ADM Michelle Howard
Women in Defense, Service to the Flag presentation
Women in Military Service for America Memorial, Arlington National Cemetery
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REMARKS AS DELIVERED

Kathy, thank you for repeating all those firsts…oh my goodness. Karen, thank you for inviting me today, and congratulations to our awardees… it's just fantastic.

So, there's a lot of connections here through different ways, some of it defense, some of it through military…commonality… maybe I should just say beltway shipmates. It's great to be here.

And so we are honoring individual service to the flag. It's appropriate to consider that the flag means different things to different people. When I think of the flag, I recall Sailors that salute the flag at colors in the morning and in the evening. I think about our defense civilians that place their hands over their hearts during the playing of the National Anthem. I am also reminded of the ships that fly the flag high on masts and the

deployed forces that protect our nation's interests around the world.

One person, who illustrates the commitment of our people to the flag, is Captain Heidi Berg.

Heidi graduated from Annapolis in 1991 and serves as an Intelligence Officer in the Navy. She has a strong family heritage of service to the flag.

Her grandfather flew biplanes in the Army in World War I, her father retired as a Captain in the Navy Reserves. She has brothers who served in the Navy and Marine Corps. Her husband is a Surface Warfare Officer in the Navy and even her father-in-law was in the Navy and commanded a submarine.

Heidi is also the proud mother of three daughters. She has the same concerns of any parent who goes into harm's way. She

wanted her children to understand the reason she was willing to take risks. So prior to deploying to Afghanistan in 2012, she explained to her daughters' why we were fighting there.

And she found that the family sense of service to the flag runs deep. During her deployment, her youngest daughter, Bella, sent her a Valentine card, and it said, "Roses are red, violets are blue, I love you, Mommy, GO KICK THE TALIBAN BUTT!"

Women like Heidi join the military or support national defense through public service because they believe in service to the flag. Women have a rich and proud history of service. That service has been wrought with obstacles and sometimes outright opposition. Literally, sometimes women have had to fight to be

allowed to defend this nation. They had to fight just to be able to fight.

As this past Sunday was Flag Day, I'd like to first reflect on the history of our flag and the cloth that women and men are fighting for.

The origin of our flag began on June 14th, 1777. The Continental Congress adopted the first Flag Act, mandating a flag of thirteen stripes, alternating red and white, with thirteen white stars in a blue field. As our young nation grew, so did our flag, with a star added for each state.

The idea for Flag Day, however, began not in the Halls of Congress, but in a small, one-room schoolhouse in Fredonia, Wisconsin. BJ Cigrand <sig-rand>, a schoolteacher brought his

students together each year to celebrate the "Flag's Birthday" commemorating that first act of Congress going back to 1777.

Our National Flag Day was officially established in 1916 and signed into law by President Truman. And what started as a celebration of students and teachers blossomed into a day of national recognition for the country's iconic symbol.

Yet when we reflect on the history of the flag and that of our nation, the documents of the revolution, the Constitution, the creation of the flag itself, are delivered in men's voices.

We often hear of the "Fathers of the Revolution." But those weren't the only voices present. Our mothers and sisters and aunts and daughters were just as vital to America's call to independence.

We have continued as a nation because of the collective strength we achieve through volunteers who choose to defend the Constitution. Women and men serve in the defense of our nation not because they have to, but because they believe in service to the flag. But in particular, women have served throughout our nation's history, even when they had to fight to fight.

154 years ago, Kady Brownell was one of about 250 women who fought in the Civil War. Some women wanted to serve as soldiers and had to dress as men to gain access to the army—but not Kady. Instead, she fought openly as a woman alongside her husband in the Rhode Island Infantry.

Kady served the flag during a time when women were not allowed to vote, own property, or hold public office and yet she still risked her life in service to her country.

In 1861, when the state of Rhode Island called for young men to enlist in the army for 90 days, her husband, Robert, joined right away. Apparently, they thought it would be a short war. Kady was right there; ready to join and fight with Robert, but Robert wouldn't allow it.

Eager to serve and unwilling to relent, Kady went to the Governor, who was so impressed by her determination that he took her into his own company. They left for Washington, DC, where she found Robert and then they served the rest of their enlistment together.

Kady achieved her goal – she was in the infantry, but she wouldn't just settle with being a water carrier or a laundress. She earned her position as the official color bearer, the person that carried the Flag into battle.

Being the color bearer is very significant and very dangerous. You cannot handle a gun and the heavy flag at the same time; that leaves you vulnerable. And the color bearer was a favorite target of the enemy.

