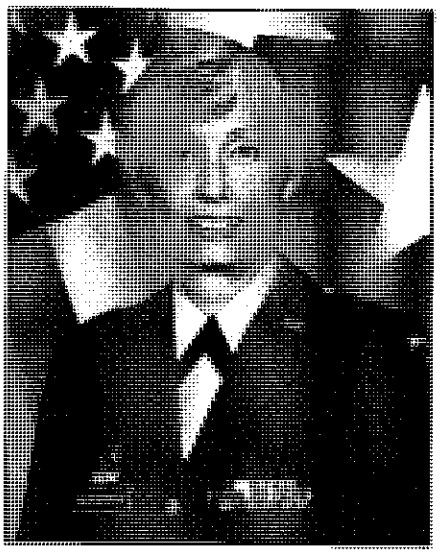
General Hickerson Retires

MG Patricia Hickerson, the former United States Army Europe Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, retired on 23 February 2001, in Heidelberg, Germany, in a ceremony hosted by General Montgomery Meigs, the Commander in Chief, United States Army, Europe. The following is a transcript of her remarks during the ceremony.



General Meigs, General Reinhardt, all our many friends, thank you so much for being here today. You honor us with your presence. Sir, thank you for your kind comments. Dennis and I thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to host this ceremony. It means so much to have this final formation here in USAREUR with you, Mrs. Meigs, and those whom we've known and served with for the last two-and-a-half years.

Thank you to the brass quintet from the 33d Army Band for your wonderful music, and the USAREUR color guard from the 529th MP Company. You really look sharp.

I'm proud to have been a soldier for the last 32 years. It was something I never expected to do with my life--in fact, joining the Army was the last thing I ever expected--especially after majoring in music--in flute performance--at an all women's college in South Carolina. Even though it was pure luck that I ended up here, the Army has been good to me. I've seen and experienced change that I never thought could happen. I've had opportunities and challenges I never thought possible. And I'm so proud of the army. There is no other organization that offers more opportunity for its people nor is more concerned about doing the right thing for its people while having the courage to make the tough decisions. This is truly the best army in the world.

Having said that, the army I joined in 1968 was very different from the one we know today. As an officer commissioned in the Women's Army Corps, I found I was in a separate army. Our uniforms were different. Our entry standards were different--in fact, the requirements for women to enlist in the army were higher than for men. Promotion systems were separate. PT, when we did PT, was different. There was one WAC colonel--the director of the Women's Army Corps, and that was a temporary promotion for that position only. Women could not be commanders of male soldiers. Women could not have children, even if they were adopted. Husbands were not dependents either unless they were physically disabled. Our pets had medical privileges, but not our husbands. They could not have ID cards. It took a Supreme Court ruling in 1973 to change this.

When the draft was disestablished in 1972, and the army became an all-volunteer force, more women were needed to meet the manpower needs of this volunteer force. Thus began the major changes that have lead to where we are today. The transition was difficult--lots of turmoil, confusion, changes in policy. Jobs were open one day, closed the next. So backward steps were taken only to go forward again as more experience and confidence was gained in the training and leading of women soldiers, and in the ability of women to be soldiers.

On 11 June 1970, I had the privilege of watching General Westmoreland promote the first WAC officer to brigadier general on the parade field at Fort McClellan, Alabama. In 1973, my WAC officer advanced course was cancelled due to the expansion of women in the army, so I joined another WAC captain and attended the Infantry Officer Advanced Course at Fort Benning, Georgia. Needless to

say, we would be the first and only ones to attend. This was like taking Algebra II before Algebra I. Our classmates were not happy we were there, but we did get better grades in tactics than our Marine Corps classmates. I believe it was this experience that resulted in my being assigned to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1975 to serve as an admissions officer for the first class of women cadets. And it was also good training for a few years later when Dennis and I went to one of our most favorite assignments--the 2d Infantry Division in Korea where we both served on the division staff under MG Robert Kingston. This was during a year which saw President Carter trying to withdraw the division, a decision which was soon reversed after the assassination of the president of South Korea, which was followed by the coup in Seoul a few months later, and the Kwangju riots that spring. We were all convinced the North Koreans were coming over the border any moment. What a wonderful year of soldiering. Even then, in 1979, I was one of a very few women field grade officers to serve in a combat division.

Meanwhile, women soldiers had become paratroopers, aviators, and military police. They were serving in field artillery and air defense artillery. They were logisticians and engineers. Many command and assignment barriers had been removed and in early 1983, women made history by deploying to Grenada, then to Panama for Just Cause in 1989, and in 1990, to Desert Storm. Desert Storm was a milestone. Desert Storm resulted in major changes in opening units and skills to women in all U.S. military services, most significantly, opening combat aviation. And changes still continue.

So the army I have known has transformed from less than 2% women in the force in 1968-with very restricted missions and opportunities-to 15% of the total force. Today, when I retire as the senior woman officer in the army, women are serving in all branches of the army except infantry and armor. There are more women generals in the active, guard and reserve and more command sergeants major than I can count. Twenty-three percent of new recruits today are women--more than one out of five. There is no more separate Women's Army Corps.

I leave being so proud of the way our army regards its people--with the emphasis on dignity and respect--consideration of others--the efforts to improve well-being for all soldiers, civilians, and family members. And especially, I am proud of the command climate here in USAREUR. I truly believe this operational command is the best place in the army to serve--it has the most challenging mission in the army, a "real" mission. USAREUR is what the army is all about--an opportunity to experience realistic training and then to apply those skills during challenging deployments in the Balkans where our soldiers are literally writing new chapters in peacekeeping, the skills of diplomacy, decision-making, nation building and how to combat terrorism. What our soldiers do every day is so impressive that it's almost indescribable--and not well understood by many. I can't think of a more meaningful assignment to conclude my career.

