

Lieutenant General Lori Reynolds

The Corps' Senior Female Marine Continues To Blaze New Trails

By Col Mary H. Reinwald, USMC (Ret)

As the Corps celebrates the centennial of the first woman joining its ranks, the stark differences between the opportunities for Opha May Johnson, who enlisted in 1918, and female Marines today are clearly evident. Lieutenant General Loretta E. “Lori” Reynolds is perhaps the best example of the distance female Marines have traveled in the last 100 years. The Corps’ senior communicator, Reynolds’ service has been marked with opportunities and accomplishments that Opha May could only dream of.

Reynolds’ recent promotion to the grade of lieutenant general for assignment as the Deputy Commandant for Information

can be attributed in part to the female Marines who have opened doors for their sisters in arms over the last several decades, but it is her record of service and significant accomplishments in a variety of challenging billets that have resulted in Lori Reynolds pinning on a third star.

The youngest of five daughters and a graduate of an all-girls Catholic high school, Midshipman 4/C Reynolds entered the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md., in the fall of 1982. The male-dominated environment was especially different for Reynolds and she was one of only two women from her class to join the Marine Corps; in contrast, the recently graduated class of 2018 had 33

women receive their commissions as Marine second lieutenants.

LtGen Reynolds cites two influences on her decision to choose the Marine Corps more than 30 years ago when so few other women made a similar decision. “My granddad was a Vietnam Marine,” she said. “He was an EOD tech. He had stories about meeting John Wayne at the runway in Da Nang.” Her family would visit her grandfather in North Carolina where he lived after he retired from Camp Lejeune. “That’s how I came to understand what the Marine Corps was all about—through him.”

Her interest in the Marine Corps was only heightened while she was a mid-



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Capt Amanda Anderson, the communication strategy and operations officer for Marine Forces Cyberspace Command, and SgtMaj Daniel Krause, Sergeant Major, Marine Forces Cyberspace Command, pin grade insignia on LtGen Lori Reynolds. She was promoted to the grade of lieutenant general during a change of command ceremony at Fort Meade, Md., on July 2, and assumed the duties of Deputy Commandant for Information on July 3.



BGen Lori E. Reynolds, CG, MCRD Parris Island, and Eastern Recruiting Region, addresses the families of the newest graduating Marines during a morning colors ceremony aboard Parris Island, Dec. 16, 2011.

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shipman. “I think what really influenced me at the academy was the Marine officers that I met,” Reynolds said, “They just were different. I think every body else is drawn to a culture. People represent that culture.”

Choosing the Comm MOS

Reynolds’ future as the senior Marine communicator began with her choice of military occupational specialty (MOS) at The Basic School when she opted for communications. “I picked it because nobody else wanted it. I was drawn to comm because at that point you know your vision is only this far—I wanted to be a platoon commander. I wanted to be able to go do something, take my Marines to the field.” The future general wasn’t thinking long term. “Nobody ever taught me to think about command or anything like that. That’s why to me it’s just a total ‘God thing’ that I’m still serving.” Reynolds added, “I thought nobody else wanted it. So I thought, ‘Well, I’ll get my first choice.’ ” Looking back, she said, “I got so lucky. I mean if I was sitting in an aviation maintenance job or some job that didn’t lead to command ... I just got so lucky.”

Like many Marines, she had no firm



COURTESY OF MAJGEN LORI REYNOLDS, USMC

Above: In 1995, Capt Reynolds was a staff platoon commander at Officer Candidates School.

Below: LtCol Reynolds is with her personal security detail in Iraq in 2004 during her assignment as the commanding officer of 9th Comm Bn.



COURTESY OF MAJGEN LORI REYNOLDS, USMC

goal for her career in the Marine Corps. “You know you join the Corps and think are you good enough to stay in? I didn’t come in thinking that I was going to be a ‘five and out’ [Naval Academy graduates incur a five-year active-duty obligation at the time of commissioning]. My vision was, if I like it, I’m going to stay. That’s still my vision. And it’s been 32 years.”

