

THE COAST GUARD

RESERVIST

MARCH 1999



**CAPT DOROTHY STRATTON,
THE FIRST DIRECTOR OF THE SPARS, REACHES ...**

1000!

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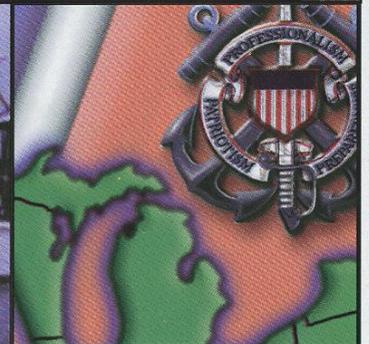
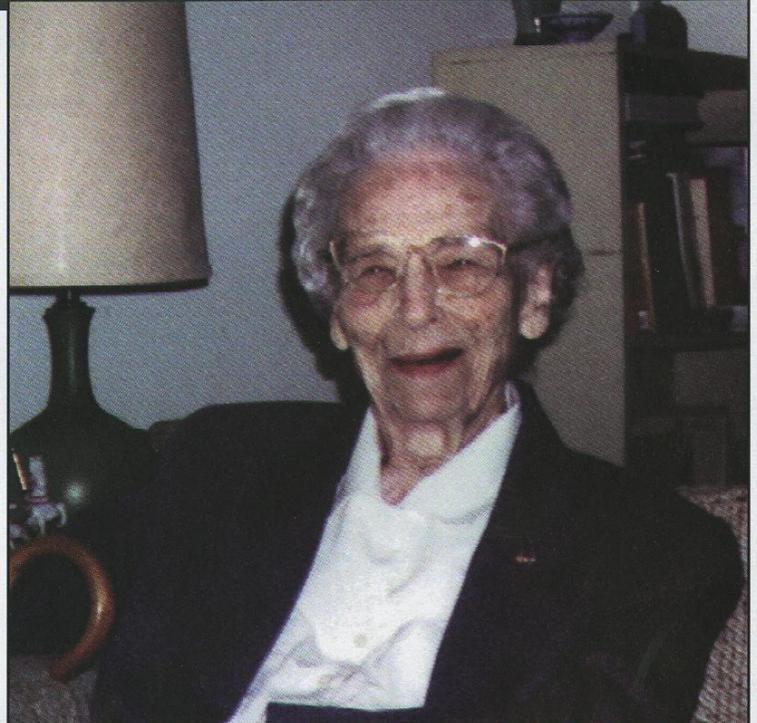
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COMMANDANT (G-WTR-2)
 U.S. COAST GUARD
 2100 SECOND STREET SW
 WASHINGTON, DC 20593-0001
 ATTN: EDITOR, THE RESERVIST
 Phone: 202-267-1991/1374/1024;
 1-800-842-8740, ext. 7-1991/7-1024
 FAX: 202-267-4325/4243

E-mail: ekruska@comdt.uscg.mil

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Readers & Postmaster: Please send address changes to:
 COMMANDING OFFICER (mas)
 HUMAN RESOURCES SERVICES & INFO. CTR.
 444 SE QUINCY STREET
 TOPEKA, KS 66683-3591

- ADM James M. Loy, USCG
 Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard (G-C)
- RADM Thomas J. Barrett, USCG
 Director of Reserve & Training (G-WT)
- CDR Charles E. Polk III, USCGR
 Chief, Reserve Communications Division (G-WTR-2)
 E-mail: cpolk@comdt.uscg.mil
- LT Kent P. Bauer, USCGR
 Asst. Chief, Reserve Communications Division (G-WTR-2)
 E-mail: kbauer@comdt.uscg.mil
- CWO4 Thomas L. Brooks, USCG
 Staff Assistant, Reservist Magazine Webmaster
 E-mail: tbrooks@comdt.uscg.mil
- PAC Edward J. Kruska, USCGR
 Editor, The Coast Guard Reservist (G-WTR-2)
 E-mail: ekruska@comdt.uscg.mil
- PA2 Chris S. Rose, USCG
 Assistant Editor, Layout & Design
 E-mail: crose@comdt.uscg.mil

On the Cover

FRONT: Official portrait
 courtesy Coast Guard Historian.

