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SC Guard gets first female general

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In 1977, a young Lander College coed drove by the Greenwood National Guard Armory routinely on her route to classes and wondered what life in the Guard might be like.

That life turned out to be a pretty good fit for the then 21-year-old Marie McKee. Some 33½ years later, Marie Goff will be pinned with a silver star today, making her the first woman general in the South Carolina National Guard.

Promoted by outgoing Adjutant General Stan Spears and approved by the White House and the U.S. Senate, Brig. Gen. Darlene Marie Goff becomes one of three assistant adjutant generals over the 11,155 members of the state National Guard.

Goff, 54, said Thursday she is grateful to be promoted and has been told by other women in the Guard that her new status encourages them to keep advancing their careers.

When Goff started, women were rarities in the state's Army or Air Guard. Today, they comprise 15 percent of overall personnel and 11 percent of the officers, according to Guard statistics.

Goff joined the ranks of women officers in June 1981 and has been a colonel at the Guard's headquarters, where her latest duties have included being director of human resources and vice chief of the Joint Staff, which reports to Spears and next week, his elected successor, Bob Livingston.

Reminiscing on Thursday, Goff recalled her drives by the Guard building near her hometown of Ninety Six. "I would see the armory every day, and I said, 'I'm going to go in there and see what they do.'" That casual curiosity put her on a career path one September day in 1977. "Once they presented the information to me, I said, 'Where do I sign?'"

Goff received her degree in sociology and later earned master's degrees from Webster University and the Army War College.

Though her career spans more than three decades, Goff said she has never been in war or deployed overseas.

She has been married three years to Col. Eddie Goff, 51, whom she met while they were at Officer Candidate School. Col. Goff is chief of coalition development at Central Command, at McDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Fla.



Col. Darlene Goff in an undated photo provided by the South Carolina National Guard.

/AP/SC National Guard

Women in the Guard

The S.C. National Guard has 11,155 members. Women have come to comprise a sizeable portion of the personnel.

- About 1,675, or 15 percent, are women. The Air Guard has 19 percent overall, a bit more than the Army Guard.
- About 1,050, or 11.3 percent, are officers. The Army Guard has 917 women officers; the Air Guard has 134.

Source: S.C. Adjutant General's office

Goff now outranks her husband.

“People keep saying to me, ‘Is Eddie going to have to salute you or pack your bags?’ If you ask him, he’ll tell you he’s been doing that for years,” she said with a chuckle.

He is driving to Columbia for today’s ceremony at the National Guard Armory.

Goff said her chief goal in her new post will be to expand a medical directorate for keeping track of medical records and medical needs of all Guard members from the time they join to beyond their retirement.

It’s a quality of life issue that Goff said is close to her heart. The project is likely to take several years to become a reality, she said.

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