

Women in TACAMO

Written by **Cheryl Vos** and Edited with historical data by **Vern Lochausen**

(Editor's note by Vern: From the perspective of today's TACAMO and today's Navy populated by very successful women, some may find it hard to believe or understand the great challenges early women pioneers of TACAMO faced. Here's a recounting of those challenges, the women who overcame them, and the great successes many achieved for the Navy at large, TACAMO, the women who followed, AND themselves.)

When I joined the Navy in 1977 as a woman, my life had its challenges, as I entered a man's world. After 2 years of active duty in a helicopter squadron and experiencing harassments, the man's world sent me off to Navy Corpsman school. In this article, I will relate the history of females in TACAMO and how TACAMO officers helped provide policies, workshops and care for integrating females into TACAMO. *Cheryl Wahn Vos US Navy: 1977 to 1983, daughter of a Navy Chief*

Women's naval history officially started in 1908 with the establishment of the Navy Nurse Corps. Today, there are almost 60,000 women serving alongside their male counterparts, with great opportunities ahead of them and a wake of history and perseverance behind them. The 20th century saw women make great strides in naval service.

1978 – THE BEGINNING...

These are the situations the first female officers experienced when assigned to TACAMO:

- One woman was told by her detailer that she was not wanted. The squadron CO resisted efforts to assign women
- Another CO addressed limited resistance by careful scheduling and ensured his XO and OPS O monitored issues
- Flight school experiences enroute included females being assigned deflated grades to protect TACAIR selection process
- Some squadron male officers effectively mentored the women.

Issues: Pregnancy policy, Commanding Officer's attitude/favoritism, resentment of Junior Officers, women's aggressiveness to break into "the crowd", belief that maintaining standards for qualification would be eroded, fraternization policy, spouses reaction to females in the command, ignorance of female requirements, i.e. uniforms, hair, etc., weak sexual harassment policy, concerns about readiness, and inadequate facilities modifications.

Effective strategies followed by the women included: Ignoring jabs and innuendos, returning jabs with good natured retorts, avoiding open defensiveness or carrying a chip on their shoulder, focusing on teamwork, accepting no favors or breaks, not trying to be "one of the boys".

Serious and embarrassing harassment occurred in one squadron: Command leadership identified and harshly punished the offenders and later all female flight deck crews were sparingly deployed to show competence. The Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) study in 1978 addressed no Navy-specific issues. It did address repeal of combat exclusion, some UCMJ and uniform and fitness issues. DACOWITS did interview TACAMO women in 80s/90s.

1983 – HEADQUARTERS ASKING.....

In December 1983, when the second group of women were arriving in TACAMO to replace those rotating to shore duty, Naval Aviation Pacific headquarters asked VQ-3 for information and assessment of women being assigned. "Provide recommendations in regard to maximum number of women that could be assigned to VQ-3 as enlisted, officers/pilots/NFO's and enlisted in flight status without impacting the operation readiness." The squadron leadership wisely asked the women while evaluating just how they had impacted VQ-3's stand up from a near-ghost squadron to full, 24x7x365 deployed airborne operations.

These are reactions from women in VQ-3 recorded and used for VQ-3's reply:

- *LT Pilot:* "I was extremely surprised to see this message on the boards. Had the message asked how may blacks/Filipino/blond headed male southpaws the squadron could take before affecting operational readiness, the overall reaction of ALCON would have been to call B.S. on it. However: Our goal is to DO THE JOB! Let's get the mission done, give 110%, and accept nothing less. A squadron, ship or station with 100% women (substitute 'black', 'AmerIndians' or 'Puerto Ricans' here!) is absurd. A good balance is needed. Logically & realistically, a 100% - female squadron is possible, but ridiculous."
- *LT NFO:* "Let's make VQ-3 100% women and get everyone off our backs with all these ridiculous, unanswerable questions. Our job is to get the mission done. All other considerations are secondary."
- *Staff Ensign:* "When trying to put percentages on the number of women in VQ-3, the numbers game becomes the driving force vice determining mission requirement to accomplish the job. Subjectively speaking, a balance of people is much more important than playing numbers."

