

Written Testimony of Jennifer L. Yount
Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations
December 12, 2023

Chairman Blumenthal, Ranking Member Johnson, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for inviting me to testify at today's hearing. My name is Jennifer L. Yount. I graduated from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in 1981 where I was a member of the second class of women admitted to the Academy. As a cadet, I fell in love with the Coast Guard and its mission. To this day, I cherish and appreciate the training, education, and lifetime of opportunities the Academy provided me. Unfortunately, I also faced sexual assault and sexual harassment during my time there. Nevertheless, I persevered. Upon graduation, I was commissioned as an Ensign and began my career. I loved my time afloat and loved completing Coast Guard missions. After 20 years, I retired as the Commanding Officer of a cutter, the first woman to command a vessel of this classification and only the second woman to command a U.S. combatant. I then became the California Maritime Academy's Director of Leadership Development and an executive and leadership consultant. Forty-six years after my first day at the Academy, I remain an active and proud member of the Coast Guard community.

I bleed Coast Guard blue. I deeply admire and respect Coast Guard women and men who sacrifice tirelessly day in and day out to protect our country, our people, and our natural resources. I also love the Academy. My testimony is motivated by my love for the Coast Guard and the people who have served it in the past and who serve it today. I am not here today to try to tear down the Coast Guard, but rather to help make it better. But my testimony is also motivated by my anger and frustration. When I first heard about Operation Fouled Anchor in June 2023, I felt powerless; my pain and anger soon began to boil over. I first heard the Coast Guard make promises that they would address sexual assault and harassment in 1979, when they said, "we will take care of it." Over 40 years later, those promises remain unfulfilled by Coast Guard leadership. No one has acted to "take care" of the systemic problem of sexual violence in the Coast Guard and its Academy. It is beyond time to do so.

My deep frustration is also fueled by the Coast Guard's insistence, particularly since the Operation Fouled Anchor scandal, that we focus only on the future, effectively diminishing the significant physical and emotional harms suffered by Coast Guard women over the past 40-50 years. Since the beginning of the #MeToo Movement in 2017, I have pushed for the recognition of "the Lost Girls," those alumnae who have never been recognized for the sexual and physical trauma they endured while at the Coast Guard Academy. More recently, in the aftermath of Operation Fouled Anchor, I joined a team of veteran Coast Guard survivors and allies to rally together to create an independent action team—*Coasties Thriving Together*. We feel lied to and lack trust in the Coast Guard after so many years of false assures that they will get it right this time. Our voices as survivors must finally be heard and acknowledged.

It is important to emphasize that this issue goes beyond the Academy and is also a Coast Guard-wide problem for officers and enlisted service members alike. Two of my three most significant incidents occurred while I was on active duty. I also must state that this is more than just a Coast Guard problem. This is a military services problem. Advocacy groups also exist at

my sister services and some of their representatives will be in attendance at the hearing. In 2021, Naval Academy women formed a survivor advocacy network to support healing and advocacy for sexual assault survivors. The group is primarily composed of graduates but has added members from other military service academies. The group organizes full-day virtual survivor retreats and hosts shorter webinars where women survivors can learn about ways to heal from their traumas and feel part of a supportive community.¹

For years, I have been told that my stories were “ancient history” and not worth discussing. But I am here today because I think my story will help explain that this problem of sexual assault and harassment at the Coast Guard Academy and in the service has existed since the beginning. My hope is to witness a day when women (and men) have the power to stand up and say, “You can’t do this to me” and when men (and women) say, “You can’t do this to my colleague and friend.” To move forward as a great nation, everyone – men and women – must similarly define and value respect, acceptance, and equality. I hope that testimony will help us get one step closer to that day.

I. My Experiences

a. Journey to the Coast Guard Academy

I was born in Baltimore, Maryland and raised in Manassas, Virginia. I first became interested in the Coast Guard Academy during my college search for a Marine Biology major. Like many young people of my generation, I was mesmerized by the Jacques Cousteau television series; so much so, I was prepared to dedicate my life to the study of the sea.

Both of my parents were young adults during the World War II era, and my father served in the Pacific theater. Service to my country seemed second nature as so many uncles and cousins had served before me. I had no hesitation or second thoughts about military service. Additionally, since I was raised to believe in myself and my capabilities, I admittedly did not question my decision to enter the Academy and become known as a legacy woman graduate.

I entered the Coast Guard Academy in 1977, the second year women were admitted. There were 42 women in my class of approximately 360, far more than in the first year. Within four years, however, our ranks would dwindle to twelve and we would become the second smallest graduating class of women ever at the Academy.

In my stories of the Academy, much can be said about my cadre, the Class of 1979. Cadre are Second Class cadets, or juniors, who during the summer are responsible for the training and integration of the newly arrived class into the Corps of Cadets. They wake you up, they tell you what to wear, where to be, and what to do nearly 16 hours a day for eight very long weeks. Today, I consider many of them friends and colleagues. However, my cadre, the Class of 1979, proudly

¹ I respectfully request that the two letters written by former MARAD Chief Counsel and former Coast Guard officer K. Denise Rucker Krepp found in Enclosure (4) regarding sexual harassment and sexual assault in the Coast Guard be included in the hearing record. I also ask that the *Maritime Executive*, *Military Times*, and CNN articles written by Ms. Krepp found in same Enclosure also be included in the record.

wore the moniker of the “Last Class with Balls,” as they would be the final all-male graduating class at the Academy. I truly believe the primary objective of some of these men was not my training or development as a future Coast Guard officer, but rather the elimination of women from the Corps. To make matters worse, I frequently heard the staff and administration comment when women were harassed or mistreated, “well, boys will be boys.” Meanwhile, alcohol consumption at the Academy was extremely high, even though by regulation we were a “dry” campus. I remember the pride reverberating throughout the Corps when in my Swab (freshmen) year, the Academy was named one of the top 10 alcohol-consuming campuses per student in *Playboy* magazine.

