



Lt Col Gina Stramaglio, Commander of the 74th Air Refueling Squadron, stands (in center) with several members of her squadron to commemorate September 11 at Grissom Air Reserve Base in Indiana.

## Gina Stramaglio Takes Flight

A U.S. AIRFORCE VETERAN'S JOURNEY OF  
COMMAND, CONFIDENCE, AND COMPASSION

PEOPLE ARE FOLDING UP their chairs after the Fourth of July parade ends when I meet Gina Stramaglio on the street. She's wearing a gray U.S. Air Force T-shirt. Her smile conveys friendliness. A mutual friend introduces us and within minutes I'm captivated. I learn that her T-shirt is no souvenir. She is a Lieutenant Colonel serving in the U.S. Air Force as an Aircraft Commander. Her global military experience of more than 20 years involves 16 deployments, some in the Middle East during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. She remains active in the Air Force Reserve while also serving as a Captain for United Airlines. As we are near Veterans Day, it seems right to schedule a time when we can talk further. Her journey is just one from the many veterans we are proud to call our neighbors.

We meet at Cook Street Coffee and sit at a table outside. I ask her what it takes to be an effective Aircraft Commander. Gina answers with two words: "Confidence and credibility." She says these are attributes she honed through the military. "It's trained into you. Performance under pressure and technical skills are important to lead and gain trust."

She's not afraid to face challenges. Gina's military status keeps her on call 24/7 for missions. "Pilot training is hard. Combat missions are hard. What a lot of people don't think about is the change of lifestyle. With multiple deployments you are away from home a lot. You miss milestones and holidays with family."



Gina Stramaglio with her dog, Logan, at Cook Street Coffee in Barrington.  
Photo: Mary Klest.



Lt Col Gina Stramaglio taxis a KC-135 during a large formation exercise at Grissom Air Reserve Base.



Lt Col Gina Stramaglio lands at Schaumburg Regional Airport after having flown the aircraft out of the path of a hurricane. Such a maneuver is called a “hurevac” mission.

### COMRADES AND CAMARADERIE

Home for her is South Barrington. She’s one of the newest members at the revitalized Barrington American Legion Post 158. There she finds support from fellow military veterans who understand the rewards and hardships of serving in the military. At her first meeting she met veteran of World War II and Post Commander Fred Schafer. “The World War II vets are my heroes. They are extraordinary,” she says. In fact, she detoured her plan to attend medical school after taking a WWII History class while studying in Rome. Inspired by those soldiers’ valiance, she decided instead to join the U.S. Air Force. She became a pilot and found her love of flying.

### TOUGH YET COMPASSIONATE

In 2022, Gina assumed command of the 74th Air Refueling Squadron. At the ceremony she was escorted by another one of her heroes, her late grandmother. “I admired her so much. She was tough, smart, kind, and never complained.”

Our conversation is interrupted by a man who wants to pet Gina’s beloved dog, Logan, resting at her feet. Her other love, animals, led Gina to volunteer at SOUL Harbour Ranch Animal Therapy Program in Barrington. “Animals bring joy, comfort and peace. Volunteering at SOUL is a way for me to give back. We started a program there for veterans. I’ve seen very tough guys break down and cry when with a horse.”

To advance in the military one must keep learning. Gina is attending War College as part of her climb to become a Colonel. She could have retired



United Airlines Captain Gina Stramaglio smiles as she completes the preflight of her Airbus 321.

four years ago but she can’t see that day coming anytime soon. “Colonels don’t fly as much as I’d like,” she admits, “but I’m willing to pass on what I’ve learned to those coming up”



As a United Airlines Captain, the cockpit is where she finds her great joy. “It’s in the sky, while flying over Norway through the Northern Lights, or watching meteor showers at night, that I feel the most awe,” she says, her voice lifting. “It’s breathtaking beauty.”

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