

Down to Earth News for the Gentle People of Cecil County

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On November 8th, 2005, a special event took place at the 5th Regiment Armory in Baltimore Maryland. Flora M. Freed (Mindy), a celebrated grandmother of four from Port Deposit, Maryland, was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in the Maryland Army National Guard as an audience of family, friends, and military personnel looked on. The ceremony marked the extraordinary career of an extraordinary woman who has dedicated her life to the service of this country.

Lieutenant Colonel Freed has pursued her military career vigorously, believing that through hard work and dedication, success would be hers. She has crossed milestones that many might have thought impossible, and has proven to herself and others that social and gender barriers are only obstacles if you see them as such.

More than 30 years ago, Mindy Freed was a young single parent, the mother of 3 children. Born and raised in Hormigueros, Puerto Rico, she moved to the United States as a member of the Armed Forces in 1982. She was determined to better herself and offer her children opportunities to be successful.

She believed that education was the "only way out," so she earned her High School diploma and gained admission to the InterAmerican University in Puerto Rico, graduating in 1982 with an undergraduate degree in Education and Physical Fitness. She was active in volleyball, track and field, and gymnastics while in college.

While attending the InterAmerican University, Freed received her commission as a Second Lieutenant from the ROTC Program at the University of Puerto Rico. For several years, she worked a full time job, pursued her degree, attended drills and ROTC activities, and raised a family of three! "Difficult but not impossible!" says Freed. She earned scholarships along the way that helped her pay the bills and support her family.

After graduation she joined the active duty ranks of the United States Army as a 2nd Lieutenant. Her mother cared for her children while she attended Army Schools.

One of her first stops was the Defense Language School



Major General Bruce Tuxil promoting Major Flora Freed to Lieutenant Colonel

in San Antonio, Texas. She didn't speak English and needed to learn the language in order to perform in her Army courses. No problem! She graduated 16 weeks later, qualified as a native English speaker. From there she proceeded to Officer Basic Course in Fort Eustis, Virginia, followed by the Rotary Wing Aviator's Course in Fort Rucker, Alabama.

While in flight school, Freed learned that she was the first Hispanic woman ever to attend Flight School at Fort Rucker, and she was the only female in her class of 35. Her 8-year-old son pinned on her wings at the graduation ceremony, the first time a child has done so in the history of Fort Rucker. In a typically male dominated world, it seemed that breaking barriers was becoming part of the fabric of her life.

After graduating from Aviation School and other related logistical courses in the aviation field, she was assigned to Fort Ord, California in 1984, and promoted to 1st Lieutenant. There she served as helicopter pilot, test pilot and helicopter maintenance officer. Freed was determined to be successful no matter what the challenge, and worked hard to demonstrate her capabilities.

Her time at Fort Ord also afforded her many memorable experiences and opportunities. As an assistant test pilot, she flew AH-1 (Cobra) helicopters, which are combat helicopters used to support ground troop operations, and flew above and below the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco for training purposes. Freed also practiced auto rotations and simulated engine failures onto nuclear submarine decks in the bay, and flew many times over Alcatraz Island during



Captain Flora Freed with face camo

engine failure recovery operations while on her way to the landing approach to Travis Air Force Base.

Flying over the California coast had its perks as well as challenges. She recalls watching whales on the bay while being on the lookout for hang gliders along the coastline. "Those characters would launch themselves from the Santa Cruz hills into the ocean, just as birds do," she said. "Not the best friends of a helicopter's rotor disk!"

To add to her flight experience, she was lucky enough to have participated in the fielding of the UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters in 1985. She was also given the opportunity to fly into Meadows Field in Bakersfield, California and experience the prototypes of the AH-64 Apache combat attack helicopter in the late 1980s.

In spite of all her accomplishments, however, she felt that she would have to choose a new career field if she hoped to advance. Aviation remained a "man's world" in those days, so she chose to switch careers and attended the Ordnance Advanced Course at Aberdeen Proving Grounds, which was the beginning of her roots in Maryland. After completing the course in 1988, she was sent for a tour of duty in Frankfurt, Germany.

Continuing her legacy of "firsts" she was assigned to the V Corps and became the first female officer assigned to the G-4, V Corps Artillery.

"I learned as much as I could and became the subject matter expert for all these interesting and powerful macho explosive devices," she said. As a maintenance officer, she was involved with many interesting jobs and responsibilities that took her to places she never imagined she would see, such as Crete, Greece, where she studied the Lance Missile firing Mechanism.

On a visit to Austria, she toured the ruins of Hitler's military headquarters and home on the Austrian border, and even witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

"To me those were times of glory. I felt as important as the President of the United States."

After serving as a Company Commander during Desert Shield and Desert Storm, Freed became involved in German community activities. She was the official Spanish language interpreter for the Frankfurt Military and Civilian Community, and also assisted with many family programs and lectures in Department of Defense Schools.

During the drawdown of the U.S. Troops from Europe in 1992, she worked to assist the political refugees that were being moved to American military bases in Germany, known as Kasernes, and fondly recalls bringing cookies and toys to the children there. These refugees came from Balkan countries. Displaced from their homes and stripped of their personal possessions, they were placed on Kasernes until they were given political asylum in Germany or other neighboring countries.

Freed completed two consecutive tours of duty in Germany from 1988-1992, and in September of 1992 she decided that it was time to



LTC Freed flanked by son-in-law, Sgt. Charles Rhoades and daughter Mindy at her November promotion ceremony

leave the Army and come home. Once home, however, she missed the military lifestyle and joined the Maryland Army National Guard where she has been serving for the past 13 years. In 1999 she earned her Masters Degree in Business and Human Resources from Central Michigan University, and she is currently the Human Resources Manager for the Maryland Army National Guard.

Colonel Annette Deener, the Chief of Staff for the State of Maryland, has known Lieutenant Colonel Freed for many years, and selected her for her current position. She says that Freed's most outstanding characteristic is her enthusiasm.

"She has always done whatever she could to become trained," said Deener. "She has what we call a "can-do" attitude that has led to her success." Colonel Deener further explained that Lieutenant Colonel Freed has been a role model to many.

"She has gained the respect of enlisted personnel by always looking out for them and ensuring that they have what they need to do their jobs. She always has the soldiers' interest at heart."

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Major Flora Freed at Andrews Airforce Base, Md., demonstrating capabilities of an Air Force helicopter to South America's School of the Americas



1st Lt. Freed at Flight School,
Fort Rucker Alabama, 1984

Lieutenant Colonel Freed has kept journals and calendars for the past 25 years and plans on writing motivational books once she retires in 2010. By that time her military career will have spanned 30 years, during which she has been the recipient of many awards and decorations, including three Meritorious Service Medals, two Army Commendation medals, an Army Achievement Medal, and many more.

Freed takes great pride in the opportunities she has had to serve her country and to support soldiers through her work. Hers has been a career of opening doors and breaking barriers, but she seems to take it in stride, and would have accepted nothing less of herself.

"There is no better job, no better cause...I am challenged day in and day out with obstacles...but the important thing to do is to continue to march and not to look back, not to give up, not for a second!" she says.

Today she enjoys getting together with her children, now grown, and recalling exciting days of travel in places all over the world, and is looking forward with excitement to the challenges ahead.

Thank you Lieutenant Colonel Mindy Freed for your dedication to your country and for your inspirational career! 🇺🇸

Major Flora Freed on Pennsylvania Avenue
across from the White House, 1997