b. Incident #1 - 1978 at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy

Through the years, what happened to me at the Academy in 1978 has haunted me and, at times, caused me immense pain and sorrow. Even as I am writing this, I feel fear. I have shared my story with very few people. Even to this day, I am unable to verbalize why I was unable to speak out then. Today, I recognize this is a common reaction. However, in 1978, as an 18-year-old, I had no idea why I held the truth to myself. I know the fear of being further ostracized was always in the forefront of my mind. I also know I wanted to be accepted as a cadet and later, an officer, and not as a *female* cadet or *female* officer. All I ever wanted was to be an accomplished Coast Guard officer and leader. For many women like me, the great mystery is how we could be so strong in every aspect of our lives and yet so weak in these terrible moments.

At the time, cadet regulations required our doors always to be open except when changing clothes or sleeping. Additionally, our doors could never be locked. These policies, a sexist campus culture, and alcohol created a perfect storm for sexual misconduct. During my first year, there were rumors of many women being physically assaulted and emotionally harassed. The emotional harassment was extreme for many of us, and the fear of sexual assault or rape prompted several of my classmates to leave the Academy. Although there was a persistent overlay of fear regarding sexual violence, it was never discussed, even among the women cadets. In those days, we focused on two things—blending in and surviving.

Despite this environment and despite the fear, I remained at the Academy. I felt a tremendous desire to serve my country. I also loved the camaraderie I experienced. I was a part of one of the greatest teams in the country—the cadets of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy. I endured harassment, assault, and discrimination because I chose to focus on the greater good of serving my country.

My first advocates, friends, and many times, saviors, were Tony and Linda Stimatz. As a Swab, I was fortunate enough to be assigned to Tony Stimatz’s Calculus I class and he would be my Mathematics instructor for four additional semesters. Tony was the first officer I witnessed who openly supported women cadets at the Academy. Tony’s wife Linda was an extremely passionate and caring woman. For my four years at the Academy, they provided me with love, safety, and refuge. They were the first to reach out and ask the question: had I been sexually harassed or assaulted at the Academy? I told them that I had. They became the first people I ever talked to about Billet Night for the Class of 1978.

Billet Night was a tradition during the spring semester at the Academy, the evening when every member of the graduating class was provided with their assignment for the next two years. Not only did it represent a graduate's assignment, it more importantly signified the end of an arduous four-year effort to graduate and become a commissioned officer. That evening, one of my cadres from the Class of 1979 came into my room and told my roommate and me of the raucous atmosphere and excessive alcohol intake by the graduating cadets. He also told us that we should be sure to lock our door when we went to bed and not open it until morning, regardless of what we heard. And so, on that night, my roommate and I locked our door, openly breaking a cadet regulation.

As midnight approached, very loud and boisterous male voices came from the corridors of our dormitory. There was a knock on the door and a voice asking to come in. We did not reply. There was another knock and a third knock and a second voice. Initially, they seemed polite, but we did not respond. As the minutes passed, the knocks became louder and more frequent, changing from polite raps to pounding and yelling. Not only did we not respond, no one else in the dormitory did either. The second class cadet's previous warning was coming true. Someone was coming and I knew they would try to hurt me. I remember the panic and fear I felt as they pounded on the door. I remember freezing, unable to move or speak. The pounding and yelling persisted until there was a loud crashing noise. The door broke open, and two first class cadets came rushing in. Within seconds one of the men was on top of me and the other on top of my roommate. I did not move, I was frozen. I have been asked time and time again for specifics about this incident – what exactly happened, how did I feel during or after, what was said during or after, what did my roommate and I do or say after, and more. Honestly, it is an absolute black hole. I just know that at a time when I was physically the strongest I had ever been in my life, I did nothing. At some point, and for whatever reason, the cadet on top of me got up. I am not sure why—maybe he had a moment of sense and reason. He then pulled his classmate off my roommate and they both left, closing the broken door behind them. I was left feeling dark and hollow.

The next morning, my roommate and I awoke, didn't talk about the attack, and went about our daily routines. The next Saturday, in our weekly room inspection, the Inspection Officer, a woman Lieutenant Junior Grade, inspected our room and noted the damage to our door. Without question or comment as to how the door had been damaged, she awarded both of us demerits for destruction to government property. Thus ended any acknowledgement or discussion of the event for over a year.

In August 1979, my class trained the entering Swabs in the Class of 1983. For the summer, I was assigned with others to a training unit cycling through two-week training events. One evening, after dinner as I entered the room for a mandatory training session, there stood Linda Stimatz with another woman. As we took our seats, they began a discussion on sexual assault at the Academy. As the discussion continued, the murmurs of "Why are we here?", "That shit doesn't happen here", and more were heard throughout the room. All the while, I slid lower and lower in my chair; I wanted to be out of that room. I realized the conversation had stopped and Linda was staring at me. Eventually, her eyes drew me out of my chair and to the front of the room, the last place on earth I ever wanted to be.

Although I prefer to celebrate the courage of others, I must say in that moment I was a courageous 19-year-old woman. As I moved to the front of the room, I felt compelled to be truthful about my experience. Negative consequences of being shunned by my classmates or worse never crossed my mind. So, I began telling my classmates my story. I ended by saying it is not a unique story. I added there are other women in our class who have been assaulted and raped, and then I stood there. My great friend, Charlie Ray, then stood up and said: “You’re our sisters and we can give you shit, but no one will ever hurt you again.”

