



Nearly 100 women from a variety of ranks in the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and the Army and Air National Guard attended the Department of Defense Building Resilience in Women Leaders Summit on March 27 in Arlington, Va. Their participation, support, dedication, and commitment to working together can help enhance the quality of life of all military women.



Jacqueline Garrick, Director of the [Defense Suicide Prevention Office \(DSPO\)](#), provided opening remarks for the day-long summit. The summit brought together aspiring and established women leaders from across the Services to learn valuable resilience strategies, including goal setting and leadership skills, and how to develop mentoring relationships in the military.



The Honorable Jessica Wright, Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, gave [keynote remarks](#) advising attendees to learn to be resilient to be successful in life. Using her own mother as a role model of resilience, Secretary Wright encouraged attendees to foster, mentor, maintain, grow, and practice resilience every single day and to learn from others how to be resilient.

Instead of asking why something bad happens in their lives, Secretary Wright told attendees to start asking what they are going to do about it. “It’s not the problem, it’s how you handle the problem,” she said. “There is intestinal fortitude, perseverance, a sense of humor, the ability and the desire to work through a situation in a positive manner. That is the silver bullet.”



Army Brig. Gen. Carol Eggert, Assistant Adjutant General of the Pennsylvania National Guard and Deputy Commandant of the U.S. Army War College, defined resilience as “the ability to withstand, recover, and grow in the face of stressors and changing demands.”

Brig. Gen. Eggert shared tips on how to be resilient from Service members who bounced back after experiencing a traumatic event. Their advice included getting help when you need it, volunteering to help others, celebrating both big and small victories, developing goals, and maintaining a positive outlook.



Brig. Gen. Eggert handed out small, blank journals to attendees to encourage them to actively “Hunt the Good Stuff” in life by recording and reflecting on three good things each day.

“Studies have proven if you actively ‘Hunt the Good Stuff,’ you will sleep better, be more fit because you won’t mind exercising, your health will be better, your blood pressure will go down, relationships will thrive, and you’ll feel more positive,” she said. “This enhances resilience.”



Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Cheri Sanders, Assistant Program Manager at the Air Force Transition Assistance and Employment Program, discussed resilience strengths and how they can help women manage challenges and stress.



Army Sgt. Maj. Apryl McWilliams, Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Army National Guard Chief Information Officer, discussed challenges to resilience.

We face challenges to our resilience in both our personal and professional lives every day, which is why it's critical that we identify and build the skills and strengths necessary to overcome them. These challenges can range in size from daily life stressors like traffic jams, to more significant events like losing a fellow Service member in combat.



Attendees participated in several activities from their summit workbooks to determine their level of resilience and examine the skills and strengths they have that help build their resilience.

Resilience skills and strengths span across four domains: mind (psychological resilience like optimism, realistic beliefs, self-efficacy, and cognitive flexibility); body (physical fitness, complementary and alternative medicine, nutrition, and sleep); spirit (meaning making, spirituality, and religion); and social (social connectedness, unit environment, peers, family, and community). Women tend to rely on the social and spiritual domains more so than men. Attendees discussed why this might be the case and how to use these domains more effectively to enhance their resilience.



Kayla Williams, author of *Love My Rifle More Than You: Young and Female in the U.S. Army* and *Plenty of Time When We get Home: Love and Recovery in the Aftermath of War*, described her experience as a former Army sergeant and Arabic linguist deployed to Iraq. She discussed the challenges of being part of the small percent of females in the Army and then returning home to support her combat-wounded husband.

Williams shared strategies she uses to maintain her resilience, including keeping up with physical activities, getting involved with a bigger community, and telling her story to help others. “You need resilience not just to survive deployment, but to survive the rest of your life,” she said.



Navy Lt. Cmdr. Lisseth Calvino, a psychologist at the Ft. Belvoir Community Hospital, discussed the importance of women leaders being able to set and follow through with goals. To do this, Lt. Cmdr. Calvino said they need to create SMARTER goals. SMARTER goals are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-based, evaluable, and re-evaluable.



Attendees created 12-month plans to achieve the goals they set by using their summit workbooks. They divided into small groups to share their plans and obtain advice, support, and encouragement from each other on their goals.



Marine Corps 1st Sgt. Patricia Trotter, company 1st Sgt. for the Headquarters and Service Company at the Marine Barracks, talked about understanding challenges to resilience.

Understanding your individual struggles, and reflecting on where they fit within “the big picture,” may give you more perspective and may make it easier to focus on the present moment.



Attendees divided into three groups by rank (Enlisted, Warrant Officer, and Officer) to discuss with a panel of successful Service members having similar roles and ranks the ways they can build their support networks and cultivate their relationships with mentors and mentees.

Secretary Wright and Ms. Garrick encouraged attendees to contact [Vets4Warriors](https://www.vets4warriors.org/) at (855) 838-8255 for peer-to-peer support. The call center is staffed by trained Veterans who are available 24/7 to assist Service members and their families in managing stress, overcoming challenges, and building resilience.



Throughout the summit, attendees had the opportunity to network with other women leaders from across the military. Attendees were encouraged to remain in contact with each other after the summit and to continue to use resources available through DSPO to enhance their resilience.