Naval Services FamilyLine

Presents

Navy Organization, History and Traditions
Navy Organization, Traditions and History

This section introduces you to how the Navy is organized, and how to best learn about history and traditions that might matter to you. You will learn more about the Navy the longer your Sailor continues to serve. You don’t have to learn everything all at once, or understand everything about your Sailor’s part of the Navy. The more curious you are, the more you will learn, and the better you will understand how your Sailor fits into it all.

Navy Mission
The mission of the Navy is to maintain, train, and equip combat ready naval forces capable of winning wars, deterring aggression, and maintaining freedom of the seas.

- Did you know that the Navy ensures that commercial shipping lanes are kept open? More than 90% of US commerce travels by sea, so this is especially important.

- The Navy also deters pirates at sea—the movie Captain Phillips is based on the true story of Somali Pirates taking an American commercial ship hostage and the rescue operation mounted by the Navy.

- The Navy is comprised of many components that all work together towards this mission. Every element is crucial to success.

Core Values
All sailors are taught to learn and live the Navy’s Core Values:

- Honor
- Courage
- Commitment

Many Navy couples and families have found that these values permeate their relationships and make them stronger. Consider embracing them as part of your own family values.

Navy Structure
There is ONE U.S. Navy. It is comprised of four core components:

- Active Duty
- Reserve
- Civilian
- Families

Each provides unique contributions to the Navy Mission and all are important. At the end of 2018, the size of these components was:

- Active Duty: 330,000
- Ready Reserve: 100,495
- Civilian: 274,300
However, each component operates in its own unique way. They have their own processes, administrations, and benefits and privileges. Civilian component spouses, for example, are not eligible for Navy ID cards and therefore cannot access military bases unaccompanied and cannot access Commissaries or Exchanges alone. (This is an issue being addressed across the Navy). Reserve component sailors pay their own way to their reserve duty stations each month if traveling to a Reserve center. As you interact with Sailors and their spouses, remember that every service member matters and every family experience joys and challenges associated with their service.

Navy Communities

You may be more familiar with the idea of Navy Communities, such as Aviation, Submarines, and Surface (ships.) You might think of these communities in terms of their relationship to the sea (above, on, or under the sea…). Another way you may think about the Navy is in terms of location (Pacific, Atlantic, Europe.) There are many more communities, such as special forces, engineers, medical, chaplains, and others. The Navy Organization Chart is a top-level look at how the Navy is structured, and the Command Structure Chart is a next-level look at how a specific Command or unit is organized.

Navy Organization
Typical Command Structure

Ombudsman
The Ombudsman is a part of the wardroom, but outside of the chain of command. The Ombudsman is a volunteer and the appointed representative of the Commanding Officer (CO) that acts as the information link between the command leadership and the command families. As such they are an official command representative and point of contact for families.

The Ombudsman can disseminate information up and down the chain of command, both official Navy and command information. Ombudsmen can refer resources that may be instrumental in resolving issues before they require extensive command attention. They provide access to the appropriate level of the chain of command for necessary intervention, forwarding grievances or reasonable requests and is a primary point of contact for families during an emergency, crisis or disaster, all while maintaining strict confidentiality.

Get to know your Ombudsman as they are a single point of contact for various resources and information.
Navy Traditions
The Navy is an organization rich with tradition and customs. From the way we gather, celebrate, socialize, and support each other, many of the customs and traditions observed by the Navy are based on hundreds of years of tradition, both British and American. Some of these customs and traditions include Keel-Laying, Christening or Launching, Commissioning, Decommissioning, Change of Command, Change of Office, Chief Petty Officer Pinning, LDO and CWO Commissioning, Retirement which can be found in the Naval Services Familyline Guideline Series Social Customs and Traditions of the Sea Services. Some people find traditions and ceremonies intimidating at first, because it feels foreign. When we learn the history of the custom, it becomes meaningful and fun.

Understanding Dress Codes
Frequently, you will receive invitations to various social events, military and civilian. Accept, if at all possible, as this will give you an opportunity to meet new and interesting people. The attire for these invitations is usually specified and can range from informal to formal depending upon the time of day, time of year, and geographic location. One of the first things new spouses ask about these events is “What should I wear?” Use the following definitions for typical dress code instructions for Navy events as a start. Ask other spouses for advice if you aren’t sure.

