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# Surface Warfare

DIGITAL FEATURE



## USS BOXER: A FOUNDATION OF EXCELLENCE IN DECK DEPARTMENT

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The officers, boatswain's mates (BMs) and undesignated seamen who make up the deck department on Boxer maintain the highest Navy standards because they know their work is essential to the mission.

Boatswain's Mate 1st Class Henry Williams has been assigned to Boxer for a year. He explained that BMs consider themselves a "jack of all trades," responsible for everything from steering the ship while at sea, to managing heavy equipment during underway operations, to constant shipboard preservation.

"BMs are one of the first rates we had in the Navy and we really take pride in that," said Williams.

Williams emphasized that deck department operates like an engine.

"Every functional piece has to work for the engine to actually flow and work. You have to be connected," explained Williams. "The ship can't run without personnel, personnel can't run if they're not committed, and when you take away that connection piece, there's going to be a failure somewhere – and that can be catastrophic."



Boatswain's Mate 3rd Class Hugh Jones, left, and Boatswain's Mate 1st Class Aaron Walker, assigned to the Wasp-class amphibious assault ship USS Boxer (LHD 4), tie lines to secure life rafts to the side of the ship while in port in San Diego. Life rafts are removed, inspected and re-certified every five years, then re-installed over the side of the ship to meet safety standards for getting underway.

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# “ BMs are one of the first rates we had in the Navy and we really take pride in that.”

- Boatswain's Mate 1st Class Henry Williams,  
USS Boxer (LHD-4)

Catastrophic is no exaggeration. Underway operations are inherently dangerous. Boxer is more than 800 feet long and weighs more than 40,000 tons. Add a contingent of Marines, their vehicles, and all their equipment, and operational risks only increase. Keeping that sense of unity and focus on teamwork helps mitigate risks in complex and arduous underway environments.

This is one example of why professionalism, pride, and discipline are fundamental elements of the concept of readiness. A professional crew working

like an engine is what makes a ship ready to complete any mission it is assigned. This is a mindset professionalism and high performance that creates a culture where crews thrive.

According to Williams, no one knows this better than deck department as material readiness and shipboard preservation are core to the mission of any ship.

“I think one of the things that a lot of people don't think about is that no matter what you're doing, once you take pride in that responsibility, everything else will just start flowing and aligning,” said Williams.



Underway, Boxer sports 116 life rafts in case of emergency. Every five years, these rafts are removed for inspection and re-packing and then re-installed. With the help of a crane, several safety harnesses, and skilled line handling, the deck department spent a day installing 50 rafts off the starboard side of the ship.

Boatswain's Mate 1st Class Aaron Walker spent most of that day tying lines, giving helpful directions, and ensuring the safety of his shipmates throughout the project. Though it's hard work, the team was all smiles and kept count proudly with each installation.

Walker never took his eyes from his work when he said about the job, "I couldn't see myself doing anything else in the world."

Williams' passion for the job is also clear when he recalls past operations.


"My favorite thing about this platform is the well deck," he said, grinning proudly. "I think it speaks dividends of what our job scope is, the camaraderie that we have with the Marines and the Navy, and how you get those two branches to work together to actually accomplish a mission – it's powerful. And it's fun."

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*- Boatswain's Mate 1st Class Henry Williams,  
USS Boxer (LHD-4)*





Whether in port or at sea, the work never stops to keep a ship in working shape. Shipboard preservation is a priority balanced with operational requirements because a preserved ship is one that can successfully stay on mission. This work takes a mindset of professionalism, discipline, and high performance – and Boxer's deck department embodies these traits.

"I think this community instilled in me a sense of purpose outside of just the scope of my duties," said Chief Boatswain's Mate LV Rosebud, also assigned to Boxer.

Rosebud has served in the Navy for 10 years and transferred to Boxer three months ago.

"Having pride in our job is important because it amplifies the importance of what we're doing and it gives us a sense of ownership," said Rosebud. "It goes beyond just doing the job to also doing it well."

Maintaining a ship is both a sprint and a marathon. Part of the marathon is keeping the crew invested in the importance of readiness. Deck department is a place where that pride begins and can spread across the crew and the whole fleet.