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- LTJG NFO, later RADM: “The entire question is ridiculous. The big question shouldn’t be, “How many women do we have in that department?” But rather, “Who do we have that can do the job?” More billets for women should be made available that would result in a warfare speciality. Restricting women to only two squadrons keeps us noncompetitive for promotion and —Ultimately — command.”
- LTJG NFO: “There are dirt ball men and women and also 4.0 men and women. The balance (percentage-wise) is unimportant as long as we get the job done. Who thought up this question?!”
- LT Pilot: (about 5ft 4): “I can see no physical limitations that would apply to restrict female aircrewmembers. Having 100% women in the squadron is reverse prejudice. The key word here is balance. Because other communities aren’t open to women (e.g, VP, TACAIR), the women are going to go for the billets that will keep them competitive. In my opinion, the squadron could use more women just to establish a better balance.”
- ATC Aircrew: “There shouldn’t be any limit on the number of women in this squadron. We’re here to do our jobs as best we can ... heavy physical labor nowadays is done by cranes, hoists, carts, etc. Both men and women, if physically unable to do something like lifting a crate, find ways around the need for sheer brute strength.”
- RM2 Aircrew later RMCM and detailer: “C’mon — let’s do the job! We’re all Sailors — there should be no differentiation based on sex. The big cut should be qualifications: can you do the job? If so, how well? There are both lazy men and women — reject those dirt balls. For women RM’s to be competitive for the E-7 board, they must have sea duty, not this Type II stuff. Only lip service is paid by board members to Type III duty. VQ-3/4 are —for us— the main sources of sea duty quals for advancement to E-7. I don’t think the numbers should be limited.”

These are reactions from women in VQ-3 regarding pregnancy:

- LT: “The pregnancy issue is actually NOT an issue. As stated by CNO in Navy Times, it has been well documented that more time is lost off the job by men due to alcoholism, drug use, UA, and illness than by women due to these reasons plus pregnancy. Additionally pregnancy is a medical down —no negative gut reactions (pardon the pun) are elected by an aircrewman’s going down for an ear block, sinus block, “headaches”, stomach aches, etc., than by a crew member becoming pregnant. In summation, pregnancy is subjective, not objective. The skipper has been put between a rock and a hard place on this one.”
- ENSIGN: “A woman in uniform is threatening to some men. A pregnant military member who has the additional ‘burden’ of being competent is even more threatening. The pregnancy issue is a highly charged emotional topic which should not even be discussed. it is a medically downing condition, NOT a reflection of the woman’s emotional stability, commitment to her naval career, etc. RE Single Parents: This is NOT a situation specific to women. Single parents in VQ-3 have ranged from married (and unmarried) female E-3’s to divorced, male O-4’s...I would suggest that VQ-3 could develop some type of training/preparation for all parents concerning actions to be taken if the parent/spouse is called to duty because of an increased DEFCON situation. “The Navy take care of its own” should not apply only to married people who have children.”

VQ-3 responded to the inquiry, citing the data requested and offering an assessment: **SUMMARY**

- 1983 female manning summary: Enlisted: 504, Females: 118, Percentage 20% —Pilots 55, Females: 6, Percentage 11% — NFO: 37, Females: 6, Percentage 16% — Enlisted Aircrew: 131, Females: 6, Percentage 5%
- Female personnel at these levels have had no negative impact on operational readiness and in fact have made significant contributions to VQ-3 achieving full operation capability.
- In absence of firm quantitative data, recommend that female personnel be assigned to VQ-3 in the same ratio as in the Navy. Using that percentage as a limiting factor would yield the following maximum number of women to be assigned to VQ-3: Female Enlisted: 101, Officers: 21, Pilots: 11, NFO: 7, Enlisted in flight status: 26.
- Maximum number of female enlisted/officers combination aircrew is four due to berthing limitations of the alert facility preclude more.
- The numbers of females in the squadron are so well integrated that there has evolved the capability to perform any assigned mission without negative impact.