If the flag went down, it would be more difficult for soldiers to find their comrades in the smoke and chaos of the battlefield, making it harder for them to fight as a cohesive unit.

Seeing the flag, standing proud, often gave soldiers the strength and hope to keep fighting. So in battle, Kady stood

firm on the front line. Even with cannonballs flying past her, she held the flag high.

Kady Brownell is part of our national heritage. Women have served the flag in every conflict through America's history. And throughout history, women have never been conscripted. They have always been volunteers, long before we had an all-volunteer force. Even when they had to fight to fight, like Kady.

So whether on the front lines or supporting from the rear, women have supported the war effort through a variety of tasks. They have been code-breakers, pilots, administrative and industrial workers, frequently openly demanding the right to fight.

Another American patriot who had to fight to fight, was LT Susan Ahn. Susan was determined to join the military and

through resilience and determination she would not be denied the opportunity to excel in Service to her nation.

Susan's parents were the first Korean married couple to immigrate to the United States in 1902., following the Japanese occupation of Korea. Japan attempted to eradicate the Korean language and much of its cultural heritage.

Her father was a prominent Korean leader and led opposition organizations against the Japanese. Even after moving back to the United States, Susan's father continued to make trips back to Korea and China where he organized his freedom movements. But in 1926, her father was arrested and imprisoned for his anti-Japanese activism and died in captivity in 1938.

Susan's father had a profound effect on her way of thinking. He stressed to his children to embrace being the best American citizens they could be, while never forgetting their Korean heritage.

Three years after her father's death, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and the United States entered World War II. The Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service or WAVES would be Susan's path to serve the flag she so willingly embraced, as well as the opportunity to fight the Japanese that had imprisoned her father.

Susan's desire to serve would not be fulfilled easily. She had to overcome opposition. Although she was Korean and not Japanese, she was rejected the first time she applied for the WAVES because of her race. Undaunted and determined to

both serve the flag and honor her father, she reapplied. And finally, she was accepted.

She taught air combat tactics to future naval pilots and became the first woman gunnery officer, training naval aircrews on how to fire .50-caliber guns.

She went on to join Naval Intelligence, continuing her service as a code breaker at the National Security Agency, and yet she still had to overcome racial barriers.

One of her supervisors was suspicious of her race, and refused to initially allow her near classified documents. But, nevertheless Susan persevered, and continued to fight for her right to fight, and in the end become a valued analyst and section chief at the National Security Agency during the Cold War.

Susan Ahn still serves the flag. And despite being 100 years young she still inspires Navy members by telling her story.

Earlier this year she says, “the Navy was good to me ... I never had a problem serving and that’s why I love America”.

Another woman who shared Susan’s love for the Navy and the flag was Rear Admiral Grace Hopper. Grace proudly served as a mathematician, physicist, computer scientist, and truly legendary innovator of her gender and generation.

So when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, Grace wanted to join the Navy. The fight she faced would have deterred a lesser person.

She was 37 years old, too old for enlistment. She didn’t weigh enough. She totaled 105 pounds when the minimum weight was 120. And although the government declared her

occupation as mathematic [sic] crucial, the Navy told her she could best serve the war effort by remaining a civilian.

Undaunted, Grace fought back, determined to use her intellect to help win the war. She persisted and was granted special permission to join the Navy, receiving waivers for both her age and weight. She was sworn into the Navy Reserve in 1943, and she of course, is one of the greatest computer scientists we've ever had.

She verified and invented new computer languages. Her work was revolutionary in the field of computer science when it was in its infancy.

And over her career, she received numerous awards in recognition of her accomplishments, to include becoming the

first woman to receive the “Computer Science MAN of the Year” Award.

When asked how many awards she had and how she felt about them, she simply said, “I've received many honors and I'm grateful for them; but I've already received the highest award I'll ever receive, and that has been the privilege and honor of serving very proudly in the United States Navy.”

It is incredible to believe that a woman who made so many significant contributions to the war effort, and to the world of technology and engineering, had to fight to serve the flag.

But Kady, Susan, and Grace demonstrate the patriotic volunteers who just also happen to be women. They represent a legacy that stretches back to the beginning of America.

And I am honored to be a part of this heritage, women both in the military and women civilians in defense. They have contributed to a free America. Women throughout our history have endeavored to serve the flag, not looking for special treatment, prestigious awards, or financial wealth, but merely for the opportunity to serve the flag itself and the great nation it represents.

