

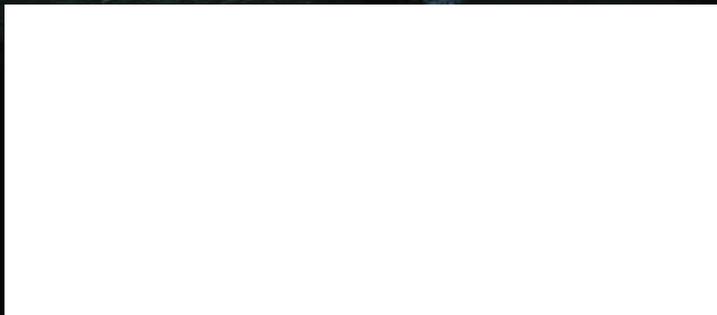
“In a young professional’s life, the first thing you’ve got to do is qualify to get into the game.” —VADM Ann Rondeau

Navy

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Women in the Navy



RADM Carpenter
First female Naval
aviator flag officer

The focus is talent and skill sets, not gender

By LT MAURA GARRITY

Editor's note: This month, AUSN invited the Sea Service Leadership Association (SSLA) to join with us in interviewing VADM Ann Rondeau, the Navy's senior three-star officer, and President of the National Defense University. LT Maura Garrity visited VADM Rondeau in her National Defense University office.

SSLA: Admiral, we have come to you this morning because you are the senior female flag officer in the Navy. May we ask you first to reflect on the changes you've seen during your time on active duty?

VADM Rondeau: The changes that we have seen over time [in the Navy] are the changes that we have seen constantly in America. That is, increased access to opportunities, increased value in what we [women] bring to the mission and just the modernity that the military and the Navy reflect over time as a mirror of society. In some ways, the military was pacing other professions. When I came into the Navy, women officers were not allowed to wear slacks and not authorized khakis, symbols of status and authority and "officership." Not being able to wear the same uniform as our male counterparts posed a symbolic barrier to women in the operational forces. But, if you look at the other professions, you can see a somewhat similar pattern. There were barriers to women in law firms, engineering firms, earning tenure in the science, technology, engineering, and math professorships. So in many ways, frankly because of equal pay for equal work, shared ethos, common rules of standards and professional conduct governed by the UCMJ and the fact that we were a military working under federal rules, the military was outpacing the rest of professional society. So, I know there have been many challenges, but changes have been commensurate with the evolution of the country, in my opinion. Over time, we have seen increased access, professional value, and a sense of earned merit in what we do.

SSLA: What was the most important change that you have witnessed during your career?

VADM Rondeau: Generally speaking, the lifting of the combat exclusion clause was huge. It was, for instance, very important at the Naval Academy. The women at the Naval Academy could not go into combat arms and combat service support and combat support are not regular options out of the Naval Academy, unlike at USMA or USAFA. This meant that women would be essentially placed wherever they would fit, but not into an identifiable branch open to their male classmates. They were treated decidedly "exceptionally" as a routine matter. This was a hugely divisive issue for the Naval Academy. The day after the combat exclusion law changed, the conversations changed at the Naval Academy for women. So for me, Title 10 changes were hugely important to the Navy and Marine Corps. The same exact thing was true for the NROTC as well.

The number two issue was Title 9 [which allowed] girls to be able to go into sports. Female athletes almost always fit in by choice in the military. They are recognized in this predominantly male culture for certain objective and sports-related criterion that they have met, certain rights of passage that they have met. They also understand being on a team, and the importance of resilience — that you pick up and go on to another day, the next game. Title 10 being changed and Title 9 being created were two big seminal changes.

SSLA: Along the same lines, as the Navy continues to mirror and progress within society, we have women commanding ships, squadrons, air wings, and battle groups now and, soon, women in submarines. We have female flag officers, master chief petty officers; so, in your opinion what is the next goal that we have to achieve?

VADM Rondeau: First of all, I think it is important to focus on something that you have said, that we've had women as COs of ships and squadrons and a fabulous flag officer who is now a battle group commander. We've had women "in the fight" over the past ten years. We've had women flying tactical aircraft. This is all now quite routine. Look at where we are; we don't have a [female] four-star; I understand that, but we have our first battle group commander [and] there will be others.

A DIALOGUE
WITH
VADM ANN E.
RONDEAU

"The notion of warfare has changed so much that we have to focus on talent, skill sets, intelligence, strategic mindfulness,... and so much more."

VADM ANN E.
RONDEAU

President,
National Defense
University



Vice Admiral Rondeau is the president, National Defense University. The National Defense University is the premier center for Joint Professional Military Education (JPME) and is under the direction of the chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Department of Defense.

Rondeau graduated with a degree in history in 1973 from Eisenhower College, where she was selected by

the board of trustees as “Most Distinguished Graduate” and received the Groben Award for leadership.

