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THE PICATINNY VOICE

Vol. 27 No. 24

<https://www.pica.army.mil/evoice>

Published in the interest of the Picatinny Arsenal, N.J., community

November 28, 2014

Audacity, empathy keys to commander's leadership

BY CASSANDRA MAINIERO

Picatinny Arsenal Public Affairs

When Lt. Col. Ingrid Parker entered Sadiyah, Iraq, in 2010, it wasn't the crumbling buildings that held her attention. Instead, it was a new school standing in the desert.

"I always call it a 'jasmine,'" said Parker about the school. "A jasmine is a little flower in the desert that can just grow anywhere. And, out in Sadiyah—an improvised explosive device production area, where all the buildings had fallen down and few people lived—that school was a jasmine."

Parker has been Picatinny Arsenal's Garrison Commander since June 2014. The garrison's mission is to provide installation capabilities and services that help to sustain a community where service members, families, and civilians will thrive.

However, in 2010, Parker served as the executive and operations officer to a battalion commander in Fort Stewart, Georgia, and later served in Iraq, where she was responsible for managing the battalion personnel, its staff and equipment. And it was in Iraq where two federal police training teams approached Parker about visiting the Iraqi school.

"The federal police training team came to me and said 'hey, we rebuilt a school'—there was a lot of school building in Iraq—and they asked if I could be a guest speaker at this new school. I said 'OK,'" Parker recalled.

"When I got there, all the Iraqi women were in the back of the room. The men were in the center, and the American women, though we weren't in the back, were on the side.

"I didn't consciously notice it at the time, that all the Iraqi women were in the back, but I don't like a room divided," said Parker. "So, after my speech, as the Iraqi

girls gave a presentation and sang The Song of Baghdad, my interpreter and I went up and started to clap with all those girls.

"I have no idea why I did it. It was just an impromptu thing. But, it broke the space barriers of the room. All the Iraqi women started to come up front with me and then the Iraqi flag came up.

"When the ceremony was over, the Iraqi general asked: 'Why did you do that?' I thought he was reprimanding me, so I kept saying 'I don't know, I don't know! Was that OK?'" said Parker. "Then he said 'It's very OK' and gave me a hug, which I didn't expect at all. I thought he was going to say 'Don't do that. We're not allowed to do that.'"

With her experience at the school ceremony, Parker bonded with Iraqi women and became the organizer of the First Iraqi Women's Conference.

The conference focused on empowering women in Baghdad by connecting professional women (doctors, teachers, lawyers, child caretakers, etc.) and helping each other to be successful within the constraints of a male-dominated country.

That year, Parker also met an Iraqi single mother with four children.

"She [the mother] worked on my forward operating base," said Parker. "I thought I was going to meet a 'mousey' and quiet lady. Instead, I got an Iraqi woman who owned a fur coat, wore leggings and boots, and carried Jimmy Chu handbags. She was like a bull in a china shop. She was bigger than life.

"After I left [Iraq] I kept in contact with her because you don't meet those kinds of people every day," said Parker. "Then later that year, she [the Iraqi mother] told me some of her life story—her husband was killed early in the war and her son was hit by a car, but she still had



Photo by Todd Mozes

Lt. Col. Ingrid Parker has been Garrison Commander at Picatinny Arsenal since June 2014. As a lieutenant colonel, a student, and a mother, she says time management and intellectual curiosity are essential for maintaining balance at work.

four daughters and she fights hard to keep them safe.

"Her oldest daughter had Down syndrome and then one of her younger daughters was then diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease. She was upset and wanted to come to the United States for her daughter's treatment. So, I said 'OK. Let me see if I can help.'"

In 2011, Parker sponsored the family, who came to the United States for a daughter's chemotherapy treatment at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. The family

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Picatinny lightens Soldiers load, shaves 12 lbs off 81mm mortar

BY AUDRA CALLOWAY

Picatinny Arsenal Public Affairs

Following the successful fielding of the lightweight 60mm mortar system, Picatinny has begun delivering the new lightweight 81mm system to troops.

The new M252A1 81mm system is 12 pounds, or 14 percent, lighter than its predecessor, the legacy M252 mortar system.

