

Day in the Life of a Sailor

By ET1 Nuclear Toe-Knee Cooper, USN 1981-1989, CVN-70 1984-1989, Docent 241113

Coming Aboard (Brow/Hanger Bay 2)

(United States Naval Reserve Intelligence Program, 2024) When reporting to the ship for the first time a sailor is required to be in a clean, proper, and complete uniform with original orders. Depending on the size of the ship, enlisted and officers may have their own brow (the ramp leading from the pier) leading to the Quarterdeck.

All Navy ships fly the national ensign (United States Flag) from the stern while not actually underway. Sailors stop at the top of the brow, face aft and salute the flag prior to reaching the Quarterdeck when coming aboard during daylight hours from 0800 to sundown. Sailors will present their I.D. card and orders upon reaching the Quarterdeck. Salute, and say "request permission to come aboard, sir." In some cases, the person manning the watch may be junior and may not even be an officer. Nevertheless, call him or her "sir" as they represent the authority of the ship's commanding officer. The sailor will hold the salute until they receive permission to board.

A Reserve Liaison Officer (RLO) will act as the sailor's initial contact and guide through the process of checking onto the ship. The sailor will be presented to their department for further orientation.

Hanger Bay (Hanger Bay 3)

How to Become a Sailor

US Navy is very good about taking high school graduates and making sailors operating at their highest potential. Potential recruits would ask advice about becoming a sailor. Here is some good advice.

- The US Navy will allow you to remain a child or help you to become a leader. It is your choice. When you join the Navy, decide. Do you want to follow orders or be responsible and give the orders.
- Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery Exam. 1976 all branches of the military used the ASVAB. Join with a purpose in mind. What skills can you sell when you get out or do you plan to say for life.

Navy Ranks and Ratings

All US Military have a similar hierarchy of command. Enlisted men are ranked E1 through E9. Officers are ranked O1 through O11. The US Navy also has what is called Warrant Officers. They are enlisted men who have a high degree of competency in their rating and have served at least 12 years of service. The Navy and Coast Guard have different titles for officers than the other services have for officers. Such as an O1 is a 2nd Lieutenant in all other services, but in the Navy/Coast Guard they are called Ensign. The enlisted men are all different across all services. (Show navy ranks and explain how someone moves up through the ranks.) In addition to ranks, the USN has approximately 75 different ratings that are shown on their dress uniforms.



Figure 1 ET1
Cooper circa 1987

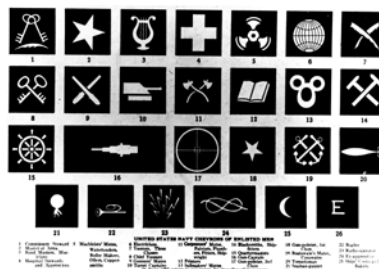


Figure 2 1917 USN Ratings

United States NAVY

Insignia of Rank

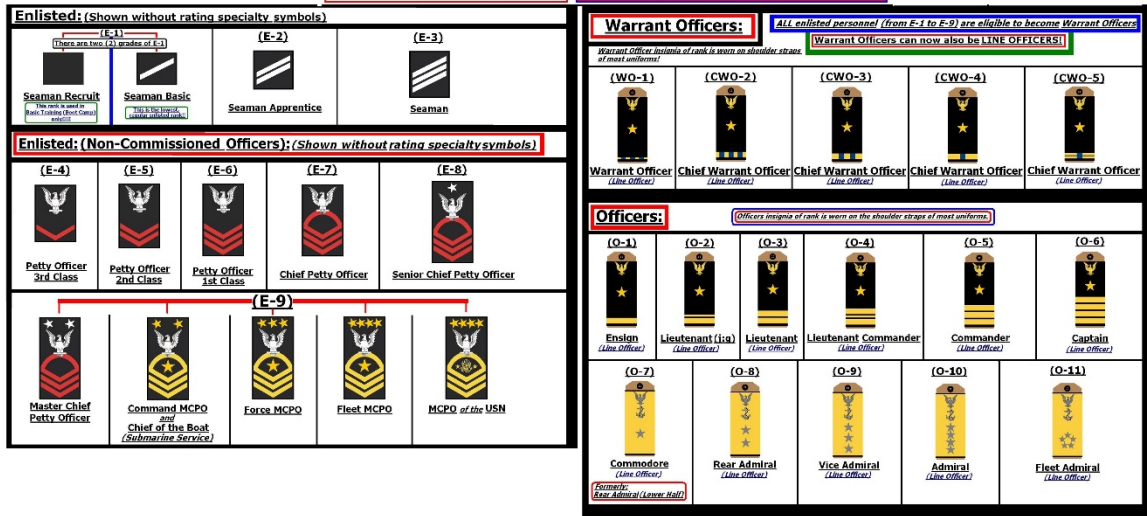


Figure 3 USN Ranks

Berthing (Walk Aft through hanger bays down fan tail ladder into crew's Berthing, Location 2-202-3)

