

Name: Timothy Asa C. Tanbonliong (TSgt, USAF)
Unit: 480th Intelligence, Surveillance, & Reconnaissance Wing
Address: 34 Elm Street, Building 23, Joint Base Langley-Eustis, VA, 23665
Email: timothyasa.tanbonliong@us.af.mil & timothytanbonliong@yahoo.com
AFA Member ID #: 671992

My Most Admired Airpower Legend

When asked who is the Airpower Legend I admire the most, only one name comes to mind: Staff Sergeant Esther Shinn McGowin Blake, who is famously known as the very first woman to join the United States Air Force.ⁱ Mrs. Blake was a widow and a proud Air Force mother of Julius and Thomas, both of whom were Army Air Corps bomber aircraft pilots who served during the second World War. After Mrs. Blake found out that her elder son Julius was shot down during a combat mission over Belgium in March 1944, she immediately enlisted in the Women's Army Corps (WAC) to join the effort of fighting and ending the war. Shortly after enlisting, Thomas was reported to have also been shot down and missing in action during a combat mission over Italy. Mustering her all courage and never abandoning the pursuit to preserve freedom that she and her sons believed in, Sergeant Blake continued to provide her best across several duty assignments in the WAC and civil service. On July 8, 1948, she marked her place in history and in our memories as the first woman (and mother) to enlist during the very first minute of the first hour of the first day women were authorized for regular Air Force duty. Sergeant Blake continued to serve under active duty throughout the Korean War as a Chief Clerk until 1954.ⁱⁱ

My admiration for Staff Sergeant Blake's resiliency, humility, and achievements in a time of war and great personal loss have inspired me during some of the most challenging moments in my life and career. I may not be a pioneer in the sense that Sergeant Blake was, but as an active duty Airman and father of two young children with special needs, I can relate with the feelings of devastation and worry which she must have felt over her beloved sons' unknown fates. Just as she chose to steadfastly fulfill a mission greater than her own agenda, I too am determined to continue serving with my utmost capacity in the world's greatest Air Force so that my children's generation—and the ones that follow them—will continue to enjoy the freedom and opportunities that they deserve. I can only teach by example and hope that my children—whatever the future holds for them—will understand that apparent setbacks could make one stronger and using one's talents in the service of the greater good is all it takes to make a difference in our world.

ⁱ U.S. Air Force (2013). "Esther Blake: First Enlisted Woman in the Air Force." *Official United States Air Force Website*. March 4, 2013. Retrieved November 15, 2018 from <https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/109629/esther-blake-first-enlisted-woman-in-the-air-force/>.

ⁱⁱ Kane Jr., Robert (2015). "Blake Paved Way for Thousands of Air Force Women." *Air University*. March 10, 2015. Retrieved November 15, 2018 from <https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/580077/blake-paved-way-for-thousands-of-air-force-women/>.