

# ALL HANDS

*Celebrating One Hundred Years*

MAGAZINE OF THE U.S. NAVY

JULY 2022





## A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR AND STAFF

Every month, we focus on the Navy's mission-focused people and technologies. As we survey how our naval forces continue to train, fight and equip the world's toughest Sailors, we look at our advantage at sea and the capabilities of Sailors deployed around the world.

It is our mission to reach Sailors, so please share this issue, scan the QR codes, and follow our social media channels for the latest information for Sailors by Sailors.



## ALL HANDS MAGAZINE

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**EDITOR**  
MC1 Brent Pyfom  
MC1 Tyler Gardner

**LAYOUT AND DESIGN**  
MC2 Janine F. Jones

**GRAPHICS**  
MC2 Dakota David  
MC2 Neadria Hazel

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## IN THIS ISSUE

[STATUS OF 13 USS INDIANAPOLIS SAILORS LOST  
OFFICIALLY CHANGED](#)

[THE ROLE OF UNMANNED, A.I. IN MIDDLE EAST  
EXPLAINED](#)

[MYNAVYHR: NAVY UPDATES DMAP – ADVANCES  
FIRST DMAP PLANKOWNERS, HOW TO BECOME  
A CERTIFIED NAVY COACH, HARP, OHARP AND  
SEMINAR PROGRAMS REACTIVATED](#)

[THIS MONTH IN NAVAL HISTORY](#)

[THE TOPGUN LEGACY: MAKING MAVERICKS WITH  
CAPT. FERGUSON](#)

[FIREWORKS SAFETY](#)

[PHOTOS FROM THE FLEET](#)

[UNDEFEATED, THIS FLAG WILL FLY: SEAMAN  
TACKLED PTSD TO MAKE MASTER CHIEF](#)

# STATUS OF 13 USS INDIANAPOLIS SAILORS LOST OFFICIALLY CHANGED

From Navy Personnel Command Public Affairs



The Navy has officially changed the status of 13 Sailors lost when the USS Indianapolis (CA 35) was sunk in 1945 from “Unaccounted for” to “Buried at Sea,” Navy Casualty announced May 27.

The change in status is the result of extensive research between Naval History and Heritage Command (NHHC), Navy Casualty Office, the USS Indianapolis Survivors Association, the USS Indianapolis Legacy Organization, and the Chief Rick Stone and Family Charitable Foundation. The announcement helps bring closure to the families of these Sailors who lost their lives at the end of a secret mission which helped end World War II.

USS Indianapolis sank July 30, 1945 after being struck by two Japanese torpedoes.

- The Sailors whose status changed are:
- Seaman 1st Class George Stanley Abbott
  - Seaman 2nd Class Eugene Clifford Batson
  - Gunner’s Mate 1st Class William Alexander Haynes
  - Seaman 2nd Class Albert Raymond Kelly
  - Seaman 1st Class Albert Davis Lundgren
  - Fireman 1st Class Ollie McHone
  - Seaman 2nd Class George David Payne
  - Storekeeper 3rd Class Alvin Wilder Rahn
  - Ship’s Cook 3rd Class Jose Antonio Saenz
  - Coxswain Charles Byrd Sparks
  - Radioman 2nd Class Joseph Mason Strain
  - Ship’s Service Man Laundryman 3rd Class Angelo Anthony Sudano
  - Gunner’s Mate 3rd Class Floyd Ralph Wolfe

**“NO AMOUNT OF TIME LESSENS THE LOSS, HOWEVER, IF WE CAN BRING SOME CERTAINTY TO LOVED ONES, EVEN SEVEN DECADES LATER, WE ARE KEEPING FAITH WITH THOSE WE LOST.”**

**CAPT. ROBERT MCMAHON  
DIRECTOR OF THE NAVY CASUALTY OFFICE**

Approximately 300 of the ship’s 1,195 Sailors went down with the ship, and some 900 men were set adrift. Only 316 survived. Due to administrative errors, many Sailors who were recovered from the ocean and buried at sea from responding vessels were misclassified as “Missing in Action” or “Unaccounted for.”

According to Rick Stone, who previously served at NHHC, he initiated the USS Indianapolis Burial at Sea Project to determine if any Indianapolis casualties met this criteria. Following his retirement from government service, he established the Chief Rick Stone and Family Charitable Foundation to continue the project and located documentation proving the 13 Sailors were misclassified.