Here is an example of where an enlisted sailor would get assigned a rack. If he was lucky, he was the only one sleeping in it. Unlucky, he could be hot bunking. That is uncommon in the modern Navy, but it was reasonably common in the days this ship was in service. All his worldly possessions had to fit inside this locker with the exception of his pea coat. He had access to a vertical locker to store his hanging items. I was enlisted during the start of the CD era. I slept with my CD collection.

When reveille sounded, he would get up get dressed in what was called dungarees. Kind of blue jean pants and a lighter colored blue shirt. Ranks of Petty Officer 3rd Class through Petty Officer 1st Class would be on their right sleeve pre-1949, left sleeve post 1949. Chiefs, warrant officers and officers would wear khakis with their ranks on their collars. The man in the lower bunk would trice his rack for cleaning. Possibly all racks would get triced depending on what the space might be used for during the day.

Daily Routine

- 0600 1MC Now reveille, reveille, all hands heave out and trice up. Give the ship a clean sweep down fore and aft. The smoking lamp is lit in all authorized spaces.
 Every 30 minutes throughout the ship the current bell would be rung until 2200. In addition to using military time, a 24-hour clock, US Navy keeps time in bells. Every 30 minutes is a bell. Bells are numbered 1 to 8 and rung in pairs. To know what time is being rung out one must know the time within 4 hours.
- 0700 1MC Now all hands to quarters for muster, inspection, & instruction.
 At this point in the day, each sailor would have assigned duties. When first reporting to a ship, just like this tour, a sailor would be sent to an orientation class. They would learn about how to find their way around the ship, location of things like dispersing, stores, recreational areas, etc. Most enlisted sailors start their service on a ship with 90 days of mess hall duty. Their department would be responsible for training for their locations and job duties.
- 2200 Lights out in all berthing compartments. Maintain silence about the decks. The smoking lamp is out in all berthing compartments.

Rando Drills. The US Navy drills most days for potential problems that the ship might face. 1MC will announce the drill and teams of people respond. One interesting note, the Nuclear Navy never announces a drill as a drill. We treat everything as real.

Head (2-199-2)

After getting up, the sailor will make themselves ready for the day. Shave, wash, brush teeth, etc. There is not a lot of fresh water out a sea. Fresh water or potable water had made by distillers on the ship. This ship could only make about 100K gallons per day of fresh water. A modern aircraft carrier can make 400K gallons of water per day. With the limited water supply sailors were instructed to take 4-minute showers. Wet, wash and rinse. Modern Navy showers have a very difficult button to press in a spray wand. It was difficult to hold the button longer than 4 minutes. Any longer than 4 minutes was known as taking a Hollywood shower.

Toilets used sea water for flushing.

CPO Berthing (C 321 AL)

Thicker beds but much like the enlisted Berthing.

CPO Mess (C 215 L)

E7 through E9 would eat here.

Chaplain and Library (2-172-1)

Every sailor has to face lines on an aircraft carrier. They all carried Books in the small of their backs. Modern Navy has access to Wi-Fi with a limited amount of data. Enlisted men get 5GB/mo.

Crew's Berthing (2-157-1)

Great example of what it was like to pack the only storage space a sailor has.

Doris Miller (2-159-5)

CVN-81 set to replace CVN-70.

Sick Bay (2-135-9)

Every aircraft carrier is also a hospital ship.

Auxiliary Laundry (2-128-5)

Laundry room used only for sick Bay.

Chow (down ladder 2-107-3)

Battle Dressing Station (3-108-1)

During GQ injured men could get first aid assistance here.

Mess Hall (3-111-1)

After getting up, the sailor typically grabs a bite to eat. He'd grab a tray and walk along the line grabbing whatever food of the day and as much as he liked. Eggs and potatoes were common breakfast items along with bacon, sausage, ham. Of note, is that if vegetables were left over from yesterday's meals, when were often added to the eggs for today's breakfast. A carrier sailor normally ate very well. Often considered the best food in the Navy. During my service, once a month we got steak and lobster. Moving on from the chow line, you would make a stop of the drink dispenser. If you were less than 10 days out of port, you would probably have milk available. Usually various juices, orange, apple would be available and of course, coffee. Typically, food would be available 23 hours a day. Mid Rats, midnight rations, was typically enjoyed by those who worked rotating shifts.

