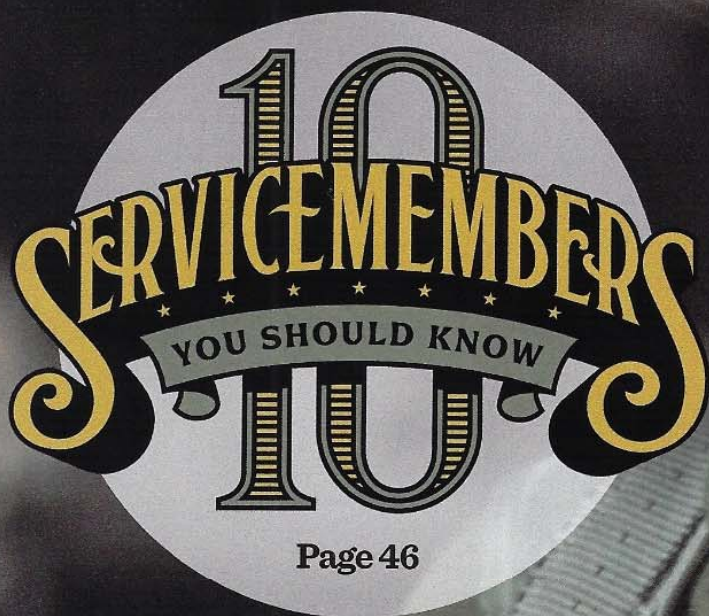




# MILITARY OFFICER

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Outstanding Officers



# 1

## SERVICEMEMBER

YOU SHOULD KNOW





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*By Gina Harkins*

EVERY MILITARY GENERATION HAS ITS UNSUNG HEROES, and this one is no exception. From an Army officer amputee who marched back into the combat zone to a Public Health Service Commission Corps doctor making vital medical advancements to the Marine Corps' first and only female infantry platoon commander, officers today exemplify the country's rich culture, says Timothy Westcott, a military historian and professor at Park University in Parkville, Mo.

**COVER STORY**



"Servicemembers who break milestones symbolize the best of our nation as torchbearers," Westcott says.

The ranks are full of men and women who have busted molds, carry out unique missions, and set extraordinary examples for their troops and the American public. These are just a few officers who embody those qualities.

## SERVICEMEMBERS YOU SHOULD KNOW

### Capt. Tomika Robinson, USA

Few missions in the military are as sacred as those carried out by Army Capt. Tomika Robinson.

For three years, Robinson has led investigative teams searching for the remains of missing Americans killed in Vietnam, Korea, and other conflicts in the Asia-Pacific region dating back to World War II. She and her teams spend up to two months in remote Asian villages collecting and analyzing data, interviewing witnesses, and conducting land surveys that lead to clues about where fallen U.S. troops' remains might be found. Excavation teams follow their leads to locate the missing.

Robinson and her troops typically deploy about five times a year, and the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency calls their work a vital part of the mission to bring long-lost Americans home.

The captain was recently selected to attend the Air Force's Air Command and Staff College, which educates joint-military leaders.

### Col. David Rozelle, USA

Being an amputee doesn't set Army Col. David Rozelle apart from others — being an outstanding leader does.

That's according to Col. Mark Haseman with the

Department of Military Strategy, Planning, and Operations at the Army War College in Carlisle, Pa., where Rozelle recently graduated about 15 years after losing his right foot in an anti-tank mine explosion in Iraq.

Rozelle was determined not to allow the devastating injury to sideline his career. By 2005, he was leading soldiers in the war zone again and has remained on active duty ever since. Rozelle is not just a great Army officer, Haseman says, but an exceptional mentor to other amputees.

