Online Journal of Space Communication

Volume 8
Issue 15 *Women in Space (Spring 2009)*

Article 33

October 2021

Profile of Susan K. Mashiko

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Brig. Gen. Susan K. Mashiko is Vice Commander, Space & Missile Systems Center, Los Angeles Air Force Base, Calif. General Mashiko is responsible for assisting the commander in managing the research, design, development, acquisition and sustainment of space and missile systems, launch, command and control, and operational satellite systems. The Space and Missile Systems Center is the nation's center of technical expertise for military space acquisition with more than 6,500 employees nationwide and an annual total budget in excess of $10 billion.

General Mashiko was born in Glendale, Calif., and entered the Air Force as a graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy where she earned a bachelor's degree in aeronautical engineering. Her career has spanned a wide variety of space and acquisition assignments, including Chief of the Programs Division in the Office of Special Projects, executive officer to the Department of Defense Space Architect, and Program Manager for the Atlas V Program. She has also served as Director of the Evolved Expendable Launch Vehicle System Program, Vice Commander of Air Armament Center, and the Program Executive Officer for Environmental Satellites. For more information on Brig. Gen. Mashiko: http://www.af.mil/information/bios/bio.asp?bioID=8858.

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1) How did you get started in the satellite business?

Because my father was in the space business I grew up surrounded by the space program. My personal interest grew after I entered the Air Force Academy. In 1980, I earned my bachelor's degree in aeronautical engineering and six years later, my Masters of Science degree in electrical engineering. I expanded my satellite knowledge base while working in the Office of Special Projects and for the Department of Defense Space Architect. I later became the Director of the Evolved Expendable Launch Vehicle System Program, and then went on to be the Vice Commander of the Air Armament Center and Program Executive Officer for Environmental Satellites. Most recently, while at the Space and Missile Systems Center (SMC) in Los Angeles, I have served as the Wing Commander of the Military Satellite Communications Systems Wing and the SMC Vice Commander. This summer, I will become the Director of Space Acquisition in Washington, D.C.

2) How have you been involved in changes brought about in or by this business (innovations, technologies, services)?

We at Space and Missile System Center here in L.A., are charged with developing, acquiring, fielding and sustaining the world's best space and missile capabilities for our war-fighting forces and for the nation including communications; precision navigation and timing; weather monitoring; missile

warning and land-based nuclear deterrence. We have very early risk reduction on-going in all programs, a disciplined system engineering process from the very start, and importantly, a very active government engagement and partnership together with industry. At SMC, we focus on mission assurance and mission success, one launch at a time. This is facilitated by a "Back-to-Basics" approach to space acquisitions - an initiative to reestablish rigor and discipline in space systems development. SMC has rebuilt processes, improved engineering and program management rigor, redeveloped the workforce, and reinvigorated partnerships with industry, and implemented engineering and business "best practices." As part of this initiative, we have also implemented a "block development" acquisition approach to manage complex systems development. The overall effectiveness of the "Back to Basics" strategy has been demonstrated by the unprecedented level of success in space and missile systems development, launch, and on-orbit performance.

3) What do you think was the greatest event/situation/opportunity you experienced?

I'd have to say that being the Mission Director for the first few Delta IV and Atlas V launches is very memorable. Having the opportunity to be part of this new generation of rockets, from development to launch, was a truly rewarding experience and one of the highlights of my career.

4) What was the greatest obstacle?

I have yet to find it. Obstacles only exist if you believe they do.

5) What do you see happening in the next five years in this industry?

The immediate future will be filled with transition and change for military space as we embrace the policies of a new administration and prepare for the incorporation of the cyberspace mission. We are already adapting to acquisition strategy changes and budget realignments. We will look to supplement our current launch capabilities with smaller vehicles, such as Minotaur 4. Further, our ever increasing population of the high frontier is creating new challenges which will require attention in order to guarantee safe usage of the medium for years to come. Overall, the industry will need to focus on faster delivery at lower cost with greater responsiveness to customer requirements.

6) What advice do you have for women interested in entering the industry?

The Aerospace industry needs talent across many areas of expertise. It's not just a career for rocket scientists. Along with those interested in engineering and science, we need business savvy program managers, sharp financial analysts, contracting and legal specialists, security and intelligence experts, and information technology gurus. If you have solid character, a spirit of service, and

a drive to make a difference in the world, chances are you can develop and apply your talents to the space industry. Never stop learning. I encourage everyone to develop your own talent…pursue what interests and inspires you. If the space career truly interests you, there is a niche for you in this industry.