

LAW ENFORCEMENT SESSION

THE LONE RANGER: MY EXPERIENCES AS GEORGIA'S FIRST WOMAN CONSERVATION RANGER

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I am Georgia's first woman Conservation Ranger. I have been working for the Georgia Department of Natural Resources since July 1976. For most of these three years I have had a boating safety assignment on Lake Allatoona, a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' reservoir in North Georgia. Just recently I was promoted to Corporal and re-assigned to Clayton County, south of Atlanta. Three years is not a long time, but much has happened in those three years. I want to share some of those experiences with you in hopes that they help other departments in opening their doors to women law enforcement conservation officers.

First, let me briefly outline my background. I have a Bachelor's degree in English from Presbyterian College in South Carolina. I have three years teaching experience in English and Reading. I have a Master's degree in education from the University of Georgia. I have 600 hours of law enforcement training received at the University of Georgia while completing my Masters. I have engaged in some outdoor activities through my association with the Girl Scouts: horseback riding, backpacking, camping, canoeing, swimming. Yes, I love the out-of-doors.

Now, that background may sound extensive, but—do you notice anything missing? Obviously, I never mentioned anything about hunting, fishing, or trapping. Even my boating experience is limited to that with a canoe, and there I am no expert. What I am trying to point out here is this: I have some good qualifications what with my formal education and teaching experiences. However, I was *not* prepared to be a Conservation Ranger for the State of Georgia. As you can imagine, not being prepared has been a problem.

In Georgia to be a ranger the basic qualifications are to be 21 years of age and have a high school education. Yes, I had definitely met those requirements. My next step was to take the State Merit test for Conservation Ranger. The Merit System requires that one has to pass a written test as well as a physical agility test before being placed on the eligibility list for rangers. However, the Merit System requires the department to choose candidates from the eligibility list who have made one of the top ten scores on that particular test. Historically, Blacks, other minorities, and women have made low on the ranger test—too low to be considered for any Conservation Ranger vacancies. Thus, Georgia had a scarcity of minorities who were rangers. To remedy this situation the department initiated the cadet program designed to facilitate the entry of minorities into the Conservation Ranger field.

The purpose of the cadet training program, as I understand it, is to increase the job knowledge of the minority to that level of an incoming ranger who normally scores higher on the qualifying test. The cadet has to meet all the qualifications of a ranger and has to pass the Merit System test at least by a score of 70. If selected, the candidate is then placed under the cadet training program which lasts anywhere from six months to a year, depending on the cadet's progress.

Throughout the training program, the cadet is taught all aspects of the job through contact with rangers in the field. He/she is receiving on-the-job-training (OJT) in these areas: firearms, laws and regulations, first aid, communications, report writing, maintenance of equipment, boating safety, public relations, driver improvement, job orientation, operations, and conservation. This training covers a minimum of 2080 hours.

The cadet has no law enforcement sanction. He/She is in a training capacity only. No sidearms, badge, or handcuffs are issued until successful completion of the program or after successful completion of 30 days of training and firearms qualifications, at which

time he/she may be deputized. Otherwise, the cadet observes the operational functions of a Conservation Ranger by working with other rangers. He/she performs his/her duties under close supervision.

If he cadet makes satisfactory progress he/she is promoted to a ranger within a year. He/she is then assigned to a position that is open anywhere in the State. The cadet is now a ranger under probation for a year. Thus, the cadet/ranger receives even more OJT since he/she has to work with someone each day during this probationary period. As one can tell, the potential for extensive training is there in the cadet and probationary ranger programs. The cadet has ample time to build a solid foundation of knowledge that he/she was lacking prior to being hired by the department. Of course, the training never really stops—just the foundation has been built. The next few years are most important in molding this ranger. All that training starts to fall in place once a solid base of knowledge has been established.