Very Formal Occasions
This is very seldom worn except by flag officers or those in the diplomatic corps. When required, white tie is worn to evening dances, weddings, dinners, receptions, and on state occasions.

Military: Formal dress uniform.
Civilian: Gentlemen wear a tailcoat with matching trousers, a white waistcoat, wing collared shirt and white bow tie. Ladies wear very formal evening gowns.

Daytime Formal Occasions
For a formal daytime function such as a wedding, the following applies:

Military: Seasonally appropriate Service Dress Uniform.
Civilian: Gentlemen wear cutaways/morning coat. Ladies wear dresses or suits appropriate to the occasion as styles dictate.

Evening Formal Occasions
The attire specified for a formal evening function is “Black Tie.” This may be worn to formal events after 6:00 p.m. such as dinners, receptions, dances, weddings, or military balls.

Military: Seasonally appropriate Dinner Dress Jacket Uniform.
Civilian: Gentlemen wear dinner jackets or tuxedos. Ladies wear formal evening gowns.
**Ceremonial Occasions**
For occasions of state, ceremonies, and solemnities, parades and reviews, military personnel participating wear the specified ceremonial uniform.

*Military guests*: Seasonally appropriate Service Dress Uniform.
*Civilian*: Gentlemen generally wear dark business suits. Ladies wear dresses or business suits appropriate to the occasion, as styles dictate.

**Informal Occasions**
Business and informal occasions in the afternoon such as luncheons, receptions, or dinners will call for “Informal Attire” or “Civilian Informal.”

*Military*: Seasonally appropriate Service Uniform.
*Civilian*: Gentlemen wear dark business suits. Ladies wear afternoon dresses or business suits; or for evening events, dressy dresses, business suits, or long skirts appropriate to the occasion, as current styles dictate.

**Casual Occasions**
Nowadays, casual functions may include dinner parties, picnics, barbecues, sporting events, etc.

*Gentlemen*: “casual attire” may range from an open collar shirt or sweater to a sports coat.
*Ladies*: attire may range from slacks to appropriate length dress shorts to casual skirts. (Shorts and jeans are inappropriate unless specifically indicated by the host/hostess.)

*Note*: In many areas of the country, dress requirements can vary for the “casual” social occasions. For example, in one part of the country, “casual” may mean shorts and sandals, and in another area, it may mean dressy slacks or skirts. When in doubt, inquire as to the local custom or ask your host/hostess.

**Aloha Attire**
When you live on an island, you may receive an invitation that calls for “aloha attire.” There are several types of aloha attire, including aloha casual, aloha formal, and aloha crisp.

*Casual*: Shorts & nice T-Shirt or golf shirt
*Aloha Wear*: Nice clothes, Aloha Shirt/Sundress
*Casual Dress*: Simple dress, nice slacks, nice shorts and sandals
*Semi-Formal*: Short Dress, Dinner jacket for men
*Aloha Crisp*: Women: Sundress, skirt or pants w/dressy sandals Men: Aloha shirt or open collared shirt with dress pants. (can be a nice Aloha shirt)
*Formal*: Ball Gown or Tuxedo for men

When in doubt, call your host or someone who has been to a similar function to ask what is appropriate to wear.
A Guide to Social Customs, Etiquette, and Ceremonies

The Social Customs Guidelines created by NSFL, by spouse-for spouse, includes information on the following topics, including when to put your hand over your heart, what to wear on a ship (pants and flat shoes), and what all of the various events that you will see are all about. Some of the topics reviewed in this invaluable resource include:

- Sea Service Etiquette
- Shipboard Etiquette
- Flag Etiquette
- Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag
- National Anthem Etiquette
- Service Song Etiquette
- Anchors Aweigh - song
- Eternal Father, Strong to Save—The Navy Hymn
- Flags, Pennants and Customs Chart
- A Guide to Ceremonies
- Keel-Laying
- Christening or Launching
- Commissioning
- Decommissioning
- Change of Command
- Change of Office
- Chief Petty Officer Pinning
- LDO and CWO
- Commissioning
- Retirement
- Social Functions and Traditions
- Receptions
- Wetting-Down Parties
- All Hands Events
- Dining-In and Dining-Out
- Navy Birthday Ball
- Hail and Farewell.

