

Surface Warfare

SNA 2025
Issue

THE COMPETITIVE EDGE 2.0



This issue:

Surface Warfare Officers
of the Year

HMAS Brisbane: A Profile
in Interchangeability

American and Japanese Sailors
test FifthGen Fighters' capability

The Surface Force at 50

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CHARTER

Surface Warfare Magazine is the professional magazine of the surface warfare community. Its purpose is to educate its readers on surface warfare missions and programs, with a particular focus on U.S. surface ships and commands. This journal will also draw upon the Surface Force’s rich historical legacy to instill a sense of pride and professionalism among community members and to enhance reader awareness of the increasing relevance of surface warfare for our nation’s defense.

The opinions and assertions herein are the personal views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense or the Department of the Navy.



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Cover: The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Higgins (DDG 76) launches a standard missile 2 (SM-2) from the forward vertical launching system while operating in the Philippine Sea. Photo by MC1 Hannah Fry.

Commander's Corner

By picking up this magazine, you are joining in the rich legacy of the Surface Warfare community. As we embark on the Navy's 250th year, we pause to reflect on where we have been and where we are going.

Every day, our Surface Force is operating forward at the point of friction functioning as a dynamic and adaptable instrument in projecting power, safeguarding maritime interests, and ensuring freedom of the seas. Three years ago, Commander, Naval Surface Forces released the surface strategy, "Surface Warfare: The Competitive Edge" to provide coherent vision in confronting a world growing more complicated. Today, our world is more fractious, volatile, and complex.

The CNO charted a course for our Navy to follow by prioritizing Warfighting, Warfighters, and the Foundation that supports them. In her 2024 Navigation Plan, Admiral Franchetti called for 80% combat surge ready warships by 2027.

This month, I will discuss the update to our surface strategy, "Surface Warfare: The Competitive Edge 2.0" at the Surface Navy Association's National Symposium. This is my approach to implement at speed the CNO's direction and push our enterprise to innovate while building on an established

organizational structure.

My first line of effort remains the development of our leaders—leaders who are warriors, mariners, and managers. Leadership development is the most important component of our strategy, and we must continue to develop leaders of character, competence, and energy.

In these pages, you will find fascinating stories of Surface Warriors pursuing personal and professional goals. These stories, produced by my Public Affairs team, illustrate the Surface Navy's history, culture, and traditions. Over the past year, our teammates featured in these pages dedicated themselves to advancing our Competitive Edge and truly embody what it means to be a surface warfare leader.

As the first quarter of the 21st century concludes, the Surface Force remains postured to preserve the peace and ensure the safety and security of our shared global maritime. It will take all of us, working together, to maximize our capability to operate incident to combat at sea, and those activities that serve the peacetime security and prosperity of our nation. We embrace the Competitive Edge as our call to action, and the U.S. Navy Sailor as our most valuable resource.

SWOBOSS



A woman with braided hair, wearing a navy blue uniform and a green earplug, is focused on operating a large red and green mechanical component on a ship's deck. In the background, another crew member in a yellow hard hat and blue uniform is also working. The scene is filled with various pipes, cables, and industrial equipment, creating a complex maritime environment.

RC to Sea

Enlisted Reservists Take Sea Duty Tours, Gain Experience and Readiness

*Story and photos by MC1 Claire Alfaro,
Commander, Naval Surface Force,
U.S. Pacific Fleet Public Affairs*

THERE'S A HUGE OPPORTUNITY RIGHT NOW FOR NAVY RESERVE SAILORS TO GET SEA DUTY EXPERIENCE.

— Rear Adm. Ted LeClair

The Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet (SURFPAC), is looking for selected reserve Sailors who'd like to put some adventure in their lives by spending a year or two filling active-duty billets in the surface fleet.

"There's a huge opportunity right now for Navy reserve Sailors to get sea duty experience," said Rear Adm. Ted LeClair, a Navy reservist and SURFPAC's deputy commander. "This fiscal year, we've had more than 100 reserve Sailors in shipboard active-duty billets. In October, 2024, there are going to be even more opportunities."

LeClair said it wasn't long ago that reserve Sailors had little opportunity to go to sea. He often got questions about it as a senior officer when visiting reserve units.

"I had to tell them if they wanted to go on a ship, then find a recruiter and join the active Navy," he said. "I'm happy to say that's no longer the case—it's a great way to supercharge your reserve career—and help fleet readiness, too."

SURFPAC expects to send roughly 120 selected reservists to fill active-duty billets in the coming year. More than 60 have already committed to taking orders, and 20 of those are Sailors are asking to stay an additional year, said Lt. Cmdr. William Sprouse, SURFPAC's Deputy Reserve Programs Director (RPD).

"It's called RC2SEA, because we're putting reservists on surface ships that can use their skills," Sprouse said. "The preference is to put them on deploying and forward-deployed ships."

The first choice is to take Sailors in sea-going ratings; however, all junior Sailors are welcome to apply, he said. For those E-5 and above, the priority is to find those with some sea duty under their belts, but others will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Orders longer than 181 days are permanent change of station (PCS) orders, allowing Sailors to bring their families to the ship's homeport while they serve. Orders under 181 days are not PCS, so they don't come with a funded move. All overseas tours are unaccompanied orders.

Two reserve Sailors already serving aboard the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Preble (DDG 88) are Electrician's Mate 2nd Class Luis Soberano, from Chicago, Illinois, and Machinist's Mate Fireman Djanya Marcellus, from Elmont, New York.

Both Preble Sailors arrived on the ship in January 2024. Soberano recently requested to stay until February 2025, and Marcellus has asked to remain until at least September 2025. Both Sailors said they have found their active mobilizations rewarding and helpful in gaining hands-on experience.



“

IT'S CALLED RC2SEA, AND WE'RE PUTTING RESERVISTS ON ANY
SURFACE SHIP THAT CAN USE THEM.

— Lt. Cmdr. William Sprouse
Deputy RPD



“

I ACTUALLY HAVE PEOPLE I COULD CALL FAMILY ON THIS SHIP THAT I’VE KNOWN SINCE A – SCHOOL. IT JUST FEELS LIKE HOME.

– MMFN Djanya Marcellus



For Soberano, it has been more about gaining on-the-job experience as an electrician. When not on active orders, he works in facilities maintenance for a large development corporation, involving him in anything from structural to electrical work. However, neither that job nor his time as a reservist has provided the same specialized, hands-on electrician experience as his time on active orders.

“I felt like I needed the experience,” Soberano said about his desire to stay active. “I’ve always been a reservist, and I’m an E-5 coming in here and honestly, I feel like I’m an E-3.”

Soberano welcomes the opportunity to gain experience and learn in a shipboard environment, including spending time out at sea.

Marcellus came aboard with a slightly different thought process. While on active orders since the beginning of the year, she is working on continuing her education in her spare time.

“I want to become a lawyer,” said Marcellus. “I’m mostly a computer person. I like office jobs, so I wanted to try something new before fully committing to becoming a lawyer. “Machinist’s mate is completely different from what I thought I wanted, so I decided, ‘Why not?’ It’s a new experience, and I’m learning something.”

Part of the draw of reserve service has always been flexibility. Reserve Sailors can volunteer for activation based on their own schedule and availability. Marcellus and Soberano both spoke of this freedom they enjoy in having that choice and the ease with which they were selected for orders they desired.

SURFPAC’s RPD staff is ready to field questions on finding and applying for advertised active sea-going jobs and can be reached at cnsp_rpd_distro@us.navy.mil.

These and many other activation opportunities can

also be searched in the Navy Reserve’s ZipServe. This online application allows reservists to apply for all reserve order opportunities ranging from two-week annual training opportunities to multi-year activations. ZipServe can be found on the Navy Reserve Homeport Portal at <https://locker.private.navyreserve.navy.mil/>.

Soberano said he had applied for a job advertised in the reserve system, and when it was already filled, Sproule called him directly to offer him the Preble opportunity.

