

# VCNO is the guest speaker at Office of Naval Intelligence's Black History Month Presentation

FROM THE OFFICE OF NAVAL INTELLIGENCE PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Vice Chief of Naval Operations (VCNO) ADM Michelle Howard knows a thing or two about breaking barriers. She was the first African-American woman to command a U.S. Navy ship, the first to become an admiral and the first woman in any of the armed services to achieve three-star rank. She later became the first woman to become a four-star admiral and as VCNO, she became the first African-American and the first woman to hold that post.

She led the task force that rescued Richard Phillips when the container ship under his charge, Maersk Alabama, was hijacked off the Somali coast in April 2009. For those who saw the Tom Hanks movie "Captain Phillips," the reference to ADM Howard on the phone is her.

Howard shared her thoughts on breaking barriers and being a trailblazer during her speech at ONI's Black History Month observation 26 Feb at the NMIC.

"I think I'm a subject matter expert in that because I once received an award that said I was a trailblazer," she said. "So I feel pretty comfortable talking about this."

Howard used this year's Black History Month "hallowed ground" theme to weave in references to several historic landmarks around Washington D.C.

She also described some of the notable African Americans from the area who have distinguished themselves by being first at something, such as political scientist Ralph Bunche, who taught generations of students at Howard University and became the first African-American to win the Nobel Peace Prize. She talked about abolitionist movement leader Frederick Douglass, whose Washington, D.C. house is a historic landmark, and civil rights activist Mary McLeod Bethune who began a private school for blacks in Florida and whose Washington home is also a historic landmark.

Howard also shared stories about Wesley Brown, the first African-American to graduate from the Naval Academy after attending D.C.'s Paul Lawrence Dunbar High School, the nation's first public high school for black students. Howard met Brown in person when she was a commander. He shared stories with her about his experiences in the racially segregated Naval Academy at Annapolis when he was a midshipman from 1945 to 1949.

Howard's theme throughout her speech was breaking barriers.

"Good morning," Howard said as she made her way up and down the aisles of the auditorium and shook hands with people who were visibly surprised. "Where are you from," she asked one audience member. She drew laughs when she said, "You look a little scared," to another.

Some of those in the audience said it felt good when she greeted them. One even said it felt astounding. "What just happened here?" she asked. "I broke the barriers."



VCNO ADMIRAL  
MICHELLE HOWARD  
ADDRESSES A  
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IN THE NMIC  
AUDITORIUM DURING  
ONI'S BLACK  
HISTORY MONTH  
PRESENTATION ON  
26 FEB.

