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U.S. Coast Guard History Program

Thomasania Montgomery



On 5 June 1975 Thomasania Montgomery received her commission as an Ensign in the United States Coast Guard. That day, Ensign Montgomery was one of two African American women commissioned, following her graduation from the Coast Guard Officer Candidate School. This event marked the first time in the Coast Guard's then-184 year history that African American women had become commissioned officers.

Ensign Montgomery began her tour of duty at Coast Guard Base Charleston, Charleston, South Carolina. Newspaper columnist, Fred Rigsbee, noted, "When Ens. Thomasania Montgomery Sconiers arrived for duty at the Charleston Coast Guard Base recently two barriers immediately fell. She became the base's first black officer and the facility's first woman."

During her time at Coast Guard Base Charleston, she became qualified as a duty officer (OOD). Additionally, she was also the duty officer for USCG Group Charleston, SC. This responsibility was significant in that the base received several search and rescue cases daily. In reflecting upon that experience years later, she recalled:

"I was always aware that any action or lack of action on my part could be significant. Organizing a search, knowing who to call, what units to dispatch, and where to look, entailed much responsibility. I feared it, yet I loved it, and I miss it very much."

Montgomery had been a school teacher in the Connecticut public school system before she joined the Coast Guard. Upon leaving the service, she returned to the classroom. In the ensuing years, she received a number of accolades as a teacher including: the Utah State Legislature Award-In Recognition of Distinguished Service in Education, Who's Who Among America's Teachers (multiple nominations), a nomination for the Huntsman Award for Excellence in Education, and the Ida B. Wells Risk-Taker Award from the Utah Alliance of Black School Educators. Most recently, she was named Teacher of the Year at Midvalley Elementary School in Midvale, Utah. Other notable achievements included the raising of four children and the completed a Masters degree. In 2013, Montgomery retired after more than three decades as a teacher.

