



# Celebrating 50 years of NU Trailblazers!

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## First to Commission: Diane Gionet '75



Diane Gionet graduated from Glenville High School in Scotia, NY in 1971 and enrolled in Elms College in Chicopee, MA. As one of ten children, she earned an Air Force ROTC Scholarship to pay for her education. She transferred to Norwich in 1972, shortly after the Norwich/Vermont College merger, where she resided on the Montpelier campus as a civilian student and drilled on the Northfield campus as part of A.F. ROTC.



In the fall of 1974, Diane, an education major, was among the first women to live at Norwich and join the Corps of Cadets. She was promoted to the rank of Cadet Captain and placed in command of the all-female Lima Detachment. That year she married fellow cadet, Richard Halliday in a ceremony in White Chapel.

In May 1975, Diane became the first woman to graduate as a member of Norwich's Corps of Cadets. She was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the United States Air Force, becoming the first woman to earn a commission from Norwich. Her first military duty station was at Keesler Air Force Base, Mississippi, where she attended Communications Officer School.

In the mid-80s Diane and her family moved to Portsmouth, NH. Shortly after, she and Richard divorced and Diane became a single parent, taking several part-time jobs to make ends meet. Known for her kindness and generosity, Diane still found time to donate many hours to charitable causes.



A seemingly incredible individual who attained so many firsts for Norwich women, Diane passed away suddenly from an undiagnosed heart condition at the age of 40. In a hometown newspaper article printed shortly after her death, Diane's 11-year-old daughter, Lizzie summed up her mother this way: "She had a big heart, big enough for everyone in the whole world."

*Records documenting women's history and experience at Norwich are available through the University Archives. <https://archives.norwich.edu/>*

### **Join the celebration!**

Tell your story. Nominate NU trailblazers. Contribute to the Women Kicking Glass Scholarship. [Learn more here...](#)