**14095, Janice Rice**

Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to thank you for inviting me to speak to you today about Women in the Military. I officially began my career in the military when I graduated from the Naval Academy in May 2000. I’ll never forget when I first arrived at the academy. I was both scared and excited about the new challenges and experiences before me. During my time at the academy I discovered many things about myself. I learned that I could do more than I thought myself capable of doing. I learned that I was much stronger than I had previously thought. And, I learned that I loved being in the military, so much so that I stayed in beyond a regular enlistment.

I made lots of new friends, many of whom have remained friends in the years since the academy. When you go through such a learning experience, when you are pushed to your limits and beyond and you survive together, there is a bond that forms. That bond carries you through whatever you experience and gives you strength to do whatever is expected of you.

I’m happy to report that the academy wasn’t all work and no play. We had our times of fun. We played a few pranks and had a few adventures that were not exactly condoned by our trainers. Because of that we had to do some extra details and run some extra laps. At the time we hated it but we also believed it was worth it.

Women in the military have come a long way in my lifetime alone. Part of our studies at the academy was to study the history of the military, and specifically the U.S. Navy. Learning how the Navy has evolved over time was fascinating. But, learning how much ground women have made in the 19th, 20th and now the 21st century is truly amazing.

Women first served on naval vessels in the mid-19th century when the served on hospital ships caring for the wounded from both the Union and the Confederacy. What began as a handful of civilian volunteers, women serving in the Navy’s ranks now include more than 68,000 active and Reserve-force personnel. The first women’s branch of the U.S. Navy was Women Appointed for Voluntary Emergency Service (WAVES). It is only in recent history that women could enlist as active duty members of the U.S. Naval.

In March 1917 the U.S. Navy first enlisted females and fulfilled clerical roles in addition to nursing roles. The Women’s Naval Reserve was created in 1942.

Women were pilots long before the military acknowledged their flying ability. On February 22, 1974, LT Barbara Allen became the first Navy woman to earn her wings. In 1980 Elizabeth Belzer was the first woman graduate and Janie L. Mines, the first black female graduate. In 1990 Lieutenant Commander Darlene Iskra, USN was the first Navy woman to command a ship. In 1996 Carol Mutter became the first female three star officer in the military in 1996. In 1993 Women allowed on combatant ships.

Women served in vital combat positions first during Desert Storm. Women served as administrators, air traffic controllers, logisticians, engineer equipment mechanics, ammunition technicians, ordnance specialists, communicators, radio operators, drivers, law enforcement specialists and guards. Women pilots flew helicopters and reconnaissance aircraft. Still others served on hospital, supply, oiler and ammunition ships. Others served as public affairs officers and chaplains. Women have served in nearly every position as their male counterparts, living in the same conditions without special consideration, and served admirably. The National Defense Authorization Act for FY 1992 and 1993 repealed the statutory limitations on the assignment of women to aircraft flying combat missions.

Think about it. Up until the last 50 years or less women’s role in the military was limited to support positions. Women served as nurses and office clerks. Women who could fly mostly ferried airplanes. Women most certainly didn’t serve on ships at sea until very recently in the history of the Navy. As a matter of fact if you pay attention to literature and fables, it used to be considered bad luck for a woman to even be on a ship. Now we serve side by side in the Navy just like in every other branch of the military. Women serve as ship captains; women serve as doctors as well as nurses; Women now fly fighter jets and face the same dangers male pilots.

You might be surprised to learn that there are many ships named for women who served.

