

REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION BROCK ADAMS, AT THE SEMI-ANNUAL MEETING OF DACOWITS (DEFENSE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON WOMEN IN THE SERVICES), NEW YORK, NEW YORK, OCTOBER 29, 1978.

Thank you very much. As I know you understand, this is a time of sadness for all of us associated with the Coast Guard. The collision in Chesapeake Bay ten days ago was a tragedy, and we are determined to find its causes so that there can never be a repetition.

Mindful of that responsibility. I'm honored to put on my Coast Guard hat and welcome you on behalf of the Department of Transportation. Your committee is fulfilling a very sensitive and important function, helping those of us in the government and the military to maneuver smoothly into the era of equal opportunity and equal reward that we all seek.

I think all of you deserve some sort of special award for serving on a group with a name like Dacowits. It sounds to the uninitiated like a cross between a headache powder and a city in Yugoslavia.

I know all of us here are dedicated to eliminating sexism from our government and our society. We believe implicitly in the principle that gender must never be the sole determining factor in filling any job. Members of one sex can be counted on, with very rare exceptions, to handle important responsibilities just as well as members of the other. In that spirit, I welcome Father Hupp and Carl Blonkvist to this meeting.

It's not easy, you know, to pioneer a historic breakthrough. But I'm sure neither of these two distinguished persons -- I almost called them gentlemen -- expect any special treatment here. They just want to be one of the -- well, one of the members.

On Tuesday, all of you will be guests of the Coast Guard out at Governor's Island. Being a good Democrat, I hope we'll find out next week that it's still Governor Carey's island.

Compared to the Coast Guard, the Department of Transportation is the new boy on the block. Commandant Hayes' organization is a good 50 years older than mine, and its historical predecessor, the Revenue Cutter Service, goes back to 1790 when transportation consisted of a few ships, a few more horses and an awful lot of feet.

As you can imagine, I'm pretty proud of the Coast Guard's record in the area of integrating and equalizing the service with respect to sex. In 1976 we admitted the first female cadets at the Academy at New London. The following May I had the privilege of announcing at the Academy's graduation ceremonies that women would begin serving at sea, on a pilot basis, on two Coast Guard cutters. We thought we might have to get some bugs out of the system before putting it into full effect.

Things have worked out so well that the Coast Guard, last August, dropped all restrictions on duty assignments for women. This opened up sea duty for all women -- not just the experimenters -- as long as a ship could give them reasonable privacy in berthing and personal hygiene. It also opened up a whole new set of assignments and ratings to women. An officer can serve as navigator. Enlisted women are eligible for the first time to become a gunner's mates and sonar technicians.

I read in the paper Friday that the Navy is coming along in our wake. They'll put 15 officers aboard five support ships for the first time this week, and that's just fine. On behalf of the Coast Guard, I'd like to offer to share with the Navy all of our experience with both officers and enlisted women at sea, to help them make the transition.

For I believe this special experience of the Coast Guard can teach all of us a lot.

As you know, the captains of the cutters during the "women at sea" tryout have reported to the commandant quarterly on their progress.

I want to share with you today some of the valuable information in the latest of these reports on mixed-sex crews. These are about the most human military reports I've ever seen. They give us a very real picture of a small, closely-contained community -- officers and enlisted personnel, men and women -- working to cope with a new situation and, by and large, coming through with flying colors.

Generally, the cutter reports indicate that women at sea have the same kinds of problems men do, not different ones. Foul weather gear was too big for some of the women, but the smaller men have been complaining about this for years. Some engine-room duties require more strength than a female crew member could muster. But this was true of some of the men, too. Women got seasick, but no oftener than men. And one skipper reported that the general incidence of seasickness seemed lower.

Women found that uniforms that were designed for shore-duty were not suitable for working on the ships. As you might anticipate, skirts were not popular for going up and down ladders when dress uniforms were required. Even the women's work uniform slacks came without pockets. The women crew members had no way to carry their notebooks and other required gear. So the women at sea shifted to dungarees. I'm glad to report, however, that the Coast Guard is now putting pockets into the seaboard uniform slacks.

