



Women's History Month

"I look forward to my command tour on USS Freedom. Commanding a combatant was not an opportunity available to female Sailors when I received my commission less than 20 years ago. I owe a debt of gratitude to the Navy women who preceded me. Thanks to their vision and perseverance, today's Navy is truly a diverse team."

– **Cmdr. Kristy Doyle, Prospective Commanding Officer LCS 1(Blue Team)**

National Woman's Day was first observed in the United States on Feb. 28, 1909. International Women's Day, now held on Mar. 8, is a time to reflect on progress made, to call for change and to celebrate acts of courage and determination by those seeking to improve the rights of women. In 1987, Congress designated March as Women's History Month, following a ground swell of interest that began with Sonoma County in California designating the week of Mar. 8 as Women's History Week in 1978.

Long denied, now invaluable

Women have only been able to enter the Navy for 101 years, but in that time their contributions have exponentially increased. Today, without the service of the 146,239 women of the Navy Total Force (active, reserve, civilian), the Navy would be unable to meet its missions. Too many firsts have occurred in the last hundred years for a full recounting in this limited space, but following are just a few examples of women who led the way:

- [Lelia Jefferson Harvie Barnett](#) worked at the Naval Observatory from 1901-1902 and for the Cost Survey from 1903-1904. At a time when few women were active in the field of science, she conducted physics research and co-authored a number of papers with her husband, Samuel Jackson Barnett.
- [Dr. Frances Lois Willoughby](#), initially commissioned in 1944 into the Naval Reserve, became the first female doctor to serve in the regular Navy (Oct. 15, 1948).
- [EMCM Mary Bonnin \(ret.\)](#) was the Navy's first and only female Master Diver. She retired from active duty in 1996 and continued to work for the Navy as a civilian.
- [Capt. Kay Hire](#) was the first woman in the military to be assigned to a combat aircrew (May 13, 1993; VP-62); and went on to become one of the first female Navy astronauts.
- The Navy currently has 24 women serving as admirals or admiral selectees (the most to-date), including [Vice Adm. Ann Rondeau](#), who became a 3-star admiral on July 28, 2006.

Encouraging development

Professional and personal development is an integral part of retaining the best and the brightest, and ensuring everyone can reach his or her full potential. All personnel are encouraged to seek ways to embrace and enhance diversity in the Navy, and to help individuals reach their full potential. Some events this year focused on the development of women include:

- [Sea Services Leadership Association \(SSLA\)](#) Women's Leadership Symposium, June 18-19, Washington D.C.
- [Federally Employed Women](#), July 20-24, Orlando
- [Society of Women Engineers \(SWE\)](#) Conference, Nov. 4-6, Long Beach, Calif.

Key Messages

- Navy missions require, and are accomplished through, the combined effort of every member of the Total Force team.
- Retaining women, and all the best and brightest of our diverse talent, is essential to meeting joint mission requirements.
- Mentoring and other professional and personal development opportunities contribute to improved performance, command climate and retention.

Facts & Figures

- On Oct. 24, 1978, active-duty women began to be assigned to some ships, and, in 1993, with the lifting of combat exclusion law, began to serve in combat ships and aircraft.
- All hands are required to have diversity training annually – available on [NKO](#).
- Web sites of interest: [Navy Women eMentor Leadership Pilot Program](#), [Women's Policy](#), [Women in Military Service for America Memorial](#), and [Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute](#)