According to the foundation’s USS Indianapolis Burial at Sea Project web page, “recovering a lost Sailor, giving their loved ones and family closure, is the greatest gift we can imagine and the greatest way to celebrate and thank the Sailors who lost their lives aboard the USS Indianapolis.”



“One of my favorite quotes is ‘Poor is the nation that has no heroes but shameful is the nation who, having heroes, forgets them,’” Stone said. “Our foundation will never forget the heroes of the USS Indianapolis and are proud of our role in helping thirteen families learn that the Navy went to great lengths to honor them soon after their deaths.”

Capt. Robert McMahon, director of the Navy Casualty Office, said bringing closure to families of those lost at sea is a “solemn duty and obligation” he takes to heart.

“Nothing is more important to me than giving families that knowledge when the unthinkable happens,” he said. “No amount of time lessens the loss, however, if we can bring some certainty to loved ones, even seven decades later, we are keeping faith with those we lost.”

One of those family members, William Baxter, nephew of Gunner’s Mate 3rd Class Wolfe, was notified April 26 of the change in status. Sailors from Naval Medical Readiness and Training Command (NMRTC) Beaufort, South Carolina,

arrived at his door with a certificate and flag to recognize Wolfe’s sacrifice.

Baxter, an Okatie, South Carolina, native, said while he did not know his uncle, “it’s nice to finally have some closure to what actually happened to [him]. Thank you all for going above and beyond for me and my family. I wasn’t expecting all of this, but thank you.”

“It was an absolute honor and a privilege to be a part of informing Mr. Baxter and his family of his uncle’s status change, and also being a part of history,” said Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Naomi Hall, one of the Sailors from NMRTC Beaufort involved in making notifications.

Navy Casualty’s mission is providing timely and first-class casualty assistance to Navy families when a Sailor is seriously ill or injured, is placed in a duty status whereabouts unknown (DUSTWUN), or is declared missing and/or Prisoner of War or dies. Learn more about Navy Casualty [here](#).



# THE ROLE OF UNMANNED, A.I. IN MIDDLE EAST EXPLAINED

From NAVCENT Public Affairs



The commander for U.S. naval forces in the Middle East discussed the role of unmanned systems and artificial intelligence in naval operations at an international security conference in the United Kingdom.

Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, commander of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, U.S. 5th Fleet and Combined Maritime Forces, spoke to an audience of nearly 800 international defense and industry leaders during the Combined Naval Event at the Farnborough International Exhibition and Conference Centre.

"We are on a path to build the world's first international unmanned surface vessel fleet," Cooper said. "Three weeks ago, we surpassed 10,000 total sailing hours for unmanned surface vessels throughout the region. Additionally, two vessels each exceeded 100 consecutive operating days at sea."

U.S. 5th Fleet is currently fielding multiple unmanned systems with artificial intelligence across the Middle East after establishing Task Force 59 in September. The task force works closely with members of industry and academia as well as other experts to provide operator feedback and help drive the innovation process forward.

"The goal is a distributed and integrated network of systems, operated with our partners, to significantly expand how far we can see," said Cooper.

Over an eight-month period, the task force stood up operating hubs for unmanned systems and artificial intelligence in Bahrain and Aqaba, Jordan while deploying new unmanned systems to a half-dozen bilateral and multilateral exercises. Additionally, some of the systems are currently contributing to daily operations in regional waters by enhancing maritime surveillance.

"Every partner and every sensor offers new information that can be added to what we call the

'Digital Ocean,' an intelligent synthesis of around-the-clock inputs encompassing thousands of images," Cooper explained. "Putting more eyes above, on and below the water's surface enhances our picture of the surrounding seas and enables us to position our crewed ships to react more rapidly."

Earlier this year, U.S. 5th Fleet announced the goal of forming a multinational fleet of 100 unmanned surface vessels by the summer of 2023.

"A network of partners can increase shared maritime domain awareness by 30 or 40 times, through an interconnected mesh of sensors and real-time data fused together," Cooper said. "This is an ambitious goal, but it is achievable because of our incredibly talented team."

U.S. 5th Fleet led the world's largest unmanned maritime exercise in February when 10 nations fielded more than 80 unmanned systems during International Maritime Exercise 2022. The exercise enabled operators employ advanced unmanned systems during 14 different operational scenarios.