Enlisted Mess (3-132-1)

Men could sit for a meal. Salad bar.

Scullery (3-150-1)

One of the many places that a new recruit would work during his first three months onboard.

Main Laundry (4-129-4)

Men's clothing would be placed in mesh bags at the foot of their racks on designated days for pickup. Clothing placed in machines and returned later in the day.

Ship's Service (4-114-4)

Lucky Bag was a lost and found for the ship. If you left something where it did not belong, you might be able to retrieve it from the luck Bay.

Tailor Shop (4-117-4)

Repair and insignia changed.

Cobbler Shop (4-117-2)

Get shoes, boots and, Boone sockets repaired.

Athletic Gear (4-116-1)

Borrow equipment to engage in sports.

Gedunk (B 304 L)

Gedunk was slang for snack-food. The sailors had to pay for this food.

Chief's mess is where the chiefs got to eat. It is really the same, just an opportunity to get away from the lower ranking enlisted men that he was leading.

Officer's mess is farther forward s with nicer accommodations with more formal attire. Officers also has the flight suit mess.

First Class Mess (3-82-1)

This would have been my place of solitude; however, I rarely went in there. I preferred to be with my men.

Ship's Store (3-69-2)

Place where the men could purchase a few necessities.

Corporal of the Guard (3-70-1)

64 Marines kept security for the special weapons, Captain and the Brig.

Flight Suit Mess (3-64-4)

Where officers could have an informal meal.

Officer's Ward Room (2-59-1)

Formal dining clean uniforms of the day.

Officer's Berthing (2-67-3)

Thicker mattress and springs.

Officer's Store (2-52-1)

Honor Stores.

Workday

Sailors would report to their various duty stations in their departments. There is typically 16 ship board departments and 10 airwing departments. As non-rates, E1-E3, they could be assigned to any of the departments.

Aircraft Carrier Organization

When fully manned, an aircraft carrier is home to as many as 6,000 personnel. This carrier had about 2,000 ships company and 1,200 airwing personnel. Thinking of a carrier as a city is a useful way to understand its organization. At the top and comparable to a city's mayor is the ship's Commanding Officer (CO), who is ultimately responsible for the entire ship and the accomplishment of its assigned mission. Next in line and acting as city manager is the Executive Officer (XO). From the XO on down, the ship's individual functions are handled by the ship's company via different departments. These departments are in turn divided into divisions, each specialized in an area of the ship's operation and mission.

The carrier battlegroup's primary mission is power projection to targets ashore and at sea. The central element of the carrier's offensive punch is its embarked air wing (CVW). The typical carrier air wing normally consists of nine squadrons, each with individual missions, which join the carrier while it is deployed.

Commanding Officer

Confusingly, the Captain is both a rank and a position and they do not have to match. The Commanding Officer is the captain of the vessel. On an aircraft carrier they must satisfy two requirements: They must be an unrestricted line officer which enables him to command at sea (not a medical officer) and he must be a naval aviator. He is always the rank of Captain (O6). Though his Executive Officer, XO (is often also a Captain), the CO runs the ship via its various departments.

Typical Carrier (Ship's Company) Organization

Each department is further subdivided into divisions with personnel manning these divisions assigned to Watches, Sections, or both.

Administrative Department

The Administrative Department is responsible for maintaining all administrative data and paperwork necessary for the ship to function properly. These functions include data processing, as well as recreational, police, and postal services. This department is also responsible for operation of the ship's Public Affairs Office as well as the onboard television and radio stations. This department typically handles personnel records, including visiting Naval Reserve personnel (see Module 1).

Air Department

The Air Department gives direct support to the embarked air wing. The Air Department is in charge of launching and landing aircraft, fueling, moving, and controlling fixed and variable wing aircraft. It is also responsible for the routine handling of aircraft on the flight deck and in the hangar bays. Note: Smaller vessels with embarked helicopter detachments should have some flavor of an Air Department, although it may be very small.

Aircraft Intermediate Maintenance Department (AIMD)

The AIMD provides industrial level maintenance for the air wing and the ship's ground support equipment.

Chaplain Department

Onboard the carrier, the Chaplain Department is dedicated to promoting the spiritual, religious and personal morale of embarked military personnel. The Chaplain Corps extends this mission to all military personnel and their dependents. The Chaplain Department also coordinates all personal emergency communications from the American Red Cross, provides pastoral care and counseling, and directs operation of the ship's library. Smaller vessels may not have their own chaplain, especially if they are deployed with a CVBG. In these cases, a chaplain will fly from the carrier via helicopter to conduct services.

