

From the Andes to the Air Force and Beyond: The Story of Lina Rivero Cashin

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COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO, UNITED STATES, March 26, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/

-- During Women's History Month, [the Space Force Association \(SFA\)](#) recognizes the achievements of Col. Lina Cashin (U.S. Air Force, ret.) and her commitment to developing space defense, resources, and education. Few professionals shine as brightly as Lina does in space exploration and national defense, where the convergence of science, strategy, and security forms the backbone of global stability. As Women's History Month unfolds, it is imperative to spotlight the achievements of women who have broken barriers and set new benchmarks of excellence. Lina stands tall among such distinguished figures, exemplifying dedication, intellect, and leadership in her formidable journey through military service and aerospace innovation.



Lina Rivero Cashin

Cashin, a senior project engineer at The Aerospace Corporation, has been a linchpin in developing space-based capabilities strategies, policies, and requirements. Her work is integral to supporting vital national security missions, a testament to her commitment to safeguarding global peace and security. In her additional role as a policy analyst for Aerospace's Center for Space Policy and Strategy, Cashin provides well-informed, objective research pivotal for crafting forward-looking policies.

With an exceptional talent for demystifying the complex interplay between technical details and strategic implications, Cashin bridges the crucial gap between engineers, scientists, operators, and acquirers. Her expertise in system engineering and requirement analysis bolsters the U.S. Space Command's and U.S. Strategic Command's capabilities in deterrence, nuclear operations, and space missions, focusing notably on satellite communication.

Her prior service in the U.S. Air Force, spanning 24 years, is marked by achievements and pioneering efforts, particularly in space and cyber operations, policy, and strategy.

An advocate for global collaboration and safety in spaceflight operations, Cashin's initiatives have led to significant advancements, including helping establish the U.S. government's space situational data-sharing program and orchestrating a space debris forum on Capitol Hill. Her military and civilian accolades, including the Aerospace Women of the Year in 2019 and the Mount Holyoke College Alumna Achievement Award in 2018, reflect her extraordinary contributions and service to serving our country, both in the military and as a civilian.

But who is Lina Cashin? Lina's story begins in a faraway land nestled within the embrace of the Peruvian Andes. Here, in a land steeped in the whispers of history and the beauty of stark landscapes, her journey commenced, shaped by the legacy of service and a fusion of cultures. Lina's mother, Marilyn Keith, an American woman from Vermont, was one of the pioneering volunteers in President Kennedy's newly formed Peace Corps. Determined and spirited, she traveled to Peru, bringing with her a passion for helping others. In the remote, mountainous regions, she worked as a registered nurse, devoting herself to the health and wellbeing of the local communities.

Marilyn met her future husband, local technician Victor Rivero, at the hospital. Their union was more than a mere meeting of hearts; it symbolized the convergence of two cultures and shared dreams of a better future. From this union, Lina inheriting the resilience of her Peruvian ancestors and the pioneering spirit of her American lineage.



Lina as a young child in Peru



Col Lina Rivero Cashin (USAF, ret.)

Growing up in Peru, Lina's early years were infused with the culture of the indigenous Quechua people. She lived a life marked by simplicity and the richness of community. Yet, destiny had more in store for her, and her family's journey led them back to the United States, to the quiet, pastoral town of Milton, Vt.

In Vermont, the Rivero family encountered a world vastly different from the vibrant communities of Peru. They were among the few Hispanic families in an area unfamiliar with their customs and heritage. Despite these challenges, the values of education, service, and family remained their guiding stars. Lina's parents continued their vocations with unwavering dedication — her mother served the local community as a nurse and state legislator and her father contributed his technical skills at IBM.

The family's ethos was a beacon for Lina, guiding her through the formative years of her life. With two brothers and two sisters, the Rivero household was a crucible of love, laughter, and shared experiences. Their closeness gave Lina a sense of belonging and a reservoir of strength she would draw upon throughout her life.

As Lina navigated her teenage years, the importance of education — a principle deeply embedded in her by her father — became increasingly apparent. He had left his homeland for the promise of opportunities in the United States, and Lina was determined to honor that sacrifice. Faced with the daunting prospect of college applications and the financial uncertainties of higher education, Lina turned to her high school guidance counselor, who provided a lifeline in the form of a scholarship list.

