

Retired Major General Maria Falca-Dodson, The College of New Jersey, Class of 1975

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Retired Major General Maria Falca-Dodson, New Jersey Air National Guard, in the course of three decades in the military, has “soared,” reached “new heights” and “lifted” others to new heights, according to various media accounts.

No matter how others say it, with or without the puns, Major General Falca-Dodson, an alumna of The College of New Jersey ('75) credits her nursing education at TCNJ (then Trenton State College) with providing the fuel that enabled her life to take off.

A two-star general, Major General Falca-Dodson was the first woman to command the New Jersey Air National Guard (2008-2012). Previously, she was the first female Deputy Adjutant General of New Jersey where she had responsibility for day-to-day management of 8,300 members of the NJ Army and Air National Guard and mobilized almost 100 percent of

the soldiers and airmen in support of The Global War on Terror as well as state emergencies including Hurricane Katrina and Rita efforts out-of-state.

“The rigorous nursing program established for me a lifelong work ethic of discipline and the highest standards The nursing program at TCNJ was and is one of the best in the country. And as challenging as the program can be, it also is nurturing. TCNJ sticks with its students, works with them, follows through with them, so they will succeed and graduate,” said Maria, who attended college full time while she was working part-time and commuting from Hamilton Township.

Maria was a senior nursing student at TCNJ when she met a campus Air Force recruiter who sparked her interest in joining the military. Not only did the military promise her adventure, but it also represented what she loved about nursing – the opportunity to make a difference in other people’s lives.

After working for a few years as a nurse, she was commissioned as a First Lieutenant in the 108th Tactical Fighter Wing, NJANG in 1980. Her initial expectation of a short-term military stint in fact turned out to be a commitment of over 32 years. She later achieved a master’s degree from Central Michigan University (1983).

In the final years of her military service, Major General Falca-Dodson was responsible for operational oversight to more than 2,300 personnel in two Air Wings and the budgetary oversight of more than \$91 million in federal funding. Command emphasis on safety and risk management resulted in a tenure of four years of accident-free flying and bombing range use.

Her civilian career, running concurrently with her military career, has been less headline grabbing as far as the “first woman” characteristic, but equally renowned for improving the health and well-

being of others. She now is Vice President of Strategic Initiatives for MDAdvantage, a NJ based professional medical liability company.

In addition to her nursing experience, prior civilian jobs have included serving as director of Military Programs for Vets4Warriors at Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care; assistant director at the War Related Illness and Injury Study Center for the US Department of Veterans Affairs; consultant for the New Jersey Hospital Association's Institute for Quality and Patient Safety; vice president for the MIIX Healthcare Group; and an assistant commissioner for the New Jersey State Department of Health. Governor-elect Phil Murphy just acknowledged her extraordinary career(s) by appointing her as a co-chair to his transition team for Military and Veteran Affairs.

As comfortable as she is with her accomplishments in her civilian and military careers, she is uncomfortable when asked if she inspires a lot of people. She believes that the military personnel with whom she served inspired and continue to inspire her, in the same way that her years at TCNJ made such a difference in her life.

Maria is a passionate fundraiser and cheerleader for her alma mater, where she previously held positions on TCNJ's Alumni Association and Foundation Boards. She will be "forever indebted" to TCNJ for the scholarships and full academic scholarships she received that gave her the opportunity for an education that transformed her life.

"The one thing education does for you – it provides something in life that no one can take away. You can lose jobs, loved ones, but you never lose that four-year degree. I cannot fathom why people would not want to contribute to a cause with such profound benefits for an individual, education in general and society overall."