

Nursing specialist excels with employer's support

She started off gliding, but Group Captain Jenny Lumsden is now one of the Royal Australian Air Force's true high flyers.

Group Captain Lumsden, who joined the Air Force Reserve in 1987, is a Clinical Nurse Consultant in Intensive Care at Royal Melbourne Hospital and combines this high-pressure civilian role with an equally challenging military career.

Group Captain Lumsden joined the Air Force as a Medical Assistant and given the lowest rank – Aircraftswoman, In 2007, she became the first woman to be promoted to the rank of Group Captain in the Air Force Reserve.

Her extraordinary career was the focus of 120 women at this year's Enterprising Women Conference at Parliament House in Canberra late last month.

"I have been extremely lucky in a lot of what I have been able to achieve, both in my civilian and military careers. But I haven't done it alone," she told the audience.

"I have had support from my family, colleagues and mentors in the Air Force and the civilian health arena. I have to give special credit to the managers at my current hospital, Royal Melbourne Hospital.

"Although I always check to make sure that they are happy for me to go before I give a commitment to the Air Force, they understand my commitment and have allowed me to deploy without hesitation."

Group Captain Lumsden has served in East Timor, helped save Australian lives after the second Bali Bombing and has also completed a tour of the Middle East as well as many aeromedical evacuations.

On two occasions, she gave Royal Melbourne Hospital 24 hours notice that she was deploying.

The audience was in awe as she described her first tour to Iraq in 2004.

"Patients mainly came by helicopter in our MASH-like hospital.

"We were confronted with patients from newborn babies to the elderly and everyone in between. We even delivered a baby.

"It was pretty basic working conditions. We ran short of IV poles so we used safety pins to hold the IV bags up on the tent lining. The beds were pretty hard and working body armour and a helmet is a whole new experience."

Group Captain Lumsden also shared her personal motto with the audience, primarily members of Women Chiefs of Enterprises International.

"You get out of life what you put into it," she said.

“I guess that health personnel have always felt some sense of needing to be there to help and support people close to the front line, to help care for those that are sick or injured, often not considering the risk to their personal safety.

“We want to use our skills and expertise to try and make a difference and allow people to be able to come home to their families.”

The Reserve has offered Group Captain Lumsden the best of both worlds.

“Opportunities do not present themselves to you without some effort on your part,” she said.

“I found an interesting quotation by Thomas Jefferson about luck. He said ‘I’m a great believer in luck and find the harder I work, the more I have of it’.

“I wear two hats – I am a part-time member of the Air Force team, a very professional team, and I am part of an Intensive Care team, both which I think gain from the experiences I have had with the other.

“I have been lucky.”