

MARCH 15, 2022

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## NO LIMITS!

Women's History Month  
Honors & Celebrates  
the Growing Roles of  
Women in the Military

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**Captain Riley Leroy Pitts**

Oct 15, 1937 - Oct 31, 1967





# No Limits!

## Women's History Month Honors & Celebrates the Growing Roles of Women in the Military

**T**he military as a man's world? Not anymore! The number of women in the military has risen sharply over the past decade, and indeed, has been on an upward trajectory ever since the U.S. eliminated conscription in favor of all-volunteer forces in 1973.

According to statistics from the Department of Defense annual Demographics Report, the percentage of women in active-duty forces rose to 17.2% and 18.7% of total military forces in 2020. In 1973, the percentage of women was just 2%, or about 42,000 women, compared to today's 398,546 women. "The annual demographics report provides a meaningful way to highlight the changing nature of our military," states Gilbert Cisneros, Jr., undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness. "DoD remains committed to ensuring that our ranks are inclusive and reflect the country we serve."

The percentage of women has increased in every branch of the military. According to the Report, women's representation is the highest in the Air Force, at 21.1% of all active-duty members; followed by the Navy with 20.4%, and the Army at 17.2%. The Marine Corps has the smallest overall percentage of women at just 8.9% of the force.

Given the growing presence of women in the military, it is not surprising that the various branches are recognizing the vital role that women have played throughout military history this March, Women's History Month.

Women serving in the military today believe there is no limit to their possibilities. "I



**W01 Cherry with her husband and young daughter**

think the military has made huge strides in expanding the roles of women; just since I have been in, more and more careers and opportunities have opened up to women," explains Staff Sergeant Miranda Taylor, an aerospace medical technician currently working as an immunizations backup technician (IBT) who has served for nine years. "We are seen and valued. We now see women in combat roles and in leadership roles all across the military. I would say to any young girl today that there is no limit on what you can accomplish in the military. If you want to be jumping from aircraft or flying one, or if you want to be a commander or command chief, you can! As long as you put in the work that it takes, there are no restrictions just because you are a woman anymore."

Warrant Officer 1 Marena M. Cherry agrees, noting, "I think women play an important role in the military; women have had a huge influence on different parts of the military throughout history and I think we bring a different perspective to daily operations. I love seeing other women in uniform grabbing the opportunities presented to them, getting promoted, and taking on challenging leadership positions while lifting up others."

Both Taylor and Cherry say they and many

of their female compatriots enlisted in the military for many of the same reasons as men do: to maximize their opportunities. "Serving in the military has meant more to me than I would have initially thought," Taylor comments. "It has given me the chance to meet my best friends, meet my husband, and introduced me to a career that I love. I joined the military for reasons similar to most people. I wanted the benefits of the GI Bill and the opportunity to travel and have experiences."

"I enlisted in the military during my senior year of high school and never expected to have all the opportunities that I have had," Taylor continues. "I have been stationed at three different bases and traveled all over the world. I have been able to teach and instruct medical classes both for the Air Force and for the Army. I have also had the opportunities to make an impact on patient's lives and perform life-saving skills when needed. I have also been able to work on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic. I graduated from the Community College of the Air Force and from Charleston Southern [University] without having a dime of student debt; this also made me a first-generation college graduate. I have also traveled more with the military than I have for personal reasons and explored places I had no