Best Resources:
The most comprehensive guide to Navy History and Traditions is Social Customs and Traditions of the Sea Services, from the NSFL Guidelines series. It is available free online.


NSFL’s Sea Legs also includes useful information about customs and traditions.

Military Time
As the US Navy are also part of our military structure, they also observe a twenty-four hour time format and use this in all aspects of their duties. The twenty-four hour format is the same time that we are used to, yet instead of using “o’clock, am, or pm” they use the term “hours”. The Navy also continues counting the hours past 12 o’clock noon, instead of calling the next hour 1 o’clock, such as 1300 hours.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>9:00 am</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11:38 am</td>
<td>1138 hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:14 pm</td>
<td>1414</td>
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<tr>
<td>7:24 pm</td>
<td>1924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00 pm</td>
<td>2300 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:15 am</td>
<td>0015 hours</td>
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</table>

Colon denotes hours from minutes, followed by am/pm to denote time of day. No colon; “hours” replaces am/pm or omitted; hours continue until 00.
Ranks and Rates
Within the US Navy the military specialty of a Sailor is called a “rating”, whereas in other services they call this a Military Occupation Specialty (MOS). The Rates and ratings only extend through the enlisted ranks such as Hospital Man 3rd Class (HM3), Mass Communications Chief (MCC). Once a Sailor attains a rank of an officer, they no longer have a rating rather they are called by their rank; Ensign, Lieutenant Junior Grade, Lieutenant, Commander, etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paygrade</th>
<th>Rate</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<th>Collar and Cap</th>
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<td>Seaman Recruit</td>
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<td>Seaman Apprentice</td>
<td>SA</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-3</td>
<td>Seaman</td>
<td>SN</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-4</td>
<td>Petty Officer Third Class</td>
<td>PO3</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-5</td>
<td>Petty Officer Second Class</td>
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<td>PO1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>E-7</td>
<td>Chief Petty Officer</td>
<td>CPO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-8</td>
<td>Senior Chief Petty Officer</td>
<td>SCPO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-9</td>
<td>Master Chief Petty Officer</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Pay Grade</td>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
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<tr>
<td>W-1⁺</td>
<td>Warrant Officer</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>W-5⁺</td>
<td>Chief Warrant Officer</td>
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The grade of Warrant Officer (W-1) is no longer used. W-5 was established in 2002.
<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Rank</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Collar</th>
<th>Shoulder</th>
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<td>LCDR</td>
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<td><img src="image10.png" alt="Shoulder_O-4" /></td>
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<td>CDR</td>
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<tr>
<td>O-6</td>
<td>Captain</td>
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<td><img src="image16.png" alt="Shoulder_O-6" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>O-7</td>
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<td>RDML</td>
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<td><img src="image20.png" alt="Sleeve_O-7" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>O-8</td>
<td>Rear Admiral (Upper Half)</td>
<td>RADM</td>
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<td><img src="image22.png" alt="Shoulder_O-8" /></td>
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<td>O-9</td>
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Spouse Tips for Success

Remember that you will learn as you go. No one expects you to understand the entire Navy. Don’t be shy about asking questions about things you want to know. While rules of etiquette are important to follow, always keep in mind that no rules will replace a warm heart, a friendly smile, and the sincere desire to share in the fellowship and camaraderie of the sea services. Remember that other spouses are your best resource. Want advice? Ask a spouse!
**Navy Jargon and Acronyms**

Navy jargon and acronyms can, and will confuse you. As there are many acronyms, some which are the same acronyms for varying communities can mean very different things, so if someone uses an acronym that you are not aware of, ask them what it means.

**Common Jargon and Acronyms**

**ABOARD** – on or in a ship. Close aboard; near a ship

**ADVANCE PAY** – an advance on your base pay for a move. This must be repaid.

**AFT** – in, near or toward the stern of the ship. AIRDALE – slang, a naval aviator.

**ALLOTMENT** – assignment of part of military pay directly to a person or bank.

**ANCHOR** – the hook used at the end of a chain and dropped to the sea bottom to hold a ship in one particular place. The smallest Navy anchors can be lifted by one person; two anchors used by USS KITTY HAWK each weigh 30 tons.

