Introduction

Good morning. We are so happy to be here. ENS Lawrence, Senior Chief Monette and I are here representing the Commander of Task Force 76, which is located in Okinawa and Sasebo, Japan. The task force commander, Rear Admiral Carol Pottenger, was hoping to be with us today but unfortunately she is out of the country and unable to attend. Admiral Pottenger is the first female commander of a forward deployed combat strike group and an excellent example of a successful female military officer. Though we will not be able to hear from such an impressive individual today, I think the three of us will be able to speak about learning to become a leader in the military. We will be talking more broadly about the average female Naval leader, from the perspective of mid-grade, junior officers, and senior enlisted female leaders. I hope our experiences will be useful for you all.

Brief History of Women’s Service in the United States

First, I would like to talk briefly about the history of women’s military service in the United States.

Women have been serving in the American armed forces since our country was formed. Prior to the First World War, women served in small numbers, sometimes even disguised as men. During the American Revolution, General George Washington, who later became America’s first president, employed women to help supply, feed and nurse his soldiers. During the Civil War, women served officially as nurses. However, it is only since the early twentieth century that women have been allowed to enlist in the military
in greater numbers. Eleven thousand American women served in the Navy and Marine Corps during World War I as yeomen, telephone operators, and nurses. Twenty years later, Four hundred thousand American women served during World War II as transport pilots, scientists, instructors, radio operators, nurses and translators.¹

Yet after each of these wars the female units were disbanded and women did not become part of the peace-time United States military in any significant numbers until the 1970’s. In 1973 the Navy was the first service to again train women as pilots. These first women pilots completed training in 1974 and were permitted to fly combat aircraft, but they were restricted from landing on and flying off ships. Air Force and Army women were also trained, but until 1993 female Air Force pilots were restricted to flying tankers and transport aircraft, and Army women were restricted to flying support helicopters.² In 1976 women began attending the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis, as well as the other military academies, and beginning in 1978 American Navy women were permitted to serve on non-combatant ships, such as supply and repair ships. Admiral Pottenger was one of those first women to serve on ships as a Surface Warfare Officer (officers with a specialty to serve on and eventually command Navy ships) and was also one of the first women to become Commanding Officer of her own ship.

Many of those first women officers and enlisted women experienced prejudice, discrimination and even occasionally harassment. But they did not quit. I consider those first women pilots and surface warriors, and the first women to attend the Naval Academy to be some of the bravest women in recent history.
Things have changed

Today things have changed. In 1979 there were over 600,000 personnel in the United States Navy, but there were only 18 women serving as officers on Navy ships. Today there are 350,000 Navy personnel and 50,000 of them, 14% are women; 7,500 are female officers. 19,000 women are serving on 164 ships and ten women are in command. When I was commissioned as an Ensign in 1994, women were starting to be sent to combatant ships and I was assigned to the USS FORT MCHENRY, an amphibious landing ship stationed in Sasebo, Japan. My younger sister, also a Navy ROTC graduate, was commissioned as a Navy Ensign in 1998 and her first ship was a destroyer. Women are now permitted to serve on all Navy ships except submarines.

Fifty one military women have reached flag rank in the United States, which means Rear Admirals, Vice Admirals and Four Star Admirals in the Navy, and Brigadier Generals, Major Generals, Lieutenant Generals and Four Star Generals in the Army, Air Force and Marine Corps. More impressively, over 1200 women have reached the rank of 0-6, which is one rank lower than Flag: Captains in the Navy and Colonels in the other services. Today women make up one in seven of U.S. military personnel serving in Iraq.

Between 1977 and 2004, Admiral Pottenger served on five ships, and was the Commanding Officer of two ships. ADM Mike Mullen, the Chief of Naval Operations and President Bush’s nominee to be the next Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, recently said of Admiral Pottenger: “(She is) an exceptional role model, not only for women—
though certainly young women can find much to emulate in her—but also for sailors of any stripe and any age.”