"The new lightweight system reduces the load for dismounted battalion mortar platoons, while retaining the same durability, rates of fire, and range of the legacy system," said Lt. Col. Will McDonough, Product Manager Guided Precision Munitions and Mortar Systems (GPM2S) with the Program Executive Office for Ammunition at Picatinny Arsenal.

Picatinny engineers delivered the first 81mm M252A1 mortar systems to troops at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, earlier this month.

Mortar systems are an indirect fire weapon used to defeat enemy troops, materiel, bunkers and other infantry-type targets. The M252A1 fires the complete family of 81mm ammunition, such as high explosive, smoke, illumination, infrared illumination and practice cartridges.

"Lighter weight has been a user desire for the 30 years I've been with the government," explained Ted Greiner, GPM2S's Assistant Product Manager for 60 and 81mm mortar systems.

Overall, the 81mm system has dropped from 91 pounds down to 79 pounds.

To illustrate how important equipment weight reduction is to service members,

Greiner recalled the time he was coaching his son's little league game and another parent approached him.

"I'm sitting on the bench and all of a sudden this guy comes running across the field and I think he's going to tackle me. He says, 'You work at Picatinny? Do you work on mortars? Well you've gotta to make those things lighter. I humped those things thirty miles a day.'"

"The parent was a former Marine and wasn't in the service any longer. But (the weight of the mortar system) was so important to him that years later he came running across the field just to tell me about it. He was happy with the range, durability and everything else, but he wanted it to be lighter."

Greiner's team was able to reduce the mortar system weight by using new

materials.

"We used lighter materials, such as aluminum and titanium in the elevation and traverse mechanism that lower and lift the bipod and traverse it left and right, and nylon Kevlar for some of the internal gear parts."

The M252A1 consists of the following components: M253 cannon (tube), M177A1 bipod, M3A2 baseplate and the M67A1 sight unit.

The bipod now weighs 22.5 pounds, compared to 27 pounds. The baseplate has been reduced from 29 pounds to 23 pounds and the cannon dropped from 35 pounds down to 30.5 pounds.

All former 81mm systems are scheduled to be replaced with the new technology in 2016.

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stayed in the Ronald McDonald Charities house and later immigrated to the United States on special immigration visas obtained with Parker's help.

"It takes people working on the behalf of other people to really change the world," said Parker. "Without our interactions together, [the Iraqi mother and her children], they wouldn't be U.S. citizens today. However, by working together—and we were in complete unison with our voices—it changed. Without working together as a team, the outcome would have been entirely different."

LOOKING FOR A LEADERSHIP ROLE

While her success as an Army leader might appear to be a natural path, Parker's decision to join the Army was coincidental.

A native of Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, Parker attended Shippensburg University, majoring in sociology with a minor in biology. In her sophomore year, after recognizing that using loans to attend summer school had left her in a financial bind, Parker searched for a way to pay for the upcoming semester.

She noticed a Reserves Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) table on campus. With the encouragement of sergeant at the table, Parker joined ROTC that year.

"I thought the study of people was interesting," said Parker, who initially took sociology to fulfill a general education requirement. "My professor did a lot of work with groups around the world and I'm interested in travel and studying our interactions with other people."

"Plus, when you're in the Army, especially leadership positions, you spend a good portion of your time working with people and learning how to influence people to do the things you need them to do, so you can complete the mission," added Parker.

Parker graduated from Shippensburg University with a degree in sociology in 1993.

She was then commissioned into the Military Intelligence Corps in 1994 and subsequently completed two masters' degrees: one in business administration from the University of Phoenix, and another in military art and sciences at



When stationed in Iraq, Lt. Col. Ingrid Parker organized the First Iraqi Women's Conference. Courtesy photo.

"Intellectual activism is really self-actualization: 'What does it take to get you involved into something?' And then, once you get involved, it's a question of 'What are you willing to lose?'"

the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College.

She is working on her doctorate in Humanities, Language Literacy and Culture Program, at the University of Maryland Baltimore County. She completed her course requirements and looks forward to completing the dissertation.

As part of her doctorate program, she is researching gender equality and the tacit or unstated rules in the workplace, family, or legal structures that inhibit gender equality for Iraqi women and women in the U.S. Army.

