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By Edward Eagerton

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Alaska Army National Guard Infantrywoman makes history

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — On the cusp of Women's History Month, one Alaska Army National Guard Soldier made her own mark in history last month by becoming the first infantry woman in Alaska National Guard history.

Sgt. Serita Unin, now a fireteam leader with Bison Company, 1st Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment, Alaska Army National Guard, is a Cup'ik Eskimo from the Kashunamiut Tribe who grew up in Bethel, Alaska. She first joined the Guard in 2009, six years before former President Barack Obama lifted the ban on women serving in combat units. At the time of her enlistment, combat arms jobs were not open to women.

"I came in as a generator mechanic and did that job for about 10 years," said Unin.

She reflected on her journey in the military up until the point that she reclassified into the infantry, stating that at first, it was not something she had considered.

"Initially I didn't want to go infantry," said Unin. "My commander at the time asked me if I wanted to switch jobs, and at first, I didn't want to."

Despite her hesitation, she explained, her leadership thought she was right for the job.

"A couple of drills later," she continued, "I got a call from my squad leader asking if I wanted to go infantry, and I thought 'I don't know,' then I went to drill, and my unit told me I was going 11 Charlie (infantry mortarman), and I got to thinking, 'it wouldn't be a bad idea.'"

Unin said that she knew it was going to be physically and mentally demanding, but she was already in the habit of working out twice a day. Physical fitness was already ingrained in her routine, and though soft spoken and thoughtful, her reflections on life and the importance of mental and physical health reveal a woman with a strong constitution, and clearly, her former leadership saw the same when they volunteered her to endeavor the journey.

She was already thinking about changing her job at the time, because she was in a position that maxed

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out at the rank of E-4 or specialist, and she was looking for upward mobility. When the opportunity presented itself, she rose to the challenge.

"I transferred over to Bison Company in October 2019 and waited to attend the infantry reclassification class since then," she said.

In January, Unin attended a three-week infantry reclassification course in Arkansas, and graduated last month as the Alaska National Guard's first female infantry soldier. When asked about the significance of making history for the Alaska Guard, she said she had mixed feelings about it, though all good.

"At first it was amazing being the first female infantry soldier in the Alaska Guard," she said, "but then I realized that this was bigger than myself. I realized that me being an infantry NCO will give other females a chance to become infantry if they wanted."

Though the ban on women serving in combat roles was lifted in 2015, it would take another two years for women to begin filtering into these units. At first, in order to recruit females directly into combat arms military occupational specialties, a female infantry officer and female infantry noncommissioned officer must have been trained and established in the gaining unit in order to have females in the chain of command.

However, by 2020, this directive had changed to require only one of the two, and with Unin now a qualified infantry NCO, the process to allow recruiters to enlist infantry women into the Alaska Army National Guard is moving forward, with recruiting command submitting the qualifications to National Guard Bureau in order to open up these enlistment opportunities to women.

Despite the historical elements of Unin's journey, she looked at the bigger picture.

"It is awesome being a part of something historical," she exclaimed, "not just about me, it's about the whole unit, it's about all females that want to go infantry, and it's about the battalion itself."

Unin explained that her most important role in this endeavor is being a good leader to the junior enlisted Soldiers in her fire team.

"I have three Soldiers under me in my fire team," she said. "For me, being an NCO, it's about taking care of the Soldiers and making sure they have everything they need to be successful, not only as a team member, but also in the civilian world."

"Being in the Guard," she continued, "we're only here a couple of days out of the month, so I have to ensure that my Soldiers have a good life outside the military as well, because if they're not taken care of on the civilian side, they're not going to be good in military life either. It's really about the Soldiers' welfare and ensuring they have everything they need to be successful all around."

For Unin, the infantry became like a second family, a sentiment common among people who serve in combat arms. She explained that she enjoys the unity and family-oriented nature of the unit.

“Being infantry in an infantry unit, people take care of each other,” she said. “It’s one big melting pot of amazing people who love infantry.”

When asked what she would tell other women looking to challenge themselves to serve in combat arms positions, her response was concise and clear.

“Do it,” she exclaimed. “You only live once. The standards are physically demanding, but if that’s what you really want to do, all you have to do is work hard, work out, be mentally fit, and just go for it.”

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PHOTO

1. **Attached pdf** includes story and a low-resolution photo for viewing on screen.
2. **DVIDS link** includes selected full-resolution photo and video production. (Accessible from military computers.)

<https://www.dvidshub.net/news/392012/alaska-army-national-guard-infantrywoman-makes-history>

<https://www.dvidshub.net/video/787968/sgt-serita-unin-makes-history-alaska-army-national-guards-first-infantrywoman>

3. AKNG official site

<https://ak.ng.mil/Media/News/Article/2546277/alaska-army-national-guard-infantrywoman-makes-history/>



Sgt. Serita Unin, a fireteam leader with Bison Company, 1st Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment, Alaska Army National Guard, poses for a photo on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, March 16, 2021. Unin made Alaska National Guard history by becoming the first infantry qualified woman in the organization after she reclassified into the infantry military occupational specialty last month. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Edward Eagerton)