Commanding Marines in Both Iraq and Afghanistan

It’s been a highly successful, and in many ways, groundbreaking 32 years. LtGen Reynolds was the first female Marine to command Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, S.C., a distinction that resonates with most Marines, but she sees her accomplishment as the first female Marine to “own battlespace” as the most significant. Reynolds served as the commanding officer of I Marine Expeditionary Force Headquarters Group (I MHG) from 2010-2012 and took the MHG to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. She is quick to point out that the Corps wasn’t looking for a woman to fill the billet. “It’s not that the Marine Corps was deliberate about it. It just happened. And finally we had gotten to the point where it just happened.”

Her outstanding record, including commanding 9th Communications Battalion during Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq from February 2004 to March 2005, was the reason it “just happened.”

“And to me that’s a first for the Marine Corps, not for me. It wasn’t a result of anything else but the Marine Corps evolving,” said LtGen Reynolds.

Reynolds has had the privilege of commanding Marines at every grade; her MOS credibility is second to none. She served in both the ground combat element and the aviation combat element as a company grade officer; as a platoon commander in 1st Marine Division’s Communications Company and as a detachment commander in Marine Wing Communications Squadron 18. Reynolds later commanded a company in 9th Communications Battalion and served as a project officer at the Marine Corps Systems Command, working primarily on communications security systems. Her favorite tour saw her return to 9th Communications Bn in 2003, but this time as the commanding officer. The battalion spent more than a year in Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom during her tenure. “Ninth Comm Bn was kind of a dream. Being able to take that battalion to combat. We did a lot of things well as a team. I felt like when I turned that battalion over to 8th Comm Bn in Fallujah, there was nothing more I could have done for them.”



LtCol Christopher L. Naler, CO, Brigade Headquarters Group transfers command authority to Col Lori E. Reynolds, CO, I MEF Headquarters Group at Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan, March 23, 2010.

Lessons Learned on Recruiting Duty

But it was her time on recruiting duty as the commanding officer of Recruiting Station Harrisburg, Pa., that taught her the most. “I learned more about myself on recruiting but it was grueling. I thought I was going to get fired,” Reynolds said, and she wasn’t kidding. “There were a lot of dark days on recruiting. Recruiting is one of those things where you learn more about leadership. I had 44 canvassing recruiters and every single one of them required something different from me and trying to figure out what that was and then having the emotional energy to give it to

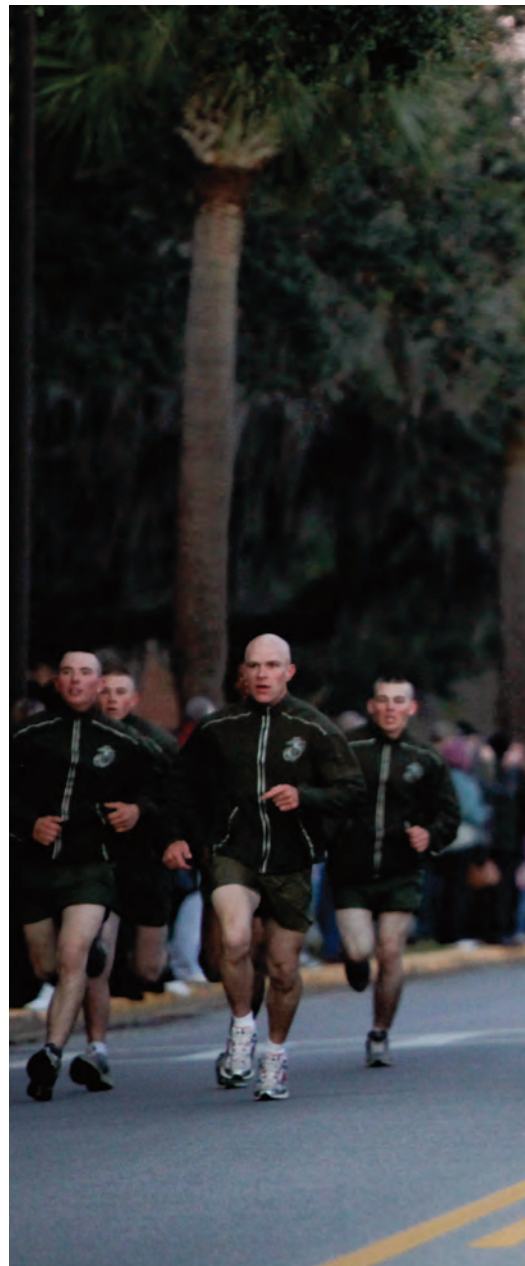
them. But there hasn’t been a day since then that I haven’t used something that I learned on recruiting duty.”