"We are clearly more capable when we operate together, which is why strengthening partnerships and accelerating innovation are intertwined," said Cooper. "It is not just about the technology. It is our people who have us on a path to realizing this vision together with our partners in the region."

The U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations encompasses about 2.5 million square miles of water area and includes the Arabian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, Red Sea and parts of the Indian Ocean. The region is comprised of 21 countries and includes three critical choke points at the Strait of Hormuz, the Suez Canal and the Strait of Bab al-Mandeb at the southern tip of Yemen.

ALL HANDS WAS A WAY TO SEE THE

# NAVY

IN A WAY I COULDN'T DO BY MYSELF.

# ALL HANDS ENRICHES PEOPLE'S LIVES, LIKE IT ENRICHED

MINE. THAT'S WHAT ALL HANDS IS TO ME.

**-OHENE GYAPONG**

FORMER ALL HANDS MAGAZINE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



ALL HANDS IS MORE THAN A MAGAZINE.  
**IT'S A COMMUNITY.**



# NAVY UPDATES DMAP – ADVANCES FIRST DMAP PLANKOWNERS

From MyNavyHR

More than 200 Sailors eligible for the Detailing Marketplace Assignment Policy (DMAP) participated in the program during its first MyNavy Assignment cycle and more than 100 will advance to the next paygrade.

These DMAP “Plankowners” include the first Sailors to apply for and be selected for an extension to their sea duty or follow-on sea tours – either at their current command or at another sea command – for advancement and other incentives.

“DMAP represents a major paradigm shift in how the Navy mans the fleet,” said Chief of Naval Personnel Vice Adm. John B. Nowell Jr. in the NAVADMIN announcing the updates to DMAP. “As such, MyNavy HR intends to collect data and feedback to help inform future adjustments to DMAP. Sailor and command flexibility and feedback remain key enablers to ensuring success.”

DMAP was announced in December 2021 and the marketplace went live in March 2022.

An update to DMAP was released via [NAVADMIN 127/22](#) June 1, 2022. This update increased eligibility for Sailors within the DMAP Phase I ratings, adjusted projected rotation dates for eligible E-4 and E-5 Sailors in their initial sea tour, instituted a 48-month sea tour policy for new accessions, and clarified instructions for commands to nominate a Sailor for command advance-to- position.

DMAP replaced the Sea Shore Flow policy for four ratings: Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Fuels), Aviation Boatswain's Mate Aircraft (Handling), Gas Turbine Systems Technician (Mechanical) and Culinary Specialist. The remaining 12 sea-intensive ratings will be gradually phased in to DMAP along with the rest of the enlisted ratings in future phases.

DMAP Phase II is expected to expand the DMAP opportunities to more rates and could launch in fiscal year 2023.

For DMAP questions, contact the MyNavy HR DMAP team at [DMAP.fct@navy.mil](mailto:DMAP.fct@navy.mil). For more information, click [here](#).



## HOW TO BECOME A CERTIFIED NAVY COACH

From MyNavyHR

The Navy Personnel Command's Talent Management Task Force recently announced a call for the second cohort of potential certified Navy Leader Coaches, focused on specific commands and communities to support building and sustaining a Navy coaching culture. Selectees will participate in a Department of Defense inter-service internal coaching training program, the Coaching Culture Facilitator Course.

According to [NAVADMIN 109/22](#), Sailors accepted into this training will begin a 16- week, 80-hour virtual program from May through September which will provide these future leader coaches essential coaching skill training. Additionally, they will receive mentor coaching and additional orientation and training required to apply for future International Coaching Federation credentialing.

The CCFC was first advertised in [NAVADMIN 213/21](#).

MyNavy Coaching facilitates peerto-peer coaching and helps participants become more “coach-like.” Exhibiting more “coach-like” behaviors means asking more open-ended questions, refraining from giving the answer or advice in a developmental situation, and encouraging bi-directional feedback.

“These soon-to-be coaches are central to carrying the mission and vision of MyNavy Coaching to senior Navy leadership who will help educate the fleet and provide support towards becoming more coachlike to enhance the performance of our personnel and the Navy overall,” said Rear Adm. Alvin Holsey, Commander, Navy Personnel Command.

