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MAJOR GENERAL GWENDOLYN BINGHAM

A Military Woman's Life in the Environment of a Military Family

I believe that it is a good thing that we welcome each other and that we come together to share insights regarding the roles of women in the armed forces in our three nations and society at large; without doubt, we can learn from each other. One of my favorite photos is one of my Dad when he got back into uniform to promote me to second lieutenant. I am the daughter of First Sergeant McMillian. I was born into a military family of five children; four of those five children either served in the military or they were a military spouse, one in the Air Force, and one in the Army.

After college graduation and commissioning at the University of Alabama, I came on active duty with the express intent of serving only four years and not a day longer. I failed miserably in that initial quest, but to my betterment as a human being. I fell in love, not only

with my husband of 30-plus years, but with this vocation called the US Army.

After more than 32 years in the military, I am proud to say that I love the Army and the opportunity to serve something bigger than myself as an individual. I am continually grateful and excited for the opportunity to serve. I give thanks to God, to my family, and to so many, many people who taught, trained, coached, and encouraged me to succeed along this way, for surely you cannot do it alone. My teaching and mentoring came from fellow soldiers and senior leaders as well as role models from the communities that I served. The three greatest loves of my life are my son, my daughter, and my husband. My husband and I have been married for over 30 years; it has been a wonderful love affair.

What has the Army done for me? Let me just tell you briefly. The Army has provided me the opportunity to be a contributing member of a team. It has taught me to be a confident and competent soldier and leader. I received a master's degree from Central Michigan University and a second master's degree from the National Defense University in Washington D.C. The Army has taken me to places all around the globe; 26 countries and counting. The Army has broadened my perspectives about people and cultures. My visit to Mexico City has been far too short. Already, in just a day and a half, I have had the opportunity to observe your rich culture, and I am very impressed.

If you were to ask me what challenges I have faced, I would say in general I have overcome three that readily come to mind. First, an inferiority complex, a lack of experience, and the fact that I'm a bit height-challenged. But due to the inferiority complex or the lack of experience, once regretfully I failed a college course. It took a negative experience to embark upon a positive one, to learn my craft and to learn it well. My father used to tell me to do the best job that I could do, no matter the job.

My second challenge was being new to an organization. I hate being the new person. People would ask, what does she bring to the table? I want to always be relevant and add value. I always want to leave my organization, and any organization I am a member of, better than how I found it. My father told me that I am responsible for my own success and the success of those around me. Where there is a problem to solve, I must join in with others to help solve it. I think our reputation speaks volumes to our credibility and to our acceptance. We build upon our reputation in our words, our deeds, and our actions.

My third challenge was feeling a sense of exclusion instead of inclusion. Women can sometimes be a minority in an organization. In a male-dominated field, I found that I was more readily accepted as a member of the organization when I found common ground and contributed as a strong member of the team. I always worked hard to be a good team player. I be-

lieve we should always surround ourselves with people who encourage us, versus discourage us. I cling to my faith and my family always; they are very important to me.

I have come to appreciate in my 30 years of service what I call my Bingham Top Ten. Today, women comprise about 36 percent of the Army's active components, but it has not always been that many. I am proud that women are represented in talent and occupation from every letter of the alphabet from A to Z. Women currently serve in over 95 percent of all US Army occupations. And on January 24, 2014, our Army announced that 33 000 positions that were previously closed to women would integrate in April of this year.

Today our Army includes 25 women generals; four who have three stars, seven wear two stars, and two of those seven serve as commanders. Finally the Army has 14 women who are wearing one star. Like the Armed Forces of Mexico and Canada, we also have a Navy, Marines, and an Air Force. Women also serve in other branches of our armed forces, and there are other women generals and women admirals. In 2008, the Army promoted its first woman to the rank of four-star general, and I personally had the privilege to come to know her; she was selfless, committed, and, above all, extremely talented.

I looked up a few statistics. At the end of 2013, our armed forces included over 214 000 women serving in

active roles. That makes up about 14 percent of our whole military. In addition, 118 000 women serve in our reserve forces. We also have National Guard forces, who report to the governors of our states. In time of war, President Obama ordered them to serve in more active roles. There are 470 000 women serving in the National Guard. They are mothers, sisters, and daughters, who must balance their lives daily in cities across our country, with the responsibility of knowing that they may be deployed to places all around the globe with little notice.

Without a doubt, women have come a long way in improving gender inequality in the military, where we serve next to men in austere locations and combat zones. Today, tens of thousands of women are employed all over the globe, many of them in harm's way. For example, in Afghanistan alone, women comprise 20 percent of the total force, some active forces, some reservists, and some from the National Guard.

In this book, there is a testimony by Commander Amy Alcorn. She has served three tours on a navy ship and has been deployed to the Persian Gulf. There is another testimony by US Lieutenant Colonel Russ who serves in the Air Force, but is currently on reserve status at the United States Northern Command. It has been my privilege to serve and to participate in this seminar.

