

Taking a Break

How three Sailors used the CIPP to accomplish their life goals

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Legalman 2nd Class Nadine Williams always had dreams of becoming a lawyer.

Williams enlisted in the Navy in 2004 as a personnel specialist in hopes of providing stability for her six-year-old son. After earning her bachelor's degree, she decided she wanted to go to law school, even if that meant going part time while on active duty. That's when she learned about the Navy's Career Intermission Pilot Program.

"I knew since I was little, I wanted to be a lawyer and I didn't know how to go to school on active duty," said Williams. "I had researched different schools to see if I could go part time or something like that and ... enlisted [Sailors], at the time, couldn't go to law school on active duty."

CIPP provides Sailors a way to take a break from active duty and transition to the Individual Ready Reserve. The break allows both officers and enlisted a chance to pursue personal or professional goals that aren't feasible on active duty. The program also allows Sailors to retain some active duty benefits such as Tricare and commissary and exchange privileges.

"The Navy is offering this program so that we can compete for the talent that's out there," said Lt. Cmdr. Chris Muller, the former manager of the Navy's Career Intermission Pilot Program. "There's a war for talent between the Navy, other services and industry, and a sabbatical is the proven option that is offered in the industrial world for retaining talent to allow people to take time off to raise a child, have a child, complete schooling - any kind of life goal that they might not be able to complete working full time."

For Sailors selected to participate in the program, they must serve two months on active duty in return for every month on intermission. So if a Sailor plans to take a 15-month intermission they can expect to have to pay the Navy back with at least 30 months of follow-on service.

Cmdr. Valerie Overstreet was flying high in her career as the commanding officer of the "Wallbangers" of Carrier Airborne Command and Control Squadron 117. She had about 19 years in the Navy when she decided to take almost a year off. She said the opportunity to sync up her and her pilot husband's duty

rotations was what appealed to her the most, but that wasn't the only benefit.

"We were very blessed to be able to get pregnant right as it started," said Overstreet. "So I was able to spend three months at home with my child before I got back [to active duty]."

Going back on active duty for Overstreet allowed her to resume her "normal" Navy career. She has been back on active duty for about two years and now serves as the 4th battalion commander for first-year midshipmen at the Naval Academy.

For Williams, the end of her intermission next August will mark the beginning of a whole new chapter in her Navy story. Because she was certain she wanted to work as a Navy Judge Advocate, she was determined to earn a commission in the JAG Corps before she even knew it was possible.

"I was accepted to law school before I was accepted into the JAG Corps," said Williams. "I was really nervous when I applied because I knew I didn't want to go back on to active duty as a legalman with a law degree; I had to be a JAG."

Williams was accepted into the JAG community last year, and after she passes the Florida bar exam, she will return to active duty as a lieutenant junior grade.

The program was a good fit for both Sailors, but not without challenges. Overstreet said one of her concerns about CIPP was potentially losing her edge as a pilot and a naval officer.

"I am a pilot, so I didn't want to lose the skills of flying airplanes and just being with my peers," said Overstreet.

Not only did Overstreet maintain her edge, she gained a bird. Overstreet was selected for promotion to the rank of captain in April.



"I'm a captain select! I didn't know how taking a year off would play at a command [selection] board because not too many people have done it," said Overstreet. "I went back a class and my lineal number went back, but I went and competed and I made it."

Williams said that finances posed a significant challenge for her since participants don't receive the same pay and benefits as they do on active duty.

"You get one-fifteenth [of your base pay], which is basically what a reservist would get if they drilled," said Williams. "It's like a utility bill."

To offset her expenses she works as a yoga instructor and uses the basic allowance for housing she receives from her Post 9/11 G.I. Bill to pay the bills.

"Law school is stressful, and I got into yoga because I wanted to be able to work out," said Williams. "If I'm teaching a class, then I have to do it. The money is a lot less, but the perks are great, and you still keep medical and dental [benefits]."

Any Sailor looking to participate in the program should be financially prepared.

"It is a large pay cut you are going to be taking when you go into the program," said Meller. "There are a lot of folks that are doing it [while] using their Post 9/11 G.I. Bill benefits and going to school, so the housing allowance can get you through that."

Lt. Cmdr. Rich Witt, a Navy SEAL, took time off to pursue his educational goals at Harvard University.

"CIPP allowed me to temporarily separate from the Navy and attend the Harvard Kennedy School of Government to earn a [master's degree] in public policy," said Witt. "CIPP also allowed me to return to active duty after the one-year sabbatical, and it allowed me to fully use the 9/11 G.I. Bill."

An intermission also lends a different perspective coming back to a life on active duty. He said the break put him in touch with people and experiences that helped him appreciate his service.

"This year away from the Navy has given me 100 different perspectives," said Witt. "As a member of the Harvard Kennedy

School, I was exposed to an incredibly diverse environment, which included classmates from over 70 countries, professors who have served in the highest levels of state, local and national governments, and other leaders [who] regularly spoke at the Kennedy School. My classmates included folks [who] have started non-profits, run for president of their country and a Cambodian monk."

The Career Intermission Pilot Program could be a good move for any Sailor who needs a break from the demands of a Navy lifestyle while accomplishing a life goal.

"CIPP offers you an opportunity to select a different path in the Navy that makes sense for you," said Witt. "CIPP offers you the flexibility you sometimes need in an environment that is often very constrained."

It's also an option for people who are looking to bring something more to their service, whether it's business experience, family matters, advanced education, or just a deeper appreciation for the privilege to serve. No matter what the reason for needing a hiatus from service, the key for Sailors is to have a plan.

"Be prepared, save in advance, map out your path and you can be very successful," said Muller. "A number of your shipmates have done that. It's clearly doable ... but it's not something you can go into blindsided."

The program will accept up to 20 officers and 20 enlisted Sailors each calendar year, while the program is authorized (currently until 2015).

Sailors who are interested in the Career Intermission Pilot Program should see OPNAV Instruction 1330.2B, which outlines specific criteria and application procedures for the program.

"The [commanding officer's] endorsement is critical," said Muller.

The OPNAV Instruction states "COs shall submit an endorsement that addresses the motivation and potential of the applicant ... and provide specific approval or disapproval recommendation."

Information is also available on www.npc.navy.mil.

Hover over the Support & Services tab, click 21st Century Sailor, then select Life/Work Integration.

The Career Intermission Pilot Program site has a complete list of resources and information on the program.