Rondeau has served in leadership, staff and command assignments in myriad mission areas: fleet operations (anti-submarine warfare, air operations, operations, intelligence, maritime transportation and sealift),

strategy and policy, training and education, business enterprise and shore installations. She has served as a White House fellow and as a chief of naval operations fellow. Rondeau is Surface Warfare qualified, earning qualifications on both MSC Merchant Marine vessels and U.S. Navy combatants. She holds subspecialty qualifications in political-military affairs, operational intelligence, operations analysis, strategy and planning and military transportation and is a licensed private pilot.

Rondeau is a permanent member of the Council on Foreign Relations. As president of NDU she is a member of the board of directors of the United States Institute for Peace, as well as Department of Defense liaison to The Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress. Rondeau has a Master’s degree in comparative government from Georgetown University and a Doctoral degree from Northern Illinois University. She has been conferred an honorary doctoral degree in public service from Carthage College, Kenosha, Wisconsin and received the New York City USO 2008 Woman of the Year award.

We will have our first woman CO of a submarine at some point in time. So, there will be “firsts” along the way; but I think the “firsts” being in our rear view mirror is as important as the “firsts” ahead of us. “Firsts” are starting points. “Next” is the continuous line, based on performance and value to mission and organization.

I think it is not just the “first” point that is new. It is what comes after it as the wide breadth of continued cascading expansion of that. It’s not just the point, it’s the line; it’s all the things that fill in behind it based upon the success of those first women. So to me, it’s not just about the “first,” it’s about the many. That’s really important. Are the many really achieving, are they accomplishing, are they excelling? That is very important to our Navy because that is the foundation upon which we operate. The question about “firsts” is important to history. The question about the many is important to the future.

I’m interested, also, in perceptions, not as a matter of quotas but as an indicator of success. You could not, right now, run any of the Services without women because of the large numbers doing important jobs. Not because of one who is a ship CO, but because of the many who are ship COs, department heads, engineers, and navigators. Not because of the one who is a combat pilot but because of the many who are repairing the aircraft. What is important for our Navy is the maturity of the force – I think that is an important part of the maturity of the organization and how we manage and lead. It is the population of successful professional experts who are doing well that is important to us.

SSLA: *What do you think about the recent push to eliminate the gender-based assignment policy?*

Editor’s note: Current assignment policies date from the time of Secretary Les Aspin in 1994, when the Combat Exclusion clause was altered to permit women on ships, in combat aircraft, etc., while maintaining an exclusion for direct armed ground combat. At that time, the Services were allowed to retain gender exclusion for reasons of privacy and berthing considerations which, until recently, drove Navy submarine assignment policy. Today, there is increasing discussion about removing all gender exclusion.

VADM Rondeau: I’ve thought about that a lot. I understand the intent. I am of a mind that if the effect of the policy is that it’s not about gender neutrality, it’s about gender preference because a supposed bias has been lifted, I would not favor that. I think that gender neutral is fine, but you should always keep in mind talent first. If you keep that in mind, the gender issue goes away. Talent, skills, and meeting standards and whether you have male, female, different racial background; whether you come from a poor or wealthy background, community college or Ivy League school; whatever it might be, that whatever you bring to the mission, a talent-driven focus is more important to me than a specific policy about gender neutrality. I believe that is the intent of the policy. That also needs to be its interpretation in practice. So, I am in favor of gender neutral assignments as an outgrowth of talent-driven focus. To me, it is a secondary effect of the primary value which is we want skill and talent, and people who meet the standards. It doesn’t matter if you are male or female. Gender-neutral assignments should not drive the problem; talent-driven focus should drive the problem. If you do that and say that gender is not an issue then, I think that’s fine.

VADM Rondeau

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What is the mission you are trying accomplish? Do you have the skills to make that happen no matter who or what you are? The notion of warfare has changed so much that we have to focus on talent, skill sets, intelligence, strategic mindfulness, mastery of operational art at the lowest possible levels, language skills and so much more. I think that the larger question that you have introduced is what is warfare? Some warfare is ground combat, hand-to-hand, Spartan; and if you have a women who can do that, I'm okay with that. Then, there is the high-end cyber, space or undersea stuff that you have to have your brain locked onto something very different. So, talent-driven focus is the answer.

SSLA: *We have touched on a lot of the Navy in just that one topic; and your career has as well the Merchant Marine, the P3 community, The White House, the Department of Defense. Could you speak to those opportunities afforded women in these different areas?*

VADM Rondeau: I am one of the last of women officers who lived a pretty eclectic career path, and I had very little training in preparation for anything because I was often the anomaly. I had a chance to Surface Warfare qualify because the rules allowed me to do that, but I could not go to Surface Warfare Officer School (SWOS). I had male leaders, who because the rules allowed it, became mentors and taught me the art and skills of surface warfare. Ship COs, because I was in the operational Merchant Marine and the rules allowed me to do this, brought me on combatants because I asked to do that to qualify. I just sought relevance. Seeking relevance, I sought to be at the waterfront by the operational forces. As an ensign, I was assigned to CINCPACFLT Staff, doing really interesting staff work in communications supporting the operational forces. I said, okay, I can't go to sea [on combatants]; but I can get on ships and learn about going to sea. I went to the waterfront and spent time on ships with JOs teaching me about this and that. I asked my male peers to show me around. In that, I began getting conversant with the language of shipboard life, the lexicon. In doing that, the quality of the conversation got better and I became more relevant. So, seeking to learn and seeking to be relevant provided impetus toward learning about the operational Navy and getting into places that were not traditional.