“This targeted approach helps us to build the desired Navy coaching culture and allows us to scale coaching across the Navy, ensuring MyNavy Coaching ‘sticks.’ ”

Participation in the CCFC is open to all active duty and FTS warrant officers (W-2 through W-4) and officers (O-3 through O-5), and E-6 through E-8 who have a minimum of three years until their EAOS. All applicants must also have a minimum of two years remaining on station or have the command provide a recommendation for an extension.

Applications should demonstrate a commitment to building and sustaining a Navy coaching culture. The selection process will closely examine each applicant's interest in becoming a Navy coach, how their becoming a coach will contribute to the career goals of the applicant, and their commitment to changing the culture of the Navy through coaching.

Read the full story in [Sailor to Sailor](#).



## HARP, OHARP AND SEMINAR PROGRAMS REACTIVATED

From MyNavyHR

After more than a two-year pause due to the pandemic, the Hometown Area Recruiting Program (HARP), Officer Hometown Area Recruiting Program (OHARP) and Senior Minority Assistance to Recruiting Program (SEMINAR) are again accepting applications from Sailors in the fleet.

These programs return outstanding Sailors to their hometown or home of record to assist the Navy's local recruiters with their recruiting efforts – without being charged leave.

“HARP duty is a non-funded program for enlisted personnel,” said Terry Black, HARP/OHARP manager at Navy Recruiting Command (NRC). “You can perform it in conjunction with permanent change of station (PCS) orders, or you can do a strictly Temporary Additional Duty (TEMADD) from your parent command.

“On HARP duty, you go home for 12 days starting on a Monday and concluding on a Friday – weekends are included in the number count of the 12 days. You work with your local recruiters; you put your working or dress uniforms on; and you go to your local high schools. The purpose of the program is to attract more of your peer groups to join the Navy.”

Black also explained how the experience of going back home can be a great sense of pride for Sailors and the impact it can have on students as well as their local community.

“Typically, when you're a good student and you join the Navy, you go back to your high school at your home of

record,” Black said. “When you walk through those hallways, they see you in that uniform.

“The uniform is an attraction piece. It's also a conversational piece. We'd like for all young Sailors to have a conversation about their Navy experience that they've been exposed to and talk to these high school kids about the Navy and try to encourage them to join our Navy – or even just actually talk to the recruiter to see if they'll be a good fit.”

Service members requesting HARP duty in conjunction with PCS orders must submit HARP requests to NRC six to nine months prior to the desired date, before their PCS orders are finalized. Blackout dates are the week of Thanksgiving, last two weeks of December and the first week of January. During these dates, no HARP requests will be approved.

While HARP is for enlisted personnel, OHARP is a non-funded program for officers.

“OHARP works a little bit differently,” Black said. “You can perform OHARP for a minimum of 14 days, maximum of 90 days. You can do it strictly TEMADD from your parent command or you can do it in conjunction with PCS orders. OHARP returns officers to their hometowns to assist the officer recruiters in locating individuals for our officer programs.

Read the full story in [Sailor to Sailor](#).



# THIS MONTH IN NAVAL HISTORY

SINCE 1941 JULY 4<sup>TH</sup> HAS BEEN A FEDERALLY RECOGNIZED HOLIDAY IN THE UNITED STATES TO COMMEMORATE THE REVOLUTIONARY CHARTER OF FREEDOM, THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, UPON WHICH THE NATION'S FOUNDING PRINCIPLES WERE ESTABLISHED



Cmdr. Rosemary B. Mariner becomes the first woman to command an operational aviation squadron, Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron 34 (VAQ 34). She is one of the first women to become qualified as a Naval Aviator in 1974 and one of the first women to fly light attack aircraft. Mariner attained the rank of Captain before retiring in 1997.

**July 12<sup>th</sup> 1990**



**July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1926**

The Distinguished Flying Cross is authorized by Congress. The first Naval Aviator to receive the Distinguished Flying Cross is Richard E. Byrd for his flight to the North Pole on May 9, 1926.



**July 4<sup>th</sup> 1992**

USS George Washington (CVN 73) is commissioned at Norfolk, Va. The ship's sponsor is First Lady Barbara Bush. The sixth carrier in the Nimitz-class of supercarriers, it is the fourth warship to be named after the first president of the United States.



