Women Veterans In Tech

by Kara Kavensky

 According to the Pew Research Center, between the years 1973 to 2010, the number of active-duty enlisted women in the military grew from approximately 42,000 to 167,000. And currently, women make up ten percent of our current veteran population.

 Transitioning to a meaningful career after serving in the military can be a challenge. With the demand for jobs in tech, many veterans are turning towards coding and technology bootcamps to skill up into their new career. The Veteran’s Administration allows the GI Bill to cover tech bootcamps, and a new VA program called VET TEC specifically encourages veterans who have already utilized their GI Bill benefits to have another funding mechanism to cover, specifically, these bootcamps.

 The following are profiles of a few of these amazing Hoosier veterans who have successfully skilled up into tech careers.

 After graduating from Pike High School, Christi Wynter attended to Penn State for a few years and reached a point where she needed a break. She was less than two semesters away from graduating and felt that her courses in information sciences and technology were not adequately preparing her for a career. What she was really interested in was cybersecurity but needed a break from college. Her brother was in the Army that that time and encouraged her to enlist in either the Navy or Air Force. Wynter opted for the Navy.

“I was interested in cybersecurity and my classes at Penn State were theory-based and not at all practical in application,” says Wynter, who was less than three semesters away from graduation. “While in the Navy, I earned a degree in business administration while stationed in Connecticut and my education in cybersecurity would happen maybe one day soon.”

 While serving in the US Navy, Wynter was a Nuclear Electronics Technician for the almost thirteen years she served. She monitored and performed required maintenance on nuclear instruments on her Carrier. This job requires the highest degrees of accuracy and attention to detail. She supervised a team of 20 and processed sailors in and out of NNPTC.

“My job in the Navy was highly regulated. We had a procedure for everything. While the job description was intimidating, you didn’t think about the risks and only focused on the next step in the procedure,” shares Wynter.

 Carriers are floating cities and are powered by nuclear reactors. Wynter was responsible for maintaining the instrumentation equipment that monitors the reactor onboard.

 In 2018, Wynter read an article describing cyber space as “the next battle zone” and it peaked her interest. She wanted to have a fulfilling career and the ability to spend more time with her family. She and her husband have three children. In order to accomplish this, Wynter chose to leave the Navy to pursue a career that offered a similar sense of purpose that she experienced in the Navy. The Wynter family returned to Indianapolis in March of 2020. While searching for opportunities, Wynter discovered the Cybersecurity program offered by Eleven Fifty Academy, a nonprofit coding bootcamp located in Indianapolis. Before enrolling, Wynter had attempted to complete a cyber certification on her own but found it to be difficult. Unsure of employment possibilities during a pandemic, she also identified a window of opportunity with Eleven Fifty Academy.

 Wynter started her bootcamp in June and graduated in September. She thought it would be difficult to find a position, but she was almost immediately hired by Sophos as a Threat Analyst. At Sophos, Wynter battles “threat actors” who use a variety of stealthy techniques to infiltrate systems.

“I like my job. I need to be constantly updating my skill set to stay fresh,” says Wynter, who works twelve hour shifts. “Nothing is ever really the same day by day.”

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 Summer Kerekes is an Army veteran who served three years active duty and another three in the reserves. She was a communications specialist in the Army and worked for a phone company with executive administration for 20 years. She also worked in IT, co-managing unified communications for over 19k users when that company was sold.

 Kerekes was living in Cincinnati when she was laid off in February of 2019. She decided to sell her home and move back to Indianapolis. Originally from the Southport area, she returned to her roots and looked for ways to broaden her skill set. Kerekes registered for Eleven Fifty Academy’s software development program and jumped into their web development course immediately after. She graduated from her second bootcamp in October and enrolled in the Salesforce and Deloitte Pathfinder program for becoming a developer on their platforms.

“I took advantage of the pandemic and committed myself to fully skilling up towards a career in tech,” says Kerekes, who is currently a learning assistant with Eleven Fifty Academy while looking for her ideal employment. “I prefer a larger company with an established structure.

 As a learning assistant, Kerekes is instructing web development to new students and is surprised that she is still learning things about the nuances of the course.

“I love education and enjoy instructing others, which I believe makes me feel more confident in my abilities,” says Kerekes. “It has been easier than I expected to add to my IT skills with software and web development.”

 Kerekes shares that she also enjoys mentoring others and is taking away more than she expected. Her mentoring plays into her own self-practicing and practical applications for sharpening her tech skills.

“The bootcamp environment (full-time) is immersive, very all-consuming, and the only thing on your mind while in it,” says Kerekes. “My military training definitely prepared me for this.”

 Kerekes is particularly proud that she has figured out other programming languages like Python. Summer feels armed and ready for her tech career.

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 Originally from a western suburb of Chicago, Lauren Kucera considers herself a naturalized Hoosier ever since she started her exercise science degree at Indiana State University. was EMT and considered continuing her education to become a paramedic or a nurse. While working working in the ER at a local hospital, Kucera realized that was not the path she wanted to pursue. During this time, Kucera joined the Army Reserves. She has been serving for over eight years.

“Growing up, we always used to drive past a National Guard Armory and my Mom told me that every time we passed it, I told her that I wanted to do that when I was old enough and one year [as a kid] I was a Soldier for Halloween,” says Kucera. “I guess it was always something I had in my mind that I was going to do and I never stopped thinking about it. I wanted something different and something that a majority of people didn't do or want to do.”

 While Kucera has not been deployed, she was recently placed on active duty orders in Indiana state for four months to help with covid support. As a medical service officer, her job is to plan and supervise medical operations. Her duties vary depending on which unit she is a part of and the circumstanced they are involved in. Kucera has done everything from making sure that the combat medics assigned to her are certified and properly trained to briefing medical treatment and operations in field training exercises and tracking patients in a mass casualty training scenarios.

 In her day job, Kucera wanted to do something different that challenged her. She attended a job fair where she met a representative from Eleven Fifty Academy. Kucera enrolled in the software development program and was offered a job on her graduation day in May 2019.

“I only wish that I had found it [Eleven Fifty Academy] earlier,” says Kucera, who serves in IT for the The Technology Services Organization of the Marine Corps. “I love problem solving and I get to solve complex puzzles every day.”

 During the pandemic, Kucera has been working remotely. Their office is downtown Indianapolis in the BMO Harris bank building. Her office is *the* IT for the Marines and work for the Navy and USAF is also performed out of this office.