Obviously, there were consequences to my comments requiring me to spend time with the Administration. Why did I not say something earlier? Who were the cadets? And many, many more questions. For about two hours I answered questions and at no time, in all these discussions, did I reveal the names of those two cadets. It was not then nor is it now my purpose. Within a couple of weeks, the dust settled and several changes to cadet regulations were made to increase safety for women cadets and cadets in general, including the ability to lock our doors at night and while dressing.

To be sure, what happened to me at the Coast Guard Academy haunted me for years to come. After my graduation, I was required to stay in the same dormitory, Chase Hall, while conducting training on personnel policies at the Academy and for leadership classes. I would regularly experience sensations of absolute and debilitating fear if I heard noises while showering or using the bathroom. Similarly, I would curl into a fetal position in my room when I heard noises in the passageway. Although none of these sensations were present when I was a cadet, they became more pronounced as I became more aware of my emotions. I found these reactions so disturbing and disruptive to my experience that I requested not to be assigned to berthing in Chase Hall again.

c. Incident #2 - 1983 Onboard U.S. Coast Guard Cutter *Dallas*

I wish I could say my story of harassment ended there. However, it did not. Upon my graduation in May 1981, I was assigned to the Cutter *Dallas* homeported in Governors Island, New York. When I reported aboard, I was the first woman ever to sail on *Dallas* and my eventual roommate would not report onboard for several months. I was greeted with warmth and professionalism and provided every opportunity to be the most successful junior officer possible. Between the Captain, Operations Officer, and Engineer Officer, I was shown nothing but the ultimate respect and professionalism. All of them were the most fabulous officers, mentors, and teachers. They contributed greatly to my professional learning and development and most importantly, created an atmosphere for me to fall in love with life at sea.

As I was preparing to complete my second year in *Dallas* and to transfer to a new duty station, I requested permission to extend one year onboard with the strong endorsement from my second Captain. It was agreed, and I began a third year, serving as the Navigator and Assistant Operations Officer. After two years sharing a room, I was assigned to a single stateroom. A private stateroom with additional space and privacy was a dream come true for any junior officer. This particular patrol would be classified as the “busiest patrol in CG history” by CG Atlantic Area Operations and I was soon designated as the Acting Operations Officer or third in command. Most of my days began before sunrise and always ended well after sunset. I was energized and excited

to be provided with such a tremendous growth opportunity and experience. Professionally, this was becoming a significant operational foundation in my career. Personally, it eventually became a nightmare.

At first, the harassment began with phone calls to my stateroom late at night with no words spoken. Next, I began receiving calls with heavy breathing. Even though I believed I was a well-liked member of the crew and close to the wardroom (the dining room for officers), I felt isolated and alone. I began to be afraid, especially when the ship was dark. Feelings of isolation and fear are highlighted and intensified when you are out on the open sea. Ships at night are dark places not just on the exterior, but also in the passageways. After every call, I became more conscious as I walked about the ship after dark. After over two years in *Dallas*, I began to watch my step and listen for every noise; I was on edge. I also began receiving menacing phone calls saying "It's your fault" and "Go away." I had no idea what any of this meant. On the final evening of this harassment, I was on the bridge until after midnight and then came below to my stateroom. I was exhausted. When I entered my room, I saw that my pillow had been repeatedly slashed open by a knife.

I was petrified. I found two service members I trusted who were close by, and I told them what had happened. I then reported this incident to the Captain. He assured me I was safe, and this behavior would not continue on his ship. I can still feel his emotion and passion for the ship, his crew, and his sense of right and wrong. I never doubted his words.

When I returned to my stateroom, my pillow and its stuffing had been cleaned up, my phone disconnected, and word was given to send a messenger if I was needed. As fate would have it, I had to leave the vessel for a short assignment. When I returned to *Dallas* nearly a week later, the Captain told me my incident was over and I would be a respected and cherished member of the crew from that point forward. I later found out the reason for the harassment was because the cutter's new Executive Officer (XO) had been approached by several crewmembers complaining about the pornographic films being shown in the berthing areas. The cat calls and other sounds were disturbing them. The XO's response was to prohibit the showing of these films, but he blamed it on the fact that women (I was the only one) were onboard. After a speedy investigation, the Captain held a disciplinary hearing on the flight deck with the crew in full formation. When the hearing was complete, there was no doubt about the Captain's position on sexual harassment and its place on his ship.

I would go on to sail on four other ships in my Coast Guard and Merchant Marine career. Dark passages remained an Achilles heel for me. Both Coast Guard and Merchant vessels turn the lights off inside the ships at night to maintain the night vision of their watch standers. Because of my fear, I carried, day and night, a small mag light with me in a sheath connected to my belt. Most thought I was *Semper Paratus*, *i.e.*, Always Ready. In reality, I was just afraid of the dark and what could be lurking around the next passageway.

d. Incident #3 - 1989 Onboard U.S. Coast Guard Cutter *Steadfast*

Unfortunately, *Dallas* was not the final episode of sexual harassment or discrimination in my life in the U.S. Coast Guard. The third major episode occurred when I was the Operations

Officer, third in command, on the 210-foot cutter *Steadfast*. *Steadfast* was my second dream assignment. My orders for *Steadfast* arrived before those of the new Executive Officer (XO), who would be second in command.

Upon seeing the XO's orders, and recognizing the name, a friend contacted me and told me this could be "trouble" but hoped he was wrong. I began to understand why shortly after this XO reported onboard. I quickly realized his need to exercise a dominant style over me particularly. Because of the relationship the Captain and I already had, and the Captain's trust and reliance on me, I reported directly to him on all operational matters. The XO did not like this and made it very clear to both of us. Although the Captain did not care, the XO began to micro-manage every other aspect of my performance and make my job as difficult as possible. Making it worse, he also effected a change to operations to have me report to him, rather than to the Captain. Tasks or decisions that took minutes previously, now took several hours as they flowed through the XO, allowing even more opportunities for his baseless and sexist verbal berating regarding my abilities and skills.

