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Women & the U. S. Coast Guard



Moments in History

1830s:

- Women were first officially assigned as keepers in the Lighthouse Service beginning in the 1830s although many wives and daughters of keepers had previously served as keepers when their husbands or fathers became ill. Civilian women continued as lighthouse keepers until 1947.

1859:

- From 1859 to 1862 Maria Andreu (a.k.a. Maria Mestre de los Dolores) served as the Keeper of the St. Augustine Lighthouse in Florida, becoming the first Hispanic-American woman to serve in the Coast Guard and the first Hispanic-American woman to oversee a federal shore installation.

1881:

- Lime Rock Lighthouse Keeper Ida Lewis became the first woman to be awarded a Gold Lifesaving Medal.

1918:

- Twin sisters Genevieve and Lucille Baker of the Naval Coastal Defense Reserve, becoming two of the first uniformed women to serve in the Coast Guard.

1941:

- The Coast Guard hired its first civilian women to serve in secretarial and clerical positions.

1942-1945:

- The Women's Reserve of the U. S. Coast Guard Reserve program (officially nicknamed the "SPARs"), was first established in 1942. LCDR Dorothy Stratton transferred from the Navy WAVES to serve as the director of the SPARs. A total of 978 women officers and 11,868

enlisted women served in the SPARs during World War II. The program was demobilized in 1947 but was reinstated on a much smaller scale beginning in 1949.

- YN3 Dorothy Tuttle became the first SPAR enlistee when she enlisted in the Coast Guard Women's Reserve on 7 December 1942.
- SPAR Harriet Radlay (later Winter) became the first female Quartermaster in either the WAVEs or the SPARs.
- In 1945 the first five African-American females entered the SPARs: Olivia Hooker, D. Winifred Byrd, Julia Mosley, Yvonne Cumberbatch, and Aileen Cooke.
- In 1945 SPAR Marjorie Bell Stewart was awarded the Silver Lifesaving Medal by CAPT Dorothy Stratton, becoming the first SPAR to receive the award.

1947:

- The Women's Reserve of the U. S. Coast Guard Reserve (SPARs) was inactivated on 25 July 1947.

1948:

- On January 31, 1948, Mrs. Fannie Mae Salter, keeper of the Turkey Point Lighthouse in upper Chesapeake Bay since 1925 and the last woman keeper of a lighthouse in the United States, retired from active service. This ended nearly 150 years during which women were employed as keepers of United States' lighthouses.

1949:

- The authority to reestablish the Women's Reserve of the U.S. Coast Guard Reserves (SPARs), approved by the President on 4 August 1949, became effective on 1 November 1949.

1950:

- The U.S. Coast Guard Women's Volunteer Reserve was opened to all eligible veteran SPAR officers in January, 1950.
- On 5 April 1950 the U.S. Coast Guard announced that former enlisted women of the U.S. Coast Guard Reserve could apply for enlistment in the Women's Volunteer Reserve, or SPARs. Enlistments would be for a three-year period with written agreement to serve on active duty in time of war or national emergency.
- On 8 August 1950 the U.S. Coast Guard announced the start of an intensive campaign throughout the nation to reenlist former U.S. Coast Guardsmen and Reservists, including SPARs, in the new Coast Guard Reserve.

1957

- LT Virginia H. Schroeder became the first woman in Coast Guard history to qualify for the Expert Pistol Medal. She qualified with both .38 caliber and .45 caliber pistols.

1958:

- Elizabeth Splaine became the first SPAR advanced to warrant officer.

1960s:

- The first civilian women were hired in non-secretarial occupations such as engineering.

1962:

- Pearl Faurie became the first SPAR advanced to E-9.

1965:

- Approximately 75 women enlisted as SK's and YN's in the USCG Reserve.

