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Naslov: ANJA KRNJETA IS THE ONLY FEMALE PILOT IN THE ARMY OF SERBIA

Strana: 60,61,62,63



Governess of the Serbian sky

ANJA KRNJETA IS THE ONLY FEMALE PILOT IN THE ARMY OF SERBIA

Being a woman in a man's job has never been easy, and being the only one would be unthinkable for most, but not this pioneering aviator

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The division of male - female roles is so deeply rooted in Serbian society that when someone defies that then they deserve no less than deep admiration. And if that is a woman, in a military environment, which traditionally belongs exclusively to men, then she deserves respect even before you meet her. Precisely one such lady marches at the military airport in Batajnica.

Lieutenant Anja Krnjeta, military officer and the only female helicopter pilot in Serbia, is a fearless twenty-eight-year-old, with joyful eyes and a wide smile, who has for years stood shoulder-to-shoulder with her male colleagues of the 890th mixed helicopter squadron Pegasus, cruising the skies over Serbia. For this young lady, with all the successes she has already achieved, it is literally a case that "the sky's the limit".

ONE AND ONLY

Built in such a way that she has to take every jumpsuit she wears to the tailors to be narrowed, with braids in her hair and discreet makeup, when you see her you will wonder for a moment if this girl is actually that woman who is said to be a fearless pilot. That impression only lasts until you offer her your hand and feel her strong grip, the kind that denotes a solid character and self-confidence.

Being a woman in a man's job has never been easy, and being the only woman in your profession is unthinkable for most. In the military, all of that becomes even more pronounced, and in aviation exaggerated. In fact, only three per cent of the population meets the high mental and physical standards demanded for this profession, and among them only a few women are discovered. That's why the success of any member of the fairer sex in this domain is even more significant.

Many facts do not favor women who want to embark on the adventure of flying, which is why the courage they show in choosing this profession is immeasurable. To begin with, they have to deal with all the toils brought by nature. Those female pilots who opt for motherhood are awaited by a long and arduous process to restore that aforementioned psychological and physical form. And all women face such a decision sooner or later. However, some, like Anja, are ready to engage in such an uncertain adventure.

"It's not easy because I'm the only one and I didn't have any older female colleague to give me pointer for some situations, some mistakes, but I have fabulous male colleagues who give me maximum support. I think I dealt with all those conditions easily because I really wanted it and I have always sought to adapt and to be in the most equal possible relationship with men" – says Anja beginning her story as she directs us to her greatest love – her Gazelle helicopter. At first she fussed over it, and later, as she



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says, they both grew up. Today she can't imagine life without flying in it. Gazelle helicopters are used by the Serbian Air Force for a multitude of tasks, as a helicopter for liaison, transport and haulage, as an ambulance, for search and rescue, reconnaissance and anti-armoured battles.

Flying helicopters implies perfect coordination of hand and foot controls, with very sensitive instruments, so nothing is done with force in the Gazelle. That's why Anja often says that her job is very feminine.

Her desire to fly didn't appear overnight. Anja spent her entire childhood nurturing hopes that she would one day work in the skies. To some extent this is not surprising, because she grew up in the company of her father Dušan, a military pilot today retired.

Given the fact that her childhood dream was to fly in the "eagle", just like her father, when she was selected for helicopters she wasn't thrilled. However, as she says, after the first flight in the helicopter she fell in love with the aircraft and they have been inseparable ever since.

- I've always had the desire to be a pilot, to make that my profes-

sion, and I succeeded in that; I realised my dream. My parents were opposed to me enrolling in the Military Academy, I suppose out of fear, because they didn't know how I would handle that situation, particularly as I belong to the first generation of girls who enrolled at the Military Academy. However, now they are sure that everything's as it should be and I think they are satisfied – says Anja.

UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCE

Her parents' fear, however, wasn't completely unfounded. Flying is a dangerous profession and, as Anja says, there is almost no pilot who hasn't experience some "minor" failure of the aircraft. Although, she

claims, pilots are trained for various emergencies, there are some that remain etched in the memory. The catastrophic floods that hit Serbia in May 2014, and especially the town of Obrenovac, are certainly something she will always remember.