**Female Leadership Styles**

So what does it take for a woman to become an Admiral or a General? The inscription on the Women in the Military Service for America Memorial in Washington D.C. is a quote from Army Colonel Rhonda Cornum, who served and was captured as a prisoner of war in Iraq in 1991. The inscription reads: “The qualities that are most important in all military jobs—things like integrity, moral courage, and determination—have nothing to do with gender.”

What qualities do senior female military officers have in common? Well, first and foremost they are very good at their jobs. They are dedicated, organized, and have the ability to work as a team player. They are also extremely confident and driven. Women who are serving as top leaders in the United States military today have generally succeeded because they have learned to function and excel in a workplace dominated by men, and they have mastered the values respected by men. They have grown up in an environment where their boss and all their peers were men. They have learned to be aggressive, authoritative, and decisive. Many of these values and traits are different from those traditionally associated with women.

Women in the private sector today are succeeding as leaders by emphasizing their feminine qualities, like nurturing, displaying empathy, cooperating, collaborating, and playing down their own contributions to emphasize the accomplishments of their team. They can succeed in business emphasizing these qualities because their
“feminine” leadership style has been proven to raise productivity and attract customers. Rigid hierarchies and top-down management approaches are no longer the preferred management style in business. However, hierarchy is an innate part of the military. In the Navy, our job is train and lead our sailors, so when called upon we can fight and win. Do these feminine leadership qualities have a place in the military?

I believe that some distinctly feminine leadership qualities are beneficial for the military. Women are known as good communicators, known for empowering their subordinates, and being positive. We strengthen our divisions and departments by strengthening those around us, inspiring our Sailors to excel. We use collaboration to elicit ideas from our subordinates that improve the organization. Women can bring different perspectives to looking at problems, and new solutions to new challenges. Though as female leaders we must adjust our style to fit the military culture, we have a lot to offer as leaders and we can help the military improve.

**Challenges Women Face in the Military**

Women still face challenges in the military. When asked what her biggest obstacle was to succeeding as a leader, Army Lieutenant General Claudia Kennedy (ret.) replied:

“In my early years, it was my own sense of ambivalence about resolving femininity and authority. Later, it was thinking about whether I could have a family and an army career.”

Military women must still juggle marriage, childcare, and housework. As in business, working women often continue to bear the majority of cooking, cleaning, and
childcare responsibilities, working a “second shift” after returning home from their day-job. When was the last time you heard a man wondering whether he could have a family and a career as well, or discussing the challenges of being a working father?

Married military women have the added challenge of transferring to new jobs in new locations every 2-3 years. This makes it difficult for husbands to pursue a career, and not many men are willing to sacrifice their career for their wife’s career. In dual military families, there is the challenge of finding career-enhancing jobs in the same location. Often couples must choose between choice jobs and being stationed with their spouse. Many women choose to make career sacrifices in order keep their family together, which can take them off the fast-track for promotions.

Women with children are often unwilling to go to sea for extended periods of time and to be separated from their children. Because of this, many of the senior Surface Warfare female officers are either unmarried or they are married with no children. I have a 15 month-old daughter. My specialty is intelligence rather than Surface Warfare. I began my career as a Surface Warfare Officer, but decided to switch specialties because there are many more shore-based jobs in the intelligence field and I am not required to spend as much time at sea in order to be promoted. On our ship there is only one female Surface Warfare Officer who is married and has children. She has two daughters who are four and three years old, and she says that she is finding it harder and harder to get underway and leave them behind.

Of course, there are exceptions, and as society changes there will be more men willing to stay home with the children while their wife goes to sea. In my case, my husband works from home as a translator and editor, and he agreed to take some time
In the information age, more and more men are able to work from home through the internet, and their careers have become more “portable.”

**The Future of Female Leadership in the Military**

What does the future hold? As more and more women rise to the higher ranks in the Navy and other services, we may slowly begin to change the culture. In ten years Navy Captains will not remember a time when women weren’t flying F-18s, and in twenty years Admirals will not have served in a Navy that restricted women from combatant ships. It will no longer be a challenge to be accepted as part of the team. We will help define the team.

