


Women’s “Herstory” Month

Recognizing Women this Month in March

Women serve across the globe in every branch of the U.S. military. In 1971, women made up just 1% of the military services. Ten years later, it was 8.5%, and now that percentage is around 18%. Also, about 33% of DOD civilians are women. In March, we pay special tribute to all women that have served and are currently serving; recognition that was established by Congress in 1987. Programs like the Women Veterans Leadership Program (WVLP) continue to foster generations of women that assume leadership positions in the military and connect with the scores of veterans that served before them. While West Point was founded in 1802, it wasn’t until 1980 when 62 female cadets were graduated, becoming Second Lieutenants in the Army. Likewise, Annapolis Naval Academy was founded in 1845, and Kristine Holderied became the first women to graduate in 1984. Progress has been exceedingly slow to recognize the contributions of thousands of women who have served this country. During the Revolutionary War, women served the U.S. Army in “traditional” roles as nurses, seamstresses, and cooks for troops in camps. Others risked their lives as they served in combat alongside their husbands, disguised as men, or operated as spies. For example, Deborah Sampson disguised herself as a man to serve in the Continental Army as Robert Shirtliffe, was assigned as a scout in a light infantry company, and was wounded during battle. When discovered by a doctor as a woman, she was discharged from the Army. However, Congress later recognized her contribution as a Revolutionary Soldier and granted her husband a widow’s pension after her death. Likewise, Margaret Corbin carried out washing, sewing, and cleaning for the Army, and stood by her husband to provide ammunition for a cannon during the British-Hessian attack on Ft. Washington in 1776. When he was fatally shot, she replaced him at his artillery firing position, and was also wounded. The Continental Congress awarded her a pension in 1779 to acknowledge her contribution in the attack, and making her the first servicewoman in the Army. Generations later, more than 300,000 women served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

This year’s theme is “Celebrating Women Who Tell Our Stories,” and recognizes the countless women that make our military strong, resilient, and accomplished. “We recognize the accomplishments of women in the department and their contributions to national security which helps maximize the department’s warfighting capabilities,” stated Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr., Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness in a February 27 memo. He continued, “The Department celebrates their collective victories which strengthen our workforce because we can leverage their unique experiences, perspectives, and expertise in support of our mission. In addition, they inspire future generations of young women from all backgrounds who desire to be a part of the department and share in its mission.”



Upcoming Chicago Events

Chicago Memorial Day Parade. Chicago AVER is marching in the Chicago Memorial Day Parade on Saturday, May 27. We'd love to recruit more people to march with us and help carry all of the service flags and AVER banner. The parade starts at noon, so please show up around 11-11:30am at West Wacker Street west of State Street. Otherwise, join the crowd and look for us as we march down State Street.

UIC Student Veterans Affairs 3K Walk and Roll. The UIC Student Veterans Affairs office hosts a 3K Walk and Roll on Saturday, May 13, 9am-12noon. This is a fundraiser at the UIC Outdoor Field Complex (900 West 14th Place, South Field, Chicago 60608) that includes a walk, kickball, veteran education info sessions, and more. Wheelchairs and strollers are welcome! This Eventbrite event costs \$20 but is free for veterans using promo code: lamaveteran.

Chicago Pride Parade. Chicago AVER is also marching in the Chicago Pride Parade on Sunday, June 25. We need to **recruit about 50 people** to help carry all of the service flags, AVER banner, and huge U.S. flag. Street barricades go up early so try to join us around 10:45-11:15am north of Montrose on Broadway to get organized. If you are interested in joining us to march in the parade and carry the flag, please email president@averchicago.org or secretary@averchicago.org. The parade follows Broadway south to Halsted, then south on Halsted to Belmont, east on Belmont to Broadway, and south on Broadway to Clark/Diversey, and then east to Lincoln Park. **We really need your help to show off our pride, so please consider joining us and sign up now!!**

Income Tax Season

You can get help with your income tax returns from IRS-trained volunteers. To get more information, check out <https://www.irs.gov/individuals/information-for-veterans>.

Interested in Video Gaming?

Video games can relieve stress, foster fun, and help you network with other Veterans. To review various options and get more information, check out https://news.va.gov/116797/video-games-relieve-stress-foster-fun-veterans/?utm_source=middle&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=VetResources&utm_id=15MAR2023.

