and their aircraft were saved, and newer fighters, including the F-22 and F-35 have the systems designed-in. She personally knows of a dozen fighter pilots who are alive and well today because the ground avoidance system worked.

The challenge in testing, she said, comes with fundamental rules that the systems must do no harm to the pilot, don't interfere with the pilot doing the job, and still prevent a collision. Added to those rules are processes to be avoided, among them what flight test pilots call, "The Mad Scientist." In other words, don't trust the system to be flawless.

And then there's the need for patience. She said, for example, it took two years of testing to plan for a five-second maneuvering window of opportunity to save the pilot and the plane. In another instance, the automatic system gives a stricken pilot a vital extra three seconds to survive what was previously fatal.

More recently, on Feb. 3, 2023, Peterson traveled to the California Aeronautical University in Bakersfield, Calif., for their Aviation Career Day. At CAU, hundreds of local area students got the chance to experience being a test pilot and flight test engineer with an inspiration through aviation from the team.

"This is their career fair," said Peterson. "Around 700 students came through, mainly high school students, that wanted to learn about aviation and the opportunities in aviation. They came to learn more about CAU and local aviation opportunities including ours."

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# Navy honors first female pilots with Super Bowl flyover

by **Stuart Ibberson**  
editor

It is the ultimate football game in the United States, and this year an estimated 110 million people watched.

Super Bowl LVII saw the Kansas City Chiefs beat out the Philadelphia Eagles 38-35 Feb. 12, 2023, in Glendale, Ariz.

And while football is the main focus of the event, many tune in to watch the commercials and, the half-time show, it was the pre-game events that had a lot of people talking.

This year, the U.S. Navy provided the military aircraft for the pre-game flyover. And to honor the 50th anniversary of the first female Navy pilots to get their gold wings in 1973, the Navy aircraft featured at the 2023 Super Bowl were flown by all-female crews.

“It’s not a feeling I can even put into words,” Lt. Katie Martinez, a flight officer assigned to one of the squadrons working on an aircraft in the flyover, said in a statement. “It doesn’t get bigger than the Super Bowl, and I am humbled and honored to be able to participate with my friends and fellow naval aviators as part of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.”

## The Navy aircraft were:

An F-35C Lightning II from U.S. Navy Strike Fighter Squadron 97 (VFA-97), the “Warhawks” from Naval Air Station Lemoore, Calif.

Two F/A-18F Super Hornets of Navy Strike Fighter Squadron 122 (VFA-122), the “Flying Eagles,” also from NAS Lemoore, and

One EA-18G Growler electronic warfare aircraft from Electronic Attack Squadron 129 (VAQ-129), the “Vikings,” from NAS Whidbey Island, Wash.

In an official release, the U.S. Navy said that, “These aircraft represent the strike and electronic attack capability of the Carrier Air Wing of the Future, providing advanced technology and enhanced flexibility to our military combatant commanders.”

Additionally, the majority of the logistics and maintenance personnel who travelled to Luke Air Force Base, Ariz., in support of the flyover were also female.

## The Navy personnel conducting the flyover were:

- Lt. Arielle Ash from Abilene, Texas. Lt. Ash is a graduate of Texas Tech

— See **SUPER BOWL**, on Page 4



Navy photograph by PO2 Aron Montano

Lt. Lyndsay Evans, a Naval Aviator attached to Electronic Attack Squadron (VAQ) 129, exits an EA-18G Growler after arriving at Luke Air Force Base, Ariz., Feb. 7, 2023, in preparation for their flyover of Super Bowl LVII at State Farm Stadium in Glendale on Feb. 12. The flyover celebrated 50 Years of Women Flying in the Navy, honoring the legacy of women in Naval Aviation.



Air Force photograph by Staff Sgt. Noah D. Coger

LEFT: Lt. Suzelle Thomas, F-35C Lightning II VFA-97 pilot, departs the flightline at Luke Air Force Base, Ariz., Feb. 7, 2023.



Navy photograph by PO2 Aron Montano

Lt. Caitie Perkowski, assigned to Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 192, and Lt. Suzelle Thomas, assigned to VFA-97, are interviewed by a correspondent from ABC's Good Morning America at Luke Air Force Base, Ariz., Feb. 7, 2023, in preparation for their flyover of Super Bowl LVII at State Farm Stadium in Glendale on Feb. 12.



Navy photograph by PO2 Aron Montano

Lt. Suzelle Thomas, a Naval Aviator attached to Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 97, exits an F-35C Lightning II after arriving at Luke Air Force Base, Ariz., Feb. 7, 2023, in preparation for their flyover of Super Bowl LVII at State Farm Stadium in Glendale on Feb. 12.



Air Force photograph by Staff Sgt. Noah D. Coger

U.S. Navy AME3 Ariana Scott places a cover over the head-up guidance system inside an F/A-18E Super Hornet assigned to the “Flying Eagles” of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 122, Lemoore, Calif., at Luke Air Force Base, Ariz., Feb. 7, 2023.



Air Force photograph by Staff Sgt. Noah D. Coger

U.S. Navy ADC Tabitha Bledsoe communicates with the pilot of an F-35C Lightning II assigned to the “Warhawks” of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 97, Lemoore, California, at Luke Air Force Base, Ariz., Feb. 7, 2023.



Navy photograph by PO2 Aron Montano

Lt. Lyndsey Evans and Lt. Margaret Dente, both Naval Aviators attached to Electronic Attack Squadron (VAQ) 129, exit an EA-18G Growler after arriving at Luke Air Force Base, Ariz., Feb. 7, 2023, in preparation for their flyover of Super Bowl LVII at State Farm Stadium in Glendale on Feb. 12.

# First Navy pilots



Navy photograph

In 1974 the U.S. Navy designated its first female naval aviators — The First Six, four of whom posed for a photograph during their flight instruction. Pictured, from left are: Ens. Rosemary Mariner, Ens. Jane Skiles, Lt. j.g. Barbara Allen, and Lt. j.g. Judith Neuffer. Allen, the first to receive her wings, was killed in a training accident in 1982. Not shown are Ana Marie Fuqua, and Joellen Drag.

## SUPER BOWL, from Page 3 —

University. She flew the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet, Navy Strike Fighter Squadron 122 (VFA-122), the “Flying Eagles.”

- Lt. Margaret Dente of North Salem, N.Y. Dente graduated from the University of Southern California. She was onboard an EA-18G Growler electronic warfare aircraft of Electronic Attack Squadron 129 (VAQ-129), the “Vikings.” Dente has accumulated 1,300 hours of flight time and was recently deployed operationally on a cruise aboard the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt. Dente’s grandfather was a U.S Marine helicopter during the Vietnam War and her father is also a pilot.

- Lt. Lyndsay Evans from Palmdale, Calif. Evans is a graduate of the University of Southern California. She was onboard an EA-18G Growler electronic warfare aircraft as a member of the elite Electronic Attack Weapons School. She was deployed operationally during 2018 onboard the USS Carl Vinson (CVN-70).

- Lt. Saree Moreno of Tampa, Fla., and a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Md. Moreno flies the F/A-18F Super Hornet for Navy Strike Fighter Squadron 122 (VFA-122), the “Flying Eagles.. She has accumulated 1,200 flying hours.

Lt. Moreno was deployed aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN-72).

- Lt. Naomi Ngalle of Springfield, Va., and graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy. Ngalle is a member of Strike Fighter Squadron 2 (VFA-2), the “Bounty Hunters.” She flies the F/A-18F Super Hornet and has more than 565 flying hours.

- Lt. Caitie Perkowski of Albuquerque, N.M., and also a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Md. Perkowski is a member of Strike Fighter Squadron 192 (VFA-192), the “World Famous Golden Dragons.. She has accumulated 602 flying hours and currently flies the F/A-18E Super Hornet.

- Lt. Suzelle Thomas of Birmingham, Ala., and a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Md. Thomas flies the F-35C Lightning II for Strike Fighter Squadron 97 (VFA-97), the “Warhawks.”

Palmdale native Evans joined the Navy eight years ago. “I joined the Navy to serve my country,” she said. “Serving in the Navy means being part of something bigger than yourself.”

