

National Security Cutter Stratton Commissioned

Two powerful swings is all it took for first lady Michelle Obama to christen the Coast Guard's newest national security cutter, Stratton, July 23rd on Pascagoula's Singing River Island.

Stepping back from the bow of the ship and drenched in sparkling wine, Obama smiled widely and eyed the 418-foot cutter Stratton, which will help the Guard carry out rescue missions, defend against drugs and regulate fishing, among other tasks.

"Believe me," the first lady said, "I am humbled that its namesake is the first woman to serve as a commissioned officer in the United States Coast Guard - one of the true pioneers in American history - Capt. Dorothy C. Stratton."

Stratton, born in 1899, was the first director of the SPARS, the Guard's women's reserve, during World War II. She named the SPARS by combining the Coast Guard motto "Semper Paratus" and its translation "Always Ready."

The SPARS, Commandant ADM Robert Papp Jr. said during the ceremony, "became our supporting beam in the Coast Guard."

Stratton oversaw more than 10,000 enlisted women and 1,000 commissioned officers in the reserve until 1946, and she was later awarded the Legion of Merit for that service.

"As a woman, and as a mother of two daughters, as an American, I stand in awe of her life of service," Obama said of Stratton. "And after all these years later, all of us - whether you're a woman or a man, Coast Guard or another service, whether you're military or civilian - every American can be inspired by her example."

Obama is the first first lady to sponsor a Coast Guard vessel.

ADM Papp, U.S. Rep. Gene Taylor, D-Bay St. Louis, and a host of other elected officials joined the first lady for the shipyard ceremony.

Although christenings are "a time-honored tradition for all our nation's sea services," Napolitano said, the ceremony held special meaning. "As we stand before the Stratton and prepare to enter her into service, we are reminded of the indispensable role the Coast Guard plays in the protection of our nation, of our citizens, and our maritime commerce. From its operations overseas in support of our troops, to its work intercepting illegal drugs and contraband off our shores, to its efforts protecting our ports and waterways here at home, we rely on our Coast Guard every day to address a broad range of national security threats and challenges."

Stratton "reflects our commitment to achieve that goal," she said. "It embodies our drive to constantly innovate and evolve our maritime capabilities and leverage technology to our greatest advantage."

Among the 3,000 audience members were about 20 women from the SPARs group, flown in from all over the country and all indebted to Dorothy Stratton