VetServe 2023

VetServe is an opportunity to celebrate your service with other veterans with a national day of service on Friday, April 21. Actually, you can make a pledge and volunteer during the VA's National Volunteer Week, April 16-22. To get more information, check out https://news.va.gov/116959/vetserve-2023-national-day-of-service-april-21/?utm_source=middle&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=VetResources&utm_id=15MAR2023. You will review the options and commit to a volunteer opportunity, share your story of service on social media, and share the volunteer work with a friend, family member, caregiver, or other type of colleague.

Veteran Training Opportunity

The VA is offering a new training opportunity called "Bystander Intervention Training for Veterans." They invite all Veterans to take the free online training to help the VA maintain a safe and welcoming environment for themselves, their fellow Veterans, their caregivers, and VA staff members.

- The training program can be found at <https://www.veterantraining.va.gov/bystandertraining/>.
- The program covers information and practical techniques that you can use if you experience or observe harassment or sexual assault at a VA facility. It provides information on how to get help, how to respond and what to say, and how to help prevent the situation from getting worse.
- It's free and requires no registration. It takes about thirty minutes to complete and can be accessed from a computer, smartphone, or tablet.
- The VA is committed to maintaining a safe, respectful, and welcoming environment in every VA facility.

U.S. Department of Defense Women's History Month

Check out the stories and statements issued by the DOD during Women's History Month. The main website is <https://www.defense.gov/Spotlights/womens-history-month/>. You can also find more stories at other websites, like <https://www.military.com/history/womens-history-month>. The White House issued a proclamation on Women's History Month on February 28, and President Biden's entire statement can be found at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2023/02/28/a-proclamation-on-womens-history-month-2023/>.

Monthly In-person AVER Meetings for the Chicago Chapter • Join Us!

We meet up every month on **First Thursdays** at 7pm (Chicago, Central time zone) at the **Center on Halsted**. **Everyone** is welcome to attend our monthly Board meetings **in-person** or via Zoom!! For Zoom, check the [averchicago.org](https://www.averchicago.org) website for the active link (click on the highlighted "Zoom" link near the bottom of the webpage) to get into the Zoom meeting. To join via audio: call 312-626-6799 with ID 488-863-384 and passcode 328090.

Rush Road Home Upcoming Program Events

Soldier Field 10-Mile. Celebrate Memorial Day Weekend with this classic 10-mile race along DuSable Lake Shore Drive. The race begins inside Soldier Field with a tribute to our fallen heroes and ends post-race with a full day of music and festivities on the grounds outside the stadium. Road Home is the official charity of the Soldier Field 10-Mile run. Register at <https://SoldierField10.com>.

Help-A-Hero 19th Ward Special Event. 19th Ward Alderman Matt O'Shea hosts the Help-A-Hero Fundraiser from Memorial Day through July 4 including PTSD Awareness Month in June. All proceeds benefit the Veteran's Mental Health Services at the Road Home Program. Learn more at <https://the19thward.com>.

Veterans Softball Tournament. The Chicago Park District partners with Chicago Sport and Social and the Road Home Program for a day of fun, food, and 16-inch softball tournament on Saturday, July 23, at Beverly Park (2460 West 102nd Street, Chicago 60655). You can register your softball team in advance at Eventbrite: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/veterans-softball-tournament-family-fest-2022-tickets-336742073607?aff=ebdssbdestsearch>.

Check out all of the upcoming Road Home events at <https://roadhomeprogram.org/outreach-and-events/>.

= Chicago Chapter 2022-2023 =

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American Veterans for Equal Rights, Chicago Chapter, P.O. Box 29317, Chicago, IL 60629, Telephone: 773-752-0058, www.aver.us and www.averchicago.org. You can email any of the Chicago Chapter officers with the following address: president@averchicago.org, secretary@averchicago.org, or treasurer@averchicago.org.

Photograph Credits

Cadet commissioning into Space Force, Class of 2021, Air Force Academy, May 26, 2021, Trevor Cokley
Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Tyshaa Kelman, U.S. Army Garrison Casey, South Korea, February 13, 2023, Kira Ducato
Airman, 355th Civil Engineer Squadron, Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, March 8, 2023, Jhade Herrera
Air Force Pilot, 357th Fighter Squadron, Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, March 8, 2023, Jhade Herrera

VA Changes Motto

The Department of Veteran Affairs has changed its motto from an Abraham Lincoln quote from 1865: "To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan" to a more inclusive mission statement: "To fulfill President Lincoln's promise to care for those who have served in our nation's military and for their families, caregivers, and survivors." In a ceremony on March 16, VA Secretary Denis McDonough said that the change is part of the VA's efforts to improve trust in its services among female veterans. The new mission statement is also meant to include LGBTQ+ servicemembers and veterans.

