

Cougars Making History by Breaking Barriers and Fostering Inclusion in the U.S Military

By Christine Le with Jacob Loew



General Barrye Price, LTC Melissa Comiskey, and 2LT Katelyn Kubosh have each played a role in opening doors to women in the U.S. military.

Photos courtesy of the U.S. Army.

Serving in the military requires a noble spirit along with a strong passion for service and our nation. Enlistment, training, service, and earning promotions are long and arduous tasks, but General Barrye Price and Second Lieutenant Katelyn Kubosh managed to succeed with flying colors. The two University of Houston alumni credit UH with giving them the tools, support, and formative experiences needed to achieve their current ranks. Moreover, the policy changes spearheaded by Price empowered officers such as Lieutenant Colonel Melissa Comiskey, who served in the first women-integrated infantry/armored brigade in the Army and is the current director of the Army ROTC program in the UH College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences.

General Barrye Price: A Passion to Open Doors in the U.S. Military

Departing from his small midwestern hometown of Gary, Indiana, in 1981, a young Barrye Price found himself beaming with anticipation as he thought about his next four years at the University of Houston. He enrolled in the College of Business Administration and joined the ranks of other academically driven pupils.¹ The blistering, sun-drenched campus exceeded his expectations. Price loved how the serene fountain waters gurgled and splashed, capturing the attention of every student that walked by on the way to class. Seeing young undergraduates bunch together on the vibrant

green grass while studying, eating, chatting, and laughing gave him a sense of joyful liveliness and belonging.

What Price did not expect when he arrived at UH was joining the ranks of military men, a prospect which had not crossed his mind as an inexperienced nineteen-year-old. Price recalled that he had brushed off his mother's insistence to apply for the Army's Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) scholarship during his early undergraduate years. Life in the Army seemed unthinkable. Nevertheless, a succession of serious talks with his mother about the failing economy, lack of job guarantees after graduation, and ROTC's full tuition benefits convinced Price to reconsider joining ROTC. The leadership training and military discipline he learned throughout his time in the program proved invaluable and equipped him with the tools for future success. Sure enough, he earned the honor of Distinguished Military Graduate from UH's C.T. Bauer College of Business and was commissioned as an officer in the U.S. Army the day before he graduated in 1985.²

The intellectual fervor and self-determination that drove Price at UH and in ROTC inspired him to pursue a graduate degree. The Army awarded him full funding not only for his undergraduate years, but also for his entire academic career while pursuing master's and doctorate degrees. Price completed his master of arts in history at Texas A&M University in 1994 and broke racial boundaries when he became the



Barrye Price is a University of Houston alum who went on to make history in the U.S. Army. Here he discusses his book, Life on the Other Side of You.

Photo courtesy of CADCA Institute.

university's first African American student to earn a Ph.D. in history in 1997. Additionally, he completed a masters of science in National Security Strategy in 2004 from the National Defense University.³

Despite his pioneering achievements at Texas A&M, Price admitted that he was disappointed in the status quo. "It's a shame that I'm the only African American to earn a Ph.D. in history at such a major institution, especially in the last twenty-six years since I graduated," Price observed. He nonetheless vocalized his sentiments as a call to action for greater access and representation for people of color at all levels of the academic system. In fact, he helped break that barrier when he taught as an assistant professor at the U.S. Military Academy in West Point, New York. "Education continues to be the great equalizer in our nation," Price proclaimed during a speech at UH's C.T. Bauer College of Business. Black figures in history, he pointed out, remain underrepresented in

the classroom and in mainstream society. Price called for a reform of the U.S. educational system that emphasizes diversity and our myriad of unique cultural experiences.⁴

Fully aware of the socioeconomic hardships that disproportionately impacted marginalized communities, Price saw his breakthroughs in higher education as rebellions against society's imbalanced racial power structures. He recalled that in the early eighties "there were tremendous racial overtones where my Blackness wasn't celebrated." But attending UH gave Price the foundational skills for survival in an environment where Blackness was gratuitously brutalized and undermined. During one Texas history class Price criticized the professor's characterization of notable Black figures like Marcus Garvey and Nat Turner as troublemakers. Price's challenge caused his professor to consider a new perspective that held radical potential. From that day forward, Price understood that his voice mattered and that speaking up does not have to be a negative experience. Two months



General Barrye Price at the 2013 Freedom Foundation Awards Luncheon with Army cadets.

