

## WPS Breaking Barriers Podcast Episode 6: Bolivia

### English Transcripts

[Lt. Col. Turner] 1:09- 2:34— Welcome to the Breaking Barriers Podcast. It is a pleasure to have you all with us for this new episode which, for the first time, is being released in Spanish. Today we have the privilege of having General Gina Reque Teran as our guest. General Reque Teran joined the Bolivian army at the age of 17 and was one of the first women to attend the military college of Bolivia. Throughout her exemplary career, she has had many achievements, including service as a military policeman, commander of infantry sections, companies, and regiments, chief of operations of the armed forces, chief of state of the Bolivian armed forces, and specializations such as courses in special forces, skydiving, and free diving. Beyond this, General Reque Teran is the first female general in the Bolivian army, and the first female general in all of South America to command combat troops. She has served for over 35 years, and now remains in passive service. Without a doubt, General Reque Teran is an inspiring woman who has broken many barriers. Welcome, General Reque Teran!

[Gen. Reque Teran] 2:34- 2:51— A big thank you to you and to the Ambassador for keeping me in mind for this, and I hope that this podcast serves as an inspiration for other women to break barriers.

[Lt. Col. Turner] 2:51- 3:09— Thank you so much General. For us it's an honor to have you, and without a doubt we'll make that happen. To start off, can you tell us a little bit about your experiences as a military official at a high, strategic level in Bolivia?

[Gen. Reque Teran] 3:09- 5:37— Yes, of course. Many experiences. Well, when women first enrolled in the Bolivian army, we had some restrictions when it came to assuming certain functions. However, overtime I was able to prove to my superiors my ability to command troops. With the troops having few women, I was typically in the military units alone as an official. However, I have been fulfilling the requirements of this role of conducting troops and soldiers at different levels and ranks, like you mentioned, and I completed several courses such as skydiving, which was one of the most beautiful ones. And when I did free falling—oh, to jump in the air is a beautiful sensation. I was also able to take a course in special forces with four other women and, of course, many men—these experiences allowed us to broaden the views of our superiors in order to continue moving forward. Being in that situation can be seen as something normal now, but in those years (1979-1980), many didn't believe that women should have been able to do that. Those experiences allowed me to rise in rank and to take on new functions, including the highest, which is the stature of being a major in the armed forces [5:00]. One of the most amazing experiences was having the opportunity to be part of the planning, execution of operations, and support that is so important when dealing with



visits from major figures, such as Pope Francis. I was involved in coordinating that operation with the police force and protocol personnel, and it was an enriching experience.

[Lt. Col. Turner] 5:37- 6:23 – Thank you so much, General. You truly did a great job at highlighting the fact that women have the mental and physical fortitude to fulfill the demands of their military careers. Also, you’ve had the experience of coordinating and organizing visits for dignitaries who require a certain level of military precision and where errors are not acceptable, and it’s very inspiring for all of us women. Thank you so much for your service to your nation. What do you think have been your biggest contributions to the progress and integration of women in the armed forces?

[Gen. Reque Teran] 6:23- 7:05 – They say that you have to lead by example so that others who are interested are able to follow. I think that, in part, my contribution is having served as an example that there is no disadvantage to women being able to serve our functions at the highest levels. I feel my biggest contribution has been the planning of a career track in which I have integrated without a distinction between men and women, so that other women can have better opportunities in establishing their careers.

[Lt. Col. Turner] 7:05- 7:47 – Absolutely. For us here in the United States, it is also very important to institutionalize the presence of women in the armed forces. Many times, we see a lot of rhetoric about the integration of women, but, without actually planning and coordinating effort that truly is on paper, in doctrine, and in military policy, it is difficult. So then, by your achievements, I am sure that you have broken many barriers. In your opinion, what do you feel are the greatest benefits of having women integrated at all levels of the defense and security forces?

[Gen. Reque Teran] 7:47- 7:59 – I believe that it offers a different point of view that complements the actions of men, and it ensures an atmosphere that is more diverse at all levels.

