

In her own words: Warrant Officer Class 2 Kirsty Meynell

“As a female service person the struggle is real. I am a veteran, I am female, I’ve seen the horror, yet I am still reprimanded by people for wearing my father’s medals on the wrong side of my chest. They are mine, I’ve earned them and I have the scars to prove it. Let me be proud.”



Warrant Officer Class 2 Kirsty Meynell. Photograph courtesy of Russ Flat, taken as part of the Pride 25 Rainbow Warrior portrait series.

Before joining the New Zealand Army, Warrant Officer Class 2 Kirsty Meynell had her civilian boss tell her that she would never succeed “I’m a pretty stubborn person, so that was almost enough for me to push through and prove her wrong.”

Prove her wrong she did. Kirsty first joined the New Zealand Army in 2000 and deployed to Timor-Leste 18 months later. She has served on multiple deployments during her time with the Army, including in the Solomon Islands and on two tours in Afghanistan.

Kirsty came out as gay while serving and her unit “didn’t even bat an eyelid,” which she says is a testament to their professionalism. When Prince Harry met New Zealand veterans and their spouses, Kirsty’s Commanding Officer asked her to attend with her wife Rachel.

Her first deployment to Afghanistan in 2011 coincided with the repeal of the United States’ ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ policy which prevented gay, lesbian, and bisexual personnel from serving openly in the military. Working with Americans during this deployment was the first time that Kirsty felt like she was different to other soldiers.

“I always had the mind-set that when I’m on deployment I’m there to do a job and I want to be known for my performance, my ability, what I achieve, not anything else. So I never outwardly advertised, especially in Middle Eastern countries, that I’m gay.”

On her second tour to Afghanistan Kirsty held three leadership positions, including as a force protection driver, and closed two missions. The pressure of being a female leader meant that she pushed herself to prove that she was more than capable, that she was the best.

“As a leader, you’ve got troops under you, you’ve gotta portray a certain image that you’ve got it together. But at times you don’t.” Not long after returning from her deployment Kirsty was diagnosed with an autoimmune disease that is triggered by trauma and stress.

During her career Kirsty has transitioned to civilian life and returned to the Army three times. Despite her service and the toll that it has taken on her, Kirsty feels that her service is not seen in the same light as other veterans. “On Anzac Day every second word is ‘he’ and ‘him.’ There’s still this belief that women aren’t put in risky positions, that we get our medals for serving in an office.”

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