

# Guardsman first female fire-support specialist Army-wide

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FRANKFORT, Ky. — Tucked away in a supply office at Armory 1 in Frankfort, Staff Sgt. Billie Jacobs, a supply sergeant for Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 63rd Theater Aviation Brigade tries to stay under the radar.

She'll lend a hand to anyone who asks, but would rather not bring any attention to herself. That's probably why you didn't even know that recently, Jacobs graduated as the first female 13F fire-support specialist in the U.S. Army.

"I never cared to be the first in anything, but being a grunt and leading troops has been where my heart was from the beginning," Jacobs said.

When she reported to the Oklahoma National Guard's 189th Regional Training Institute in Norman, Oklahoma, Jacobs said it was as routine as checking in to any duty station. Running through her mind was the "same thing" that has been there as the only female since I was 13.

"If you go in there and prove yourself as a Soldier, the actions will speak louder for yourself than words," she said.

In January 2016 implementation of Defense Secretary Ash Carter's plan that lifted all gender-based restrictions on military service. The decision opened more than 200,000 jobs across the military – roughly 10 percent of the force – to women. The 13F MOS was the only field artillery job that hadn't been opened to women.

Other support roles, such as 92Y supply sergeant allowed women to serve alongside infantry or other male-dominated fields. This is where Jacobs spent her first years in the Kentucky Guard. She also volunteered for Joint Support Operations, Kentucky's Counterdrug mission where she egressed from hollers and fields via static line attached to a UH-60.

The rigorous training schedule at 13F-school re-



**Staff Sgt. Billie Jacobs**

quired hours of memorizing new military jargon used by field artillery and special operations. She had to become proficient at identifying weapons systems necessary to eliminate a threat and methods for remaining concealed. Students became experts in map reading and land navigation and understood that any mistake made on a map overlay could cause serious collateral damage. Ruck marches and field exercises would be enough for some to ring the bell and quit. Even the hardest of Soldiers.

But Jacobs said her mental capacity to never give up and not let down the people who believe in her is what kept her going then, through the 13F course and now.

"Mind over matter is real and having heart can push you through things your body swears it can't," she said.

Jacobs said she didn't do anything extra to prepare for 13F-school. As a body builder, wrestling coach and all around "PT-stud," Jacobs was already in prime shape.

"You should always be prepared for anything," she said. "Were there moments where I knew I would have to shatter ceilings? Every opportunity I tried

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to, because I didn't want to be looked at as weak or incapable.

"I tried to shatter ceilings in some aspect, everywhere I've been and with all the challenging things in life I've experienced," Jacobs said.

Those life lessons and motivations not only impact her subordinates and leaders, but also her community. As a coach for the Anderson County Youth Club wrestling team, Jacobs helped coach a team of 48 young boys and girls. The team placed 13th out of 60 teams in the State Wrestling Finals for 2016.

"Billie is the type of person who you want as a role model," said 1st Lt. Jonathan Strayer, training officer for the 751st Troop Command. Strayer asked Jacobs to assist with coaching the team this year.

"At work, if you task Billie with something, she does it without needing direction or guidance," he said. "On the mats with the kids, she brings that same dedication and determination but easily tailors her lessons to individual kids' abilities.

Even though Jacobs doesn't have any children, Strayer said her interactions with them was natural, proving that her leadership qualities and dedication to building a successful team come from within.

"Her sportsmanship and professional nature taught the team that a female can do anything," he said. "Just by doing something she loves (wrestling), she was able to teach these young men, and especially the young girls that women are equal and in many regards can even out wrestle us."

Now that she can hang a 13F diploma on her wall, Jacobs knows that being the first female to have the title is an honor, and she hopes other women will follow suit.

"Don't be afraid," she said to women who are considering joining combat roles. "Words can't kill you but they sure can help motivate you. Push through. You literally can do anything you put your mind to, beating yourself is the first step."



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