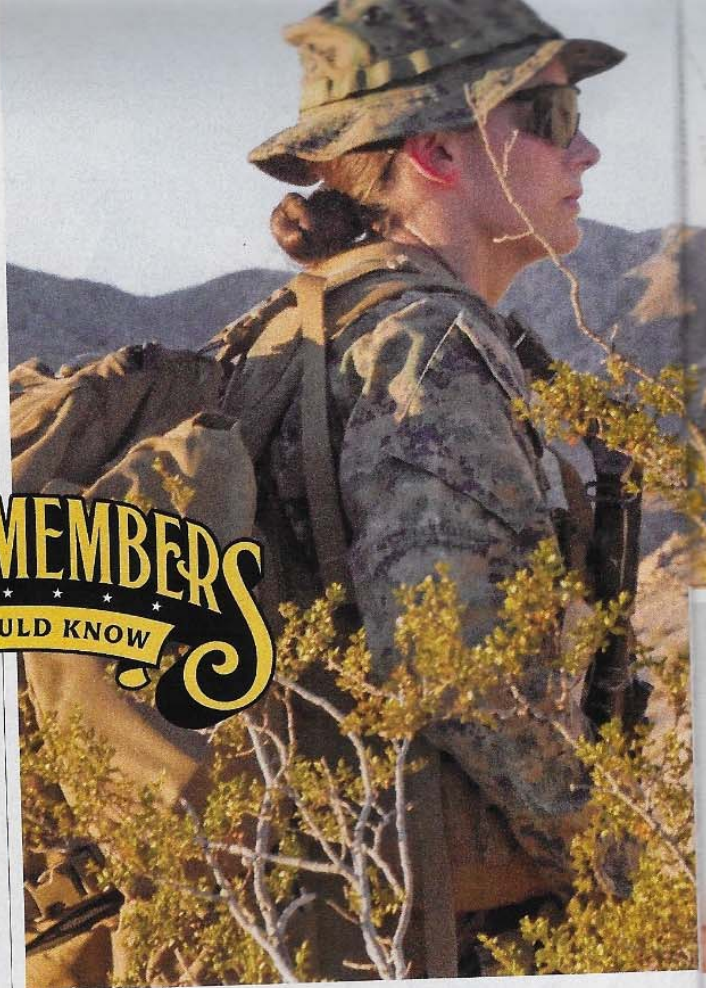
"He is very active in wounded warrior ski programs and a vast array of other activities to help veterans achieve their goals," he says.

Before Rozelle left the Army War College to become the new deputy commander of Leader Training Brigade at Fort Jackson, S.C., Haseman gave him a farewell note.

"I paid him the highest compliment I could think of: 'I'd be proud to have my son serve under your command,'" Haseman says.

### Capt. Marina Hierl, USMC

Capt. Marina Hierl is the first and only woman to ever lead a platoon of infantry Marines,



PHOTOS: FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: LEFT, SENIOR AIRMAN LEAN FERRANTE/USAF; SENIOR AIRMAN JOHN NIEVES CAMACHO/USAF; SPC. LAUREN HASRAH/USA; SGT. GREGORY BOTO/USMC; PETTY OFFICER 1ST CLASS DAVID HENNESSY/USA





and the men in her charge wouldn't have had it any other way.

"She's one of us," Lance Cpl. Kai Segura told *The New York Times* last year when Hierl led him and other members of Echo Company, 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines, through a six-month deployment to Australia.

Hierl made history in 2017 when she became the first female Marine to complete the service's grueling Infantry Officer Course. The drive to "do something important with her life" was behind her desire to become a Marine officer, she told the *Times*, setting in motion a trailblazing career.

The infantry leader recently was promoted to captain and currently serves as the assistant operations officer with 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines, Capt. Jim Stenger, a spokesperson for the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), says. Hierl and her Marines were deployed aboard the USS *Boxer* (LHD-4) as of press time.

### Cyber Warrant Officer 1 Nicholas Drenning, USN

The Navy hadn't had chief warrant officer ones in decades — until Nicholas Dren-

ning became one of the first sailors selected to wear the rank again in FY 2019.

The Navy's tech-savvy cyber experts are in demand in the private sector, leading the service to resurrect its once-defunct W-1 rank. It's part of an effort to hold onto sailors like Drenning as part of a new cyber warrant program.

Since Drenning applied for that program as a cryptologic technician 2nd class, it made him the most junior sailor selected to pin on the W-1 rank. Once he was promoted, he said being a warrant officer would allow him to share his technical expertise with others in the fleet.

"Part of shaping our community is going to be building effective relationships with junior-enlisted, the chief's mess and fellow officers," he said in a Navy news release.

