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1.) The End of Ratings: What's Next in the Navy's Radical Enlisted Shake-up / 2 OCT 16

NAVY TIMES, Mark D. Faram

"Choose your rate, choose your fate." It's a saying every sailor has heard — and as of late September, it's history.

That's the news as the Navy has eliminated every sailor's rating title in favor of generic rank-specific titles like petty officer 2nd class, a move intended to encourage training across specialties and to help them later transition into the civilian workforce with more skills.

"We're going to immediately do away with rating titles and address each other by just our rank as the other services do," said Chief of Naval Personnel Vice Adm. Robert Burke in a Sept. 19 interview. "We recognize that's going to be a large cultural change, it's not going to happen overnight, but the direction is to start exercising that now."

The announcement signals a tectonic shift in Navy's personnel system, where sailors have long identified with their individual occupations — ratings — first and foremost. They're the stuff of murals aboard ship and ink on arms. The magnitude of the move isn't lost on the Navy's top leaders, who recognize this move will be unpopular and stress the changes will allow sailors to move easily between related fields and choose more duty stations.

The move ends every enlisted rating, some of them like Gunner's mate, Quartermaster and Boatswain's mate that dated back to the Continental Navy. The Navy has had nearly 700 different rating titles in that time — all of which are now history.

It starts the Navy on the most radical personnel overhaul in a generation, one that will change the way sailors are trained and advanced — it could even end the semi-annual petty officer advancement test.

"We're going to take a new approach to the enlisted ratings with the idea that we would provide more assignment flexibility, more training opportunities and better civilian credentialing opportunities," Burke said.

This began with Navy Secretary Ray Mabus' mandate in January to eliminate the use of the word "man" from rating titles to make the enlisted service more appealing to women. In June, the Marine Corps — also under the Mabus edict — announced they'd take "man" out of 19 occupational titles. The Navy has gone much further. Their more controversial approach will eliminate the rating title every sailor uses and aims to scrap the existing advancement system and start over.

Burke said this will eliminate conflicts as the Navy moves to a more modern personnel system over the next few years. The promise is that sailors will soon be able to qualify in multiple skills and across today's traditional rating lines. That will mean they can apply for a wider variety of jobs, duty stations and have more chances to move up the ranks.

What you need to know about the Navy's sweeping changes:

New titles

For the first time in the Navy's history — every sailor's title will be the same. For E-3 and below sailors, the only title will be "seaman."

Though the title “seaman” still has “man” in it, the working group found no workable alternatives, according to now retired Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy (AW/NAC) Mike Stevens, who was the driving force for these changes.

“We just didn’t have any good substitutes for seaman,” Stevens told Navy Times in an interview this summer. “One was mariner, but no one liked that — the other one was sailors, but that was convoluted because we all refer to ourselves as sailors. So we kept it and the secretary agreed.”

Gone in name will be the other non-rated designations — airman, fireman, constructionman and hospitalman. These designations will be converted to codes.

Now sailors’ jobs will be identified by a four-character combination, known as a Navy Occupational Specialty. Consider the three most historic ratings, once abbreviated as GM, BM and QM. They’ll now be B320, B400 and B450, respectively.

The service has translated every previous rating and special skill into over 160, four digit alpha-numeric NOS codes. Navy Enlisted Classifications will still fall under an NOS as they did with a rating, to denote skills not common across the rating.

“Petty officers will be addressed as petty officer and then their name, or petty officer third, second or first class more formally — chief, senior chief and master chief for the senior enlisted,” Burke said.

For example, Yeoman 2nd Class (SW/EXW) Snuffy Smith will now have the title, Petty Officer 2nd Class (SW/EXW) Snuffy Smith. When Smith reaches the chief’s mess, he’ll be Chief Petty Officer (SW/EXW) Snuffy Smith.

As seen above, warfare qualifications will continue to be abbreviated in sailor titles.

“Sailors take great pride in earning those coveted warfare designations and they like to place those behind their ratings because they want people to know they’ve earned them, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy (IDW/SW) Steve Giordano said. “That won’t go away — they will still have those as part of their titles.”

The only exception to the job title rule will be the MCPON.

Badge of honor

Much about the overhaul remains to be determined. Case in point: ratings badges.