Communications Department

The Communications Department sends and receives messages to and from other ships, aircraft and shore facilities via various sophisticated electronic equipment. Such equipment includes computers, satellites, cryptographic devices, and high-power transmitters and receivers.

Deck Department

The Deck Department is charged with the most traditional of nautical responsibilities. Enlisted Boatswain's Mates (BM) maintain the exterior of the ship's surfaces, anchor and moor the ship, man the rescue and assistance lifeboats, and monitor underway replenishment. The BMs' most prevalent (and audible) duty is the "piping away" of different events over the ship's intercom. This department is headed by the ship's First Lieutenant (a job title, not to be confused with the Army, Air Force or Marine Corps rank of O-2).

Dental Department

The Dental Department provides comprehensive dental care, encompassing simple preventative care through emergency services for all embarked personnel. Note: Only large ships, such as carriers and amphibious warfare ships, have embarked Dental Departments. This department, along with Medical and Supply, are known as support departments.

Engineering Department

The Engineering Department maintains the ship's power plants providing steam for propulsion and aircraft launch catapults. It also provides all life support systems, fresh water, heating, air conditioning, ventilation, hot water, electrical power, telephone service, and maintains the ship's sewage system. The ship's Chief Engineer, or "Cheng", heads this department.

Maintenance Management Department

The Maintenance Management Department is responsible for the scheduling and coordination for all off-ship maintenance (i.e., repairs at shipyards or dry docks) and planned organic maintenance ship-wide.

Medical Department

The Medical Department is responsible for maintaining the health of the crew, the treatment of sick and injured ship's personnel, disease prevention and the promotion of good health ship-wide. The head of this department must be an officer of the Navy Medical Corps (MC). Additionally, the Medical Officer also advises the ship's CO on ship's hygiene and sanitation conditions. Smaller ships may not have an embarked Medical Officer in which case Hospital Corps personnel run the department under the administrative auspices of the Operations Department.

Navigation Department

The enlisted navigation Quarter Masters (QMs) and the ship's navigator brief the Commanding Officer and the Officer-of-the-Deck (OOD) on the position of the ship, the direction of travel and the safest sea lanes to traverse. Computations are made using celestial navigation, electronic machinery and visual reports. The Navigation Department is also responsible for executing all military traditions, customs and honors onboard ship.

Operations Department

The Operations Department is responsible for collecting, cataloging, analyzing and distributing combat information vital to the accomplishment of the ship's offensive and defensive missions. Heading this very important department is the ship's Operations Officer, or "Ops." Intelligence, photographic intelligence, local air traffic control, and missile system maintenance are types of services provided by this department. The ship's intelligence officer and the CVIC spaces fall under this department on a carrier. As an intelligence officer or enlisted Intelligence Specialist, you most likely will be assigned to this department.

Safety Department

The Safety Department is responsible for ongoing training and education programs, equipment dangers, procedural hazards, and accident prevention.

Supply Department

The Supply Department is responsible for feeding and paying the ship's crew, including the running of ship's wardroom(s) and messing spaces. This department holds responsibility for the laundry and dry-cleaning services, stores, barbershops, and recreation services. This department also stocks spare parts for underway ship and/or aircraft repairs.

Heading this department is the ship's Supply Officer, a member of the Navy Supply Corps (SC). The Supply Officer may have assistants for disbursing, food service, ship's store, or wardroom mess.

Training Department

The Training Department is responsible for the continued coordination of enlisted advancement exams, reenlistments and coordination of special schools. Training also handles general damage control and 3M training. Each department may also have their own training department.

Weapons Department

The Weapons Department maintains and operates the ship's various weapons systems. Personnel of the Weapons Department also assemble, test and maintain bombs, missiles, torpedoes and small weapons ammunition. On smaller ships, this department might fall under the administrative auspices of the Deck Department.

Air Wing Organization

It mirrors the ship's organizational structure. The embarked aircraft squadrons retain their corporate identity and basic organization, but each squadron also supplies specific personnel, such as ship mess cooks, stewards, and laundry, to the various departments listed above.

Air Wing Commander (CAG)

The CAG is directly responsible for the operational readiness and tactical performance of the air wing. He is responsible for the coordination and supervision of all activities of the embarked squadrons and detachments, and for the material readiness, communications, and intelligence functions of the air wing. The CAG does not fall directly under the carrier's commanding officer. Rather, he is a co-commanding officer. Both the carrier CO and CAG report to the composite warfare commander CWC.