Photo courtesy of General Barrye Price.



General Price, his wife Tracy, their son William, and retired astronaut Dr. Bonnie Dunbar at the 2013 Freedom Foundation Awards Luncheon.

Photo courtesy of General Barrye Price.

later at his graduation ceremony, amongst a crowd of fellow lieutenants, Price replicated that moment in class and spoke against an unfair statement made by the course director from the stage.⁵

In 2000, Price was involved with President Bill Clinton and the First Lady's Task Force for "Raising Responsible and Resourceful Teenagers" that produced new research about the impacts of teenage anxiety. Price also participated in President Clinton's Mississippi Delta Task Force that focused on building tactical strategies for groundwater sustainability, wildlife management, and ecological vitality in the Mississippi Delta.

Most notably, in 2011, Price served as the Army's point person to Congress in overturning the Direct Ground Combat Exclusion Rule that prevented women from being assigned to units engaged in direct combat with an enemy of the United States during war. Price was a brigadier general at the time and worked with the support staff of Secretary of the Army John M. McHugh, and Army Chief of Staff Raymond Odierno.

Two women in particular, Colonel Linda Shiemo and Major, now Colonel, Trina Rice, produced the research necessary to prepare Price for his testimony to Congress. Overturning the Direct Ground Combat Exclusion Rule was the lynchpin in opening all military occupational specialties for women in all branches of military service. The Army spent the next four years pursuing efforts to accomplish that goal. “I treasure the military experience because I look through that prism, and it makes me a better husband, father, son, friend, Cougar, and a greater ambassador for the stockholders who have invested in me,” Price declared.⁷

Today, General Price serves as the president and chief executive officer of Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA), an organization founded on principles of care and the prevention of drug addiction among youth. His publications include the 2001 book, *Against All Enemies Foreign and Domestic: A Study of Urban Unrest and Federal Intervention Within the United States*; the 2016 book, *Life, On the Other Side of You: A Study of Life, Death, and Renewal*; and the 2020 book, *Homeland Defense: Civil Unrest and Federal Intervention within the United States of America*. Barrye Price’s accomplishments as an academic, serviceman, and officer in the U.S. Army have allowed many people from all walks of life, most notably women, to succeed and break barriers in the U.S. Army.

Lieutenant Colonel Comiskey: Facilitating Price’s Change

Lieutenant Colonel Melissa Comiskey joined the University of Houston in 2022 as the department chair of Military Science and director of Army ROTC, but her career had crossed paths with General Price’s work years before that. Comiskey graduated from Texas A&M University and joined the Army as a second lieutenant. Similar to Price, Comiskey was drawn towards Army ROTC by the wide range of benefits provided. Upon graduation and completion of the leadership program, Comiskey decided to further her career in the U.S. Army. “I



LTC Comiskey hopes that through her work as the department chair of UH Military Science, she can foster change in the U.S. Army by promoting a culture of inclusion. Photo courtesy of LTC Melissa Comiskey.

fell in love with the Army – most importantly, the people,” she explained. “We say, this is my squad, this is my team of teams, my family. It’s like that everywhere. There’s just that camaraderie that’s irreplaceable.”⁸

Comiskey completed the Adjutant General Officer Basic Course and took a post in Germany as a platoon leader. She then served as a battalion human resources officer, after which she deployed to Iraq for fifteen months. Upon her return, Comiskey earned her master’s in military arts and science from the Air Command and Staff College. She worked in the Pentagon as chief of command policy and chief of distribution branch for enlisted personnel policy.⁹ Comiskey has extensive experience with personnel management and human resources within the U.S. Army, which made her the perfect person to execute Price’s policy changes.

