

WI National Guard: Wisconsin National Guard Soldier profiled in National Guard Bureau salute to Women's History Month

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Sgt. Danielle Cornell, a radio retransmission team chief in the 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team on drill weekends and a systems administrator for the Wisconsin United States Property and Fiscal Office (USPFO) during the week, is special because she has served in the Wisconsin National Guard for 11 years, she is a veteran and she is a wife and mother. But the National Guard Bureau is featuring Cornell and other female Guard members during Women's History Month because she is typical of the type of person who brings value to the National Guard - an organization charged with the critical dual-mission of serving our nation as the primary combat reserve of the Army and Air Force in times of war, and as the first military responder here at home in times of emergency.

Why did you join the Wisconsin Army National Guard?

Cornell: When I was in high school, I wanted to be something more than just a student applying for colleges or just joining the workforce. I definitely was looking for ways to challenge myself and to gain self-worth. High school was just an awkward period where I never felt I fit in. [Growing up], money issues were a real thing. I had uncertainties to worry about. All I knew was, I needed to build a future.

Asking your mother to sign off on your enlistment papers is a big choice, and [she] did struggle with making that choice. But she wanted me to grow individually and to

make my own choices. I still remember my mom looking at me and asking if this is really the choice I wanted to make.

What made you stay after your first term of enlistment expired?

Cornell: I knew this career is something I could depend on. Moving up the ranks gave me more responsibilities and challenges. I like having that drive to try new things outside my comfort zone and being held to high expectations. The National Guard has given me and my family many opportunities.

How do you balance being a wife, mother and National Guard member?

Cornell: Being a mother is my number one priority. Our children are not quite the age to understand what we do yet, but they do think living in a household [in Sparta, Wisconsin] where wearing green camouflage every day is normal.

Every morning when we drop off our children at the Child Development Center at Fort McCoy, when reveille or retreat sounds, our son will stop and salute. In moments like this, we appreciate what we have. We are raising our children in this environment and we are okay with that.

I do have to say teamwork plays a big part. My husband is also a service member and a federal technician, so he knows the obligations I have. We work together and cover down in the spots where one of us can't. We are each other's biggest support and I don't know where I would be today if I didn't have my best friend.

Sometimes my husband and I drill the same weekends. This was my biggest fear after being pregnant with our first child — "Who's going to watch my child?" From the start my mother never hesitated. She travels two and a half hours to watch our children in our own home every month. She's supportive and enjoys watching the children. Plus, the children love one-on-one Grandma Time.

You've deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan during your career. How did those deployments impact your family life?

Cornell: My husband and I didn't have children yet. But if we did, it would have been extremely difficult to leave our loved ones. We are very family-oriented and enjoy doing family activities. I would miss that a lot. There's nothing that compares to cuddling with your children and reading them a book at night.

My husband and I had to find what worked best for us to transition back to our everyday normal routines, which was a struggle at times. We had to learn how to understand and support each other.

What observations can you make about your experience as a woman in the Wisconsin Army National Guard?

Cornell: I'm not sure how it was before I joined the military but it seems that the Army is very supportive about maternity leave for new mothers. As a breastfeeding mother, my leadership was very supportive about my journey. They always accommodated me, even in the field. My sergeant major even made sure I was adequately provided for. This right here is huge.

I feel that the military has taking strides to support women in combat roles more than ever before. I am extremely supportive of this! But I also do believe that when women make that commitment, they should be held the same standards and expectations as our brothers.

The military has been slowly evolving to allowing women to do more, and I do think this is a good thing.

What advice would you give to women considering joining the military?

Cornell: The National Guard offers great benefits and skills you can use everywhere. Being part of a small community makes you one of a kind. The comradery is amazing, and you get to be exposed to things that most people don't.

This will be a challenge, and you have to willing to make changes.