### Maj. Gen. Jeannie Leavitt, USAF

Maj. Gen. Jeannie Leavitt has spent her Air Force career busting through gender barriers. She has racked up more than 3,000 flight hours — including more than 300 in combat over Iraq and Afghanistan — since becoming the service's first

### Outstanding

**officers** include (clockwise from top left) Capt. Marina Hierl, USMC; Maj. Gen. Jeannie Leavitt, USAF; Col. David Rozelle, USA; Capt. Tomika Robinson, USA; and Cyber Warrant Officer 1 Nicholas Drenning, USN.



## SERVICEMEMBERS YOU SHOULD KNOW

female fighter pilot. About two decades later, Leavitt marked another milestone when she became the first woman to command a fighter wing as head of the North Carolina-based 4th Fighter Wing in 2012.

Now overseeing Air Force Recruiting Service, Leavitt stressed in a 2018 TED Women Spotlight that the nation benefits from a diverse military.

"If I have people around the table who think very differently, that have different backgrounds ... then we're able to come to a better solution," she said. "It's going to take longer. There will be vastly different opinions. But we will get to a better solution in the end."

### Capt. Chris Walsh, USAF

As a special tactics officer, Capt. Chris Walsh serves in one of the Air Force's most elite career fields. Now he has his sights set on joining another elite group: the 2022 U.S. Olympic Bobsled Team.

Walsh, who serves with the 24th Special Operations Wing, has been granted special permission to join the Air Force World Class Athlete Program. That allows him and other Olympic hopefuls time to train for and compete in national and international competitions.

If he makes the 2022 U.S. Bobsled Team, Walsh will join the more than 104 other Air Force personnel who've represented the service in Olympics sports, including eight coaches, Lynn Kirby, an Air Force spokesperson at the Pentagon, says. That leaves a big impression on the millions of Olympics viewers, she added.

"If Captain Walsh earns a spot on the U.S. Olympic bobsled team, it will absolutely have a positive impact for Air Force recruiting efforts," Kirby says. "Captain Walsh would have the chance to represent the U.S. and the Air Force on the world stage."

### Maj. Gen. Giselle "Gigi" Wilz, ARNG

Maj. Gen. Giselle "Gigi" Wilz wasn't just the first woman to make general officer in the

North Dakota National Guard, but she is one of

the organization's youngest-ever officers having earned her commission at the age of 19.

Wilz, a retired colonel's daughter, enlisted in 1983, shipping off to basic training right after high school. Three years later, she earned her butter bars and picked up several overseas deployments, which she told the *Bismarck Tribune* helped pave the way to becoming a general.

That included serving in Operation Desert Storm/Desert Shield, a peacekeeping mission in Kosovo, a yearlong deployment to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and leading disaster relief efforts in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria.

After making one-star, she said she hoped her career path set a positive example for men and women in the National Guard.

"If somehow I've knocked down a few barriers for females along the way, then that's a great thing, too," she added.