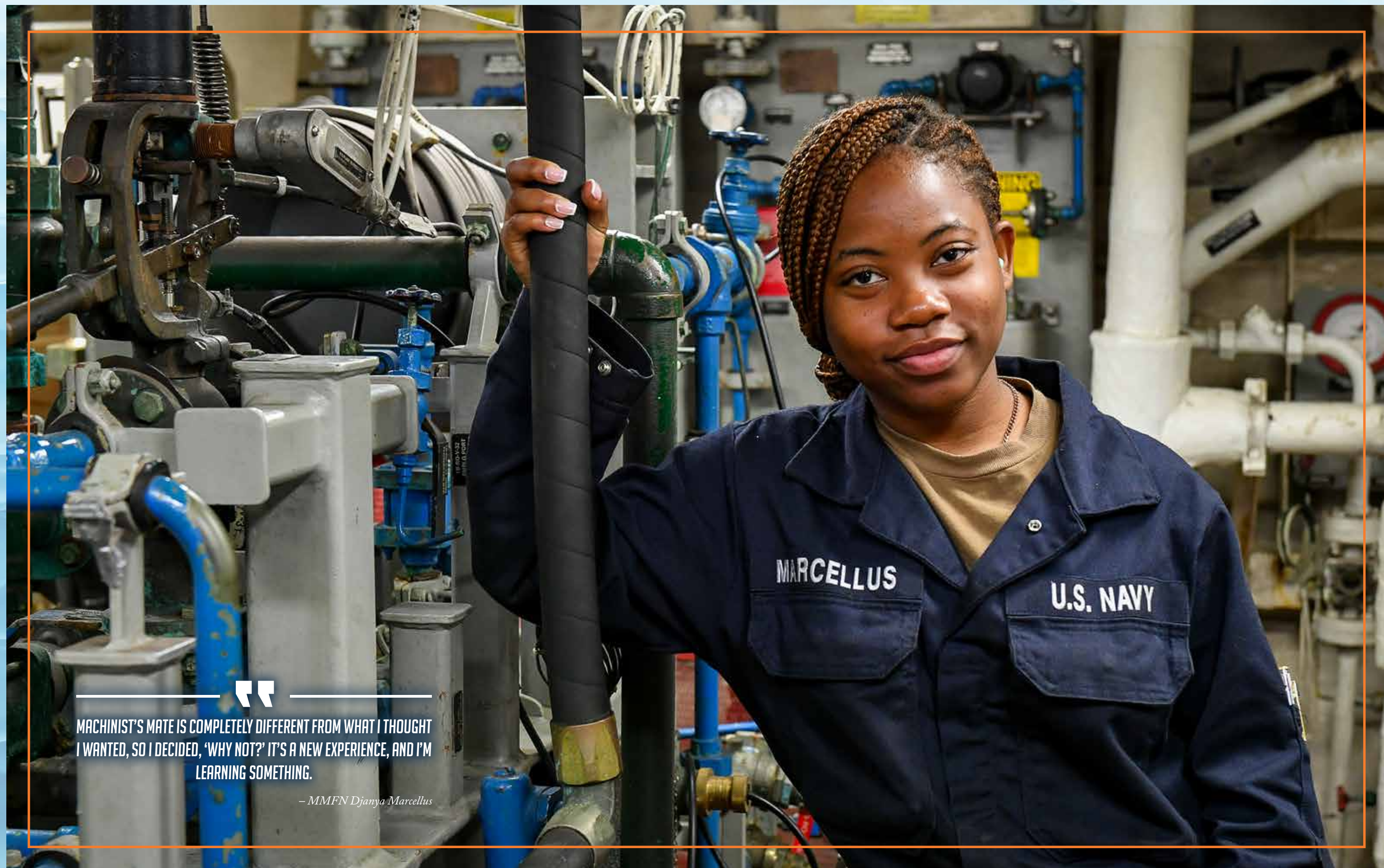
Marcellus asked for jobs on the West Coast and was immediately offered the job on Preble. She advised anyone considering the Navy first to join the reserves and then choose active-duty orders because it provides flexibility to select the job you think will be the best fit and the opportunity to extend or leave at the end of the active orders if it’s not.

She also said the benefits and community cannot be matched.

Marcellus explained that while her experience has affirmed that she would still like to become a lawyer, her time as a machinist’s mate has given her an appreciation for the hands-on work involved. She said she enjoys the learning process, no matter the equipment it applies to. Most of all, though, she has stayed aboard Preble for the people.

“I enjoy the people, and they make it worthwhile,” said Marcellus. “I actually have people I could call family on this ship that I’ve known since A school. It just feels like home.”

Soberano advises anyone considering Navy service to seriously think about what would be suitable for them, “either reserve or active. Active offers more, but as a reservist, I am very happy with everything I’ve done, and I’m very happy with everything the Navy has done for me.” ↓



“

MACHINIST'S MATE IS COMPLETELY DIFFERENT FROM WHAT I THOUGHT I WANTED, SO I DECIDED, 'WHY NOT?' IT'S A NEW EXPERIENCE, AND I'M LEARNING SOMETHING.

— MMFN Djanya Marcellus



Reserves at the Ready: SURFOR Reservists activate and deploy in critical roles

*Story by MC1 Claire Alfaro,
Commander, Naval Surface Force,
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Photos by MC1 Claire Alfaro and U.S. Navy*

Reserves at the Ready

SAN DIEGO (Apr. 15, 2024)—All winning teams have a common denominator to their success: a deep bench of skilled talent who step up to fill critical needs in the clutch.

For more than a century, the U.S. Navy Reserve has consistently played a crucial role in the fleet, not just during times of war but also in peacetime. It has always been a reliable source of trained manpower, critical skills, and expertise, stepping up to fill the gaps when needed.

Though many still see the reserve only as a wartime asset providing a quick infusion of manpower to the fleet in urgent moments, this stereotype is changing fast. Reservists now fill critical roles in the fleet, from senior leadership to specialized job positions.

"The Navy's deep bench—the Navy Reserve—is critical to sustaining the fight at sea," said Rear Adm. Ted LeClair, deputy commander of Commander, Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet (CNSP) and a Navy Reservist. "There are hundreds of Sailors trained and ready to head out on a moment's notice so our ships don't skip a beat in readiness."

In the Surface Force alone in fiscal year 2023, more than 100 reservists supported afloat commands, totaling 12,716 days of operational support. So far in 2024, 90 Sailors have answered the call, with 25 serving 120 days or more.

These are two examples of reservists answering the call to keep ships in the fight. You never know; there might be one on your ship.

THE NAVY'S DEEP BENCH—THE NAVY RESERVE IS CRITICAL TO SUSTAINING THE FIGHT AT SEA. THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF SAILORS TRAINED AND READY TO HEAD OUT ON A MOMENT'S NOTICE SO OUR SHIPS DON'T SKIP A BEAT IN READINESS.

— Rear Adm. Ted LeClair



Riding the Forward-Deployed Waves

The U.S. Navy has an abundance of forward-deployed ships operating around the globe at any given time. Making this possible are thousands of Sailors who wake up every day ready to fight and win when called upon.

However, there is occasionally a critical manning gap that needs to be filled by a willing Sailor back home—and that willingness is much more common than you may think.

Illustrating this are two command master chiefs (CMDCM) serving aboard Forward-Deployed Naval Force (F-DNF) ships in the Pacific Ocean in 2023 and 2024.

CMDCM Sean Baney, from Rossford, Ohio, is the CMDCM on the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Shoup (DDG 86). CMDCM James Butler, from San Diego, spent eight months as the CMDCM aboard another destroyer, USS John Finn (DDG 113).

The role of a senior enlisted leader is vital. Most of the Sailors in these billets are master chiefs (the highest enlisted rank) and go through training to take on the new rank of CMDCM. A large part of a CMDCM's job is to be the resource, advocate, and source of accountability for all enlisted Sailors on the ship. A gapped CMDCM billet means Sailors are missing that resource. It's a big set of shoes to fill.

For Baney, there was no hesitation. Activating for a long-term at-sea assignment was a great opportunity.

"It is a win-win situation, gaining unique experience while filling a critical billet," Baney said. "I hope that this will lead to

more opportunities for reserve Sailors to serve aboard ships underway, being part of a team while gaining critical in-rate and mobilization experience."

Gapped billets can occur for several reasons, but one main factor is timing. It takes time to train up a new CMDCM to fill the senior enlisted role, and deployed ships must be prioritized for filling those billets. Training Sailors for their positions takes time

at every level and in every rating, resulting in occasional gaps between a Sailor leaving a command and a new Sailor filling their spot. This is where reserves can help, often filling short-term gaps in shore billets while active Sailors fill long-term gaps at sea.

Butler and Baney are unique because they are reservists filling long-term sea duty billets. While the connection between reserve and active duty is vital, it is rare for

reservists to be activated for extended periods at the CMDCM level and, especially on a deployed ship. However, that seems to be changing.

According to the CMDCM for CNSP Reserve Forces Keith Metcalfe, filling a gapped sea billet with a reservist is relatively straightforward. A ship identifies a manning requirement and coordinates with CNSP's Reserve Program Director. The billet is validated and funded, then advertised to reserve forces. Reserve Sailors can then be matched with the open billets and receive their orders.

I HOPE THAT THIS WILL LEAD TO MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESERVE SAILORS TO SERVE ABOARD SHIPS UNDERWAY, BEING PART OF A TEAM WHILE GAINING CRITICAL IN-RATE AND MOBILIZATION EXPERIENCE.

— CMDCM Sean Baney



So, why hasn't this happened more? Butler believes it is a matter of changing mindsets.

Butler is a special agent for the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) when he isn't doing reserve duty. In early 2023, at an FBI recruiting event aboard the San Diego-based Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Cowpens (CG 63), Butler learned that Cowpens, along with 17 other ships, did not have CMDCMs on board. Those ships were borrowing CMDCMs from other ships for deployment, and the senior enlisted leader role was filled by someone else while in port.

Butler was shocked. As a CMDCM, he knew this constant shifting left Sailors with an inconsistent source of support in their chain of command. He recalls saying in a conversation with then Force Master Chief for CNSP, Greg Carlson – "Force, have you considered sourcing from the reserve force? Please let me know if I can help."

According to Butler, it had yet to occur to anyone that reserve CMDCMs might be willing to go active for long periods to fill gapped sea billets.

"A bunch of us are built for sea," said Butler. "Not all of us. But a lot of us grew up on the ship."

Two weeks later, Butler got the call. He was offered a chance to deploy with forward-deployed USS John Finn out of Japan and jumped at the opportunity.

Butler's wife, who also works for the FBI, introduced him to the ship's namesake in 2003. She met the Medal of Honor recipient when he was traveling at a nearby airport where she

worked. She invited Butler to come and meet him, and they continued to stay in contact for Finn's remaining years.

"John was cool. He didn't really care what was going on with the ship, though," Butler noted, chuckling.

For Baney, serving aboard Shoup was equally exciting. "For the first week while I was aboard, one of my shipmates was Machinery Repairman 1st Class Johnathon Smith. He is my son."

Smith and Baney served together for a week, with Baney saying it was his favorite part of the experience thus far. Smith then transferred to Recruit Training Command (RTC) Great Lakes as a recruit division commander. Navy service runs in the family.

Both CMDCMs also spoke of the excitement of bringing a new round of Navy chiefs into the fold during their time at sea. Baney proudly shared

that due to operational requirements and the difference in time zones, "the new chiefs we had aboard were the first four this season across the entire Navy."

Baney also takes pride in the opportunity to serve the Navy both at home and abroad. "I have friends at home who have never left Ohio, and I have been to six continents and 30 countries while being able to serve my country and be a part of something bigger than myself."