1988 – CO TELLS THE STORY OF SUCCESS

After serving in VQ-3 from 1981 to 1987 CDR Barry J. Coyle, wrote a Navy War College paper on “Women in the Navy” in 1988. Barry addressed these issues: women’s responses to headquarters inquiry, documented success of TACAMO women key leadership roles. Based on his experience, he made recommendations for Navy at large. “Women in the Navy” was edited and published in Naval Institute Proceedings:

Some excerpts from Barry’s paper:

- *Women in the US Navy have never been deliberately assigned to direct combat duty - this being an exclusively male function. And while women have played a significant role in helping to win wars, they have been largely excluded from peacetime military forces.*
- *The principal drawback is the fact that this is a controversial and forward-looking decision which would require Navy leadership to overcome some false beliefs and stereotypes.*

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- *The history of VQ-3 during 1981 to 1987 illustrates both satisfactory performance of women and the challenges of fully integrating women into a previously all-male organization.*
- *Although VQ-3 is part of the nuclear strike forces, it was somehow chosen as “non-combat” duty for the purposes of assigning women. During this time the percentage grew to reach 28% women.*

In summary, VQ-3 was scheduled to receive the oldest EC-130Q aircraft during this period (in place of all new Q's) between 1980 and 83. This complete turnover was successfully accomplished in 13 months in 1984-85. All of these challenges were met, not at a minimum level, but with a high degree of professionalism and ever improving excellence. In recognition of its performance, VQ-3 became one of the most highly decorated squadrons in the Navy, winning a Navy Unit commendation, a Meritorious Unit Commendation, two consecutive Battle citations for maintenance and operation excellence with 25% females integrated into the male-female team. Women officers served as Mission Commanders, Aircraft Commanders, Instructor Pilots, Division Officers, Flight Surgeons, and Intelligence Officer. Enlisted women, from E-3 to E-7, served in every aircrew position and, in every rating used in the squadron. This including the aviation maintenance rating, Radioman, Master-at-Arms, Intelligence Specialist and Yeoman. Women made invaluable contributions to the success of the squadron.

The TACAMO Community is unique in the Navy in that female officer and enlisted personnel are assigned to a Warfare Specialty squadron in which they serve alongside men in every aircrew position and rating and can compete with their male counterparts for advancement and promotion. For officers, this includes competing for Aviation Command.

The real question is: What difference does it make? The attitudes, physical strength, proper ratio of women to men, facilities, pregnancy, fraternization, sexual harassment, public opinion all came with workshops in VQ-3.

Barry Coyle's Conclusion and Recommendations from his Navy War College paper on “Women in the Navy” in 1988:

The Navy's experience with women in ships and squadrons over the last 10 years adequately demonstrates women's capabilities to perform arduous duty under difficult conditions. Units with mixed teams of men and women have performed as well as any in the Navy, as discussed in this paper. There seems to be no compelling reason to deny women volunteers the opportunity to serve in combat billets in ships, aircraft and submarines of the Navy. Assignments of this type would solve the current rating imbalance and permit continued access to high quality manpower pool.

Recommendations:

- *Introduce legislation to repeal 6015, 10 USC. The Navy successfully altered this stature in 1977 and should have no trouble eliminating now.*
- *Develop job-related physical standards for ratings, specialties and units where strength may be a factor in performance. Then develop screening and testing procedures for men and women desiring to enter or remain in these billets.*
- *Establish policy and directives for equitable assignment of women and ensure the programs are managed from the top down.*

1993 -NAVY ASKS WING HOWGOZIT

The TACAMO Wing was commissioned in May 1992. The USS Lincoln carrier battle group was preparing for the integration of women for an upcoming deployment. Naval Air Forces Command asked TACAMO again how it went and for some recommendations based on the experience of women in TACAMO

A roundtable discussion among men and women in the Wing was set up. At that time women represented about 18% of the community units at Tinker. Several had returned for a second/third tour in TACAMO. They had progressed to the Senior Chief and O-5 level of leadership and one has been selected for training squadron command.