There have been a few shipboard romances, producing joy for some and jealousy for others, and one unpleasant incident involving offensive language. But these were all things that the same men and women -- and their superiors -- probably would have had to deal with if they had been ashore instead of at sea.

The cutter captains have had some very encouraging reports about individual performance. A substantial number of women crew members have performed well above average. One female officer, according to her skipper, "has proven far superior to the male officer previously assigned to the duty." One enlisted woman showed such excellence that her captain strongly urged her to apply for officer candidate school.

Even where there appeared to be some emotional difference between men and women at sea, the commanding officer found compensating values.

"In general," one captain reported, "the women were much more sensitive to criticism and lower marks than the men; at least, they displayed more displeasure than men. On the other hand, they were more apt to correct their deficiencies and improve their performance than were the men."

One captain even said the men in his crew were better behaved with women on board. In the old days, they used to "showboat" to get attention from the male crew members. But the captain reported that "the women do not seem to favor this type of behavior," so discipline has improved.

But the Coast Guard has not suppressed identity in promoting equality. On one ship, female crew members supervised repainting the mess desk in a new color scheme and added home-made curtains for the portholes. They also redecorated a recreation area. In some instances, they have volunteered sewing services for the men. If this be sexism, make the most of it.

Candor compels me to report one problem as yet unsolved. As many of you know, members of the oncoming night watch at sea are normally awakened individually -- often vigorously -- by one of the off-going watch. But male crew members on the cutters are not allowed in the female berthing area. Alternative methods -- shouting from outside, knocking on the bulkhead and using alarm clocks -- tend to wake everyone.

A request by the women that male messengers be allowed in the berthing area for wake-up duty was refused. At present, women do not go into the male berthing area on wake-up duty, but one captain reported "considerable male interest in this idea."

The most significant part of this whole story to me is the extent to which the mixed-sex crews have become the accepted, normal and natural thing aboard the Gallatin and the Morgenthau. During seabag inspection, the women do not want a separate check of their clothing but prefer to stand with the divisions in which they serve.

According to their skippers, the women generally are tired of the publicity that results from their role as pioneers at sea. They would rather be accepted simply as members of the Coast Guard who happen to be on sea duty. In fact, they'll be much happier when their captains no longer have to file these "women at sea" reports, a position with which I sympathize. I'm sure that day is coming, because one of the captains has already concluded that "in most minds, we have a mixed crew, rather than a mixed-sex crew."

One lesson the Coast Guard is learning as we move forward with the mixed-crew concept is the need to understand adjustments that must be made by the men in place, as well as the women arriving. Our younger officers and senior petty officers have had no experience dealing with the day-to-day problems that arise. perfectly naturally, when women join the complement of a small ship or shore station for the first time.

So far, there has been no formal orientation course for such male personnel. Some of them are hesitant, probably with good reason, to consult their superiors on such small but important social and morale questions.

One senior officer has suggested holding informal rap sessions at the district level, so these officers and petty officers can exchange experiences and learn from each other's wins and losses in mixed crew management. Sounds like a good idea to me.

The women at sea in the Coast Guard, as you all know, no longer have to give up the ship when we go into training maneuvers with the Navy. Now they remain on board, working side by side with their male shipmates on every kind of exercise.

There's no doubt in my mind that our seagoing women in the Coast Guard will demonstrate conclusively that they can handle this duty as well as men, or better. And that's going to raise, sooner or later, a big question for Congress.

As you all know, the law now prohibits any kind of combat service by women. That's the kind of arbitrary restriction that I think Congress should re-examine very closely in the years ahead. I served in Congress for 12 years, and I know how much of its work is adapting the law to changing circumstances, recognizing new attitudes and new aspirations.

If women demonstrate in the Coast Guard that they are fully qualified to operate radar equipment or monitor engine room controls, if they volunteer to stay at their posts though war should come -- then Congress is going to have to pay attention. Not today, not tomorrow and certainly not before Election Day, but soon. There are simply too many women today who believe that equal opportunity means equal responsibility. And I agree with them.

Meanwhile, I'm very proud to be the civilian leader of the Coast Guard. Together, we're in the front line of the opening engagement of a historic battle.

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