

## **Capt. Laura Scotty Speech, Veterans Memorial Service, 2015**

[Thank you for intro]

[Thank you / Welcome to special guests]

It is certainly an honor and a privilege to be here today on such an august and solemn occasion. Driving up the Avenue of Flags – a unique display that no other Veteran’s Cemetery in the United States can boast – I was both humbled and sobered by my surroundings. Since Miramar National Cemetery opened in 2010, more than 6,000 have been buried here. Though the Veterans Administration doesn’t keep records on how many of those are female veterans; we do know that one of the first four veterans buried here when the cemetery was dedicated on November 22, 2010 was a woman. Lieutenant Commander Mary Jane Crothers.

Mary Jane Crothers was from Oceanside, CA and was born April 24, 1931 and passed away on August 26, 2010 at the age of 79.

LCDR Crothers first entered military service as an Ensign on September 14, 1954 with a designator of 2905 – Nurse Corps Officer Reserve. She was accorded the rank of Lieutenant Junior Grade on December 21, 1955 and promoted to Lieutenant on November 1, 1958. She earned her rank of Lieutenant Commander on June 1, 1964. In civilian life, Mary Jane Crothers was a civil service nurse working here in San Diego County.

According to her friends, she was a charming, warm-hearted woman who loved to sew. Although she was described as quiet and reserved,

friends say she frequently showed a dry sense of humor and a twinkle in her eye.

One friend said she was in many ways an independent and creative woman who earned the respect of those around her. She always had a smile and a kind word for everyone.

LCDR Crothers is an appropriate starting point today; both because she was one in a long line of amazing women (especially nurses) who have served our country, and because she was one of the first veterans buried here.

I was very honored to be asked to be here today and to talk about the expanding role and contributions of women in the Armed Forces. I myself owe my military start, at least in part, to a woman who served in the Navy. When I was in high school I was looking to attend some pretty expensive colleges. Since my father was a school teacher and my mother a day care provider, I knew I needed to find some scholarships to realize my dream. It was in pursuing those opportunities that I came across the ROTC (or Reserve Officer Training Corps) scholarship option. I read about it, saw that the scholarship paid for 4 years of school and guaranteed you a commission as an officer – and a job - upon graduation. I thought not only was that a great way to pay for college, but I was truly excited about the opportunity to do my patriotic duty and serve my country. I narrowed my options to Navy and Air Force and asked my mom for advice on which service she recommended.

It was then she reminded me that my grandfather, who had died several years earlier, served as a pilot in WWII and that's when he met my grandmother who was a Navy WAVE. With the now obvious family history of Naval service I had to uphold, I chose the Navy. (Well, that

and the fact my mom also said the Navy uniform looked nicer than the Air Force uniform which is still true.) From that time forward, I took great pleasure in talking to my grandmother whenever I could about her experiences in the Navy. She loved spinning a yarn, often fueled by a glass of wine, and showing me pictures of herself in uniform; which I must say hasn't changed too much. So in many ways, it was my grandmother who started shaping my ideas of what I could do as a woman in the Navy.

As you heard in my bio, I chose to go into aviation. I became a Naval Flight Officer and I suppose I owe initial credit for that decision to my grandfather's influence. Though, if I'm being honest, Tom Cruise and Top Gun get to share the credit for getting me excited about flying and Naval Aviation!

As I embarked on my Navy career, first as a Midshipman at Notre Dame, then a flight student in Pensacola, and eventually a fleet aviator in two different squadrons, I never thought it unique or special that I was a woman going to serve in the military – I just thought it was the patriotic thing to do, something anyone would do, to serve your country. However, currently less than 0.5 percent of the American population serves in the Armed Forces (compared to the more than 12 percent that served during WWII and my grandparent's generation). But of the small percentage who serve, women are making up an even larger portion of that population.

Women currently comprise nearly 15% of our total active duty military force and just over 19% of our reserve force. That's more than 210,000 women in our active duty military and over 115,000 women in the reserve force.

There have been many significant milestones for expanding roles of women in the modern US military:

In 1978 the US Coast Guard first allowed women to serve in any position;

In 1991 Congress removed the ban on female pilots in combat;

In 1993 Congress removed the ban on women serving on US Navy combat ships; and

In 2005, for the first time in US history, a female soldier received the Silver Star for bravery in combat.

In 2010 the US Navy began allowing women to serve on submarines;

And in 2013 then Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta ended the ban on women serving in combat roles on the ground. The US military is hoping to make all combat roles “gender neutral”; meaning if a soldier – male or female – meets the physical requirements necessary for a combat role, he or she will be allowed to serve in that role.

But the expanding role of women in the Armed Forces also brings with it an increasing sacrifice from those women who serve.

Though today is an appropriate day to honor all of our veterans who have served their country and are no longer with us; it is especially important that we note the significance of what Memorial Day represents. Just as Veterans Day is our reminder and opportunity to honor, celebrate, and thank all of those who currently serve or who have served in the military; Memorial Day is the holiday set aside to remember, honor and pay tribute to those who died while serving in the Armed Forces.

And women, along with men, have been making the ultimate sacrifice for this great country of ours for many years.

Women served on the battlefield as nurses, water bearers, cooks, laundresses and saboteurs in the American Revolution; served as nurses aboard Commodore Stephen Decatur's ship *United States* during the War of 1812; and even impersonated male soldiers in the Mexican War. Women provided casualty care and nursing to Union and Confederate troops at field hospitals during the Civil War and women soldiers on both sides disguised themselves as men in order to serve. In 1865, Dr. Mary Walker received the Medal of Honor and is currently the only woman to receive the nation's highest military honor.

