

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH MAJOR (RETIRED) MEG KULUNGOWSKI,  
U.S. ARMY, AND FIRST LIEUTENANT MEGAN KELVINGTON, U.S. ARMY VIA TELECONFERENCE  
TIME: 12:00 P.M. EDT DATE: THURSDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2008

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LINDY KYZER (U.S. Army, Public Affairs): We are very pleased to have  
with us Major (Retired) Meg Kulungowski and First Lieutenant Megan Kelvington.  
They're the first mother and daughter to graduate from West Point. Megan  
graduated from West Point 25 years to the day of her mother.

They're here with us and they commemorate the significance of the 30th  
anniversary of the disestablishment of the Women's Army Corps. So this is a  
special Bloggers Roundtable. I wanted to introduce them. And they'll have a few  
minutes of opening remarks and then take your questions.

Just as a reminder, please keep your mute button pressed when not  
asking a question, so we can eliminate some of that background noise. And now  
I'll go ahead and introduce Major (Retired) Meg Kulungowski and Lieutenant  
Kelvington for their opening remarks. MAJ. KULUNGOWSKI: Hi, this is Meg.

I'm currently serving as the director of congressional affairs for the  
Joint IED Defeat Organization. And prior to that, I was active-duty for 11  
years as a military intelligence officer. And then I got out and stayed home  
and was a stay-at-home mom for about eight years.

And when I came back to work, I started as a part-time employee with a  
non-profit that advocates for military families, the National Military Family  
Association, and then went to work Senator Hutchison for a year as office  
manager. And she has more than once had a military spouse as her office manager  
because she's found that they're good at multi-tasking and taking care of young  
people.

And then I went to work for PEO Soldier and did their congressional  
affairs. And PEO soldier was a new PEO that takes care of everything a soldier  
wears and carries, and then went to Army Budget Liaison, which is the office  
kind of like Army OCLL but does the work with the appropriators, and then went  
to one of the war colleges, ICAF and then came to JIEDDO. And that's been --  
that's me.

Megan.

LT. KELVINGTON: Yes.

My career is far shorter than that.

I went to West Point, graduated in 2006 and then went to flight school. I just finished flight school, April of this year.

In flight school, I did the Black Hawk transition. At the end, I found out that I was picked up to do the fixed-wing transition. So I stayed another three months at Fort Rucker in Alabama. I learned to fly airplanes there. And I'm now doing my advanced transition for the RC-12 in Fort Huachuca, Arizona.

MS. KYZER: Okay, great. Thank you so much for those introductions.

Do we have any questions to get us started?

Q CJ has one.

MS. KYZER: Okay.

Go ahead, CJ.

Q For both, first of all, I'm an MI guy myself. (Inaudible) -- both of you. (Laughter.)

What are your thoughts? There's a lot of discussion in Congress, as well as in the civil community, about women in combat. What are your thoughts, both as female soldiers, having women in actual combat roles, traditionally male-dominated combat roles?

MAJ. KULUNGOWSKI: Megan or me?

LT. KELVINGTON: Okay.

Q Both of you, actually.

LT. KELVINGTON: Mom, you can go first.

MAJ. KULUNGOWSKI: Let's see. I'm not an advocate really of changing whether they should go into infantry. I don't see the reason. But then I think we have, we still have some artificial, you know, restrictions that I think that -- in that, you know, women that can't go into either -- actually I'm not even sure how it currently reads. But I think it's something along the lines of --

LT. KELVINGTON: You have to get attached below battalion level.

MAJ. KULUNGOWSKI: Which I think is immaterial these days.

I mean, you can, you know, you can be at a corps support unit and be in as much harm's way as someone who is in a -- is working in, you know, an infantry battalion too. So I think those artificial kind of limitations need to be relooked given that, you know, the conflict is all around.

But in terms of the training specialties, you know, I'm sure, they can, they can, you know, we think, they can probably continue to reevaluate given that, I know, we had some restrictions in Air Defense and Field Artillery which those branches no longer kind of do what we thought, you know, what they were doing 15 years ago, when we last looked at them.

So you know, in that regard, I think, we could probably, we probably should continue to look at MOS specialties, as to whether they should

be opened. But you know, me personally, you know, I'm not -- I have no desire to go infantry and don't really see any value in women, you know, serving as infantrymen.

LT. KELVINGTON: Okay.

I agree with my mom on the point that I see no reason in allowing women to, you know, either go 11 Bravo or 11 Alpha as far as infantry MOS. However my argument for that is, the camaraderie that infantry units build. And there is a difference between having -- when you throw a woman into the mix.

