



Celebrating 50 years of NU Trailblazers!

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From Cadets to Commanders: The Evolution of Inclusive Leadership



Sarah Patchem '98 Hillary Britch-Hedberg '07

As the oldest private military college in the United States, Norwich University has been a bastion of military education. Following 153 years as an all-male institution, Norwich has undergone a transformative shift in gender dynamics in the last half-century. Among the most significant has been the appointment of six female cadets to the rank of Regimental Commander.



Alison Lanz '10 Regan Steen '15

Norwich was among the first senior military colleges to admit women to the Corps of Cadets in 1974, two years ahead of the federal academies. In 1997, when Virginia Military Institute accepted its first women following a Supreme Court order, **Sarah Patchem '98** became Norwich's first female Cadet Colonel.

The position holds immense prestige, carrying the responsibility of leading the Corps of Cadets and maintaining discipline within the student body. Reflecting on her experience as the highest-ranking cadet, Sarah said, "Change is difficult for organizations, and people react to it in many ways. I did not focus on the negative reactions to the change, though I did learn to acknowledge the diversity of opinions and help move the culture toward the new reality."



Erin Gats '17 Morgan Wood '19

Since 1997, five other women have held the rank of Cadet Colonel: **Hillary Britch-Hedberg '07**, **Alison Lanz '10**, **Regan Steen '15**, **Erin Gats '17**, and **Morgan Wood '19**.

The appointment of female regimental commanders acknowledges Norwich women's qualifications and leadership skills. Each demonstrated their ability to assume command and lead their peers while breaking barriers and challenging stereotypes. Regan Steen '15 eloquently captured the essence of leading the Corps in saying, "Know going into this position

that not a single one of your decisions will make everyone happy. It will be your responsibility to base all of your decisions on what you truly believe will be best for your fellow cadets and the Corps as a whole.”

The accomplishments of the female regimental commanders as students and alumnae make them role models for future generations, inspiring other women to pursue leadership positions within the Corps and beyond. Hillary Britch '07 summarized her experience by saying “Before Norwich, I wasn't much of a risk-taker; if I wasn't sure I would succeed at something, I didn't want to risk doing it. Norwich changed that. Being willing to accept risk and try things I wasn't comfortable with was probably the most important lesson I learned on the Hill.”

The legacy of these first female cadet colonels symbolizes a positive shift toward inclusivity at Norwich, a testament to the university's dedication to fostering an environment where all cadets, regardless of gender, can excel and contribute to the university's mission.

Records documenting women's history and experience at Norwich are available through the University Archives. <https://archives.norwich.edu/>

In 1972, Vermont College merged with Norwich University. 2024 marks the **50th anniversary** of the first women to live on the Northfield campus and the first to join the NU Corps of Cadets—two years prior to the US Service Academies!

Share your Norwich experience in the Women Kicking Glass Oral History Project!

Call 1-866-456-1993 or email customerservice@publishingconcepts.com for a personalized link to share your story and photos.

The deadline for contributions is January 19, 2024.