

# Ready, Set, Airlift! Ep. 7 Women In The Air Force

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**Julian Hernandez (Host):** Greetings, Alamo Wing members and fans. Welcome to Episode 7 of Ready, Set, Airlift! I'm your host, Julian Hernandez from the 433rd Public Affairs Team. This is a special In Between UTA episode to discuss Women's History Month. If you heard our last episode, you know we had an opportunity to chat with Air Force Recruiting Service Deputy Commander Brigadier General Lisa Craig.

After our conversation on the state of recruiting, she also opened up about her experiences as a woman who has worked her way up in the ranks of the Air Force.

Ma'am, a lot of females across the country now are considering military service, probably a big change in the past decades.

What would you say to, some. young woman who is considering a future in the military?

**Brig. Gen. Lisa Craig:** Well, one, I think it's probably the best decision I may have ever made in my life was to join the air force. The military writ large is a great meritocracy, so the harder you work and the better you do, the more opportunity that comes our way.

And there's very few places that I have learned of in society that reward in the same manner, regardless of your gender, regardless of your background you have the opportunity to excel. And so the military and the Air Force in specific has given me that opportunity. And the Air Force Reserve, more specifically, has even opened that aperture further.

You know, I've had an amazing opportunity to have 12 different Air Force specialties in my career, which is very unusual. Most people go through their career with one, two, maybe three specialties. But I've had 12 one is just that the Air Force has continued to evolve we've just expanded and contracted and, and how we approach those specialties.

The other opportunity that has come my way is that, and I'll use that word opportunity as opportunities have presented themselves to me. I've just said yes. And Chief Gaylor who recently passed I considered one of my mentors, and I had the opportunity to hear him speak about two years ago, and his approach was that opportunities .

Are things that create the richness of our life, the tapestry, the, the way that we can either look back or look forward on, on our lives. And the more opportunities we say yes to, the more colorful and rich that tapestry is. Our opportunities come about because we are good at something or we show that we might be interested.

So the second part of what he talked about was our aptitudes. And we're given at birth a certain set of aptitudes. But then we grow those aptitudes through learning and development. And as a woman in the military, that development opportunity for me has been extremely rich. And I try to never say no to anything or anyone who's pouring into me in that development space.

So you have opportunities and aptitudes. All of those really almost meaningless if we don't have a good attitude. And so his third principle was have a great attitude. And the more you have a positive attitude toward those opportunities and your aptitude and the growth of that aptitude, The more opportunities come your way.

So as a woman, and long before I ever knew that philosophical underpinning, that's how I look back. I look back that as a woman, I was given all of the opportunity to succeed. And then I just took advantage of it. My oldest brother is my strongest mentor and he's been my lifelong mentor and certainly my military mentor.

He retired as Major General in the Air Force Reserve. And his philosophy to me, which kind of leads into what Chief Gaylor had mentioned, is that, Anytime you're given an opportunity, don't self eliminate. So, things like professional military education and other developmental opportunities and assignments and special duties and special projects.

The more you say yes to those, the more opportunity and more rich your life is as a result of taking advantage of those, but that attitude of leaning in and saying yes, and doing so with a loving heart, like toward yourself, that resilience, self love and love toward your mission and love toward your fellow airmen.

Again, as a woman, I feel like that's kind of my wheelhouse and my. maybe my superpower is just this silver lining approach and the and the positive approach. I'm not going to say I'm always happy and cheerful, but I try to look at what are the positive aspects. And as a woman, I just. I can't imagine a better life than having served.

And so when our young people come up and ask, like, why would you want to serve or what does it do? Well, first of all, it gives back. It feeds my family, which is also kind of an important thing. But the, the ability to make a difference in so much of society and in so many people's lives, I just can't find a better avenue.

To make a difference than, than serving, whether it's for four years or like me for 35 years giving back to this nation to me is just fundamental to keeping it the great place that it is to, to live and, and raise families and, and be a part of.

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** I love that you highlighted the positive aspects and the opportunities, but oftentimes lurking behind every opportunity was a great challenge that preceded it.

And so in 35 years in service, I'm sure you had no shortage of challenges either. Maybe tell us about a few unique challenges of being a woman in uniform.

**Brig. Gen. Lisa Craig:** So when I first came in the military, the biggest challenge was so many career fields were closed to women. Couldn't be a fighter pilot, although I was too short anyway, so that wasn't an issue.

But there were just so many things. We were not allowed to do by law and policy, and those things have gone away. You could do anything now in the military as long as you're strong enough and you have the aptitude and, so that was a challenge when I started by surrounding myself with people, men and women who saw my potential and pivoted in to bolster me.

I was able to overcome a lot of those challenges at the same time that the career fields started opening up. I don't think I was ever in a career field that wasn't traditionally open to women. But I was given opportunity in each one of those things.

One of the greatest opportunities I had I had been working as a command post controller in a very challenging staffing shortage time, but I was given an opportunity to be a wing exec, and I had three different commanders that I was a wing exec for in a total of three years of that position, which is a long time to do that job but they poured into me and gave me More confidence in myself and put me in positions that I quite frankly was very uncomfortable in and didn't think I had the skills to do.