There were times that I was told no. What I would say was give me the chance to try – and that failure was the risk, but success was the gain. How do you know that I can't succeed? At times, it was just too hard because the



rules were too hard. But individual leaders were great. They were leaders, mentors — men who took risks. I had friends who laughed at me and egged me on and encouraged me. It was a combination of experiences and events and persistence on my part. I am an optimist by nature. If I can't find a door here, I'll find one over there. I'm going to find an avenue that will make me relevant and add purpose and be meaningful so that I can contribute. Optimists usually see solutions and alternatives toward success. That was certainly part of my own attitude. There is opportunity in nearly every circumstance. The larger question is, do I matter to this event? If I can't answer that question, then I'm going to move on. There were times I could not answer that question about a specific event, but generally the answer was yes.

You always have your detractors; but in hindsight, I've become wise to this. I think that I instinctively knew that; but, in hindsight, I've given it some coherence and logic. And the logic is this: In a young professional's life, the first thing you've got to do is qualify to get into the game. The criterion to qualify is sort of like playing golf – it's you against the course and the course does not change. It is you against the objective and unmoving standard. The next phase is you in the tennis game. It's about win-lose, somebody wins, somebody loses. It is a highly competitive environment. That is your first ten years in any profession. You get in based upon the golf game, you play the tennis game, then you play the team sport. You are contributing to the team. Then, as you gain seniority, you are delivering the team because you are the coach or the general manager. Then, you become part of the clubhouse because, now, you are even more senior. So for me, it's one massive set of sports. In that environment where you are trying to prove relevance and worth, everybody is competing and



LT Garrity (left) and VADM Rondeau

sometimes it is win-lose. You really hope it will be win-win. That is where you move into the team sport. You have already qualified to be a pilot or whatever. It is all about how to think about competition; and it moves from highly competitive against standards and each other to increasingly collaborative to ultimately collaborative. You mature in this process. Some things get personal, but many things are not. Many things are just part of the game. Knowing which one you are in is important. If you are in a team sport and you start playing that head-to-head win-lose, you're going to lose. You have to be adaptable in that environment. In hindsight, I think I've understood that key to all of these phases of professional life is that matter of trust and character. These traits matter nearly above all other things.

SSLA: *General Colin Powell once said that the biggest difference between Colonel and General was that people felt they could no longer approach him. Since leaders matter, and we know that they do, how do you stay connected to the deckplate level?*

VADM Rondeau: It is really hard the more senior you get, really hard. In my opinion, it is about talking and listening to everybody and trying to get layers of people [in the conversation]. But it is more than just about listening and talking to people. It's about seeing things, sensing things. The whole command climate is not just about you, the leader. You can get egotistical and have extraordinarily destructive conceit if you think it is all about you. The more senior you get, the less it is about you; it's about your team. You matter and you make the difference in the leadership tone. The quality of conversation really matters and how the leader acts in those conversations will often determine the authenticity, forthrightness and openness of input and

feedback. If your team is bringing up new ideas, if people are coming up with innovative thinking that is valid and informed, if you are engaging with them and they are engaging with you, then the leader will have quality conversation that matters. The more senior you get, the more focused you are on command climate. What is the tone, how does it feel, how are people treating each other? You have to think about that in the aggregate. The more senior you get, the larger the aperture, so your measurements have to adapt and adjust. You do need to talk to people and you do need to be accessible. You have to do that reliably often and really have a conversation and really discuss to be believable. Then, you have to act on what you heard. If all you are doing is listening and you are not leading better informed, then people think you aren't listening. The leader has to do some things to be believable. Authenticity is a huge requirement as a trait for leaders.

SSLA: *If you were speaking to young midshipmen at the Academy or in University NROTC, what would be your advice as to career and opportunities?*

VADM Rondeau: We are talking about how to plan and manage your future. It is up to you to make your career as well as to make your opportunities. It is a developmental process. You need to be thinking all the time about what you want to do and how you will seek and develop the opportunities to succeed. Engage with people, seek mentors, and think of each day as an opportunity to learn, to develop, and to move ahead. As part of this effort, you must be receptive to new ideas, new thoughts, and, yes, criticism. Each of these elements serves to inform and enable you to make judgments and decisions about your future. It is a continuous educational process, whether you are learning and developing a new skill, or accumulating and processing knowledge. In a way, you are constantly asking yourself the question: What can I learn today that will make me a better officer or person tomorrow? Above all, know that trust is key – to be trusted, credible, believable and to be viewed as a person of integrity and good character. Almost everything else required to perform can be trained, taught and learned. So, do well by your character above all.

SSLA: *We want to thank you for spending a great deal of time with us today. It was a great experience for me as a lieutenant to discuss these issues with you.*

VADM Rondeau: It's really important to listen to people who are junior as well as senior. I've enjoyed this. 🙇