

The Ottawa University Alumni Association
Presents the 2005
OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

To
Dorothy C. Stratton
Class of 1920



Field of Accomplishment: Leadership for Women

In 1920, when Dorothy C. Stratton received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Ottawa University, the career prospects for women were somewhat more restrained than they are today. But it appears that the trends of the time did nothing to dampen Dorothy's enthusiasm for personal and professional growth.

After leaving Ottawa, she continued her education by attaining a Master of Arts in Psychology from the University of Chicago; and then a Doctorate of Philosophy in Student Personnel Administration from Columbia University. Dorothy taught in several different school systems while she completed her advanced degrees, and then she joined the staff of Purdue University as Dean of Women and Associate Professor of Psychology in 1933. She became a full professor at Purdue in 1940.

As the country faced the prospect of World War II, Dorothy felt an urgent need to serve her country. She has been quoted as saying that a woman trustee at Purdue – where she was Dean of Women – said, “Dorothy, you can't afford to do this.” To which Dorothy replied, “I can't afford not to.”

In the summer of 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 the U.S. Naval Training Station at Smith College. She had begun her first work assignment for the WAVES when she received a telegram instructing her to go to Washington, D.C.

In the nation's capitol in November 1942, President Roosevelt signed the law establishing the Coast Guard Women's Reserve, and the then-Lt. Stratton was sworn in as its director. She became the first woman accepted for service as a commissioned officer in the history of the United States Coast Guard.

As she began her new assignment, Dorothy urged the adoption of the acronym SPARs as a name for the members of the Women's Reserves, based on the Coast Guard motto “Semper Paratus – Always Ready.” She pointed out that “a

spar is often a supporting beam and that is what we hope each member of the Women's Reserve will be." Dorothy's instinct was right on target, and the acronym was adopted.

During her four years as director of the SPARs she recruited and led 10,000 enlisted women and 1,000 commissioned officers. She led the service through World War II and until the SPARs' demobilization was completed in June of 1946. Dorothy has been quoted as saying: "I am sometimes referred to as the commanding officer of the SPARs. Actually, I had no command authority. All I had was the power of persuasion."

In 1946, Captain Stratton was awarded the Legion of Merit. At the time of its presentation, the Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal, noted that Dorothy was "A brilliant organizer and administrator [who] demonstrated a keen understanding of the abilities of women. . ." On receiving the award, Captain Stratton noted: "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."

Following her service career, Dorothy Stratton went on to serve as director of personnel for the International Monetary Fund, and then spent 10 years as the national executive director of the Girl Scouts of America.

At the time of this writing, Dorothy Stratton is living in West Lafayette, Indiana, and has reached 105 years of age. Long past her 100th birthday, she maintained her interests and her memberships in 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 as an associate member of the American Psychological Association. By coincidence on the day this nominating statement was prepared, a check to Ottawa University's Annual Fund arrived from Dorothy Stratton. Her 106th birthday will fall on March 24, 2005, God willing.

For her bold pursuit of personal and professional growth, her dynamic organizational and leadership skills, and her life-long contributions to the prospects for women and to society, Dorothy C. Stratton is awarded the OUAA's prestigious Outstanding Achievement Award.

Outstanding Achievement Award

This new award, established in 2005, is designed to recognize those who have made their mark and made a difference in their chosen field of endeavor. Recipients will, over time, constitute OU's "hall of fame" and their life stories will help demonstrate what one can do with an OU education. The OUAA Board notes that the large number of awards being presented this first year should not be interpreted as diluting the importance of the recognition. With over 18,000 living alumni, the Board wanted this inaugural class to help demonstrate the scope and intent of the award. The number of awards given annually is expected to decrease in coming years.