Then started the inappropriate jokes about women, likely for my benefit. The XO made sure not to make these jokes while in the presence of the Captain, but had no trouble in my presence, even though it made me obviously uncomfortable. Additionally, hardly a meal in the wardroom went by without him making a joke about his beautiful blonde girlfriend and disparaging her about something stupid she had done.

While underway on deployment and moored at the Coast Guard Base in San Juan, Puerto Rico I met with Tony Stimatz, my trusted friend and advisor, and broke down crying telling him my story. I had had enough. Within several hours, he was driving me to the Naval Hospital in Roosevelt Roads for an evaluation for increasing depression over the past six months. The report from that October 1988 appointment read: "She complains of a decrease in appetite with a five to six pounds loss of weight during the past week, difficulty in falling asleep, increase tearfulness, decreased energy level, difficulty in concentration, loss of self-esteem, and self-confidence." The report also noted that I had been berated and belittled by my Executive Officer.

I would remain at the Naval Hospital for four days before being transferred back to my homeport in St. Petersburg, Florida and for follow-up care at MacDill Air Force Base. On my second visit to MacDill, I met my new doctor who was a woman. Because of her gender, I thought that I would finally have a doctor who would listen to me. I was wrong. The military was not yet prepared to respond to this type of harassment, and she focused my treatment on "improving my coping skills." This diagnosis led to a Coast Guard Medical Board review to determine whether I should be dismissed from service. Although I was cleared by the Medical Board in February 1989, this evaluation remained on my record. It took me two years and countless hours of advocacy to finally expunge this record so that I could be promoted to Lieutenant Commander in 1991.

With the Medical Board behind me and new orders to Washington, D.C., I thought my career was moving in a positive direction again. However, shortly after arriving in D.C., I received my Officer Evaluation Report from *Steadfast*. The receipt of this evaluation led to several years of administrative paperwork and effort to have my personnel record cleared of statements I considered gender-biased and discriminatory. Of gravest concern was the reports reference to my

removal from the vessel due medical reasons, which is prohibited. The filing of and approval of my claim was the first successful Board for the Correction of Military Records (BCMR) in the Coast Guard for gender discrimination.

Having been selected for Lieutenant Commander, and having prevailed on my claim of gender discrimination, I was looking forward to going back to sea as an Executive Officer (XO). I was told that of every Commanding Officer with a vacant XO position in the coming transfer season, only one would take me “because of my reputation.” Thus, in February 1992, I received my orders to cutter *Vigorous*.

Vigorous would be my breakthrough assignment re-establishing me as an exceptional officer afloat. Of the 23 performance criteria on my first XO evaluation, I received nine 7s (7 being the highest possible proficiency score); thirteen 6s; and one 5. When I shared this report with a mentor of mine, who was later to become the 25th Vice Commandant of the Coast Guard, she made two comments. First, she said laughing, “if I saw this in a promotion board, I would throw it out, because it was just too good.” Then she said: “You don’t need a ship, you already walk on water.”

Eventually, I decided to retire from the Coast Guard in 2001. I received a license of Master of Steam or Motor Vessels of Any Gross Tons upon Oceans from the U.S. Merchant Marine. I spent three years as an Assistant Professor in the Marine Transportation Department and then spent five years as the Director of Leadership Development at The California Maritime Academy, a campus of California State University. I subsequently retired from the Maritime Academy in 2009, and went on to become an Executive and Leadership Coach and Leadership Trainer and Consultant.

As you can tell, I am extremely proud of my Coast Guard career. However, I cannot help but feel dismayed that today’s servicemembers and today’s cadets are still fighting against similar types of sexual assault and harassment that my peers and I faced back in the late 1970s and 1980s. This treatment was not acceptable when I was active in the Coast Guard, and I am at a loss that it is still happening today. Coast Guard service members and our country deserve so much better.

II. Actions

Sexual assault and trauma at the Academy is a systemic problem, and it must be acknowledged as such. Such an acknowledgement highlights that this is a deeply embedded cultural problem at the Coast Guard, not just a lack of policies or training. However, policy changes must also occur, including dormitory management, a zero tolerance alcohol policy, a re-evaluation of the Board of Directors and a revitalized Board of Visitors, and modernization of its personnel records management system. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there must be accountability for all those past and present who have failed the Academy, its cadets, and the U.S. Coast Guard.

a. Acknowledgement that Harassment and Assault is a Systemic Problem

The Coast Guard must acknowledge that military sexual assault and trauma is a systemic problem at the Academy and in the service and must be addressed in a comprehensive and effective

way. That acknowledgment should begin by an apology from the Commandant, with words to the effect of: “I’m sorry on behalf of the Coast Guard for the pain and suffering caused an untold number of women and men subjected to military sexual assault and trauma.”

Although the Commandant has apologized in the past, her addresses feel scripted by attorneys and lack any empathy to the survivors for the years of pain and suffering we have felt. I had hoped as an Alumna, mother of an Alumna, and now Commandant, she could or would have stepped forward as a courageous leader and acknowledged this for all the women and men who are classmates, colleagues, and friends. Until the Coast Guard acknowledges the breadth and seriousness of what has happened, we cannot move forward in taking the steps necessary to effect meaningful change.

I believe the Coast Guard memorandum dated November 27, 2023, “Commandant’s Directed Actions – Accountability and Transparency” is an absolute denial and refusal to openly acknowledge that systemic sexual assault and harassment has occurred at the Academy for the past 47 years, since 1976 when women entered as the Class of 1980. By only looking forward, the Commandant has discounted and contributed to the pain and scarring felt through the years by so many, including her own classmates and shipmates.

b. Culture Change

For harassment, assault, and discrimination to exist for over 45 years, a sense that such behavior is tolerated must be embedded in the culture of Academy and the Corps of Cadets, in particular. The culture of any organization comes from the top. Cadets and service members look to their leaders to set the rules and tone in any particular setting. Leadership at the Academy and in the Coast Guard – at all levels – must articulate and demonstrate on a daily basis a zero tolerance for sexual harassment and assault, and an intention to enforce strict accountability. If the leaders do not do this, or look the other way as sexual harassment and assault continues as before, they must be removed.

