

2011 WAVES National Scholarship Recipient and Essay

Sydney Stimson, from Plymouth, MA, is the granddaughter of Carolyn Prunier, a member and past president of Pioneer Valley WAVES, Unit 81. Carolyn served for three years as a radioman and was stationed at the Communications Station (NPG) San Francisco, CA, and the Communications Center, Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, Portsmouth, NH.

Sydney will be attending the University of Massachusetts (Amherst) and aspires to be a renowned oncologist. Sydney has many accomplishments, which include being a delegate of the Student Council since her freshman year of high school; senior editor of the yearbook club; working in the family business during the summer and school vacations, and raising more than \$4,000 for victims of Hurricane Katrina.

WAVES National wishes Sydney much success in all her future endeavors.



*Sydney Stimson
Scholarship Winner*



Carolyn Prunier, grandmother

Essays are printed as written and have not been edited by the White Caps Editor.

Today's Sea Service Women at War

By Sydney Stimson

Susan B. Anthony once said, "It was we, the people, not we, the white male citizens; nor yet we, the male citizens; but we, the whole people, who formed the Union...Men, their rights and noting more; women, their rights and nothing less." In today's world, the old stereotype of a man in uniform is incorrect. Today, there is an average ration of seven males to every three females serving in the armed forces. Although the men still outnumber the women in our forces, women play a significantly higher role in the service compared to even as little as fifty years ago.

As a retired member of the Marines, Amber Tilton knows what it is like to serve her country in one of the infamous places of the current news. Amber enlisted in the Marines when she was only twenty-three years old and signed her life away, well, at least the next six years of her life. That was it; she was a reservist for the United States Marines. When asked why she chose to enlist in the military, she simply said that college wasn't for her. She said that she had not previously done anything responsible with her life and she felt that enlisting was the only thing to do with her future and something to be proud of. She served four and a half months in Iraq at the air base called Alasad. She then went to Fallujah for the remainder of the year to finish her time overseas.

I couldn't imagine what would have gone through my head if I found out that I was going to be serving and fighting for my country overseas in Iraq. I had to know; I asked Amber what exactly went through her head, and what she was thinking when she found out she would be serving in notorious Iraq. Of course she was feeling the most common and natural feeling of nervousness and at first she even tried to find a way of getting out of her situation. But when she thought about it, she realized she needed to stick together with her troops and she said she even "felt confidence in numbers". When she continued to think about it, she was glad she was going over there, so she could see first hand what it was like and what was truly going on.

Amber stated that serving in Iraq has its pros and cons. When asked what the worst part about serving in the military was, she said it was knowing the reality of what goes on. "Knowing what

goes on over there, makes you lose the naivety about the world. Babies are born and raised amidst complete chaos, so what's stopping it from happening here." When asked what the best part of serving in the military was, she slowly sat down and thought about her answer for a couple minutes. She looked at me and told me the story of a little boy who was in a bright orange jumpsuit. He stood about four and a half feet high with a shovel at his side that towered over his head. He stood right next to a gigantic pile of dirt beside him. Without answering the question directly, I knew what her answer was. The best part of serving in Iraq was seeing the Iraqis who persevered through it all.

When she served over seas in Fallujah, she took the same path everyday to the area where she would check females entering back onto the town after it had been destroyed. This year's scholarship is named in honor of Navy Culinary Specialist 1st Class (CS1) Regina R. Clark who died June 23, 2005 while serving during Operation Iraqi Freedom. When I informed Amber of this, she got a very blank look on her face, as if she was about to cry. When I asked if she was okay, she told me very slowly that when her time serving over seas was done, she went back home. Regina Clark took over for her and traveled the same path that Amber did every day. Amber could have been the one in the car when the explosive device detonated nearby, killing everyone in the convoy vehicle.

When I asked Amber what it was like in Iraq, and how the culture in that country differed from what she grew up with her in America, she went on about how she would almost rather live there. She told me the story about how she was talking to a female Iraqi with a very unique style. She had on a jeweled bracelet and when Amber complimented the female on the bracelet, she simply took it off her wrist and gave it to her without even thinking twice about it. It was then that Amber realized that when you have so much less, and grow up in such lower standards of living, it made you tougher.

Past war history generally focused on males who served in the military. When I asked Amber what the difference between men and women serving in the military was, she didn't have a clear answer. She told me that she personally felt that there was a huge difference for a father and a mother to leave their child at home. She told me that it was a lot to take on being a woman serving in the military. She said that there is a lot of sexual tension between the men and women in order to get their minds off of what is going on around them and that being around the men made her "feel like the prey" and that the sexual tension itself "turns people raw." When Amber was promoted in her unit before all of her male friends were, they completely ignored her and refused to talk to her or acknowledge her in any way. Towards the end of our interview together, I asked Amber what her general feelings were about the reason she was serving over seas. She told me that when she was over there, she would seek out ways to believe in the mission – to make it seem like she wasn't wasting her time. She told me that although she believes in the Iraqi freedom mission and Iraqi freedom, she doesn't know if it was worth the effort, but she really hopes it will be worth it in the end. Even though she hates to admit it, she thinks the chance is low. She said to me, "Twenty years down the road, if Iraqis are free and live in a nice place, and we did help them to that, then that would be the only reward we will ever need."

I asked Amber that if she was asked to, would she serve again and she said she would if she didn't have her family. She said it would be too much to risk with her husband of five years, her daughter, Alexa, and another child on the way.

Women have just as much of an impact and role in the military and armed forces as men do and maybe even more. They do everything that the men do yet they still have to deal with the discrimination from the news, media, and people about their gender. I have much faith that women can and will continue to surprise our world, especially, today's sea service women at war.