These insignia are for ratings that no longer exist — now they’re NOS classifications — and there are a few ideas on what to do. Keep them. Dump them. Replace with something new.

“We may want to go to something that signifies the new career fields or stay with something for the NOS — or we may want to simply go to something like the anchor, constitution and Eagle,” Burke said referring to the insignia on the chest pockets of the blue-and-gray Navy working uniform. “We just want to see where we end up on this journey before we re-badge ourselves, so it’s all open.”

In the meantime, sailors can hold off on having their dress blues and whites sleeves resown.

Flexible careers

Sailors will soon be able to qualify for more skills and even advance in multiple NOS quotas. To get there, the Navy is reviewing how to redraw the community lines that distinguish skills by specialty.

"Today we have 12 career fields that group the [over 90] Navy enlisted ratings we have today," Burke said. "Most sailors will be hard pressed to tell you what they are because they are outdated for the most part."

"We want to redraw those career field lines with two major objectives," Burke said. "First, we'll regroup the now Navy Occupational Specialties so that the training and experience is similar between the career fields. If we do that right, we'll be able to pinpoint additional training or experience that a sailor needs to move into a different, but related NOS."

These have been grouped into broad categories like aviation, surface engineering and nuclear power. These would become broader career fields that group sailors by skill type.

"Maybe there's a field we'd call aviation maintenance," Burke explained. "We'd like to get to the point in the first step where we can move sailors between types of engines, and then maybe move between engines and airframes and into avionics, too — then possibly move between maintaining combat systems on an aircraft to combat systems on a ship."

As the Navy designs and fields newer ships, Burke said more commonality between systems will make these kinds of leaps more possible.

Burke says they'll achieve that through modular training via the new Ready Relevant Learning system that is coming online this year for every career field in the Navy, providing constant training throughout a sailor's career. It can be used to qualify sailors as they advance in a given skill set — or to give them new skills to cross them into a related field.

"You might have to go to a brick and mortar schoolhouse for a couple weeks, but it will be at a fleet concentration area so you are not going to have to leave home," Burke said. "You might only need enough training that could be accomplished through an app on a smart device, or through a distance learning course — or even by acquiring an additional certification at your current shop or at your squadron."

But acquiring the new NOS won't require you to go back through another "A" school, he said. What will happen is the Navy will simply look at your existing skills and design a custom program to fill in the gaps.

"If you complete those requirements, you could shift into a different NOS," Burke said. "And that shift will bring with it an increase in assignment options, more detailing flexibility — more homeports to choose from, more types of platforms."

It could even put more money in your pocket.

"It will open up more timing options — maybe move into an NOS that has special or incentive pay or even a re-enlistment bonus."

The new system allows sailors to hold onto your old skills, and learn new ones that allow you to move between different billets.

"Then, unlike today, where you cross-rate and you don't go back," Burke said. "Our idea is the lines between NOSs will be blurry and will allow you to move back and forth."

Advancement changes

For now, the advancement system will be organized by NOS. But how it works may be radically changing in coming years. It could mean instant promotions and the end of the test.

The Navy currently advances to vacancies in given career fields Navy-wide twice a year, where sailors are ranked by rating based on their performance, occupational knowledge and more. The biggest way to gauge their knowledge is via the semiannual petty officer test. The new system will rank them by NOS.

As the Navy improves its information systems, the twice a year system could get dumped. Instead, advancements will happen year-round, anytime vacancies occur. As part of this, MCPON Stevens had advocated for dumping the advancement test and going to a new, points-based system similar to those used by the Army and Marine Corps.

The Navy is still working through proposals to change the advancement system under NOS, such as getting rid of the tests.

““I think that’s one possibility we’re looking at,” he said. "But we’re just getting started in deciding where we need to go with the advancement exams."

“With this ability to move back and forth between multiple Navy Occupational Specialties, we have to really think through what that does. Will you have to meet the requirements to advance in all of [the skills you have qualified in] or just one and how that would impact assignments?"

Burke stressed that any changes to the advancement system will be announced well in advance of their implementation and for now, sailors will advance along the new NOS lines.

"So if any sailor out there is wondering if they have to do anything different in preparing for their next exam, the answer to that is no, not yet, and we’ll give you adequate time to prepare when it does happen. We’re very sensitive to the need to do that very methodically."

