

# Fight for Women to Serve on Combat Ships

GRADES 8-12



## Overview

This activity is geared toward participants in grades 8-12. The estimated amount of time to deliver this lesson is 75 minutes.

Ever since the Revolutionary War, women have played a role in the military history of the United States. Despite this, societal views on gender put constraints on the capacities in which women were allowed to serve, especially in combat. In this lesson, participants will explore the advocacy that led to women being allowed to serve on combat ships in the Navy, starting with their right to serve as permanent, regular members of the Navy in 1948.



## Objective

Participants will be able to identify what led to the amendment and repeal of Section 6015 of Title 10 of the U.S. Code.



## Materials

- Excerpts from primary source documents
- Profiles of Rosemary Mariner, Joellen Drag and Yona Owens.



## Inquiry

Share photograph of the first enlisted women to serve in the general Navy.

- What do you notice in the photograph?
- What might these women be doing?

Discuss events leading up to the Women's Armed Services Integration Act passed in 1948.

- What do you think it means to serve as permanent, regular members of the Navy?
- What do you think women would be allowed to do at that time?



## Investigation

### Limits of Title 10 U.S. Code, Section 6015

Share section 6015 as it was written in 1948 with participants:

- What skills might be associated with jobs or ratings related to serving on a ship?
- How might not being able to serve on a ship impact one's career or life after the Navy?

Discuss efforts made by women for equal opportunity in the United States between 1948 and the early 1970s.

### Expansion of Roles in the Navy

Discuss the impact of Z-gram 116 and eliminating the practice of women being assigned exclusively to certain billets.

- How might Title 10, Section 6015 still limit opportunity for women assigned to new billets?

Separate participants into groups of three. Hand each participant the profiles of either Rosemary Mariner, Joellen Drag or Yona Owens. Provide time for them to look over the profile and answer how Section 6015 might impact each woman. Then provide time for participants to discuss similarities and differences with the other members of their group. Ask the whole group:

- How did Section 6015 impact these women?
- In what ways did each woman respond?

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Share what led Title 10, Section 6015 of the U.S. Code to be declared unconstitutional and share amended section 6015.

- What is the difference between amending a law and repealing a law? What are the limitations of this change?
- What opportunities do women not have access to if they cannot serve in combat roles?

## The Repeal of Section 6015, Title 10

Show image of Rosemary Mariner in aircraft.

- How might seeing women in combat on television or in photographs alter perception of women in the military?

Discuss the events leading to the repeal of 10 USC 6015. Share excerpt from GAO Report: Women in the Military: Deployment in the Persian Gulf War.

- How might this impact how women were viewed by Congress?
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## Activity

### Discussing the Impact of the Repeal of 10 USC 6015

Review the limitations of Section 6015 of Title 10 of the U.S. Code. Have participants look through [Celebrating Navy Women: Department of Defense](#) and identify one or two women who served after 1993, or the repeal of Section 6015.

- What opportunities became available to them that were not available due to Section 6015 of Title 10 of the U.S. Code?
- What advocacy may have led to women having these opportunities?

### Researching More Steps Towards Equality

Have participants research firsts for women in the military in the past ten years. What arguments are being made that limit their opportunity to serve in the same roles as men?



## Lesson Connection

Learn more about Admiral Zumwalt and the changes he made to the Navy in our lesson: **Investigating Z-Grams.**



## Background

Women played a major role in the success of the United States in World War II through their involvement on the home front, as medical support, and as part of Auxiliary Corps such as WAACs, WASPS and WAVES. In response, Army leaders as early as 1946 requested that enlisted women be offered a permanent place in the Armed Forces. However, legislative debate delayed the process. On June 12, 1948, Congress passed the Women's Armed Services Integration Act. The act granted women the right to serve as permanent, regular members of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and the recently formed Air Force. These women would also be entitled to veteran's benefits with some limitations. The Women's Armed Services Integration Act, alongside Executive Order 9981, which desegregated the military, also permitted African-American women to officially serve in the armed forces. African American Yeoman Edna Young (shown in photo NH 106756) is one of the first enlisted women sworn in the regular navy on July 7, 1948.

Although women could now serve as regular members of the armed forces, there was a limit on the number of women in each branch, restricted promotions, a limit on the number of female officers and authorities were allowed to discharge women without specified cause. There were also restrictions on women in combat stated in Title 10 U.S. Code, Section 6015. These restrictions could be found in other aspects of American society.