Similarly, Butler's most significant source of satisfaction was knowing he filled an imperative role during a critical time. It was only 12 days from when he got the call to activate to the day he arrived at John Finn, and he stayed until another CMDCM could take his place in January 2024.

I HAVE FRIENDS AT HOME WHO HAVE NEVER LEFT OHIO, AND I HAVE BEEN TO SIX CONTINENTS AND 30 COUNTRIES WHILE BEING ABLE TO SERVE MY COUNTRY AND BE A PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER THAN MYSELF.

– CMDCM Sean Baney



SAILORS DON'T GET A LOT OF DOWNTIME. IF WE KNOW WITH ENOUGH NOTICE WHAT KIND OF SAILORS THEY NEED, WE CAN GET SOME RESERVES OUT THERE EARLIER, AND WE DON'T BURN SAILORS DOWN WITH PATROL AFTER PATROL.

– CMDCM James Butler

Butler recalled John Finn's commanding officer, Cmdr. Earvin Taylor telling him the ship was in a better place because of his presence. Taylor hugged Butler on his last day aboard, telling him, "Shipmate, mission complete!"

Following this, much of the crew mustered on the quarterdeck to ring Butler ashore, a Navy tradition to honor those departing a ship for the final time.

"I don't know if you ever call it mission complete," Butler noted. "You just know you have moved the ball as far as you're going to move it, and then someone is going to pick it up and carry it on."

Butler also spoke of his desire to more fully exploit the active-reserve relationship in the future, especially for forward-deployed units, so reservists can continue to help carry that ball.

Part of the difficulty of being forward-deployed is the rigorous schedule. Ships are either in a demanding maintenance phase, or they are underway on active patrol. Not only this, but any gapped billet in each ship's crew creates a significant difficulty both in-port and underway. To go on patrol, some ships may borrow Sailors from the ships in port to fill those gaps.

"You have all those ships out there pulling from each other all the time," Butler explained, "so Sailors don't get a lot of downtime. If we know with enough notice what kind of Sailors they need, we can get some reserves out there earlier, and we don't burn Sailors down with patrol after patrol."

This seems to be the hope for the active-reserve partnership from now on. Recognizing that reserve Sailors are interested in going to sea means moving fewer active Sailors around so

often, creating consistency and a stronger Navy team.

What does this mean for Navy reservists? Nothing new. Reserve Sailors may see an increase in advertised sea duty opportunities. They will still choose to volunteer for those billets and activate long-term.

This is where Butler's passion for the uniform shows. He advises Sailors to "have passion and do what's right, not what's easy. I would offer this advice to anyone, no matter their career field."

Butler and Baney are not the only Sailors who have stepped up to the plate so far. Metcalfe named several others, including Master Chief Machinist's Mate Raymond Erich, who served for two years aboard the amphibious assault ship USS Wasp (LHD 1).

Being active as a reservist is an exciting opportunity but may also be daunting. At over 30 years of service, Butler didn't know how young Sailors would react to his presence. He only knew there was a need, and he could fill it.

"I thought, everyone's going to call me a dinosaur. Some of them did. But at the end of the day, nothing's different," said Butler, recalling his interactions with the crew. "No matter your component, a Sailor is focused on one thing, and that's the mission."

Whatever his methods, they seemed to work. Butler spoke of his last day again with some emotion. He said as the ship pulled into port, a young Sailor asked him if he was leaving immediately. Butler told him their new CMDCM was there, so it was time for him to go, even adding that he would be in good hands with their next CMDCM. The Sailor looked at Butler and said, "Well, you'll always be my CMDCM."



Swimming into Action

On a crisp, early Spring morning at Naval Base San Diego, three Navy reservists are taking a little swim in the chilly waters. This swim is far from leisurely, though, as a local warship looms above them, and the sounds of its Sailors echo down to the surface. These are search and rescue (SAR) swimmers, and they're training for active-reserve integration in the Pacific force.

This integration between active and reserve components transcends rank and even rating. SAR is not a Navy career field but a specialized collateral duty job available to Sailors from many ratings who can pass the physical fitness and training requirements, whether active or reserve.

Like other areas in the fleet, the active force can have difficulty filling SAR job gaps. According to Electronics Technician 1st Class Alex Stokes, a reserve SAR swimmer from Elk Grove, California, "Ships can't leave the pier unless they have qualified rescue swimmers, and it's hard for the active fleet to qualify and maintain them."

Because ships must have a qualified SAR swimmer on board to get underway, the reserve force has developed a SAR unit to supplement the fleet swimmers and meet the needs of deploying ships.

"We maintain those currencies, and we can augment ships at

a moment's notice," said Stokes.

Reserve SAR swimmers can activate and fill these critical billets anywhere from a few days underway to a months-long deployment.

Senior Chief Boatswain's Mate Gregori Bianchini, from Portland, Oregon, is the pioneer of the reserve SAR program for the Pacific fleet. As their senior enlisted leader, he oversees the reserve SAR units for the East and West coasts. So far

this fiscal year, the seven SAR swimmers in the Pacific unit have gone underway with six ships for a combined total of more than 212 days.

"We are making an impact globally daily," said Bianchini.

When they are not activated, these Sailors' time mainly consists of living their civilian lives and keeping up with their qualifications by participating in SAR exercises. Bianchini

said every quarter, he brings his Sailors in for a week to do drills or further sustainment, and then each has a typical drill weekend on top of that.

This way, they work on requirements to ensure they are current on necessary training. According to Bianchini, keeping his Sailors qualified allows them to do as little or as much active time as they want while also becoming more competitive for advancement within their rates.

— ET1 Class Alex Stokes

SHIPS CAN'T LEAVE THE PIER UNLESS THEY HAVE QUALIFIED RESCUE SWIMMERS, AND IT'S HARD FOR THE ACTIVE FLEET TO QUALIFY AND MAINTAIN THEM.



On March 21, three of these SAR swimmers put their training into practice, operating from the Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Chosin (CG 65). Each swimmer was lowered into the water off the ship's side while it was moored pierside at Naval Base San Diego. This exercise helps keep the swimmers sharp and provides a training opportunity for the deck department on board. Boatswain's mates across the brow could be heard shouting repeat-backs and improving their process throughout the exercise.

All three swimmers offered enthusiastic encouragement to the crew after the exercise. These Sailors are highly motivated, passionate, and ready to serve. Each one credits the reserve SAR program as a fulfilling and exciting way to stay involved with the Navy.

"Once I found out I was going to be a search and rescue swimmer, that's all I wanted to do," said Damage Controlman 2nd Class Ulysses Jiminez, from San Diego. "I just love being in the water and doing something that means something."

Each of the swimmers from the exercise said they were glad to feel their job as a reservist had a level of importance and necessity.

"The cool part of being a reserve SAR swimmer, especially

attached to [CNSP], is you are part of the actual Navy. You're going out and being operational," said Stokes. When we come here and recertify as rescue swimmers, we interface with the active units. We're doing something important, and we're doing something that could potentially save a life. We're still getting that touchpoint with the active fleet. And yeah, it just feels important."

Quartermaster 2nd Class Alan Medina, from Fresno, California, said his favorite part of the job is the chance to be impactful and versatile as a reserve Sailor. In total, he has spent more than 100 days underway filling critical SAR billets.

Not all reservists want to be activated for so long, though. There is plenty of opportunity for them, too.

Stokes said that he finds personal fulfillment from helping whenever his schedule allows. "I'm able to fill in as a [type commander] evaluator, so when I come out, I'm maintaining currency for the boys, but we have other guys who are just on back-to-back reserve orders. So it's almost like being active, except you kind of get to choose where you go."

Bianchini was also aboard Chosin for the exercise, overseeing each evolution and collaborating with the deck department.

THE COOL PART OF BEING A RESERVE SAR SWIMMER, ESPECIALLY ATTACHED TO [CNSP], IS YOU ARE PART OF THE ACTUAL NAVY. YOU'RE GOING OUT AND BEING OPERATIONAL.

— ET1 Class Alex Stokes





THAT'S ONE OF THE BIGGEST THINGS THAT I CAN HANG MY HAT ON: WE'RE ABLE TO GET SHIPS UNDERWAY ANYTIME, ANYWHERE.

— BMCS Gregori Bianchini

"I think the best part of this job is the impact that we give to the fleet, being able to get ships underway that can't get underway," said Bianchini. "From my standpoint, being an evaluator and a swimmer, being able to teach deck crews and make them better across the Navy and globally is fun."

Bianchini also spoke proudly of his other Sailors' current work, mentioning that Chief Electrician's Mate Brad Wiggins just returned from a homeport shift for USS McCampbell (DDG 85) and Hull Technician 1st Class Cory Cain after already spending time aboard the Chosin for its homeport shift, recently left to supplement a forward-deployed ship in U.S. Seventh Fleet.

"I think this is a great program for Sailors who have a good bandwidth to be able to help, and it has instant impact," said Bianchini. "That's one of the biggest things that I can hang my hat on: we're able to get ships underway anytime, anywhere."

He hopes to see the program grow, highlighting two pathways to join the team. The first is for rated reservists who would like to add the SAR collateral – he invites them to qualify and then follow the steps to become certified.

The second is for Sailors coming off active duty into the reserve force who already have the SAR collateral. He invites those Sailors to attend the two-week refresher school, certify, and become part of the team.

The SAR program is only open to Sailors with a rating and the physical ability to qualify.

Stokes agreed that sharing this opportunity is also his desire. "A lot of people don't know this exists. So join us if you're a swimmer coming off active duty and you still want to scratch that itch. If you're in the reserves, fit, and up to the challenge, join us."