Her dissertation, titled "Women Leaders in Iraqi Civil Society and American Women-in Arms: An Army Officer's Investigation into Similarities through Life Stories," focused on women leadership in Iraq and in the U.S. Army. Focusing on the journey of women in the Army and Iraq, it highlighted how to improve the lives of women in both areas.

For Parker, getting involved with an issue has a number of dimensions.

"Intellectual activism is really self-actualization: 'What does it take to get you involved into something?' And then, once you get involved, it's a question of 'What are you willing to lose?'" explained Parker. "Women and a lot of organizations mask the compromises that women make to be successful in male-led organizations. There is a price tag for our success."

BECOMING A LEADER

Parker has served in every area of the Department of Defense—tactical, strategic, and force-providing units. Her roles have ranged from company commander to special staff officer to counter-terrorism senior operations leader.

Before coming to Picatinny, she was assigned to the National Security Agency at Fort George G. Meade, Maryland, to working with inter-agency processes. She is a career military intelligence officer.

"Everyone says that's an oxymoron—'military intelligence.' How do you put those two words together?" Parker said with a slight laugh.

"However, the thing about military intelligence is that sometimes you don't know about our successes. We can't tell you when we're good at something because we're protecting trade craft and our understanding of the enemy. We're quiet professionals and we're OK with that."

"It actually reminds me a lot of ARDEC," said Parker, referring to the



Photo by Todd Mozes

Garrison Commander Lt. Col. Ingrid Parker was a good sport at Picatinny Community Day by willing to get drenched as part of the fund-raising dunk tank.

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largest organization at Picatinny Arsenal, the Armament Research, Development and Engineering Center. Its mission is to empower, unburden, and protect the warfighter by providing superior armaments solutions that dominate the battlefield.

"Approximately 90 percent of our Army's lethality and weapon systems come from posts just like Picatinny. Without that, you wouldn't have lethality in the force. Military intelligence is the same way. We provide information for leadership, so that they can make informed decisions to keep our homeland and our forces safe."

Over her career, Parker has received several military awards, including two Bronze Star Medals, the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, two Meritorious Service Medals, six Army Commendation Medals, two Joint Service Achievement Medals, four Army Achievement Medals, a National Defense Service Medal as well as a Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal.

"Honestly, I never meant to serve 22 years in the Army," Parker admitted. "But, I've always loved the Army and, for women, the Army offers leadership and career development that is just not the same in the civilian community."

THE POWER OF EMPATHY

With a background of 22 years of active service, a doctoral student, a mother, and Picatinny's new Garrison Commander, Parker says that time management and intellectual curiosity are essential to maintaining balance.

"I have a lot of intellectual curiosity—meaning that I always look for more education. I always question what someone says," said Parker. "It drives more education because you can take any

phenomenon and really start to see the root cause and see how the phenomenon works in a multi-faceted way."

In addition, Parker cites empathy as one of her key strengths as a leader. However, Parker says empathy differs from sympathy. Sympathy is when you acknowledge another's feelings and provide comfort. Empathy when you acknowledge another person's feelings because you have also experienced it.

"What I've learned is that the Army tries to deal with things on a non-emotional level, but the real deal is that all the people in the organization have some level of emotion," said Parker.

"Each worker is dealing with their own personal emotions—anger, fear, sadness, happiness—and that is their reality. When the Army teaches you how to guide an organization, they want you to see the hard and steady ways to do it. But, the emotional side is still there."

For women entering the workforce who hope to eventually reach leadership positions, Parker states that intelligence, efficiency and audacity are vital for successful leaders.

"We shape our men to be audacious," said Parker. "But we don't shape our women to be audacious. We shape them to have a little more humility. Yes, you need humility, but you also need audacity. When in charge, be in charge."

As a leader, Parker refers back to what sociology taught her and prefers a win-win approach where everyone benefits from a particular course of action.

"The thing about leadership is that you could give an order to folks—'You will do this'—and I've totally done it," said Parker. "Still, when the rubber meets the road, it really takes people to execute the decision and that's why I like the win-win approach if possible."