



# Maritza S. Ryan

Colonel Maritza Sáenz Ryan graduated from West Point in 1982, a member of only the third class to include women cadets, and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Field Artillery. Her first assignment in the Army was to the 1st Armored Division Artillery in Nuremberg, West Germany. Due to her outstanding military record and academic achievements, she was selected for the U.S. Army's Funded Legal Education Program and returned stateside to attend law school. Upon graduation from Vanderbilt University Law School, where she was selected for Order of the Coif, and admission to the New York bar, she transferred to the Judge Advocate General's Corps (JAGC) and was assigned as a trial counsel (prosecutor) at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Then-Captain Ryan deployed shortly thereafter, during Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm, as brigade legal counsel for a Field Artillery brigade of 1,000 soldiers. She served as one of a small number of women officers and soldiers in the brigade. After her return from Saudi Arabia and Iraq, Colonel Ryan was selected to attend the Command & General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Upon graduation, she was scheduled to assume a significant position at JAG Corps headquarters in Washington, DC. A life-challenging battle with cancer, however, altered those plans. After an extremely rigorous course of ultimately successful treatment, Colonel Ryan recovered, was retained on active duty by the Army, and applied for a position as an Academy professor at West Point. She was selected as Deputy Head, Department of Law, at the U.S. Military Academy in August, 2001.

In 2006, Colonel Ryan became the Professor and Head of the Department of Law, a position requiring presidential nomination and congressional confirmation. Upon her appointment, she became the first woman and first Hispanic West Point graduate to serve as an academic department head in the Academy's 210-year history.

In an essay entitled *In Blood and Spirit* for Maria Shriver's 2009 book *A Women's Nation*, Colonel Ryan

quoted her mother, Angela, as advising her when considering whether to accept the challenge of becoming a cadet at West Point: "If only I had had the opportunity, I would have taken it!" Today, Colonel Ryan's tenacious commitment to West Point—and the timeless values it represents—continues unabated. In 2008, the West Point Center for the Rule of Law was established under her leadership. Already the Center has hosted a number of major conferences, featuring speakers as diverse and distinguished as U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder, Her Majesty Queen Noor, and broadcast journalist Dan Rather, among many others. This year's spring conference, held over three days in April, examined the topic *Gender Justice: Toward Achieving Equality*. The Center, thanks to visionary donors and grantors, has also sponsored a number of cadet educational trips and activities, to include the Point-to-Point Project, a groundbreaking visit to the slums of West Point, Liberia, to examine and assist with post-civil war rule of law issues, and the War-Crimes Staff Ride, a trip through several European countries, studying the circumstances of major wartime atrocities and ending at the site of the International Military Tribunals in Nuremberg, Germany.

Just as women in all sectors of the law face daunting glass ceilings, women in the military still also face "brass" ceilings. Because of Colonel Ryan's strong belief that both male and female cadets benefit immensely from having women judge advocates as teachers and mentors, she has made it a top priority to increase the number of women officers on the law faculty. She also continues to be one of the strongest advocates at West Point for enhancing the number of women in the Corps of Cadets. Colonel Ryan serves as a senior advisor to the Margaret Corbin Forum, a student organization dedicated to educating, empowering, and inspiring young women and men to achieve full and equal gender integration in the Corps and the Army. She has been instrumental in raising awareness of the inequity and impracticality of the Combat Exclusion Policy, which restricts women's roles and opportunities in the military regardless of talent or ability.

Whether serving as a Field Artillery officer, a judge advocate, or a professor, Colonel Maritza Ryan has excelled throughout her career and was named in 2006 as one of the Top 100 Influential Hispanics in America (government category) by *Hispanic Business Magazine*. Married to classmate Robert Ryan for over 29 years, she is the proud mother of two enlightened sons, Alexander, 21, a cadet 2nd class at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut, and Andrew, 18, a cadet candidate at the U.S. Military Academy Preparatory School.