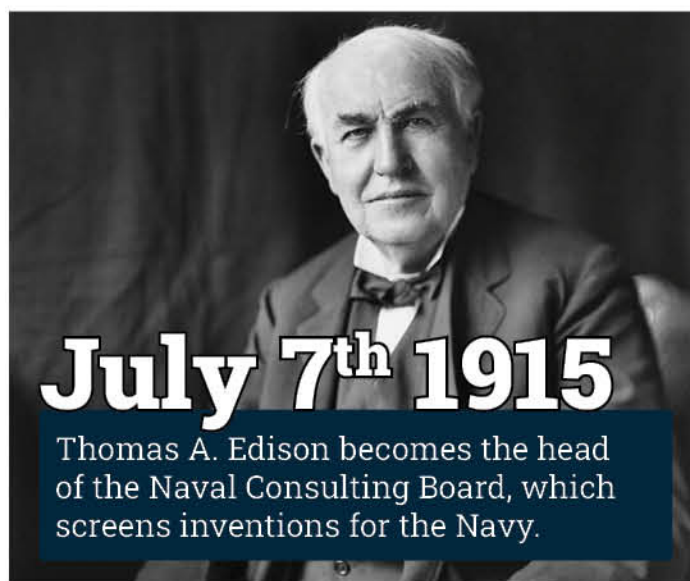
**July 18<sup>th</sup> 1792**

Continental Navy Capt. John Paul Jones dies in Paris, France. A legend during the American Revolution, Jones argues for Congress establishing a United States Navy. When it fails to do so, the unemployed captain found work as a rear admiral in the Russian navy for a couple of years, but eventually returns to France, where he dies. More than a century later, his body is discovered, exhumed, brought back to the United States under huge fanfare and reburied in a magnificent sarcophagus at the United States Naval Academy.



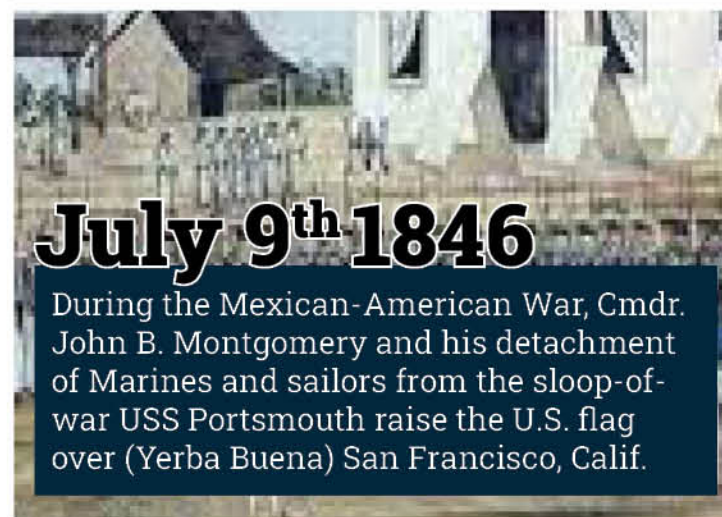
**July 25<sup>th</sup> 1943**

The first Navy ship named for an African-American, USS Harmon (DE 678), is launched. USS Harmon is named in honor of Mess Attendant 1st Class Leonard Roy Harmon who posthumously receives the Navy Cross for heroic actions trying to save a shipmate on board USS San Francisco (CA 38) during the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal on Nov. 13, 1942.



**July 7<sup>th</sup> 1915**

Thomas A. Edison becomes the head of the Naval Consulting Board, which screens inventions for the Navy.



**July 9<sup>th</sup> 1846**

During the Mexican-American War, Cmdr. John B. Montgomery and his detachment of Marines and sailors from the sloop-of-war USS Portsmouth raise the U.S. flag over (Yerba Buena) San Francisco, Calif.



President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs the act establishing WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service). During World War II, more than 80,000 officers and enlisted women serve in the WAVES.

**July 30<sup>th</sup> 1942**



# THE TOPGUN LEGACY: MAKING MAVERICKS WITH CAPT. FERGUSON

From Lt. Bryce Baswell



The sun rises over Nevada. A rumble rolls across the desert, but it's not the sound of a rare rainstorm. It's two U.S. Navy F/A-18 Hornets engaged in a close-range combat training exercise. One is the haze-grey color of fleet squadrons. The other sports desert camo with a red star on its tail, one of the paint schemes used by the Navy Reserve's adversary aircraft squadrons to mimic those used by America's adversaries.