BACK: Coast Guard Mutual
 assistance, taking care of our own.

This issue of *The Reservist* marks a very special occasion for all of us in the Coast Guard Reserve. One of our own, **CAPT Dorothy Stratton**, first Director of the Women's Reserve (SPARs), turns 100 years old March 24.

Wow!

I first put this special event on the long-range schedule back on Oct. 18, 1997. That's the day that the Women in Military Service to America (WIMSA) monument was dedicated at Arlington National Cemetery. While covering that event, two World War II-era SPARs approached me and reminded me of this special occasion. Of course I had heard of CAPT Stratton. I featured her on the cover of *The Reservist* in November 1992 for the SPARs' 50th birthday bash in Washington, D.C. (see inset below).

"She was revered," retired SPAR **CWO4 Betty Splaine** told me recently. "She was someone we all looked up to."

So, in early January 1999, I approached 12-year reservist **YN2 Susan Shanahan**, Office of Reserve Affairs. Susan participated in the WIMSA ceremony and has recently departed for Officer Candidate School at the Coast Guard Academy.

"Now that you're a college graduate (December 1998), why don't you put that English degree to work right away and interview CAPT Stratton and write our cover story for the March issue?" I asked.

She was excited by the opportunity and the rest, as they say, is history. Don't miss her interview in this issue. You'll also notice that the colors of this issue are gold and black. Those are the colors of Purdue University — where CAPT Stratton was Dean of Women and taught during the 1930s and early 1940s.

In addition to Shanahan's article, we also advertised for and collected birthday greetings here at *The Reservist* for CAPT Stratton. As I write this in late February, we have already received over 200 e-mail birthday greetings and more than 50 good old-fashioned cards for the captain from every nook and cranny of our nation, and several from overseas. One e-mailer even suggested that the Coast Guard change its core values during her birthday week to *Honor, Respect and Devotion to Dorothy!* All those e-mail greetings and cards were to be presented to CAPT Stratton by SPARs **CAPT Jeanne Gleason** and **CWO4 Betty Splaine** at a birthday dinner planned by her family in West Lafayette, Ind. March 20.

With all the hoopla surrounding CAPT Stratton's 100th birthday (although the captain has asked for no big fanfare), we got wind from **MCPO-CG Vince Patton** as we were going to press of another Coastie turning 100 during March. He is **BMC Morris O'Rourke** who turns 100 on March 27. Chief O'Rourke enlisted in the Coast Guard June 11, 1924 and retired from active duty Feb. 1, 1940. If you'd like to send him a birthday greeting, his address is P.O. Box 241, Ledyard, CT 06339. He is our third Coast Guard centurion that we're aware of as **Chief**



Eracleo Olimpolo of Washington state, our oldest living Coastie, turned 100 last April. A very happy 100th to CAPT Stratton, Chief O'Rourke and belated birthday greetings to Chief Olimpolo. We salute and honor all of you.



Irving Legend

STORY BY YN2 SUSAN SHANAHAN, USCGR

I believe it was no coincidence that Dorothy Stratton was born on the heels of a new century and in March — the month in which we celebrate women's history. She was indeed one of the first pioneers for Coast Guard women; one who helped pave roads that many of us today are still trying to complete. For those of us who sometimes encounter barriers in the road toward future achievement, it often helps if we look back for inspiration, and remember collectively, how it all began.

There are some roads that can actually take you back in time...to a place, a memory, an era when things were different. I traveled that road Feb. 4, and it led me to the residence of CAPT Dorothy Stratton, the first female officer in the Coast Guard Reserve.

She lives in West Lafayette, Ind., a small mid-western city that you would not normally associate with someone who once belonged to a seagoing service. It is 60 miles northwest of Indianapolis — the land is flat farmland and far from any ocean.