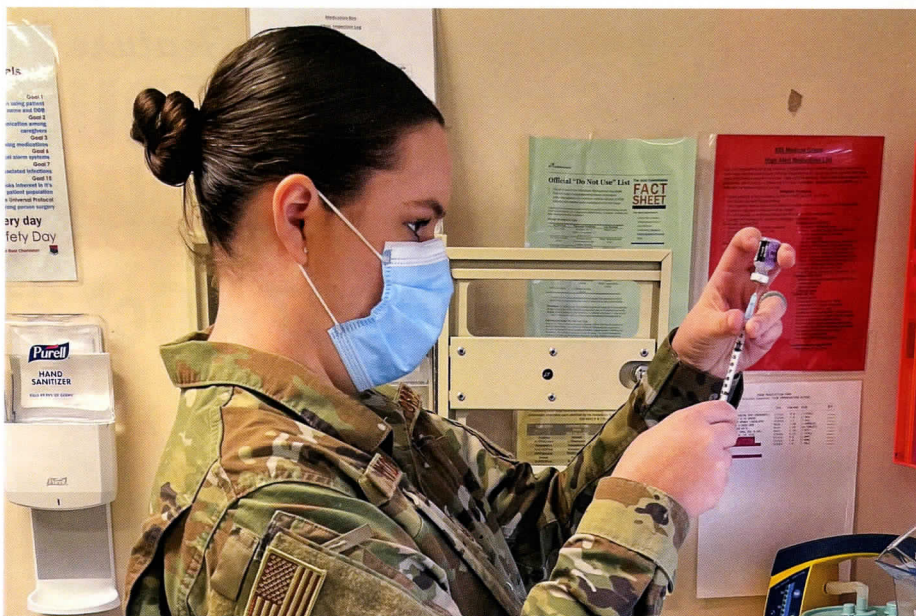


idea even existed. I love to move around and travel so these were an important part in my decision-making process."

Cherry joined the Army in 2009 as an armament and avionics repairer for helicopters. "My first duty station was Hawaii where I was able to fine tune my mechanic skills; Hawaii is also where my husband and I met and got married," she remarks. "After Hawaii, I was selected to become an Unmanned Aircraft Systems Operator and spent six years following that path. I was able to be a Platoon Sergeant, Course Manager for the Advanced individual Training course and add two beautiful little ones to our family. More recently I was selected to become a Warrant Officer and am currently going through flight school to fly helicopters. I have deployed to Afghanistan once, been to an abundance of training exercises and military schools to include SHARP and MRT Level 1 and 2. We have lived in seven states in 10 years, traveled overseas a little bit and had the opportunity to learn high demand skills without generating a ton of debt while logging hours and years of experience. I have also been able to complete an associate's degree and am eight classes away from a bachelor's degree with zero debt.

"Personally serving in the military fulfills my sense of purpose in life," Cherry adds. "I truly enjoy the opportunities that have been afforded to me during my career and it has allowed me to pursue career fields I didn't think were possible in the civilian world. It has also provided a way to provide for my family and help others in need."

Along with the opportunities have come some challenges, many of which are common to all military personnel and their families. "There are many challenges that military personnel and families face," Taylor acknowledges. "When I first married my husband, he deployed a lot and we lived overseas so I did not have my family and friends – that was tough, but it also introduced me to the military family community and the huge amount of support that they give. I would get together with the spouses of other deployed sailors regularly. We would do lunch or dinners, have paint nights, beach days, or attend any other fun activities that were going on. When I had my children, the military community reached out both professionally and friends. They offer



**SSgt Miranda Taylor, who enlisted in her last year of high school, has been serving in the Air Force for nine years**

so many classes for every stage of life (moving, buying a home, pregnancy, finance, etc) and just try to help each member and their families as much as possible."

Cherry points to, "frequent moves and uprooting of your family whenever the Army says it's time," as some of the biggest concerns. "Prior to having kids it didn't bother us as much, but now that we have two kids the uprooting from friends and routines is hard, trying to find where to live without being at the duty station is always stressful and getting daycare started before you have to report at your new location is difficult.

"You have to connect and network with people to be successful in this profession; having support is key," she continues. "I often refer to it as 'finding your tribe:' a couple good friends you can rely on to help with the kids or come over to hear you vent. My last duty station was probably the best because another service member who is also a mom became my best friend, we are both married and have two kids, we have been at two duty stations together and literally having them with us was such a blessing. We alternated watching each other's kids so that we could have date nights with our spouses, took our kids on adventures together, and just had someone to rely on when life or work got too much to handle."

Both women heartily endorse the military for today's young girls looking for careers. "Any woman looking into the military



should not feel as if it is a man's job anymore," Taylor asserts. "There are so many women in uniform and I can guarantee that any of us would be more than happy to talk to you about our experience and help you out in any way possible during the decision and enlistment process and even once you become a military member."

Cherry proclaims, "Don't let anyone tell you, you can't make it because you're a girl! Don't let the persona of a male-dominated profession intimidate you: yes, you may have to work harder or it may seem like the spotlight is on you because you may be the only female or one of a few but you can achieve success, get the promotion, take the leadership position or whatever it may be if you show up to be a soldier and do the job you signed up to do. Wear the uniform with pride, be the standard that others look to for guidance, and no matter what your rank may be, be the leader you want to be led by!" 