From a long way off, the jets seem serene, like birds of prey gliding the updrafts. But up close, it's a hell storm. The jets pump out swirling vortices of scorched gases. The sound can literally be felt, and the acrid smell of jet fuel permeates the air. The two aircraft maneuver furiously, both attempting to establish positional advantage against the other. Finally, one gets the upper hand. "Copy Kill"—a successful engagement.

Capt. Brian "Ferg" Ferguson has spent a significant portion of his career involved with air-to-air combat training exercises like the one described above. Ferguson attended the Adversary Instructor Course at the Navy Fighter Weapons School, also known as TOPGUN. He also commanded the

Fighting Saints of Fighter Squadron Composite Thirteen (VFC-13), based at Naval Air Station Fallon, Nevada, the same installation as TOPGUN. VFC-13 is one of the Navy Reserve's adversary aircraft squadrons dedicated specifically to providing the highest quality adversary training for Navy fleet squadrons and other units, a Navy role provided only by the Navy Reserve. These and numerous other career experiences [see note below for more\*] helped make Ferguson an ideal candidate to serve as the Navy's technical advisor for TOP GUN: Maverick, Paramount Pictures' new sequel to its 1986 blockbuster-hit feature film, Top Gun. Ferguson described how he came by the job.

"Toward the end of my tour of duty as the Deputy Commander, Naval Air Force Reserve, the Chief of Staff for Commander, Naval Air Forces contacted me," said Ferguson. "He said he thought I might be the right person for the role of advisor for TOP GUN: Maverick. At first, I declined because I had been focused on so many other things professionally, and I knew there would be many other people well-qualified for the job. However, the Chief of Staff kept ping me, and eventually my wife, Susan, was the one who changed my

mind. She told me, "If they get it wrong and you had a chance to make it better that you didn't take, you'll be complaining about it for the rest of your life, and if they get it right, you'll regret that you weren't a part of it."

Ferguson served on active-duty orders for just over a year while filling the role of the Navy's technical advisor for TOP GUN: Maverick, during which he also performed the critical role of aerial coordinator for the Naval Aviators and aircraft involved in the film.

"I wore many hats," said Ferguson. "Primary was safety. The things we did in the jets were not necessarily any more risky, complicated, or difficult than any given fleet training mission or combat duty, but they were different and required a great deal of careful and deliberate risk management. It was clear to me that any benefits the Navy hoped to gain from the film showcasing our profession to the nation and the world would be more than erased by a mishap. I also coordinated the aerial sequences, knowing the capabilities and limitations of the F/A-18 and aircrew. Tom Cruise, Jerry Bruckheimer or Joseph Kosinski would want something, and perhaps it was not attainable safely within our comfort

margins. I would work with them and the civilian aerial cinematographer to find a way to make it work safely and still be spectacular. I was also responsible for assisting with realism in the script, storyline, and uniform accuracy, minus a few scenes that were filmed prior to my arrival."

Although Ferguson stipulates that not every part of the film is 100% accurate to the realities of Naval Aviation, he says that overall, it provides an extremely realistic vision of what being a Naval Aviator is like.

"The film makes very limited use of CGI—it's almost all real-life Navy pilots in real Navy jets doing real maneuvers," Ferguson said. "We're taking the audience into the jets with us, onto the ship, and into combat. Various people who saw the film with me all said the exact same thing: "I felt like I was in the jet!"

Working on TOP GUN: Maverick was coming full circle for Ferguson. Like many others, he was inspired in a major way when he saw the original film, Top Gun, in theaters when it was first released in 1986, his senior year of high school. He attributes watching the film, as well as seeing the Navy's Blue Angels and other Navy aircraft at airshows,





to his decision to enter Naval Aviation. Now, 36 years later, he's working on film projects that will help to inspire a new generation of Naval Aviators, including another Hollywood film named Devotion, the renowned story of Naval Aviators and brothers-in-arms Jesse Brown and Tom Hudner during the Korean War, scheduled to be released in the fall of 2022. Ferguson explained the lasting legacy that films about the Navy can have.

