

# NATALIA ARIAS



Branch: Army National Guard

Year Joined: 2018

Unit 143d TC—Job Title: 88M motor transport operator

It was always a dream of mine to join the military to be a part of something greater. I wanted to help my community, but I also wanted to pursue my education. so, the NJ Amy National Guard it was.

Honestly, any time I get to drive the trucks is my favorite assignment because I love driving the big trucks. It's a change from driving my little sedan every day.

My favorite memory so far was the time after we did my first land navigation course in Fort Dix with my unit. It was a hot, humid day, but it was fun trying to navigate the swampy forest with my teammates. At the end of the training day, my buddies and I got together to share silly stories of what happened during our training (like one group walking in circles, someone ripped their pants trying to jump across a river, etc.).

It is sometimes difficult to balance the military with civilian life. Important dates and training sometimes clash, national emergencies come up and disrupts school/everyday life, and military life requires planning ahead in the civilian life, so you don't fall behind on assignments/work.

The military influenced who I am as a person. I'm much more open than I was before the military. I voice my thoughts and opinions more when I feel I need to. I'm more confident in myself and am much more ambitious.

I find most of my resources through the school since my civilian life is much more consumed in being a full-time student more than anything.

I am the first person in my family to serve, so that also makes me the first woman to serve, too.

If another woman was about to enlist, I would tell her to not lose her purpose. To train your body both physically and mentally. Everything will be okay, but it is a big commitment, so make sure you're ready.

# KELLY TAGGART

Branch: Active Duty Navy

Year Joined: 2014

Unit USS Ralph Johnson —Job Title: Fire control man



## ***Why did you join the military?***

I just the military to travel and to futher my education.

## ***What was your favorite assignment and why?***

I am a plank owner of The USS Ralph Johnson. The experience of commissioning the ship was unbelievable.

## ***What is your favorite memory while in the service?***

My favorite memory is surprising my family after not being home for a year.

## ***Was it difficult for you to transition back to civilian life? If so, in what ways?***

It was difficult to transition just because of the routine you get into in the military.

## ***Did the military influence your thinking and living after you were home? If so, how?***

Yes I think it did. My work ethic and drive are definitely different from being in the military. Also smaller things like my hair and appearance are still important.

## ***What was your biggest challenge of returning to civilian life?***

My biggest challenge has been juggling a part-time job, full-time school, and being a mom.

## ***Where did you find resources?***

I find resources from other servicemembers still. I reach out to other people who have gotten out and ask them what to do or where to find whatever it is that I am looking for.

## ***Are you the first woman in your family to serve?***

I am the first woman in my family who has served.

## ***What would you tell another woman about to enlist?***

I would tell them stay ready so you don't have to get ready. This is the best advice I received from my Senior Chief and it applies to every facet of your life.

# MELANY PENA



Branch: Army      Joined: 2019

Unit : 508th MP Co—Title: Military Police

I decided to join the military for educational benefits, the experience, and ultimately to serve my country. I have a passion for the criminal justice field, and I believed joining the military will help me be a competitive job applicant after I graduate. I also couldn't think of a better more respectful way to give back to my country than to serve.

My favorite assignment would have to be the DC mission I recently went on. This was a response to the capital storming that occurred back in January and the presidential inauguration in Washington DC. I remember going to Washington DC as a child, but this experience was completely different. To be a part of a historical moment, to have the opportunity to be there, and to secure our nation's capital is something I will never forget. To see firsthand what was happening, actively pulling security, and witnessing the lockdown of an area that is normally busy with constant moving parts is a sight I will never forget.

My favorite memory (of service) so far would have to be the day I graduated from basic and advanced individual training. I am still fairly new in the military but this was one of my proudest moments. Knowing that I was able to complete 20 weeks of training, being away from home, qualifying with a weapon even though it was my first time even holding one, passing physical tests, and the emotional challenges that I faced, I was proud to walk across the stage and become an American soldier.

It can get difficult at times to live in the two worlds of civilian life and military. Right now, I am still in the process of obtaining my bachelors degree and I had to take one year off school to complete basic training. Luckily since I took college courses while in high school and registering for extra classes, I am still on track to graduate on time. It can be hard to balance school, training, and missions. I want to succeed in both aspects of my life, but it can be difficult at times to find a balance.