1968:

- On 31 January 1968 Coast Guard SPAR Chief Storekeeper Mary Ashley Rose retired "after a career of more than 20 years of service in the Coast Guard. Chief Rose is the first enlisted woman to retire from active duty in the Coast Guard."
- As of 28 October 1968 there were a total of 158 SPARS in the Coast Guard as follows: Officers: 72 ("8 on Extended Active Duty & 64 Reserves of various kinds"); Enlisted: 86 ("29 on Extended Active Duty and 57 Reserves of various kinds").

1972:

- On 28 March 1972 a bill was introduced in the House to authorize the appointment of women to "any military service academy" although this bill fails. Congress eventually lifted restrictions on 7 October 1975 with a rider attached to the Defense Authorization bill that year (Public Law 94-106).
- On 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 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.
- The first women's Reserve Enlisted Basic Indoctrination classes were established in 1972. Four ratings were made available: Yeoman, Storekeeper, Radioman, and Hospital Corpsman.

1973:

- Congressional legislation ended the Women's Reserve and women were first officially integrated into the active-duty Coast Guard and the Coast Guard Reserve. Female reservists then serving on active duty were given the choice of enlisting in the regular Coast Guard or completing their reserve enlistments.
- In February, 1973 the first women since 1945 were admitted to Officer Candidate School.

- On 1 November 1973 enlistment of women was first authorized for four year tours of active duty. The ratings to be held by these women were limited to yeoman (YN), storekeeper (SK), hospital corpsman (HM), photo-journalist (PA), dental technician (DT), and musician (MU).
- On 7 December 1973 the first female enlistees were sworn into the regular U.S. Coast Guard: Y1/c Wanda May Parr and Y2c Margaret A. Blackman at a ceremony held in Yorktown, VA. On that date as well CWO Alice T. Jefferson became the first woman commissioned officer to be sworn into the regular U.S. Coast Guard. Jefferson was sworn in by Admiral Chester Bender, Commandant, at a ceremony held at Coast Guard Headquarters. She retired in 1984 with 24 years of service. CWO4 Jefferson had joined the SPARs in 1943, was discharged in 1945 and returned to service in 1963.

1974:

- The first group of women ever enlisted as "Regulars" reported to Cape May on 15 January 1974.
- Mixed-gender basic training began.
- On 29 February 1974, Radioman (RM), Fire Control Technician (FT), Telephone Technician (TT) and Boatswain's Mate (BM) ratings were opened and school-qualified proviso dropped, thus sanctioning non-rated women.
- In April of 1974 Karen F. Rovinsky became the first woman assigned to a patrol boat with the New York Captain of the Port. She was assigned to a 40-foot patrol boat after attending boat operators school in Yorktown, VA.
- Eleanor L'Ecuyer became the first woman on active duty promoted to Captain (O-6) since World War II.

1975:

- The 3 January 1975 issue of the *Commandant's Bulletin* noted that SN Debbie Atkin was the "first regular woman to graduate from the U.S. Coast Guard Reserve Training Center's Boatswain's Mate School."
- Marlene DeTienne earned her coxswain rating in 1975 becoming one of the first active-duty women to do so. She was the first woman to make BM3 by striking.
- On 5 June 1975 ENS Thomasania Montgomery and ENS Linda Rodriguez graduated from Coast Guard Officer Candidate School, Yorktown, VA, becoming the first African-American female commissioned officers in the Coast Guard.
- On 11 August 1975 a Department of Transportation press release noted that the Commandant, ADM Owen Siler, 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 the Academy "thus becomes the first of the armed forces to open its doors to women." (*Alumni Bulletin* (Sep/Oct 1975), p. 8.
- In November of 1975 the Commandant approved a new uniform for women in the Coast Guard. Edith Head, a celebrated Hollywood fashion expert, designed the uniform.

1976:

- On 1 January 1976 all aviation ratings opened to women. This completed opening to women all ratings in which "their service would not unacceptably impact the sea-isolated/shore duty ratio."
- In February, 1976 the Coast Guard Academy first announced the appointments of 50 cadets to enter with the Class of 1980, including three women: Cathryn Lis of Bristol, CT; Susan Kollmeyer of Groton, CT; & Cynthia Snead of Melbourne, FL. The Coast Guard News Release published on 4 February 1976 regarding their announcement 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; 4 February 1976).
- Debra Chambers Buchanan and Debra Lee Wilson became among the first female coxswains in the Coast Guard.
- In April, 1976, Dior Yvonne Lowen became the first active-duty woman to graduate from ASM "A" school, Lakehurst, NJ.