Recommendations from the roundtable group included:

- *Support at Department Head/XO/CO level is critical*
- *Set command climate and state expectations at command indoctrination and welcome aboard interviews*
- *Zero tolerance policy on fraternization and prejudice/harassment*
- *Assign female senior enlisted and officers ahead of less mature GENDET high risk group to set the right tone. Work together and acknowledge differences between men and women*
- *Assign more than one or two females to a unit to allow the command to more easily assimilate them*
- *Evaluate females on their individual merits rather than as a group*
- *Don't have a separate chain of command for male/female issues*
- *Men must be familiar with female uniform standards*
- *Pregnancies have not been a problem*
- *Education and counseling of young enlisted personnel required for pregnancies. Balance manning in shops to avoid shortages*
- *Facilities can be modified with money or ingenuity (flip signs on heads, deploy women in pairs, etc.)*

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1996 -DACOWITZ VISITS THE WING

JAN 1996: Females in TACAMO

	Enlisted	Officers		Enlisted	Officers
CSCW-1	29	2	VQ-4 (sea)	25	7
NTSU	3	1	NTG	3	0
VQ-3 (shore)	10	1	PSD	4	0
VQ-3 (sea)	37	5	VQ-4 Det PAX	18	0
VQ-4 (shore)	17	0	VQ-3 Det TRAVIS	13	0

TOTAL: Enlisted 159, Officers 16

The Defense Advisory Committee of Women in the Services (DACOWITS) Fall Conference was held in Oklahoma City. The Navy had an allocation from the Office of Secretary of Defense reception and dinner. The committee interviewed CDR Nora Tyson, then CO of VQ-4, later VADM Tyson and Commander Third Fleet. She highlighted the success of and significant contributions of women in TACAMO. The DACOWITS study in 1996 used some of the Wing recommendations:

- Open all class ships and aircraft to women
- Additional child care support services

Each year, DACOWITS continued to interview women in the military, hear their stories, recommendations, and successes. Each year the recommendations varied but continued to get into the real issues that needed to be addressed by the Services and the Department of Defense. These examples show the progression of issues.

1997 - DACOWITS Study Recommendations:

- Equality Management: promote command climate which ensures human dignity on overseas installations
- Quality of Life: Establish a women’s health curriculum for providers that would be applicable for each level of care

2018 - DACOWITS Study Recommendations:

- Conscious and unconscious gender bias
- Review of pregnancy polices to ensure careers aren’t harmed

- Safe helplines for cases of abuse in dating, spousal, other situations
- Increased opportunities for women’s service on ships
- Increased child care and lactation support facilities
- Updates of Physical Fitness Assessments/body fat standard

2021 - DACOWITS Study Recommendations:

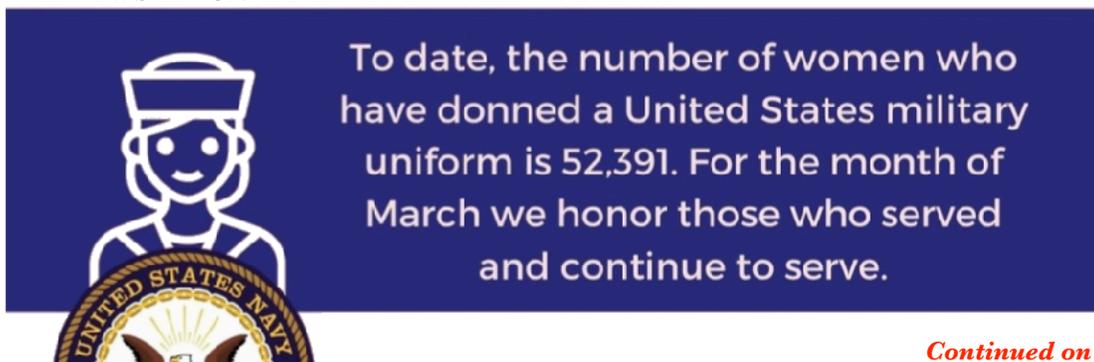
- Committee will examine the impacts of pregnancy and the postpartum period on a servicewoman’s ability to progress in her military career, to include pregnancy discrimination.