The key here, of course, is the training. It needs to be well-planned, job related, and specific—with definite goals to be accomplished. And those involved in the training—whether a ranking officer or field ranger—need to know these goals and maybe even given ways in which to accomplish them. If those involved in the training of the cadet are not aware of what the goals are or how they are to be reached, then the training tends to be haphazard, and the cadet is the one to suffer. He/she can become confused and thus has to sort topics out for him (her) self. Some of this sorting out process can be a positive learning experience to a certain extent. *But if the cadet is left to train him (her) self completely, the program is letting him (her) down.* It is hard to train oneself when the person does not yet know what is to be learned. In the long run, it is the cadet who has to prove what he/she has learned—not the trainers. To all those watching, it is the cadet who passes or fails, not the program. However, if a cadet *does* fail, let it be because he/she actually *has* failed—not because the program failed him/her.

Of course, my comments thus far have dealt with training a minority ranger candidate who is unprepared for the job. I hope that situation is rare for any state in the position of hiring minorities. (And when I use the term “minority”, I am including women only because they are minorities in this field.) I speak from experience: more harm is done to the department, to fellow rangers, and to the cadet if the candidate is selected for a job for which he/she is unprepared or unqualified. My credibility as a ranger is very suspect when a hunter or fisherman finds out I do not have any hunting or fishing experience. My 600 hours of law enforcement training was excellent—so maybe I was a good risk in that respect—but my basic knowledge of game and fish activities—or lack of it—is and has been a definite handicap. I have made great improvements—I have learned a great deal—but there are still areas I am deficient in because my background has been different from that of most rangers who take this job. Growing up female has also been a handicap. By that I mean because I was a girl, I was not expected or allowed to do some of the things boys were allowed and expected to do, i.e., drive fast, tinker with cars, work with and operate machinery, etc. Some of these activities seem to be inherent in the background of most men. But my background is lacking here because, growing up as a girl, I was expected to engage in other activities. I still can perform my job as a Conservation Officer without some of the knowledge gained through these experiences. My problem, though, is that I feel so helpless when I see other rangers doing things I can't—not that I can't learn, if given the chance. However, be aware that there are women who have had these experiences. It's just that *I* wasn't one of them.

A point I would like to make here is that not all women or minorities are unqualified to be Conservation Rangers. They are not in general any less qualified than the rangers traditionally hired—their background is just different. If minorities are to be seriously recruited, this difference in their background needs to be overcome—and it can be done through proper training. However, there are women and minorities who have a related background, so extensive training (as through a cadet program) may not be necessary.

In April 1976, I passed the State Merit System test for Conservation Ranger, as well as the physical agility test. I was interviewed later that month by Colonel R. K. Fansler, who was the Department's Chief of Law Enforcement at that time as well as the originator and initiator of the cadet program. After the interview, the fingerprinting, and background investigation, I was hired. July 1, 1976 was my first day at work.

Now I guess you would like to hear about my experiences as a woman in this male-oriented field. First, I had to weather the endless complimentary jokes:

"You can arrest *me* anytime!"

"Hey, last year I went fishing without a license. Aren't you going to arrest me?"

"If I *am* under arrest, when are you going to search me?"

"You're the best looking game warden *I've* ever met!"

"I guess you feel like the 'Lone Ranger,' huh?"

But the one statement that was perhaps the most realistic was the one made by the old hunter upon his realization that the game warden field had been infiltrated by women: "Isn't *anything* sacred anymore?"

My biggest problem has been convincing the public that *I am* a woman. Most hunters and fishermen are programmed to see male in our gray and green uniforms. And my short hair, stocky physique and somewhat deep voice have not helped. I have had women try to throw me out of women's restrooms or at least appear startled when they see the boots and green long pants in the next stall. I have had hunters say "Sir" when I asked for their licenses. I had one man ask me, "Son, why aren't you in school?" He looked slightly amazed when I informed him that not only was I *not* his son, but I was definitely old enough to be out of school. I guess that has been the most common mistake: the sporting public's first impression of me is that I am a young boy. ("Wow! Do they ever hire them young these days!") It has also been humorous to talk to someone and know that he does not realize I am a woman. I can usually tell by the language the man uses. Most men I have encountered try not to use profane language in front of women. Thus, when the men "cuss" relaxingly, I know they do not see that I am a woman. When they are advised that I am *not* "one of the boys", they apologize profusely, thinking they might have said something to offend me. However, their language does *not* offend me. It just gives me a clue that they are mistaken as to my sexual identity. (Anyway, *I* do not apologize for my language, so what the hell?)