1977:

- On 24 May 1977 the Coast Guard issued a request for female volunteers to "FILL WOMEN AFLOAT AND LORAN STATION ASSIGNMENTS." Beginning in late-September of that year the first of 24 women chosen for afloat assignments began reporting on board the CGCs *Gallatin* and *Morgenthau* as members of their permanent crew. Twelve women--two officers and 10 enlisted--served on board each cutter.
- Janna Lambine became the first woman designated as a Coast Guard aviator. [Click here](#) for her photo.
- On 1 August 1977 Connie Swaro became the first active-duty woman advanced to E-7.

1978:

- In August, 1978 the Commandant announced that "all personnel restrictions based solely on sex would be lifted." Thereafter all officer career fields and enlisted ratings were open to women.
- In January 1978 YN2 Ella Bragg became the first woman to reenlist in the regular Coast Guard since the Service began accepting women as regular enlistees.
- YNC Holly became the first female company commander at TRACEN Cape May. She commanded the first all-female company Gulf-101.
- SN Lia Adams-deBettencourt was the first woman to be awarded a certificate for completing a tour in the Presidential Honor Guard.
- Marlene DeTienne attended the Law Enforcement School in Yorktown as a BM1 in 1978. DeTienne was the first female active-duty BM1 in the Coast Guard and the first woman to attend LE school. She was invited to be the Coast Guard's enlisted representative to the 1979 DACOWITS Conference and was the only female (and only BM1) in the Ops Center during the 1980 Mariel Boat Lift. She was the first woman to make BM3 by striking.

1978/79:

- Jeanette Roberts Burr became the light-keeper of the New Dungeness Light Station, becoming the first uniformed Coast Guard woman to become a light-keeper. She was the first

woman light-keeper since Fannie Mae Salter, a civilian Coast Guard employee who retired in 1947.

1979:

- Beverly Kelley became the first female commanding officer afloat in U.S. history when she took command of the CGC *Cape Newagen*.
- LT Kay Hartzell became the first female commanding officer of an isolated duty station when she took command of LORAN Station Lampedusa, Italy.
- Sandra Ward West graduated from C-130 Flight Engineer School at Little Rock AFB, becoming the first woman to both attend and graduate from that school. She was the first female C-130 Flight Engineer.
- On 21 June 1979 SN Ina J. Toavs became the first woman to be awarded the Coast Guard Medal.
- Cadet 1/c Linda Johansen became Regimental Commander of the Cadet Corps, the first woman to win Corps command at any of the four service academies.
- MST3 Lia deBettencourt completed MST "A" school with the highest GPA of any Marine Science Technician since the inception of the MST "A" school.
- Marlene DeTienne was invited to be the Coast Guard's enlisted representative to the 1979 DACOWITS Conference.

1980:

- Jean M. Butler and 13 others became the first women to graduate from the Coast Guard Academy. They graduated as part of the Academy's Class of 1980.
- DACOWITS amended its regulations to include the concerns of Coast Guard women.
- On 24 April 1980 First Class Storekeeper Mary Alice "Mike" Shaffer retired from the Coast Guard Reserve after more than 34 years of active and reserve service. She was the last World War II SPAR to retire from the service.
- BM3 Susan Stiteler became the first woman to lead a boat crew to overall victory in a small boat competition as the coxswain of Station Barnegat's small boat.
- In June, 1980, Petty Officer Jan Freeman was assigned to LORAN Station Kure, becoming one of the first two women assigned to isolated/restricted/independent duty there if not in the entire Coast Guard. Petty Officer Freeman had protested the restriction of enlisted women from serving at isolated/restricted/independent duty and forced the Commandant to change that policy.
- Petty Officer Beth L. Suher was the first female quarters manager. She served at Secretary of Transportation Elizabeth Dole's dining room as well as ADM Paul Yost's quarters in the early 1980s. She received her training at the Culinary Institute of America.
- Petty Officer Flora E. Randolph was the first African-American female to work in the AMVER center on Governor's Island, NY. She later became the first African-American female assigned to AIRSTA Savannah.
- Marlene DeTienne was the only female (and only BM1) in the Ops Center during the 1980 Mariel Boat Lift.