I would suggest that one way the Coast Guard can effect positive change is through its dormitory management policies. In December 2020, during a focus group, a senior African American retired officer stated, “the Beast lives in Chase Hall.” On most evenings, the Coast Guard Academy dormitory Chase Hall has only one adult on duty. The remainder of the Corps of Cadets oversight is conducted by the upper-class cadets (20 to 22 year olds) who wield considerable power and control over those within their command. I recommend the inclusion of live-in positions, similar to resident directors at universities, throughout Chase Hall, to provide evening and weekend oversight and guidance to student leaders. “The Beast” must be exorcised before a change to culture can exist.

I also recommend a zero-tolerance policy on underage drinking, and/or drinking on campus, including implementing a breathalyzer analysis of all cadets upon returning from liberty. This would require underage cadets to register zero and cadets 21 and older to register 0.08 and below, aligned with the legal limit in Connecticut. Although alcohol abuse has been slowly reduced throughout the years, it continues to be an obstacle for the Coast Guard to overcome, and a primary driver of sexual violence. As the 2022 Department of Defense Office of People

Analytics (OPA) Service Academy Gender Relations Survey showed, nearly 60% of all unwanted sexual contact incidents involved the use of alcohol.

Additionally, I recommend a re-evaluation of the personnel structure of the Academy's Board of Trustees. Of the 19 Board members, 10 are Academy graduates and 14 are either current or former Coast Guard employees, to the best of my knowledge. Therefore, the lack of diverse thinking and opinion brought forth in devising a strategic plan or any thought for that matter is questionable at best. Similarly, I recommend this Committee ensure a revitalized Board of Visitors at the Academy, since they are the only service academy without an active Board which is a responsibility falling squarely on Congress.

c. Veteran's Disability Benefits / Records Management

I further recommend this Committee ensure that funding is dedicated by the Coast Guard to modernize its personnel records systems as referenced in Enclosure (3). Veteran disability compensation for a service-related condition resulting from sexual assault or harassment while in the military must be approved by the Veterans Benefits Agency, which requires submission of a full personnel file. For Coast Guard veterans, this takes years because, unlike the Department of Defense, whose files are digitized and rapidly transmitted, the Coast Guard has a two-year backlog to produce files and no indication that victims of sexual violence have "head of the line" privileges.

d. Accountability

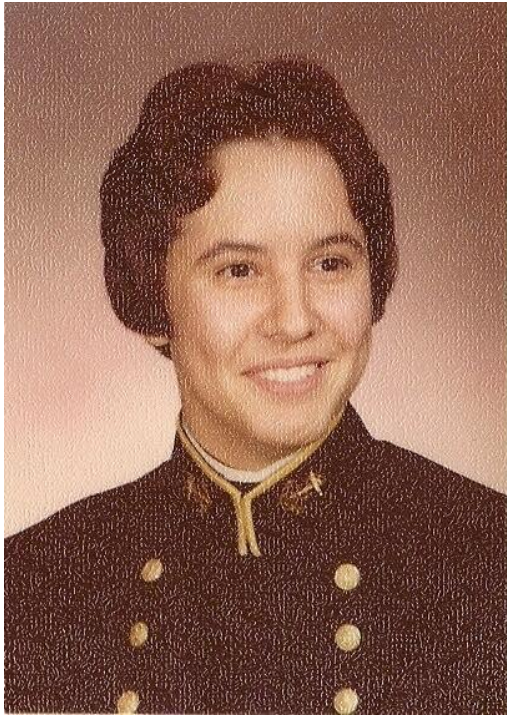
No change will result at the Academy, or in the service, if there is not full accountability—something that has been obviously lacking to date. Without such accountability, trust cannot be rebuilt within the workforce moving forward. As proven, years of studies and metrics have required change and change has never occurred. At a minimum, I recommend every individual associated with the Fouled Anchor cover-up be questioned under oath by Congress as to their understanding and role of the investigation and appropriate actions to taken based on that testimony.

Additionally, I request all former senior leaders associated with the Academy and the Operation Fouled Anchor investigation, including the Superintendents and Commandant of Cadets, should not be allowed to hold a leadership position at the Academy and have a voice in the Academy's future until their tenure has been fully vetted by this Committee to ensure no wrongdoing on their part with regard to their handling of matters related to military sexual assault and trauma.

Finally, leadership throughout the chain of command must ensure that in instances of sexual violence and harassment, "the penalty fits the crime." Too many times, I've heard a commanding officer comment on an individual's job performance, rather than their actions or character, when assessing their misconduct. As a service, we must honor our Core Values and halt this pattern of injustice and inequality regardless of whether a perpetrator is a "hard worker."

III. Final Thoughts

To conclude, I include two pictures, the first as a Swab when I was 17 years old and the second, my graduation picture when I was 21 years old. I look far different today as a 64-year-old woman. Still, I hope that the readers of this testimony remember that my first incident happened when I was just an 18-year-old girl.



(Left)
My Swab Portrait
(1977)

(Right)
My Graduation
Portrait (1981)

My family and I have always been extremely close. I shared everything with my parents. My brother was my best friend. However, my assault at the Academy was something I could not share even with them. I finally shared this with my brother this recent Thanksgiving holiday as I was preparing for this testimony. I told him, “I am glad Momma and Daddy are no longer living so I don’t have to tell them too.”