My memories col-

lectively are less than 30 years old, yet the woman I am about to meet has 70 years on me. This, of course, is the main reason I've come to visit her. It's not everyday that someone turns 100, but this isn't just someone to me...or to many other people.

In the Beginning...

Dorothy C. Stratton was born on March 24, 1899 in Brookfield, Mo., daughter of the late Anna Troxler Stratton and the Rev. Richard Stratton, a Baptist preacher. She attended high school at Lamar, Mo. and Blue Rapids, Kan. She then earned a Bachelor of Arts from Ottawa University, Ottawa, Kan.; a Master of Arts in Psychology from the University of Chicago; and a Doctorate of Philosophy in Student Personnel Administration from Columbia University. She was also awarded several honorary degrees.

While working on her advanced degrees, she taught at Brookfield, Mo., Renton, Wash. and San Bernardino, Calif. She then joined the staff of Purdue University as Dean of Women and Associate Professor of Psychology in 1933, becoming a full professor in 1940.

At Purdue, Dr. Stratton had already begun to hone the leadership skills for which she later became famous as Director of the Coast Guard SPARs. She remembers part of her role as Dean of Women was to act as

“What’s your secret to longevity?” I ask. “I don’t know,” she says.

disciplinarian.

“I tried from the beginning to establish a more positive atmosphere,” recalls Stratton.

She did so initially by moving her fourth floor office to the ground floor, in efforts to make it easier for students to visit. At a university where the ratio of men to women was 7:1, Stratton understood that having an open-door policy provided an equally beneficial learning experience for her and her students.

The university was renowned for its agricultural and engineering studies, but did not offer a Bachelor of Arts. Its curriculum largely attracted students interested in scientific studies, so Dr. Stratton adopted a vision to make science more appealing to women, and devised an experimental curriculum for women. The experiment proved successful as undergraduate enrollment of women at Purdue increased from 600 to over 1,400. She also managed the construction of three new residence halls and an employment placement center for women. With Helen B. Schleman, a colleague at Purdue who would later become a commander and Assistant Director of the SPARs, Dr. Stratton co-authored an undergraduate social usages book titled *Your Best Foot Forward*.

With these successes at Purdue already behind her, the black cloud of World War II loomed ahead. Like many veterans of World War II, she felt an urgent need to serve her country. So in June 1942, she took a leave of absence from Purdue and joined the Women Appointed Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES), otherwise known as the Naval Women’s Reserve. She received her commission in the Navy as a lieutenant after completing the first WAVE indoctrination class at U.S. Naval Training Station at Smith College,

Northampton, Mass.

While serving as Assistant to the Commanding Officer of the Radio School for WAVES in Madison, Wis., LT Stratton received a telegram to come to Washington, D.C. On Nov. 23, 1942, the president signed an amendment to Public Law 773, thereby establishing the Coast Guard Women’s Reserve. Newly promoted LCDR Stratton was sworn in as its director just a few hours later, simultaneously becoming the first woman officer accepted for service in the history of the Coast Guard.

She immediately took to the task of creating another first. In a November 1942 memo to wartime Coast Guard Commandant ADM Russell R. Waesche, Stratton wrote:

The motto of the Coast Guard is “Semper Paratus — Always Ready.” The initials of this motto are, of course, SPAR. Why not call the members of the Women’s Reserve SPARs?...As I understand it, a spar is often a supporting beam and that is what we hope each member of the Women’s Reserve will be.... I like SPARs because it really has meaning.”

Stratton’s choice title for women in the Coast Guard was in every way appropriate. The Coast Guard was well aware that no ship can function without its support, and indeed the Coast Guard might not have succeeded in its war effort had it



Celebrating the 46th SPAR birthday in St. Louis in 1988 are CAPT Helen Schleman, left, Stratton, center, and Betty Waesche, right.

not been for the dedication of all of its SPARs.

Promotions came quickly for LCDR Stratton. She was promoted to commander on Jan. 1, 1944, and to the rank of captain one month later. During the war, her only brother, the late Capt. Richard C. Stratton, served in the Medical Corps Reserve of the U.S. Army.