Let me take this opportunity to thank some of those with whom we've served. In addition to GEN Meigs, I thank LTG Jordan and his predecessor, LTG Coffee, our chief of staff, MG Campbell, my fellow directors on the USAREUR staff, CSM Lady, LTG Riley and our tactical leaders, the SFOR commander, LTG Dodson, and two special friends-LTG Petrosky and LTG Adams.

Most importantly, my DCSPER family. I've been very blessed to have worked with the most dedicated and competent military and civilian personnel anywhere in the army. The mission of DCSPER and its two field operating agencies, the Civilian Human Resources Management Agency and 1st Personnel Command, and the USAREUR Band and Chorus, is huge, complex and diverse. It touches every soldier, civilian and family member in USAREUR, plus all soldiers serving in the Balkans and literally everyone in the European command. This dedicated group of professionals works tirelessly to achieve the highest standards of excellence, no matter how difficult, in order to make life better for those whom they serve. It's been an

honor and privilege serving with each and every one of you, and I thank you for all you do every day.

A special thank you to our German guests. Again, GEN Reinhardt, thank you so much for being here. Also, Herr Burgermeister Dallinger and his wife from Schwetzingen and our friends, the Umverhaus' and Deszchenkos. And of course, our German and American friends from the Heidelberg golf course, where Dennis keeps his office. And we thank our many new friends from AAFES with whom we have a special bond. Thanks also to my DCSPER front office and the USAREUR protocol office who made this ceremony happen.

Dennis and I have thoroughly enjoyed living in Germany. We wish we could stay longer, but we plan to come back for visiting - and shopping and golf.

Lastly-I thank my family. We are pleased that Dennis' father-Tom Fogarty-is here representing Dennis' mom and seven brothers. My mother and sister wanted to be here. But most of all-I have Dennis. We met while we were captains stationed in Atlanta over 26 years ago. It's been a wonderful journey together. I owe him everything-he's the one who is well-grounded with common sense. He has been my strength and I wouldn't be here without him. We've also had a lot of fun-especially with our different last names and at a time when male spouses were almost as unusual as senior women officers. But Dennis was also a participant-particularly the times when I was a commander and he made his significant contributions to family readiness and soldier support. Now--this is the part of the ceremony where the spouse is normally presented with flowers. There have been many occasions during my career when Dennis has received flowers, so it's only fitting at this time that I make the appropriate presentation to thank my husband for his contributions to our career. But today, I thought I should give him something different-something symbolic of our future. Dennis, this key is an "IOU" for your new golf cart when we get to our new home.

We're off on a new adventure-we're PCSing to the corporate world-a new job-a new state-new friends to be made-but never the old ones to forget. We invite all of you to visit us in Richland, Washington, or wherever we may be. And we thank you for sharing this special day with us.

A Career at a Glance

Major General Patricia Parsons Hickerson, born in Louisville, Kentucky, is a graduate of Converse College, Spartanburg, SC, earning the Bachelor of Music degree with honors in flute performance. She also earned the Master of Music degree from Converse College, and in 1989, was awarded an honorary doctorate degree in Public Service from her alma mater. General Hickerson's military education includes the Women's Army Corps Officer Basic Course, the Infantry Officer Advanced Course, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, and the National War College.

In 1968, General Hickerson received a direct commission as a First Lieutenant in the Women's Army Corps. Since then, she has served in a variety of positions to include her initial assignment as a Manpower Control Officer, Manpower Control Division, Military District of Washington; commander of the 14th Army Band, Women's Army Corps Center, Fort McClellan, AL; Branch Advisor to the Combat Service Support Branch, Readiness Group, Fort Gillem, GA; Admissions Officer at the U.S. Military Academy; Chief, Officer Personnel Management Branch, U.S. Army Military Personnel Center, Eighth U.S. Army, Korea; Deputy G1 for 2d Infantry Division, Camp Casey, Korea; Personnel Staff Officer in the Assignment Procedures Office for the U.S. Army Military Personnel Center; Military Assistant for the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs; Chief, Personnel Actions Division, VII Corps; Commander, 38th Personnel and Administration Battalion, VII Corps; Administrative Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and Commander, Central Sector, Military Entrance Processing Command, Chicago, IL.

In February 1991, General Hickerson became the 57th Adjutant General of the Army, serving concurrently as the Commanding General, Physical Disability Agency, and Executive Director, Military Postal Service Agency. Her following assignment was as the Deputy Commanding General, United States Army Recruiting Command West, Fort Knox, KY. In January 1996, General Hickerson became the Commanding General of the Soldier Support Institute, Fort Jackson, SC. She was the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel and Installation Management, U.S. Army Forces Command, Fort McPherson, Georgia, when she became Deputy Chief of Staff Personnel, U.S. Army, Europe.

General Hickerson's decorations and awards include: The Distinguished Service Medal; Defense Superior Service Medal (with one Oak Leaf Cluster); Legion of Merit (with two Oak Leaf Clusters), Meritorious Service Medal (with four Oak Leaf Clusters); Army Commendation Medal; Joint Meritorious Unit Award; National Defense Service Medal (with one service star), and the Order of Horatio Gates Bronze Medal and Gold Medal (two awards).