I never thought I could speak in public. And my boss had me start writing speeches and delivering speeches. I wasn't confident as a writer. So he challenged me to write things for him on his behalf. And so those challenges became those opportunities. The opportunity to help others along the way and mentor and grow future leaders.

Those are challenges seeing in somebody the way somebody saw in me and then lifting them up and moving them in a positive direction or at least opening their eyes to the opportunities has always been a challenge. Earlier I also mentioned when I was the mission support group commander at the Alamo wing, we had a challenge.

We didn't have any money to, to fix our facilities. We didn't have good policy. There was this form that had to be signed, but you couldn't get the signed form until you had the money. You couldn't get the money until you had the signed form. It was this big catch 22. And so finding a way to bring folks together collaboratively was just another gigantic challenge.

When everybody had their perspectives, and nobody was really willing to see the art of the possible. Could we trust one another? And that's the other great thing about the military. We build our relationships on trust. and so breaking down that challenge of getting the funding for these projects and getting the approvals was just one of the greatest life challenges and opportunities.

And I, I would say quite a big win for the Alamo wing at the time we gained 56 million dollars in projects shored up. 11 leaky roofs across the campus. We used the historical footprint of some of the old hangars and renovated and built these new beautiful spaces. Just the, the multitude of projects we were able to get funded as a result of not allowing No to stand in the answer pathway, which is, we just didn't allow it to happen.

And so using my positive attitude and my curiosity and my unwillingness to accept no without a law in the way and even then, let's work to get the laws

changed that I think has been the, the most remarkable thing about being a woman in the military and, and being a military officer and leader.

It's, those challenges have existed. Ah, there's always been the, day to day challenges of having people that you don't necessarily see eye to eye with and having to find a way to navigate those relationship challenges. Great life lessons along the way.

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** So you highlighted mentors in there.

And I think universally across any interview I've heard with a general officer, they're all very quickly able to highlight some key mentors that got them to where they are in their point in their careers. Do you have any mentors you'd like to highlight? And, you know, particularly because we're discussing women's history month, any.

Female mentors that really guided you in the right direction.

**Brig. Gen. Lisa Craig:** So I mentioned my very first mentor. That was my oldest brother, Major General Vince Mancuso. He retired about five years ago. Still serves as my mentor today. So lifelong. I've had a couple of teachers along the way. In my master's classes, I had an ethics professor who was a retired general officer, army general officer who really poured into me.

There's been a few female general officers and quite frankly chiefs who I have leaned on. I've always leaned on a chief or senior NCO in every single assignment. And I maintain those relationships. I'll highlight my very, very first mentor Chief Master Sergeant Gerald Murray. He was the 14th Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force eventually, but he was our maintenance chief when I worked in my first fighter squadron.

And he essentially poured into me day one and still maintains a close friendship and relationship with me to this day. From a female perspective, retired Lieutenant General Gina Grosso, she and I were captains together when I was the wing exec I mentioned she was our MPF chief. And she went on to become the director of personnel for the Air Force before she retired.

Another really strong mentor Major General Connie Jenkins. She is right now the director of the A 4 in U. S. NORTHCOM. Let's see, who else? Chief Master Sergeant Erica Kelly, who is the retired Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Reserve and the senior enlisted leader for the Air Force Reserve a few years ago.

She retired. She and I still maintain a really close relationship Colonel Beth Harine, the mobilization assistant to the director of public affairs for the Air Force. And I, my mentors are across the spectrum. Not everyone is, A personalist like I am now, they're from all over, I've mentioned maintenance and pilots and logisticians and it's that broad, rich experience.

Chief Master Sergeant Deb Kelly, who was a lifelong member of the Alamo wing. She did three years of active duty and then was in the Alamo wing for over 30 years. She taught me so, so much, not only about being a leader, but about all of the different specialties that I was to lead the mentors I do rely on mostly now are women Lieutenant General Andrea Tullis, who is the Air University commander Major General Jeannie Levitt first female fighter pilot I have her on speed dial.

Several Alamo wing commanders, General Wittenberger, Colonel Dave Scott, Colonel J. C. Miller, Colonel T. K. Smith, Colonel McClain, just recently retired. Those folks believe in me and, and work to make me the best person I can. And in turn, then, I feel it's each of our responsibility, no matter what your rank is, is to mentor and lead.

And I'll go back to our referral programs that we have. When, when you care enough about the force, you not only want it to be the best, you want to develop the people that are in it to be their best, but you want to bring folks into service that have that potential to lead into the future. So using the Talent Accurization Referral Program through our Aim High app, and, either getting a stripe or a medal, those are ways that we can tangibly show that we're mentoring the next generation, but they also bring us the richness of our future force.

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** I think a lot of airmen. We'll never get the experience of, of having a face to face conversation with a general officer. So maybe using this as a window for all of our airmen who do listen. If you were to bump into an airman and they asked you the question, what advice ma'am, would you give me as I'm moving on in my career?

**Brig. Gen. Lisa Craig:** Well, the first one I give absolutely everyone doesn't matter if they're in the military or not take more pictures than you think you should. There are there are periods of my life where I have the memories, but they fade and and having that tangible and then staying in touch. With those people that matter, and it's become easier in our era of social media and electronic connections.