Still "Semper Paratus Always Ready!"

Today, CAPT Stratton has good reason to brag of her many accomplishments, including making it to the age of 100. Yet bragging is the one thing she doesn't do. Her intelligence, grace, wit, and most of all, humility, are striking. I am wandering the halls of her residence building trying to find the world's first SPAR officer, and it is she who finds me.

CAPT Stratton is walking toward me, and she is neatly dressed in a cream silk blouse, black and white checkered trousers, and azure blue blazer. Though she uses a cane to help her walk, it is only the slightest of aid. Her shoulders and small frame stand upright as she moves her slim figure with an ease akin to Ginger Rogers. Her soft eyes and face are framed by a modest and recently coifed hairdo because she just came from a hair appointment. The captain recognizes me immediately since I am in uniform. She smiles and extends her hand with a warm hello as I introduce myself.

CAPT Stratton guides me to her room, marked by her nameplate on the door. There are no "I love me" pictures or trophies or anything of the like in view. There is merely a bed, a dresser, some bookshelves, a few chairs, and two small tables. We sit down in the chairs near her solitary window.

I ask the captain if she has read the ten or so questions I sent to her. I am immediately taken by the fact that she appears more organized than I. Slightly intimidated, I am glad that I did my homework in reviewing her biography.

She seems more inclined to ask about me than to talk about herself. But it's not long before I move to an easy and obvious question — a question that you might ask anyone who is about to turn 100 years old.

"What's your secret to longevity?" I ask.

She replies with the same simple answer that my great Aunt Ruth once gave me at her 100th birthday party.

"I don't know," she says.

OK, so I asked her what prompted her to join the Naval Reserve and take a leave of absence from Purdue?

"Lilian Gilbreath," she replies, and asks if I had heard of her.

I confess that I hadn't. She explains that Dr. Gilbreath was a very influential woman as professor of Engineering at Purdue. It was she who encouraged Stratton to consider serving her country via the military, but in the case of Dorothy Stratton, as was the case for many WWII veterans, little encouragement was needed.

"I was willing to do whatever I could to serve my country," she recalls.

At that time, another woman trustee at Purdue said, "Dorothy, you can't afford to do this."

To which Stratton replied, "I can't afford not to."

Always Interested in the Future...

Because of her good humored friendliness and reputation as a "talented raconteur," Stratton easily earned the affections and admirations of all who knew her. So, I asked her to recall a lighthearted moment from her time in the Coast Guard Reserve.

She obliges, remembering her attendance at a formal dinner with several other female dignitaries. CAPT Stratton had been asked to speak but during introductions, the emcee made a humorous and memorable folly. Chuckling, she recalls how the introductory speaker tried to explain the definition of the word SPAR and its translation as the motto for the Coast Guard Women's Reserve. Mistakenly, the emcee repeated the motto as "Seldom prepared, always ready!"

When CAPT Stratton completed her service to the Coast Guard in January 1946, then Commandant ADM Joseph F. Farley awarded her the Legion of Merit. The accompanying citation, signed by then Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal includes the following comments:

"A brilliant organizer and administrator, CAPT Stratton demonstrated a keen understanding of the abilities of women and the tasks suited to their performance....under her inspiring leadership, the organization expanded to include approximately 1,000 officers and 10,000 enlisted women assigned to shore billets at the peak of the Coast Guard war program."

Upon receiving her award, CAPT Stratton replied: *"I am glad this medal is called the Legion of Merit, for it is to the Legion that it is awarded, the Legion of 11,000 who volunteered to do a wartime job. As representative of the Legion of SPARs, I am happy to accept this award and to say how much we have appreciated the opportunity to serve in the Coast Guard. The Coast Guard utilized the highest percentage of women of any of the services. This is adequate testimony to the adaptability of the Coast Guard, and to the ability of the women who entered its service. We have liked serving in the Coast Guard and we shall always be interested in its future."*

Though her brilliant career as Director of SPARs ended in 1946, it certainly didn't mean the end of her service to America. She served as the Director of Personnel for the International Monetary Fund from 1946-50, and then as National Executive Director of

BIRTHDAY WISHES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

the Girl Scouts of America from 1950-60. She is still a member of the National Association of Deans of Women, American Association of University Women, Business and Professional Women's Club, National Education Association, American Association for the Advancement of Science and an associate member of the American Psychological Association.