[Lt. Col. Turner] 7:59- 8:10 – Yes, of course. It’s not about a competition, it’s about complementing each other in a way that improves the efficacy of the military—right?

[Gen. Reque Teran] 8:10- 8:12— Yes, exactly.

[Lt. Col. Turner] 8:12- 8:53—Well I don’t have any doubt based on what you’ve talked about so far that you’ve had a strong influence on the integration of women in the armed forces in Bolivia. On a personal note, I thank you for that. From what I understand, presently there are no restrictions in terms of the integration of women in the armed



forces of Bolivia, in the same way that in the United States there are no restrictions for any type of function. How have you many these advances in the integration of women? It's not something that you see everywhere throughout our region, and it's something that I believe truly sets us apart, that the integration is ample. How have you achieved this in Bolivia?

[Gen. Reque Teran] 8:53- 9:47—Initially, we women have had to demonstrate that we can develop within the functions and activities that we were assigned. Parallel to this, we've had the support of our superiors to be able to develop the policy, the plans, and the projects that allow and ensure that women who join the armed forces are able to do so without restrictions. Now, there will always be issues because we don't all have the same viewpoints. However, we have it written as policy. Because of this, we have been able to have women integrate into the armed forces without restrictions.

[Lt. Col. Turner] 9:47- 11:08 – Yes, of course. Even if we have it written as policy, as women it is our responsibility to remain a part of everything and to demonstrate that we are capable. And this is where we always need to support one another, so that we can lift each other and hold ourselves to the highest standards. Gen. Reque Teran understands very well that when we are on military missions related to protection and defense, we need to have the best talent, whether that is men or women. This is independent of being a man or a woman—professionalism does not have gender. So, it's important that we do this in all parts of our society and bring on the people who are the most competent. When someone says that women don't have space here, then what they're doing is limiting ourselves. I believe that it's a really great thing that in Bolivia they have recognized that the role of women is very important, and now it's up to us to perform very well. I see that there are many positive factors, but we military women know that we have to be realistic. We have to be very realistic. What is there still left to do? What are the next steps?

[Gen. Reque Teran] 11:08- 11:34—We are always going to run into problems along the way. At this moment, the next steps would be to secure equity in opportunities by improving existing regulations or developing new specific regulations in the forces, and in turn improving different offices within the armed forces.

[Lt. Col. Turner] 11:34- 12:13— Yes, having these regulations is very important. And also, in terms of resources, even with the simplest things. For example, uniforms—having uniforms that are designed for women, that offer them an opportunity to succeed and feel protected since all military personnel (men and women) are exposing themselves to danger. Ensuring we have all these policies and resources is extremely important, and these are steps I see many of our countries are still yet to take.



[Gen. Reque Teran] 12:13- 12:19—Yes, you're absolutely right—in addition to having regulations, we need resources.

[Lt. Col. Turner] 12:19- 13:21—And what we see is that, as we change our mentality from the integration of women being something that we don't talk about, to something that we only really think about, to something that is a priority, the resources somehow become available. There are always resources available for set priorities in some way. Even if it costs resources, in the long-term, prioritizing and valuing women is an investment for your people and society in security and defense. With all of your experience, with so many years of service to your nation, what has been one of your greatest sources of pride in serving your country? Do you have any personal stories that you'd like to share with us?

[Gen. Reque Teran] 13:21- 14:29—In reality, every moment in my career has been the greatest, because, little by little, I've achieved the goals that I'd given myself. However, I can also tell you that the one that makes me most proud is commanding an infantry unit for two years. That has been one of my proudest moments. In the experiences I had within those years of commanding that unit, my soldiers were there to fulfill their mandatory military service. Then they got their certification to return to civil duty, and in one of the final certifications during my time commanding I had the surprise of having my soldiers who were about to leave give me a plaque recognizing my service. It was so emotional that even today I become emotional thinking about it.