Eight women became the first female candidates to enter U.S. Navy flight school in 1973, and a year later six graduated to earn their wings. They become known as “The First Six.”



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# The U.S. Air Force's first female chief

In 1960, Chief Master Sgt. Grace Peterson became the first female chief master sergeant in the U.S. Air Force.

She was not only the first female chief master sergeant; she was part of the original group of senior NCOs to be selected for the rank of E-9.

At the time of promotion, Peterson was the first sergeant of a 400-person Women in the Air Force (WAF) squadron at McGuire Air Force Base, N.J.

Peterson entered military service in New York City soon after the attacks on Dec. 7, 1941, that thrust America into World War II, and she joined what was then called the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps in 1942.

During an interview at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in 2010, Peterson said, "I joined because of the horrors of Pearl Harbor and I felt I had to do something about it."

Peterson recalled the first momentous day she entered WAAC as a boot trainee. She was sent to the first WAAC training center, which she called hastily established, at Fort Des Moines, Iowa.

The "genius" who prepared these facilities to receive the first females into the military will forever command her admiration, she said.

"Male OD coats were issued and trailed in the snow for the shorter girls. None of us needed mittens



for the sleeves completely enveloped our arms," she said.

Four weeks later, she was assigned as company clerk to the second WAAC training center at Fort Oglethorpe, Ga., and in less than one year the "boot trainee" had risen to the rank of first sergeant.

To this date, Peterson maintains the "boot" expression derived from the heavy brogan shoes she had her charges wear in those days. After experiencing the rigors of basic training and a tight academic schedule — first as a pupil and later as an instructor — the precedent establishing experience of the veteran of six months

service women performed during the war."

Throughout the war years, Peterson remained in the continental United States except for a period of duty at Ladd Field, Alaska.

When in July 1947, the Air Force became a separate and co-equal service, Peterson said the natural thing to do was to make the transition from Army to Air Force.

Peterson retired in July 1963. Following her passing, she was laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery on Feb. 8, 2019.

was considered too valuable to relinquish.

She had, so to speak, found her niche in the Army ... to greet and train the women volunteers who had followed her in steadily increasing numbers.

At this point in her career, Peterson said, "I was not only proud of my personal good fortune, but I felt an immense pride of my sex. Many of the volunteers we received — some a great deal older than myself — were college graduates and had established civilian careers but chose, instead, to serve with the armed forces. And I think the record points out the caliber of

## Bass named 19th Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force

On June 19, 2020, the U.S. Air Force announced that Chief Master Sgt. JoAnne S. Bass would become the services' 19th Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force.

And when Bass assumed the position as the highest enlisted person in the Air Force on Aug. 14 that same year, she made history as the first female to hold the office.

In selecting Bass, incoming Air Force

Chief of Staff Gen. CQ Brown said Bass brings skills, temperament and experience that the job requires and an outlook on leadership that meshes with his own.

"I could not be more excited to work side-by-side with Chief Bass," Brown said.

Brown himself made history when he was confirmed as the 22nd Chief of Staff of the Air Force becoming the first African American to hold the post.

"I'm honored and humbled to be selected as the 19th Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, and follow in the footsteps of some of the best leaders our Air Force has ever known," Bass said at the time of her selection. "The history of the moment isn't lost on me; I'm just ready to get after it. And I'm extremely



Air Force photograph by Kyle Brasier

Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force JoAnne S. Bass talks to almost 300 Airmen at a town hall during her visit to Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., June 29, 2021. Bass met with the installation's Airmen, families and civilians and saw the mission of the 412th Test Wing.



Air Force photograph by Airman 1st Class Stassney Davis

Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force JoAnne S. Bass is greeted by leadership from the 92nd and 141st Air Refueling Wings at Fairchild Air Force Base, Wash., Jan. 18, 2023. During her visit, Bass met with key leaders from Fairchild and the Spokane community to address challenges Airmen and their families currently face. She also held a base-wide-all-call where she heard from Airmen, highlighted her key priorities, as well as what Airmen can expect in the coming years.

grateful for and proud of my family and friends who helped me along the way."

At the time of her selection, she was the 2nd Air Force's Command Chief Master Sergeant at Keesler Air Force Base, Miss., which she had reported to in July 2018.

Bass was raised as an Army dependent, living in several overseas and stateside locations, prior to entering the Air Force in 1993. Throughout her career, she has held a variety of leadership positions serving at the squadron, group, wing and major command levels. She has significant joint service and special operations experience and has participated in several operations and exercises as well as deployments in direct support of Operations Southern Watch, Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

The Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force represents the highest enlisted level of

leadership, and as such, provides direction for the enlisted force and represents their interests, as appropriate, to the American public and to those in all levels of government.

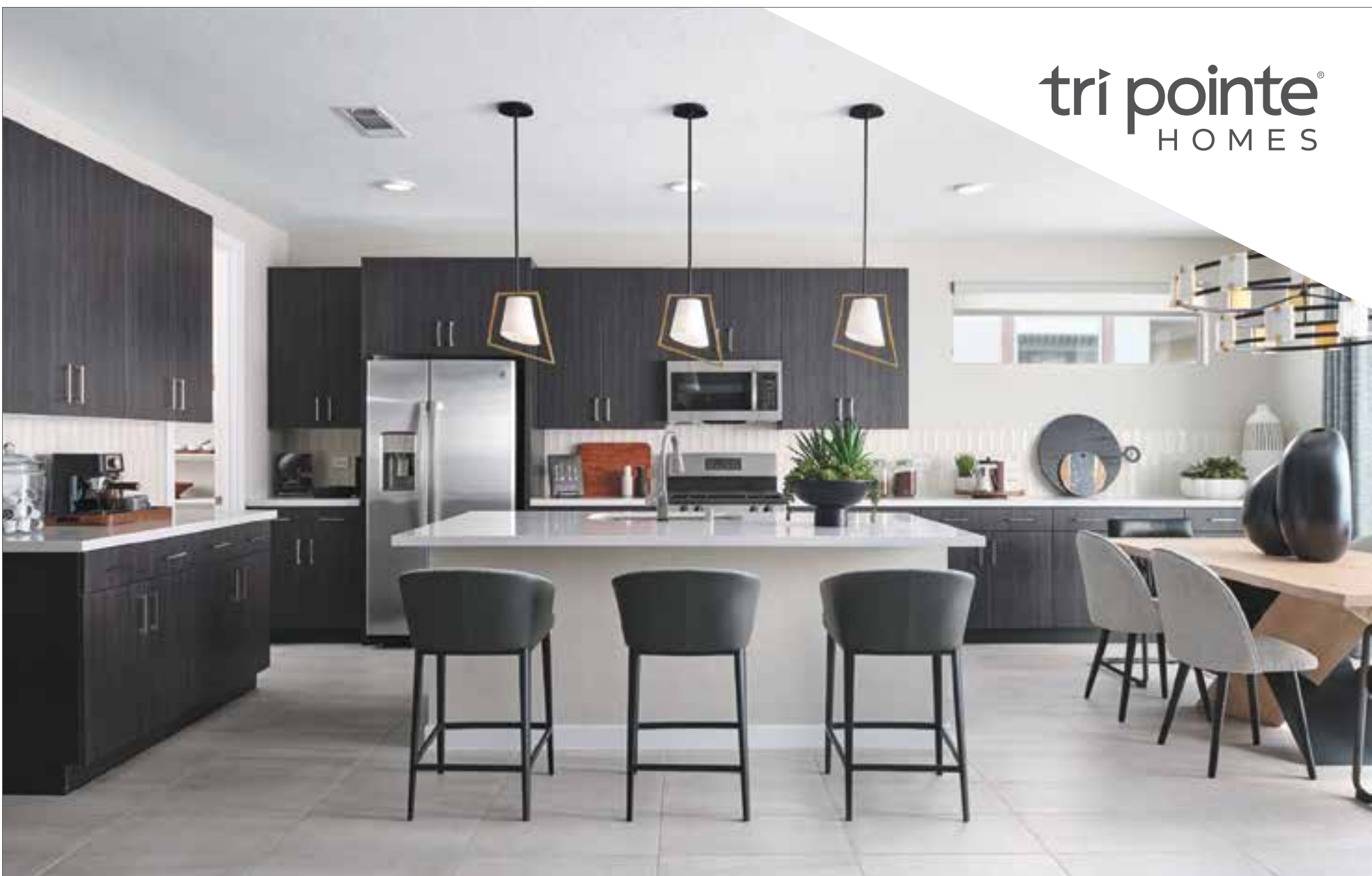
The CMSAF serves as the personal adviser to the Chief of Staff and the Secretary of the Air Force on all issues regarding the welfare, readiness, morale, and proper utilization and progress of more than 600,000 Total Force Airmen.