I absolutely despise the argument when people say, oh, well, you know, women are physically weaker; there's just some things you can't do. Because I'm here to tell you that I had male classmates of mine, at West Point, that couldn't score as high on the PT test as I could.

So for things like, you know, okay, being in a tank, I could somewhat see that. But as far as, you know, things like the 160th is still not open to female pilots, I personally have no desire to be in a unit like that. However I think it's ridiculous to not allow women into units like that.

In the infantry, small-unit standpoint, I can somewhat understand just from a social aspect. However as my mom was saying, there are still stigmas out there about where women can and can't be. And that's absolutely absurd.

Q Thank you.

MS. KYZER: Great.

Are there any other questions?

Q This is Chuck.

I wanted to ask both of the women, who appointed them to the academy? And if they wouldn't mind, what was their graduating rank?

LT. KELVINGTON: West Point or high school?

Q West Point.

MAJ. KULUNGOWSKI: West Point.

My appointment came from Bob Duncan, I think. He was the -- my dad's from Oregon, so I actually applied through there. And he ended up not being in office, I think, by the time I graduated. And where was I in my class? Let's see. I think around 120-something maybe, 119, around there.

LT. KELVINGTON: I actually had a presidential nomination as well as and, Mom, correct me on this. I think it was Warner actually gave me --

MAJ. KULUNGOWSKI: I'm not sure.

LT. KELVINGTON: I can't even remember who. I really, I don't know. I was a little disappointed in the way our representatives did it. I really had no contact with any of my congressmen. The way I was, you know -- the way they did it was basically any other college application.

So honestly I don't even remember. I know I got one from either a representative or a senator. But I honestly couldn't tell you who because I got in on a presidential. And I was about, I want to say, somewhere between 250 and 280 in my class at West Point.

Q Thank you.

(Cross talk.)

Q I have a question, actually two if I can be greedy.

You have a great perspective, Major. You were in one of the first classes that -- you were really still groundbreaking the role of women. And your daughter has inherited that.

Between the two of you, have you discussed the changes, in the roles and the perspective toward women in the military? Can you speak to that? And then I'll ask my second question.

MAJ. KULUNGOWSKI: I don't know that we've really discussed it that much. My view on the academy experience is particularly, you know, more your plebe year is, everybody's experience is unique to them. You don't know really how much more difficult your year is than the person who went before you or the person after you.

You know, everybody feels like their plebe year is challenging. And I mean, later you can kind of look back and see that, oh, you know, oh, this might have changed or that might have changed, but -- and then it's -- (chuckles) -- it's by design a very challenging time frame.

In terms of what I have seen at the academy that has changed as it related to women, one thing certainly is, in light of the increased awareness of sexual assaults -- not unique to the academies, but you know, I think throughout college campuses -- the academies have had to kind of tighten security. Cadets lock their doors now, where, one, as a cadet, I never ever -- it never even crossed my mind that I might ever be at risk. It -- you know, and I -- but I think that was also, you know, kind of more time-associated. You know, in the late '70s and early '80s, you know, rape on campuses wasn't anything that, you know -- I don't recall ever hearing about it, and I certainly never heard any -- you know, anything about it when I was at school, whereas, I mean, it now seems to be more prevalent throughout society and throughout college campuses, and the academies are no exception. And they know that that was one change.

At academies now, they major. I didn't have a major, a -- you had an area of concentration where you took some of your electives in. And so, you know, I think that has been a positive change and not unique to women, but just a change at the academy.

And then, you know, they have much more -- much greater opportunity to travel and do semester abroad-like kinds of programs or during their summer training and that kind of thing.

In terms of the -- Megan, I don't know. Can you think of other things?

LT. KELVINGTON: Some of the other stuff that I think was big was, I never had -- I -- you know, I honestly couldn't give you a name of a person -- of a male that didn't want me there. I'm sure they existed in my class and

even, you know, maybe some of the male officers that were there. But I certainly never felt out of place.

I actually have a story. My plebe year in math class, it wasn't until the second or third week where my instructor said, "Okay, guys, pull out your books," and then he goes, "Oh, and Megan." And that -- it took until that third week that I looked around the class and went, "Oh, my God, I'm the only girl in my math class."

But in those, you know, two or three weeks of school, I hadn't even noticed that I was the only girl in there, because there was absolutely no difference. You know, I worked with them, going up to the light boards just the same. In my plebe year company, I had upperclassmen that made it their goal to watch out for the plebe girls, because they knew that, you know, sexual assault and that kind of thing was an issue.