2021-TODAY’S NAVY

As the 21st century progresses, so does technology and war fighting. Gender has become less of an issue as the ability to operate complex equipment has become even more important. In 2010, the Department of the Navy announced that women would be authorized to serve aboard submarines. Ballistic-missile (SSBN) and guided-missile (SSGN) class submarines were the first to have female Sailors among their crews. In 2016, Secretary of the Navy Ash Carter opened all combat jobs to women. The need to ‘account for’ women in TACAMO and the Navy overall becomes less and less important as they are continuing to serve as team mates to their male counterparts. The TACAMO Wing reports:

TACAMO Females summary:

There are currently **approximately 369 female** (enlisted and officer) serving in TACAMO including all UIC’s. There are others in support like TWS and CNATT that are not within our numbers.



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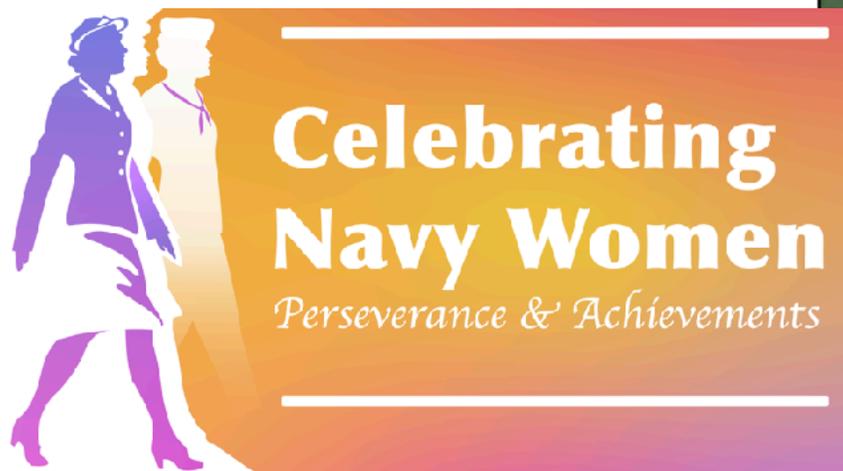
PROOF POSITIVE-TACAMO WOMEN MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN KEY LEADERSHIP POSITIONS:

- VQ Detailer: LT **Peg Klein** - Mid '80s
- Squadron COs:
 - VT-28: **Jeanine Igou**, T-34s, Corpus
 - VQ-4: **Nora Tyson**
 - VQ-3: **Sue Davies**, later **Peg Klein**
- Wing Commander: **Peg Klein**
- Amphibious Deep Draft Command: **Nora Tyson**
- Expeditionary Strike Group: **Peg Klein**
- Flag Officers: **Wendy Bryant, Nora Tyson, Peg Klein, Robin Braun**
- **Nora Tyson**: VQ-4 CO, Officer-in-charge at Naval Air Maintenance Training Detachment 1079, Director of Staff for the Commander of Naval Forces Europe, and an executive assistant to the Chief of Naval Operations, As Rear Admiral (lower half) Commander of Task Force 73 in Singapore, Commander of Carrier Strike Group Two, first woman to command a United States Navy aircraft carrier task group, Rear Admiral (upper half) Vice Director of the Joint Staff, vice admiral and named as Deputy Commander United States Fleet Forces Command, commander of the Third Fleet, making her the first woman to lead a United States Navy ship fleet, and Tyson implemented the '3rd Fleet Forward' initiative announced by CINCPACFLT Admiral Scott Swift, retaining Third Fleet operational control of forces, including a three-ship SAG and Carrier Strike Group 1, deployed beyond the hitherto Third Fleet/Seventh Fleet boundary at the International Date Line.
- **Peg Klein**: Senior Advisor for Military Professionalism, reporting directly to [Hagel] on issues related to military ethics, character, and leadership ... Rear Admiral Klein will coordinate the actions of the Joint Staff, the Combatant Commands, and each of the military services – working directly with the Service Secretaries and the Service Chiefs and Commandant at Naval Academy and the Expeditionary Strike Group CDR.
- **Robin Braun**: VR-48 CO, VADM Chief of Naval Reserves
- **Pam Vaughn Valdez**: Six years enlisted in VQ-4, 1984 joined Boeing as E-6 avionics maintenance training instructor; led program execution for several defense services programs including E-6 Training, E-6 Flight Test, Boeing Vice President of Air Force Services for Boeing Global Services.