[Lt. Col. Turner] 14:29- 15:02—Yes, because your troops recognized the value of your leadership that truly must have had an impact on them. Considering your experience commanding troops, knowing that these soldiers valued you so much not only as a woman but as a military leader, Bolivian, woman, and soldier, how would you define your leadership style?

[Gen. Reque Teran] 15:02- 15:25—There are so many leadership styles that I don't know if I can define one so specifically. I believe that leadership needs to match the mission and situation that you're in. So, I believe that my leadership is more eclectic in an attempt to match the group of people that I'm working with, the situation that we are in, and the mission that we need to accomplish.

[Lt. Col. Turner] 15:25- 15:52 – Yes, of course. Absolutely. So then, for example, with what you mentioned about that operation when you were coordinating the security for Pope Francis—in that moment, how would you define your leadership style? I imagine that it's different from when you're with the troops. Tell us more about this more eclectic style—what are some of the limits and characteristics of this leadership style?

[Gen. Reque Teran] 15:52- 16:45—Well, you have to know how to define the leadership style that you're going to use in different situations. There will be different styles



required in different moments—not just one. In the moment when we were planning the visit from the Pope, it was a moment of participative leadership. Because not only was it our military troops, but it was also the police force and the Pope’s security team, along with aspects of protocol that had to be followed from different groups, including the Church. This meant that my leadership needed to be much more participative and integrated with different people, in order to create and execute this mission in the best way possible.

[Lt. Col. Turner] 16:45- 17:35—Truthfully, in this talk I’ve learned so much about this idea of an eclectic leadership style since it’s something that I haven’t explored very much. Based on what I’m hearing, that style is based on empathy and decision-making. Thank you for sharing that. I’ll have to reflect and think about it a bit more. Maybe I’ll give you a call to explore even a little more on it to have a deeper understanding of what it means. It’s truly so interesting and has made me think. You are a pioneer in all senses in the trajectory of your career, which has been incomparable for not only many of us women but also for men. What advice would you offer to new generations, particularly women who would like to join the armed forces or security forces?

[Gen. Reque Teran] 17:35- 18:02—First, I would tell them to do it and that there is no impediment. With decisiveness, confidence, and strength, they will meet their goals. Obviously, I would also tell them that nothing in life comes easy, and neither does being in the armed forces. But when someone has the confidence in themselves along with the strength and the conviction to achieve it, then that’s it. They should do it.

[Lt. Col. Turner] 18:02- 19:05—So then, to young Bolivian women, the advice is, “Yes, join the armed forces and serve your country with honor and dignity.” And I think that this is advice that all women in uniform offer to young women, because we know that our service is greater than us. It’s sharing with your family, with your neighbors, with our society, with our communities, and with our country. It’s a beautiful type of labor, and one that is so needed in all of our nations. Okay, we are nearing the end of our time together for this episode, and we have one final question that we ask all of our guests: In thinking of a gender perspective in the defense and security forces, how do you think each individual—both men and women—can participate in “making the invisible, visible”?

[Gen. Reque Teran] 19:05- 19:44—This makes me think a lot because the answer lies in the question itself of how to “make the invisible, visible.” Some will do it by demonstrating their capability, value, and excellence in what they do. Others will break barriers in opening up the closed structures that still exist within society. But all of us can participate by standing out in our roles and highlighting the positive. Even in the negative, we can find something positive. This way we can improve the perspectives from different generations within the security and defense forces.



[Lt. Col. Turner] 19:44- 20:06—For all of our listeners, what a privilege to have General Reque Teran with us today as a pioneer in defense and security. General Reque Teran thank you so much for sharing your experiences with us, for representing Bolivia, and for representing all of us military women. For me, it has been a great honor to speak with you.

[Gen. Reque Teran] 20:06- 20:21—Thank you so much. The honor has been mine to be able to share part of my experience in the roles that I've played throughout my professional career. Thank you so much for this interview.

