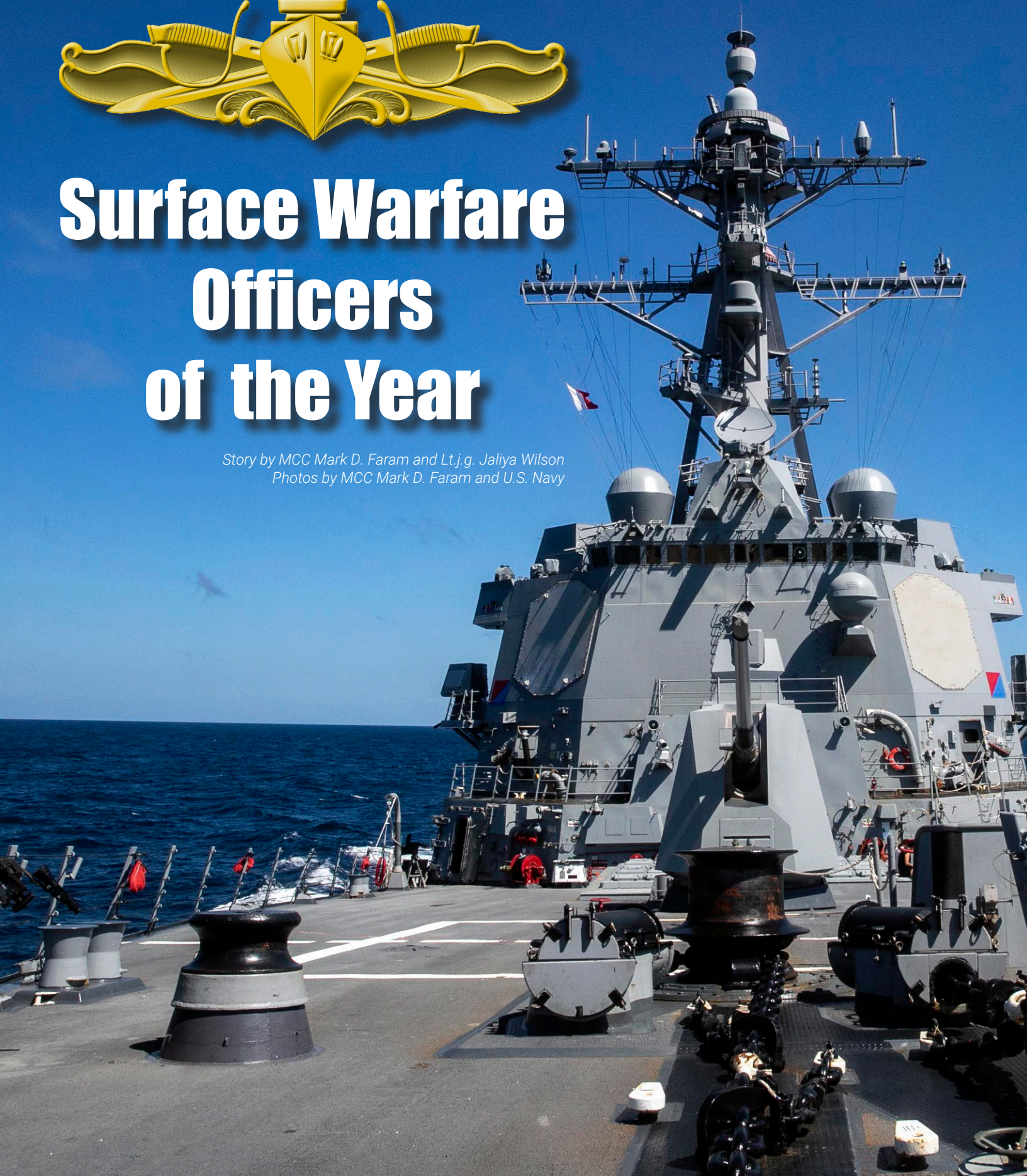




Surface Warfare Officers of the Year

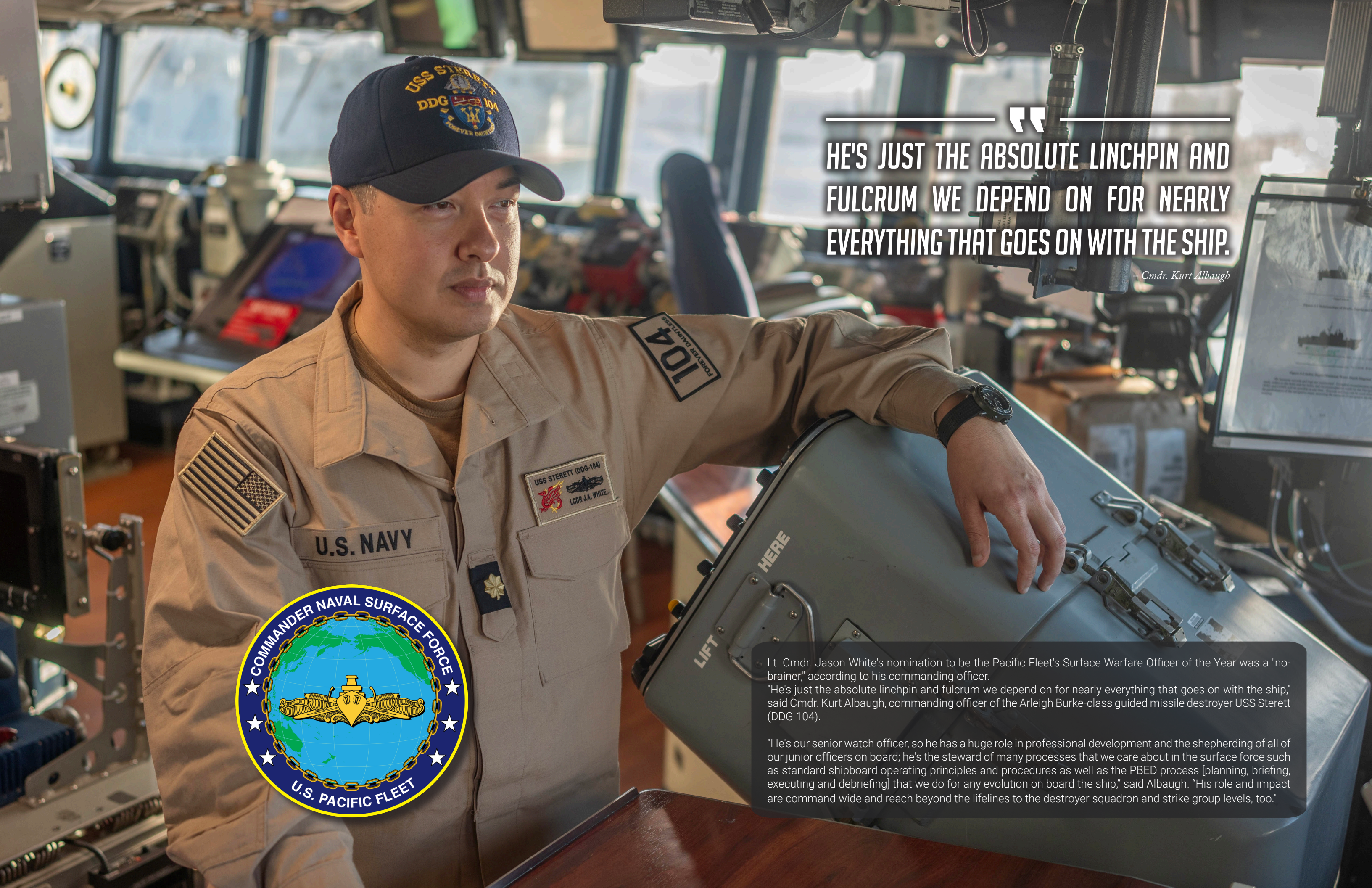
*Story by MCC Mark D. Faram and Lt.j.g. Jaliya Wilson
Photos by MCC Mark D. Faram and U.S. Navy*





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.



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**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.

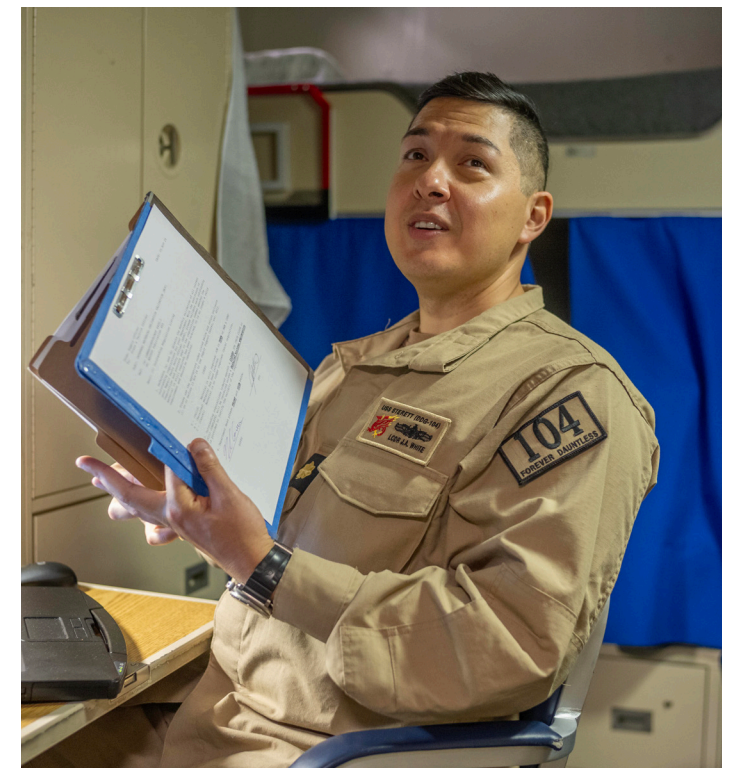
– Lt. Cmdr. Jason White

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 Sterrett - 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





**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."





As a warrior of the surface fleet, Sichtler 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 Sichtler. "In the simulator, Capt. Mara would always focus on sharpening my technical abilities and leadership."

As a Warfare Tactical Instructor (WTI), Sichtler 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 Sichtler 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. Sichtler as their senior watch officer, especially during their deployment.

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

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

Sichtler'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. †

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 Sichtler

From completing the Live Fire with a Purpose (LFWAP) program to enduring a challenging deployment, Sichtler 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 Sichtler. "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 Sichtler 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 Sichtler. "But what stood out was our crew's ability to maintain focus during some of the most tactical operations

we've ever conducted."

Sichtler 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 Sichtler. "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."

Sichtler 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.

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

– Lt. Cmdr. James Sichtler



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
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