

# A WONDERFUL LIFE

THE RETIREMENT OF MAJOR GENERAL CHARLES J. DUNLAP, JR.—THE DEPUTY JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL



Gen Carrol H. Chandler, the Vice Chief of Staff of The Air Force, congratulates Maj Gen Dunlap.

*The following remarks, which were edited for this publication, were made by Major General Dunlap at his retirement ceremony at Bolling Air Force Base, D.C., on 19 February 2010.*

**I**N PREPARING FOR THESE REMARKS, I asked one of our bright young captains, Captain Nina Padalino, what she thought company grade officers would be interested in hearing from me. She replied they would like to have some advice on whether or not make the Air Force JAG Corps a career, and what circumstances helped me make my decision. She continued they would like to know what I learned when I was a company grade officer that helped in my career and, finally, is there anything that I would have liked to have known back then.

Let me try to tackle just a few of those. I'm not one of those people who come to something like this and say, "I have no regrets." I have lots of

regrets in life. I think anybody that doesn't have regrets probably isn't thinking hard enough about it. But, I don't regret the decision to continue to serve in the Air Force. Why is that? *The people.*

What about the people? My theory is you tend to like people who are happy and the key to happiness is serving others; and that's essentially what servicemen and servicewomen do in the Armed Forces. So being around people who are mostly happy, motivated, and working towards a common goal, is actually a good place to be. In addition, because service in uniform may require the ultimate sacrifice, it creates a special kind of mindset. It's one where principles mean something. In the JAG Corps, ours are: Wisdom,

Valor and Justice; and most of our people really to live up to that. It's great to be around people who have values *and who stand up for them*.

Over the years, I have been privileged to have been mentored by a great number of genuinely stand up people. But, let me talk about some experiences I had as a company grade officer with one of those people. One of my first SJAs was a lieutenant colonel everyone knew as "Mean Henry Green." He's quite a legend in the JAG Corps. He was and is a colorful character and deserved his "Mean Henry" title. There are a million Henry Green stories and, although some of his techniques would be out of place today, I did learn a lot from him as a company grade officer.

Let me give you a couple examples. Like a lot of young JAGs, I got into the bad habit of running into his office to get a quick and easy answer (for me anyway!) to some military justice questions. I think he realized I was getting sloppy and lazy and decided he was going to put an end to it.

So, one day, when I went into his office, I barely got my question out, when I looked up to realize, too late, that "Mean Henry Green's" Manual for Courts-Martial was sailing directly towards my head. And this wasn't the nice skull-friendly paperback version. This was heavy bound version of the manual. Just before it impacted, I remember him saying to me, and I'm leaving out a few of the words, "Dunlap, read this damn book! There is a dangerous amount of information in there." I did, and it made all the difference.

He was teaching me that the tedious process of self-education and self-reliance was essential to success. But don't think that he left any of the young captains adrift. He truly cared. He spent untold hours one-on-one and in groups, teaching us, not just about the practice of law, *but about how to be an officer*. He insisted that the young captains learn everything about the Air Force. He made us understand we were part of a larger team; the Air Force and the Armed Forces of the United States.

He was a voracious reader of history. And let me tell you, in the course of my career, if there's one thing that's made a difference, it's the fact that I like to read. I've read everything I can about military history, the Air Force, strategy, and the

other services. So I simply can't emphasize how important that lesson was for me and my career.

Let me tell you about another example that stayed with me all these years. I remember one time when we actually recommended dismissal of charges against some Airman because of insufficient evidence. We were a very prosecutorial-oriented office, so this was a very unusual circumstance.

The recommendation enraged the accused's commander, who was this gigantic full colonel. He got Lieutenant Colonel Green in the parking lot after work and read him the riot act. He told Colonel Green, "your career is over, you're done, you're finished, get out of here." I'm leaving out some words there. This was an era where young captains were not exposed to that kind of spectacle from senior officers. So, it was really unusual.

I can clearly remember Lieutenant Colonel Green standing there holding his ground telling him, "Colonel, you can do whatever you want, but I'm not changing my mind." It was really quite something to see. And afterwards, when I talked to "Mean Henry" later, he told me simply that that's we do as judge advocates. We tell people what they need to hear, not just what they might want to hear. He taught me earlier on about the importance of speaking truth to power.