And at that time, we weren't allowed to lock our doors, because they came around to do what they called (cap ?) check -- you know, bed check, make sure everyone's in their room and lights are out. So they would actually, you know, open your door and poke their head in. So weren't allowed to lock our doors. They've come up with a new policy since then, though.

And so on big nights when upperclassmen either picked their branch or posted, which are kind big party nights at West Point -- not partying in the barracks, obviously, but -- at like the First Class Club, where cadets can buy beer -- we would have certain upperclassmen that would stay sober and would kind of roam the halls to make sure that those upperclassmen that had been drinking didn't do anything stupid.

So I always felt perfectly protected, you know, with or without the threat of sexual assault. I never -- just like my mom was saying, you know, I never felt it was an issue for me.

Another part of that was probably that we were both Corps Squad our plebe year. My mom ran all four years, and I ran my freshman and sophomore year. So I was actually gone a lot on the weekends and, you know, in the evening was at practice for track and cross country. So I wasn't around quite as much as a lot of other women were.

MAJ. KULUNGOWSKI: I can say also when I was there, there weren't enough women to have women in every class, in every company.

So, for instance, Class of '80 was, say, in -- I think they were in A Company of each regiment, and maybe A and C, and then we must have been in B and D when we came along. And so there were only six women in each company. And so in my company, which was (F-3 ?), when we arrived to the Class of '81, there were no other women in the company.

And then so the Class of '80 companies that had women, I think, and then my classmates who had women in their company, the prejudice against women went away much more quickly, I found, because they were working with us day to day, and those inherent prejudices that they may have come in with were quickly dispelled when they realized that, oh, gosh, she can do as many pull-ups as I can, or she is as good in math as I am, or, you know, that kind of thing; whereas my classmates who did not have women in their company, some of those prejudices kind of prevailed throughout their time and that they didn't have the day-to-day exposure to women that my classmates in my company did.

So it's just kind of an -- it was an observation that, the longer I was there, I realized that, huh, some of these guys -- you know, the day-to-day exposure actually was very beneficial.

Q Wonderful. Thank you.

My second question is, I've tended -- I have had some conversation with some -- I'm actually a military spouse. I'm former Army, also am I, so -- (inaudible) -- (laughter). And in fact, Major, I met you many, many years ago, but you would not remember it. (Laughs.) Yes, yes. I'm an ROTC product, and one of the -- yeah. And we met at -- I can't remember when, many years ago.

Q Under a table at the old (club ?) -- (laughter).

MAJ. KULUNGOWSKI: Yeah. (Laughs.)

Q Basically, right. Anyway, many, many years ago. And when I saw your name come across, I was pretty excited to talk. But it was such a brief encounter, you would not remember. I was star struck by you at the time.

MAJ. KULUNGOWSKI: Oh! (Laughter.)

Q So anyway, but recently I had a long conversation with a group of military mothers, and they dropped what I considered was a bomb on me when they explained two of them were also prior active duty. One was enlisted, one was an officer. And they now have children serving.

And the one mom looked at me and said it's a different heart muscle. When your husband deploys or when you deploy, you know what you're facing. But when your child deploys, when your child is the one that's facing the possibility of going into imminent danger, it changes everything.

And I just wanted to know if you had experienced that. What was that like for you when your daughter announced she did want to follow into your footsteps? And now, in light of the fact that we're in an ongoing conflict, what are your thoughts toward that?

MAJ. KULUNGOWSKI: Well, we haven't really experienced it firsthand yet, because -- I mean, other than, you know, certainly her -- she -- making the decision to go into the military, but the actual real deployment we haven't. But our son-in-law has deployed -- is on his second deployment now. And certainly it makes it much more real when, you know -- (chuckles) -- it's not just some other -- you know, it's not some other person's child, you know, it's -- I mean, yeah, I would have to agree, I mean, and I -- it is a whole different mind-set. And certainly as a parent you're much more protective of your children from -- you know, and they think -- and you know, you prepare yourself different -- you know, when you --

Q Certainly.

MAJ. KULUNGOWSKI: -- than, you know, you would -- I -- you know, you want to take care of them, and you know, that doesn't go away.

Q Speak to just the fact that you're the first mother and daughter graduate of West Point. How does that make both of you feel? Were you even

aware of it at the time? When did you realize you were the first? Can both of you speak to that?