The [Pocahontas](http://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs/p/pocahontas-iv.html), was a harbor tug commissioned in 1942 and named for Pocahontas. Another harbor tug named for a woman was [Sacagawea](http://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs/s/sacagawea-i.html) that served in Charleston harbor from 1942 to 1945. The [USS*Higbee*](http://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs/h/higbee.html) , 1945 was a Gearing-class destroyer named for Lenah S. Higbee, Superintendent of Navy Nurse Corps 1911-1922. The *Higbee* served in Fast Carrier Force. She was the first ship laid down, christened, and commissioned for a woman who had served in the U.S. Navy, and the first to see combat so named. The [USS*Hopper*](http://www.history.navy.mil/research/archives/command-operations-reports/ships/h/hopper-ddg-70-i.html) was commissioned 1997. It was built and commissioned at Bath Iron Works in Bath, Maine. The Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer is named for RADM Grace Murray Hopper, a computer technology pioneer who led the Navy into the digital age.

The [USS*Roosevelt*](http://www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/NH-106000/NH-106854-KN.html) is explicitly named for both Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Eleanor Roosevelt, the USNS*Sacagawea* was announced in 2000 and is the second of a new class of replenishment ships, USNS *Mary Sears*, an oceanographic survey ship, launched in October 2000 and is still active as of 2005. She was named for Commander Mary Sears. There are also the USS*Anna B. Smith*, the [USS*Bella*](http://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs/b/bella-i.html)*, the* USS*Annie B. Embry*, the USS*Luella*, [USS*Sara Thompson*](http://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs/s/sara-thompson.html), and last but not least, the [USNS *Amelia Earhart*](http://www.msc.navy.mil/inventory/ships.asp?ship=198).

Lenah S. Lenah S. Higbee was one of the Navy’s first twenty nurses and in 1911 became Superintendent of the Navy Nurse Corps. She further distinguished herself as the only woman to receive a Navy Cross while still, and in 1944 was the first woman to have a warship, USS Higbee (DD 806), named in her honor.

During World War II, 90,000 female officers and enlisted naval reservists, commonly known as WAVES, were stationed at U.S. shore commands as well as commands overseas. Navy nurses treated patients ashore, afloat, and in the air during World War II. Flight nurses retrieved the injured from the battlefield and transferred them to planes for evacuation and further treatment. Flight nurse Jane Kendeigh prepared patients for evacuation from the Iwo Jima battle area. Navy nurse Beatrice Kissinger, and Navy WAVES Emma Hernandez numbered among the estimated 250,000 - 500,000 Latinos who served in the U.S. Armed Forces during World War II.

Rear Admiral Grace M. Hopper, was one of the Navy’s most accomplished women and a leading computer scientist. A graduate of Vassar, she earned a master’s degree and a Ph.D. in math from Yale before joining the WAVES. She helped develop the Navy’s first computer, the UNIVAC computer, the UNIVAC-1. She coined the term coined the term “bug ” to describe a computer problem.

The contributions of the 350,000 women in the military during World War II convinced military and congressional leaders that women should be allowed to participate in peace time. The Women Armed Service Act of 1948 did just that with some restrictions. Captain Joy Hancock played a critical role in getting the act the act passed. During the early 1970s Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Elmo Admiral Elmo Zumwalt Jr. focused on quality of life issues for Sailors, especially ensuring equal opportunity ensuring equal opportunity for women, blacks, and other minorities. He issued numerous mandates for change, commonly known as Z-Grams. On 7 August 1972 he issued Z-Gram116, which expanded the role of women in the Navy.

Throughout the 1970s opportunities increased dramatically for women. The Reserve Officer Training Corps, aviation training ship commands training, ship commands, and Chaplain Corps were open to women.

Lts. j.g.’s Barbara Allen and Judith Neuffer were among the first four female naval officers selected for flight training in 1973. Captain Arlene Captain Arlene Duerk, a World War II and Korean War a World War II and Korean War veteran, served as Chief of Nursing Service, Naval Hospital Great Lakes until 1970, when she was promoted to Director, Navy Nurse Corps. Two years later she became the Navy’s first female admiral. In the summer of 1976 eighty-one women entered the Naval Academy’s Class of 1980. In 1978 the Navy started its “women on ships” program, assigning women to auxiliary ships such as USS Vulcan (AR 5).