A wave of sit-ins for civil rights brought national attention to American racism in the 1950s and 1960s. This push was a platform for all disadvantaged groups that felt they were being left behind, such as women, opening the door to the second wave of the feminist movement. Women continued to push against policies and practices that limited their opportunity through activism well into the 1970s.

## Expansion of Roles in the Navy

In response to protests by members of the anti-war movement against the Vietnam War, the United States adopted an All-Volunteer force and ended the draft in 1973. Due to a difficulty in

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recruiting and keeping qualified men in the armed forces, more attention was brought towards recruiting women. Limiting the types of positions they could fill was becoming less of an option.

In 1970, Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt Jr. became Chief of Naval Ops and set out to improve the retention of Navy sailors, including women. In Z-gram 116, released in 1972, which focused on "Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women," Zumwalt eliminated the practice of women being assigned exclusively to certain billets and encouraged the assignment of women to the several roles they were not traditionally assigned.

On November 10, 1976, Yona Owens and six other women, including LTJG Joellen Drag, sued the Navy with the help of the ACLU to challenge the constitutionality of Title 10, Section 6015. On July 27, 1978, Judge John Sirica found that Title 10, Section 6015 of the U.S. Code was unconstitutional and violated the equal protection guarantee in the Fifth Amendment. Several proposals to amend Section 6015 were submitted by members of Congress until it was finally amended in October 1978. The amendment stated, "Women may not be assigned to duty in vessels or aircraft that are engaged in combat missions nor may they be assigned to other than temporary duty on vessels of the Navy except for hospital ships, transports, and vessels of a similar classification not expected to be assigned combat missions."

## The Repeal of Section 6015, Title 10

During the First Gulf War, 37,000 military women were in the Persian Gulf by the end of February 1991. During Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, although women did not serve in units whose mission involved direct combat with the enemy, some women were subjected to combat. The American public watching the Persian Gulf War on television would see women on their screen in combat roles despite policies that restricted them. The Department of Defense's Risk Rule, created in 1988, barred women from situations in which there might be risk of hostile fire, capture, or direct combat.

One of the arguments surrounding women on board combat ships from military men is that unit integrity and cohesion would be adversely affected and not allow male bonding. The U.S. Government Accountability Office, which is often called upon by Congress to provide fact-based, non-partisan information, released a report in July 1993 on the involvement of women in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Backed by evidence found in the report, Secretary of Defense Les Aspin called on Congress to repeal 10 USC 6015 in spring 1993. On November 30, 1993, Congress repealed 10 USC 6015. Just a few months later, USS Dwight D. Eisenhower welcomed 500 women out of 5,000 officers and crew members.



## Additional Resources/References

Oral History Interview with Yona Owens

<https://gateway.uncg.edu/islandora/object/wvhp%3A22457>

Navy Women in Ships Resources from Naval History and Heritage Command

<https://www.history.navy.mil/content/dam/museums/hrnm/Education/Women%20in%20Ships%201978%2020160207.pdf>

Yona v. Brown

<https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/455/291/1415795/>

Women in Naval History Timeline

<https://www.history.navy.mil/news-and-events/multimedia-gallery/infographics/history/women-in-naval-history-timeline.html>

Pub. L. 103-160, div. A, title V, §541(b), Nov. 30, 1993, 107 Stat. 1659, which struck out item 6015

"Women members: duty; qualifications; restrictions". -

<http://uscode.house.gov/statviewer.htm?volume=107&page=1659>

GAO Report: Women in the Military: Deployment in the Persian Gulf War

<https://www.gao.gov/products/nsiad-93-93>

Library of Congress- Women in the Persian Gulf War

<https://www.loc.gov/item/webcast-5511>

Celebrating Navy Women: Department of Defense

[https://media.defense.gov/2021/Mar/16/2002601542/-1/-1/2021\\_WIN%20EBOOK.PDF](https://media.defense.gov/2021/Mar/16/2002601542/-1/-1/2021_WIN%20EBOOK.PDF)



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## Documents and Images



### First enlisted women to serve in the general U.S. Navy

Credit: Naval History and Heritage Command

1948 Women's Armed Forces Integration Act--Title 10 U.S. Code Section 6015

Women may not be assigned to duty in aircraft that are engaged in combat missions nor may they be assigned to duty on vessels of the Navy other than hospital ships and transports

Excerpt from Z-Gram 116: EQUAL RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN THE NAVY

"2. As another step toward ensuring that women in the Navy will have equal opportunity to contribute their talents and background to accomplishment of our missions, we are taking the following actions: ...

