



# RHUMB LINES

*Straight Lines to Navigate By*



January 28, 2010

## African American/Black History Month

*"Throughout the history of our great nation the fight for justice and equality has been strengthened through our integration of the armed forces. Diversity is our road map for the future, borne of good practical sense, gleaned from our past and irrevocably tied to our future."*

– Vice Adm. Anthony L. Winns, Naval Inspector General

DoD's theme in celebration of African American/Black History Month is "Reaching Out to Youth: A Strategy for Excellence." The national theme is the "History of Black Economic Empowerment."

### African Americans in the Navy

Historically and currently, African Americans have seized opportunities to serve, lead and excel in challenging assignments worldwide.

- On March 15, 1947, Ensign John W. Lee became the first African American to be commissioned into the regular Navy.
- The [Centennial 7](#) were the Black officers who commanded submarines during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- [Rear Adm. Michelle Howard](#) is the first African American female to lead a combined task force in the 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet, serving as commander during the Maersk-Alabama piracy incident off the Somali coast, which led to the successful rescue of Capt. Richard Phillips.
- [Force Master Chief Laura A. Martinez](#) was awarded the 2009 Pioneer Award from the National Women of Color for achievements that include leading 500 corpsmen in providing health services for 15,000 U.S. and allied troops while deployed to Kuwait in 2003.

### Paying Tribute to Service

A number of Navy vessels are named to honor notable African Americans including:

- The Military Sealift Command ships, USNS Watson (T-AKR 310) and USNS Henson (T-AGS 63), an oceanographic survey ship, which is [currently supporting Haiti relief](#) as part of Operation Unified Response.
- [Charles Drew \(T-AKE 10\)](#) which will be christened in San Diego on Feb. 27.
- The destroyers [USS Oscar Austin \(DDG 79\)](#), [USS Pinckney \(DDG 91\)](#) and the future [USS Gravely \(DDG 107\)](#) to be commissioned this Fall.

### Navy Economically Empowering its Members

- President Harry S. Truman increased opportunities for African Americans to serve throughout the Navy in July of 1948 with [Executive Order No. 9981](#). Today, roughly 72,000 African American officer and enlisted Sailors serve in uniform. About 94,000 African Americans serve in the Navy's Total Force.
- Navy offers [Reserve Officer Training Corps \(ROTC\) scholarships](#) at 16 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) across the nation, continuing to provide our future leaders with opportunities for personal and professional growth.

### Key Messages

- Uniformed and civilian African Americans have served in the U.S. Navy since its beginnings, providing valuable skills, services and perspectives.
- The Navy continues to represent the strength of the nation's diversity and its ability to directly support the Maritime Strategy and national defense.
- The Navy employs top performing Sailors and civilians whose diverse backgrounds, experiences and skills are necessary to meet today's challenges.

### Facts & Figures

- Today, 13 African Americans admirals serve on active duty and one serves in the reserves.
- More than 50 percent of African American naval officers graduated from HBCUs.
- In 2009, the Navy earned a top Diversity Council Award and the Optimas Award for excellence in personnel management.
- For more information on African Americans in the Navy, visit the "African American Navy Experience" at the Naval History & Heritage Command website: <http://www.history.navy.mil/african-hist.htm>.