When she was 10 years old, Wendy Lawrence watched Neil Armstrong take the first Neil Armstrong take the first steps on the moon and decided to become an astronaut. This 1981 Naval Academy graduate began astronaut training in 1992, the first woman from the academy to do so, and went on to log more than 1,200 hours in space. She made four space flights between 1990 and 2005, including two trips to the Russian space station the Russian space station. Rear Admiral Deborah Loewer distinguished herself throughout a 31-year naval year naval career, career, becoming the Navy’s first warfare first warfare-qualified qualified woman promoted to flag rank. She established a successful mentoring program for female surface program that continues today.

Captain Margaret G. Kibben, a Navy chaplain, In 2010 Kibben was promoted to rear admiral and named the 18th Chaplain of the U S Marine Corps as well as Navy Deputy Chief of Chaplains for the Navy.

One example of a notable modern woman U.S. Naval officer is a Naval Academy classmate of mine who was killed in action. Her name is Capt. Jennifer Harris and she was part of the \"Purple Foxes\" of HMM-364. Her crew was shot down February 7, 2007. Jennifer was an extraordinary woman and an extraordinary pilot. She excelled in her classes at the academy and was a natural leader. Whenever we were on assignment while in training everyone looked up to Jennifer to lead us even before she received any promotions. She even led us in our somewhat questionable pranks.

The most important thing about Jennifer is that she just naturally earned the respect of those around her. She excelled at whatever she set her mind to do and set the example for those who worked with her. Another thing that Jennifer was good at was reaching out to a team or crew member who was struggling in some area. She didn’t coddle them; instead she encouraged them and taught them so they learned what was necessary to the best of their ability. (You might want to mention here any awards she earned). Making and keeping friends such as Jennifer is one of the things that makes being in the military one of the greatest careers one could have.

Being a woman in today’s military offers so many opportunities that they are too numerous to list. But, I would like to share some of them with you. When you sign up for the military, and especially if you decide to make it a life-long career, you really do get to travel the world. Whether you travel to every state in the United States or whether you travel to countries around the world, you will never be able to say it was boring. Women in the Navy travel the oceans on vessels of every type and style from aircraft carriers to submarines. Women in the Navy fly every type of naval aircraft from air/sea rescue to fighter jets. Women can start at the very lowliest sailor and still rise in the ranks to admiral if the stay in long enough and apply themselves. The opportunities are endless if a woman wants to take advantage of them.

In the old days if a woman was in any branch of the military and became pregnant she had to leave the military. Today’s woman can marry and have a family and remain in the military. Spouses can both serve in the military. There are so many opportunities for women today, many of which are unimaginable to someone outside the military. Another perk of joining and staying in the military is earning your college degree in your choice of fields from management to medical to science to aeronautics and mathematics. There are no limits to what a woman can do in today’s military. Today woman make up 17% of active and reserve naval forces with 59000 active duty and 9000 reservists.

When they asked me to speak to you I thought long and hard about what I should say to you. There is so much I could say to you about being a woman in the military today. I’ve told you so many good things about it you must wonder if there are any negatives. I’ll be honest with you nothing is perfect. I’ve had my challenges. I’ve had to make the difficult choices between my military career and things I wanted to do in my personal life. But, I think people in non-military careers have to make similar decisions. It’s all about priorities and those priorities may change through the different seasons of our lives.

I knew a person once who seriously considered the military but at the last minute changed her mind. When asked why she changed her decision she stated very simply, “I knew my personality and I knew that in the military one must obey without question. I also knew I couldn’t do that for the long term. So, I saved me and the military a lot of grief by not joining.” I understand that the military life isn’t for everyone. But, for those who choose it, the rewards are amazing.

Yes, you do have to obey without question. Yes, you may have to go when you’d rather stay or stay when you’d rather go. Your life may sometimes be in danger as you serve your country. But, the payoffs outweigh the challenges in my opinion. Not every day will be exciting. Not every day will bring you new challenges. But, every day you will have the opportunity to serve your country in ways that you could not in any other career you might choose.