On top of her service in Germany, Iraq, and South Korea, Comiskey also has a passion for military education and inclusion in the U.S. Army and military as a whole. She was on the frontlines of the facilitation of General Price’s efforts to expand inclusion in the U.S. military. “I was at [the armored brigade combat team] in 2016 executing the second part of what he started. We were the first unit to integrate female infantry and armor officers and soldiers under a policy called ‘Soldier 2020’ which opened all positions to all people, regardless of gender. After that, I went to the Pentagon where we expanded that policy to all units across the Army.”¹⁰

Bringing inclusion and change into the U.S. Army is not accomplished through simply creating policies. Breaking barriers comes in two parts – the implementation of inclusion into policy and the change in culture. Speaking on the



LTC Comiskey with Colonel Stephen Ruth, the Director of the Houston Strategic Officer Recruiting Detachment. Both Comiskey and Ruth are involved in recruiting and mentoring future leaders in the U.S. Army.

Photo courtesy of LTC Melissa Comiskey.



2LT Katelyn Kubosh graduated from UH in the top ten percent of all ROTC graduates nationwide.

Photo courtesy of
2LT Katelyn Kubosh.

importance of culture in the U.S. Army and how changing it can show lasting change, Comiskey asserts “that leaders [must] understand and embrace diversity, and not just diversity, but inclusion.” This includes “challenging culture, ideas, thoughts, and perspectives.”¹¹ As senior officers in the U.S. Army, Price and Comiskey helped make the Army more inclusive and opened doors for the next generation of leaders in the officer corps.

Lieutenant Kubosh: Achieving What Once Was Impossible

A beneficiary of Price and Comiskey’s efforts to open doors to women, Katelyn Kubosh was born and raised in Spring, Texas, a suburb north of Houston. She attended her first year of undergraduate studies at The University of Texas in Austin as a business major. Unlike General Price, however, being immersed in a new city surrounded by complete strangers made her terribly homesick. Almost all of her family members attended the University of Houston, including her grandfather, her parents, her older brother, and younger sister. “My parents ended up getting married on campus. That’s so cheesy and so funny,” she reflected. Given these strong ties to Houston, living in Austin miles away from her entire family did not feel right. “I didn’t want to be a Longhorn anymore. I missed my family, and I missed Houston,” she lamented.¹²

After months of deliberation, Kubosh came to a critical decision and, by January 2018, found herself cheerfully roaming the halls of UH. During the next three years she spent as an undergraduate, Cougar pride became an indistinguishable part of her identity.

Kubosh enrolled as a hotel and restaurant management major in the Conrad N. Hilton College. Before joining the Army, she thought about going into the restaurant business or joining the family law firm.¹³ Kubosh’s little sister was enrolled at UH at the time as a hotel and restaurant major,

and following the same academic path made sense. Kubosh’s studies brought to life numbers, management, and accounting. Needless to say, she loved every part of it.

While at UH, Kubosh decided to join the ROTC program. “My decision to join ROTC was very much spiritual. When I was at The University of Texas, I joined ROTC, but I was at a different place in my life, so it didn’t work out.” Learning military tactics during times of war was something that threw Kubosh out of her comfort zone. She recalls telling people before she joined the UH program that she would never join the Army because it was just not the right fit for her. At UH, however, her experience flipped 180 degrees. “I had a calling. I saw myself as a little warrior,” she smiled. “My spiritual decision was made as a Christian. I joined with the desire to serve God and to bring Him glory. That is the central part of who I am.”¹⁴

Similar to General Price, Kubosh was guaranteed two years of fully funded tuition while she attended UH. She was willing to put herself up on the chopping block for ROTC, which she explained “is what you make it out to be. How involved you get is how much the program can give back to you as a person.”¹⁵ Plus, the tactical and leadership knowledge she acquired during her time in ROTC proved useful for her future aspirations. Kubosh eventually earned the title of Cadet Battalion Commander, an esteemed position within the ROTC program.

