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40 Years of Women at the Naval Academy: 'Ability, not gender'

Walter E. (Ted) Carter Jr.

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Flightline

40 Years of Women at the Naval Academy: 'Ability, not gender'

By Vice Adm. Walter E. "Ted" Carter Jr.
Superintendent of the U.S. Naval Academy

The Naval Academy recently hosted its annual Astronaut Convocation, inviting five of our 53 astronaut graduates to the Yard to discuss the future of the space program with the Brigade of Midshipmen. Among them was U.S. Marine Corps Maj. Nicole Aunapu Mann ('99), the most recent United States Naval Academy (USNA) graduate to be selected by NASA.

Mann joins an illustrious line of Naval Academy alumnae who have served in the U.S. space program. One of the academy's earliest woman graduates was retired Capt. Wendy Lawrence, my classmate from the great Class of 1981 and the first woman from USNA to fly in space. Capt. Sunita Williams ('87) is one of four members—and the only woman—on NASA's new commercial spaceflight team, selected to partner with private sector companies developing spacecraft that will fly astronauts to the International Space Station. The Naval Academy's representation in the past and future of space flight is just one example of our graduates' achievements at the highest levels.

As we mark the 40th anniversary of the integration of women at the Naval Academy, I'd like to highlight how far we've come and look ahead in anticipation of a bright future. On July 6, 1976, the Class of 1980 arrived on Induction Day. Four years later, 55 women from that class graduated, becoming the plankowners of gender integration at this great institution—an accomplishment that we celebrated last year at the 35th Reunion for the Class of 1980.

Compare that to our most recent graduates—of the 1,070 midshipmen who graduated last May, 204 were women.

And the numbers continue to grow. More women have applied for admission than ever before (more than 4,300 applications!) for the soon-to-be-inducted Class of 2020. The current Plebe Class of 2019 boasts the largest number of women in academy history—ANY academy—with 324 inducted last July. In a summer marked by near record-low attrition, every woman completed Plebe Summer.

Women now comprise more than a quarter of the Brigade. Female representation will continue to grow; America's talented youth are clearly attracted to the Naval Academy and the missions of the U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps. More importantly, beyond just the numbers, the evolution of gender integration has made significant positive progress over the past four decades. With combat positions being opened to all women starting next year, the attitude and personality of the Brigade has become one of inclusiveness for all, men and women.

“Since 1980, more than 4,600 women have graduated from the Naval Academy and have gone on to excel in their military careers and beyond.”

Since 1980, more than 4,600 women have graduated from the Naval Academy and have gone on to excel in their military careers and beyond. Adm. Michelle Howard ('82) was the first African-American woman to reach flag rank as well as the first woman to wear four stars. She now serves as our vice chief of naval operations, the second-highest ranking position in the Navy. Rear Adm. Margaret Klein ('81), now senior advisor to the secretary of defense for military professionalism, was the first woman to serve as commandant of midshipmen. Marine Col. Roberta Shea ('91) recently served as the first female deputy commandant, and she is currently serving as the commanding officer of the I Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) Headquarters Group in Camp Pendleton, California.

Their legacy of leadership continues today within the Brigade. Midshipman 1st Class Jenna Westerberg serves as this semester's Brigade commander, following on the heels of Midshipman 1st Class Margo Darragh's leadership in the same position during the fall semester. This is the first academic year

in which women earned the Brigade commander leadership position for both semesters.

The Brigade has a wealth of role models to choose from among their peers—including women who excel morally, mentally and physically. Midshipman 1st Class Megan Musilli is one of only 32 Americans and the only service academy student selected for a 2016 Rhodes Scholarship. She is a mathematics major and is training to become a Navy physician. Midshipman 1st Class Ally Strachan, a weapons and systems engineering major, ranked in the top five percent of her class and was selected for the Mitchell Scholarship. Just last month, nuclear engineering major Midshipman 1st Class Megan Hough was selected for a Gates Cambridge Scholarship, one of only 35 recipients nationwide.