**ANCHOR’S AWEIGH** – said of the anchor when just clear of the bottom.

**APO** – Army and Air Force Post Office

**AWOL** – Absent Without Leave

**AYE-AYE** – term used to acknowledge receipt of a command or order from senior. It means “I have heard the order; I understand it; I will carry it out.”

**BAH** – Basic Allowance for Housing

**BAS** – Basic Allowance for Subsistence

**BOQ** – Bachelor Officer Quarters

**BELAY** – to cancel an order; stop; firmly secure a line.

**BEQ** – Bachelor Enlisted Quarters

**BERTH** – space assigned ship for anchoring or mooring.

**BERTHING** – where Sailors sleep onboard ship Navy Terms

**BILLET** – an allotted sleeping space; an individual’s position in the ship’s organization.

**BOATSWAIN** – pronounced “bosun,” refers to the mate, warrant officer or petty officer in charge of boats, rigging and ground tackle aboard ship.

**BOW** – most forward part of a ship.

**BRAVO ZULU** – Good job!

**BRIDGE** – platform or area from which ship is steered, navigated and conned; usually
located in forward part of ship. BRIG – Sailor’s universal term for jail.
BULKHEAD – one of the upright, crosswise partitions dividing a ship into compartments.
CAPTAIN – rank, or commanding officer of a ship or squadron.
CACO – Casualty Assistance Calls Officer
CDC – Child Development Center
CHAIN OF COMMAND – the military’s management concept
CHINFO – Chief of Information
CMC – Command Master Chief
CNO – Chief of Naval Operations
CNP – Chief of Naval Personnel
CO – Commanding Officer
COB – Chief of the Boat
COLA – Cost of Living Allowance
COMMISSARY – grocery store on base where service members and families can purchase food, beverages, etc., at prices usually lower than in civilian stores.
COMMODORE – used as an honorific to any officer commanding a squadron or flotilla of submarines, destroyers or smaller ships.
CONUS – the Continental United States. (48 states and the District of Columbia.) Flying in CONUS determines certain limitations to space-available travel on military aircraft.
COURSE – direction steered by a ship or plane.
COMRATS – Commuted Rations
COS – Chief of Staff
CPO – Chief Petty Officer
CROW – slang, eagle on petty officer’s rating badge.
DECK – a floor or platform extending from end to end of a ship.
DEERS – Defense Eligibility Enrollment Reporting System
DETAILER – the person responsible for deciding your Sailor’s next duty station
DEPLOY – tactical term used for dispersal of troops; also disposition of ships in battle formations.
DSN – Defense Switched Network; Department of Defense internal telephone system
(formerly Autovon).
DOD – Department of Defense
DODDS – Department of Defense Dependent Schools
EFMP – Exceptional Family Member Program
EMBARK – to go aboard ship preparatory to sailing.
ENSIGN – lowest ranking commissioned officer.
EXCHANGE – department store run by the military.
EXECUTIVE OFFICER (XO) – regardless of rank, the officer second in command of a
ship, squadron or shore activity. In early days, such an officer was the first lieutenant.
FATHOM – in measuring depth of water, six feet. From Anglo-Saxon faehom. Originally
distance spanned by man’s outstretched arms.
FFSC – Fleet and Family Support Center
FITNESS REPORT – written report of a chief petty officer or above performance of duty.
FITREP – Fitness Report
FLAG OFFICER – Rear Admiral, Lower Half; Rear Admiral, Upper Half; Vice Admiral;
Admiral, and Fleet Admiral are flag officers.
FLEET – from Anglo-Saxon fleet. Organization of ships and aircraft under one commander.
FLIGHT DECK – deck of ship on which planes land, takeoff.
FLTCM – Fleet Master Chief
FMF – Fleet Marine Force
FORCM – Force Master Chief
FORWARD DEPLOYED – Forward deployed means you are permanently stationed
outside CONUS and are able to rapidly deploy to nearby hot spots.
FPO – Fleet Post Office
FRG – Family Readiness Group
FRO – Family Readiness Officer
FSGLI – Family Servicemember’s Group Life Insurance
GANGWAY – open in bulwarks or rail of ship to give entrance; order to stand aside and get
out of the way.
GEEDUNK – slang, ice cream soda, malted milk, anything from soda fountain or Geedunk
stand.