Of course, this problem of mistaken sexual identity can be embarrassing especially for the rangers working with me. They at first did not know how to react to the problem. But once they saw me laughing about it, they, too, laughed. Sometimes they find it very humorous to inform the confused person that he needs to look again at that "little boy ranger."

Another problem I have had is in answering nature's call in the woods. Believe me, in some aspects of this job, there is a definite advantage to being male and a definite disadvantage to being a female. For one thing, toilet paper does not grow on trees. It did not take me long to discover a way to carry some with me all the time, since I am not always in my own vehicle when I am working. The front pockets of my uniform shirt hold kleenex very nicely. Also, padding there can't hurt.

My first "pit stop" in the woods during archery season highlights my problem: The ranger I was with asked me if I had checked the tree limbs above me before doing my "business". The look on my face told him that I was still "green" enough not to realize that deer hunters tend to hunt from tree stands. No, there weren't any hunters around in the area that day, but from then on, I checked *all* around me before feeling "safe" enough to make a "pit stop". And of course, my problem is compounded when I am working on a cold, rainy night—especially if I am wearing the insulated coveralls issued by the department. You probably realize that the coveralls are designed for the men, making their "pit stops" easy. Stripping down on a cold, wet night is not my idea of fun, but it can be a necessary evil for a female game warden. I have yet to be "caught with my pants down" by a spot lighter on one of these details, but there is no telling how many people I have unconsciously "mooned" during the day as I answered nature's call in the woods.

And, yes to answer an unasked question, I have surprised many a man as *he* was answering nature's call. Surprisingly enough, some have been more embarrassed than I about the incident. I have watched fishermen from a distance with binoculars to determine if they really were fishing. Sometimes I see more than I bargain for, but you wouldn't believe how many quit protesting that they weren't fishing when I indicate some of the activities I saw while watching them fish.

And, of course, the men have tried to convert me over to being a tobacco chewer instead of a gum chewer. One even tried "setting me up" at a fox trial by slipping a can of snuff into my coat pocket early that morning. He intended to ask me for some snuff later on that day amongst a crowd of hunters. Thank goodness I found the can

of snuff before he was able to pull off that joke. I guess I wasn't as sleepy as I looked that morning. Then there was the time I was sent into the store to buy some chewing tobacco for this same ranger. I had a hard time convincing the clerk it wasn't for me. But, really, all I still chew is ORBIT gum!

But not all of my experiences have been humorous. The old hunter's comment earlier ("Is nothing sacred anymore?") reflected many ranger's attitudes toward my presence in their world. My coming to work as a ranger not only has been an adjustment to me, it has been an adjustment for the men. They were not accustomed to working with a woman in the field. And I was very much aware of that problem. I guess I had an unconscious goal of getting into a comfortable working relationship with the men. I was aware that my presence was "stifling" to them, especially if they were in a group. Therefore, at district meetings I would go talk to the secretaries or read a magazine while the men were outside chewing their tobacco and "chewing the fat" with each other. I think the men in my old district felt fairly comfortable about having me around during their jam sessions—but I still conveniently disappear when I think they need time to themselves—to be themselves, especially now that I am in a new district. Because of my recent change in status and location, I imagine I shall encounter more adjustment situations with this new group of rangers. Hopefully, we all shall be successful in our adjustments.

And how have I gotten along with the Ranger's wives? I have not detected any serious problem with them. Once they met me, they could see I was no threat to them or their relationships with their husbands. I do suggest that any department that hires a woman needs to have all their wives meet her at the beginning. They need to get to know her as one of their husband's working partners and not see her as a sexual partner. Hopefully, the woman herself will be serious enough about her job and career to develop working relationships, not sexual ones. Yes, there will be overtures, but if she is sincere, she will avoid conversations, situations, or encounters that could lead to sexual liaisons.

One minor problem has been in regard to my view of having doors opened for me. I do not feel particularly feminine when I am wearing a man's uniform, complete with badge, gun and boots. Therefore, I feel odd at having someone open a door for me. Besides, I wonder about the impression on the public: Are they aware that one ranger is showing gentlemanly courtesy to the woman ranger or are they thinking, "If she has to have doors opened for her, what else has to be done for her?" I have tried to show all the rangers I work with that I intend to "earn my keep." I want to do my share unless I am physically unable to. I am uncomfortable with any effort on someone else's part to do something for me, even something as small as opening a door for me. Perhaps it is the symbolism I am fighting.