LT. KELVINGTON: It was sometime in my -- once I was accepted -- was that when, maybe? -- and I don't think we were really aware of it until someone, you know, at the academy mentioned it to us or said something. And then when I really realized, it was -- I was a plebe in my plebe company, and some of the upperclassmen had been in the study room reading and doing -- you know, probably studying for a history exam, and someone came knocking at my door, you know -- "Hey, you know, Cadet, come here, come here. You know, is this you? Is you and your mom?" And that had the registrar for that year, and I was listed for one of our class bullets that, you know, we were the first mother/daughter. So for my graduating class, one of the bullets was, we were the first class to have laptops, and the other bullet we were the first class to have, you know, a mother/daughter cadet.

And so that was the first time I realized, like, oh, yeah, that's my mom and I. And it wasn't a big deal to me because, just as, you know, the bio they sent out said, the military's in our family. You know, my grandfather was -- you know, my mom's dad was an MI officer. My other grandfather served in World War II in the Navy. Both my parents went to West Point. Many of our family friends went to West Point. And so when it came down to make a decision of where to go, me going to West Point really wasn't -- I mean, I don't want to downplay it, but it really wasn't that big of a deal, like it would be in most families. Certainly I knew my parents were proud of me and supported me, but I think -- I mean, I know they would have been proud of me and supported me if, you know, I had gone to X state university just the same.

And certainly when I graduated, that was definitely thrilling. But as far as being accepted and being the first mother/daughter, I don't know that it ever really affected me that much, other than knowing how big of an accomplishment it was to have my mother be a graduate. But as far as mother/daughter, I really just did what I knew and what I was comfortable with.

MAJ. KULUNGOWSKI: When Megan went in, she went in in 2002, and so that was the bicentennial year for the academy, and so they did an extra-large register, which is their -- kind of the book that lists all of the graduates, and for each class they kind of did their notable notables. And what Megan's saying there is that in her class it was, you know, that she was noted as the -- instead of, like, the first mother/daughter -- noted as the first daughter whose both -- or first woman or something whose both parents were graduates, because in the class of 2005, there were actually two sons whose both parents were graduates as well.

So West Point didn't recognize it as the first mother/daughter. They -- you know, the first daughter of both parents had graduated.

MS. KYZER: Okay. CJ or Chuck, did you have any other questions?

Q I wanted --

Q Go ahead.

Q I wanted to ask the lieutenant, I recognize the Black Hawk, but the fixed-wing aircraft I didn't recognize. What is it? LT. KELVINGTON: Okay. Well, the C-12, to start off, is a dual-engine turboprop aircraft that can hold up to eight passengers and is often used for VIP missions.

Q Okay.

LT. KELVINGTON: I'm going to be flying the RC-12, which is used for -- in the intelligence community. So we take all of our passenger seats out and, you know, load with different intelligence equipment.

Q So you would actually be flying that aircraft possibly in a combat zone.

LT. KELVINGTON: Yes, yes.

Q Okay.

MAJ. KULUNGOWSKI: But at 35,000 feet. (Laughs.)

Q Oh, okay.

So it's pressurized and --

LT. KELVINGTON: Yes, it is pressurized.

Q Okay.

Q I have, I have a follow-up, if I can.

MS. KYZER: Yeah, go ahead.

Q I guess it's more for Megan because, you know, I'd go back to the combat roles thing. I will definitely agree with you that there are plenty of girlie men in the, in the Army that can't do half the stuff that some of the women can do in the military.

LT. KELVINGTON: (Laughs.)

Q But I guess if we did open up these combat roles to women, should they be judged on the same standard as far as like weight in their packs and, you know, length that they march and the PT standards and things like that? Or go ahead.

LT. KELVINGTON: As far as the Army's standard for PT tests, I do agree with having different standards. Because you're going to get -- you -- you know, that's Army-wide. There's different standards for different age groups and all that kind of stuff. As far as what you're talking about, you know, let's say, open it up to the infantry, letting -- you know, just take it from there, okay, let women go to Ranger School, then no, there should be no different standard, if we're going to go that far, because there's no different standard for age groups in that sort of thing.

You know, going to Ranger School, they don't say, oh, well, you know, sir, you're coming in late. You're 40 so, you know, you don't have to carry the saw.

No, it doesn't work like that. So if, you know, if women are going to enter, then there should be no difference. And as a matter of fact, I actually had -- there was two or three women in my West Point graduating class that used

to max the PT test on the men's scale. So there are women out there fully capable to do it.

Q Absolutely.

LT. KELVINGTON: So -- no, I would not agree with having a different standard.

Q If I could ask your mom -- Ma'am, one question as well -- having been in the military life and the civilian life, kind of seeing both sides of it, do you -- do you think the military -- how does the military compare with civilian life with regard to opportunities for women?

MAJ. KULUNGOWSKI: Hm.

Q Or I guess their treatment of women as well would be another way of putting it.

