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REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION  
ELIZABETH HANFORD DOLE  
DEDICATION OF THE MILITARY WOMEN'S CORRIDOR  
THE PENTAGON - WASHINGTON, D.C.  
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It's a pleasure to be here and a privilege to participate in this fitting tribute to America's women in uniform -- past, present and future.

This is a historic display, and properly so. For the story of women in America historically has been one of pioneering -- of challenging the odds, doing the improbable, overcoming the conventional wisdom of the time that limited the role of women in our society and their potential for leadership.

To their credit, the Armed Forces moved quickly in the days following Pearl Harbor to establish women's "auxiliaries" and -- later -- to accept women into the regular enlisted and commissioned ranks. General Eisenhower, before war's end, was to speak warmly of their contributions, saying that "they met every test and task assigned them."

Women today are doing no less, and indeed far more -- both in the service and out, pioneering anew in the arts and sciences, and in space itself.

Yes, women are getting pleasantly accustomed to making historic gains. We are all proud of Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, the first woman to serve on our nation's highest court. And I am proud, especially so today, of my own footnote in history. As Secretary Weinberger mentioned, I am privileged to be the first woman to head a branch of the Armed Services -- the United States Coast Guard.

This hall commemorates as well a long list of "firsts" in the pioneering role women have played in military service. A fair share of those, I am pleased to say, wear Coast Guard colors -- including the first to command a ship at sea.

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For more than 200 years our sailors have referred to the ship's captain as "the Old Man." But when the "Old Man" is a woman, tradition needs modification. To the crew of the Coast Guard cutter CAPE CURRENT, Lt. Sue Moritz became "the Old Lady," at the ripe old age of 26. Her superiors confirmed her professionalism as one of the first women ever to command a U.S. naval vessel, by awarding her the Coast Guard Commendation Medal.

The events of the 1970's in the Coast Guard coincided with the tremendous influx of women into the civilian work force during the same period -- a time I think of as the "quiet revolution." It was a time when words like unachievable, unattainable, unimaginable and impossible disappeared from the vocabularies of women dedicated to equity -- and nothing less -- in our society.

Again, women in the service were among the pioneers. In fact, many of those we honor today represent an extraordinary range of skills and achievements -- "front line troops" in a quiet revolution taking place all across America.

So I am both proud and delighted to be here to help dedicate this corridor. And I look with anticipation to the years ahead when women will have even greater opportunities to serve our nation. I am confident that then, as in the past, our five armed services will be in the vanguard of progress in providing these opportunities.

The Coast Guard, like each of our armed services, has its heroes -- not all of whom are men. From Ida Lewis, who for 50 years tended a New England lighthouse and -- in 1869 -- was cited for bravery, to Seaman Ida Jesse Tovas who in 1979 rescued a fisherman from a boat sinking off the California coastline, the Coast Guard has exemplified personal courage and devotion to duty.

But as we look to the future, I think of another American woman of great courage. She never held public office. She didn't serve in the military. She won no medals for combat. Yet her spirit and her example have inspired millions. Her name was Helen Keller -- and she summed up her philosophy in a single sentence. "One can never consent to creep," she said, "when one feels an impulse to soar."

Today, half a century after Miss Keller spoke out, American women are truly beginning to soar. Here in this place, this corridor dedicated to military women, you pay tribute to women who have made their mark on our armed forces, on our society and on the country we all love. Thanks to you, all who walk this corridor will recognize that the women of America always have been and always will be pioneers of progress.