Reynolds remembered the words of a senior Marine she served with on recruiting duty. “We had a sergeant major in 4th District who said recruiting duty unmask the imposters. And he’s exactly right. If you have a weakness, you will find it on recruiting duty. And it will challenge you ethically. It will challenge your stamina, it will challenge your faith. I believe that every person has that significant emotional event in their career where the lightbulb goes off and they go, ‘Now I get it.’ And that happened

Below: BGen Lori Reynolds, CG, MCRD Parris Island, left, and SgtMaj Gary Buck, Sergeant Major, MCRD Parris Island, right, stand at the position of attention as “The Marines’ Hymn” is played during a morning colors ceremony aboard Parris Island.



LCPL ANESHEA YEE, USMC



MARINE CORPS SYSTEMS COMMAND

MajGen Lori E. Reynolds discusses how the sea services are devoting increased resources to cyber warfare at the 2018 Sea Air Space exposition in April at National Harbor, Md.

for me on recruiting duty. I wish it had happened earlier. I would have been a much better platoon commander if I had known where these kids came from and what they would do. We would have had different conversations with them about their career aspirations.”

MarForCyber

Her current assignment as Commander, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Cyberspace Command puts Reynolds on the cutting edge of the latest warfighting domain, and the challenges and responsibility are unceasing. “It’s funny we’re talking about recruiting. One of the things that I always regret about my time on recruiting duty is that I never felt like I could unburden my Marines from the mission. And I feel the same way at MarForCyber. You wish you could give them a day off every once in a while, but you can’t because there’s so

BGen Lori Reynolds leads the motivational run with recruits at MCRD Parris Island, Jan. 19, 2012.



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much work to do. So much work to do to modernize, from the network perspective to the delivery of cyber effects—it's such a new domain, we're just still trying to figure out how to be efficient and how to get authorities when we need them. It's just a lot of work to be done. But it's moving so fast; it's fascinating because things are happening so quickly now."

Her concern for her Marines and MarForCyber's ability to accomplish this mission in the future is clearly evident. "What keeps me awake at night is how we're going to take care of these Marines so that we retain them and give them what they're worth—just amazing talent." Looking to the future, she continued, "I would like to get to the point where we're actually going to create a different tribe. We have the MOS now which is a huge win. It's a good step in the right direction. You have cyber, comm, intel, maybe 7200

[air command and control]. You bring in the command and control experts, bring those all together in a way that people are spending careers thinking about the kinds of things that we're trying to do now. And all of them are warfighters as well. I don't think we're there yet but we'll get there and it won't take us that long."

Serving as the MarForCyber commander has helped prepare the general for her next assignment as the Deputy Commandant for Information and Commander, Marine Corps Forces Strategic Command. The promotion to serve as one of the Corps' most senior Marines comes with a third star, an achievement only two female Marines have accomplished before her. Looking back over her more than three decades in the Corps, the general believes that the recent lifting of restrictions on female Marines is probably the biggest change she has seen, but she is pragmatic

by nature and knows that challenges remain. "Obviously it's progress," said Reynolds, "but what I worry about moving forward is that we continue to have this discussion, "are they good enough to meet the male standard?" and we're missing the value of what women bring." She believes that the Corps of the 21st century should also focus on the unique attributes female Marines possess. "Why don't we start thinking about where women bring the value to the Marine Corps? We just don't talk about it. It's as if there isn't anything. And that's what I think we're missing." Her experience on both recruiting duty and at the recruit depot was evident as she discussed what the Corps can do to prepare young female Marines for success. "What we're trying to do when they come to us is get them ready to make a career with us. We're trying to give them the skills. We're not trying to make them



COURTESY OF MAJGEN LORI REYNOLDS, USMC

As the CO of 9th Comm Bn, LtCol Lori Reynolds deployed with the battalion to Camp Fallujah, Iraq in 2004.

men; we're trying to meet a standard so that they can use their best skills that they bring to the fight. So this is what we can teach them.