Increase opportunity for women's professional growth by:

- {1} eliminating the pattern of assigning women exclusively to certain billets, and
- {2} assigning qualified women to the full spectrum of challenging billets, including those of briefers, aides, detailers, placement/rating control officers, attaches, service college faculty members, executive assistants, special assistants to cno, maags/missions, senior enlisted advisors, pep, etc."

October 20, 1978- Amended section 6015,

"Women may not be assigned to duty in vessels or aircraft that are engaged in combat missions nor may they be assigned to other than temporary duty on vessels of the Navy except for hospital ships, transports, and vessels of a similar classification not expected to be assigned combat missions."

Excerpt from GAO Report: Women in the Military:Deployment in the Persian Gulf War. NSIAD-93-93. Published: Jul 13, 1993. Publicly Released: Jul 13, 1993.

#### Results in Brief

Overall, the unit commanders and focus group participants gave primarily positive assessments of women's performance in the Persian Gulf War. Women in the units GAO visited worked on a broad spectrum of assignments and tasks during the deployment. Focus group discussions indicated that women and men endured similar harsh encampment facilities and conditions. Health and hygiene problems during the deployment were considered inconsequential for both men and women. Cohesion in mixed gender units was generally considered to be effective during deployment, and the unit commanders and focus group participants often described cohesion as being best while the units were deployed. The groups GAO talked to cited pregnancy as a cause for women returning early from deployment or not deploying at all, but the groups generally identified few actual cases.





### Rosemary Mariner in the 1990s.

Credit: United States Navy

Excerpt from GAO Report: Women in the Military: Deployment in the Persian Gulf War

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**Yona Owens**

Formal U.S. Navy headshot of Yona Owens, 1973.

Credit: Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project

In May 1975, Interior Communications Electrician Third Class (IC3) Yona R. Owens sent a letter to the Navy Times with the purpose of contacting Navy women like herself who were trained for shipboard ratings, but were given limited opportunities due to combat restrictions. The IC Rating had been opened to women by Z-Gram 116, but women couldn't serve at sea.

In order to acquire the necessary IC skills for advancement, it was necessary to have experience working on shipboard systems, so Owens would work extra hours on the vessels of her peers when they were docked when she was off-duty in order to gain the experience needed to advance.

Owens received over 300 letters in response to her Navy Times letter and over 100 Navy women agreed with Owens in their replies.

1948 Women's Armed Forces Integration Act--Title 10 U.S. Code, Section 6015 states:

"Women may not be assigned to duty in aircraft that are engaged in combat missions nor may they be assigned to duty on vessels of the Navy other than hospital ships and transports"

**How might Section 6015 impact Owen's experience?**

**Joellen M. Drag**

Credit: Naval History and Heritage Command

In 1973, Ensign Joellen Drag became one of the first two female helicopter pilots, however Section 6015 restrictions barred her from landing on or even hovering over the flight deck of a Navy ship to deliver mail. Drag was also unable to deploy with her predominantly male squadron, which meant that she had less flight hours as her male counterparts, impacting her promotion prospects.

At the rank of Lieutenant, Junior Grade, Joellen M. Drag, sent a 5-page letter to the Secretary of the Navy on March 4, 1976, requesting “duty in a flying status aboard United States Naval Vessel(s)” similar to that of her squadron.

In her letter, Drag states, “...I am making this request so my development and career as a naval officer might keep pace with that of my contemporaries in this squadron. I am evaluated against them in my fitness reports, and accordingly feel that I must be allowed to compete with them in all areas on an equal basis.”



LTJG Drag’s request was endorsed by her commanding officer and was forwarded up through the chain of command, eventually reaching the Secretary of the Navy; however, the request was not approved.

1948 Women’s Armed Forces Integration Act--Title 10 U.S. Code, Section 6015 states:

“Women may not be assigned to duty in aircraft that are engaged in combat missions nor may they be assigned to duty on vessels of the Navy other than hospital ships and transports.”

**How might Section 6015 impact Drag’s experience?**

## Rosemary Mariner

Credit: Naval History and Heritage Command

In 1974, six female aviators would earn their wings, including Rosemary Mariner. She was one of the first female military aviators to fly a tactical jet aircraft, the A-4 Skyhawk, and later the A-7E Corsair II. The missions she was cleared to take part in were impacted by regulations at the time.

In 1982, she qualified as a surface warfare officer aboard USS Lexington (CV-16). She would later become the first woman to command an operational naval aviation squadron when she led VAQ-34 during Operation Desert Storm.

In 1992, she worked with members of Congress and a Department of Defense advisory board to overturn Section 6015 and other regulations that prevented women from serving in combat roles.



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**How might Section 6015 impact Mariner's experience?**