GENERAL QUARTERS – battle stations for all hands.

GTMO – abbreviation for U.S. Naval Base, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

HASH MARK – slang, service stripe worn on uniform of enlisted personnel.

HEAD – place in ship or on shore station that might otherwise be called a restroom, washroom or toilet.

HONORS – ceremonies conducted in honor of a visiting dignitary, usually involving sideboys and, occasionally, a band and honor guard.

JAG – Judge Advocate General (lawyer)

KNOT – measure speed for ships and aircraft, as “the destroyer was making 30 knots,” or “the top speed of the plane is 400 knots.”

LDO – Limited Duty Officer

LINE OFFICER – officer who may succeed to operational command as opposed to staff corps officer who normally exercises authority only in a specialty; (e.g., hospitals, supply centers, etc.).

MAST – captain’s mast, or merely mast, derived from the fact that in early sailing days, the usual setting for this type of naval justice was on the weather deck near ship’s mainmast. Currently, means type of hearing with commanding officer presiding, in which any punishment administered is non-judicial in nature and is an alternative to court martial.

MCPON – Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy

MESS – meal; a place or group of officers and crew who eat together as in “crew is at mess,” “meeting was held in CPO mess,” or “she was the guest of wardroom mess.” Mess comes from Latin mensa, or table.

MUSTER – to assemble crew; roll call.

MWR – Morale, Welfare and Recreation

NAVFAC – Naval Facility

NAVSTA – Naval Station

NFAAS – Navy Family Accountability and Assessment System

NMCRS – Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society

NOSC – Navy Operational Support Center

NSA – Naval Support Activity

NSFL – Naval Services FamilyLine
OAL – Ombudsman-at-Large
OCONUS – Outside CONUS
OCS – Officer Candidate School
OOD – Officer of the Deck
OPNAV – Office of the Chief of Naval Operations
PAO – Public Affairs Officer
PCS – Permanent Change of Station
POC – Point of Contact
POD – Plan of the Day
POW – Plan of the Week
PORT – left side of ship looking forward.
PSD – Personnel Support Detachment
QUARTERDECK – part of main (or other) deck reserved for honors and ceremonies and the station of the officer of the deck (OOD) in port.
QUARTERS – living spaces assigned to personnel aboard ship; government-owned housing assigned to personnel at shore stations; assembly of personnel for drill, inspection or meeting.
RANK – grade or official standing of commissioned and warrant officers.
RATE – grade or official standing of enlisted personnel; identifies pay grade or level of advancement; within each rating a rate reflects levels of aptitude, training, experience, knowledge, skill and responsibility.
RATING – job classification with the Navy, such as electronics technician.
SAPR – Sexual Assault Prevention and Response
SARC – Sexual Assault Response Coordinator
SATO – Scheduled Airlines Ticket Office
SBP – Survivors Benefit Plan
SCUTTLEBUTT – a drinking fountain in Navy is called scuttlebutt. A scuttlebutt in old days was a cask that had openings in the side, fitted with a spigot; also rumor, from the fact that Sailors used to congregate at the scuttlebutt or cask of water to gossip or report on day’s activities – sometimes true, sometimes not.
SEA – Senior Enlisted Advisor
SECDEF – Secretary of Defense
SECNAV – Secretary of the Navy
SEL – Senior Enlisted Leader
SELRES – Selected Reservist
SGLI – Servicemen’s Group Life Insurance
SIDEBOYS – impeccably-uniformed Sailors who participate in honors ceremonies on the
quarterdeck.
SITREP – Situation Report
STARBOARD – right side of ship looking forward.
STERN – after part of ship.
SWAB – rope or yarn mop; also, an unflattering term for a Sailor.
SPC – Suicide Prevention Coordinator
TAD – Temporary Additional Duty
TAMP – Transition Assistance Management Program
TBD – To Be Determined
TLA – Temporary Lodging Allowance
TLE – Temporary Lodging Expenses
UA – Unauthorized absence
WARDROOM – a compartment aboard ship near officers’ stateroom used as officers’ mess
room.

More jargon and acronyms can be found in the NSFL Sea Legs publication.


If you have not read our other modules, go back and read through them or follow the link
below to continue onto our next module

Next module:

Understanding Benefits and Privileges