Even though my assault happened 46 years ago, I am still impacted by these memories. A few years ago, I conducted a consulting project with the Academy’s Alumni Association. I asked the Association President if she could arrange for me to visit the room I was assaulted in and accompany me there during my next visit. My former cadet room is now part of the Office Candidate School and has been transformed into an office. There were no racks (beds), but the built-in closets and bookcases were the same. I opened a closet, closed my eyes, smelled old cadet smells, and was hit by nearly 40 years of emotions. I began to sob uncontrollably. Just a room and its smell can bring forward 40-year-old emotions.

I hope that my testimony today will help compel the Coast Guard Academy and the Coast Guard to acknowledge the harm that has been inflicted on its cadets and servicemembers, so that it can undergo a true cultural change to rid sexual assault and harassment from its ranks, and finally hold accountable those who failed to protect us.

A cultural transformation of the Academy and Coast Guard must occur so that surviving is no longer the norm and thriving is.

- Encl: (1) List of Coast Guard Assignments for Jennifer L. Yount, CDR, USCG (Ret.)
(2) Coasties Thriving Together
(3) Helping Survivors of Military Sexual Trauma Access Veterans Administration Care, Joanne McCaffrey Albero, CAPT, USCG (Ret.)
(4) Materials written by former MARAD Chief Counsel and former Coast Guard officer K. Denise Rucker Krepp

List of Coast Guard Assignments for Jennifer L. Yount, CDR, USCG (Ret)

- 1977 – 1981 U.S. Coast Guard Academy, New London, Connecticut
Graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Marine Science
- 1981 – 1984 USCGC *Dallas*, Governors Island, New York
Assigned as a Deck Watch Officer and Navigator
- 1984 – 1987 Seventh District Operations Center, Miami, Florida
Assigned as a Law Enforcement and Search and Rescue Operations Officer
Simultaneously obtained my Masters in Business Administration from Barry University in Miami Gardens, Florida while attending night school
- 1987 – 1989 USCGC *Steadfast*, St. Petersburg, Florida
Assigned as Operations Officer (Third in Command)
- 1989 – 1991 U.S. Coast Guard Command Center, Washington, DC
Assigned as a Coast Guard Operations Duty Officer
- 1991 – 1993 Enlisted Personnel Assignment Branch, Coast Guard Personnel, CG Headquarters, Washington, DC
Assigned as a Central Assignment Officer and Women's Afloat Assignment Officer
- 1993 – 1995 USCGC *Vigorous*, Cape May, New Jersey
Assigned as Executive Officer (Second in Command)
- 1995 – 1997 Military Personnel Policy Branch, Coast Guard Personnel, CG Headquarters, Washington, DC
Assigned to review and revise existing policies and develop new policies for military personnel
- 1997 – 1999 Chief, Cutter Management, Pacific Area, Alameda, California
Assigned to the oversight of the Coast Guard Pacific Area cutter fleet
- 1999 – 2001 USCGC *Dauntless*, Galveston, Texas
Assigned as Commanding Officer (First in Command)
- September 30, 2001 Retired from Active Duty



Our Purpose

Coasties Thriving Together is an independent action team comprised of volunteer Coast Guard veterans serving survivors of military sexual and physical trauma. We provide a platform for information sharing and resource availability, third-party external recommendations, and a community of compassionate allies dedicated to thriving, not just surviving.

Our Core Values

Honor: Integrity is our standard. We demonstrate uncompromising ethical conduct and moral behavior in all our personal and organizational actions. We are loyal and accountable to the trust of those we serve.

Respect: We value our diverse colleagues who have experienced a range of traumatic events. We treat each other and those we serve with dignity, respect, and compassion and without judgement. We consider all communications as confidential within the bounds of the law, and through positive, constructive discussions without the call-out culture. We work as a team.

Devotion to Thriving: We are volunteers who want Coast Guard veterans to flourish. We exist to continue to serve, connect survivors with support, call for accountability, and provide education where policy or legal limitations and constraints lie. We serve with pride.

Our Vision

We stand Always Ready to shape policy, identify gaps in governance and resources, call for accountability, and recommend innovative and inclusive solutions to help our own thrive after experiencing trauma.

Why Now?

The Independent Action Team questions the trustworthiness and credibility of the Coast Guard, and Coast Guard Academy in fully caring for survivors of military sexual and physical trauma. As survivors, friends of survivors, and leaders, we know this is not just an Academy problem, but a Coast Guard problem. We also know that at the Academy and in the Coast Guard military sexual assault and harassment still exists despite efforts to reduce or eliminate it from its ranks.

Enclosure (2)

The environment of hazing, bullying, and harassment went unchanged for decades leaving many survivors in its wake without acknowledgement or trauma treatment.

Although locating recent data specific to military sexual and physical trauma in the Coast Guard is sparse, the 2021 *Improving the Representation of Women and Racial/Ethnic Minorities Among U.S. Coast Guard Active-Duty Members*, commonly known as the *RAND Study*, does shed some light on this as a Coast Guard problem. According to the *Study*, “thirty percent of female enlisted personnel (compared with 4 percent of male enlisted) and 20 percent of female officers (compared with 3 percent of male officers) indicated that experiences involving sexual harassment or sexual assault were retention considerations.²” Additionally, “47 percent of female enlisted personnel (compared with 5 percent of male enlisted) and 54 percent of female officers (compared with 6 percent of male officers) indicated that they are sometimes unfairly singled out because of their gender.³”

As women and men with no positions and no authority we intend to have a voice, say “No more,” and ensure substantial actions are taken. We also intend to provide a virtual safe haven for all to congregate, share, and receive the support needed to not just survive, but to thrive.