So those are those are some there's a few others. I mentioned Chief Gaylor's philosophy of opportunities, aptitudes and attitudes, and those three foundational concepts. If I had known those at the beginning, I mean, I probably lived them not knowing I was living them, but I would have been more deliberate and I would recommend folks who take those opportunities to develop themselves and develop those around them and do so with a very positive attitude, even when the going is tough.

And then the one thing that I always lean in on and we haven't touched on at all today is the word love and people like groan when I say it because it seems so dichotomous to military service. Love underpins kind of everything I do. The love of myself, the resiliency factors, that is something every airman should subscribe to.

We have four that we talk about a lot in the military, our mental, our physical, our spiritual, and our social. But there's a fifth pillar and that's financial which I think is foundational. So for every future airman or young person coming up, Subscribing to te Loving yourself enough to taking care of those five things? You'll set yourself up for a very positive life, but love of your mission, love of your fellow man, love of the other airmen with whom you get the opportunity.

I think that's just something that's foundational and we talk about it in, in many other terms besides the word love resiliency is one of those things we talk about. But, trust is, to me, love and trust are, are almost inextricably intertwined. So trusting your fellow airmen that they have your back and you have their back, and then never breaking that trust, if you can at all help it.

Those are the things that if I had somebody tell me those things, I don't know that my trajectory would have been any different. But I think I would have appreciated it a lot more looking back now on these 35 years. I definitely would have taken more pictures though.

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** Well, I want to close on maybe a lighter note.

I alluded to perhaps a little bit of the mystique and fascination around general officers, because whether you're in the military out of it, you just don't run into them on a day to day basis. So maybe tell us a little bit about a day in the life of a general.

**Brig. Gen. Lisa Craig:** Well, before I get to a day in the life of the general, I was promoted for one week to general officer and I was sitting at a conference

room table with the AETC commander at the time was Lieutenant General Webb and his command chief, Chief Thompson.

And General Webb looked around the table and there were six female general officers sitting at the table. And I have this amazing picture of the six of us and it's now hanging in the trailblazer conference room in AETC. So it's super proud moment. So the day in a life, I don't think we ever stopped being starstruck because here I was, this baby general officer sitting at the table with all of these people who knew how to do it.

Right. And I was, I was so insecure at that moment. And I looked around at the table and I was one of them and it was a really special moment. But a day in the life of a general, I don't think is that different than the day in the life of anyone. You know, you get up in the morning, I work out every day when I can if my schedule doesn't allow, it doesn't feel like a great day.

You know, I get ready, I come to work check in on my schedule, check in on my email. Go to a lot of meetings, what I do in those meetings may look different than when I was a lieutenant or a captain, but ultimately it's a day full of schedule and trying to ensure that I take great care of myself and I take great care of the mission and that I especially take great care of the people around me.

And then, you know, I just, I, when I go home, I do work really, really long hours. I think that may just be the Lisa Craig approach but I think it's a little bit the, the rank that you get to, there's a little bit more expected of you, not necessarily in terms of time. But in terms of commitment, if you will so when I go home, though, I do try to devote myself to my family and while I don't think I have the word balance quite correct, I, I do have the word harmony in my life and try to, to give each part of my life the importance it Deserves.

And then I lay my head down. I don't sleep a lot. I'm a super high energy. If you couldn't tell from the way I've approached our time together. I, I tend to get about five hours of sleep, six, maybe every night. And I'm just an extreme extrovert. I get all of my, Energy from being around people.

So that's what it feels like for me to be a general. I just don't know that that's what it feels like for, you know, me as a captain or me as an airman in a different rank band listening to this podcast. But I do think it's pretty much the same. I have the same stressors and worries.

And, and joy I think that, that most people do I try to stay a little bit spiritually grounded and remember that for me being a Catholic Christian, that, that God is



super important in all of my decisions and that I want to make I want to make Him and I want to make the people that I associate with proud of, Me, and I think that that's probably true.

No matter what age or stage of life. We all come to work every day to try to do good things. And and so for me, that's what it feels like to be a general is that. I, I feel like more eyes are on me and so not that that changes anything about my integrity but it makes me have a bigger voice to help those around me influence policy and change and that gives me a great sense of joy and accomplishment when I can make all that come together.

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** Brigadier General Lisa Craig, Deputy Commander of the Air Force Recruiting Service. Thank you so much for taking the time, ma'am, and for sharing your insights.

**Brig. Gen. Lisa Craig:** Thank you for having me. It's been a pleasure.

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** Before we go, we want to remind you to subscribe to Ready, Set, Airlift! on your favorite podcast platform if you haven't already. That allows you to get new episodes right as we release them, and it tells us if you, our listeners, are enjoying the show. If you've already subscribed, thank you. Feel free to also leave us a review or send us an email to airliftpodcast@gmail.

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On that note, we are going to wrap up this episode of Ready, Set, Airlift. I've been your host, Julian Hernandez. On behalf of the Public Affairs team, we wish you well. Stay tuned for another episode from us in a couple of weeks ahead of the April UTA.