As a woman what would you do with your life if you could do anything, no limits whatsoever to hold you back? In a civilian career you have to choose one career and give your all to it and it is limited to one thing whether it is business, medicine, science, retail or whatever career you can imagine. In the military you can serve in multiple different fields over the course of a career and once the military approves a change for you they pay for all of your training. Just think of it, you can earn your college degree and no student loans. You just serve your country for the time required, and if you’re going to make the military your career then that won’t be a problem.

Oh, and ladies, think about this. In a civilian career how much money do you spend on your wardrobe? Many women would tell you that what they earn doesn’t come close to justifying how much they have to spend to meet the professional requirements of their career. You never have to ask yourself the age old question, “What am I going to wear to this or that function?” because military policy tells you what to wear. How great is that?

I’ve talked about how great it is to be in the military and do all the things you want to do. But, let me tell you about the other side of the coin. One of the greatest things I love about the military is when I get to reach out and help my fellow man. Whether I am serving in some type of rescue mission or whether I am working a fund raiser so we can send food, medicine and water to a group of people who need help, I am serving those in my society who are in need, It doesn’t matter if it’s a long term need or an immediate need. By working on missions such as this I can help those who can’t at the moment help themselves.

By serving as an officer in the military I have even more opportunities to help others. I can oversee projects that reach out to a community. I can make sure that supplies are delivered where they were intended. And, I can help out other women in the Navy who need help making their career be what they want it to be. It’s important as women that we mentor those women who come after us and teach them the way to go so they don’t make the same mistakes we made. They’ll have enough opportunity to make their own share of mistakes. It’s the least we can do to pass our knowledge and experience forward so they can learn from our successes and our failures.

As I said at the beginning I’ve been in the military since I graduated from the academy in 2000, nearly 15 years ago. It’s hard for me to grasp that 15 years have passed since that momentous day. I remember my parents were so proud of me that day. They could barely contain their excitement as we left the base that day. It was as if they had graduated themselves. My father and I don’t share many things in common. But, we share our military experience. Regardless of the branch of the military in which you serve, there is a bond, a camaraderie that you feel with others who have had similar experiences of combat or just plain hard work getting a base ready or implementing improvements. We share some of the same inside jokes. We know much of the same slang that outsiders would merely make a funny face when they heard it.

Regardless of the branch of the military we all share a bond to one another. The different branches may fuss back and forth just like brothers and sisters. But, let the threat come from outside our country and watch all our branches of the military join ranks to protect our great country. We share the bond of serving our country selflessly. We serve the bond of protection where we protect one another no matter what. There is no military threat from without that is against one gender or one religion. Attacks that come against us come against the lesser ones in our midst. That ruthless act merely serves to rally all of us, regardless of any differences we have among ourselves.

In my 15 years in the Navy I have had such wonderful experiences. I have travelled to some of the most beautiful places in the world and experienced beauty that is hard to describe because I can’t find the words. At the same time I’ve travelled to places all over the United States and seen beauty unmatched right within our own borders.

In my years in the military and in my travels I have met some of the most amazing people. I’ve met people with talent for the arts, skill in business, both talent and skill in athletics and a plethora of other skills and talents, I wouldn’t have had the joy of meeting all these people, who are now a part of who I am, had I not travelled with the military.

In my travels I have tasted food from nearly every culture on earth and experience pure bliss at the natural flavor and colors, as well as the healing properties of some plants and herbs. There is so much in our earth naturally that can help us with some curses of our modern existence such as children injured when they are too young to be out working, only doing so to help their family make ends meet. It’s great to be able to sit down at a table drawn by one of my nephews who has such natural talent and talk about that talent and what he can do with to earn a living.

I would love to tell every woman here tonight what a great joy it has been for me to serve my country in the U.S. Navy. It is an honor and a privilege to be able to serve as I have.

Thank you all for your attention this evening.