2021- CNO PROJECTS RECOGNIZE WOMEN IN THE NAVY

The Navy History and Heritage Command published an e-book compendium of some of the Navy's most successful women, past and present. [Celebrating Navy Women: Perseverance & Achievements](#) came about as a result of the CNO Admiral Mike Gilday's wife Linda (Pictured at Right) just casually mentioned they should make the library in their official residence something special. They coined the phrase Women in the Navy or WIN. The compendium is just one of the recognition projects and it recognizes some the TACAMO women flag officers.

[2021 WIN EBOOK.PDF \(defense.gov\)](#)



Women in TACAMO

Reunion of "Ladies of the 1st 5 Years of TACAMO"

Barbara Righter: Enjoying a "Ladies of the 1st 5 Years of TACAMO" reunion at the summit of Pike's Peak 14,000' in Colorado Springs, hosted by Jeannie Igou.

Pictured: Front row (L) to (R)

- Cyndi Burgunder
- Peggy Klien
- Lisa (D12) Liton
- Robin Braun
- Sue Davies

Back row (L) to (R)

- Jeannie Igou
- Barbara Righter



WE ARE NOT INVISIBLE
 "LET THE GENERATIONS KNOW THAT WOMEN IN UNIFORM ALSO GUARANTEED THEIR FREEDOM. THAT OUR RESOLVE WAS JUST AS GREAT AS THE BRAVE MEN WHO STOOD AMONG US. AND WITH VICTORY OUR HEARTS WERE JUST AS FULL AND BEAT JUST AS FAST - THAT THE TEARS FELL JUST AS HARD FOR THOSE WE LEFT BEHIND."
World War II Army Nurse

Center for Women Veterans >>LINK

October 9, 1987 Wing Tips

Navy graduates 15 naval flight officers

Fifteen students graduated from Interservice Undergraduate Navigator Training Tuesday.

Ensign Stephen B. Zike earned the Alden C. Markey award, which is presented to the outstanding graduate of each IUNT class. He was also a distinguished graduate.

The other distinguished graduate was Lt. j.g. Kathryn A. Long.

The guest speaker was Navy Cap-

tain Eldon Stephen Wilson, assistant chief of staff for operations and training, where he oversees training for all naval aviators, naval flight officers and naval aircrewmembers. Following one year at San Angelo College he entered the University of Texas under an NROTC scholarship where he studied four years as a midshipman. In June 1966 he received a bachelor of arts degree

and was commissioned an ensign in the U.S. Navy. His first duty station was NAS Pensacola, Fla., where he began flight training. He graduated as a naval aviator in October 1967.

In July 1983, the captain reported for a tour of duty as a member of the chief of naval operations staff (OPNAV). During this three year tour, the captain served first as

assistant, then branch head for aviation anti-submarine warfare training and more recently as assistant for aviation policy and programs for the DCNO (air warfare).

Captain Wilson obtained his present rank in March 1986, and assumed his current assignment at NAS Corpus Christi in August of the same year.



Distinguished Graduate
 Lt. j.g. Kathryn A. Long
 VQ-3



Lt. j.g. Lesley S. Priest
 VQ-3
 Barbers Point, Hawaii



Ensign Tomothy P. Egan
 VQ-4
 Patuxent River, MD



Ensign Jeffrey A. Tallman
 VQ-4
 Patuxent River, MD