

SIUE Military And Veteran Services Highlights Women Veterans Day

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EDWARDSVILLE - The Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Office of Military and Veteran Services is honoring the contributions of women's service to the United States through military service this month in conjunction with Women Veteran's Day, which is annually recognized on June 12.

"The contributions of women can often be forgotten or overlooked," said U.S. Navy veteran and SIUE Coordinator of Military and Veteran Services Telisha Reinhardt, "even more so when it comes to military service, being that the military is a male-dominated institution that had legally restricted or denied women's participation in the complex before the passage of laws and regulations that made consideration for women.

Undeterred, women have taken great pride in wearing the uniform, displaying great courage as soldiers, sailors, Marines, and airmen to honorably complete the missions assigned.”

On June 12, 1948, the permanent service of women was signed into law, permitting the recruitment for commissioning and enlisting of this population into the Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force to be continuous in both the time of war and peace. It was women’s profound and courageous service that proved to the military and political leaders that women are an asset to the armed forces, paving the way for their irreversible inclusion into the United States military under the Women’s Armed Services Integration Act.



According to the Council on Foreign Relations and the Department of Labor, women make up 19% of active-duty personnel, 10% of the veteran population, and 1.5% of the national population. As of fall 2020 within the SIUE military-affiliated population (which consist of active-duty, drilling reservists, National Guard, dependents and veterans), the University had 187 servicewomen and women veterans attending, making up 23% of this subpopulation.

In March 2021, Military and Veteran Services hosted its first segment of the “From Uniform to University: Veterans in the SIUE Community” panel discussion, a program

that brings together veterans of different identities at SIUE into conversation with the public through sharing their perspectives and knowledge on service in the armed forces. The first panel discussion acknowledged women veterans and their realities in the armed forces. The women veterans that participated in the first segment bravely shared the stories of their service as women in uniform.

To further showcase women veterans in the SIUE community, in honor of the anniversary of the 1948 Women's Armed Services Integration Act in the month of June, four women were asked to reflect on their service.

SIUE alumna Christine Durham, enlisted in the Air National Guard in 2014, where she served for five years assigned to Emergency Management, before enlisting into the Air Force after completing a bachelor's in criminal justice in May 2018. While in the Air National Guard, Christine was assigned to the 183rd WG in Illinois, and is now in the Air Force attached to the 136th AW in Texas.

"I have a lot of family in the military, so I wanted to continue that legacy," Durham said. "It also didn't hurt that I would be able to go back to school and finish my bachelor's debt free."

Along with earning the incentive to finish her education, her time in military created an environment to establish great relationships. "I love being in the Air Force and have met a lot of people," Durham added. "I've made a lot of good friends through the people I've met during my time in the Air National Guard."



Fellow alumna Rachel Cawvey, enlisted in the Navy straight out of high school in 2012, serving as an Aviation Ordnanceman in San Diego. “The Navy interested me, because I have always been a traveler,” Cawvey said. “I love exploring new cultures and experiencing different lifestyles.”

Rachel graduated in May 2018 with a bachelor’s in psychology and criminal justice.

“I have learned to be self-disciplined, how to be a team player, and most importantly, to be a part of something bigger than yourself,” she explained. “The camaraderie within active-duty members is truly unmatched and a bond that will never be broken.”

Reinhardt enlisted in the Navy in 2009, and served in Japan until 2013, before returning to civilian society.

“During my time in the Navy, I was blessed to see many parts of the world and makes friends with some totally awesome people I would not have been able to meet otherwise,” she said. “It was fun exploring Japan, Australia, Singapore, Philippines and Thailand with the other women on my ship.”

Reinhardt notes that she joined the military to explore the world and make more of her life. “I served in the Navy as an Engineman, which involved extremely tough and demanding physical labor,” she recalled. “I had never worked that hard before, but my time in the military instilled in me the discipline to carry forth in life with the necessary confidence and direction that led me to SIUE.”

Another Navy veteran, Anne Werner, PhD, PE, associate professor in the School of Engineering’s Department of Construction, served from 1985-96 as a civil engineering officer.

“I really liked the uniform hat and wanted to wear it – turns out women didn’t get to wear the hat style that I liked, it was just for the men – women had to wear this goofy hat that went back to the 1940s WAVES uniform, well, the whole uniform was from the 1940s,” she shared.

Like Reinhardt, Werner enjoyed being able to see the world, having traveled to California, Puerto Rico and Japan.

“I got to travel to some interesting places and see how other people in other countries live,” Werner said. “I lived in other countries, learned to speak Japanese a little bit, held good jobs, learned a lot, got to serve my country and tried to do good.”

“Hopefully, my service showed that women are just as good or better than men when it comes to serving,” she continued. “When I joined, women were not allowed in the Seabees (Construction Battalions), but they were allowed in the CBU’s. Why? Because, they were female.

“Ironically, it was the CBU’s that got sent to Iraq during the ‘Iraq War’ with women officers and women enlisted personnel. Right after I got out, they opened up the Battalions to women. Of all the places I have worked, the Navy was the most equitable. I had great supervisors that treated and expected the same from me as the males, and also I got paid the same as my male counterparts.”

For more information on SIUE’s Office of Military and Veterans Services, visit siue.edu/military.