Earning certifications

One thing is certain: civilian certifications will play an even greater role in sailors career paths.

Right now, the Navy operates a web site that for more than a decade has helped sailors acquire civilian certifications for the Navy skills they hold. It’s called Navy Credentialing Opportunities Online. The Navy plans to take that a step further and incorporate certifications into career paths so qualified personnel will readily attain the credential via their training.

“We can draw these lines intelligently to describe our occupations in a way that make sense for [civilian] certifications,” Burke said. “For example, an air traffic controller would be tied into a path so that when they leave the Navy, they leave with the appropriate level of an FAA air traffic control certification."

Aviation maintenance sailors could work towards the coveted FAA Airframes and Powerplants certifications. Surface engineers and deck sailors could net themselves Coast Guard licenses.

Many of these valuable and time-consuming certifications that sailors had to get on their own time will now be part of their careers in the future. Moving up the ranks could depend on getting them.

"If an advancement exam does exist in the future it could also serve to help qualify sailors for a certification as well," Burke said. "It depends on what your certification will be — some are federal, but most of them are state level certifications and no two look exactly the same — but we are now heading down this road."

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Naval Education and Training Professional Development Public Affairs

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Designed to complement and support the NCP's Virtual Education Center (VEC), the redesigned NCP website greatly improves the ability for Sailors, commands and academic institutions to access Voluntary Education (VOLED) information.

"The Navy has taken the lead in modernizing its VOLED program, ensuring Sailors have the same opportunities as their civilian counterparts," said Capt. Lee Newton, NETPDC commanding officer. "Our goal is to provide online access and support to Sailors pursuing voluntary education at the time and place that's most convenient for them, using the virtual tools with which they are already familiar."

According to Navy VOLED Director Ernest D'Antonio, the website enables Sailors to find specific educational information tailored to their individual needs.

"From getting started on their degree path, to applying for Tuition Assistance (TA), to taking those final classes for a master's degree - it's all here on the newly redesigned site," said D'Antonio.

Sailors will notice several new tools designed specifically for the NCP website:

- 1) Text and web-chat features available from 6 a.m. - 9 p.m. EST.
- 2) A searchable knowledge database with Frequently Asked Questions.
- 3) A "Call-Back" feature where the Sailor can complete an online form requesting a representative from VOLED contact them about a question or concern.
- 4) An E-Request/ticket system where a Sailor can complete an online request to have an issue resolved and tracked.
- 5) A self-scheduling tool for education counseling which will have separate calendars for the VEC and Navy College Offices in Kitsap, Wash., Jacksonville, Fla., Norfolk, Va., and San Diego.
- 6) The "Wizard" tutorial which takes Sailors step-by-step through the TA process with links to WebTA training and videos.
- 7) A centralized e-mail system where Sailors can choose from a list of standard subjects and their e-mail will be directed to the appropriate counselor for reply.

"The enhanced customer service system in the new website is a quantum increase in capabilities for our customers," added D'Antonio. "They now have the capability to live-chat with the VEC, submit a call-back request or search the new Knowledge Management database, all from a smartphone, tablet, home or NMCI computer."

The URL for the new Navy College Program website is: www.navycollege.navy.mil

The Navy's Virtual Education Center hours are from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. EST Monday - Friday and may be reached by calling: (877) 838-1659 or DSN 492-4684, or contacted via the website: <http://www.livehelpnow.net/lhn/TicketsVisitor.aspx?lhnid=30432>.

Sailors can also get the latest information by following Navy Voluntary Education on Facebook:

www.facebook.com/NavyVoluntaryEducation/.

We value your feedback on the new look, feel and performance of the NCP website and VEC customer service!

Please give us your feedback at: https://www.research.net/r/VEC_CUST_SVC_SURVEY_V1.

Additional information about the Naval Education and Training Professional Development Center can be found

via <https://www.netc.navy.mil/netc/netpdc/Default.htm>

For more information, visit www.navy.mil, www.facebook.com/usnavy, or www.twitter.com/usnavy.

For more news from Naval Education And Training Professional Development And Technology Center, visit

www.navy.mil/local/NETPDTC/.