### Capt. Jason Hamilton, USCG

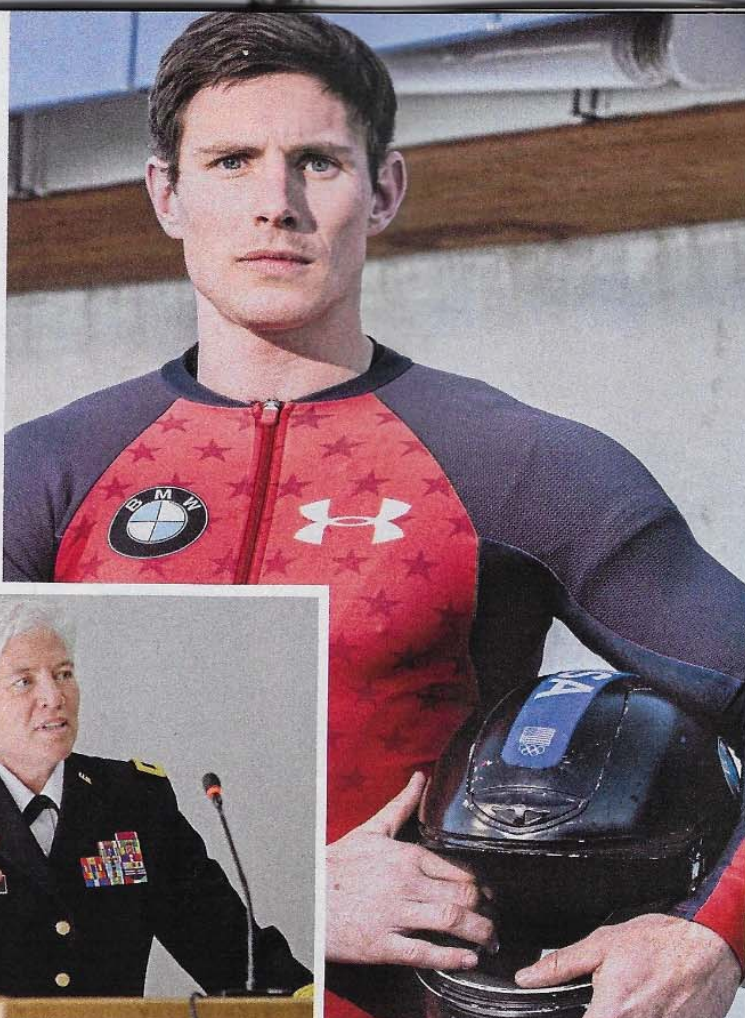
Capt. Jason Hamilton led the Coast Guard Cutter *Healy* (WAGB-20) into new territory several years ago.

Hamilton served as the cutter's commanding officer when it became the first U.S. surface vessel to reach the North Pole unaccompanied. Currently serving as the chief of response for the Coast Guard 13th District, Hamilton led the 420-foot icebreaker from Seattle to the Earth's northernmost point in 2015 — a transit so difficult, it can only be done during the summer months.

"*Healy* has clearly demonstrated our capability to operate throughout one of the most challenging operational environments on the planet," Hamilton told the crew when they reached the pole.

Following that first trip, *Healy* has since made additional treks to the North Pole. Coast Guard leaders are pushing to build a new fleet of icebreakers, with the hopes of adding three medium and three heavy vessels.





## Capt. Jose Serrano, USPHS

Capt. Jose Serrano earned one of the Public Health Service Commissioned Corps' top honors this year.

In July, Serrano received the Distinguished Service Medal, the Commissioned Corps' highest honor award, for his exceptional career-long leadership in guiding gastrointestinal, pancreas, and liver research programs at the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases.

The award is presented to an officer "who has demonstrated a genuine sense of public service by making exceptional contributions to the mission of the PHS," his service medal details state.


Serrano is program director for projects studying liver, gastrointestinal, neuroendocrine, and pancreas processes. That includes research on major diseases affecting the liver, pancreas, and gastrointestinal tract. According to his official biography, his goal is to get to the root of what causes diseases in those parts of the body and to develop plans to treat and prevent them.

## Cmdr. Rebecca Waddington, NOAA

Cmdr. Rebecca Waddington flies into hurricanes for a living, and last year, she was part of the first-ever all-female crew to pilot a NOAA aircraft during one of those missions.

Waddington joined the NOAA Commissioned Officer Corps to get some time aboard a ship before committing to a master's program to study oceanography. Then the chance to fly came up, and she has been hunting hurricanes ever since.

On Aug. 5, 2018, then-Lt. Cmdr. Waddington and Capt. Kristie Twining made history when they flew around Hurricane Hector near Hawaii, dropping monitoring devices to collect data about the storm. This year, she flew a Hurricane Dorian mission before the storm touched down in Florida.

The daughter of an aeronautical engineer, she's been around aircraft most of her life. Now she's also the deputy chief of flight operations at the NOAA Aircraft Operations Center in Lakeland, Fla. 

*Gina Harkins is a freelancer based in Washington, D.C. Read her article "Corps Reform" to learn about new Marine Corps directives, page 52.*

## Servicemembers such as

(clockwise from top left) Capt. Jason Hamilton, USCG; Capt. Chris Walsh, USAF; Capt. Jose Serrano, USPHS; Cmdr. Rebecca Waddington, NOAA; and Maj. Gen. Giselle Wilz, ARNG, continue to break the mold.