Background

In June of 2023, CNN exposed a secret investigation into alleged sexual abuse at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy uncovering a history of rapes, assaults and other serious misconduct being ignored and, at times, covered up by high-ranking officials. The probe’s findings, “Operation Fouled Anchor,” completed in July 2019 had been kept confidential by Coast Guard senior leadership. Operation Fouled Anchor focused on reports of sexual assault at the Academy between 1992 to 2006.

Operation Fouled Anchor, named after a ship’s anchor entangled around itself, was launched in 2014 when an academy graduate claimed her allegations of rape from years earlier had never been investigated. While looking into the woman’s case, agents determined her allegations and more than two dozen other reports of misconduct had essentially been buried by academy leaders. And as they continued digging, they unearthed more than 90 potential assaults from the late 1980s to 2006. “There was a disturbing pattern of not treating reported sexual assaults as criminal matters,” the Coast Guard’s draft report reviewed by CNN stated. In some instances, school officials at the time recommended launching criminal inquiries into

² Rand Corporation. (2021) *Improving the Representation of Women and Racial/Ethnic Minorities Among U.S. Coast Guard Active-Duty Members*. Table 5.6.

³ Rand Corporation. (2021) *Improving the Representation of Women and Racial/Ethnic Minorities Among U.S. Coast Guard Active-Duty Members*. Table 6.4.

alleged assaults only to be overruled by top leadership at the academy, according to records reviewed by CNN.⁴

Shortly after the initial CNN report, Admiral Linda Fagan emailed the entire Coast Guard workforce in which she said, “As your Commandant, I am personally committed to a culture of transparency and accountability regarding our efforts to prevent and address the scourge of sexual assault” and, “We own this failure, and on behalf of the United States Coast Guard, MCPOCG [Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard] and I apologize to each victim and your loved ones.”⁵

A letter from Congress dated July 13, 2023 stated “In fact, it seems likely that absent a media inquiry or some other spurring event, the existence of the Fouled Anchor investigation would never have become known to Congress or the public, much less to the CGA community. The failure of the Coast Guard—which is itself a law enforcement entity—to properly handle allegations of sexual assault among students at its own Academy is stunning and inexcusable. The Coast Guard’s subsequent choice to withhold information about what it had uncovered regarding its institutional failures is also deeply disappointing and frankly calls into question its commitment as a whole to address the institutional failures that are revealed in the harrowing findings of the Fouled Anchor investigation.”⁶

Of particular concern is the apparent lack of interest or desire in looking at any sexual assaults prior to 1992. The Leadership Team unequivocally knows sexual assault (once women entered the Academy in 1976) has been occurring at the Academy, yet no one in a leadership position is willing to acknowledge the historic significance of this. It also is possible that male survivors of harassment and assault live in the shadows from the shame long before 1976 and in the years since. Furthermore, no leaders have defined this as a systemic problem.

⁴ Blake Ellis, Melanie Hicken and Audrey Ash. “Criminal investigation into Coast Guard Academy revealed years of sexual assault cover-ups, but findings were kept secret.” [CNN](#). June 30, 2023.

⁵ Letter from Congressmen Jamie Raskin and Bennie G. Thompson. Congress of the United States. Addressed to Admiral Linda L. Fagan, Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard. Dated July 13, 2023.

⁶ Ibid.

Helping Survivors of Military Sexual Trauma Access Veterans Administration Care

To determine if a Veteran rates disability compensation for a service-connected condition resulting from experiencing Military Sexual Trauma (MST), the Veteran must file a claim through the Veterans Benefits Agency (VBA).

Every VBA regional office has an MST Coordinator, someone trained to assist Veterans filing claims for MST-connected conditions. Since very few incidents of sexual assault and sexual harassment are reported through official channels or have associated medical visits discoverable in the Veteran's active-duty medical record, VBA needs a complete official personnel file to verify claims of service-related trauma and determine a compensation rating.

For Coast Guard veterans, this presents a serious problem. Coast Guard personnel files are not all digitized and the service has just one person responding to requests for personnel files from ALL Coast Guard veterans. As a result, there is a 2-year backlog to receive files and no indication that victims of MST have "head of the line" privileges.

The DoD has a digitization process and automatic upload of personal files to the VBA portal. The Coast Guard does not.

Coast Guard Veterans and MST survivors are at a distinct disadvantage in accessing the benefits their counterparts in the other armed services receive in a timely fashion due solely to a lack of resources being devoted to fixing what appears to be an antiquated personnel records system.

If ever there was a problem that money could fix, this is it. If data sharing agreements between Coast Guard and VBA systems are a roadblock to the completion of this process, dedicated administrative support to clear the backlog of personnel record requests should be the priority of Coast Guard Personnel Command. The answer cannot be "we don't have the time or resources to help." Veteran Coast Guard MST Survivors deserve better.

To be clear, survivors of MST can access certain healthcare services at a VA Medical Center for conditions they experience related to the experience of MST. The burden of proof and requirement for documentation of corroborating evidence is not as stringent to get counseling at a VA Medical Center or VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic, but to rate disability and be compensated for conditions, Veterans must file a claim through VBA. Any service member who does not live near enough to a VA Medical Center or VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic must rely on and perhaps pay for counseling, medication, and healthcare services from a local provider for conditions related to MST. The determination that a condition is service connected would allow for the Veteran to receive care for those services and compensation from VBA to cover the care of health services.

The issue is timeliness of claims being adjudicated and compensation being granted. The administrative delay in the Coast Guard processing personnel file requests requires Coast Guard Veterans to wait years to have their claims processed, which means for years they are being asked additional, invasive questions and reliving the traumatizing events as they tell their story again and again.

