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U.S. Coast Guard History Program

The Integration of Women in the USCG Academy

“Integration Will Be Complete, Treatment Will Be Equal”

As stated by RADM Bill Jenkins, USCG
Superintendent, USCGA (1974-1977)

TIMELINE: Significant Milestones & Dates:

1972

- Equal Rights Amendment passed both houses of Congress (House on 12 October 1971; Senate on 22 March 1972—never ratified)
- 28 March 1972 the first bill introduced in the House that permitted the appointment of women to “any military service academy”. Congress eventually lifted restrictions in August, 1975 with a rider attached to the Defense Authorization bill that year.
- 10 April 1972 the Commandant, Admiral Chester Bender, established an official board “to determine the need for permanent women officers in the regular Coast Guard.” The board concluded in their report submitted to him in May, 1972 that:
 - 1) “No need for regular women officers in specific billets currently exists in the Coast Guard except in cases where a male applicant with adequate qualifications is not available. This requirement in itself does not justify initiation of a program at this time. In fact, a program of such small size is not desirable.
 - 2) Nevertheless, considering all factors, it is in the overall best interest of the Coast Guard to begin a controlled women officer program with provisions for integration into the regular Coast Guard included.
 - 3) Planning and execution of a women officer program in the Coast Guard is overdue.
- 7 November 1972: Richard Nixon was re-elected. The Commandant at the time, ADM Chester Bender, was well aware of the Administration’s strong support of equal rights for women. That support filtered down through the top civilian appointments, including Nixon’s Secretary of Transportation Claude Brinegar.
- **At some point during 1972 it was reported that the Academy conducted a study about admitting women (but no copy of this study/report has been located at this point).**

1973

- February, 1973: First women since World War II report to “Reserve Officer Candidate Program” (OCS) at Yorktown, VA. They became part of Class I-75.

- 8 June 1973: First women since World War II graduated from the “Reserve Officer Candidate Program” and were commissioned Ensigns. Five trained during a two-week cruise aboard CGC *Unimak*—they were the first women to see service afloat.
- 25 July 1973: Congressman Leonor K. Sullivan introduced a bill that became Public Law 93-174 (passed 5 December 1973) that “Provides that, effective upon enactment of this Act, all members of the women's branch of the Coast Guard Reserve who were serving on active or inactive duty on the day before enactment shall become members of the Coast Guard Reserve without loss of grade, rate, date of rank, or other benefits earned by their prior service.”
- 5 December 1973: End of SPARs, women integrated into active-duty & reserve forces.

1974

- 15 January 1974: First group of women ever enlisted as Regulars in the Coast Guard reported to TRACEN Cape May (32 women in total).

1975

- Sometime in late 1974/early 1975 the Academy Superintendent, RADM Bill Jenkins (RADM Jenkins served as the Superintendent from 1974 until his retirement in 1977), established a planning committee to study the issue of integrating women into the Cadet Corps.
- 8 July 1975 Congressman Lester R. Wolff of New York introduced H.R. 8414 that called for the admission of women to the USCG Academy. His bill was referred to the Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries.
- Congressman Wolff's efforts were communicated to SECTRANS William Thaddeus Coleman, Jr., who asked the Commandant, ADM Siler, “Admiral, are there any really valid reasons why women should be kept out of the Coast Guard Academy?” Siler replied in the negative. Coleman then asked that “Do we have to wait for Congress to act upon this?” Again, ADM Siler responded in the negative.
- 29 July 1975 Representative Charles H. Wilson of California introduced H.R. 9011 “A Bill Relating to the Admission of Female Individuals to the Coast Guard Academy.” On the same day Congressman Wolff introduced H.R. 9013 with the same name as Congressman Wilson's bill. Both were referred to the Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries. Wolff then introduced another similar bill, H.R. 9347, on 3 September 1975. It was referred to the Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries.
- 11 August 1975: DOT press release noted that ADM Owen Siler, Commandant announced “that women will join the Corps of Cadets at New London. . .Admiral Siler said his decision to admit women to the Academy was based on the many contributions he expected women to make in the peace-time missions of the Coast Guard. . .He noted that current statutes do not bar the admission of women to the Coast Guard Academy and that action by Congress will not be required. This decision is also in keeping with the strong commitment of the leadership of the Department of Transportation to assure equal rights for women.” An article in the CGA *Alumni Bulletin* noted that “WOMEN JOIN THE CADET CORPS” and that the Academy “thus becomes the first of the armed forces to open its doors to women.” (*Alumni Bulletin* (Sep/Oct 1975), p. 8. (Author noted that “as of this writing” the DOD Authorization Bill had not yet passed and was pending Conference Committee action.)
- Deadline to apply to the CGA for Class of 1976 was 15 December 1975. (DOT Press Release No. 62-75, 11 August 1975); 700 women applied out of a total of a record 10,000 applications received by the CGA—only 3,000 applications received for the previous year. (ALDIST 143; COMDTNOTE 5720).
- In the fall of 1975 there were already 32 female officers and 420 enlisted women currently serving in the Coast Guard.