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The 2016 survey began in August and will close on Nov. 20, 2016. A random sampling of 33,000 Active Duty service members was identified to participate in the survey, and is voluntary. Notification and reminder letters were mailed to participants, and a final reminder email will be sent in early October.

The survey has occurred regularly since 1988 to gauge the overall readiness of the Navy and the present-day impact of policies on Sailors. The survey gives Sailors the opportunity to voice their opinions concerning work-life balance issues relating to family and is the primary source by which the Navy tracks data and attitudes relating to these topics. Navy leadership strongly encourages invitees to participate in the survey and provide their valuable feedback to the Navy.

Survey responses are also used to monitor the effectiveness of existing programs, including General Military Training (GMT), the Physical Fitness Assessment (PFA), and Navy healthcare.

While user names are required to log into the web survey, all identifying information will be deleted from the data set during analysis to maintain the anonymity of the respondents. Results will be statistically weighted by pay grade and gender to be representative of the Navy population.

A summary of results from the 2014 survey are available at <http://www.public.navy.mil/bupers-npc/organization/bupers/WomensPolicy/Pages/ResearchStudies.aspx>. Results from the 2016 survey are expected to be released in spring 2017. The survey is conducted by the Navy Personnel Research, Studies and Technology (NPRST) Division and Naval Air Warfare Center Training Systems Division (NAWCTSD). Questions on the survey may be addressed to Lt. j.g. Chandler Brown, Navy Inclusion and Diversity Assessment Officer, 703-604-5071, caroline.brown@navy.mil.

For more news from Chief of Naval Personnel, visit www.navy.mil/local/cnp.

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Just like Navy COOL for Sailors, DON Civilian COOL is a resource tool, mapping certifications and licensure based on formal training and on-the-job experience. The DON COOL website portal at <http://www.cool.navy.mil/> now has a site specifically for civilians that is searchable by federal occupation code or title.

"Our intention, since Navy COOL's inception, has always been to eventually include DON civilians," said Michael Talley, assistant program director for Navy COOL. Navy COOL has helped more than 52,000 Sailors obtain civilian credentialing, which can contribute to career development while on active duty and when a Sailor joins the civilian workforce, possibly even as a federal employee.

DON Civilian COOL was developed in partnership with U.S. Fleet Forces Command and is the first of its kind for DOD civilians.

The initial group of 37 federal civilian occupations includes fields such as information technology, human resources, administrative, financial, engineering, education, legal, supply and security careers. It also has information for the cyber security workforce.

Keith Boring, program director for Navy COOL, said his team plans to continue connecting credentialing prospects for more DON civilian occupations by updating the program at regular intervals.

"Civilian COOL provides an expanded opportunity for DON personnel to pursue personal and professional development," said Boring. "This program sets the foundation for all the other branches of service to offer credential opportunities for their civilian employees."

Navy employees will find explanations for the different types of credentials and the four-step credentialing process, including costs and possible avenues for funding. DON Civilian COOL does not provide funding for costs associated with initial credential attainment and maintaining and renewing the credential.

Navy COOL may only fund application fees, exam fees and annual maintenance fees for DON civilians in the Navy's Cyberspace Information Technology/Cyber Security Workforce. For most employees, some costs may be funded by the Navy if an employee's command approves and budgets for it. In other cases, veterans eligible for the GI Bill may tap into that resource.

The DON COOL program is part of a joint-service initiative to promote civilian credentialing opportunities for military service members and civilian employees. DON COOL reflects the Navy's ongoing commitment to Sailors, Marines and civilians in providing world-class training, experience and opportunities that will serve them well, whether during active-duty, federal service or post-service civilian careers.

For more information about DON Civilian COOL, visit <http://www.cool.navy.mil/dciv/> and for DON COOL, visit <http://www.cool.navy.mil/>.

Navy COOL is located with the Center for Information Warfare Training, which delivers trained information warfare professionals to the Navy and joint services, enabling optimal performance of information warfare across the full spectrum of military operations.

For more information, visit www.navy.mil, www.facebook.com/usnavy, or www.twitter.com/usnavy.

For more news from the Center for Information Warfare Training organization, visit www.navy.mil/local/cid/, www.netc.navy.mil/centers/ciwt, www.facebook.com/NavyCIWT, or www.twitter.com/NavyCIWT

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