

Gen. Michael J. Dugan

July 1, 1990–September 17, 1990



Portrait by George Pollard



MICHAEL J. DUGAN was born on February 22, 1937, in Albany, New York. He received a high school diploma from Saint Peter's Academy in Saratoga Springs, New York, and then entered the U.S. Military Academy. He graduated in 1958 with a bachelor of science degree. He then completed the Air Force primary, basic, and advanced flying training schools. After a four-year stint with the 79th Tactical Fighter Squadron in England, where he flew F-100s, and a two-year stateside tour at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida as an A-1 pilot, he went to Pleiku Air Base in the Republic of Vietnam in January 1967 as an A-1E pilot for the 1st Commando Squadron.

From November 1967 to November 1972 Dugan was stationed at the Air Force Academy, serving in several assignments including air officer commanding. In 1972 he earned a master of business administration degree from the University of Colorado in Boulder and attended the Air Command and Staff College. The following year he studied at the Air War College at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama.

From June 1973 to July 1977 Colonel Dugan was assigned to Headquarters U.S. Air Force, Washington, D.C., first as an action officer and branch chief in the office of the deputy chief of staff, plans and operations, and then as executive to the vice chief of staff. He next served at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, as vice commander and later commander of the 355th Tactical Fighter Wing. Dugan subsequently became commander of the 23d Tactical Fighter Wing, England Air Force Base, Louisiana, and commander of the 832d Air Division at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.

In May 1982 he moved to Langley Air Force Base, Virginia, where he served successively as Tactical Air Command's assistant deputy chief of staff for operations, inspector general, and deputy chief of staff for operations. He was assigned to the office of the deputy chief of staff for plans and operations at Air Force Headquarters and worked as director of operations starting in June 1986 and as assistant deputy chief of staff beginning in January 1987. Seven months later he became Air Force deputy chief of staff for programs and resources and held that position until he became deputy chief of staff for plans and operations in March 1988. The following April Dugan went to Europe as commander in chief, U.S. Air Forces in Europe, and

commander, Allied Air Forces Central Europe, at Ramstein Air Base, West Germany. In July 1990 he replaced General Welch as chief of staff of the U.S. Air Force.

General Dugan's primary goal was to eliminate boundaries, and to that end he was intent on integrating functions, opening communications, and solving problems. Outgoing and personable, Dugan was especially interested in facilitating communications and "spreading the word" both inside and outside of the Air Force. One of his initiatives was the "Latest Word" message, in which he used three monthly messages to field personnel to provide correct information in advance of the media, hopefully to eliminate fear, anxiety, or uncertainty with respect to possible manpower cutbacks and the threat of war.

In an effort to improve communications with the media, Dugan provided them with an "On Target" program that listed the key Headquarters U.S. Air Force officials who were competent to discuss all Air Force issues. His effort to be more communicative with the media and the public prematurely ended his tenure as chief of staff of the Air Force. In the midst of the Operation Desert Shield deployment, he flew to Saudi Arabia on an inspection and took several members of the Air Staff and three reporters on his aircraft. He granted interviews to the reporters during the trip. Subsequently, Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Colin C. Powell objected to some of his comments, reported in the media, on the status of U.S. forces and future operations in the Persian Gulf. Cheney relieved Dugan as chief of staff effective September 17, 1990, although he remained on active duty as a special assistant to Secretary of the Air Force Donald B. Rice until January 1991. At the time of his departure, Dugan penned the following message: "To the men and women of the Air Force—Your mission—providing air power and space power to the nation—is essential and enduring. I bid you a fond farewell with my head high, my Mach up, and my flags flying. Good luck, good hunting, and Godspeed to the greatest Air Force in the world."

After his retirement from the Air Force, Dugan lectured for several years on strategic studies at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. In 1992 he became president of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. He has also served occasionally as an expert on military matters for the national media.