1981:

- On 1 September 1981 Connie Swaro became the first active-duty woman to be advanced to E-8.

- Lieutenant Colleen Cain, the first female Coast Guard pilot to fly an HH-52, became the first female Coast Guard aviator to qualify as an HH-52 co-pilot, pilot and aircraft commander.
- SN Cecelia M. (Oakes) Stoutamire became the first African-American woman to be assigned to an icebreaker when she reported aboard CGC *Glacier* in 1981. She also became the first African-American woman to participate in an Operation Deep Freeze cruise while aboard, participating with *Glacier* during Operation Deep Freeze 1981.

1982:

- Lieutenant Colleen Cain became the first woman killed in the line of duty when the HH-52 she was flying as co-pilot crashed during a SAR mission.
- Day Boswell became the first active-duty woman advanced to Public Affairs Chief Petty Officer.

1983:

- The official Coast Guard policy on women in combat was established. The Coast Guard Chief of Staff, RADM Paul A. Yost, noted: "the men and women on our vessels are trained and function as a team. Removal of women during wartime would degrade operational readiness while replacement personnel are trained and acquire experience."
- Angela Dennis and Daphne Reese became the first African-American women to graduate from the Coast Guard Academy.
- Jacqueline A. Ball and Deborah R. Winnie became the first Hispanic-American women to graduate from the Coast Guard Academy.
- AD3 Carolyn DeLeo became the first woman to be awarded the Air Medal
- Robin Patton became the first female radioman advanced to E-7.
- Lia deBettencourt became the first woman to make Coast Guard Person of the Year for an entire District (D-5 in 1983 and D-3 in 1985).

1984:

- BM2 Linda Moroz was the first woman to complete Navy Dive School (she was assigned to the National Strike Force Dive Team, Elizabeth City, NC).
- Vivien Crea became the first Coast Guard woman officer assigned as Military Aide to the President.
- On 17 August 1984 Connie Swaro became the first active-duty woman to graduate from the Coast Guard's CPO Academy.

1985:

- Denise Matthews became the first woman to graduate first in her class at the Coast Guard Academy.
- On 3 June 1985 the first Coast Guard aircraft ever flown by two female pilots conducted a SAR mission off the west coast of Florida. The flight crew consisted of LTJG Vickie Karnes and LTJG Cathy Bierne and they flew a HU-25A from Air Station Miami.
- First woman to graduate at the top of the class from Damage Controlman School at Governors Island, April, 1985.

1986:

- Kelly Mogk (Larson) became the first female Coast Guardsman to graduate from Navy Rescue Swimmer School and was the Coast Guard's first female rescue swimmer.
- Pamela Jones became the first woman promoted to CWO (PERS).
- Lia deBettencourt became the first female MSTC.
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- Ellen Terrill became the first woman promoted to CWO (F&S).
- Connie Swaro became the first woman promoted to CWO (MED).

Sandra Stosz was the first woman to serve as the military aide to the Secretary of the Transportation when she served as Aide to Secretary Sam Skinner from 1989-1990.

Krystine Carbajal became the first enlisted woman assigned as officer-in-charge ashore.

- Robin Patton became the first woman promoted to CWO (COMMS).

Cheri Ben-Iesau became the first African-American female ASM.

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- Lane McClelland was appointed as the Coast Guard's first Women's Policy Advisor.
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- ENS Patricia A. McFetridge becomes the first female Coast Guard aviator to receive the Distinguished Flying Cross.