Deputy Air Wing Commander (DCAG)

The primary duty of the Deputy CAG is to assist the CAG, acting as his executive officer. The Chief of Staff will ensure the activities and functions of the CAG staff adhere to the desires of the CAG.

Operations Office (Ops)

Responsible for supervising the training, operations, and readiness of all air wing squadrons. The Operations Officer standardizes operational procedures between squadrons, coordinates and develops operational contingency plans, and supervises the execution of those plans.

Under Sea Warfare Operations Officer (USW)

Responsible for Under Sea Warfare operations conducted by air wing assets. The USW Operations officer provides advice on the operational employment and training of the air wing USW squadrons.

Air Intelligence Officer

The Air wing Intelligence Officer is responsible for the collection, preparation, and dissemination of intelligence material needed by the CAG to plan and execute operations with air assets. He also directs and supervises the Mission Planning (MP) work center of Combat Visual Information Center (CVIC).

Maintenance Officer

This individual is responsible for monitoring and coordinating the maintenance of air wing assets, and ensuring all necessary equipment and spare parts required by the squadrons is available. The Maintenance Officer also reports to the CAG regarding the impact on operational readiness by maintenance and material conditions in the squadrons.

Weapons Officer

Advises the CAG on loading, handling, and expenditure of the weapons employed by the air wing. This individual will assist the squadrons in all matters relating to weapons handling and employment.

Landing Signal Officers (2)

Two LSOs are normally assigned to the air wing. They coordinate with pilots to improve recovery (i.e., landing) operations and safety awareness.

Flight Surgeon

The Flight Surgeon provides medical care for the officers and men of the air wing. He is tasked with keeping the CAG informed of particular medical problems affecting the air wing.

Carrier Air Wing Intelligence Team

This group consists of the squadron intelligence officers and intelligence specialists assigned to the squadrons in the air wing. The Air wing Intelligence Officer is the leader of this team and as such is the Mission Planning Coordinator. All squadron intelligence personnel work in CVIC when embarked. That is, they integrate into a combined CV/CVW intelligence team. The Carrier Air Wing Intelligence Team provides direct support to the air wing with cyclic event briefs/debriefs, and in-flight aids in support of exercises and/or operations. Except for the Tactical Airborne Reconnaissance Pod System, TARPS officer, the members of this team also augment the Supplementary Plot, SUPPLOT. The TARPS officer normally works in the Multi-Sensor Interpretation (MSI) area of CVIC.

A Ship going to Sea

Underway

Manning the Rail

A fine Navy tradition is called manning the rails. All off duty personnel are requested to dress in their dress uniforms and line the deck of the ship. My own carrier had the tradition of blasting music over the deck speakers and we always played Niel Diamond's Coming to America.

Going to Sea

The routine for an aircraft carrier going to sea is to:

1. Lite off boilers the day before.
2. Get the men and supplies aboard.
3. Rig for material condition York
4. Set the at sea detail
5. Pull all lines off the pier. Shore power, steam, ropes.
6. Man the rails in dress uniforms.
7. Once out to sea, start flight operations and receive the compliment of aircraft.
8. Perform a man overboard drill.

General Quarters

A note about beards, they were very traditional in the Navy until about 1987 when the Navy forbade beards. Early days, beards were OK, but with modern warfare, sailors might need to use OBAs or gas masks. This means they needed an air tight seal on their faces. When this started, sailors were instructed to keep their beard trimmed up under their chins for that air tight seal. As you might imagine, some sailors did not keep up their daily maintenance of their beards.

Real Day

Does any of that sound a little too convenient? Reality most of ships company works a rotating shift. Junior sailors often work 5 and dimes and can be as bad as port and starboard duty. Five and dime means that you work 5 hours then you have 10 hours off and you keep working that shift 24/7/365. Those 10 off hours were not spent playing your favorite video game. You were doing maintenance on equipment and learning you next job. My normal habit was to work a 5-hour shift, study and perform maintenance, work another 5-hour shift, shower eat and find some rack time, then repeat during the next 30-hour cycle.

Off Time

Popular games for sailors. Most sailors play Cribbage. Other very popular games are Hearts and Spades. Then, of course, sailors gambled playing poker even though gambling is against the UCMJ, Uniform Code of Military Justice.

In Port

While in port, sailors typically worked a more normal 5-day work week from 0800 to 1600. But then there are duty days too. Typically, every third or fourth day was a duty day where you stayed on the ship for 24 hours and stood watches. My own department did port and starboard watches. 6 hours on watch and 6 off.