

## Proud to serve: Retired Chief Warrant Officer 3 meets Dutch Royalty and WWII Veterans

1st Sustainment Command (Theater) Public Affairs  
Story by Staff Sgt. Josephine Pride



Monique Ryan, retired chief warrant officer 3, far right, greets King Willem-Alexander, with Queen Maxima during a visit at the Arlington National Cemetery on June 1, 2015. The event was a part of a commemoration ceremony held to honor the American service members who fought in Europe during World War II. (Courtesy photo)

FORT BRAGG, N.C. – As she gazes at the two unit names engraved in the bottom of the Operation Market Garden memorial in Nijmegen, Netherlands, goose bumps form on her skin from the thought of how these units shared a part of her life.

The 53rd Quartermaster Detachment (Airdrop Support), 101st Airborne Division, and Echo Company, 782nd Maintenance Support Battalion, then known as 407th MSB, 82nd Airborne Division, both played a vital role during the liberation of Holland in World War II and were also units Monique Ryan, a retired Chief Warrant Officer 3, served in during her Army career.

“I’ve always thought it was such an honor to do it because to me, it feels like paying back a debt,” said Ryan, who visits the Operation Market Garden memorial every time she travels back to Holland.

Born and raised in Helmond, Holland, Ryan has an emotional attachment to serving in both of these storied units.

At the age of 22, Ryan first journeyed to the United States after she married a U.S. Soldier she met in Europe.

Things did not go as planned and once they separated, she decided to join the Army in 1986.

“I had a hard time getting a job,” said Ryan as she looks off into the distance in a moment of reflection. “I literally pawned everything I owned.”

Ryan was originally supposed to join the Army as a multi-channel transmission systems operator, but that all changed once her drill sergeant realized she was not an American citizen.

“The only thing they offered me was cook, prescribed load list clerk and rigger,” said Ryan. “The drill sergeant told me ‘go ahead, pick rigger because you’ll never make it through,’ so I went to rigger school.”

Ryan could barely do a push-up when she reported for duty, but she would not let that hold her back.

“I broke my leg on the fifth jump and became a holdover,” said Ryan. “You either had to make all your jumps or you had to re-class, and I said I wasn’t re-classing again.”

Ryan was determined to finish rigger school and prove her drill sergeant wrong when he said she would

not complete the training.

It's my father telling me I would never amount to anything, and it's that drill sergeant that told me 'you're not going to make it', said Ryan. You look at all those things and you have two choices: you can say woe is me or you can say forget you.

She fully recovered from her injury and finished the last jump she needed to graduate.

At first glance, Ryan's stern expression may intimidate those who do not know her, but as her personality unfolds, her down-to-earth, candid nature reveals itself.

"I got in trouble a lot because of my mouth," said Ryan. "I received every rank twice till I made E5."

Donna Tabor, Fort Bragg command historian, can relate to how hard it was for a woman coming up through the ranks during those times.

"As an early female paratrooper at Fort Bragg in 1979, I remember what it was like to be a woman in a man's world," said Tabor. "It is amazing the strides female Soldiers have made since my time."

There were not a lot of women serving as riggers in the Army during that time, but Ryan did not let that stop her while being only one of two females in her entire unit.

She exemplifies the famous saying "Well-behaved women seldom make history," by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich.

"I always wanted to do that one thing that was outside the norm to do," said Ryan. "If I would have just stayed in the middle or just stayed unnoticed or done a job that a lot of women did it wouldn't have made a difference."

Ryan excelled in her career and achieved a lot of first-time accomplishments for women in the Army during her service. However, she makes it known that she only wants to be recognized for the hard work she put in every single day.

"It doesn't matter if you are male or female," said Ryan. "It matters if you do what needs to be done and do it right in such a way that you can look back at it and say, 'I did that the right way.'"

As a junior Soldier, Ryan competed in her unit's Soldier of the Month board and eventually surpassed her peers as the first female Soldier of the Year for U.S. Army Europe.

When it came to the board uniform for 21st Theater Sustainment Command, female Soldiers had to wear a skirt, said Ryan. As a paratrooper, you have to wear boots and a beret, which require you to wear pants.

When asked by the 21st TSC sergeant major why she did not want to wear a skirt she replied by saying she did not want to have an advantage by wearing a skirt, but rather by the badges she wore on her chest.

After serving for 11 and a half years, Ryan decided to become a warrant officer.

Adding to her list of firsts, she later became the first female warrant officer to be in charge of the Heavy Drop Rig Site, 782nd MSB on Fort Bragg.

Ryan hung up her boots and beret in 2006 but feels she will always be a Soldier at heart.

When she and her husband returned to Fort Bragg from his tour in Korea, the first thing she did the next day was wait to see Soldiers run down Ardennes Street during their morning physical training.

With a drink in hand, she sat down and made a toast to the troops as they ran past her.

"I still get teary-eyed when I think about it," said Ryan.

Although she has called the U.S. home for 30 years now, Holland will always hold a special place in her heart.

She was recently afforded the opportunity to meet the King and Queen of Holland during their visit to the Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia in early June as a part of a commemoration ceremony honoring the American service members who fought in Europe during World War II.

Col. Joseph Simonelli, chief of staff for the cemetery and also a close friend of the family, called to invite Ryan to be a special guest during the Dutch Royal visit.

She was also thrilled to know she would be able to meet veterans who jumped into Holland during the war.

I just wanted to thank them for what they did, said Ryan. Because of the sacrifices they made I was able to grow up the way I did and come over here and join the same exact same units.

Not only was Ryan able to thank the veterans, she also had the opportunity to speak to King Willem-Alexander and Queen Maxima.

"I was so nervous," said Ryan as she places her hands on her cheeks and grins from ear to ear remembering that special moment. "I think I was on cloud 15 leaving out of there," she said.

As a busy wife and mother of two daughters, Ryan keeps herself busy with picture framing as well as helping Soldiers in need.

She provides professional framing and matting to people and organizations that require frames without making a profit.

When she is not working on frames or spending time with her daughters, she is supporting her husband of 17 years, Col. James Ryan, chief of staff, 1st Sustainment Command (Theater), and caring for their three dogs, and one cat.

As she takes time to reflect on the past events throughout her life, Ryan feels she had a successful career and continues to enjoy living life to its fullest.

"If I would have stayed in Europe, I don't think I would have ever found the strength inside of me that I found when I joined the Army," said Ryan. "It was probably the best thing that could have ever happened to me."

(The 1st Sustainment Command (Theater) provides Theater Sustainment Mission Command to Army, Joint, and Multinational Forces in support of U.S. Central Command Unified Land Operations in order to enable the combatant commander's ability to prevent, shape, and win our nation's wars.)



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