Sue Gray, 50, has been promoted to the rank of Air Vice-Marshal and appointed Director of Combat Air at Defence Equipment & Support. Having twice served her country on the frontline she will now be responsible for the procurement and maintenance of all combat aircraft, training aircraft and remotely-piloted air systems for the Armed Forces.

Air Vice-Marshal Gray joined the RAF in 1985 and was commissioned into the Engineer Branch. During her career she has deployed to Iraq on both the First Gulf War in 1991, and again on Operation Telic in 2003 when she was Chief Engineer for the Joint Helicopter Force.

She is the second woman in the RAF to be promoted to Air Vice-Marshal after Elaine West was appointed Director of Projects and Programme Delivery at the Defence Infrastructure Organisation in August.

Air Vice-Marshal Sue Gray said:

"It is an immense privilege to have served my country for the last 28 years in the RAF and I am delighted to continue to do this in my new role as Director of Combat Air. I look forward to the challenges of ensuring the UK stays at the cutting edge of combat air power, delivering world class fast jet, training aircraft and remotely piloted air systems to our Armed Forces."

Defence Minister Anna Soubry said:

"I am delighted that the Armed Forces continue to demonstrate there are no glass ceilings for female personnel and that they recognise and promote the best people, irrespective of gender. The vast majority of roles in the Armed Forces are open to women and I hope they draw strength from these appointments and take full advantage of the opportunities available to them."

Air Vice-Marshal Gray was commissioned into the Engineer Branch of the RAF in August 1985 after gaining a degree in Electronics from Newcastle Upon Tyne Polytechnic. Her career has encompassed service on VC10 Transport aircraft, taking her all over the world, followed by an extensive period with the Support Helicopter Force, during which time she deployed on the First Gulf War in 1991 and again in 2003 in charge of the life support, logistics and Chief Engineer for the Joint Helicopter Force.

Back in the UK, she had postings as the Senior Engineer Officer on No 27(R) Squadron (Chinook and Puma Helicopters) and Officer Commanding Engineer & Supply Wing at RAF Benson (Merlin and Puma Helicopters) as well as staff appointments in Headquarters Air Command and gaining a MSc in Aircraft Design. More recently, she moved into the Acquisition area within Defence Equipment & Support, leading the Combat Clothing Project Team delivering new body armour, helmets and combat clothing to front line troops. Her most recent job was leading the department delivering Remotely Piloted Air Systems for all three Services.

Prior to Air Vice-Marshal Elaine West's promotion in August, the highest rank held by a regular serving female officer in the modern day RAF was Air Commodore which is a one-star post. In the WAAF and WRAF there had been a two star rank of Air Chief Commandant. The highest ranking female officer in the Navy has been Commodore. The highest rank achieved by a woman in the Army has been Brigadier.