"I think that films can have a dramatic impact," Ferguson described. "For example, the original Top Gun film did three things. First, it helped boost Navy recruiting a tremendous amount. It allowed the Navy to enjoy a massive influx of applications from some of the best and brightest young men and women in America. Second, it helped remind the Naval Aviation community that we literally have the coolest job on the planet! Like every job, there are parts of it that are mundane, but the film celebrated the most thrilling parts of it and reminded people that when they look back on their time in the service, those are the parts they are going to remember, not the long hours or paperwork. Third, it helped connect much of the American public to the Navy in a way in which they hadn't been before—in a contemporary way that gives them some familiarity with what the Navy does today. I am confident that TOP GUN: Maverick will have the same effect, which is why the Navy and the Department of Defense supported the project at the highest levels."

Ferguson described more about the impact he thinks the new film will have.

"I am confident this film is going to help reenergize pride in the Naval Aviation community and the military at large. It can really pull people in and connect them to a Navy that they may not realize has been continuously involved in combat operations around the world for most of the last 30 years. This film will bring Naval Aviation to screens in front of hundreds of millions of people and allow them to experience how it looks from the cockpit, and more importantly, what it feels like to be an aviator in the U.S. Navy."

Ferguson also discussed the critical role the Navy Reserve plays in supporting Naval Aviation and the Navy at large.

"The Navy Reserve provides a strategic depth for warfighting readiness during these times when we are challenged by near-peer adversaries. We stand ready to surge combat-capable end strength...whether the demand signal is tactical airpower, strategic lift, unmanned systems, watch-floor manning, seapower, medical support, Seabees, logistics, Naval Special Warfare, or any number of other specialties, the Navy Reserve maintains a readiness to mobilize, to fight and win anywhere in the world."

Ferguson offered the following advice to Navy Reserve Sailors in the early parts of their careers:

"Be proud of what you do! The Navy cannot do its job without the Navy Reserve. Take care of the person on either side of you and the person in the middle, and lean on each other. Also, listen to your Chiefs, whether you are junior enlisted or an officer."




We've always been  
**one hundred percent**  
committed to our Sailors.

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# FIREWORKS SAFETY



Never use fireworks while impaired by drugs or alcohol.

Anyone near fireworks should wear protective eyewear.

Never hold lit fireworks in your hands.

Never light fireworks indoors.

Only use away from people, houses, and anything flammable.

Never point or throw fireworks at another person.

Only light one at a time. Maintain a safe distance after.

Never ignite fireworks in a container.

Do not try to re-light or handle non-working fireworks.

Soak both spent and unused fireworks in water for a few hours before discarding.

Keep bucket of water nearby to extinguish fireworks that don't go off or in case of fire.

Never allow young children to handle fireworks.

Older children should use them only under adult supervision.

Never use illegal fireworks.







# PHOTOS FROM THE FLEET

The Naval Service—forward deployed and capable of both rapid response and sustained operations globally—remains America’s most persistent and versatile instrument of military influence.



MU3 Samuel Deteiler  
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BU Brandt Welsh  
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SN Evan Adams  
[@USS.Chancellorsville](#)



GM3 Zachary G. Whitley  
[@ussbenfold](#)



SN Eulalio Mesa  
[@USSGeorgeHWBush](#)