There will still be those who believe that women should not serve in combat positions, but as more women serve honorably in Iraq and Afghanistan, American society has begun to come to terms with the thought of women serving and dying in combat. Between March of 2003 and September 1st of this year, 80 military women have been killed in Iraq.¹⁴ In the Global War On Terror, there are no longer front lines and rear-support areas. The front lines are everywhere. A convoy truck driver is more likely to be killed in Iraq by an IED than an infantry soldier on the ground. And that truck driver is often a woman.

Sending women to combat areas is also a necessity; the U.S. Military can no longer carry out its many missions without including women in almost all of them. As one enlisted man put it, “We have too much work to do here to worry about whether it is done by a man or a woman.”¹⁵
However, women still need more female role-models and mentors. Although there are currently many women in senior positions, the majority of junior female officers have a male boss. My boss and my boss’s boss are both men. Interestingly, my ship’s Commanding Officer’s boss is a woman (RADM Potterger). He says, “Actually Admiral Potterger is exactly like all the other bosses I have had ...she’s taller than me (he’s kind of short and the Admiral is very tall). My point is that in establishing a working relationship, gender is no more important or relevant than height or eye color or skin color or hometown. ” More and more, men are beginning to respect and admire their female commanders.

But even today, women rarely have the benefit of learning to become a leader from a successful female officer. Therefore, we continue to emulate more masculine leadership styles. But imagine a military where women learn successful female leadership styles from their female boss. How would that change the organization? Once military women have more female superiors and peers, I believe they will be better able to exert their own natural leadership styles and display more of their innate strengths.

Female Leaders’ Contributions to International Security Cooperation

Female military leaders can also make international contributions. Greater cooperation and coordination among countries is proving to be the best way to defend our shared global interests. Admiral Potterger assigns great importance to the engagement aspect of her job, interacting positively with other countries through port visits, community relations projects, and joint military exercises. Her goal is to send the
seven ships under her command to ports the United States Navy hasn’t visited for many years and to expand the impact of community relations projects while the ships are there. She is striving to work together with the militaries of other Asian countries to foster mutual understanding and collective security.

Senior female officers can also set an example for other cultures with male dominated societies that may dismiss women as inferior. Women leaders in the United States Navy interact with leaders all over the world, and symbolize what women can achieve when they are allowed to perform to their fullest potential. Admiral Pottenger routinely works with military leaders from Asian countries where women do not serve in the senior ranks. She is planning to visit military academies in the Philippines and South Korea and meet with their female cadets, demonstrating to them that women can make outstanding military leaders. When countries discount women’s abilities they cut their talent pool and brainpower in half. Perhaps we can help improve women’s status in these societies.

Conclusion

In closing, I would like to share some advice from a senior female military leader to all of you in the audience who are future leaders for Japan and the world. Jo Rusin, a retired female Army Colonel gives us all this advice:

“At the beginning of your career, the world of business, like the military world, can be intimidating. Don’t be afraid. Nobody starts off knowing everything about his or her work. If you didn’t have what it takes to succeed, you wouldn’t be here. …(however)
Natural-born leaders are few and far between. The rest of us have to learn to become leaders.”19

And finally a quote from our Task Force Commander, Admiral Pottenger. She says:

“I have served in the USN for thirty years. I have had the great fortune to be mentored by amazing leaders, both men and women; and I have tried to pass that mentoring along to those who work for me. I believe one of the most important traits of a good leader – whether in the military, business, academia; of whatever race, gender or persuasion, is to bring along those coming up behind. If you commit to the development of your people as a primary focus of your energy and passion, everything else falls into place.”

Thank you.

2 Ibid., p. 442.
3 Ibid., p. 445.
5 Ibid., p. 89. See also “2006 Military Personnel Statistics.”
7 Wilson, Closing the Leadership Gap, p. 89.
10 Book, Why the Best Man for the Job is a Woman, p. xiv.
11 Ibid., p. xv.
12 Ibid., pp. xiv–xv.
13 Wilson, Closing the Leadership Gap, p. 154.
15 Wilson, Closing the Leadership Gap, p. 89.
16 McCloskey, They View Me As A Novelty.”
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.