



THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY
WASHINGTON DC 20350-1000

August 25, 2023

MEMORANDUM FOR DISTRIBUTION

SUBJECT: Department of the Navy 2023 "Women's Equality Day"

On 26 August 2023, the Department of the Navy (DON) joins the Nation to celebrate Women's Equality Day, commemorating ratification of the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution, which granted women the right to vote. To observe this year's theme of "Continuing to Make History," we honor the women who diligently fought for this watershed achievement and those who continue the hard work of inclusive representation in the DON.

Ratification of the 19th Amendment followed many historic "firsts" within our Navy and Marine Corps. Women served in the Navy as civilian nurses during the Civil War. In 1908, Congress authorized the "Sacred Twenty" to enlist in the newly commissioned Navy Nurse Corps. In 1917, Chief Yeoman Loretta Perfectus Walsh became the Nation's first woman to enlist outside of a nursing assignment and in 1918 Opha Mae Johnson became the first woman to enlist in the Marine Corps. Just a few years later by the end of World War I, approximately 11,000 women had enlisted in the Navy and another 300 women had enlisted in the Marine Corps.

Women continued to make history in the DON and this year commemorates several major milestones and monumental shifts regarding gender equality. 2023 marks 50 years of women serving in Naval Aviation, 30 years of women serving on combatant ships and aircraft, and 13 years of women serving on submarines.

All of these women, from those that served during the Civil War to the first who served on submarines, carved paths for the more than 180,000 women serving today in every rank and position in the DON's total force, including our first woman nominee to be a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The DON will not rest on these achievements. This is simply the beginning. As your Secretary, I will always remain committed to ensuring that all members of the DON's military and civilian service are provided equal opportunity to advance in their careers. We must maintain our commitment to all of society and reflect on ways to showcase talent from all communities within our Nation until there are no more historic "firsts" in the DON.

For more information about the impact that women have made within the DON, I encourage you to visit <https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by/topic/diversity/women-in-the-navy.html>.


Carlos Del Toro

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