

Armor School Graduates First Female Abrams and Bradley Fighting Vehicle Maintainers

The Armor School observed “firsts” in 2012 when it graduated its first female Bradley Fighting Vehicle maintainers May 31 and its first female M1 Abrams tank-system maintainers Aug. 1.

The 91M Bradley maintainer and 91A Abrams maintainer courses are two of six combat-support jobs made available to women after the Army expanded access to some combat positions formerly reserved for men. Of the six military occupational specialties, two are taught at the Armor School, Fort Benning, GA.

Five Soldiers became the first female Bradley Fighting Vehicle maintainers. They are PVT Christy Bailey, PVT Taylor Robbins, PVT Melissa Allen, PVT Christian Haws and PVT Amanda Layman.

Four Soldiers made history as the first females to obtain the 91A MOS. They are PFC Emma Briggs, PFC Anita Ramirez, PVT Erika Leroy and PVT Kaitlin Killnight.

Company E, 3rd Battalion, 81st Armor Regiment, 194th Armored Brigade, conducts both courses.

The graduates trained alongside their male counterparts to transform them into mechanics for the Bradley and Abrams. The instruction included general automotive knowledge, learning to read schematics, understanding suspension systems, electronics, diagnostics and troubleshooting the engine and turret systems.

Not only was Briggs one of the first females to obtain the 91A MOS, but she was the distinguished honor graduate. SSG Jahi Foster, one of the 91A instructors, said Briggs’ willpower was what set her apart from the rest of the class.

“She had a lot of self-motivation and she came in with the same attitude every day,” Foster said. “A lot of the students have problems, and they’ve been here for months dealing with things, but she always came out with the same hard-charging, ready-to-go attitude every day.”

Bailey said she joined the Army to find a greater purpose in life. “I joined the Army to do something better with my life, and I didn’t want to be a desk clerk

– I wanted to be as close to the action as possible,” Bailey said. “This seemed as close as I could [get] to doing something for the Army and for myself at the same time. I like to be hands-on, and it’s pretty hands-on.”

Following in the footsteps of her father, who served as a tanker, Robbins decided to join the Army after high school. “I wanted to prove that female Soldiers could do this and be leaders and cut the way for future Soldiers and females here,” she said. “I (assumed) they would be harder or softer on us females, but in all we got treated the same, and they expected the same as males.”

“We worked very hard to ensure our female Soldiers were treated exactly like our male Soldiers,” said CPT Travis Iommi, company commander. Iommi said the integration process presented little challenge to the E Company cadre; barracks renovations and regulations were thoroughly established to promote the safety and security of male and female Soldiers.

The Soldiers said they relied on teamwork and commitment to operate just as any other class would. “In the Army, it’s a big teamwork effort,” Bailey said. “You have to push your individual needs aside to get the job done.”

Iommi said hard work and camaraderie are the most vital assets for any Soldier to succeed in the Army.

“It doesn’t matter if you’re male or female,” Iommi said. “If you get after it, (do) PT and volunteer to put in a bunch of hard work and work as a team, I don’t care what your gender is, people are going to say, ‘That’s a Soldier I would want in my motor pool.’”

(Editor’s note: This article was adapted from “Breaking barriers: 4 Soldiers set to become Army’s first female Abrams tank maintainers” by Nick Duke and “Bradley Fighting Vehicle maintenance course graduates first female Soldiers” by Aniesa Holmes.)



PVT Kaitlin Killnight (left), PFC Emma Briggs (center) and PVT Erika Leroy work on an Abrams tank simulator in Bldg. 5215 at Harmony Church, Fort Benning, GA. Along with PFC Anita Ramirez, these Soldiers made history Aug. 1, 2013, when they became the first females to graduate from the 91A Abrams tank maintainers’ course.

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MOS – military occupational specialty