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Commander of Alaska Air National Guard receives general's star

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — Karen Mansfield, who as assistant adjutant general for air serves as commander of the Alaska Air National Guard, was promoted from colonel to brigadier general at a ceremony at the Arctic Warrior Events Center here March 6, 2016. She became the third female member of the Alaska Air National Guard to receive a general's star.

"I'm honored," Mansfield said. "But this promotion, it's not for me; I don't view it that way. It's for the Airmen. It will give me the ability to more for the organization."

As the commander, Mansfield ensures the training and equipping of more than 2,000 Alaska citizen Airmen here, at Eielson Air Force Base and at Clear Air Force Station, both near Fairbanks.

"General Mansfield is, first of all, scary smart," said Brig. General Laurie Hummel, Alaska adjutant general. "She is a forceful advocate for the men and women under her command, and for the mission of the Alaska Air National Guard. She questions assumptions and speaks her mind. She is truly the right person at the right time for the Alaska Air Guard."

"I am excited about moving forward," Mansfield said, "We will continue to follow General Hummel's vector and continue to build on the foundation we established over the last year."

Mansfield's April 2015 assumption of command of the Alaska Air National Guard represented a coming home of sorts. From 2000 to 2010 she served in the Guard's Anchorage-based 176th Wing before departing to serve in a variety of staff positions with the Washington Air National Guard. She returned to take command of the Alaska Air National Guard at Brig. General Hummel's request.

Mansfield was commissioned as a distinguished graduate from Officer Training School in 1989. Her first operational assignment was as a weapons controller with the 601st Tactical Control Squadron, Zweibrucken Air Base, Germany, where she deployed in support of Desert Shield and Desert Storm. She was then assigned to the 962nd AWACS, Elmendorf Air Force Base, Alaska, executing airborne counter-drug missions and participating in operations throughout the Pacific theater. During this tour she attended the USAF Fighter Weapons School, which established her as a tactics officer, a role she then performed at the Southeast Air Defense Sector, Tyndall Air Force Base, Florida and as an instructor at the USAF Weapons School Command and Control Division, Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada.

In 2000, she transitioned from Active Duty to the Alaska Air National Guard as the 176th Maintenance Group Executive Officer and shortly thereafter gained a full-time position as the Transition Team Chief for the 176th Air Control Squadron. Colonel Mansfield moved from there to 176th Wing Plans, first as an operational planner then as the Chief of Plans before being selected as the 176th Force Support Flight commander, where she was responsible for personnel, training and services functions for the Wing.

In 2010, she transitioned to the Washington Air National Guard, eventually being named that organization's director of staff. In that capacity she provided leadership for a wide assortment of programs including logistics, financial, manpower and personnel, public affairs, information systems, recruiting and retention, civil engineering, medical, and state emergency responses. Her duties include oversight of special ANG programs such as diversity, family support, employer support, and international state partnership programs.

Her service has earned her numerous awards and distinctions, including the Meritorious Service Medal with four devices.

Previous female Alaska Air Guard members to be promoted to brigadier general include Deborah McManus, who like Mansfield served as assistant adjutant general for air; and Sharon Dieffenderfer, who served as chief of joint staff for the Alaska National Guard. Both are now retired.

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