"I do not know when the next conflict will arise or when the next humanitarian disaster might occur, but I do know whenever our nation calls, Airmen will respond," she said at the Air and Space Forces Association's Air, Space and Cyber Conference on Sept. 20, 2022. "It is because of you that Americans sleep well at night and will continue to do so for generations to come."



Air Force photograph by Staff Sgt. Sabatino DiMascio

Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force JoAnne S. Bass takes a selfie with Senior Enlisted Leaders of Al Dhafra Air Base, United Arab Emirates, Jan. 9, 2023. Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. CQ Brown, Jr., and Chief Bass conducted an All-Call at Al Dhafra AB. Their stop in Al Dhafra AB was one of many across Air Force Central Command to recognize and thank Airmen and Guardians "Standing Watch," remaining vigilant and on call 24 hours a day to protect U.S., allies and partners' national security.



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# The 1st Female Marine Silent Drill Platoon commander

by Katie Lange

DOD News

Marine Corps Capt. Kelsey M. Hastings spent the first few years of her career as an artillery officer. Little did she know that within six years, she would become the first woman to command the Marine Corps Silent Drill Platoon for its 2023 season.

Hastings, 28, graduated from the Naval Academy in May 2017 and immediately began serving as a Marine Corps field artillery officer with the 1st Battalion, 12th Marines in Hawaii.

In 2020, she moved to Washington, D.C., to serve at Marine Barracks Washington, a registered national historical landmark that supports ceremonial and security missions. There, she was required to go through Ceremonial Drill School to learn the rigorous fundamentals of the ceremonial mission. Hastings served as a marching platoon commander and a marching company executive officer before being selected as the 2023 Silent Drill Platoon commander.

The highly disciplined platoon performs during historic Friday Evening Parades at the barracks and Tuesday Sunset Parades at the Marine Corps War Memorial, along with other ceremonies throughout the nation from May to August. The 24-Marine platoon's performances with their 10-pound M1 Garand rifles are precise and calculated — and they're all done without verbal cadence or commands.

As Hastings took over the reins of the platoon, she talked to us about this special mission.

**What's so special about the Silent Drill Platoon?**

We're given the opportunity to represent the Marine Corps to the public. We get to go around the country to organizations and schools that request us to be there to show the world what the Marine Corps is — that we are professionalism and how we care for attention to detail.

**There have been a lot of female "firsts" in the military over the past few decades. What are your thoughts on that designation?**

At the end of the day, I just I feel honored to be a potential role model for both men and women who want to be a Marine. I wouldn't necessarily say I take that title as a big honor. Yes, I am the first, but at the same time, I'm team commander and I've done this before. So, I want to do my best for my Marines and the mission. It's an honor, but it's not the reason that I'm here. It's not the reason I'm leading. I want to lead Marines and be selfless in that regard.

**Tell me about Ceremonial Drill School. Do you get chosen for it?**

All officers and staff non-commissioned officers who get stationed at Marine Barracks Washington go through Ceremonial Drill School. It's something we all share and work through. Then, once you graduate, you go off to your



Isaiah Gomez

U.S. Marine Corps Silent Drill Platoon performs at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, N.C.



Marine Corps photograph

Marine Corps 1st Lt. Kelsey M. Hastings conducts a drill sequence as part of her final evaluation at Marine Barracks Washington's Ceremonial Drill School in Washington, D.C., Feb. 3, 2021. The three-week course prepares barracks officers and staff noncommissioned officers for the unit's rigorous ceremonial mission. Marines are evaluated on the fundamentals of marching, sword manual, voice commands and uniform preparation.

job. After I graduated, I became first platoon commander in Bravo Company [ceremonial marchers]. I did that for one season. Then I was chosen to be the Bravo Company executive officer, and I just got selected for Silent Drill Platoon. It's a command-selected position, and it's really an honor.

**What is the hardest part of leading a drill platoon?**

Personal discipline. I never thought standing still for so long would be as hard and exhausting as it is. Also, there are all the minor drill movements and making sure that my appearance is perfect, from the uniform to how I'm standing to how I'm executing things — on top of making sure that everyone's taken care of in my platoon and the mission's being met. It's doing that part to perfect what I'm presenting. That is definitely something that I constantly get to improve on — making sure everything is to the Marine Corps' standards.

**Tell me about the 24 Marines in the platoon. How are they chosen?**

Actually, today [Nov. 30, 2022] is the first day of our silent drill school. We had a fair amount of Marines from last season who moved, got stationed into the fleet or are getting out of the Marine Corps, so we have to replace them. For the next three weeks, we will have silent drill school, and we will select the people to replace those who left. Then in February, we'll be going to Yuma, Ariz., to train further to develop our routine and skills. Then, at the end of Yuma — we call it Challenge Day — where everyone basically does an evaluation, and the best top 24 get selected.

Some of the Marines who were in last season, they're working right now to make sure that they are up on their skills. It's a constant thing where you can't become complacent — you can't think that you've made it. We're all here to keep improving and working together to create a performance that is phenomenal and memorable.

**What is training like for the platoon's Marines?**

It's long days. At silent drill school, we start around 6 or 6:30 a.m. and end just before dinner. We'll stop for breaks periodically, but the whole day is still — it's a lot. In Yuma, we eat breakfast, then we start working, stop for lunch, keep working, stop for dinner, keep working, and then just rinse and repeat each day. Even outside of when we're at work, I have some Marines who keep on working on their rifle skills, which is just a testament to how phenomenal these junior Marines are and how dedicated they are to the platoon and the mission. It

takes a large amount of time to get these guys to a place that we feel comfortable presenting our performance to people.

**What have you found to be the hardest skill to master?**

We don't jump directly into 'Okay, spin the rifle four times.' We do it step by step by step — crawling through the whole thing. By the end, everyone's like, 'Okay, can we get to the spins?' But we've got to do all those beginning steps before we get there. And it's all dependent on the person. Some people grasp certain things faster than others. There's not generally one thing that is something that people struggle with. It's all dependent on the Marine and what their natural skill type is.

**As commander, what would you like to bring to the position?**

I think that because of COVID-19, we weren't at the forefront of people's minds. So, I really want to get our name and our performance out there around the country to different organizations and kids in high schools — people who don't normally get the opportunity to come to Marine Barracks Washington and see a parade.

When I was a kid, I got the opportunity to see the Silent Drill Platoon perform in Seattle. My family never would have been able to come out here to the barracks to see it. So, giving that to the public — taking our performance to them allows them to see what we do. I stand there and watch in awe of what they do, and I'm sure that the public does that as well.

**What do you enjoy most from the performances?**

The crowd and the Marines getting to see that their hard work is appreciated. They spend so many hours [preparing], and so getting to see little kids watching in awe as they're throwing the rifles — I think that's a really rewarding feeling.

**What do you see yourself doing after your year commanding the platoon is over?**

I'm excited about the next few years. I think there's going to be some really amazing opportunities in leadership and in being with the Marines. I'm up for orders to go back to the fleet in the summer of 2024. I want to be a battery commander, really, really badly. Then from there, I don't know. I'm kind of taking it one duty station at a time. So, ask me again in the winter of 2024!



DOD photograph by Elizabeth Fraser

Marine Corps 1st Lt. Kelsey Hastings leads a platoon of Marines assigned to Marine Barracks Washington while conducting military funeral honors for Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Darin Hoover in Section 60 of the Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Va., Sept. 24, 2021. Hoover died on Aug. 26, 2021, as a result of an enemy attack while supporting non-combatant evacuation operations in Kabul, Afghanistan. Twelve other service members from the Marines Corps, Navy and Army died in the same attack supporting Operation Freedom's Sentinel.





