BIO – Marlene DeTienne

I entered the USCG, 22 Feb 1974, recruited in Jacksonville, FL. But, there was a delay (delayed enlistment) so I didn't get to Cape May boot camp until sometime in April and graduated 14 June 1974.

Since an entire company of women had gone through prior, with cameras and press, the impression I got was that the Company Commanders hadn't yet got the word on what to do with a co-ed company and so the women in our two companies (India-90 and Kilo-90) were treated just like the men. The only exception might have been in the obstacle course, but we'll never know since it had been down for repair all winter and wasn't available for use during my time at Cape May.

I'd entered boot camp with a guaranteed Yeoman school but was advised that a number of ratings had opened up since I'd enlisted including BM and ET. I graduated Honor Man and selected Airsta St. Petersburg to strike BM3. You chose your duty station based on your class standing , the person who placed second in our class was also a woman, and I remember her whispering to me before the ceremony that I had "better not take ET school."

I served in Airsta St. Pete until the Air Station was moved to Clearwater in '76 and then moved across the harbor to Gru St. Pete and stayed there until '77. During my time in St. Pete I made SN, BM3 and BM2 and passed both SAR and Boating Safety mail-order courses. I also gave up a chance to go to Cape Disappointment to train on the MLB's to get married instead (to a BM1 on the Steadfast, a 210 stationed in St. Pete). Since I needed sea-time to make BM1, I wrote—and still have copies of—letters that I wrote in '76. In St. Pete I ran 17-footers, 30-footers and 40-footers for SAR.

Eventually, to satisfy the requirement for sea-time, I was sent to Cape May to get my heavy-weather coxswain certificate, which I did in (sometime between 1977 and 1978). I qualified on 41-footers and 44-foot MLBs. I made BM1 there. I was sent to LE school in Yorktown, VA, being the first female to attend (1978). And, I went to SAR School on Governor's Island in '79.

After Cape May, I was stationed in Key West as the only BM in the ops-center. This was in 1979. While there, I was asked to be a part of the DACOWITS conference in D.C.in April of 1980. Then came the Mariel Boat Lift and the GRU, as well as the rest of the Coast Guard, was quite busy for a few months.

I was then sent to the USCGC Mellon in Seattle, WA, fall of 1980. I was in charge of the deck force, the forecastle during special sea detail and the small boat detachments when we were on patrol. I also qualified as LSO during my tour there. We trained twice in San Diego at REFTRA as well as 2-month tours to AK for fishery patrols. I left the Mellon in '82.

Since I wanted to have a well-rounded career, I next went to an ANT team in Dulac, LA. They were in charge of all he buoys in Terrebonne Bay and up the channels in southern LA. I went to ATON School, again on Governor's Island. I ran a 55-foot buoy boat while there. After a little over a year there, I chose to leave the service in Aug '83.

Bosun's Mate Marlene Detienne

Staff Photo by GOERGE TRABANT

Bosun's Mate

3,100 Men, Six Women

SARAH SNYDER
Staff Writer

Marlene Detienne became the sixth female bosun's mate in the U.S. Coast Guard three weeks ago.

She applied for the rating in March after her required six months as a seaman, and scored 10th out of 373 applicants. At present, 3,100 men hold the rating.

"It's kind of a big deal, but I've been one of the guys since I've been here," she says. "It's all in the woman's attitude. If she thinks she's something special, she'll get a lot of flack."

Now that she's a bosun's mate, Ms. Detienne works as boat coxswain, in charge of the Coast Guard's 40-foot rescue vessels from the time they leave the station to the time they return. She is responsible for the success or failure of whatever rescue mission she takes a crew out on.

"A seaman just executes the orders of a bosun's mate," she says. "And they're under constant training. A mate has more responsibility — and better pay!"

Some 350 women have joined the Coast Guard since it became the last branch of the military to be opened to them 1½ years ago. Most of the women are yeomen — secretaries in the Coast Guard who deal strictly with office work.

"I don't know why more women wouldn't want to be bosun's mates," Ms. Detienne says.

Ms. Detienne is on rescue duty 24 hours straight every fourth day. The rest of the time she works with other bosun's mates and seamen maintaining the boats.

Although she is in full charge of small boat crews, she's restricted from going to sea in either a black fleet or white fleet ship, because the Navy has not provided facilities for women on their larger vessels.

"I'd really like to be able to go to sea, and the Navy is considering putting separate rooms on ships like the Steadfast (a Coast Guard cutter) but it hasn't yet. Women just can't go."

Of the 25 ratings in the Coast Guard, seven are open to women: yoeman, storekeeper, corpsman (Medic), dental technician, electronics engineer, radio man and bosun's mate, the last to be opened.

"When I was in boot camp and they announced that bosun's mate rating had just been opened to women, almost every guy there started laughing. They thought it was pretty funny — and a lot still do."

Boot camp training is exactly the same for women as men. "You get up at 5 a.m., run a mile, do exercises, drills — it's the same," Ms. Detienne says.

"I haven't run across any sitution where being weaker than a man was a handicap. You handle anchors and pull people out of the water — and pull yourself out, that's harder — but it's no hassle. But I can't just say that I can do it. I have to prove it. Handling a 90-pound jackhammer was fun!"

Ms. Detienne got her share of "flack," as a seaman. "Most women would close their ears at some of the talk, but I'm used to it," she says. "The attitude among some men is either they think you can't do something or they're trying to scare you off."

But none of the Coast Guard men working with her show resentment, deference or any other sign they feel she is something special. Most of them joke about a few of the names they called her when she was still new. Now there is more comaraderie between Ms. Detienne and the boat crews than between most of the men.

She's still a bit of a novelty — not that she gets any special treatment, because she's the last to want any, but because the men feel she has overcome possibly more kidding than the average seaman, and because she has proved herself not just to be capable, but unusually so. She became a bosun's mate in the shortest time possible and will be going up for second class rating in September.

Of course, the Coast Guard isn't Ms. Detienne's whole life. She says, "I like to keep my private life and Coast Guard life separate — except when I go out and get drunk with the guys!"

A Sense Of Responsibility

Finds assignment as boatswain mate challenging

" The Coast Guard instills in a person a sense of responsibility; you realize it's all up to you, " said BM3 Marlene Detienne, a coxswain of 30 and 40 foot search and rescue boats at Coast Guard Base St. Petersburg, Fl.

A high school graduate from Seattle, BM3 Detienne traveled around the country, going from job to job. Finally, in February of last year, she joined the Coast Guard " for excitement and challenge."

While in boot camp, the boatswain mate rate was opened to women. Detienne, wanting a job out of doors, jumped at the opportunity to strike for the rating.