

Linda Strite Murnane



Colonel Linda Strite Murnane's family did not have the financial resources to send their children to college. She worked her way through three years of college and enlisted in the United States Air Force in 1974 at the age of 22 as an

airman basic, the lowest enlisted grade, hoping to finance her goal of attending law school.

Within 18 months of her enlistment, she completed her B.A. in political science with honors and in 1977 was commissioned as a second lieutenant. When she arrived at an assignment to Keesler Air Force Base, Mississippi, she was accepted to attend night law school at Loyola University. Four nights a week, after finishing her more than 40-hour-per-week military duties, she drove 100 miles each way to New Orleans to attend classes. In 1978, the Air Force selected her to attend law school full-time under the Funded Legal Education Program.

Colonel Murnane continued to commute 200 miles a day, five days a week, through the date of her delivery of the first of two children born while she was in law school. The Department of Defense policy prior to 1976 would have required Colonel Murnane either to surrender her children for adoption or to separate from the military. Thirty years later, in May, 2007, Colonel Murnane's historical review of the legislative treatment of women in the military was published in the *Duke Law Journal of Gender Law and Policy*.

Due to illness in her family, she transferred to the University of Cincinnati College of Law, where her second daughter was born with a variety of medical conditions. Despite juggling the responsibilities of managing the serious medical conditions of her two children, as well as her law school studies, Colonel Murnane won the American Jurisprudence Award in constitutional law and was one of the first six Urban Morgan Fellows in International Human Rights. She satisfied her degree requirements in December, 1980 with a G.P.A. near the top 10% of her class. She completed the journey

from airman basic to lawyer and captain in the Air Force in less than seven years, with two children born en route to accomplishing that goal.

In 1994, after many assignments throughout the world, Colonel Murnane was selected as one of only two women to serve on the Air Force trial bench as a military judge. For the next 10 years, her service as a military judge included tours as a chief circuit judge in Europe and at Bolling Air Force Base in Washington, D.C. As chief circuit judge in Europe, Colonel Murnane presided over the first Air Force trials conducted in the war zones in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom and deployed five times to Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia.

Colonel Murnane served on the first U.S. military assistance team sent to Rwanda following the genocide, and she provided training on freedom of speech and freedom of the press. She presented the same program to the Argentine military in Buenos Aires, where they continue to deal with issues of the "disappeared persons."

Before her current duties in The Hague, she served for two years as the executive director of the Human Rights Commission for the Commonwealth of Kentucky, where she continued her passionate fight for equal justice for all people.

Having retired from the U.S. Air Force in 2004, Colonel Murnane presently serves as a United Nations staff member at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague. She provides support for the international judges appointed by the United Nations Security Council to preside over the trials of the six accused of serving as leadership of the Herceg-Bosna community and six associates of Slobodan Milosevic who are accused with crimes in Kosovo. She also is responsible for the support to the international judges trying the case of Voljislav Seselj, leader of the Serbian Radical Party.

Colonel Murnane's commitment to gender equality in the military is legendary among her contemporaries. Her efforts helped transform the military law practice from an overwhelmingly male-dominated profession to one in which, today, women lawyers have risen to the general officer rank in the Army and the Air Force and many more are in the pipeline to achieve even greater success.