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# US Navy Blue Angels selects first female demo pilot



Navy photograph by POC Michael Russell

Left wing pilot, Lt. Amanda Lee, assigned to the U.S. Navy Flight Demonstration Squadron, the Blue Angels, prepares for takeoff prior to a training flight over Naval Air Facility El Centro, Calif. Lee is the squadron's first woman F/A-18E/F demonstration pilot. The Blue Angels are currently conducting winter training at NAF El Centro, in preparation for the upcoming 2023 air show season.

by **Stuart Ibberson**  
editor

Each year, the U.S. Navy announces the new team members for the U.S. Navy Blue Angels flight demonstration team.

When the Navy announced the five new team members for the 2023 Show Season, the service also made history.

Included in that list was Lt. Amanda Lee.

And while Lee is not the first female Sailor to serve with the Blue Angels in the teams' 56-year history, she is the first demonstration pilot to join.

She will serve alongside three other women currently on the team – serving as a flight surgeon, public affairs officer, and event coordinator.

Lee is a native of Mounds View, Minn., and prior to joining the team she was assigned to Strike Fighter Squadron 106 based at Naval

Air Station Oceana, Va.

Lee also took part in the first all-female flyover in 2019 for the funeral of retired Capt. Rosemary Mariner — the first woman to command a naval aviation squadron.

In a Navy release at that time, Lee said, “When I come into the ready room right now, I’m a pilot first, a person second, and my gender really isn’t an issue. It’s people like Captain Mariner that have paved that way for us, so it’s really a huge honor. I’m super humbled to be a part of this flyover in her honor.”

Lee reported to the squadron in September 2022 at the end of the show season. She is now taking part in a five-month training program that includes time at NAS Pensacola, Fla., the Blue Angels’ home base, and NAF El Centro, Calif.

The Blue Angels first air show of the 2023 season is at NAF El Centro on March 11.

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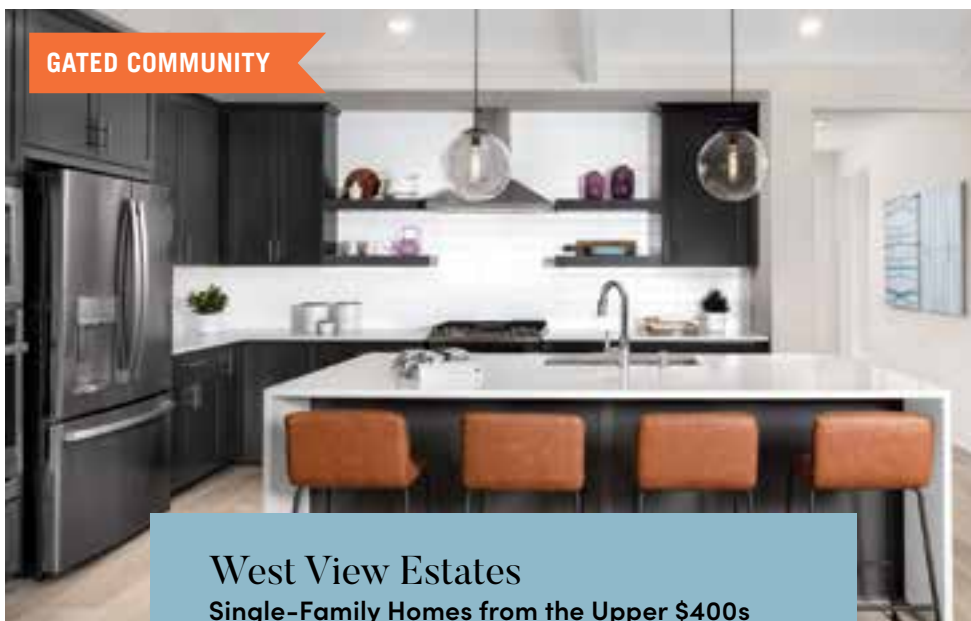


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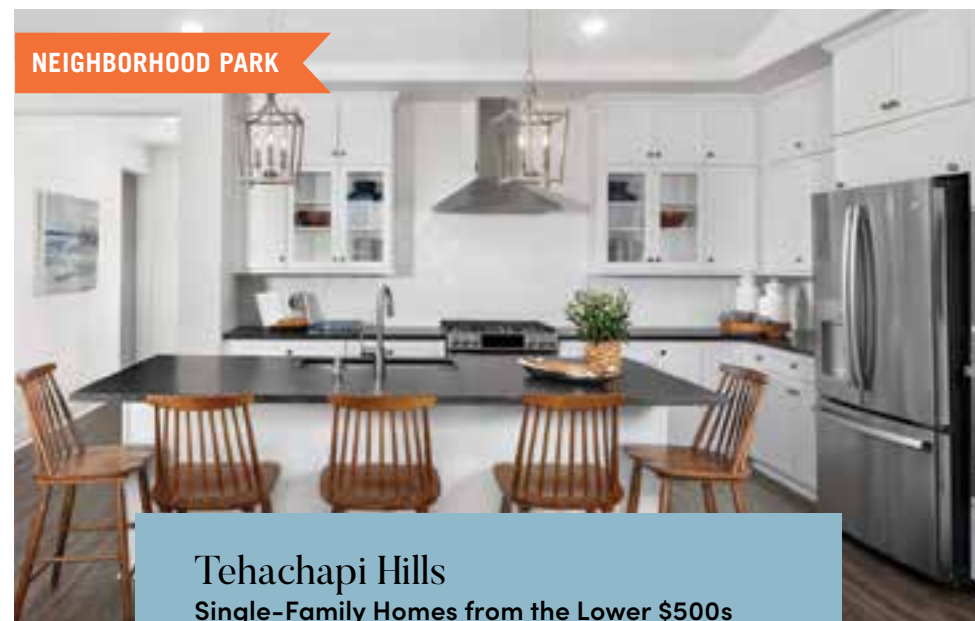
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# Making room at the aviation table

by KC Rawley

Aerotech staff

Carrie Worth, research pilot and Gulfstream lead project pilot at NASA Armstrong Flight Research Center at Edwards, Calif., can tell you the exact moment she decided she wanted to fly.

Growing up in Big Bend, Wisc., with relatives in Fond du Lac about an hour away, the Oshkosh EAA Fly-in was a yearly summer outing for her family.

"I distinctively remember one year when I was in grade school, and I was starting to get more interested. I knew I liked airplanes. I thought I might wanna fly," Worth said.

During an aerobatic performance with an EXTRA EA-260 plane, Worth was "watching this pilot do these things that I couldn't even believe are possible with an airplane."

Naturally shy, the eight- or nine-year-old turned to her father as the plane taxied in and said uncharacteristically, "I wanna meet the pilot; I wanna know how he did that."

As the young girl watched the glamorous female aerobatic pilot Patty Wagstaff step out of the airplane, Worth turned to her father and said, "Now I can be a pilot."

"I was exposed to aviation at a young age, but it wasn't until I saw her get out of the airplane that it clicked," Worth said. "I knew then."

Years later, as a lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force at Wright Patterson AFB, Ohio, Worth was able to relate the story to Wagstaff, who asked why she hadn't come up to speak to her.

"I was brave enough until I saw you standing there, and I was brave enough to want to meet the pilot. And then something about seeing you made me know I could be a pilot."

"But then I was too shy again to come speak to you," Worth said.

Now, after a 21-year military career where she logged more than 5,800 hours of flight time, including more than 1,100 combat hours, and working as an instructor pilot, evaluator pilot, and aircraft commander in multiple aircraft, including the C-21A, M/HC-130P, and CN-235, Worth is the one speaking to and inspiring young



Courtesy photograph

Carrie Worth in front of a T-37 at Columbus Air Force Base, Ohio, early in her military career.

girls to become pilots.

Having that personal connection with someone who looks like you and is doing what you yearn to accomplish is so important in getting underrepresented people into aviation, according to Worth.

