

CMG **SPEAKS** »»

## HEATHER “LUCKY” PENNEY

---

Former USAF Lieutenant,  
Mitchell Institute for  
Aerospace Studies Defense  
Policy Expert



### BIOGRAPHY

Most widely recognized for her service on September 11, Heather “Lucky” Penney is a renowned speaker on topics ranging from personal courage; decision-making under stress; leadership; organizational transformation; inclusivity; high performance teams; national defense issues; and aviation. Heather was part of the first wave of women who went directly into fighters from pilot training. She grew up around aviation and warbirds, and learned that Congress had opened combat aviation to women while she was earning her Master of Arts at Purdue University where she stood up the first collegiate team to race in the Air Race Classic. She applied to the Air National Guard and earned her wings at ENJJPT, Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training, where she flew the T-37 and T-38. The first and only woman in the 121st Fighter Squadron, Heather deployed to Operation Iraqi Freedom for initial combat operations as a night-time SCUD Hunter in the western deserts of Iraq, also supporting Special Operations Forces. She flew the F-16 for ten years before having to make the difficult decision to leave the fighter aviation as a single mother. She continued to serve, flying the Gulfstream G-100 Astra jet for another six years in the VIP Special Airlift Mission. For over ten years, Heather was a Director of various Air Force programs for Lockheed Martin, specializing in capture management, government relations, and strategic business development. Her portfolio included the F-22, the F-16, F-35 training, and the Air Force’s Advanced Pilot Training competition to replace the T-38. She now is a Senior Resident Fellow for the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies at the Air Force Association, where she researches and advises on defense policy issues related to airpower and the Air Force. She has been a regular lecturer at the Air Force’s Squadron Officer School; is a Director of the Board for the Experimental Aviation Association; has been inducted as an Air Force Eagle at Air University; and was the Beideman Visiting Scholar at the Oskin Leadership Institute for Weideman University. Heather’s passion for aviation has never faded – she has flown her Taylorcraft BC-12 coast-to-coast, owned several vintage aircraft, and raced jets

at the Reno Air Races; she has over 3,300 hours with Commercial, CFII/MEI, and ATP ratings; and she volunteers with the Collings Foundation, copiloting their B-17 when her busy schedule allows her to get away. She enjoys flying her WWII Army Air Forces PT-13 Stearman, 1961 aerobatic Bucker Jungmann, and 1950 Cessna 170A with her husband, two daughters, and rescue dog, Gilmore (named after Roscoe's lion). When she isn't in the air, you can usually find her with her family, camping and hiking in a National Park.

## **CONDENSED BIOGRAPHY**

Most widely recognized for her service on September 11, Heather "Lucky" Penney was part of the first wave of women who went directly into fighters from pilot training. The first and only woman in the 121st Fighter Squadron, Heather deployed to Operation Iraqi Freedom for initial combat operations as a night-time SCUD Hunter in the western deserts of Iraq, also supporting Special Operations Forces. She flew the F-16 for ten years before having to make the difficult decision to leave the fighter aviation as a single mother. She then flew the special airlift mission and retired out of the Pentagon. For over ten years, Heather was a Director of various Air Force programs for Lockheed Martin, specializing in capture management, government relations, and strategic business development. She now is a Senior Resident Fellow for the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies at the Air Force Association, where she is an expert on defense policy issues related to airpower and the Air Force.