Bianchini echoed this invitation. "The Sailors in this program are doing exactly what the program was intended to do: to stand in and support the mission at the most critical time so the Navy's not skipping a beat. We're doing what we should be doing, making an impact every day." ⚓





Destroyer Chaplains: Driving Personnel Readiness on Navy Destroyers

*Story and photos by MCC Mark D. Faram
Commander, Naval Surface Force,
U.S. Pacific Fleet Public Affairs*

“
THE NAVY IS COMMITTED TO PLACING CHAPLAINS AND RPs ON
THESE PLATFORMS WITH THE MOST JUNIOR COMMANDERS AND
MOST VULNERABLE CREWMEMBERS ENGAGED IN THE MOST
ISOLATED AND ARDUOUS MISSIONS.

— Capt. Scott Cauble

The Navy's Arleigh Burke-class destroyers increasingly operate as individual deployers in austere and demanding operational environments around the world, far from traditional Navy support.

This makes serving on these "greyhounds of the sea" among the most challenging jobs in the Navy.

According to a Surface Force study, crews on long and demanding operational deployments experience higher stress levels than traditional strike group deployments. This demands increased courage and commitment to complete the mission.

Now, the Navy's Chaplain Corps is stepping up to help, increasing its fleet presence with a multi-year effort putting chaplains and religious program specialists (RP) onboard each destroyer.

"The Navy's studies show that combat and crisis effectiveness are directly linked to personnel readiness," said Capt. Scott Cauble, Force Chaplain on the Commander, Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet staff.

"The Navy is committed to placing chaplains and RPs on these platforms with the most junior commanders and most vulnerable crewmembers engaged in the most isolated and arduous missions."

Cauble said that the effort is now roughly 50 percent complete. Going forward, all deploying destroyers will depart with chaplains in the crew.



USS Russell at Naval Base San Diego the night before deployment.



Clockwise from Top Left Lt. Vaughan checks his cell phone in Pearl Harbor, listens to Sailors on deck, Shares a story with FC3 Anthony Brusca and meets with the ship's triad on the fantail.



Adding the enlisted RPs to the mix will take longer but is on target to be completed in the next two years.

Until recently, only cruisers and larger Navy vessels rated chaplains and RPs in their crews.

Two chaplains were instead assigned to each of the Navy's destroyer squadrons to provide spiritual support for destroyers.

This has been the case since before the Vietnam War. Chaplains shuttled between the vessels when they were at sea but were never full members of the ship's crews.

In the future, destroyer squadrons will still have a senior chaplain assigned, but junior chaplains will now be assigned directly to the ships.

"The model of shuttling chaplains on and off destroyers was better than nothing, but it was not as effective as we needed," Cauble said. "Part-time chaplain support to shipboard triads and their crews was barely effective - full-time destroyer chaplains are changing that dynamic dramatically."

It's also changing the level of competency in the Chaplain Corps as now most new chaplains will go to sea first in their careers, he said.

"Destroyers are a great place to learn about the Navy - it's a small crew and a young crew and a good place for a new chaplain to learn," he said.

Lt. Zachary A. Vaughan has been assigned to the guided-missile destroyer USS Russell (DDG 59) since October 2, 2023.

He's the first full-time chaplain in the ship's 30-year commissioned life and the Navy's version of a small-town minister, charged with the spiritual readiness of roughly 330 souls who call the ship home.

Russell departed San Diego on February 10 and is operating in the Western Pacific.

"In a small town, as with a ship, everyone knows your name, place and role," Vaughan said.

"That's the same on a ship. Everyone has a role and is vitally important and needed—they are part of a team, and the mission would suffer without them being here and fully engaged."





Vaughan, 39, has been in the Navy for nearly eight years and on active duty since 2021. A native of Tucson, Arizona, he spent over a decade ministering at Serenity Baptist Church in the small rural Arizona town of Three Points southwest of Tucson.

For much of his life, he felt called to ministry and to serve his country.

His family has some Navy history, as his grandfather, or "Tata," as he calls him, was a 22-year reserve Seabee. Vaughan's recollection of his sea stories is one of the reasons he wanted to serve, too.

It wasn't until 2016 that Vaughan found a way to bring both of his "callings" together.

Early in 2016, he said, two of his seminary friends told him they were talking to a Navy chaplain recruiter and encouraged him to look into it.

In a few short months, he was a reservist and found himself out and about in the Navy, filling in where the Navy needed him both on the ship and ashore.

This included a short activation during the COVID-19 Pandemic, during which he remained in quarantine for periods so he could fill in anywhere at a moment's notice.

The more time he spent on active duty as a reservist, the more he thought about joining full-time.

That mobilization was followed by an offer of an

indefinite recall to active duty. Vaughan, with the support of his wife and their four children, Vaughan accepted. Soon, he was one of the chaplains assigned to Recruit Training Command in Great Lakes, which the Navy then followed up with orders to the Russell.

Within seconds of his arrival aboard, "I immediately lost my dress blue cover when it was caught by exhaust exiting the ship on the port side and ended up in the water," he said. "So that started me out with a dose of humility on day one—I just started laughing because what else can you do?"

THE MODEL OF SHUTTLING CHAPLAINS ON AND OFF DESTROYERS WAS BETTER THAN NOTHING, BUT IT WAS NOT AS EFFECTIVE AS WE NEEDED. PART-TIME CHAPLAIN SUPPORT TO SHIPBOARD TRIADS AND THEIR CREWS WAS BARELY EFFECTIVE - FULL-TIME DESTROYER CHAPLAINS ARE CHANGING THAT DYNAMIC DRAMATICALLY.

— Capt. Scott Cauble

Since then, the command and their new chaplain have been learning how a clergyman fits into the day-to-day operations of a warship.

"As the commanding officer, my concerns boil down to the crew's well-being and our mission readiness," said Cmdr. Michael McInerney, Russell's commanding officer.

"Having a chaplain is critical to the crew's well-being."

Growing up in the Navy on cruisers and destroyers, McInerney saw much of his life at sea with and without a chaplain.

Though thankful for the squadron chaplains' contributions during their visits, he says he's already seeing how much more effective a full-time chaplain is.

"They weren't here long enough to fully build trust with the crew—they were ship riders," he said. "Many times, a chaplain arrived in response to something bad happening. That is changing now. Having full-time chaplains is a proactive approach to Sailor well-being. Chaplain Vaughan is better equipped to prevent that bad scenario from happening in the first place."

Key to Vaughan's effectiveness on Russell is that he is

a confidential outlet for Sailors and has set counseling hours during which he can be reached for one-on-one talks.

Strict confidentiality rules mean that what's said during these private talks stays between the Sailor and Vaughan.

"It's a sacred trust that I have with every Sailor, and I don't think about whether they are religious or whether they go to my services," he said. "I am here to care for everyone—confidentiality means what they say is not going anywhere."

The fact that a talk with "Chaps" is 100 percent confidential is critical to Vaughan's trust among the crew. That "sacred trust" is also essential to the ship's leadership, too.

"The fact that Lt. Vaughan has a confidential bond with the Sailors gives him the ability to connect with them much deeper than any of us can," McInerney said. "Their trust in him gives them a confidential outlet they might not otherwise have out here."

“

IN A SMALL TOWN, AS WITH A SHIP, EVERYONE KNOWS YOUR NAME, PLACE AND ROLE. ON A SHIP, EVERYONE IS VITALLY IMPORTANT AND NEEDED—THEY ARE PART OF A TEAM, AND THE MISSION WOULD SUFFER WITHOUT THEM BEING HERE AND FULLY ENGAGED.

— Lt. Zachary A. Vaughan





Left to Right – Lt. Vaughan (L-R) speaks in a mess deck meeting, prepares his evening prayer on the bridge and salutes as the Russell passes the USS Arizona Memorial in Pearl Harbor.



WE'RE GOING TO FIGHT FOR ALL OUR SAILORS—WHATEVER FAITH THEY BELIEVE IN. IN THE NAVY EVERYONE NOT ONLY HAS THE RIGHT BUT MUST ALSO BE GIVEN THE ABILITY TO PRACTICE WHAT THEY BELIEVE—THAT'S VITAL.

— Lt. Zachary A. Vaughan

The ship's triad realizes the importance of the trust between Vaughan and the Sailors, McNerney says and honors that.

"He checks in with me daily. If he sees trends, he can bring up general issues, without giving specifics, that he believes are affecting the crew," he said. "It might be something like underlying stressors the crew is struggling with."

He said that knowledge "empowers the triad to do something to influence or mitigate those issues before they become bigger problems."

Vaughan says he often prays with and for those seeking his counsel or venting about their jobs or lives. "I can't report anything, but I can tell them what help

is available and encourage them to seek it out," he said. "I can say, hey, let's go talk to Doc about this because I think that'd be the best thing for you to do—but the decision is up to them."

Though Vaughan sees his role as a counselor as a big part of his job, he believes being visible around the ship and present when evolutions are happening is just as critical.

While at sea, "Chaps," as he is called by the crew, walks around the decks and observes everything from underway replenishment to weapons shoots and even fire drills. If it is happening on the Russell, he's there more often than not.

During lulls in the action, he gets to know the Sailors by name simply by sitting down with individuals and groups and having conversations.

Every evening, as the sun goes down at sea, Vaughan makes his way to the ship's bridge and says a prayer over the 1MC announcing system, preceded by a short story he shares with the crew.

"You'd never know he's only been here a little over four months," McNerney said. "He is really fully integrated with the crew."

Vaughan said there's no extra space on a DDG, but he's thankful he has an office to work in, even if it's small.

"The CO has given me the use of his at-sea cabin; it's a place to base out and a private place for talking to Sailors," he said.

He knows it's not the long-term solution, but for now, it's working. ⚓

Allied invasion of Normandy
6th June 1944

Phase One

Phase Two

Phase Three

Phase Four
Naval Attack

Phase Five
Ground Invasion



Boat Coxswains and “Dodge City Shootouts” The Surface Navy at D-Day

Story by MCC Mark D. Faram
Commander, Naval Surface Force,
U.S. Pacific Fleet Public Affairs
Photos curtesy of
Naval History and Heritage Command





Eighty years ago, on June 6, 1944, 132,500 Allied forces stormed ashore on France's Normandy coast to begin the final liberation of Europe from Nazi rule.

