

WOMEN LEADERSHIP VIRTUAL EXCHANGE (WLVE) DIGITAL STORYTELLING PROJECT

One Woman's Journey as a Leader of Marines

Story by KSU student Timothy Callaway.

Photos provided by Captain Chambers

Alicia Chambers is a commissioned officer in the United States Marine Corps. She has been in the Marine Corps for nine years and currently holds the rank of Captain. She is the Officer Selection Officer for the State of Georgia with her primary job being a Communications Officer.

Captain Chambers grew up in Sacramento, California and attended San Francisco State University. She studied Information Systems and was a track and field athlete. She decided to join the Marine Corps her junior year of college. She was accepted and attended Officer Candidates School for ten weeks after graduating college. She then went to the Basic School for six months, where newly commissioned officers learn to lead Marines in combat as provisional rifle platoon commanders. After completing the Basic School, she then attended the Basic Communications Officers Course. After completing her training, she then went to Okinawa, Japan for her first duty station. Following her tour in Japan, she then went to Recruiters School and became an Officer Selection Officer at Kennesaw State University.

When asked what her biggest challenge was in becoming an officer, Captain Chambers replied, "Being a female." Around 2010 to 2011, the time she was attending San Francisco State, the Marine Corps was only around 6% female. However, she did not want "females don't join the Marine Corps because it's difficult" to be her excuse. She would always get questioned, "Why would you do that? That's so hard." However, she never understood why people would ask her that, but would never second-guess a girl becoming a ballerina.

She hated the fact that women and young girls were being pushed by society to "do only some difficult things, but not the most difficult things." Friends and associates would often question her decision to join the military. Her track coach did not want to write a letter of recommendation for her due to his dislike of the military and did not understand why she would want to join.



Captain Chambers pictured in-front of the Semper Fidelis All-American plaque

The [WLVE project](#) is a partnership between Hassan II University of Casablanca and Kennesaw State University. It is supported by the Stevens Initiative, which is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, with funding provided by the U.S. Government, and is administered by the Aspen Institute. The Stevens Initiative is also supported by the Bezos Family Foundation and the governments of Morocco and the United Arab Emirates.

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However, despite these obstacles, she refused to give up her aspiration. She even used it as inspiration to accomplish her goal of becoming an officer. Throughout her application process, she trained exclusively for the male physical fitness standard. She believed there were not separate male and female standards, but only one standard: The Marine Corps Standard.

Captain Chambers' role model was Lieutenant Uhura, the communications officer from the Star Trek television series. She grew up watching Star Trek with her father and, although fictional, the portrayal of Lieutenant Uhura by the actress Nichelle Nichols was very influential to her. She was inspired by the character's intelligence. Captain Chambers loves being able to talk to college students about joining the Marine Corps and being able to effect a change in the lives of those college students.

One of Captain Chambers' best experiences leading other Marines occurred when she was stationed in Okinawa, Japan for three years as her first duty station. While in Japan, she participated in humanitarian response and disaster relief in Nepal and the Philippines. She never thought she would be a part of leading a disaster response while she was in the military as it seemed contrary to the mission of the military. However, she enjoyed affecting a positive change in the lives of those affected by disasters.

Her most challenging leadership experience occurs when one of her Marines fails to meet the standard or becomes injured. When one of her Marine fails to live up to the standard, she takes it as personal disrespect that they knew her expectations yet sought to do something inappropriate or illegal. She takes responsibility for when something bad happens to one of her Marines, however, she acknowledges that she needs to take a step back and reflect on why the situation occurred. Ultimately, managing her Marines is the hardest challenge she faces.



Captain Chambers diving in Okinawa, Japan

Her advice for women aspiring to become leaders around the world: “Find a mentor. I don’t care if they look like you. I don’t care if they talk like you. I don’t care if they’re from the same city. It just needs to be someone that can advocate for you.” Captain Chambers emphasized the point that mentors and role models need not be from the same culture as you nor necessarily have many other things in common with you. The most important detail she highlights about the mentor is that they should be willing to help you regardless of differences. Being an African-American female in the Marine Corps has already made Captain Chambers a part of a minority. Additionally, choosing to be an officer and go through strenuous leadership training made it difficult to find mentors that related to her in ways most people would look towards. Her final words of advice to women aspiring to become leaders are to “seek out a mentor. Don’t wait for someone to come to you. You need advocates out there.”

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