"There's a there's a great organization called Sisters of the Skies. And it's made up of Black women, who are less than half of 1 percent of the aviation world. And that's not even getting into breaking it down into maintenance and air traffic control," Worth said.

"So, it started as a small group of women saying, 'We're just gonna get pictures and videos and information of us out there,' and now it's just grown. It's huge. And they're making a difference because little girls have someone who looks like them."

That's why she and fellow pilot Jennifer Aupke started The Milieux Project, a 501(c)(3) with a mission to connect girls to aviation.

"I flew fixed wing and she flew rotary wing. She flew the helicopters and people assumed since we were both female lieutenant colonels, that we must have always known each other forever, but we had never met before," Worth said.

"Hanging out in the backyard in South Georgia, we realized that despite never meeting each other, our stories were all lining up of the experiences we had, all the challenges we faced, how we overcame them and who were the people that we had, who were allies to support us in our careers."

"We decided then and there that we



Courtesy photograph

Carrie Worth and Dean Neeley in a TG-14 U.S. Air Force trainer.

need to give better advice than we got."

The women started a blog, assuming someone out there would connect with their stories. As their contacts grew, they decided on founding the Milieux Project, which is French for "social environment," which encourages young women and helps connect them to sources to aid their aviation aspirations.

Ask Worth what type of flying she enjoys the most, and the answer is unequivocal — combat search and rescue — which she did in Afghanistan and Iraq. "I loved it: night vision goggles, landing in the dirt, and helping people out on their worst day. Refueling helicopters. Going in to rescue injured personnel. I loved everything about it. The camaraderie among all the community of combat search and rescue," she said.

"Sleeping on a cot I loved. Nobody thinks about living in a tent in the Air Force. I loved how hard and challenging it was because it was also incredibly rewarding."

Worth also experienced a different type of search and rescue in support of Hurricane Katrina, where a fellow airman debriefed her for information about where she flew, desperate for information about her family.

"When you're doing it at home, it just breaks your heart a different way," Worth said.

After a joint staff position as chief of Strategy Plans and Policy for Headquarters Special Operations Command Europe from 2011 to 2013 in Stuttgart, Germany, she was offered an opportunity to come back to search and rescue as a commander.

1997 — Bachelor of Science, Space Operations, U.S. Air Force Academy, Colo.

2007 — Master of Science, Aerospace Engineering, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

2010 — Master of Science, Defense Analysis (Irregular Warfare), Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, Calif.

"They're not even finished asking the question before I said 'Yes!,'" Worth recalls. "So, I kind of started and finished my military career there: The perfect bookend."

When asked about sexism she might have encountered in the military, Worth said her negative experiences were mild compared to those in pilot training when it was opened to women in the late 1970s.

"There were always people who didn't think you belong there, or thought you got there because the Air Force was filling a quota or assumed, 'Oh, we must not have had enough girls in the last class,' but they were far outweighed by my classmates who were supportive."

Some classmates' wives refused to let them participate in study groups with Worth or made accusations when they returned from travel with her, but she said the negatives were better once she was stationed than in the academy.

The most sexism she encountered was career fields not being open to females. Those graduating in the 1970s and 1980s could fly, but not all aircraft. When Worth graduated in 1998, many fields were open, but not all: "You could fly fighters. You could fly bombers, but there were still a lot of closed communities like special operations," a role she did take on later in her career.

Worth retired from the military in 2018 after her selection for the rank of colonel, and started flying the Boeing 747-400 and 747-8F aircraft for UPS. Although she enjoyed her new commercial aviation career, she pursued a childhood dream and joined the flight operations directorate at NASA Armstrong Flight Research Center in Palmdale, Calif., in March 2021. She now flies the Gulfstream G-III mission support aircraft.

Now Worth spends time mentoring with TuskegeeNEXT, PreFlight Aviation Camp, and NASA STEM outreach programs, heeding the words of a male commander who told her, "Carrie, when you have a seat at the table, your job is look around and see who's missing. Be that advocate. Be that voice."

"While I realize my experience is not everyone's experience — and I know I cannot speak for everyone — my aviation career has been phenomenal and I am grateful for everyone who supported me, and also for those who were not supportive — they also drove me to succeed."

To help young women interested in aviation, contact:

The Milieux Project: [www.themilieux.org](http://www.themilieux.org) Instagram: @milieuxproject LinkedIn: The Milieux Project

TuskegeeNEXT: [www.tuskegeenext.org](http://www.tuskegeenext.org)  
Sisters of the Skies: [www.sistersoftheskies.org](http://www.sistersoftheskies.org)

PreFlight Aviation Camp: [www.preflightcamp.org](http://www.preflightcamp.org)

Legacy Flight Academy: [www.legacyflightacademy.org](http://www.legacyflightacademy.org)

Research pilot Carrie L. Worth on the steps of a Gulfstream III at NASA's Armstrong Flight Research Center at Edwards, Calif. She joined NASA Armstrong's flight operations staff in March 2021 after 21 years in the U.S. Air Force, and commercial piloting.

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# Engineer hasn't left Earth, but her work has

by KC Rawley

Aerotech staff

As a child, Patricia "Patty" Ortiz thought she wanted to be an astronaut.

But when she saw a television episode of Punky Brewster a few weeks after the Challenger disaster, she was positive.

The show, with a cameo by astronaut Buzz Aldrin, was meant to reassure kids that they shouldn't give up on their dreams; that bad things happen, but brave pioneers push on. And the seven-year-old Ortiz recommitted herself to her dream of space.

After many years, she hasn't left Earth's atmosphere yet, but her work has.

In Moscow 2016, Ortiz collaborated with international partners Roscosmos and Kurnichev Space Center to assess a contingency freeze scenario for the Russian segment of ISS Functional Cargo Block on the International Space Station where she was the only woman on the engineering team. The work provided an operational plan to prevent the FGB from freezing during propulsion transfer while adhering to ISS flight rules and operational products.

Now, as deputy project manager of Orion Heat Shield Spectrometer for Team Artemis — she has a part in putting a woman and the first person of color on the Moon for the first time and establishing a base for Mars exploration.

After the Punky Brewster airing, "I really was very gravitated towards the math and science courses. Growing up, I excelled in those courses, and so I did quite a bit of making sure that I was keeping up with my math and physics courses, but I also tried to stay really well-rounded," Ortiz said.

She credits her athletic coaches and her single mom for modeling leader-



NASA photograph

ship and good work ethics. Ortiz is a first-generation American and first in her family to go to college. Her mother immigrated from El Salvador alone with Ortiz's three siblings shortly before the civil war broke out.

Growing up in South Central Los Angeles with a single mom and without academic guidance inspired Ortiz to join the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers at the University of California, San Diego.

"The mission of the organization is to change lives, to empower the community through STEM awareness — accessing it, supporting it," Ortiz said.

"I want to get these young kids excited, and to get them motivated. You know, a lot of times kids get scared of the math and physics. And it is almost crippling for them, and I hope that my story inspires young kids and motivates them to continue to study hard and pursue these STEM fields.

"We like to go out and volunteer to these lower income neighborhoods and elementary schools where the kids maybe don't have any professional role models in their lives."

Part of Ortiz' advice to young people is that "first impressions matter."

Boeing hired Ortiz same-day at a job fair when she still had three months of college left because the recruiter remembered her. She had been part of an eight-to-10 person winning team at a conference Boeing was part of, and the recruiter had been impressed. The college senior was given a written offer that day, contingent on her passing her classes.

The Artemis job came after Ortiz moved from Houston to NASA Armstrong at Edwards, Calif., in their Space

Projects and Partnerships Branch and was sent to a project management training with other centers. Armstrong had been wanting to collaborate with other NASA centers to do space work, and a colleague from Johnson Space Center also at the training who met Ortiz on the training team was the branch chief of the Orion Heat Shield Spectrometer project and said they needed a deputy project manager for Artemis. Now Ortiz splits her time between the two centers, some of it remotely.

When she was hired by a NASA contractor, her mother was concerned about her youngest going all the way to Texas, but Ortiz told her she'd give it five years to see how it worked out. She stayed 13 years.