It was the most extensive amphibious operation the world has ever seen. Nearly 12,000 Allied aircraft and 7,000 ships landed 132,000 troops on the beaches or by parachute behind German lines.

By the end of the day, a tenuous foothold in Hitler's "Fortress Europe" had been won at a cost of more than 4,500 Allied soldiers killed and another 5,500 wounded or missing.

It was an operation that could have gone either way. That day in Normandy, the fate of the war hung in the balance for both the Allies and the Axis powers.

"Victory is not assured, but it can be achieved," Capt. Tim Steigelman, deputy commodore of Naval Beach Group 1 (NBG 1), told a gathering of West Coast Navy amphibious units in a ceremony on the beach near Naval Amphibious Base Coronado on June 6, the 80th Anniversary of the landings in Normandy.

Those include Beachmaster Unit 1 (BMU) 1, Assault Craft Units (ACU) 1 and 5, and Amphibious Construction Battalion (ACB) 1. Still in service today, these Navy units can trace their unit and occupational lineage back to World War II and, in some cases, the Normandy landings on D-Day.



The legacy of the Sailors at Normandy now falls to the men and women of the Navy's beachmaster, assault craft, and amphibious Seabee units. These units were all male back in the day, but in today's Navy, women fill this role, too. If the nation ever needs to assault an enemy beach again, these are the Sailors and units that must answer the call.

Amphibious operations are a team sport. The Navy's role is to get the troops to the beach and keep them supplied with reinforcements and supplies to sustain the fight. But the Army must win the fight ashore. One can't win without the other.

That role starts with beach reconnaissance and obstacle and mine removal. It's then on to naval gunfire support for the troops before and during the invasion. Then, it's the Navy's job to put the Army or Marines on the beach.

There's an argument to be made that a share of the hero's accolades should go to the Navy's boat coxswains, called "small-boat boys," said Lt. Cmdr. Max Miller in his book *The Far Shore*, which describes in Sailor's terms what the Navy did during

the invasion and in the days following.

The book's title, "Far Shore," was the Navy's official word for where the invasion would take place. Miller's account, written shortly after the battle for the beaches, brings their role to light in a way rarely described before or since.

Most soldiers coming ashore that day arrived on the beach in an LCV, a Navy abbreviation for "Landing Craft, Vehicle, and Personnel." The smallest of the Navy's landing craft, these boats could carry 30 troops and their gear to the beach.

According to historian and author Steven Ambrose in his book *D-Day - June 6, 1944: The Climactic Battle of World War II*, the United States and its allies used 1,089 of these craft on D-Day.

These boats were also known to the Sailors and Soldiers alike as "Higgins Boats."

The name is a nod to Andrew Jackson Higgins, the New Orleans entrepreneur who invented the craft and others like it and supplied them to U.S. and Allied navies by the thousands.

According to General Dwight D. Eisenhower, who was in overall command of the Normandy Landings, Higgins was "the man who won the war for us," Eisenhower told Ambrose after the war.

"If Higgins had not designed and built those LCVs, we never could have landed on an open beach," Eisenhower said. "The whole strategy of the war would have been different."

Too small to cross the English Channel on their own, they made the cross-channel journey on troop transports and large landing craft and put in the water closer to shore. The

coxswains then handled the final trip to the beach.

Some of the youngest Sailors in the Navy were driving those boats or helping as crewmen. If not for the grit and determination of these Sailors as they made the trip from ship to shore many times that day, there might not have been the resounding victory that came with the arrival of the Allies on European soil.

"[The Navy coxswains], as much as anybody, won that lengthy battle for the storm-stricken Normandy beaches of Omaha," Lt. Cmdr. Miller wrote

The legacy of these Sailors now falls to the men and women of the Navy's beachmaster, assault craft and amphibious Seabee units who does this type of work today. Back in the day, these units were all male, but in today's Navy, women fill this role, too.

Miller wrote in his description of these coxswains, "He is of high school age perhaps, or just about to become a college freshman."

"His craft would vary from [landing craft] to anything small which could be beached quickly, then backed away again before the [German 88mm artillery guns] would get adjusted on him," Miller wrote. "The usual time required for the adjustment of these guns was four minutes. This means that the small-boat boy would try to accomplish each beach assignment within three minutes."

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— Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower

Miller wrote that there wasn't time to check their watches. This battle timing was instinct, born of trial and error and many trips from ship to shore. Many of those who didn't meet that timeline paid the ultimate price. Others lost their lives to mines and other obstacles.

During the opening days of the battle for Normandy, his boat became his home, battered by the sea and "grimy inside and out" with sand and grease and "with a hull bearing the bumps of many batterings (sic) and with some bullet holes," Miller wrote.

His existence was a constant motion from ships to the shoreline, which Miller described as the life of a "water gypsy," many of whom never returned to the ship that launched them at 6:30 a.m. on June 6.

To sleep, he said, these amphibious Sailors would "hot rack" in stretchers used for evacuating the wounded and the dead. They became experts at scrounging food and candy. Sometimes, they'd even manage a shower or a hot meal from the ships they'd visit after depositing the wounded and before being reloaded for another trip to the beach.

Their role and that of other Sailors throughout the D-Day armada was crucial to the battle's successful outcome that day. Many more served on the destroyers, which brought fire support to the soldiers on the beaches or scoured the beaches in the dark hours before the landing, clearing

mines and obstacles in the way of the landing force.

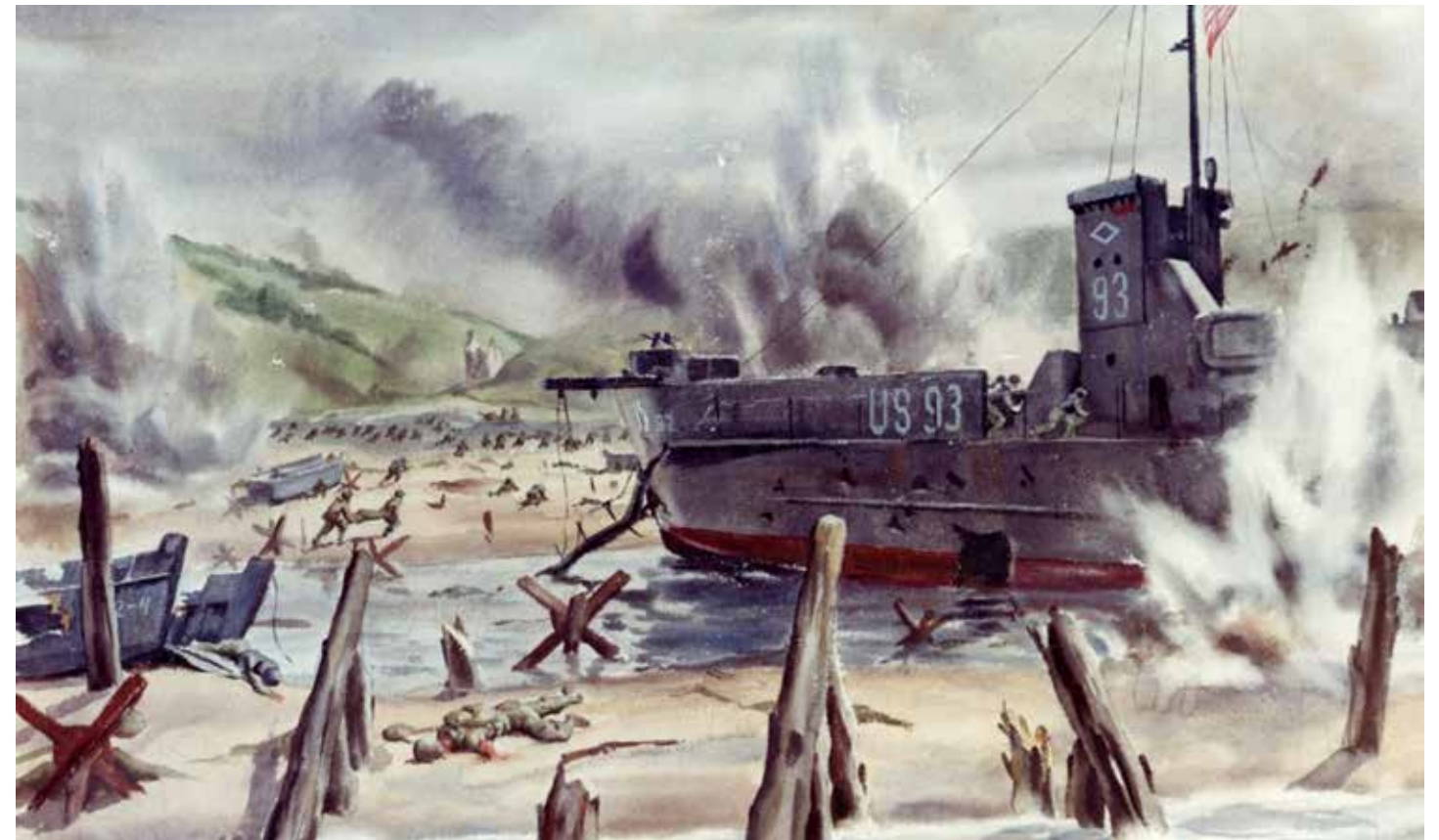
The U.S. Navy had three battleships off Omaha and Utah beaches: The Pearl Harbor survivor USS Nevada, the USS Texas, and the Navy's oldest battleship afloat, the USS Arkansas. Some cruisers were also present, but their deep drafts kept them miles offshore as they bombarded the coast in preparation for the landing.

But it was the actions of multiple Navy destroyers off Omaha Beach that the Navy's Surface Warriors showed their stuff, and according to many on the beach, they saved the day for the Soldiers on that beach.

James Knight, an Army Engineer with the 299th Combat Engineer Battalion, arrived on the beach in the first wave on Omaha Beach. He said that from his arrival at 0630 to sometime after 1030, "Regardless of the time of arrival, nearly every living person on Omaha was pinned down."