Even though the Coast Guard has changed dramatically since the era of World War II, milestone makers like CAPT Stratton bid us to recall some of the positive things that have not changed. The Coast Guard still continues to utilize women to their utmost capabilities. Despite the many changes in the Coast Guard between CAPT Stratton's time of service and mine, one timeless common bond remains — we are both proud to have served in the Coast Guard, and, as CAPT Stratton noted in 1946, "we shall always be interested in its future."

For the women who are serving in the Coast Guard and Coast Guard Reserve today, and for those who are considering service to the Coast Guard in the future, CAPT Stratton sends her best wishes. She is grateful to have served the Coast Guard as the first Director of its Women's Reserve and is the last survivor of the original women's directors from World War II.

As a Coast Guard Reservist, I am thankful for her.

As our interview comes to a close, I find that I have a few more things in common with CAPT Stratton. I now know that we also share a love for reading (she just finished a large book on Charles Lindbergh) and a fondness for chocolate ice cream. So I hope that on or around March 24, CAPT Stratton will have the chance to enjoy some birthday cake with plenty of chocolate ice cream.

Happy 100th birthday CAPT Stratton! Thank you for your dedication, service, legacy to women, and to the Coast Guard and its Reserve.



Photo courtesy of CAPT Jeanne Gleason, CG SPAR

CAPT Stratton, center, cuts a SPAR birthday cake aboard the CGC Unimak during the November 1967 SPAR 25th reunion. Assisting are RADM Russell R. Waesche, Jr., left, and CDR Herb Hartlove, right.

"As you celebrate your birthday, know that the men and women of Team Coast Guard salute you and wish you continued health and happiness in the coming year."
— ADM James M. Loy
Commandant, USCG

"Your contribution to our Coast Guard will always be remembered."
— ADM Paul A. Yost, Jr.
Former Commandant, USCG (1986-90)

"Over the years, I have had the pleasure of knowing and serving with a host of women who were your SPARs. What a legacy you gave us...reaching the century mark is certainly special and I heartily congratulate you."
— ADM James S. Gracey
Former Commandant, USCG (1982-86)

"You are indeed an inspiration to us all. It is quite an honor to help share in your celebration..."
— VADM Timothy W. Josiah, USCG
Chief of Staff

"Have a most wonderful celebration. You most certainly deserve it. We wish you many more birthdays and the very best health."
— RADM F.L. Ames, USCG HQ

"Your exemplary service to the Coast Guard and our nation shines as inspiration to all of us. From everyone in the Reserve community, Bravo Zulu and happy 100th!"
— RADM Tom Barrett, USCG
Director of Reserve & Training

"Do you really know what a remarkable job you really did?"
— CAPT William I. Norton, USCGR (Ret.)
Frankfurt, Germany

"A big thank you for pioneering the way for us!"
— MCPO Marian C. Bayus, USCGR, MSO Philadelphia

"What wonderful news when I heard that you will be celebrating your 100th birthday! I am glad to be part of your celebration, even though it is from afar."
— SK1 T. Vincent Jang, USCGR
Group San Francisco, Calif.

"Aloha and Hauoli La Hanau."
— LCDR Jack Laufer, USCGR, D14, Hawaii

"I'm proud to be maritime woman! Thanks for helping to make it possible."
— LTJG Amy Long, USCGR, CGHQ

"You are defying the actuarial tables established for the Coast Guard retiree pension system. God bless you!"
— LCDR John E. Engelberger, USCGR (Ret.)
Morrisville, Pa.

"I was once told that to live long I needed to do three things: live simply, expect little, and give much. Congratulations on mastering all three and thank you for being such a positive influence on a Service we both love."
— CDR William J. Diehl, USCG, MSO Detroit, Mich.