



March 30, 2016

Women's History Month event recognizes women in combat



Author Kirsten Holmstedt reads a selection from her 2009 book, "The Girls Come Marching Home: Stories of Women Warriors Returning from the War in Iraq," at a national NAVAIR Women's History Month event March 24 in Patuxent River, Md. (U.S. Navy photo)

NAVAL AIR SYSTEMS COMMAND, PATUXENT RIVER, Md. — Tammy Duckworth was piloting a Black Hawk helicopter in Iraq in 2004 when she was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade. She lost both legs and partial use of her right arm, becoming one of the more than 800 women wounded in the Iraq and Afghan wars and the first female double amputee from the war, according to the military.

Duckworth's story is just one of many that award-winning author and educator Kirsten Holmstedt has told in a trilogy of books focusing on women in combat, some of which she shared at NAVAIR's [Women's History Month](#) event held March 24.

"Today, more than ever, women are also known for their chivalrous actions," Holmstedt said. "The code of chivalry is something women have found within themselves. We celebrate those who sacrifice themselves, and those who carry the banner."

Holmstedt has interviewed multiple female soldiers, Sailors, Marines and airwomen who fought in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, where the front lines became increasingly blurred. She gathered stories of their time in the service, their transition back into civilian



March 30, 2016

Women's History Month event recognizes women in combat

life and their experiences dealing with trauma and injuries. Her presentation included video clips and readings of excerpts from her books.

Holmstedt has advocated for women in combat and the need for greater rights and protection for women within their units. Her message comes at a time when all U.S. military combat positions are now open to women, including infantry, armor, reconnaissance and special operations. Fifteen percent of Department of Defense active duty personnel are women.

Asked about a common thread among the women she has interviewed, Holmstedt said, "Resiliency was definitely a theme: surviving and thriving postwar." Duckworth, for example, became a congresswoman in Illinois.

The theme of the event, "Working to Form a More Perfect Union: Honoring Women in Public Service and Government," honored women who have shaped American history and its future through their service and leadership in the Department of Defense and in the nation. The event was co-sponsored by NAVAIR's Women's Advisory Group (WAG) and Equal Employment Opportunity and Diversity Division.

The WAG, a subgroup to the Executive Diversity Council, was founded in 2012 to make recommendations to senior leaders on topics such as family friendly workplace policies; science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) initiatives; women in the military; women in non-traditional roles; and barrier analysis.

At NAVAIR, women in STEM make up 17 percent of the STEM workforce and 13 percent of engineers. Women comprise 25 percent of the total command.

"We are here to highlight the contributions of women through their service to our nation," said Capt. Frank Morley, NAVAIR vice commander. "Their talent and innate desire to be role models shapes our workforce and makes it competitive, efficient and innovative."

Award winners recognized

The event also served to recognize NAVAIR's fiscal year 2015 Mentor of the Year Award winners and winners of various honorary awards at each site.

These Mentor of the Year Awards are given annually to NAVAIR employees who best exemplify the ideal qualities and character of a mentor:

- Cherry Point, North Carolina: Jewel Wall
- Jacksonville, Florida: Sean Olin
- Lakehurst, New Jersey: Bradley Smith
- Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division: Curtis Kidner
- North Island, California: JB Thurmond



Women's History Month event recognizes women in combat

- Orlando, Florida: Jacqueline Foxx
- Patuxent River: [Michele DeMoss-Coward](#)

Established in 2007, NAVAIR's Mentoring Program offers speed and group mentoring, training, a playbook and an online tool, iMentor, to help match mentors and mentees. Currently, there are more than 6,000 NAVAIR civilians registered in iMentor.

Jerry Short, a WAG executive champion and NAVAIR's comptroller, ended the event by saying, "Every March, we celebrate diversity in the workforce. Today, we want to pause and take the opportunity to see some of the accomplishments taking place across the combat field. I hope today's event moved and inspired you. Find a young girl and mentor her. Empower the women you are working with to lead and succeed."



Rear Adm. CJ Jaynes (second from left) being honored for her service at NAVAIR and as a founding member of NAVAIR's Women's Advisory Group by fellow champions (from left) Leslie Taylor, Toni Meier and Jerry Short at a national Women's History Month event held in Patuxent River, Md., March 24. (U.S. Navy photo)