Enclosure (3)

November 28, 2023

Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, Chairman Webster, Ranking Member Carbajal, Chairman Green, Ranking Member Thompson, Chairman Gimenez, Ranking Member Thanedar, Chairwoman Cantwell, Ranking Member Cruz, Chairwoman Baldwin, Ranking Member Sullivan, Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Paul, Chairman Blumenthal, and Ranking Member Johnson,

My name is K. Denise Rucker Krepp and I'm a former Maritime Administration Chief Counsel and former Coast Guard officer. I'm writing to you today to thank you for your investigations into the sexual harassment and rapes at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy and in the service. Please hold the individuals who committed these crimes accountable for their actions and please hold the individuals who covered up these crimes accountable as well.

Dozens of survivors spanning decades of crime gathered at the Military Women's Memorial earlier this month to talk about rape at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy and in the service at large. The event was billed as a healing opportunity. In reality it was a pain-ridden trip down memory lane for survivors who sat for eight hours listening to current Coast Guard leaders make hollow promises while the service rots because of past failed leadership.

Before my first cup of coffee, I learned about a woman who was raped shortly after joining the service. She never told her parents about the crime. While washing my hands in the bathroom another woman shared that she was raped while attending the Coast Guard Academy in the late 1990s. Another woman shared that she was gang-raped by three students at the school and had spent two thirds of her life on medication because of the crimes that occurred almost forty years ago.

I was simply sexually harassed as a young Coast Guard officer at Coast Guard headquarters in the late 1990s. I am also a survivor of retaliation and retribution by Coast Guard officers but the crimes committed against me pale in comparison to those committed against the dozens of women who sat in the audience with me.

One of the panels was entitled "Coast Guard Panel Accountability and Transparency - Building a More Accountable and Transparent Coast Guard" so I dutifully attended the session, because I genuinely thought that there would be a discussion on holding the admirals who created the toxic climate that tolerated the crimes accountable. I also mistakenly thought that there would be a discussion on holding the admirals who hid Operation Fouled Anchor from Congress and Coast Guard personnel accountable.

Neither happened so I politely stood up and asked the Coast Guard admiral who was talking about everything but accountability and transparency when both would occur. Looking up from the written answers that he'd been provided to recite, he shared that my question would be best directed to Admiral Fagan, the Commandant of the Coast Guard.

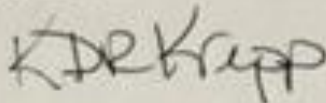
Two hours later, Admiral Fagan arrived with Admiral Thad Allen to give a summary of the day's events. She spoke about how going forward things would be different, there would be no more victims.

I too want my service to go forward but doing so requires a hard look in the rear view mirror so again I politely stood up. I shared that I was a survivor of sexual harassment and I asked when the admirals who failed to prosecute the crimes would be held accountable. I asked when the admirals who covered up the crimes would be held accountable. And then I waited for a response, still standing at attention.

Admiral Fagan angrily replied that she'd already apologized for past failures and that she was committed to ensuring that there would be no additional victims. And then she continued on talking about other things, glossing over the decades of pain staring at her from the seats in the first, second, tenth, and sixteenth rows of women.

Past systemic failed leadership destroyed lives and the cancer of failed leadership is destroying the health of today's Coast Guard. Current Coast Guard personnel are being told to trust their leaders but their leaders aren't holding their predecessors accountable for criminal behavior leading to a shocking lack of distrust in those at the top. For change to occur, Congress has to act. Congress must demand that Coast Guard officers who committed crimes and covered up crimes be recalled and prosecuted. Stop the rot before it completely destroys the Coast Guard.

Thank you.



K. Denise Rucker Krepp
Former Maritime Administration Chief Counsel and former Coast Guard officer

December 6, 2023

U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland
Security & Governmental Affairs
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC, 20510

Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Paul, Chairman Blumenthal, and Ranking Member Johnson,

My name is K. Denise Rucker Krepp and I'm a former Maritime Administration Chief Counsel and former Coast Guard officer. I'm writing to you today to thank you for holding the December 12th hearing on sexual harassment and sexual assault at the US Coast Guard Academy and in the service.

The arc of sexual harassment and sexual assault in the Coast Guard spans 40 plus painful-filled years. At a recent Coast Guard event billed as a healing opportunity I spoke with a woman who was raped in the 1990s and she never told her parents. Another graduate shared that she was gang-raped.

After the event, a male survivor contacted me sharing his story of assault. A recent graduate posted this week on Instagram sharing that she too was raped at the school. Three times. First by a superior. The second time by a classmate. Third time by an international student.

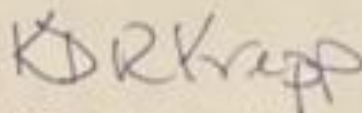
I was simply sexually harassed as a young Coast Guard officer at Coast Guard headquarters in the late 1990s.

At the healing event I asked Admiral Fagan when the admirals who failed to prosecute the crimes would be held accountable. I asked when the admirals who covered up the crimes would be held accountable. And then I waited for a response, standing at attention.

Admiral Fagan angrily replied that she'd already apologized for past failures and that she was committed to ensuring that there would be no additional victims. Stunned by her deliberate refusal to hold past leaders accountable, I dispiritedly sat down.

Past systemic failed leadership destroyed lives and the cancer of failed leadership is destroying the health of today's Coast Guard. Please continue to hold hearings on the sexual assaults that have and are occurring in the Coast Guard. Please demand that past leaders, including those that I served with in the Coast Guard legal community, be held accountable. Please stop the rot.

Thank you.



K. Denise Rucker Krepp

Former Maritime Administration Chief Counsel and former Coast Guard officer



Opinion: The long afterlife of the Tailhook scandal

amp.cnn.com



Shame on those who failed to take Coast Guard sexual assault seriously

militarytimes.com



Op-Ed: Time to Investigate SASH Cover-Up at U.S. Coast Guard Academy

maritime-executive.com