After supporting 22 successful ISS missions with her NASA work in Houston, Ortiz only got to witness one shuttle launch in Florida. In 2009 she was part of the Node 3 cupola final checkout to make sure nothing was out of configuration.

"You know, we had been so intimately involved with the hardware, the Node 3 Cupola people. I started working on that in January 2004, and to see it from design on paper to physically being able to touch it in a bunny suit before it launches was so rewarding," she said.

The move to Armstrong Flight Research Center was to be closer to her aging mother, and to put some aeronautics on her resume.

Now Ortiz will oversee Orion Heat Shield Spectrometer on Artemis II through V. Currently, JSC is building all of the OHSS box for the four missions.

In April of this year, she will travel to Kennedy Space Center in Florida for an end-to-end test of the unit which

## EDUCATION

2003 Bachelor of Science in Aerospace Engineering, University of California, San Diego, Calif.

LEFT: Patricia Ortiz and support aircraft mechanics removing the right F-18 wing at NASA Armstrong Flight Research Center at Edwards, Calif., for a shape memory alloy ground test. The F-18 wing was shipped to NASA Glenn Research Center in Ohio to perform the ground test. Ortiz is now the deputy project manager for Orion's OSHU.



Courtesy photograph

Patricia Ortiz is deputy project manager of the Orion Heat Shield Spectrometer for NASA's Artemis II-IV Program being assembled at Johnson Space Center, Houston, Texas.

includes "additional calibration and check-out of the OHSS box, the fiber optic cables and the heat shield optical subassembly," according to NASA.

Ortiz calls it "incredibly exciting" to be a part of the Artemis mission.

"It's a small footprint into getting boots on the Moon and that's extremely exciting to be a part of," she said.

"We don't have anyone that looks like me doing these amazing things. So, for me, it's extremely exciting to know that now the first woman will be able to land on the Moon. An — beyond, we're going to continue to explore.

"And after the Moon is Mars — we want to do everything that we can make sure that the team is safe and that we do our due diligence to design and get the hardware safely to the Moon and back.

"That's our number one priority as an Artemis team. Always."

And has Ortiz given up on her childhood dream of being an astronaut?

"I don't discount anything," she said. "The sky and beyond is the answer."

Readers can follow Patricia Ortiz at her inspirational Instagram page "Latinas Need Space."



NASA photograph

The Orion Heat Shield Spectrometer flight unit assembly for the Artemis II mission is pictured here without the top lid installed.

# Esther Blake: First enlisted woman in the Air Force

Staff Sgt. Esther McGowin Blake has the distinction of being the “first woman in the Air Force.”

She enlisted in the first minute of the first hour of the first day regular Air Force duty was authorized for women on July 8, 1948.

Blake originally enlisted in March 1944, in Miami in the Army Air Forces, served one year in the Alaskan division and was discharged in November 1945. She reenlisted in April 1947 and was assigned to the ground force but seized the first opportunity to return to the Army Air Forces. Service in the nation’s armed forces was nothing new for Blake.

She supported the war by working at the Miami Air Depot as a civilian employee. Blake was a widow. She joined the Women’s Army Corps when she found out her eldest son, Lt. Julius Blake, was reported missing. He was a B-17 Flying Fortress pilot out of England and had been shot down over Belgium. Her other son, Lt. Tom Blake was serving in B-25 Mitchell medium bombers in Italy — he was also shot down at a later time.

At the time Blake was quoted in the Miami Herald as saying that her reason for joining the WACs

was the hope of helping free a soldier from clerical work to fight, thus speeding the end of the war.

“If I can do this,” she said, “My efforts will be worthwhile.”

During the months and years that followed, she saw both her sons return from combat with only minor wounds and heavily decorated.

She was assigned to several bases throughout the United States and in Alaska and the Yukon Territory near the Aleutians. She separated from service briefly and return to her civilian job in Miami in the mid-40s; however, she heeded a recall for women in service and returned to an Army assignment at Fort McPherson near Atlanta.

It was during this assignment that the Air Force became a separate branch of the service and women in the Air Force were authorized. She remained active with the Air Force until 1954 when she separated and went to work with the civil service at the Veterans Regional Headquarters in Montgomery, Ala.

Blake, the first woman in the Air Force, died Oct. 17, 1979. In 1987, the Air Force Senior NCO Academy at Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala., named one of their student dormitories in her honor.



Courtesy photo



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# Soldier Becomes 1st Female Army Guard M1 Abrams Tank Master Gunner

by Army Sgt. 1st Class Whitney Hughes  
Army News Service

Staff Sgt. Elizabeth Cox became the first female Army National Guard Soldier to graduate the Army National Guard Warrior Training Center's M1 Abrams Master Gunner course in December 2022, earning the title and additional skill identifier of Abrams Master Gunner.

The 53-day course at Fort Benning, Ga., upsills accomplished armor crew members like Cox and hones their proficiency in tank gunnery and maintenance. Cox's desire to impart knowledge to her home tank crew motivated her to attend the course.

"I really enjoy the fact that you have one crew, and you become a family," she said. "You have to take care of your track. If you don't, you or a member of your family could die."

At the AMG, she and other students became experts in advising commanders at all echelons on tank operations, assisting with the planning, development, execution and evaluation of all combat and individual, crew and collective gunnery training.

"Staff Sgt. Cox was excellent in her navigation of this course," said Sgt. 1st Class Steven Camp, an instructor at the ARNG Warrior Training Center. "She had

a wealth of tactical knowledge of tank operations from afar. Initially lacking technical knowledge, she was a quick learner, and when the opportunity presented itself, she was the first to volunteer."

As a newly minted master gunner, Cox is now a subject matter expert in advanced gunnery methodology, turret weapons systems maintenance, and gunnery training management.

"I think that it's amazing, the amount of knowledge to be able to diagnose exact components that you just wouldn't be able to do as a normal crew member," said Cox. Having had the M1 for only 18 months, Cox added that as a master gunner, her proficiency presents the Texas Army National Guard with a new baseline in armor education.

"Being able to impart information from the base level forward so that we can start a program and make sure it goes correctly is exciting, and I'm excited to take all that back to my crew."

In and outside the tank, Cox's armor family ties run deep. Her partner and fellow Texas ARNG member, Sgt. 1st Class Josh Simmons, graduated about a month before Cox from a master gunner course for the Bradley Fighting Vehicle, a lighter armored track vehicle.

"We're uniquely positioned in that we're probably the only people who can

really be in the same household and completely understand what one another is going through," said Cox.

The "armor couple" is looking forward to maximizing newfound knowledge from master gunner courses to make the state's combat arms programs more lethal.

"The Warrior Training Center is such a huge asset, particularly because in the National Guard, we're not out on tanks 24/7. So, having a class that prepares you and gets you back in that mind frame is such an asset for success," Cox said.

The Army National Guard's WTC graduated more than 2,000 students from various courses at Fort Benning and mobile training annexes.

WTC course offerings include Ranger Training Assessment, Master Fitness, Air Assault, Pathfinder and Rappel Master, and support training for events like Best Squad, Best Soldier and NCO competitions.

"WTC is the ARNG's premier functional training and leader development organization, consisting of trained and disciplined Soldiers that are competent, motivated and professional leaders," said Lt. Col. Gary Dettloff, WTC battalion commander. "Functional training provided by the WTC supports the federal mission of Large Scale Combat Operations and the state's mission for domestic response to natural and man-made disasters."



Courtesy photograph  
Staff Sgt. Elizabeth Cox, an armored crewman with the Texas Army National Guard's 3rd Squadron, 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment, poses for a photo on her M1 Abrams Tank at Fort Hood, Texas. Cox recently became the first female in the ARNG to graduate from the Abrams Master Gunner school, an advanced gunnery and maintenance school that earns graduates the designation of Abrams Master Gunner.

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# Flying doctor inspires NASA pilot

by KC Rawley

Aerotech staff

As a child living on China Lake Naval Weapons Station in the Mojave Desert, Elizabeth “Liz” Ruth received her medical care in an unusual way.

The children on the remote Navy base were visited by a female pediatrician who flew in from Lancaster, Calif., in her own private plane.

Ruth thinks her last name was Nielson, although she’s not sure.