Being in the military has influenced my way of thinking and living. The military has also influenced my fitness. I make sure now to take care of myself, whether it be through my diet or exercise. I try to be the best version of myself that I can be so I try and exercise at least 5 times a week because my job depends on my physical fitness. I have learned to never take what I have for granted, whether it be things I thought are simple and overlooked, such as a hot shower, bed, education, and even the food I eat.

The resources I used to find out about the military and enlisting were through one of my close friends who is in an ROTC program for the Air Force and through the internet. My close friend is enrolled in an ROTC program for a college we both attended and hearing her experiences made me interested. We would exercise together, and I would help her prepare for her physical tests. To see another female my age in the process of enlisting encouraged me to research more about the military. I would watch YouTube videos about other females who enlisting and listen to their stories.

Yes, I am the first woman in my family to serve.

I would tell her (another woman about to enlist) to never give up on herself and to keep pushing through. Being in the military is one of the most rewarding jobs and being a woman in the military is something to be proud of. You will be surprised how strong, both mentally and physically, you are when you set your mind on something despite your gender and the stereotypes that may follow. I would tell women to not let the stereotypes and judgment discourage them from enlisting. Some of the best leaders I know in the military are females and aspiring to be a great leader is the motivating factor that pushes me to be like them.

# ARIANA HAWKINS



*Marine Corps - Joined: 2009*

*I left active duty in 2018 but continue my service in the Reserves*

***Era of Service:** War in Afghanistan/Iraq War*

***In what unit did you serve?:***

*HMLA-269 and as a Drill Instructor aboard Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island*

***Last Rank:** Gunnery Sergeant*

***What was your job title?** AH/UH Flightline Helicopter Mechanic*

I always wanted to serve and work with helicopters. I love the discipline and structure of the military.

**What was your favorite assignment and why?** Being a Marine Corps Drill Instructor. I had the opportunity to transform women's lives for three years. I made Marines and continue to mentor some of my old recruits.

**What is your favorite memory while in the service?** Becoming a Senior Drill Instructor. It's fun to be the green belt, but the Senior can make a difference in the recruits' lives in a different capacity. You get to show them what a SNCO should look like and act like. You are their first real taste of leadership and set the tone for who they will become.

**Was it difficult for you to transition back to civilian life?** If so, in what ways? Yes. I was used to be responsible for 50-70 recruits or multi billion dollar helicopters. I went from that to personal training in a gym and sitting in class with people a decade younger than me. The culture shock was real and adjusting to having less responsibility was difficult.

**Did the military influence your thinking and living after you were home? If so, how?** Yes. I have a better handle on time management and I think my work ethic wouldn't be where it is today without my experience.

**What was your biggest challenge of returning to civilian life?** Having less responsibility and feeling like what I am currently doing isn't as important as what I was doing while on active duty.

**Where did you find resources?** I used a lot of the material they gave us at TRS. I've also leaned on the vets office for a place to study and stay focused.

**Are you the first woman in your family to serve?** Yes!

**What would you tell another woman about to enlist?** I would tell her to never forget where she came from and why she joined. It's easy to get caught up in trying to fit in and make a name for yourself, but none of that is worth it if you lose who you are in the process.

# PERLA LUCERO-DOMINGUEZ



Army National Guard - Joined: 2019

I am part of the 143rd TC

**What is your job title?** Human Resource Specialist

**Why did you join the military?** I joined the military because I wanted to challenge myself and become something more.

**What is your favorite assignment and why?** My favorite assignment is being able to assist in whatever is needed for the well-being of others.

**What is your favorite memory so far, in the service?** My favorite memory so far in the service is graduating from basic combat training. It was the day that I felt most accomplished.

**Is it difficult for you to live in the two worlds of civilian life and military?** If so, in what ways? **What is your biggest challenge?** It is difficult to live in the two worlds of civilian life and military, at times, because one may interfere with the other. Then you must find ways to work around it.

**Did the military influence your thinking and living? If so, how?** The military influences my thinking and living on a daily basis, because it holds me to higher standards.

**Where did you find resources?** I found resources by utilizing the people I had around me. A friend of mine had just enlisted and introduced me to the recruiter.

**Are you the first woman in your family to serve?** I am the first woman in my family to serve and I am proud to do so.

**What would you tell another woman about to enlist?** I would tell another woman who is about to enlist that this will be the best decision they will make because it will provide knowledge and skill that civilian life wouldn't.