"I remember in particular a situation when, during the floods, I had to evacuate a boy who'd had an epileptic seizure. Although in those moments you're only thinking about how to complete the task successfully, such situations remain engraved in your memory."

Anja spends a lot of time at the airport, so it is there that she feels "at home". Her work colleagues take care of her "like their own". Sometimes, she says, they forget she's there,

so she frequently hears men's jokes, though she has also learned to respond in kind. When they lack a player for some sport, they always count on her.

As the only woman, Anja treats her colleagues with respect, and tries to have exceptional collegial relations with everyone. She never allows them to go easy on her, and they only have words of praise for her.

"Anja is an extraordi-

📍 *Flying the female flag*

MATERNITY LEAVE MEANS ANJA FLIES SOLO

► **Anja Krnjeta is the only female military helicopter pilot in Serbia. She enrolled in the Military Academy in 2007, when she was joined in pilot training by fellow female enrollees Ana Tadić and Sandra Radovanović.**

As Ana and Sandra are currently on maternity leave, Anja is the only woman who flies the skies over Serbia. Although there is no lack of interest in this calling among women, the extremely high mental and physical requirements needed to pass the entrance mean that only last year two girls managed to pass the exam. The entire burden of future generations of women pilots rests on the shoulders of Anja and her female colleagues.



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nary person, disciplinarian and pilot. She is extremely motivated for this calling and has good flying characteristics, which represents a good basis for further development in terms of flight," say her squadron colleagues.

You can't help but wonder whether this woman in the military jumpsuit, surrounded by men, their jokes and interests, misses "women's talk", those coffees with girlfriends where the world of men is "denied access", even if any of them wanted to attend.

- I have such a situation that I live in Novi Sad and I work here, so I don't have much time to hang out with my female friends.

But when we do see each other, we enjoy the real "women's" stories and I really like that – says Anja, explaining that she doesn't find it strange to be a "soldier in high heels". Sometimes, on special occasions, she has been known to jump from her military jumpsuit into a pair of very high heels.

NO "OFF" SWITCH FOR THIS JOB

Still, she says, her profession is such that it is impossible to turn off a switch in her head and simply forget about work once she leaves the airport. Being a pilot means being on 24-hour standby, and gazing skywards is a habit you are even not aware you have.

"You can't switch off. There's always an on mode running, the job is such that it can't be left behind after the end of official working hours," Anja tells us, while her words are also confirmed by an inside joke that exists among pilots. They say that their wives are carefree on the beach, because while other men are looking at girls in bikinis, pilots are looking at the sky and counting planes.

No matter how firmly she keeps her feet on the ground, as shown by her successes, Anja feels safer in the sky. She proved this by learning to fly first, and only then learning to drive a car. And even before that, this 1.68m tall woman learned to drive a lorry. Anja has managed to smash all the taboos related to male-female occupations, and especially those related to flying. However, the fact that she is currently the only woman testifies to her having overcome a difficult path of sacrifice, perseverance, and even spite.

AVID WEATHER WATCHERS

To her future female colleagues, she says, she will try to be exactly what she lacked – an older colleague who will gladly share her experience with them.

We started the interview with Anja a little after 2pm. In the course of two hours, as long as we spent with this girl from Novi Sad, Batajnica Airport was covered by fog.

∴ My two greatest wishes from an early age were to ride and to fly, and I managed to achieve both

Then it became clear why pilots consider the weather forecast to be the most important news broadcast.

While Anja is preparing for her flight, which might be cancelled due to the adverse weather conditions, one detail in particular catches the eye – her purple gloves. In addition to highlighting her feminine side in a military environment, they also show how much this girl knows how to live her dreams.

"These are riding gloves. Before I enrolled in the Military Academy, I did horseback riding for ten years. Those were my two greatest wishes from an early age – riding and flying, and I managed to achieve both," says Anja, adding:

"Everything is possible in life and there are no limits, only it's extremely important to have desire, courage, to dive into something completely and love for the work you do." Apart from all the dreams she has already realised, Anja still has one outstanding.

"I'd like to "give a ride" to my parents and my brother, especially my dad, who is a retired military pilot." ■