“I just remember she was such a good doctor. My mom loved her and trusted her with all six of us kids. And she flew her own airplane up to see us.

“So, at that time, I guess I just really looked up to her and thought well, that would be a great life, you know, be a doctor and have my own airplane.”

“So yes, she was my inspiration,” Ruth said.

“And it never, even though I wanted to fly, never once occurred to me that I could be a professional pilot because I never saw a woman professional pilot. Even airlines, you know, there was just no women pilots for me to see”, Ruth said.

“I could see myself doing that because she was doing it. And for someone who wanted to fly so much, it’s kind of surprising to me now that I didn’t have the imagination to see myself as a professional pilot. But it does go to show that it’s hard to be what you don’t see.”

The plan was to go to college, then medical school to have a job that paid enough so Ruth could afford a plane.

But in 1973, when Ruth was in high school, the U.S. Navy started training aviators for the first time since World War II, and in 1974 the woman graduated who would demonstrate a path to the skies for young Liz Ruth: Rosemary Mariner.

“Rosemary was in the China Lake test squadron and flew airplanes to test missiles for my dad, who was an engineer, and he introduced me to her,” Ruth said.

“Once I saw her, then everything became very clear to me. Oh my gosh, I can skip the whole medical school thing and I can be a professional pilot.”

Mariner was the first female military pilot to fly a tactical jet and the first to command an



NASA photograph

Liz Ruth in front of NASA's Stratospheric Observatory for Infrared Astronomy (SOFIA), which she piloted until the plane and program were retired in 2022.

## EDUCATION

Bachelor of Science, Business Administration, University of Southern California, Los Angeles.

Master of Aeronautical Science, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University



NASA photograph

Elizabeth “Liz” Ruth in her official NASA portrait. Before working for Armstrong Flight Research Center, Ruth was an active duty pilot of the U.S. Air Force, where she served as instructor pilot, check pilot and aircraft commander for the T-38 and T-43, and a commercial airline pilot.

aviation squadron. She retired as a captain in 1997 after 24 years of service, and at her 2019 funeral, was given the first-ever all-female “missing man” flyover and was honored at another all-female flyover at the 2023 Super Bowl.

Ruth started college on an ROTC scholarship majoring in engineering but found it “boring and tedious” so she switched to business so she could graduate and get into pilot training faster.

In the U.S. Air Force, Ruth was an active-duty pilot serving as an instructor pilot, check pilot and aircraft commander for the T-38 and T-43 from 1981 to 1989. She left the military with the rank of captain and went to work for United Airlines.

Before Sept. 11, 2001, Ruth and her pilot husband were both working full-time for United, balancing work and staying with their three young daughters. But after the attack on the World Trade Center, the airlines were in financial difficulty and demanded pay cuts and pension loss from their employees.

Ruth and her husband “came to a decision point of ‘is this worthwhile anymore? You know, is this how we want to raise our kids?’ So, I walked away from a perfectly good airline career, which is kind of unheard of. So now I’m finding out lots of women did that at the time,” she said.

The 10-year hiatus from flying is a decision she never regretted.

“I was fortunate enough that my husband could work and make enough money for all of us, and I could concentrate on the kids.

“I would have much preferred if we both could have worked part time. I think that’s a better model, but of the available choices, that’s what we did. So, we were able to raise the kids the way we wanted to.”

Ruth thinks there needs to be more flexibility in the work force: “Have both parents work part time while the kids need them and then be able to go back full time.”

After the children were grown, she assumed that she couldn’t go back to piloting because of the way the flying industry usually works, and did other kinds of jobs, but a chance encounter with a NASA pilot on a commercial flight, led to an interview with the Armstrong Flight Research Center and her flying SOFIA.

“NASA was imaginative enough to see that someone who’s been out of the cockpit, but still has that wealth of experience, could get themselves back up to the level that they needed for flying these airplanes,” said Ruth.

The Stratospheric Observatory for Infrared Astronomy (SOFIA), was a modified Boe-

ing 747SP with the world’s largest airborne astronomical observatory.

“We had a nine-foot diameter infrared telescope, and we flew during the night. We’d take off around sunset, land before sunrise and do observations all night long. Nine- to 10-hour-missions,” explained Ruth. “All the SOFIA pilots have checked out in both seats to be the pilot in command or the copilot, and we would trade off seats. My job was to be in command of the airplane.”

The SOFIA program was a “partnership with Germany, 80 percent funded by the United States and 20 percent funded by Germany,” said Ruth. “And they made the telescope and were on most of the missions.”

“On any given night, we would have scientists from all around the world. So, at every mission brief, you’d hear all sorts of different voices and accents. Sometimes we would have schoolteachers, sometimes we had media. But it was always a variety of people, all very excited to be on Sophia doing their projects.”

The SOFIA project has now been discontinued, and Ruth went on the plane’s final flight to Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., in December of 2022. The plane has a new home at the Pima Air Museum in Pima, Ariz.

“They’re pretty happy to

have it. I think Pima’s going to take very good care of SOFIA. So, we’re really happy that that she found a good home,” Ruth said.

Although she misses SOFIA, there are new horizons for Ruth. Her new project at NASA is learning how to fly the RQ-4 Global Hawk surveillance drone that does telemetry for missile launches, and she also flies NASA’s Gulfstream II.

The Gulfstream has a pod built by JPL on the belly of the aircraft to do precision ground mapping. “We had a very fun project this summer in Fairbanks, Alaska — the Arctic-Boreal Vulnerability Experiment. The Arctic temperature is changing faster than anywhere else in the world, and they want to see what the effects are. We flew over very precise lines, and while we were flying, there were people on the ground also taking samples and people in towers, making observations and satellites going overhead so that we can get a really good idea of what’s happening on the ground. And they do this every year so they can see what the changes are.”



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# NASA engineer Shideh Naderi

by KC Rawley

Aerotech staff

Shideh Naderi has experienced much success since coming to the United States from Iran at 18 to study electrical engineering.

While still a junior in college, she applied for NASA's Pathways Internship and landed a full time NASA job upon graduation. Since then, she has received \$2.5 million to design and test a solution that solves a space mission problem, worked as an electronics/software engineer, was a deputy project manager on the Global Hawk/SkyRange project, and is now the flight test coordinator for the Convergent Aeronautics Solutions and Weather Tolerant Operations (CAS-WTO) program at Armstrong Flight Research Center at Edwards, Calif.

Oh, and next she'd like to become an astronaut.

"My ultimate career goal is to be an astronaut. I like to call it a goal, not a dream, because you wake up from dreams. But goals are obtainable," said Naderi.

She admits it's a steep climb.

The first requirement is technical and academic excellence, then physical fitness, and finally personal traits and personality, according to Naderi. She says she's working on the first two requirements now.

"I think they put out an application every few years and it is extensive — you need recommendation letters, fill out a bunch of paperwork, but then there's tiers, and they want people who have done extraordinary things."

"If I'm just checking boxes, if I'm saying, oh I have a private pilot license, or I have a scuba diving license, or if I'm running marathons just to be an astronaut, they don't want that. They want you to do those things for yourself, for your own enjoyment and for your own challenges. That's something that they look for. So, when they look at all these applicants, I think they can tell who's actually doing it for themselves, and who's not."

After the applications have been reviewed, cuts are made, and those left "go through testing and training and then the group gets reduced and reduced and reduced until they final have a class of 10 or 12 astronauts. So, it's a very extensive process," Naderi said.

"A lot of people maybe make it to the first or second round, but they can never make it to the final round. You have to be very exceptional to be an astronaut."

The internship with NASA came after Naderi sent a message to a woman who had said online she got picked for an internship with NASA

"I didn't even know her. I said, 'How was the interview with NASA? Was it hard? Do you have any recommenda-



Courtesy photograph

Shideh Naderi is a NASA engineer working in the flight test coordinator for the Convergent Aeronautics Solutions and Weather Tolerant Operations (CAS-WTO) program at Armstrong Flight Research Center at Edwards, Calif.

tions? And she said a few things and 'By the way, the Pathways Internship is open and they're going close in like two days.' I had my resume ready to go for SpaceX, and I had a letter of recommendation for something else ready to go. So, I applied that night to the job opening on USA Jobs. And then I also applied to other internships and NASA."