In the years since that event, I've found that speaking truth to power can sometimes come at personal costs. But, I've always thought of "Mean Henry Green's" example. As the Reverend Billy Graham once said, "Courage is contagious when brave men take a stand. The spines of others are stiffened." "Mean Henry" stiffened my spine on more than one occasion ....

Getting back to Captain Padalino's questions, there's more to why I stayed. It was the opportunity for adventure. It was wonderful to be a young single captain traveling around Asia and Europe. I'm not going to tell you any stories from those travels. (My wife is here!). There is one more story that I will relay. Although it isn't from my company grade days, it may illustrate how military service can create memories that really are almost impossible to obtain otherwise.

***Having a “life” means  
having the opportunity to serve.  
It is challenging yourself over  
and over again. It is to have  
adventure after adventure.***

---

I can well remember my first deployment for Operation PROVIDE RELIEF/RESTORE HOPE. It was during Christmas, and most of the headquarters element to which I was assigned were Marines. The operation was an urgent one. There were thousands of people dying as a result of a civil war; the sheer chaos of a violent, imploding country dominated by squabbling warlords. A drought had destroyed crops. I saw some terrible things during that deployment and even just thinking about the smell of rotting bodies makes me gag.

But, Christmas was a respite from what we were seeing in Somalia. The Kenyan priest said Mass in a tent on our little compound. His accent was strong, but his energy really communicated. There was a Christmas party. Despite the 90 degree heat, someone dressed up in a Santa outfit and asked what we wanted for Christmas. Well, don't ask a bunch of people deployed what they want for Christmas. Everybody wants to go home! But it was a lot of fun.

The most memorable part was Christmas dinner. It was set up outside under a dazzling, clear, African night. Believe me, in that part of Africa, there isn't much competition for the stars by artificial light. Our African food contractors often served us gazelle and other kinds of weird food, but, for that particular night, the menu they came up with was Italian food. At the dinner, kind of ironically, some Germans joined us. They were deployed with us for that operation. In fact, it was the first time they had served in Africa since Rommel was there.

Somebody arranged to have an African band to play. They knew a lot of African music, which was interesting, but not exactly seasonal for most of us. In fact, the repertoire of U.S. tunes seemed to be nonexistent until, that is, they got to the very last one. Completely unexpectedly, they

started playing one piece of music familiar to all Americans: *Amazing Grace*.

It struck me then, and it still strikes me now, what a wonderful life the military can be. There I was a Philadelphia lawyer, in Africa, eating Italian food with a bunch of Marines and some Germans, listening to *Amazing Grace*—and all outside under a spectacular Christmas night sky. What an adventure!!!

Life can be strange. When I first put on the Air Force uniform in 1970, I never envisioned myself ending up where I was that day in Africa or in the years to come. I treasure those memories. I have always believed that serving in the military is not just a living, it's having a life. There is a difference. It's a life, when you look back on it, that means something.

So, I guess the best answer to the question young Captain Padalino posed to me about why stayed in is to pose a question back. When you're going to be, as I will be on my next birthday, 60 years old, what do you want to look back on? And as for me, I can't speak for anyone else, but having a “life” means having the opportunity to serve. It is challenging yourself over and over again. It is to have adventure after adventure. And it's to have the privilege to meet and work with people who are so terrific and wonderful.

So, Captain Padalino's final question was: Is there anything that I wish I had known then that I know now? Well, there is. I wish I knew that I was going to meet my wife, Joy. Knowing I would meet her would have made my social life a lot easier. It would have taken a lot of stress out of being a young captain!

In closing, let me just say, it's been a wonderful life. It's been a wonderful life because of many of the people who are here. You have made our life a wonderful life. We hope, in the future, we will be able to continue our relationships with you because Joy and I have nothing but good feelings about our Air Force career. We are really looking forward to the next phase of our lives.

Still, the shadows are lengthening for us. We hope to continue to try, as we always have tried, to do our duty as God gives us the light to see thy duty. Thank you so much. 🙏