Another symbolic gesture I am resisting is the tendency for other (male) law enforcement officers to hug my neck instead of shake my hand as they greeted me. Oh, yes, I am flattered by this attention. However, I am concerned about professional appearances. To me it is not professional to hug the neck of another officer while in uniform in normal greeting situations and especially between members of the opposite sex. I want to be shown the same respect as other officers (if I deserve it). I realize that the officer is trying to be gentlemanly by offering a hug instead of a handshake, but I do not expect this kind of greeting. I am just as complimented by a firm handshake. To me, a person's manners can be discerned by the professional courtesy with which he treats all officers, regardless of sex.

As you might suspect from what I have already mentioned, there has been the problem of being treated as a woman and being treated as a fellow ranger. The two are almost a contradiction of terms. I wanted to be treated as a fellow officer, not particularly as a woman. When I was hired, I did not expect my co-workers to watch their language, open doors for me, or allow me to precede them into a room. These actions are flattering, but they tend to get in the way of my own efforts to keep treatment of me equal. I did no (and still do not) expect or want special consideration. I want to be treated as any other ranger. But with the two handicaps I have had to overcome (my sex and my background), the men and I both have had some adjusting to do. It remains to be seen as to who had the greatest problem: the men in their adjustment to me or me in my adjustment to them and their unfamiliar world.

The public's acceptance of me has been good in most cases. However, a few times I have encountered some resistance in an attempt to arrest violators. On some occasions the resistance was due entirely to my sex. ("Ain't no woman gonna arrest me!") Even

women have given me a hard time, and I feel the "flack" I received was because I was a female giving another female a ticket. On other occasions the resistance was due to the fact that I was a law enforcement officer (notably "game warden") interfering with that person's day. In all circumstances so far, the arrests were effected or the situations were resolved somehow, whether through my own efforts or those of other officers called in to assist in a potentially volatile incident. One such situation that recently occurred involved a very hostile man pulling a gun on me and another ranger as we attempted to check his land for a dove field. Here we tried our best to keep the situation under control without the use of deadly force. The man was eventually placed into custody, but not before we had to have assistance. The case goes before the grand jury later this week (in October). The indictment is to include both felony and misdemeanor charges if the grand jury agrees with us. Thus, I have found that resistance in this job can include anything from verbal assault to aggravated assault, some of it not necessarily leveled at me because of my sex—more so maybe because of my status (as a law enforcement officer).

So, what have we learned from my experiences? First, if your State needs a cadet program to facilitate the entry of minorities into the field of conservation law enforcement, set up a well-planned, specific program and train everyone involved in the education of the cadet. Then recruit and hire qualified, prepared candidates to participate in the program. Second, expect adjustment on everyone's part when a minority or woman is hired (with or without a cadet program). There may be problems, but if all involved have an open mind and are willing to compromise, the adjustments may be less painful for everyone. Third, treat each minority as any other officer. Evaluate his/her background. Determine what the person knows and can do. Then identify areas of the training where he/she needs help and fill in the gaps, as you should do with any new employee. Fourth, be careful of stereotyping. Each person will be different. For example, not every woman will be as handicapped as I. Some will even need less help or training than others. Just treat the individual as any new employee who needs to be trained for a job for which he/she is unfamiliar.

I do not mean to sound presumptuous or trite with the above "advice", but these are some of the things I have learned from my three years as a ranger. I hope these comments will help other departments have a successful experience with women and minorities.

Finally, I would like to say that my experience with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources *has* been a positive one. Considering all, I *do* enjoy my work. Even though this job has been a major adjustment for me, nevertheless, my life has been enriched by the knowledge I have gained, by the situations I have encountered, and most especially by the working relationships I have formed with my fellow rangers. I could not have survived without their support. I feel lucky to have been selected as Georgia's First Woman Conservation Officer. Hopefully, I won't be the "Lone Ranger" for long as more women become interested in this field and as more departments open their doors to them.