His description of being on Omaha Beach that morning was published in a letter to the crew of the USS Frankford (DD 497) in the August 1989 issue of US Naval Institute Proceedings Magazine.

The German positions on the bluffs overlooking Omaha Beach allowed the defenders a commanding view of the beach and the invading Americans. The plan was that aerial and naval gunfire bombardments would neutralize these defenses before the troops landed. Once on the beach, Sherman Tanks would pick up the supporting fire mission.



"Unfortunately, things didn't go anywhere near the way they were planned," Knight wrote. "The air bombardment landed way inland, beyond the beach defenses" as did the pre-dawn naval gunfire.

Leadership told the troops that shell and bomb craters would cover the beach "to provide us cover," but they were "practically nonexistent," he said.

As for the supporting gunfire, "only one of the amphibious tanks made it in," he said, "the others were swamped and went to the bottom shortly after being launched a mile or two out."

In the first few hours on Omaha, casualties were nearly 50 percent, Knight wrote. The thousand or so who managed to survive and reach the cover of the dunes "were pinned down by such murderous machine gun, sniper, and mortar fire that any movement meant almost certain death," he wrote.

"The many desperate attempts to advance even a few yards usually resulted in a casualty from an antipersonnel mine or machine gun fire."

Soldiers couldn't retreat or move forward. Stuck with no artillery support, they needed help. With few radios surviving the landing, this word was not getting to the ships at sea.

All that changed once the reality of the situation on Omaha started trickling back to the offshore armada. Rear Admiral Carleton F. Bryant, who commanded naval gunfire off Utah and Omaha, radioed a message from the Battleship USS

Texas to the nearby destroyers: "Get on them, men! Get on them!" he said. "They are raising hell with the men on the beach, and we can't have any more of that. We must stop it."

Springing into action were Gleaves-class destroyers USS Emmons (DD 457), USS Carmick (DD 493), USS McCook (DD 496), USS Doyle (DD 494), USS Baldwin (DD 624), USS Harding (DD 625), USS Frankford (DD 497) and USS Thompson (DD 627).

All the destroyers closed on the beach responded and provided gunfire support at different locations. What Knight saw Frankford do stuck with him for the rest of his life.

Between 1000 and 1030, Knight saw the ship headed straight for him, going fast. Initially, he thought the ship had struck a mine and was trying to

beach itself, though he saw no smoke or damage.

"[The Frankford] started to turn right and, before she completed the turn to be parallel to the beach, all her guns opened fire. At the same time, I saw smoke leave the gun barrels; shells landed a few yards above my rock cover. As the destroyer proceeded toward the western end of the beach, I watched her go farther and farther from me and expected to see her pull out to sea at any minute, when suddenly I realized she was backing up and her guns had yet to pause since commencing fire."

“
**THEY ARE RAISING HELL WITH THE MEN ON THE BEACH, AND
WE CAN'T HAVE ANY MORE OF THAT. WE MUST STOP IT.**

– Rear Adm. Carleton F. Bryant



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Frankford then, Knight said, "backed up almost to where she had started, went dead in the water for the second time...and again headed toward the other end of the beach, with all guns still blazing. When she reached the western section of the beach, she pulled out to sea."

“
THE DESTROYERS CAME RIGHT UP TO THE BEACH FIRING INTO THE CLIFF. YOU COULD SEE THE TRENCHES, GUNS AND MEN BLOWING UP WHERE THEY WOULD HIT

— Lt. Joe Smith

Lt. Owen Keeler, Frankford's gunnery officer, filled in some details from their side in a letter answering Knights' letter of gratitude to the ship and crew.

When the call came to help those on the beach with gunfire, the Frankford was 1000 yards out, he said, but the German camouflage was so good that "from that distance, we could not see who was where or pinpoint anything to shoot."

Cmdr. James Semmes, Frankford's skipper, then, "navigating by fathometer and seaman's eye, he took us in... to within 300-400 yards," Keeler said, but still it was tough to "see who was where or pinpoint anything to shoot."

Keeler said he soon got help from the beach but not by radio calls or traditional signals.

"One of our light tanks that was sitting at the water's edge with a broken track fired at something on the hill," Keeler said. "We immediately followed up with a five-inch salvo. The tank gunner flipped open his hatch, looked around at us, waved, dropped back in the tank, and fired at another target. For the next few minutes, he was our fire-control party. Our rangefinder optics could examine the spots where his shells hit."

Knight wrote that the effects of Frankford's daring charge were felt immediately on the beach. "Not long after you swung out to sea," Knight wrote. "There was movement on

the beach."

Frankford's pounding of the bluffs enabled the infantry to advance up the slopes to clear the fortifications.

"Before your 'cruise, there had been only dying and scratching for cover for several hours," Knight wrote. "There is no question, at least in my mind, if you had not come in as close as you did, exposing yourselves to God only knows how much, that I would not have survived overnight. I truly believe that in the absence of the damage you inflicted on German emplacements, the only way any GI [Soldier] was going to leave Omaha was in a mattress cover or as a prisoner of war."

The other destroyers made their passes, firing at nearly point-blank range at the bluffs. Lt. Joe Smith, a Navy beachmaster, recounted to Ambrose what he saw during another destroyer's run.

"The destroyers came right up to the beach firing into the cliff," Smith said. "You could see the trenches, guns and men blowing up where they would hit...there is no question in my mind that the few Navy destroyers we had there saved the invasion. Believe me, I am a destroyer man from that day on."

One Sailor on the beach described the destroyer's actions as a "Dodge City shootout." The Navy's action got those on Omaha moving, allowing the Army to secure the beach by sundown.



“
THANK GOD FOR THE UNITED STATES NAVY!

— Maj. Gen. Leonard T. Gerow

According to Ambrose, each destroyer off Omaha Beach fired between 500 and 1,000 5-inch shells. Some returned to England after their work off Omaha Beach with few or no rounds remaining in their magazines.

From the lowliest private on Omaha Beach to senior officers who came ashore



later and saw their handiwork. Among them was Major General Leonard T. Gerow, who set up his headquarters on Omaha Beach at 1900 on June 6. He radioed a message to General Omar N. Bradley, who was in overall command of the U.S. landings, saying, "Thank God for the United States Navy!" ⚓



The Surface Force at 50

Story MCC Mark D. Faram
Commander, Naval Surface Force,
U.S. Pacific Fleet Public Affairs



On July 1, 2025, the Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet – and its east coast counterpart Naval Surface Force, Atlantic, which combined make up the U.S. Naval Surface Forces - celebrates 50 years as an organization.

Both commands became operational on July 1, 1975, a mega-merger in the works for over a year and paralleled on both coasts. In May 1974, during the final month of his time as the Navy's top officer, Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt approved a massive plan to consolidate three major type commands on each coast and the smaller mine warfare units, creating the Surface Force as we know it today.

"NAVOP" message 89/74, which announced the merger, where Zumwalt stated that "these new commands will encompass the present functions of the amphibious, cruiser-destroyer and service type commands in both the Atlantic and Pacific Fleets." The three stars on our command's crest signify a merger signify these three long standing commands on each coast," and the number of the stars worn by the force commander.

The move brought the surface force on par with the Naval Submarine and Aviation forces, already unified type commands headed by three-star admirals.

"The rationale for this action is to achieve an organization which will permit more effective management and utilization of existing resources, thereby improving the support-to-combat

ratio, allowing us to eliminate duplication in administrative and support areas, thereby generating savings in common overhead," Zumwalt said in the message.

The merger began on both coasts on January 1, 1975. By April 1, the amphibious and cruiser-destroyer forces merger was complete. The final move was to fold in the service force and the mine warfare units on June 30, and the commands were complete. The next day, July 1, 1975, the commands and the force were declared fully operational.

Two ships remain in force today that were participants in the 1975 mergers. The forward-deployed command ship USS Blue Ridge (LCC 19), now in Yokosuka, Japan, and sister ship USS Mount Whitney, in Gaeta, Italy, still provide that bridge to the past.

Gone from today's surface force today are now Naval Special Warfare Groups One and Two, which since 1987 belong to the Naval Special Warfare Command, and the Explosive Ordnance Disposal Groups and Mobile Diving and Salvage units, which since 2006 belong to Naval Expeditionary Combat Command.

In addition, the Naval Amphibious Base, Coronado, also came under SURFPAC at the beginning but now comes under Naval Installations Command. ⚓





Surface Warfare Officers of the Year

Story by MCC Mark D. Faram and Lt.j.g. Jaliya Wilson
Photos by MCC Mark D. Faram and U.S. Navy

Surface warfare officers (SWOs) are world-renowned maritime warfighters, tacticians, and leaders.

SWOs train extensively to operate the most advanced warships and combat systems, ensuring their shipboard teams are ready for high-end combat. The Surface Force is built on a warfighting culture of grit, tenacity, and connectedness, enabling Surface Warriors to operate in the most austere operational environments and win decisively.

The Surface Force recognizes one SWO from each coast annually with the Surface Warfare

Officer of the Year award. This award acknowledges SWOs who best personify the ideals of the Surface Warrior ethos, which includes excellence in warfighting, leadership, and mission accomplishment through professionalism and personal example.

Competition for the honor is challenging and requires more than personal accolades and seniors' recommendations. Once nominated, the competition has multiple parts, testing knowledge and skill through written and practical exams.

“
HE'S JUST THE ABSOLUTE LINCHPIN AND
FULCRUM WE DEPEND ON FOR NEARLY
EVERYTHING THAT GOES ON WITH THE SHIP.

— Cmdr. Kurt Albaugh



Lt. Cmdr. Jason White's nomination to be the Pacific Fleet's Surface Warfare Officer of the Year was a "no-brainer," according to his commanding officer.