During the Spanish-American War 1,500 civilian contract nurses were assigned to Army hospitals in the US, Hawaii, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines, as well as to the Hospital Ship Relief to help combat the thousands of US soldiers sick with typhoid, malaria and yellow fever. Twenty nurses died during that conflict.

The United States first allowed women to enlist in, or officially join the military during World War I. Over 35,000 women served as nurses, clerks, telephone operators, and stenographers. The Navy enlisted women as Yeoman to release sailors for sea duty, and the Marine Corps enlisted female Marine reservists to "free men to fight". Though they were usually kept far from the fighting, more than 400 military nurses died in the line of duty during World War I.

During World War II, the number of enlisted women increased to more than 350,000. Their roles also expanded to include mechanics, drivers, and even soldiers and pilots. However, female soldiers and pilots were kept in the United States to defend the country and to free more men

up to fight overseas. WWII saw the establishment of the Women's Army Corps (WAC) and the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP). The Navy Women's Reserve (the WAVES), the Marine Corps Women's Reserve, and the Coast Guard Women's Reserve (known as the SPARs after the motto Semper Paratus – Always Ready) were also stood up during this time. More than 400,000 American military women served at home and overseas, nearly all in non-combat jobs; yet over 543 women lost their lives during World War II.

After World War II, the nature of warfare began to change. During the Korean War and Vietnam War, combat zones were often hard to determine. Even though they were serving in non-combat roles, women in the US military sometimes came under enemy fire. Over 1,000 women served in theater in Korea where 15 were killed in the line of duty; and over 7,000 served in theater in Vietnam where 16 lost their lives. Nearly 200 Army and Air Force women were among the forces deployed to Grenada in 1983 as part of Operation Urgent Fury, and 770 women deployed to Panama in Operation Just Cause in 1989. Approximately 41,000 American military women deployed for Operation Desert Shield/Storm where 6 women were killed in action.

On September 11, 2001; in the attack at the Pentagon 125 people were killed on the ground and 59 passengers lost their lives; 10 active duty, reserve and retired servicewomen were among the casualties.

Servicewomen were activated and deployed in support of the war on terrorism. Since the attack on America on September 11, 2001 a total of 144 women deployed to Afghanistan, Iraq and Kuwait have lost their lives in service to America.

Clearly the women who have died are no different from the men who have sacrificed for this great country of ours... but women have long

been serving in the armed forces with courage and distinction. And it's in that vein of service that I want to recognize three amazing women from different military branches who all gave their life in service to America; one, a Navy pilot and personal friend, and two others with local San Diego ties.

Navy pilot Lieutenant Valerie Cappalaere Delaney, 26, along with her two crew members, was killed March 13, 2013, when her EA-6B Prowler crashed in a cornfield while she was on a routine training flight out of Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, WA. LT Delaney was an aerospace engineering major and women's lacrosse player at the United States Naval Academy where she graduated in 2009. Fearless and determined she earned her Wings of Gold in February of 2012 and became a jet pilot. She married her husband Sean, a fellow Naval aviator, in February of 2012. I met Valerie at a Women in Aviation, International conference and was immediately impressed with her drive, her sense of fun, and her big heart. LT Delaney will always be remembered as a person of great integrity, strong faith, and an unyielding compassion for all those she met. Her legacy will be an inspiration to future naval aviators.

Army nurse Captain Jennifer Moreno, 25, from San Diego, was killed along with 3 others, in October of 2013 by a roadside bomb in Khandahar, Afghanistan while on foot patrol. Capt Moreno was an Army nurse who was working with the Special Forces US Army Ranger Unit as a Cultural Support Team Member. She had volunteered for the position with US Army Special Operations Command after completing Army airborne training in 2009. Captain Moreno was born in San Diego, graduated from San Diego High School and was commissioned in the US Army as a nurse corps officer after graduating from the

University of San Francisco with a nursing degree. Captain Moreno was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star, the Combat Action Badge, Meritorious Service Medal, Purple Heart, Afghanistan Campaign Medal and the NATO Medal.

My last special recognition is for Marine Corps pilot Captain Elizabeth Kealey, 32, who died from injuries sustained when her UH-1Y Huey helicopter crashed during routine flight operations at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center in January of 2015. Captain Kealey, a 2005 United States Naval Academy graduate, was a young woman who wanted to pursue only the toughest challenges life could toss her way. The mentality that drove her decisions, according to her mom, was “I’m going to go into the Marines because that’s the hardest branch of the military, and I’m going to fly helicopters because that’s the hardest thing to do.” She learned from her father, a retired Army colonel and former liaison officer for the US Military Academy that “You do your job, you do it well, and you don’t brag about it.” “She had all kinds of potential to do all kinds of things, but going to the Naval Academy and serving her country in the military was her dream.”

So I humbly ask of you all today, in honor of LCDR Crothers and all our veterans who are no longer with us...but especially in honor of Captains Kealey and Moreno, LT Cappalaere Delaney and all those that have died in service to our country... that we remember, we pay tribute to, and we thank those men AND women that have made the ultimate sacrifice for the freedoms we enjoy today and every day.

This weekend let us all take pause to honor our fallen.

Thank you.