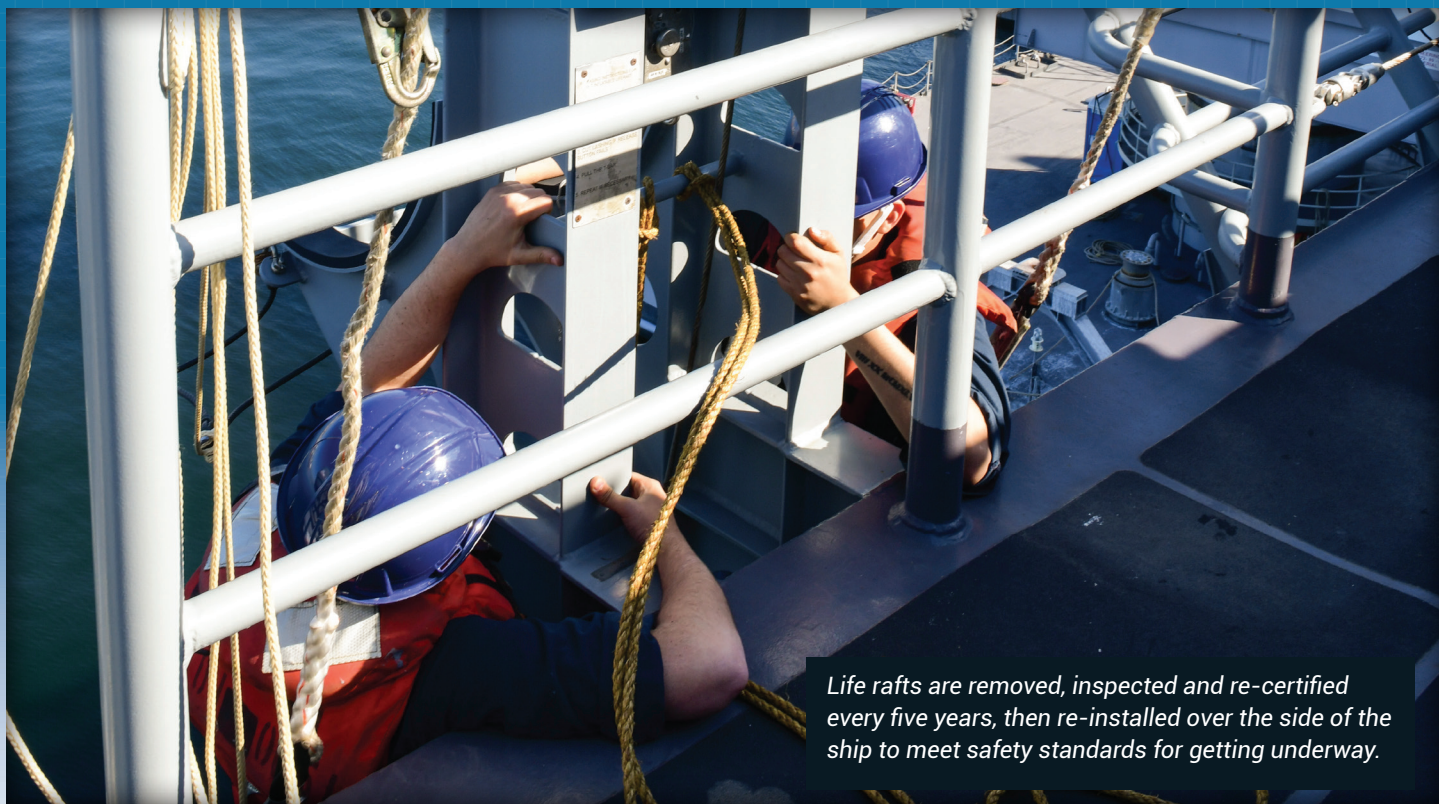
"I think of pride like an overflow," said Williams. "Once you fill that cup, next thing you know you're filling up another cup – and that's how you build great leaders. It's contagious."

U.S. Navy ships deploy for longer periods and more frequently than any other Navy in the world.

As a result, our ships face greater maintenance and preservation challenges. Preservation efforts are constant, even while out to sea. Walking the weather deck of a ship underway, it's common to find deck department working hard to eliminate rust and corrosion. Rust is an unfortunate but normal part of being out to sea, and the crew's efforts to fight it never stop.

"At times it seems like it's not the best job or the most glorified one, but it's definitely vital to movement and vital to mission accomplishment," said Rosebud.





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*- Chief Boatswain's Mate LV Rosebud,  
USS Zumwalt (DDG 1000), Navigator*

A shipshape unit means a mission ready unit, but it also means greater speed in identifying safety hazards and equipment failures. The faster problems are identified, the faster they can be solved and the ship can return to its responsibilities.

Every member of the crew makes readiness possible. For Williams and Rosebud, though, they can't imagine doing any other job.

"What made me choose boatswain's mate was that sense of pride that we have when we are getting things done in the major evolutions," said Rosebud. "They're always exciting for me. I like the thrill of it

being inherently dangerous, but also knowing that we have safety measures in place. You have to have a lot of trust, a lot of communication and a lot of rehearsals and time spent together as a team."

"I think the ship will always depend on a boatswain, with everything we do around the ship," said Williams. "That's why I take so much pride in my job and my love for the military. I love what we do and the impact we have on the world. I know when I see a ship out there that's 'haze gray and underway,' it couldn't get underway without the boatswain's mates." ⚓