"He's just the absolute linchpin and fulcrum we depend on for nearly everything that goes on with the ship," said Cmdr. Kurt Albaugh, commanding officer of the Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer USS Sterett (DDG 104).

"He's our senior watch officer, so he has a huge role in professional development and the shepherding of all of our junior officers on board; he's the steward of many processes that we care about in the surface force such as standard shipboard operating principles and procedures as well as the PBED process [planning, briefing, executing and debriefing] that we do for any evolution on board the ship," said Albaugh. "His role and impact are command wide and reach beyond the lifelines to the destroyer squadron and strike group levels, too."



"I've learned more on Sterett, but I owe all my ships something," said White. "I've kept consistent as I've stayed on destroyers but switched around in the mission areas and departments I've been attached to because I think variety is essential to every SWO's career." Even though all the technical knowledge White's gathered through nearly a decade of service is crucial to his career, he's learned that the most critical core competencies a SWO must develop is leading and taking care of Sailors. "You have to be a master at leading people," said White. "As officers, the way the Navy is structured, we don't directly maintain our equipment and we don't operate most of it ourselves. We rely on enlisted talent and subject matter experts to operate – our chiefs mess and junior enlisted who make our ships. So our job is removing barriers and ensuring our Sailors are taken care of as professionals and human beings, so that they can succeed in their careers

and personal lives. You'll find a successful ship where we empower our Sailors by providing them the tools they need to succeed; where we fail, you find the opposite." Albaugh says White is a rising star in the SWO community, and his next assignment will take him temporarily off ships to learn to navigate the halls of the Pentagon as a member of the chief of naval operations surface warfare directorate. "He'll be a requirements officer in our surface warfare directorate, which is absolutely a place where we send top talent to keep developing in their professional career, setting him up for command screening," said Albaugh. "I can't speak for the board when they meet in the future, but I would not be surprised at all to see his name on the command selection list in a year or two after the board meets."

I KNOW THIS IS AN INDIVIDUAL AWARD, BUT SUCCESS ANYWHERE IN THIS COMMUNITY IS A TEAM SPORT.

– Lt. Cmdr. Jason White

As evidence of White's impact, Albaugh pointed out that Sterrett produced this Year's Surface Warfare Officer of the Year and won the top award a surface ship can get in the Pacific Fleet - the Spokane Trophy. "I know this is an individual award, but success anywhere in this community is a team sport," said White of the award. "I'm honored, but fundamentally, I'm just very humbled to be in this position at all. This is 100% a team effort for Sterett - I did not get here alone." He acknowledges that the selection process was grueling, packed full of oral, written, and practical exams - where it was up to him to perform on his own. But the foundation of his success was the sum total of all he's learned since joining the Navy after graduating from Georgia Institute of Technology.

"If you told me at Georgia Tech that I was going to be in the Navy, I would have told you there was no way that would ever happen," said White. "But I needed a job and a career, and now I've found something I love to do and have gotten to see the world doing it." Commissioned from Officer Candidate School, his first assignment was the Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer USS Donald Cook (DDG 75) out of Rota, Spain. Next, he went around the world to serve on another destroyer, USS Stethem (DDG 63), operating out of Yokosuka, Japan. After training to be a WTI at the Naval Surface and Mine Warfighting Development Center (SMWDC) Headquarters in San Diego, he reported to the San Diego-based Sterett.

HE'LL BE A REQUIREMENTS OFFICER IN OUR SURFACE WARFARE DIRECTORATE, WHICH IS ABSOLUTELY A PLACE WHERE WE SEND TOP TALENT.

– Lt. Cmdr. Jason White





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**THIS AWARD REPRESENTS THE INCREDIBLE LEADERS,
PEERS, DIVISION OFFICERS, AND SAILORS WHO HAVE
WORKED WITH ME OVER THE LAST 11 YEARS.**

— Lt. Cmdr. James Sightler

Lt. Cmdr. James "Jeb" Sightler arrived on the Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer USS Laboon (DDG 58) ready to assume the duties of the weapons officer but ended up filling a gapped billet as the ship's plans and tactics officer. While in that role, he was selected as the Atlantic Fleet's SWO of the Year. "This award represents the incredible leaders, peers, division officers, and Sailors who have worked with me over the last 11 years," said Sightler. "It's very humbling to get an award like this one because of what so many others have invested in you."





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LABOON OPERATED IN AN AREA WITH A CONSTANT
THREAT, BUT WHAT STOOD OUT WAS OUR CREW'S
ABILITY TO MAINTAIN FOCUS DURING SOME OF THE MOST
TACTICAL OPERATIONS WE'VE EVER CONDUCTED.

– Lt. Cmdr. James Sightler

From completing the Live Fire with a Purpose (LFWAP) program to enduring a challenging deployment, Sightler credits his crew aboard Laboon for their resilience and commitment.

"Through every operation since my time onboard, I have been incredibly proud of the crew," said Sightler. "From shooting missiles to emerging from the basic phase, our team has always made me proud."

The deployment on Laboon brought both hard work and adversity, but it also underscored the perseverance of Sightler and his crew. Reflecting on their time in the Red Sea, where they engaged with Houthi rebels.

"Laboon operated in an area with a constant threat," said Sightler. "But what stood out was our crew's ability to maintain focus during some of the most tactical operations

we've ever conducted."

Sightler credits much of his success to the unwavering support of his wife of 19 years and their two children. He considers work-life crucial, especially in the demanding life of a Surface Warfare Officer.

"Without them, I truly would be nothing," said Sightler. "Work doesn't have a time limit, and it can easily consume most of your day – that's why I carve out time for my family, even during my busiest moments onboard Laboon."

Sightler followed an unconventional career path that led him to becoming a SWO. He started his career as a staff sergeant in the Air Force. He then became a gunnery officer, fleeting up to a navigator, and then developed his skills as an experienced watchstander.

As a warrior of the surface fleet, Sightler credits those who helped him become the confident and competent leader he is today. Paying special tribute to how the late retired Capt. Michael Mara mentored him in the trainer, helping him hone his seamanship skills. Every SWO seeks to improve their mariner skills. Much of that professional development happens during visits to a Navigation, Seamanship, and Shiphandling Trainer (NSST), which the Navy operates in fleet concentration areas.

"As a junior officer, I learned how to drive ships from the retired captains at NSST," said Sightler. "In the simulator, Capt. Mara would always focus on sharpening my technical abilities and leadership."

As a Warfare Tactical Instructor (WTI), Sightler embodies the program's core principles; humility, credibility, and approachability. His tenacity and warrior mindset inspire those who serve under him and motivate the next generation of SWOs.

"Today's junior officers are more than capable of becoming

the leaders we need for the future," said Sightler confidently. "I always tell them to focus on mastering the fundamentals and knowing how to fight the ship. When you're under pressure, those core skills will carry you through."

The junior officers under his leadership felt proud and confident with Lt. Cmdr. Sightler as their senior watch officer, especially during their deployment.

"Whether his involved ship handling or fighting the ship from the Combat Information Center, [Sightler] made sure we had the resources - tactical publications, training, etc., to exceed expectations," mentioned Lt.j.g Matthew Cava.

Sightler's mission and goals prove why he exceeded the expectations defined by the SWO of the Year award.

Sightler's guiding principles, including his belief in being "good at the fundamentals under pressure," have been central to his success as a leader. His ability to maintain composure and confidence, even in the most demanding situations, continues to set the standard for those who follow in his wake. †

“
TODAY'S JUNIOR OFFICERS ARE MORE THAN CAPABLE OF
BECOMING THE LEADERS WE NEED FOR THE FUTURE.

– Lt. Cmdr. James Sightler



JAMES EDWARD BACHMAN SIGHTLER
HOME STATE: SOUTH CAROLINA



SURFACE WARFARE OFFICER
LIEUTENANT COMMANDER

Career Snapshot

USS Laboon (DDG 58)
Student, Surface Warfare Officer School, Newport, RI
Destroyer Squadron 28, Norfolk, VA
Naval Surface and Mine Warfare Development, San Diego, CA
Naval Surface Warfare Development Center, San Diego, CA
Student, SECNAV Tours with Industry, Atlanta, GA
USS Mason (DDG 87)
Student, Surface Warfare Officer School, Norfolk, VA
USS Mason (DDG 87)
Transient Personnel Unit, Norfolk, VA
Student, Officer Candidate School, Newport, RI
Prior U.S. Air Force Enlisted Service

2022 - Present
2021-2021
2019-2021
2019-2019
2019-2019
2018-2019
2014-2018
2014-2014
2013-2014
2013-2013
2013-2013
2005-2013

Select Awards

Air Medal
Navy/Marine Corps Commendation Medal (w/Combat) (2)
Navy/Marine Corps Achievement Medal
Air Force Achievement Medal
Meritorious Unit Award (w/1 Oak Leaf)
Air Force Outstanding Unit Award (w/3 Oak Leaf)
Combat Readiness Medal
Air Force Good Conduct Medal (w/1 Oak Leaf)
Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal
Global War on Terrorism Service Medal
Air Force Expeditionary Service Ribbon (w/Gold Border)
Pistol and Rifle (Expert)

JASON ALAN WHITE
HOME STATE: GEORGIA



SURFACE WARFARE OFFICER
LIEUTENANT COMMANDER

Career Snapshot

USS Sterett (DDG 104)
Student, Surface Warfare Officer School, Newport, RI
Nimitz Warfare Analysis Center, Suitland, MD
Naval Surface and Mine Warfare Development, San Diego, CA
Nimitz Warfare Analysis Center, Suitland, MD
USS Stethem (DDG 63)
Student, Surface Warfare Officer School, Newport, RI
Commander, Fleet Activities Yokosuka Transient
Personnel Unit, Yokosuka, Japan
USS Donald Cook (DDG 75)
Student, Surface Warfare Officer School Learning Site,
Norfolk, VA
USS Donald Cook (DDG 75)
Student, Officer Candidate School, Newport, RI

2022 - Present
2022-2022
2021-2022
2019-2019
2018-2019
2016-2016
2016-2016

2016-2016
2014-2016

2014-2014
2013-2014
2013-2013

Select Awards

Navy/Marine Corps Commendation Medal (2)
Navy/Marine Corps Achievement Medal (2)
Navy "E" Ribbon
National Defense Service Medal
Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal
Global War on Terrorism Service Medal
Sea Service Deployment Ribbon
Overseas Service Ribbon
NATO Medal
Rifle Marksmanship Ribbon
Pistol Marksmanship Ribbon

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IT WAS A FANTASTIC EXPERIENCE FOR ME, WE DEPLOYED AS AN INDEPENDENT DEPLOYER TO U.S. 7TH FLEET. WE WORKED WITH A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT STRIKE GROUPS. WE SAW SERVICE IN THE KOREAN THEATER, INDIAN AND SOUTH CHINA SEAS.