"A friend of mine teaches at NDU [National Defense University]. They were having a discussion and [part of the discussion on women in the military included], there's the 'can they now run an 18-minute boundary and do 20 pull-ups?' But one lieutenant colonel says, 'When I was deployed to Afghanistan, I had a woman on my team and she was able to do things that my men couldn't do. So I'll carry her extra 10 pounds if she can do that for me.' And he's a big meateater kind of guy. Isn't that what we want? Don't we want everything that might be needed by the commander?'"

She is impressed with the young men and women joining the Corps today and notes that their confidence is something she didn't see when she was a young company grade officer. "I admire their willingness to walk up and say 'How did you do this?' We never would have walked up to a colonel, if we could even find one, or a general and say 'Will you mentor me?' Their self-confidence is light years ahead of where we were." But she is quick to point out that while the self-assurance of so many young Marines is admirable, other qualities are just as important in a leader. "I think confidence is good. But

if there's been one thing that has worked for me it is humility. I think especially as a woman you have to be willing to be vulnerable as a leader. And that's really tough but the only way you're ever going to build the team around you when you're in command is to show a little bit of vulnerability, to be willing to learn and listen, and say, 'I don't have the answer to that.'"

Memorable Days in the Corps

Reflecting on her decades of service, Reynolds especially enjoyed her time as the commanding general of Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island. When asked what her best day in the Corps was, she was quick to respond. "I've had a lot of best days. I would say every Friday at Parris Island where we graduate five, six, seven hundred new Marines who absolutely think that their life has a purpose, a virtuous purpose. You know those are all good days." Her love for Parris Island was evident as she continued: "It's a wonderful place. Everybody is focused on the same goal. And it just brings you right back to the heart of what we do. The foundation of the all-volunteer force is trust. And so what we are doing at PI is to make sure that we are earning people's trust. It's that simple." There were numerous other good days for Reynolds including every time

she successfully accomplished the mission and turned over command. "I think every day I gave up command and felt like there was nothing more I could do—that would be a good day.

Memorial Day 2004 is etched in LtGen Reynolds' memory as her worst day in the Corps. Corporal Dustin L. Sides, a truck driver in 9th Communications Bn, was killed in action. "We lost Cpl Sides out in Fallujah; that was a bad day. We had a convoy that was moving from outside to Fallujah and they got right into an ambush in Hit, Iraq. It was Memorial Day, so he's the face of Memorial Day for me. It's one thing to lose a Marine. It's another thing to lose a Marine because they are doing something you ordered them to do."

As the Corps' senior female Marine, Reynolds often has been called upon to provide a woman's perspective or give advice and counsel on the role female Marines play in the Corps. Her measured, sage and objective counsel is a breath of fresh air when discussions get heated or contentious. Never one to react quickly and without thinking, Reynolds looks at problems from all angles. She has a clear understanding, born of experience, of the challenges female Marines face from the beginning of their time in the Corps. "It's a constant balance of fitting in and standing out."

She notes that examples of female Marines excelling are often absent when the Corps' history is told. "The war stories that we grew up with, the stories about our Corps; there aren't any stories about women. Chosin Reservoir, Iwo, you hear about Lieutenant Bobo." She went on, "You know, every Marine comes in and thinks 'Will I ever be that good? Can I earn it?' You earn the title every day. But for a woman I think it's even harder because you say 'OK, I don't want to be an impostor. I don't want to run around and just wear the title that somebody else earned!'" But like every Marine, they get to the point where the light goes on. "You understand enough and you have confidence enough that you are bringing value to the team. Because it is a comparison. You're constantly comparing yourself to people, comparing yourself to history, you're comparing yourself to your peers—because you just want to be good enough."

As clearly demonstrated by her decades of exemplary service, LtGen Reynolds is far more than just "good enough." From combat to the recruit depot, whether leading communicators, cyber or infantry Marines, Lori Reynolds has excelled wherever the Marine Corps has sent her and is an outstanding choice as the next Deputy Commandant for Information. 🐼