Women Inspiring Innovation through Imagination: Celebrating Women in STEM

1862 - Sisters of the Holy Cross served aboard USS Badger, the Navy’s first hospital ship, joining a crew of 12 officers and 35 enlisted providing medical care.

1908 - Congress established the Navy Nurse Corps. May 13, and the Surgeon General appointed Esther Voorhees Hasson as the Superintendent. She had served as an Army nurse aboard hospital ships during the Spanish-American War.

1917 - Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels approved enlisting women in the Navy on March 17, just a few weeks before the United States entered World War I. During the war, 11,275 Yeomanettes had service as office workers for the Navy.

1917 - Congress mandated that women be admitted to the service academies including the U.S. Naval Academy and women took the oath in July, 1917.

1943 - First four women chosen for flight training at the United States Naval Academy.

1944 - The WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service) was established with the appointment on August 3 of Lieutenant Commander Mildred H. McAfee, USNR, as the Director of the WAVES. They worked in administrative, aviation, Judge Advocate Corps, medical, communications, intelligence, storekeeper, science, and technology.

1948 - Over 8,000 WAVES and over 8,000 officers in the U.S. Navy and 23,145 Marine Corps women served during World War II in clerical work, as parachute riggers, mechanics, radio operators, map makers, motor transport support, and welders.

1950 - For the first time in history, Marine Corps women served aboard USS Red Rover, the Navy’s first hospital ship.

1954 - More than one thousand U.S. Armed Forces women served on duty in Korea during the Korean War.

1960 - First enlisted women assigned as surface warfare specialists.

1961 - Lieutenant Charlotte T. Suneson, USNR, reported for duty on board USS General Mann (AP 112) and became the first line WAVE to have shipboard duty. Bertha Peters Bidelman became the first woman Marine promoted to Sergeant Major.

1967 - Congress authorized women to achieve flag rank in the U.S. Navy. CDR Grace Hopper, USN, was recalled to active duty and assigned to the CNO’s staff as Director, Navy Programming Languages Corps. As co-inventor of COBOL and a pioneer in computer technology, RADM Hopper served in the Navy until 1986.

1970 - Captain Alma G. Ellis, USN, became the first woman line officer assigned to the U.S. Naval Academy as Director, USNA Museum.

1972 - Lieutenant Commander Georgia Clark, USN, became the first female U.S. Navy Judge Advocate.

1972 - Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Elmo Zumwalt issued Z-116 that authorized entry of women to all ratings, allowed women to be assigned to noncombatant surface ships.

1974 - Lieutenant Barbara Allen, USN, became the first Navy woman pilot to earn her wings.

1976 - First five women were selected to command combat ships.

1980 - The first fifty-four women graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy, 56% of whom later became career officers.

1982 - Women Inspiring Innovation through Imagination: Celebrating Women in STEM

1986 - The WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service) was established with the appointment on August 3 of Lieutenant Commander Mildred H. McAfee, USNR, as the Director of the WAVES. They worked in administrative, aviation, Judge Advocate Corps, medical, communications, intelligence, storekeeper, science, and technology.

1990 - Rear Admiral Martha J. Evans, USN, was the first woman to command a Naval Station, Treasure Island.

1991 - 14,000 U.S. Armed Forces women served in theater during Desert Storm.


1993 - Congress repealed the Combat Exclusion Law preventing women from serving on combatant ships.

1995 - Commander Wendy Lawrence, USN, became the first woman naval aviator to fly an aircraft aboard space shuttle Endeavor, launched on March 2.

1996 - Lieutenant General Carol A. Mutter, USMC, became the first Marine Corps female officer to wear three stars and the only second woman in history of the armed services to do so.

1998 - First women were selected to command combat ships with Commander Maureen A. Foote, USN. Mount Vernon (LSD 39), the first to assume command.

2004 - Mary A. DeCrescito, Ph.D., appointed first female Vice Academic Dean at USNA.

2006 - Brigadier General Angela Salinas, USMC, became the first Hispanic woman flag officer in the U.S. Marine Corps.

2010 - Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus approved women to serve in Ohio class submarine crews. January 9, 2011.

2012 - The highest ranking women in the Navy today are three-star admirals: Vice Admiral Ann Rondeau, USN, National Defense University president; Vice Admiral Carol P. Narveson, USN, deputy chief of staff, NATO Headquarters, and Vice Admiral Michelle Howard, USN, Deputy Commander, U.S. Fleet Forces.

2015 - Rear Admiral Margaret D. Klein, USN, became the first woman to command Midshippoms at the U.S. Naval Academy. She now serves as Chief of Staff, U.S. Cyber Command.

2016 - Midshipman Julienne Gallina became the first woman to command a Naval Station, Treasure Island.

2017 - Rear Admiral Janet Wolfenbarger, USN, became the first female Commandant of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

2018 - First female Command Master Chief was appointed to the service academies.

2019 - First woman to achieve flag rank in the Navy is Commander Rachel S. Greenlaw, USN.

2020 - The Navy currently has 35 active and reserve female flag officers and 59 female command master chiefs.

2021 - Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Mike Gilday, congratulates Rear Admiral Michelle Howard, first woman to become the Navy’s first female senior leader.

2022 - The Navy currently has 35 active and reserve female flag officers and 59 female command master chiefs.
Celebrating Women’s History Month at the U.S. Naval Academy

First Class of Midshipmen 1980

Juliane J. Gallina, ‘92
first female Brigade Commander

First Class of Women Midshipmen 1980

Elizabeth A. Belzer, ‘80
first female graduate

Janie L. Mines, ‘80 - first African American female

Cataine Sunita Williams, USN, has spent 322 days in space on two missions, the most recent mission from July through November 2012.

Vice Admiral Michelle J. Howard, USN, ‘82, Deputy Commander, U.S. Fleet Forces, first African American woman to command a ship.

Rear Admiral Grace M. Hopper, USN, whose pioneering spirit in the field of computer technology led the Navy into the age of computers, had a lengthy career as a Navy officer. She co-invented COBOL (which made it possible for computers to respond to words instead of numbers), thus enabling computers to “talk to each other.”

Professor Angela Moran, Ph.D., Dept. of Mechanical Engineering. Innovator in STEM outreach programs.

Matice J. Wright, ’88
first African American female Naval Flight Officer

Marine Sgt. Sunita Williams, USN, ‘87 - With 50 hours and 40 minutes, Williams holds the record for total cumulative spacewalk time by a female astronaut.

Dr. Mary E. Walker, first and only female to receive the Medal of Honor, first-ever female surgeon. Served in the Civil War. Battle of Bull Run.

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