— Cmdr. Bernard Dobson

In 2013 Dobson was given orders to USS Wayne E. Meyer (DDG 108) for his department head tour. Prior to reporting to the then San Diego-based destroyer, he went to train at the Surface Combat Systems Training Command (SCSTC) AEGIS Training and Readiness Center (ATRC). Following his advanced training in Australia to become a IAMD Officer, Dobson later assisted in the development of the Surface Warfare Tactics Instructor (WTI) program. He served on Wayne E. Meyer as the Air Defense Officer in the early days of the Plans and Tactics Officer (PTO) billet. During his time as department head on Wayne E. Meyer, Dobson deployed to the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operation.

"It was a fantastic experience for me," said Dobson. "We deployed as an independent deployer to U.S. 7th Fleet. We worked with a number of different strike groups. We saw service in the Korean theater, Indian and South China Seas."

He describes how his fellow department heads from Wayne E. Meyer have gone on to command.

"Some of them have just finished their command tours," Dobson said. "It's been fantastic to come back and catch up with some of the people I served with who are in command of their own DDG. I caught up with several of them on

the way over to San Diego and while here including the commanding officers of USS Sterett (DDG 104), USS Barry (DDG 52) and USS Kidd (DDG 100)."

When Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Adm. Lisa Francetti spoke at the Center for Strategic International Studies following the release of the Navigation Plan, she described her plans to have the Navy contribute more to the joint force. She cites Aegis as a prime example for the Navy, Air Force and Space Force to come together to improve the precision and lethality of the joint force. Cmdr. Dobson referenced CNO Francetti's Navigation Plan when discussing joint operations in the Australian military.

"A couple of decades ago, Australia became a true joint force," Dobson said. "Army, Navy and Air Force all operate under a joint doctrine. We don't deploy as a Navy anymore; we deploy under a joint headquarters. We have developed a common lexicon that governs exactly how Australia intends to fight."

Strategically, the exchange billets between the two navies serve another important role, Brisbane's commanding officer explained.

"One of the great things the Australian Navy can contribute to, because we have worked with the U.S. Navy for many decades, is we work really well with our own services, and we understand our American peers," said Dobson. "We sit on Aegis, and other technology that we have in our platforms, and we are the interface between the Australian joint force, and the U.S. Navy. The Navy becomes the interface to the U.S. joint force. That's how we connect as two allied forces."

In addition to Brisbane's commanding officer, the ship's Air Warfare Officer, Lt. Cmdr. Chris Boardman, also trained with the U.S. Navy before taking orders to USS Pinckney (DDG 91).

The ship's executive officer, Lt. Cmdr. Kurt Phelps served as the Combat Systems Officer for Destroyer Squadron 31 in Hawaii, before taking orders to his current post.

The ship's operations officer, Lt. Cmdr. Kyle Livingston is slated for orders to Naval Surface and Mine Warfighting

Development Center (SWMDC) where he too will train to become a WTI.

A common thread shared by all of the Australians who served on American ships was the similarity between the U.S. and Australia. The United States represents a second home to them, a place that shares their values, language and appreciation for the sea.

For more than 80 years the U.S. Navy has been sailing in the Indo-Pacific alongside U.S. allies and partners. Special relationships like the one between the American and Australian navies operating interchangeably across platforms, take the friendship between the nations to a new level. With a relationship rooted in shared democratic values, common interests, and historic ties, the American and Australian partnership is vital to defending a free and open Indo-Pacific. †

WE ARE THE INTERFACE BETWEEN THE AUSTRALIAN JOINT FORCE, AND THE U.S. NAVY. THE NAVY BECOMES THE INTERFACE TO THE U.S. JOINT FORCE. THAT'S HOW WE CONNECT AS TWO ALLIED FORCES.

— Cmdr. Bernard Dobson



American and Japanese Sailors test FifthGen Fighters' capability.

With tests of the F-35B on Japanese Ship (JS) Kaga (DDH-184), the U.S. Navy and Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) begin to expand the interchangeability of fifth-generation fighters in the Indo-Pacific.

*Story by Lt.j.g Julian Jacobs
Commander, Naval Surface Force,
U.S. Pacific Fleet Public Affairs*

Throughout October and into November, JS Kaga (DDH 184) conducted developmental tests of the F-35B in the Southern California operations area. These tests and this ongoing alliance showcases the interoperability and future interchangeability of US and JMSDF forces in the Indo-Pacific.

Kaga and her sister ship, JS Izumo (DDH 183), were initially built as helicopter carriers but have been retrofitted to support a shift to fixed-wing aviation. Starting in 2022, Kaga received several significant upgrades, including reshaping the Izumo-class destroyer's bow from a trapezoid to a rectangular shape and reinforcing the flight deck. These upgrades, completed in March of this year, work to support short takeoff and vertical landing operations, capitalizing on the capabilities of the F-35B.

To test these upgrades and F-35B flight operations, JS Kaga hosted the Patuxent River Integrated Test Force,

which included U.S. Sailors and Marines from USS Makin Island (LHD 8), USS Essex (LHD 2), and USS Tripoli (LHA 7), in addition to Patuxent River's team of engineers.

Cmdr. Donald "Slomo" Emerson, force naval aviation officer at commander, Naval Surface Forces, U.S. Pacific Fleet, was part of this massive effort, helping to integrate fixed-wing air operations onto Japanese multi-functional destroyers. Emerson was brought onto the test team to serve as Air Boss, a senior officer coordinating flight operations, specifically for the F-35Bs. The role of an Air Boss during this test was unique. As this is the first operational test of the platform with the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force, Emerson was tapped due to his extensive experience operating with F-35Bs while deployed on USS Makin Island. Leaping at the opportunity, Emerson noted that he "likes a challenge" and "couldn't say no" to an opportunity this exciting.

An Air Boss can't do their job alone. Emerson needed someone with knowledge and experience to run the flight deck, so he recruited Senior Chief Aviation Boatswain's Mate Yuriy Dyshkant. Dyshkant is a former shipmate of Emerson's from their June 2023 deployment and was brought onto the project to run the flight deck team for the tests. Emerson notes that Dyshkant has been "doing this forever," giving him the technical skills to get the job done and the leadership experience that has given him the balance between being a leader "beloved by the sailors" and one who harnesses their abilities. Emerson credited the team's success to Dyshkant's hand-selected Sailors. Senior Chief Dyshkant looked for several qualities when assembling his flight deck team. He needed sailors with the requisite personnel qualifications, previous operational experience with F-35Bs, and the ability to adapt quickly to

non-standard operations. Choosing from Sailors he served with, he assessed the individual Sailor's level of competency, response to stress, and ability to work as a team. Much of Emerson and Dyshkant's time was spent working with their Japanese counterparts to develop standard practices and emergency response procedures for fixed-wing aviation. With many of the tests designed to stress the Kaga's crew and material condition, many aircraft operations were experimental, driving the team's critical thinking and ability to test new ideas quickly. These tests allowed the Sailors to exchange culture, encounter and overcome unknowns, and thrive in never-before-seen stress points. For Capt. Shusaku Takeuchi, the Commanding Officer of JS Kaga, the challenges to flight operations included adverse weather off of Southern California, equipment failures, and the language barrier. The

Japanese and American teams prioritized communication to overcome these challenges and "tackled the trials together." Shusaku notes that the language barrier was a "significant challenge," but by the end of the trial, the Japanese and American teams fostered an "integrated atmosphere." In the challenging security environment of the Indo-Pacific, ensuring that our close allies have the foundation in both training and equipment to support the next-gen warfighters ensures freedom and security throughout the region. To Emerson, these tests represent a major strategic shift in the Indo-Pacific. Emerson can't begin to "quantify the significance" of having F-35Bs operate organically with Izumo-class ships. To him, having a historical ally in this contentious environment with this capability is "a game changer." Shusaku emphasized that this trial was "only the first step toward F-35B operations" for the Japanese. Achieving the full operational capability

of the F-35B will require continued effort as the Japanese leverage the "extensive expertise" in fixed-wing aircraft operations of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps. Of note, a key challenge to full integration of the F-35B on Izumo-class destroyers will come from establishing a framework of cooperation between the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Forces and the Japanese Air Self-Defense Force. Of all the outcomes from these tests, Capt. Shusaku believes the most important takeaway is the "personal connections formed during the trials." Over the three weeks, the teams "literally shared meals and sleeping quarters while overcoming various difficulties together." The Navy's competitive edge lies in its people; with tests and innovations like these, America's allies sharpen democracy's sword. ⚔



Photo by Cmdr. Darin Russell



Photo by Sgt. Luc Boatman



Photo by Sgt. Luc Boatman



Photo by MC1 Kelby Sanders



Photo by MCC Mark D. Faram

SURFACE FORCE

VISION: A Surface Force second to none that controls the seas and provides the Nation with combat naval power when and where needed.

MISSION: Man, Train, and equip the Surface Force to provide Fleet Commanders with credible naval power to control the sea and project power ashore.

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