AVER Chicago Chapter Meetup

Local members gathered on March 19, at the home of Jim and Patrick to celebrate the New Year in person.



Rush Road Home Upcoming Presentations

History of Military Sexual Trauma (MST) and Barriers to Reporting and Healthcare, April 14. This presentation will first provide an overview of MST and prevalence rates. Next, we will examine how sexual violence is used as a weapon of war using historical lens. We will also describe the psychological impact of sexual violence during war. Further, we will describe common barriers to reporting MST and accessing healthcare resources for MST. Contact Ashton Kroner, Ashton_Kroner@rush.edu, 312-942-8387 for info.

Emotional, Cognitive, and Behavioral Impacts Following Military Sexual Trauma and Treatment Recommendations, April 21. This presentation will broadly focus on outcomes following military sexual trauma and treatment recommendations. First, we will describe how polyvagal theory may help explain responses to MST. We will also share treatment recommendations and considerations for common emotional, cognitive, and behavioral complaints following MST.

Sexual Trauma and Pelvic Health, April 28. Pelvic health concerns can include pain and dysfunction in the urinary, gastrointestinal, colorectal, gynecological, and sexual systems. Although experiencing military sexual trauma is associated with greater risk for pelvic health concerns, many survivors have difficulty accessing medical care for these concerns. Providers will learn how to engage patients in dialogue regarding the pelvic floor, including how to explain anatomy and physiology, and will gain strategies that empower clients to advocate for their pelvic health.

Friends of Dorothy

A freelance writer, Molly Savard, is trying to locate servicemembers who were stationed at Great Lakes Naval Base in 1981 for a story about the Friends of Dorothy investigation. Contact molly.savard@gmail.com.

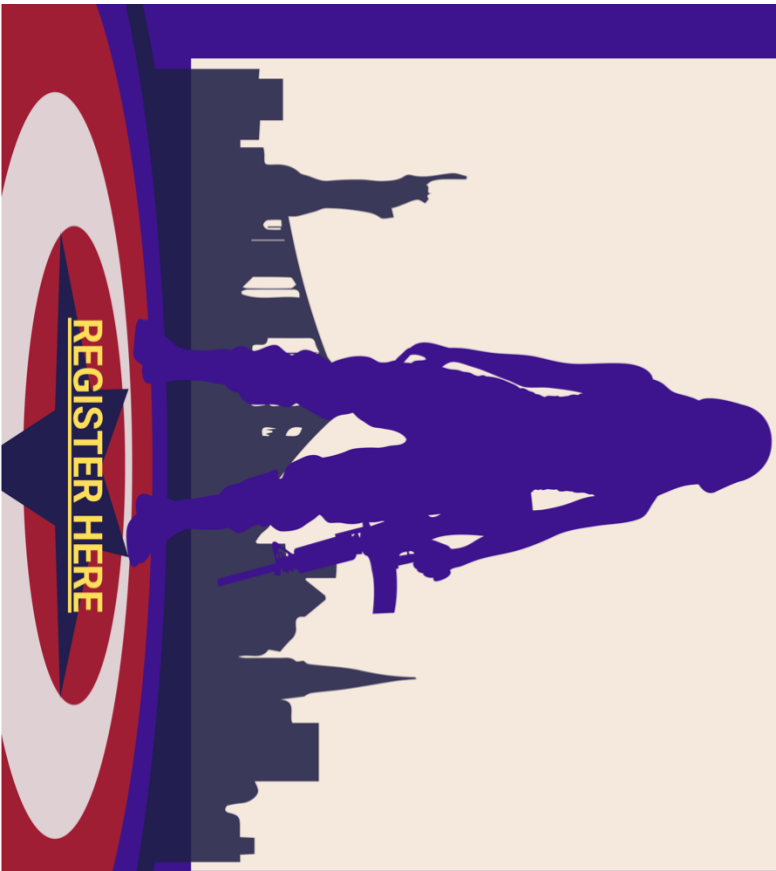
I SERVED TOO: THE FEMALE VETERAN PERSPECTIVE

HYBRID-FORMAT PANEL DISCUSSION

THURSDAY 30 MARCH 2023

10am-12pm | 2551 W Cermak Rd, Chicago, IL

REGISTER HERE



PLEASE **REGISTER** TO JOIN US **VIRTUALLY OR IN PERSON** FOR DISCUSSION, CAMARADERIE, AND REFRESHMENTS.