This list would set Lina on a path she had never imagined, leading her to the ROTC scholarship and, subsequently, to Mount Holyoke College. Here, Lina's academic pursuits in math and physics were not just about personal achievement but about building a foundation for a future she was only beginning to envision. It was here, amidst the rigorous demands of academia and military training, that Lina's character was forged — shaped by the legacy of her family, her dual



Lina , her husband Col James Cashin (USAF) and three daughters at Lina's retirement celebration.n



heritage, and her unyielding determination.

Lina's journey through college was a microcosm of her life's more extensive journey and a testament to her resilience, ability to navigate different worlds, and commitment to service. These years were a preamble to an illustrious military career that saw Lina ascending through the ranks of the U.S. Air Force.

But Lina's story is more than a tale of military accolades; it is narrative rich with heritage, service, and leadership themes. As an active member and leader in the SFA, Lina continues to shape the future of space defense and policy. Her commitment to fostering international collaboration and innovation in space situational awareness highlights her visionary approach and dedication to a secure and cooperative space environment.

Col. Bill Woolf (U.S. Air Force, ret.), SFA president and founder, captured the essence of Lina's contributions: "Through her exceptional service and innovative mind, Lina has exemplified the true spirit of leadership and dedication in space and defense. She is a rare combination of excellence and inspiration, showcasing what is possible when passion meets perseverance."

Her military achievements include the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, the Meritorious Service Medal, the Air Force Commendation Medal, the Combat Readiness Medal, the Joint Service Achievement Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, and the National Defense Service Ribbon. Beyond this, Lina's life is a testament to resilience, cross-cultural unity, and unwavering commitment to service.

Lina's journey was not solitary. Her husband, James Cashin, shared her life and her dedication to military service as a fellow Air Force colonel. Together, they navigated the complexities of military life, balancing professional duties with personal commitments.

The birth of their three daughters introduced a new dimension to Lina's and James' lives. They instilled lessons from their diverse backgrounds and military experiences in their children, and the girls grew up in a home where service was a virtue, education a priority, and family an anchor. Drawing from her upbringing, Lina ensured that her daughters were aware of their rich heritage, encouraging them to embrace their unique identities and approach the world with open hearts and curious minds. Their daughter, Katie, has continued the family legacy and serves in the U.S. Air Force.

However, the demands of military life and parenting were immense. When Lina and James served as commanders, the challenges seemed insurmountable. During these periods, the role of their extended family became crucial, with both Lina's and James' mothers stepping in.

Their assistance was not just in the daily routines, but also in nurturing the warmth and security of a loving home. The grandmothers became integral to the Cashin family's journey, and they enabled Lina and James to fulfill their military duties, knowing their daughters were in caring

hands. This invaluable support system allowed Lina to continue her service without the constant worry that plagues many working parents, especially those in demanding roles.

Lina's story is a narrative woven with threads of dedication, heritage, and love — a life lived in service to her country, family, and community. Her journey underscores the significant impact of strong familial bonds, the importance of cultural heritage, and the indomitable spirit of service that transcends boundaries and generations.

In honoring Lina, we celebrate the countless women and men who serve tirelessly in various capacities, often away from the limelight. Lina's legacy continues to inspire and resonate, reminding us of the collective efforts required to forge paths in traditionally male-dominated fields and to create a world that values service, education, and unity.

"Fortune favors the bold, a motto I've embraced. It's about the courage to step out and take action."

[About the Space Force Association \(SFA\):](#)

The Space Force Association (SFA) is the only independent, 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that serves as a professional military association whose sole focus is supporting the United States Space Force, United States Space Command, U.S. national spacepower at large, and our global partners and allies' efforts in space exploration. Its core functions are to research, inform, and advocate to achieve superior spacepower by shaping a Space Force that provides credible deterrence in competition, dominant capability in combat, and professional services for all partners. In addition, the SFA has an essential function to provide support for the men and women of the U.S. Space Force. Membership is open to both military and civilians. For more information on the SFA, please visit ussfa.org.

Rhonda Sheya

<https://ussfa.org>

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