

A Military Pioneer

An Interview with General Ann Dunwoody, Retired, U.S. Army

EDITORS' NOTE *Ann Elizabeth Dunwoody is a retired Four-Star General in the United States Army. She is the first woman in U.S. military and uniformed service history to achieve a four-star officer rank, receiving her fourth star on November 14, 2008. In 2005, Dunwoody became the Army's top-ranking female when she received the promotion to Lieutenant General (three stars) and became the Army's Deputy Chief of Staff, G-4 (logistics). She was nominated as Commanding General, U.S. Army Materiel Command, by President George W. Bush in June 2008, and confirmed by the Senate one month later. She served in that capacity until August 2012 and retired from the Army in October 2012. Dunwoody graduated from State University of New York College at Cortland with a degree in physical education and was direct commissioned into the Women's Army Corps.*



Ann Dunwoody

ORGANIZATION BRIEF *The United States Army (army.mil) is the main branch of the United States Armed Forces responsible for land-based military operations. It is the largest and oldest established branch of the U.S. military.*

Did you know early on that your career would be in the military?

There were four generations of West Pointers in my family, but joining the army really wasn't on my radar screen.

During my junior year in college, the army designed a program to recruit more women officers. If you were accepted into the program, they paid you \$500 per month during your senior year in college and, upon graduation, commissioned you as a 2LT with a two-year commitment. So I signed up for two years and I was hooked.

What barriers did women have to overcome and how have things changed?

When I started in the army, we still had the WAC (Women's Army Corps); a separate army composed of women who trained separately. Shortly after I joined, they disestablished the WAC and started the integration of women into the regular army, which was exciting because it meant that, in the career fields open to women, we could have the same career path opportunities as our male counterparts.

The journey was exciting not just for me but for all women that came in during that time. Our mantra was to help with integration – no longer would we have all women outfits, but we'd have the opportunity to lead integrated platoons and organizations. The goal was to never let the system keep us from being an integrated entity.

I watched doors open, though there were still many I had to kick down. Getting into airborne school back then was really exciting. Looking back, I

see how far we have come – my niece is an A-10 pilot in the air force, just like her dad; and here I thought jumping out of airplanes was cool.

How concerned are you that the army is being stretched thin, and does it still have the capacity it needs?

It's very concerning. Over the past decade and with an army at war, it is difficult to appreciate the demands on soldiers. When you're at war, it's seven days a week and 24 hours a day, because something is always going on. You're always thinking about how you can make things better for those who are deployed in harm's way. When you're on leave, you still have your communications with you so you can keep abreast of the ongoing issues – that is your focus.

The military has a support role and a deployment role. When you have units deployed, it takes a toll on soldiers and their families, and on leaders. People don't realize that many young soldiers with young children have deployed five or six times over the past decade. This is very stressful for soldiers and their families.

The military is very conscious of how much stress and strain is put on the families of soldiers, and they have built programs to combat this.

Because of medical advances, people that would never have survived previous wars now survive. We have learned a lot about forward medical support on the battlefield, modernizing prosthetics, and treating invisible injuries like PTSD.

Will the army present a different model for deployment in the future?

Many people still think of war on the linear battlefield with a clear frontline where the bullets were flying and a rear echelon that was a safe haven. Now with an asymmetrical

battlefield, there is no safe place – everyone is in harm's way. So the military has tried to develop and maintain the leading edge on technology and has had to adopt the philosophy that every soldier is a rifleman first.

If I have a fear, it relates to budget cuts and reductions. There is money being taken out of R&D and dramatic cuts in force structure. Is peace busting out all over? No, but our budget acts as if it is.

The most important element is developing the right strategy for the size of the military and not letting budget considerations drive strategy.

Have the services and support met the demand for those who have been deployed and are returning to normal life?

A lot of people across the country are doing a lot of great things for returning service men and women. The demand is so great right now but there are a lot of efforts that might not be knitted together. Vets are still the highest unemployed population – women vets also present a big challenge. We have to keep an eye on that because we have to make sure the quality of life we provide our returning men and women is equal to the quality of their service and sacrifice.

What do you tell young people today who consider joining the military?

For me, serving in the military was the most professionally rewarding career I could imagine. I tell women that the doors continue to open. No matter how long they are in for, they will be better citizens when they leave the military because of the responsibilities they are given and the ethos to which they are exposed.

I'm currently supporting the Franklin Project with Stanley McChrystal of the Aspen Institute. The purpose of the project is to make national service a national program so that every person in America has a chance to contribute to the country, not just through the military but also through service like the Peace Corps or helping the homeless. It's about doing something for your great country.

Do business leaders understand the value in hiring former members of the military?

Yes, I think many do. If I can leave you with one thing, it's that we need to make sure that everyone in America knows that these great soldiers coming back will bring qualities and traits to your organization that will not just make them stand-out individuals but also make your organization better. ●