So organizations like Women in Defense help ensure these stories, and achievements are recognized. They make sure the voices of women are heard, and their contributions are realized. Just as we do today. So Thank You for allowing me to be a part of this wonderful event.

And please join me in applauding the 2015 Women in Defense Service to the Flag Awardees.

So, Karen, I think you said if we had time… you'd be willing for me to take a few questions.

Q: Admiral, if you could undo one thing you did along the way, what would you undo?

ADM Howard: I don't think I have to undo anything, I am an admiral. I guess it's a job hazard, is it not?

Q: Diane from Northrup Grumman… Thank you so much for being here today, so have your first 12…11 months in this role been for you?

ADM Howard: So this is my fifth tour in the beltway, so I knew a little bit about what I was getting into. The jobs in the beltway are always hard, but I always walk away remembering how fantastic they are. And so when I used the word 'shipmates' at the beginning, I mean it. It really is a treat to work with so many people so motivated, either for their services or the joint fight, or for the friend, or for the Department of Defense, or even bigger then that… national security.

This is a different job because of the scope. It's the real heart of train, equip, man… is the CNO's responsibility, and so as the number two, everything he does, I'm supposed to be ready and able to step in. There are some usual rule sets; if he's on travel, I have to be here in case they convene the JCS. So, I came into the job Wednesday, July 1… Friday was, I think, was

July 3… or was it July 4… I was at the White House for a national citizens swearing in, we had several sailors… And by that Sunday I was on my very first Sunday morning talk show. And then Monday, I was in my first tank… four days into the job. Sat down, and each of us as the chief, or vice chief, we represent our service. The chairman provides best military advice to the President, and then our particular perspective are to provide, in my case, the best naval advice to the president. So, we are sitting there, and it was a special tank and the Secretary of Defense walked in because he wanted to talk to the JCS. He walked in the door and he said, "Hey, good afternoon, gentlemen."

And then stopped and went, "Oh my goodness, good afternoon ladies and gentlemen."

And then he stopped and said, "Wow, I bet that's the first time that's been said in the tank."

And then we started to talk about Iraq, Syria, and everything else that's going on in the world… So there's a current operations overlay to the job in terms of being ready to talk about events in cast of national security. There's a huge budget component to the job, and joint requirements oversight… And then the vice chief has lots of cats and dogs… health, support, to oversight, interoperability to international engagement, wounded warriors, education, NPS, Naval Academy, Naval War College, safety integration… so all the things that there's not necessarily a clean four-star oversight over between the fleets come to the vice chief. So it's enough to keep you busy.

And then when I took the job, I realized the average lifespan for vice chief seems to run 24 months, and so I told the CNO I would have two focus areas: gender integration and cyber culture. And I have been pretty persistent in talking to those to the American public, to internal Navy audiences, and to national security audiences. So, let me give… How many engagements…media, congressional, and speaking, have I done since last July.

Aide: I think end of last week, Ma'am, was 247.

Q: Ma'am, thank you so much for being here. As a fellow retired naval officer, I have to say how proud I am to see you here. My question… I continue to serve in the United States Army as a civilian… a senior executive, and my question for

you is, what special quality, if you could name one, that you feel as women we bring to our jobs that enhance our service? Not that it would be any better than a man, but it's different. And what quality would you say is the one quality that you have seen, time and time again see you through?

ADM Howard: I actually, emphatically, don't say that. I believe that women are individuals and have the right to be individuals like men do. I believe every citizen has strengths and attributes that they bring to this country… to their job, to their family, to their community. And I would be the last one to try and stereotype women as leaders, but women as individuals. I emphatically push back against this premise that we have something in common that's an attribute. Some women have

some things in common, so more than others. And that which you have in common with your male counterpart is your [inaudible]… I do believe there's attributes that we might want to pursue depending on our occupation. And I've talked about this a lot… and it's less about the occupation than about where you are in your career or your community. There's some of you that are pioneers, or trailblazers, and it depends. If you're a woman engineer, you probably are. If you are a woman who is a leader in a company, you probably are. I mean, when you look at fortune 500, or top corporations… you look at defense corporations, you are the leaders of the company. So if you're breaking boundaries within your organization, you're probably a pioneer. And then I have over the years said, "If you are going to be a ground-breaking pioneer – whether it's in the military or

it's a construction business, there's just some attributes you need to think about: stamina, sense of humor… a sense of self, comfort with self, travel light… and I mean mentally light… and then the last one I talk about is that you have to stay connected to other women. And, if you are a minority, you have to stay connected to other minorities in your affinity group.

