

Army officer draws on life, career experiences to prepare next generation



By Joe Lacdan, Army News Service, February 13, 2024

Amanda Azubuike is overcome with emotion during her promotion ceremony to brigadier general at Fort Knox, Ky., on Oct. 28, 2022. Azubuike assumed command as the deputy commanding general of U.S. Army Cadet Command where she oversees the...

WASHINGTON — Joining the military never crossed Amanda Azubuike's mind as a teenager growing up in a diverse borough of London.

A desire to further her education and life circumstances would spur her into military service.

Born to a Nigerian father and a Zimbabwean mother, Azubuike emigrated to the U.S. in 1984 and later began her Army career by enlisting in the Arkansas National Guard while attending the University of Central Arkansas.

After three decades in the Army, Azubuike continues to champion education, notably in the fields of science, technology, engineering and math, as she looks to recruit the next generation into the Army's officer corps.

As Army Cadet Command's deputy commanding general, now Brig. Gen. Azubuike oversees changes to how Army cadets train and prepare for the operational Army. Azubuike believes her career as an aviator and public affairs officer prepared her to lead Cadet Command during one of its biggest transitions.

Last year the service announced that it will reassign Army Recruiting Command as a three-star command and will absorb Cadet Command as well as the Army's recruiting marketing team. Cadet Command manages the Army's 274 ROTC programs and oversees the training of 30,000 cadets and 275,000 junior ROTC cadets.

In October, Azubuike and Cadet Command hosted the Junior ROTC Raider Challenge National Competition where JROTC programs from dozens of nationwide high schools compete in an obstacle course, war games and teamwork exercises.

Brig. Gen. Amanda Azubuike, Army Cadet Command deputy commanding general high fives JROTC Cadets as they finish the 5K run at Fort Knox on Nov. 4, 2023 during the Junior ROTC National Raider Challenge. The JROTC National Raider Challenge is an...

Azubuike shares her Army story with cadets from the time she enrolled in an Air Force junior ROTC program, to her commissioning, to joining the Army's general ranks. She also cites the career path of her sister, Fiona Azubuike, who served the Army as a pediatrician and deployed to Afghanistan. Fiona now works in the ER and as a pediatrician in the Miami area.

Amanda Azubuike said she tries to impart that the Army can help new cadets achieve their life objectives whether in a long military career or using the Army as a stepping stone to a civilian job as her sister did. During the school year, Azubuike travels to different colleges and high schools throughout the country and does Q&A sessions with students.

"Whatever goals they have or whatever success looks like to them, the Army can help them achieve that," said Amanda Azubuike, who recently spoke to cadets during events hosted at The Citadel, a traditional military institution in South Carolina, the University of Oklahoma and South Carolina State University. "And so that's the message that I take when I travel across the country and I'm looking at potential cadets and potential future lieutenants."

Azubuike said the Army currently seeks more diversity within its ranks and officers skilled in technology and STEM career fields.

To reach a more diverse demographic of recruits, the Army established Strategic Officer Recruiting Detachments, or SORD in Houston and Los Angeles. SORDs spread awareness and educate diverse populations on college and Army careers. They also offer scholarships to high school seniors.

“We are trying to ensure that our officer corps is more diverse and representative of the Army as a whole,” she said.

During the summer, the command also oversees a 5,000-member support staff that assists with Cadet Summer Training at Fort Knox, Kentucky.

Azubuike said Cadet Command maintains close partnerships with historically black colleges and universities and Hispanic serving institutions. This month, the command will send representatives to the Black Engineer of the Year awards in Baltimore to recruit potential officer candidates.

Education as a foundation

Azubuike’s father, a lawyer, and her mom, a nurse, instilled the importance of the pursuit of knowledge into her.

“It was expected that we go to college,” said Azubuike. “Education was extremely important and reinforced in our home academics. It was extremely important to my mom and dad.”

Azubuike recalled her first introduction with the military: graphic images of the Vietnam War posted by the British media in magazines and broadcasts. As a child, she remembered her mother shielding her eyes from the images.

When she arrived in the U.S. at age 14 she had plans to attend college. But she could not earn an academic scholarship until she earned her U.S. citizenship. So Azubuike joined the Arkansas National Guard at 17 serving as a chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear specialist.

“I was concerned. I was a skinny, little 100-pound 17-year-old girl,” she said. “I was concerned with my abilities to get past basic training. I didn’t know anything else. I didn’t play sports because coming from an African home, my parents were focused on academics.”

To her surprise, Azubuike excelled during basic training and formed close bonds and relationships during her short time in the Guard.

Following her graduation from Central Arkansas she finished flight school in 1995. Azubuike began her career flying UH-1 Iroquois helicopters and then the RC-12 Guardrail. She had dreams of becoming a commercial pilot and planned to leave the Army after 10 years.

Then 9/11 changed her plans, and the Army retained her with its stop-loss program. Airlines also furloughed staff, making her future uncertain. Azubuike decided then to commit to the Army as a career and transitioned to public affairs after a decade as an aviator and working in combat arms. She eventually landed a public affairs position at the Army's Pentagon headquarters.

She tries to relay her experiences in the Army with cadets. In addition to fostering relationships with different colleges, she also works closely with the Army Enterprise Marketing Office based in Chicago, Civilian Aides to the Secretary of the Army, or CASAs, and community leaders.

"I talk to cadets about this all the time. You're going to face challenges," Azubuike said. "You're given a mission and a short amount of time; you don't have enough people to do your mission. You're having to assess your resources.

"It's all in how you approach them. In any leadership position, it's your job to really assess your determined strengths and weaknesses within your team, and how you're going to bring out the best in everybody ... And so that's what I've generally done in every job that I've had."

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