Cassandra Taylor

is a 28 year Army Veteran, born and raised in Maywood, IL where she attended Proviso East High School. She received her Bachelor's Degree of Science in Technical Management in 2007 from DeVry University in Addison, IL, and her Master's Degree in Human Resource Management in 2008 from Keller Graduate School of Management in Schaumburg, IL. In 2019 she decided to go for her MBA with a concentration in Healthcare Management from Keller Graduate School of Management in Chicago. She held several positions within the military such as Training Specialist, Training Manager, and Training Coordinator. She is currently a Project Manager at the United States Postal Service. She is also a member of the National Suicide Prevention Hotline, Assault and Harassment Trainer, Victim's Advocate and Child Prevention leader.

Her current employer is Rush University Medical Center in Chicago where she works as an Ambulatory Analyst. She is the Founder and CEO of Top Flight Defense, Inc. a nonprofit organization to empower, educate, and enlighten female veterans in self-defense, self-awareness, and self-care. She is certified in Adult & Child CPR & 1st Aid, and Adult & Youth Mental Health. In 2016 and 2017 she competed in the Ms. Veteran America 2016 and 2017 Competition where she made it to the top 20 contestants out of 400 other female veterans. She is also a member of the National Center of Female Veterans Leaders in the United States on a regular basis. She has been featured on the national television show, as well as raised funds to educate and house them and their children. She also has performed The National Anthem at several sporting and military events, such as: Chicago Sky WMLBA, Professional Bull Riders, Chicago Wolves, and Chicago Bandits, Mission Bar B Que, and Monster Truck Jam. She is a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Schaumburg Hoffman Estates Alumnae Chapter, and her hobbies are exercising, singing, dancing, and spending time with her grandchildren.



Zakiya Mosi McKinney

is a Chicago, IL native and graduate of Kenwood Academy. After watching Popcorn at 6 years old, she decided to join the Navy in 1992. She fulfilled that dream and joined the Navy as an AD (Aviation Mechanic's Mate) and served honorably until her end of active service in 1996. Desiring to continue on, Zakiya attended Chicago State University while serving in the Naval reserves until 1999, when she decided to re-enlist to Active Duty.

Despite loving her aviation career, she decided to leave the military to go to the Sheriff's Technical School and eventually until 2009, when she left the military to serve her community as a home health attendant then a 3rd grade teacher. Zakiya considers herself a professional volunteer, always looking for opportunities to change the world for the positive.



Denise Montoya

was born and raised in Chicago, IL, she joined the United States Air Force and served as a Security Forces Member from 2008 till 2012. She graduated from Northwestern Illinois University with a major in Community Health and Wellness in 2015. Denise worked at Jessa Brown VA within the Center for Development and Child Engagement department and continues to volunteer her time with the organization. She has been recognized for her performance and response to the unprecedented size and scale of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 by the Department of Veterans Affairs and was featured in the Department of Veterans Affairs' 2021 Annual Report. Denise continues her work as a veteran advocate by being a part of the VA Women's Improvement Network and a member for the Veteran and Family Advisory Council at Jessa Brown VA.



Abbie Holland-Schmitt

is a post 9/11 Iraq combat veteran whose transition served as the center-point of her ongoing advocacy on behalf of veterans.

After six years of military service, she began her career working for the Army Wounded Warrior Program as a non-clinical case manager for the most critically injured, ill, and wounded soldiers transitioning out of the military. Since then, she has served as Alumni Manager for the Wounded Warrior Project, National Director of Operations for the Illness Shared Network of Veterans, and co-founder/President/CEO of a nonprofit organization focused on peer-to-peer counseling and mentoring support. Most recently, Abbie was the Chief Operating Officer at Veteran Roasters Cup O'Joe Coffee, a company focused on employing veterans who have experienced housing insecurity.

Abbie is a noted commentator and legislative influence who testified before Congress on the transition process from the ODB to the VA. She is considered a subject matter expert on veteran issues. She has been featured in several national news outlets. She is the founder of the Illness Shared Network of Veterans, a nonprofit organization that provides support for veterans with chronic health conditions. She joined Sifer Foundation in 2021 and is the Director of the Justice-Innovative Veteran Program. Simultaneously, Abbie serves as a Veteran Ambassador at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign on a two-year community MST research project. She received her Bachelor of Science in Psychology and Political Science from Edgewood College in Madison, WI. She is working towards a master's in social work at Aurora University.