MAJ. KULUNGOWSKI: I think it -- I think that treatment is -- well, I've only been a government civilian since 2003. And I think, you know, certainly working as an Army civilian -- there's many female SES, you know, employees, and I think it seems as though we certainly compete on an equal footing. I really haven't worked, you know, private sector so much in terms of, you know -- I don't know.

I know -- you know, as I kind of look around at -- some of the defense industry doesn't seem as -- Lockheeds and Boeings and (inaudible) -- I think they're trying to improve their diversity -- (chuckles) -- but it seems to be still pretty much -- you know -- white male dominated. But a lot of that also is they have frequently hired retired (general ?) officers, and certainly the preponderance of those are male.

Q All right. Well, thank you, Lindy. I'm done.

MS. KYZER: Okay. Are there any other questions out there? Well, we'll go ahead and we are getting close to our time. We'll go ahead and wrap up.

I had -- as a PEO, I had one question, so if you include this in your closing, and if you already addressed it, I apologize. I'm a little dense sometimes. But just talk about, for both of you, different perspectives why you initially made that step to go to West Point. And I know -- I'm sure, Lieutenant Kelvington, your parents had more of a swaying in you -- but I guess especially for Major Kulungowski what -- kind of what prompted you as -- you know, especially at that time to decide to go to West Point. MAJ. KULUNGOWSKI: Well, I actually graduated from high school here in Arlington, so there was a -- my dad was at the Pentagon, and so it was -- the fact that women were going to the academy was a known topic.

The seed had actually been planted when I was about 10 and my dad had sent away for a catalogue for my brother. And it happened to be in the car. And he said, oh, what's that? And he said, oh, you know, that's something on the military academy, but Paul's not going to -- you know, Paul's not interested. And I said, oh maybe I -- you know, maybe I could go. No, they don't take women. And it's like, what?

What do you mean, you know, women -- girls can't go there? What is that? So it kind of got, you know, stuck in there.

So then when it -- when they opened it, you know, it's like oh, huh. And then as I started to look at colleges here, I really wasn't sure what I wanted to major in. And at that point, at West Point you took a very broad curriculum and had no major. So I thought, well, that -- you know, that would probably be good for me. I -- you know, maybe I could -- out of all that smattering of things that you take, maybe I would find something I was interested in and then I would have five years of job experience, you know, in doing that and then go out into the big, broad world. So that's kind of what shaped my decision.

MS. KYZER: (Great ?).

LT. KELVINGTON: As for me, as I stated before, I grew up knowing about West Point, and somewhat of what it was all about. But I think one of the big things was the comraderies that came out of it. Hearing my parents talk about, you know, a majority of our families friends and -- were -- had gone to West Point with my parents, and the memories they had together, how close our families were really because that bond started through, as we call it in our family, mutual misery at times. But it was like, gosh, you know, you can't get that anywhere else.

And then I really realized I wanted to go into the Army over other services, and it was like, well, if I'm going to go to the Army, I might as well go to the academy and really get the whole experience out of it. And I'm -- although I always say that graduation day, seeing it in the rearview mirror was a great time in my life, I really did enjoy my experience there. I mean, I met my husband there. All of my best girlfriends, I've met at -- you know, we went through West Point together. So I really don't have a bad thing to say.

Q Well, if you ever need a new first sergeant, I'm looking for a new job. (Laughter.)

Q I have one last question, if I could just jump in -- this is Beth again. I have an Internet talk show for military spouses, and I just wondered if there was a possibility to have both of you on my show.

MAJ. KULUNGOWSKI: Sure. LT. KELVINGTON: Sure.

Q Lindy, I assume I can contact you --

MS. KYZER: Yeah. Just let me know if they'll agree to it. Nothing like getting them live on the air to make them say that they'll do it, but yeah, we can we -- we would -- (laughter).

Q No pressure, right?

MS. KYZER: We'd love the opportunity if we could -- (inaudible).

So just shoot me an e-mail and we'll all get connected.

Q Well, the lieutenant jumps out of perfectly good airplanes, so she probably could do a talk show.

MS. KYZER: Yeah. There you go. Exactly. This is easy.

Well, again, thank you so much everyone who was on the line. We will have a transcript, and you can catch the audio file. It will be at [defenselink.mil/blogger](http://defenselink.mil/blogger). Thank you again so much, Major Kulungowski and Lieutenant Kelvington. It was a pleasure to have you on the line. And this concludes the roundtable. Thank you very much.

LT. KELVINGTON: Thank you.

MAJ. KULUNGOWSKI: Thank you.

MS. KYZER: Bye-bye.

END.