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Commanding a Role for Women in the Military

By **RACHEL L. SWARNS**

WASHINGTON — For more than a decade, Lt. Gen. Ann E. Dunwoody has delighted in leaping through the doors of military planes and plunging into the night with a parachute on her back.

A master parachutist and a former battalion commander, General Dunwoody handled logistics for the 82nd Airborne Division in Saudi Arabia during the first gulf war. As a three-star general, she has flown to Afghanistan and Iraq to ensure the steady flow of ammunition, tanks and fuel to the troops.

But one of the biggest joys of her 33-year military career has been jumping out of airplanes and into roles previously unimaginable to generations of women in the Army. Last week, President Bush asked General Dunwoody to take over a new Army command as a four-star general. If confirmed by the Senate, she will become the first woman in the armed services to achieve that rank.

In her new role, General Dunwoody, 55, would lead the Materiel Command of the Army, which supplies soldiers with military hardware, repairs armored vehicles and sustains combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Her quiet, determined climb into the Army's upper echelon highlights both the widening role that women are playing in the armed forces and the difficulties they encounter in reaching the

top.

“I grew up in a family that didn’t know what glass ceilings were,” General Dunwoody said in a statement. She declined to comment for this article, saying through an Army spokeswoman that she preferred to wait until after her Senate confirmation hearing. Senate Democrats said a hearing date had not been scheduled.

General Dunwoody’s brother, father, grandfather and great-grandfather all graduated from [West Point](#). Her father, Harold H. Dunwoody, and great-grandfather, Henry Harrison Chase Dunwoody, served as one-star generals, her relatives say. Her older sister, Susan Schoeck, was the third woman in the Army to be a helicopter pilot. And her niece, Jennifer Schoeck, is a fighter pilot who has flown missions in Afghanistan.

Today, women make up about 14 percent of the 1.4 million people on active duty in the military. More than 100 women have died in the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

But the number of women at the very top, while growing, remains small. In the Army, where women make up 14 percent of active duty personnel, they account for about 5 percent of the generals, according to Lt. Col. Anne Edgecomb, an Army spokeswoman. There are 15 one-star generals, three two-star generals and two three-star generals, including General Dunwoody.

Friends say that General Dunwoody, who specializes in logistics and is married to Craig Brotchie, a retired [Air Force](#) colonel, has chafed over the years at those who questioned her abilities or marveled at her accomplishments.

“Her issue is, when are people going to stop being surprised?” said Jeanette Edmunds, 55, a retired major general who has known General Dunwoody since the two attended officer

training in the 1970s.

“You’re not out there thinking, ‘Am I good enough?’ ” General Edmunds said. “You don’t think, ‘I’m going to be the first this or that.’ You think, ‘This is cool. People think I’ve done good work.’ ”

Gen. Dan K. McNeill, the former American commander of [NATO](#) forces in Afghanistan who retired this month, agreed. He described General Dunwoody as “remarkable” and praised her leadership skills and creative thinking, pointing to innovative strategies she developed to support soldiers in the rugged terrain in Afghanistan.

“She has been in and out of both theaters, and she knows what we’re up against,” said General McNeill, describing her work in Iraq and Afghanistan. “It’s really unfortunate that most of the focus will be on her gender.”

But for many military women, General Dunwoody’s nomination is something to be celebrated, precisely because she has pierced what many describe as the “brass ceiling.”

Lt. Gen. Claudia Kennedy, who in 1997 became the first woman in the Army to reach the rank of three-star general and is now retired, said she felt giddy when she heard the news.

“I was twirling and throwing my hat in the air,” she said. “It shows people that the leaders in the Army think it’s important to pick the best qualified, not just the men.”

General Dunwoody, who lived in Germany and Belgium when she was growing up, joined the Army after graduating from the [State University of New York](#) at Cortland with a degree in physical education in 1975.

In recent years, she has preferred to speak publicly about the opportunities for women in the Army as opposed to the difficulties they face.

“This nomination,” she said in her statement, “only reaffirms what I have known to be true about the military throughout my career: that the doors continue to open for men and women in uniform.”

But earlier in her career, General Dunwoody talked frankly about her struggles to make her mark in the male-dominated military. “It was like coming into the Dark Ages,” she said in a 1992 interview with The New York Times. She was describing her initial experiences as an officer with the 82nd Airborne Division in Fort Bragg, N.C., in the late 1980s.

“Some senior officers perceived that their bosses would think less favorably of them if they allowed me to be assigned to the division in a critical position,” she said.

When she was a major at Fort Bragg, her superiors assigned her to account for the division’s equipment, including trucks, weapons and parachutes, a job normally given to low-ranking captains.

She said her assignments improved when her supervisors became familiar with her work. Her colleagues recall that General Dunwoody, who competed in gymnastics and tennis in college, also impressed her peers with her fierce athleticism. (Even today, she runs regularly, sails and plays tennis.)

“She impressed a lot of people in that environment, a high-density male environment, a high-testosterone environment,” said Lt. Gen. David W. Barno, a former military commander in Afghanistan who worked with her at Fort Bragg and is now retired.

Her résumé soon listed a string of notable firsts. In 1992, she became the first woman to be battalion commander for the 82nd Airborne Division. In 2000, she became the first woman to be a general at Fort Bragg.

In 2004, she became the first woman to be commander at the Combined Arms Support Command of the Army at Fort Lee, Va.

Her brother, Harold H. Dunwoody Jr., said she loved handling logistics for soldiers in the field, perhaps because she grew up watching from afar as her father served in Vietnam. “I think supporting the troops is what she really enjoys doing most,” he said.

That job got more difficult after the United States invaded Afghanistan and Iraq. Defense logistics officers struggled to overcome shortages of armor, lithium batteries and tires in the early days of those conflicts, the [Government Accountability Office](#) reported.

Last year, General Dunwoody, who became the Army’s senior logistician in 2005, acknowledged in an interview with Inside the Army that the service was struggling to maintain and repair blast-proof trucks because they had so many different models. She became the deputy commanding general of the Materiel Command this month.

“Over time they’ve made improvements,” William M. Solis, who analyzes military issues for the Government Accountability Office, said of the Army’s logistics efforts. “But it’s a huge endeavor.”

If she harbors any doubts about assuming her new rank or her new duties, General Dunwoody does not let them show, her friends say. In her new role, they expect that she will do what she has always done — take a deep breath and take the plunge.

“You can live a humdrum, everyday life or live it for all it’s worth,” General Edmunds said. “She lives it to the fullest.”

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