Amazingly, a nation-leading 42 percent of women at the Naval Academy compete in Division I NCAA Athletics on 15 different sports teams. Last semester, varsity soccer player Midshipman 3rd Class Meghan Hegarty was named to the Patriot



Photo by NASA

A 1987 graduate of the Naval Academy, NASA astronaut Sunita Williams, Expedition 32 flight engineer, appears to touch the bright sun during the mission's third session of extravehicular activity on Sept. 5, 2012.

League All-Academic squad and was chosen as a First-Team College Sports Information Directors of America Academic All-District honoree. Five members of the Navy volleyball team recently earned placement on the Patriot League Academic Honor Roll. Women's swimming and diving recently dominated the Patriot League Championship, winning the team title and all three individual meet awards (swimmer, diver and rookie of the meet).

In addition to observing Women's History Month throughout March, we marked the anniversary of the integration of women at USNA with a variety of ceremonies and observances. Our annual Naval Academy Foreign Affairs Conference this Spring focused on "Women and Security: The Implications of Promoting Global Gender Equality." Our commissioning week in May and induction day later in the summer will allow us the

opportunity to welcome back many of our alumnae to impart their experiences on our new graduates and incoming freshman class. Our Naval Academy Museum will also open a new exhibit in July focusing on this anniversary.

As superintendent, and as someone who was a student at USNA in the earliest days of women on the yard, I'm extremely proud of what our graduates and our current midshipmen have accomplished and look forward to what they will achieve in the future as their opportunities to serve expand. For women in the Navy and Marine Corps, the future has never been brighter, and the Naval Academy will continue to develop women of character and consequence to lead our Sailors and Marines.

Vice Adm. Walter E. "Ted" Carter Jr. is Superintendent of the U.S. Naval Academy. Reprinted from <http://navylive.dodlive.mil/2016/03/01/40-years-of-women-at-the-naval-academy-ability-not-gender/>



Vice Adm. Walter E. "Ted" Carter became the 62nd superintendent of the U.S. Naval Academy (USNA) July 23, 2014. A native of Burrillville, Rhode Island, he graduated from the USNA in 1981, was designated a naval flight officer in 1982, and graduated from the Navy Fighter Weapons School (NFWS) Top Gun in 1985.

Carter's career as an aviator includes extensive time at sea, deploying around the globe in the F-4 Phantom II and the F-14 Tomcat. He has landed on 19 different aircraft carriers, including all 10 of the Nimitz-class carriers. He commanded the Fighter Squadron (VF) 14 "Tophatters," served as executive officer of USS Harry S. Truman (CVN 75), and commanded both USS Camden (AOE 2) and USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70). His most recent fleet command assignment was commander, Enterprise Carrier Strike Group (CSG) 12 during Big E's final combat deployment as a 51-year-old aircraft carrier in 2012.

Ashore, Carter served as chief of staff for Fighter Wing Pacific and executive assistant to the deputy commander, U.S. Central Command. He served as commander, Joint Enabling Capabilities Command and subsequently as lead for the Transition Planning Team during the disestablishment of U.S. Joint Forces Command in 2011. After leading Task Force RESILIENT (a study in suicide-related behaviors), he established the 21st Century Sailor Office (OPNAV N17) as its first director in 2013. Most recently, Carter served as the 54th president of the U.S. Naval War College. During

his tenure, he established the Naval Leadership and Ethics Center in Newport, Rhode Island, May 1, 2014.

Carter flew 125 combat missions in support of joint operations in Bosnia, Kosovo, Kuwait, Iraq and Afghanistan. He accumulated 6,150 flight hours in F-4, F-14 and F-18 aircraft during his career and safely completed 2,016 carrier-arrested landings, the record among all active and retired U.S. Naval Aviation designers.

Carter is the recipient of the Distinguished Service Medal, Defense Superior Service Medal (two awards), Legion of Merit (three awards), Distinguished Flying Cross with Combat V, Bronze Star, Air Medal (two with Combat V and five strike/flight), and Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal (two with Combat V). He was awarded the Vice Admiral James Bond Stockdale Leadership Award and the U.S. Navy League's John Paul Jones Award for Inspirational Leadership.

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