Kubosh finished at UH in May 2021, graduating in the top ten percent of all Army ROTC cadets across the United States. Additionally, she was the only student among her Hilton College cohort to graduate with a 4.0 GPA. Kubosh soon applied to infantry school and was accepted, leaving behind



2LT Kubosh was not just training to be a leader in the ROTC; she was also training to enter the infantry force as a woman.

Photo courtesy of 2LT Katelyn Kubosh.



Due to Gen. Price and LTC Comiskey's efforts in the U.S. Army, 2LT Kubosh was able to succeed and do what was impossible in the Army a few years ago.

Photo courtesy of 2LT Katelyn Kubosh.

a groundbreaking legacy by becoming the first female cadet from UH to join the infantry at the rank of second lieutenant.¹⁶

General Price's long and arduous efforts to lift gender-based restrictions in the military were the legal actions that allowed Kubosh to apply to infantry school in the first place. The second that Price heard about Kubosh's acceptance into infantry school, he was moved to tears. As a UH alumnus, Price confirmed that his struggles were not in vain. He immediately contacted Kubosh to congratulate her for the historic feat on which she would soon embark. "This was without question the most rewarding achievement during my thirty-one years of Armed Service to our nation. Katelyn Kubosh was the cherry on the sundae," Price affirmed.¹⁷

Although the infantry school training proved much more difficult than Kubosh expected, her efforts were worth the struggle. "The infantry is a very gruff, tough, and strict place. I struggled the most adjusting to the environment," she said. Infantry school taught Kubosh how to carry her own and how to get the job done, especially in an environment in which people do not give affirmation and praise easily. What made training especially difficult was being one in an extremely small minority of women within the school. In a class of 160 people, only six were women. "In my platoon of forty people," she continued, "there was only me and one other woman. Having so few women had its natural consequences and struggles. The guys would only talk with the guys. I felt isolated."¹⁸

Despite her struggles, Kubosh persevered. The last thing she wanted to do was pretend to act like a man, but she realized that women could do traditionally masculine jobs. "Women have strengths that men do not have and vice versa. That's something to be celebrated," she concluded. Kubosh continues to learn through trial and error how to lead as a woman and how to break the "impossible" barriers. After years of hard work and training, she has no doubt that the military was her calling. "I have to admit, I can't imagine wearing anything but the Infantry insignia."¹⁹

After infantry training, Kubosh was assigned to Fort Hood where she became a staff officer tasked with the planning of logistics such as supply maintenance and training soldiers.

Everything she learned in ROTC and infantry school prepared her for this post, especially how to lead people in combat and applying chains of command. She continued to gain new skills throughout the many practice operations she ran at Fort Hood, with every effort assuming some future deployment. "Even though I'm an officer, I'm really new to the Army. There's a lot of stuff I still don't understand, but we all teach each other every day," she said in 2022. Today, Kubosh is a Platoon Leader in a Mechanized Infantry Company.²⁰

The work that these individuals have done in the U.S. Army mark major milestones ever since the 1948 desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces by President Harry Truman. General Price, Lieutenant Colonel Comiskey, and Lieutenant Kubosh represent the impossible made possible. Being benefactors and facilitators of change, they know what it means to struggle against racial and gender inequality to achieve greater access in the U.S. military. Their hardships remain with them today and continue to animate their lives. For Price and Kubosh, the University of Houston was a stepping-stone for them to pursue greater life goals. Price and Kubosh always keep in mind how much the city of Houston has provided them and, thus, continue to give back through military service and educational speeches that advocate for racial and gender equality in all sectors of society. For Comiskey, being the second female director of the Army ROTC at UH is a respectable feat; she hopes to train and help cadets foster inclusion and maximize the potential of every service-member in the Army, regardless of identity. All three individuals hope that future UH students will maintain the tradition to create a better, more sustainable future for us all. **HH**

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