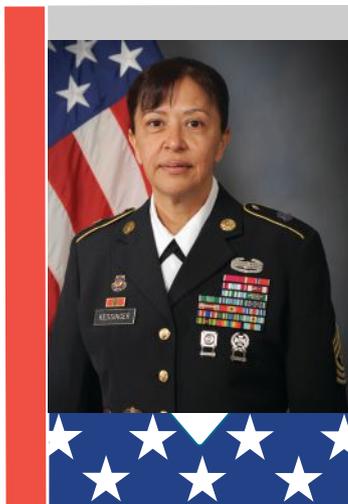


Latinas in the Armed Forces, Opportunities for All

By Gloria Romano-Barrera

Women have defended the United States for years. They have contributed their talents, skills and courage to this endeavor with dedication. Whether they are in the U.S. military academy, serve in combat roles or are civilians, the military has enable women to have successful careers. Meet 16 Latinas that despite challenges and sometimes dangerous work, thoroughly enjoy their jobs in the military—and continue to serve the country with pride.



**Sergeant Major Linda Kessinger,
United States Army**

“I joined the military because I wanted to help my mom,” says SGM Linda Kessinger who comes from a single parent home. “Growing up we didn’t have much and my mom was working two jobs just to have a roof over our head. We lived on welfare and food stamps and there were times when we were evicted from the house we were living in. I always wanted to join the military

but my mom didn’t want to let me go so when I turned 21 and still without a good job which I would consider a career job, I decided to walk to the Recruiting Station and joined the Army. My goal was to stay in just long enough to save money so I could go to college and help my mom with my brothers and sisters.”

A native of Seguin, Texas, Kessinger enlisted in the U.S. Army delayed entry program in 1984 and entered active duty on January 24, 1985. Her military occupations are 71L (Administrative Specialist) and 42A (Human Resources Specialist).

Her advice to women is to ‘never forget where you came from and never let anyone tell you that you can’t accomplish something just because of the color of your skin or the language you speak. “Set short and long term goals and follow through with them; if you fall, get up, dust yourself and try again,” she shares. “Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would ever one day be a Sergeant Major or stay in the Army 32 years and accomplish the things I did.”



**Staff Sergeant Christina Mota-Aguiar,
United States Marine Corps**

Born in Patterson, California BSSgt Christina Mota-Aguiar enlisted in the Marine Corps in January 2004. Reporting to recruit training in May 2004, Mota-Aguiar wanted to serve in the military because it was her way of giving back to a country that has afforded her so many opportunities. “My mother made so many sacrifices when she left Mexico to come to the United States and I know she did it to give her family a better

life,” she shares. “I’ll never take that for granted.”

For Mota-Aguiar, being able to influence the young men and women looking for a career path in life is the best part of her job. Throughout the years, she has learned that nothing is ever easy but if you are willing to work hard for what you want, nothing is impossible.

In September 2012, she deployed to Afghanistan in support of Operations Enduring Freedom as a team leader for Cultural Support Team 82-1, Special Operations Task Force West. In 2016 she reported to her assignment as Staff Non-Commissioned.

Although balancing work and family is one of the biggest challenges she’s had to face, she has acquired appreciation for the simple things in life and today her advice to Latinas is to “be willing to put in the work, be driven and motivated.”