• Although women had held command cadre positions aboard the Coast Guard's WPB fleet beginning in 1979 it was not until 1994 that the service began integrating their crews. During that year CGC *Monomoy* and *Pea Island* became the first fully integrated patrol boats in the Coast Guard.

- • Diane Perry became the first African-American female AE.

Nadine H. Lewis was the first female YN to be awarded a cutterman's pin.

- On 15 December 1994 BM2 Jeralyn L. Mandell became the first female surfman qualified on the 52-foot MLB (she also qualified on the 44-footer).

1995:

- Doris Hull became the first active duty African-American woman to be promoted to warrant officer.
- BM2 Kathy Niles became the first woman to win the Munro Award.
- ENS Lucinda Cunningham became the first female OIC in charge of any of the armed forces' honor guards.

1997:

- Joyce Johnson became the first female Admiral appointed from the Public Health Service to head the Coast Guard Health and Safety Directorate.

- Pamela Autry became the first female Chief of the Boat.

1998:

- Sally Brice-O-Hara became the first female commanding officer of a Coast Guard Training Center.
- First two female "Gold Badge" Command Master Chief Petty Officers: Patricia Stolle and Diane Bucci.
- Sandra O'Toole became the first woman Chief Petty Officer Academy School Chief.

1999:

- Jo Wildman became the first woman promoted to CWO (WEPs).
- Gayla Thompson and Karyn Terry became the first women promoted to CWO (ENG).
- LTJG Kathy Niles became the first woman to command an 87-foot WPB when she took command of USCGC *Stingray*, Mobile, AL.

2000:

- GM3 Tajuana Usry became the first African-American woman to receive the Small Arms Instructor (SAIO designation).
- LT Nicole Carter was the first African-American female officer to receive a permanent Cutterman's Pin.

2001:

- CDR Sharon Donald-Baynes became the first African-American woman to command an operations ashore unit when she took command of Group Lower Mississippi River based in Memphis, Tennessee.
- ENS Andrea Parker became the first African-American woman to graduate with an engineering degree from the Coast Guard Academy.

2002:

- In June, 2002, CAPT Jane M. Hartley, USCGR, was designated as the Commanding Officer of Marine Safety Office Wilmington, North Carolina and as such became the first woman in the Coast Guard to become Captain of the Port.
- Then-CDR Gail Kulisch took command of the Atlantic Strike Team, becoming the first female commanding officer of a Strike Team.
- Cadet 1/c Sarah Salazar became the first Hispanic female Regimental Commander at the Coast Guard Academy.

2003:

- First active-duty women to serve in a combat zone: when CGC *Boutwell* served in the Northern-Arabian Gulf in support of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom from January 2003 to June 2003.
- LT Holly Harrison became the first Coast Guard woman to command a cutter in a combat zone. She was also the first Coast Guard woman to be awarded the Bronze Star Medal.

- In December 2003 Coast Guard helicopter pilot LCDR Sidonie Bosin was recognized by the First Flight Centennial Commission's 100 Heroes Committee (formed for the commemoration of the Wright Brothers first powered flight) as being one of the "top 100 aviators of all time." She was also the first female aviation officer in charge of air crews deployed to the Coast Guard cutter *Polar Sea* in the Antarctic, including one of an all-female flight crew.

2004:

- Then-CDR Meredith Austin took command of the National Strike Force Coordination Center, becoming the first female commanding officer of the Center.
- YNC Crystal A. Sparks became the first female Company Commander School Chief at TRACEN.
- LCDR Rhonda Fleming-Makell was the first African-American female Coast Guard officer to earn a 20-year retirement.
- YNCM Pamela J. Carter was the first female active duty master chief petty officer to retire with 30 years of active-duty service when she retired on 1 June 2004.
- First female commanding officer of the Coast Guard Institute: Theresa Tierney, August, 2004.

