

FIRST AA FEMALE HELO PILOT (MH65):
An Up-close Interview with *LT LaShanda Jones*



Interview By: Mr. David S. Rosen, PACAREA
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BACKGROUND

1985 ~ Born in New Jersey, raised in Fayetteville, NC

2003 ~ Entered Spelman College for Women on partial Bonner scholarship

2005 ~ CG in Junior Year via CSPI Program

2008 ~ OCS, then Pensacola Flight School

2010 ~ LA Airsta, with training at Mobile

WHY THE COAST GUARD?

La'Shanda initiated contact with a CG recruiter at a Spelman College Job Fair at the end of her sophomore year. While manning a booth for the Bonner Scholar Foundation, she thanked the recruiter, retired Senior Chief Dexter Lindsey, for his service. He in turn discussed the CG career path and was impressed by the 19-year-old LaShanda, offering her a full scholarship for her remaining two years. (Tuition was \$28k.) Her first summer was spent in Boot Camp, her second in Miami. Upon graduating she was sent to Staten Island for Vessel Inspection duties with the MSSTs and underway for 3 months with the CGC *Midgett*.

WHY DID YOU BECOME A PILOT?

While at Staten Island, LaShanda was volunteered for the opportunity to sail on the CGC *Midgett* that September. (OCS didn't start until January.) She sailed from Seattle to Kodiak, Dutch Harbor and Japan for three months, developing an interest in navigation. However, the Ops Chief was impressed by her dedication and hard work and advised her to consider aviation. He pointed her to Jeannine Menzie, the first female AA USCG pilot, as a role model. The *Midgett* docked in December.

La'Shanda had one month before OCS started in January 2008. She was able to get orders to Clearwater, where she was befriended and inspired by Jeannine and her husband George, an HH60 pilot. Both Jeanine and George mentored La'Shanda and took her flying in their aircraft. She in turn demonstrated leadership and initiative.

WHAT WAS THE HARDEST PART OF YOUR TRAINING?

Flying solo for the first time in a Cessna. At Pensacola LaShanda learned to enjoy formation flying. She studied engines, transmissions and mechanical gear and learned aerodynamics, charting and instrumentation. She flew a variety of small planes and helicopters. Flight school lasted from June 2008-January 2010.

WHAT IS THE GREATEST CHALLENGE OF BEING AN MH-65 PILOT AT LA AIRSTA?

La'Shanda began her four-year stint with HH65 Dolphin training in Mobile. She greatly enjoys the teamwork at the Airsta, the company of six other female officers and the leadership of her Operations Officer Commander Elizabeth Booker.

Challenges include Instrument Flying (IFR), which is simulated in Los Angeles due to the weather. Another challenge is learning hoisting and calculating the torque margin. The LT continues to demonstrate hard work, initiative, learning aptitude and dedication.