Naderi got the call from NASA and started a few weeks later.

She became the lead investigator on a project to develop and test a magnetic coupler for cryogenic fluids, that could withstand dusty conditions on the moon and other planets. Her team picked this from a list of technological problems that hinder space exploration to develop an answer.

"If you're a Pathways intern, you get to come back every summer automatically to continue your internship. That was like set in stone. I think I did a decent job, so I got hired on like two weeks after graduation."

Her advice for success in engineering is to apply for internships, join clubs, and do practical experiments, even if you must design your own.

Also, students should join professional groups like the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, of which Naderi was the president of her college's chapter.

"One club at college was Mechatronics and we were building an autonomous submarine that would do underwater tests fully autonomously. So that was a huge engineering challenge," Naderi said.

In 2015 the San Diego State Mechatronics Club came first out of 38 international teams: world champions.

## EDUCATION

2016 Bachelor of Science, Electrical Engineering w/ Minor in Computer Science: San Diego State University, San Diego, Calif.

2019 Master of Science, Electrical Engineering: University of California Los Angeles, Calif.

Practical experience like this on a resume makes it stand out from the rest.

"Having a degree for the job is like the literal minimum requirement, even if you have really good grades. People hiring look for those with experience, because in a real job situation you're getting interaction with a lot of other people. You get to face technical and nontechnical problems that you have to solve, and that gives you the experience."

"I think experience is more important than, for example, graduating a year or two early, so I highly recommend internships to everyone in their field."

"Everyone knows you need math and physics, but the overall thing is that you need to know how to do problem solving, how to break the problem down, and kind of divide and conquer if you have issues.

"As a high schooler who wants to go into engineering, I would just take good AP classes, take college courses, be ahead of the game, and I would highly recommend that they apply to internships even as a high schooler, a lot of companies hire interns from high school, or they have programs specifically tailored for high schoolers or freshmen in college."

Naderi said she wants to tell anyone afraid of going into a male dominated role that "you will have more allies than enemies. The majority of people are good, especially in the higher education levels, they are way more used to women being engineers, they're way more supportive. They don't care if you're a woman or not."

## Red Flag-Nellis 23-1



Air Force photograph by Senior Airman Mega Estrada

Senior Airman Sydney Woo, 354th Fighter Generation Squadron weapons specialist from Davis Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., performs final weapons checks prior to take off during Red Flag 23-1 at Nellis AFB, Nev., Jan. 23, 2023. Red Flag provides Airmen with realistic training to test their readiness capabilities.

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# “I am grateful that my one talent, flying, was useful to my country”



Courtesy photograph

Cornelia Fort

She was dead at 24, the first female pilot to die in wartime active duty.

Her commanding officer sent a compassionate letter back to the young pilot's mother: “My feeling about the loss of Cornelia,” wrote Nancy Love, “is hard to put into words — I can only say that I miss her terribly, and loved her. If there can be any comforting thought, it is that she died as she wanted to — in an Army airplane, and in the service of her country.”

In 1945 the young women from Tennessee who came from privilege was honored with a local airport named after her, built near her family's farm. It closed in 2011, but for many years the pilots coming and going would drive by the monument in front of the facilities at the site that in her own words, simply and modestly sums up her wartime contribution: “I am grateful that my one talent, flying, was useful to my country.”

Although Cornelia Fort lived a very short life, she made an impact on society, helping open the doors for women in the future. It's a tragedy the generations after her never got the chance to hear her speak or read her story of a long, full life, but we are thankful for the message she championed: that a privileged life may have its benefits, but if that life doesn't fulfill your rebel spirit and desire for adventure then maybe the privileged life isn't all it's cracked up to be.

During this month as we celebrate the many amazing achievements of women in aviation, let's not forget that it was a young woman from Tennessee, in an unarmed Interstate Cadet, who was the first to see head on the beginning of a war that would open the doors of opportunities for women.

Those opportunities would benefit many women, and at the same time help to end that war. And remember Cornelia Fort who did her very best while feeling proud and earning her the opportunity to serve her country as an American pilot.

four drove the children to their exclusive private schools. And after Cornelia turned 19, her father presented her to society in an elaborate debutante ball, attended by hundreds.

But Cornelia had other ideas and a prim and proper life was not in the cards as she looked for greater adventure. The one driving motivation that had her walk away from the glamorous life was the desire to become a pilot.

Around the time of her father's death in the spring of 1940, Fort took her first flying lesson, and she was instantly addicted. Though she could never quite articulate why she loved planes so much, her sister

would later claim that it was quite simple: Cornelia was a great rebel of her time. Within a year Cornelia had become the first female flight instructor in Nashville.

During that time with war clouds forming around the world President Franklin Roosevelt knew there would be a need to have as many pilot instructors as our nation could get, so he opened up to anybody who could teach the art of flying and Cornelia fit that bill to a tee!

Entering the Civilian Pilots Training Program, she took a flight instructor's job at Fort Collins, Colo. Then in the fall of 1941, she was hired to teach defense workers, soldiers, and sailors to fly in Hawaii. In a letter home to her

mother, she wrote: “If I leave here, I will leave the best job that I can have (unless the national emergency creates a still better one), a very pleasant atmosphere, a good salary, but far the best of all are the planes I fly. Big and fast and better suited for advanced flying.”

Little did she know that national emergency was coming her way in the form of Japanese dive bombers and fighters that calm Sunday morning — Dec. 7, 1941. As she took her student up for his last lesson before he soloed, a sleek mono plane appeared, coming straight at her Interstate Cadet; she grabbed the controls and evaded the strange intruder to Hawaii airspace. As she looked to identify the renegade aircraft she watched as a silver object departed the plane and the bursting of a bomb in Pearl Harbor told her that the skies were nowhere to be if this was a full-on attack.

As she made a beeline back to the John Rogers Airport at Pearl, she made a hasty departure from her plane with the student as attacking aircraft strafed the small civilian field. In a blink of an eye, Cornelia had survived the beginning of World War II for America, but the attack provided an opportunity for her to become the pilot she had always dreamed of.

Her first invitation came in a telegram while she was still in Hawaii dated Jan. 24, 1942, from leading female aviator Jackie

Cochran. It asked Fort to join a select group of American women who would fly with the Royal Air Force Air Transport Auxiliary in Britain. Fort couldn't accept the offer because she wasn't back in the continental U.S. in time, but in the fall of 1942, she was one of a handful of women to receive another invitation.

This time the telegram asked her, “If interested, please report within twenty-four hours to Wilmington, Delaware, for service in the Ferrying Division of the Air Transport Command.”

Fort was more than interested; she was ecstatic. Here was a chance to play an important role in the war effort. In a letter home she wrote, “The heavens have opened up and rained blessings on me. The Army has decided to let women ferry ships and I'm going to be one of them.”

Cornelia flew in the newly established squadron, the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Service. WAFs, as they were known, were hired to fly planes from factories to military air bases. They were the first hires who over time would become the very successful W.A.S.P. (Women's Airforce Service Pilots) program. In the beginning, those pioneer women dealt with many harsh conditions: the weather, navigation, camouflaged air bases, crazy country hopping logistics, and of course egotistical male pilots who felt that women did not belong flying aircraft in any manner, especially for a nation at war.

Of course, Cornelia felt that the only way to show the disbelievers, “the snickering hangar pilots,” she concluded, “is to show them,” and Cornelia and the other female pilots did just that. They were resilient, professional, and as capable as the men of flying any military aircraft they were assigned to. They called in sick less frequently and they maintained a marginally better safety record.

Cornelia was going to be dealt a hard blow to her life and dreams, and only flew for her country for just a few brief months. On March 21, 1943, she was one of a number of pilots, both male and female, who had been assigned to ferry BT-13s to Love Field in Dallas, Texas. During that mission, one of the men's landing gear clipped Fort's airplane, sending it plummeting to earth. Fort didn't have time to parachute to safety.



Photograph courtesy of the Nashville Public Library

Cornelia Fort's War Department identification card.



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