- On 22 September 1975 Academy Superintendent RADM Jenkins forwarded his “review of and recommendations for change” to implement what the Commandant noted was a “signal initiative” of admitting women to the Academy.
- 7 October 1975 President Gerald Ford signed Public Law 94-106 (DOD Authorization Act) in which an attached rider authorized the admission of women into the armed services’ academies.

1976

- 3 February 1976: The Coast Guard Academy announced the appointments of 50 cadets to enter with the Class of 1980, including three women: Cathryn Lis, Susan Kollmeyer, & Cynthia Snead. The Coast Guard News Release also noted that: “Of the four largest federal service academies (Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard) the Coast Guard Academy is the first to offer an appointment to a woman.” (USCG News Release No. 7-76, 3 February 1976)
- 28 June 1976: Class of 1980 swabs report to the CGA, including 38 women (14 eventually graduated with their Class).

Senior Leadership Attitudes:

- Move to integrate USCG & the Academy began under Commandant Chester Bender (1970-74)
- Elimination of the Women’s Reserve as a “separate” service in December, 1973. Thereafter women reservists were integrated into the CG Reserve and they were then also permitted to enlist in the active Coast Guard or go through OCS to gain an active-duty commission. This was the watershed moment and once this was done the following integration efforts were only a matter of time—there was no turning back and any remaining restrictions were only on the books for a few more years.
- Some resistance at the top initially, but Admiral Siler and Hayes led the way to full integration successfully. Efforts were firmly entrenched and ingrained by the time Commandants James Gracey and then Paul Yost took office.

ADM Chester Bender (1970-1974)—World War II veteran

- Was not in favor of admitting women to the CGA—they would take spots away from men being trained for combat (which at the time women were forbidden by law from doing); argument used by many anti-integration opponents including the later-Secretary of the Navy James Webb.
- Despite this, ADM Bender recognized the “handwriting on the wall” and with pressure from the Nixon Administration for “equal rights for women, to which I subscribe in general terms” in 1972 he ordered a study to be conducted “as to the feasibility of having women” at the Academy. The study found no problem in modifying the Academy’s facilities or course of study to admit women but:

“based upon the conclusions of the academy with regard to the needs of the service and based upon the conclusions of the reviewing personnel at Coast Guard headquarters concerning the needs of the service, we determined that as far as we were concerned, we, the Coast Guard, we didn’t feel it necessary to have women there.”

Interestingly the Commandant of Cadets at the time of that study was then-Captain John Hayes. Hayes later noted that:

“We concluded that there was simply no basis for excluding women from a technical or mechanical perspective. I then went on to say that philosophically, I was not as convinced that this was the right kind of course for the nation to take, and I’ve said, frankly, to women’s groups in years since that I’m still not absolutely convinced that in the long run of our civilization, that this has been a good move. On the other hand, what convinced me to make the decision concerning women in the Coast Guard that I did while Commandant—my belief that they should share equal opportunity and responsibility with the men. Once the political system had made a decision to include women in new ways in the Coast Guard, then there was only one right way to go about implementing that decision. That is to remove all bars to career assignments and opportunities for women.”

He credited his ability to think outside of the box to his graduate degree program at the Naval War College he conducted in the early 1960s—so a relatively conservative service school convinced him to look beyond black and white issues to see the gray—one mark of a good leader—can you look at an issue and see it and act upon it objectively?

ADM Owen Siler (1974-1978); World War II veteran

- Under Admiral Siler’s tenure the Academy opened its doors to women beginning with the Class of 1980 in the summer of 1976. No mention of his personal thoughts other than he would not allow any changes in the Academy’s training or educational programs other than those necessary for “physiological differences between men and women.” His theme over the entire integration effort was on maintaining mission effectiveness without disruption and with minimal distraction.

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