2005:

- LTJG Jeanine McIntish-Menze became the first African-American female Coast Guard aviator when she earned her wings on 24 June 2005. [Click here for more information.](#)

2006:

- CWO3 Mary Ward became the first female warrant boatswain to command a Coast Guard station when she took command of Station Port Canaveral in 2006 where she served until her retirement on 16 June 2006.
- CWO2 Apple G. Pryor, assigned as the Main Propulsion Assistant onboard the CGC *Boutwell*, was the first African-American female Naval Engineering Chief Warrant Officer of the Coast Guard.
- LT Isabel Papp was the first female medical officer to be assigned to a PSU. She was also the first Hispanic female MD to be assigned to a PSU and was also the first Hispanic female Physician's Assistant in the Coast Guard Reserve.
- LT Rachel Lewis was the first African-American female officer to serve aboard USCGB *Eagle* as Command Cadre (Operations Officer), 2006-2008.

2007:

- Mary Cunningham became the first African-American female and the first active-duty female to make Chief Damage Controlman when she was advanced from DC1 to DCC on 1 August 2007. She advanced to Senior Chief in 2012.
- LCDR Louvenia A. McMillan became the first African American female to hold the Advanced Boat Force Operations Insignia.
- On 25 September 2007 AMT2 Katrina Cooley became the first African-American female HH-65 Flight Mechanic.
- Martha E. Utley became the first female master chief for the Hospital Corpsman/Health Services Technician rating on 1 June 2007.

2008

- Jennifer Lowden became the first female school chief for Training Center Yorktown on 01 June 2008. She also became the first female MKCS in the Coast Guard when she was advanced on 01 August 2008.
- Ensign DeCarol Davis was Valedictorian of the Coast Guard Academy Class of 2008. She was the first African-American female to earn that honor.

2009:

- LT Felicia Thomas took command of the CGC *Pea Island* on 19 June 2009. She was the first African-American female commanding officer of a Coast Guard cutter.
- LT Carrie Wolfe and LT Olivia Grant became the first African-American female Engineering Officers on a "major" cutter when they reported aboard the CGC *Spencer* and CGC *Venturous* respectively in the summer of 2009.
- CAPT Sandra L. Stosz was promoted to RADM, becoming the first female graduate of the Coast Guard Academy to reach flag rank.
- SKCM Mary Fowlkes was the first African-American female to reach SKCM in the Coast Guard Reserves.
- Cadet 1/c Jacqueline Fitch became the first African-American female Regimental Commander at the Coast Guard Academy.

2010:

- On 9 April 2010 LTJG La'Shanda Holmes became the first African-American female helicopter pilot in the Coast Guard.
- CWO2 Rosie McNeill became the first female ISS warrant officer in the Coast Guard.
- On 1 June 2010 Ronetta McNeill became the first female ISS warrant officer in the Coast Guard.
- On 1 June 2010 Martha E. Utley became the first female to serve as Command Master Chief for the USCG HSWL service center.
- In 2010 F&S2 Ifong Lee became the first and only Samoan CWO2 in the Coast Guard.

2011:

- On 1 March 2011 Kristin Werner became the first female Chief Gunner's Mate in the Coast Guard.
- On 3 June 2011 RADM Sandra Stosz assumed command of the U. S. Coast Guard Academy, becoming the first woman superintendent of that institution. She was also the first woman to command any U.S. service academy.

2012:

- Chief Warrant Officer Kilohana Akim became the first female Pacific Islander of Hawaiian descent to make INV3 in the Coast Guard when she was promoted on 1 June 2012.
- Chief Warrant Officer Laura E. Freeman became the first female Material Maintenance Specialty (MAT) warrant officer in the Coast Guard when she was commissioned MAT2 on 1 June 2012.

2013:

- RDML June Ryan became the first prior-enlisted woman to be promoted to flag rank when she was promoted to RDML in October, 2013. She was frocked in March, 2013.

2014:

- GMC Laurie A. Kennedy became the first female Senior Chief Gunner's Mate (GMCS) in the Coast Guard when she was promoted on 1 October 2014. At the time she was attached to CGC *Waesche* (WMSL-751).