There is… I have a belief, that when you are a pioneer and there's not a lot of people that look like you or have the same inherited attributes, you are on, really, a trailblazing journey. And so you've got to find people who look and have some of the same attributes in order to get together and share wisdom. You're going to have to go to peer, sort of mentoring or discussion in order to get though the challenges. Because there's not going to be anyone above you who is going to be

able to advise you. So in the case of women, staying connected to other women in very important.

Q: Hi, Admiral. I'm Vera Parker, I'm retired Navy commander; I met you a couple of times before. But, obviously you had a successful career, and I'm sure you've had many challenges, and I'm curious to know, what was the biggest challenge you had to overcome in your career and what lessons have you learned from that?

ADM Howard: So, the biggest was before I even started. It was when I was 12 and I wanted to go to a service academy. I saw a documentary on television, and I thought, "That's it, that's what I want to do." And I went and talked to my older brother, and I said, "That's where I want to go."

He said, "You can't go. Service academies are closed to women."

It was against the law. And then I was in shock. It was hard for me to believe that there would be a law that would prevent me from doing what I wanted to do.

So I went and talked to my mother, and I said, "Hey this is what I want to do; I want to go to a service academy."

And she's like, "Well, you're still young. You're only 12, but, if it turns out a few years from now you still want to go and it's against the law, we'll sue the government."

Being a good mom, there was more.

She said, "Look, you need to understand… this is something you should go after… you should also go after what's right. But the process could take years – a long time.

She said, “You could sue the government, the government could agree with you, the law could change, but you could be too old to go to the service academy.”

And she said, “But, you need to think about that if a woman coming in after you gets to go because you did the right thing,”… she said, “That is just as important.”

… My head was reeling… I was 12, the law changed by the time I was 16, so… I didn’t have to go after it. But what she taught me, that I think I have kept through my career, is, if you believe something is right, you have to attack it with persistence. You should not let a ‘no’ stop you from doing what you think is right.

Aide: We’ve got time for about one more, ma’am.

ADM Howard: Alright, Jake, thanks.

Q: You mentioned that one of your priorities is gender integration, so in this industry, certainly at Northrup Grumman, on diversity and trying to bring together diversity of thought and diversity of talent… can you share maybe some tips on how you think industry can do a better job of finding great, diverse, talent, and bringing that talent aboard and how we might do a better job there?

ADM Howard: So, there are some processes we have in the military that make it easier for us to be more inclusive in the pool. And I have not been a civilian, so you are going to have to

say, "No, your understanding of this is wrong." But when you have a job that opens up, and you have a single person that is going to be the determining, then who makes this pool of candidates that that single person is going to look at? And so, within the Navy, if we have a job that is going to open up, we make sure that the pool has diverse candidates. So that's a pretty small change. But if a pool is always homogenous, you will only hire homogeneous people. And it doesn't mean that a diverse candidate will get the job, but if you never have a pool with diverse candidates, they will never get the job.

But what that means is you have to change the way you think about when you have opportunities to hire somebody, and somebody has to say, "We need at least a few diverse candidates." Either by gender, or affinity group or something.

And then sometimes that starts a dialogue, because based on the job, some of the diverse candidates may not be interested… some of them have to be 'wooed' to apply… knowing that if they apply and interview they may not get the job. That's true sometimes with the majority of candidates. So first of all, how do you structure the pool and who does the hiring and is the opportunity there for every single time have a hire.

And I think the other thing we do is our promotion system… and I've been involved with it probably since I was a Lt. Cmdr., is very equitable. So, because of who we are, our promotions are decoupled from the job. So, when we promote, there's a board of 15 people and they are looking at all of these records and they are making a determination on the person based off their performance. And we look for fully qualified and the

best qualified… So, I have found boards to be extremely equitable. But out of those 15 people, we make sure the board has diverse representation – women, minorities, coast, types of jobs, different experiences, so that there's each different people could look at that record and go…"oh"… they see something and can talk to it about a strength to the record, that if the board was homogenous, they might look straight past.

And so there's… I think we have some advantages because of the way we can hire and the way we promote. It's interesting, McKenzie did a study, and they interviewed a lot of women in the military… and the women had a lot of gripes about the services, just like the guys do. But one of the things that the McKenzie report said was that it was very common across all women who served that they felt that the military was a

meritocracy. Well, that's a strength to a company. And the companies have got to look at themselves and say, "Are we really a meritocracy?" Or are people being hired [by] one guy [and] one guy he might know.