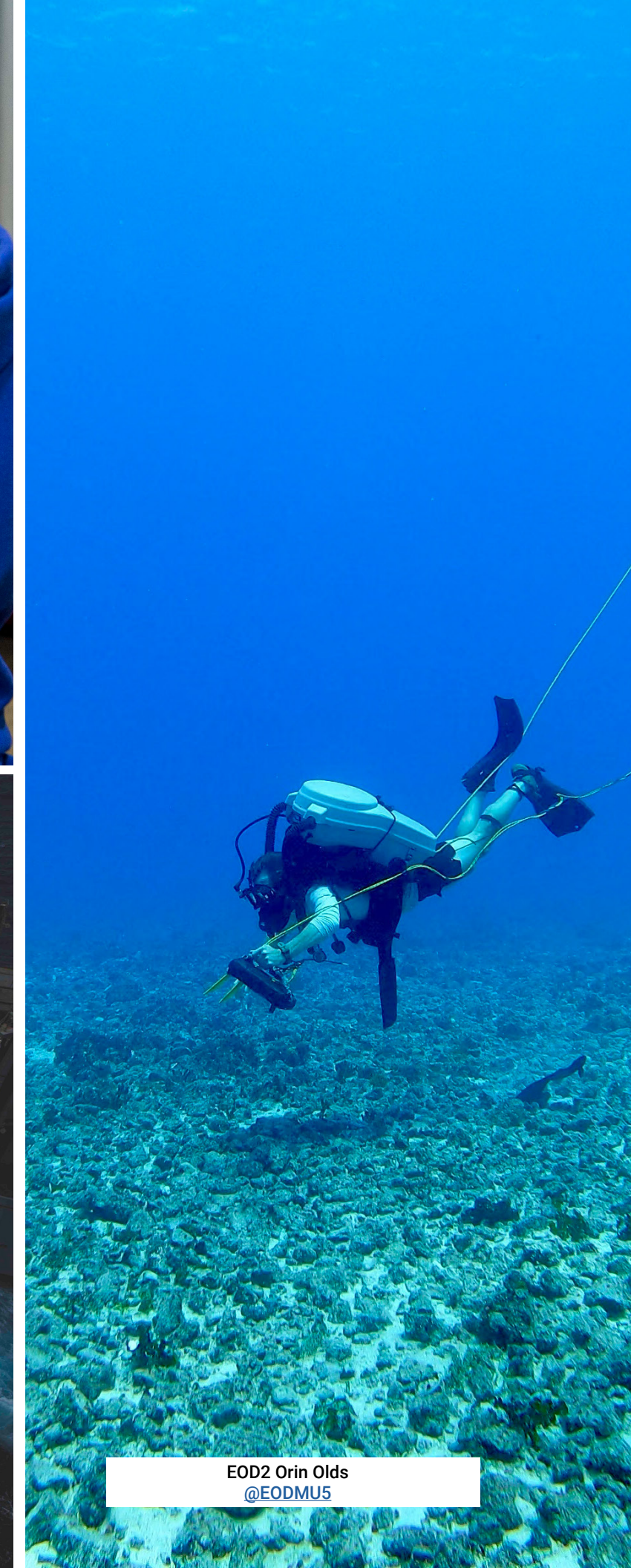
ABH1 Tu N. Chau  
[@Kearsarge](#)



NCCM Tanasha Fabian  
[@CVN79JFK](#)



ET2 Logan Pierce  
[@USSGeorgeHWBush](#)



EOD2 Orin Olds  
[@EODMU5](#)



# UNDEFEATED, THIS FLAG WILL FLY: SEAMAN TACKLED PTSD TO MAKE MASTER CHIEF

From Petty Officer 2nd Class William Sykes



The terrorist attack that struck USS Cole (DDG 67) on the morning of Oct. 12, 2000 left a lasting impact on the crew. They experienced arduous conditions that many Sailors train for, but few will ever see.

Master Chief Information Systems Technician (IT) Amaury Ponciano, from Union City, N.J., was a Seaman at his first command, aboard Cole, during the sneak attack. The crew saved the ship, but lost 17 Sailors including a few who Ponciano considered good friends. The events of that day, left him with Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); but his diagnosis did not prevent him from leading a successful career in the Navy. After 22 years of honorable service, Ponciano was promoted to the Navy's most senior enlisted rank – master chief petty officer. Only one percent of the force holds the distinction.

He was pinned by his daughter Belen Ponciano, Master Chief Information Systems Technician Dave Berrien and Master Chief Fire Controlman Korey Jones during a ceremony on May 23, 2022.

"[Healing] was difficult because you have to understand yourself and that takes time," explained Ponciano when talking about his PTSD. "The first years were a struggle. I broke a lot of relationships, with both partners and friends, because my anger would get the best of me. The littlest things would trigger me to no end. Unfortunately I didn't know how to deal with that."

In the days following the attack, in the midst of ongoing damage control efforts, maintaining the physical security of the ship and honoring the fallen; Ponciano found

inspiration from the Chiefs Mess and the daily raising of the American flag.

"There were things that we young Sailors didn't understand ... like the Chiefs Mess making us hold colors. It was 120 degrees in Yemen and after all that had happened, it's the last thing you are thinking about," said Ponciano. "The way a chief broke it down to me stays with me 'til this day. He said it was to show them that we haven't been defeated. That this flag will fly."

The leadership of USS Cole mandated mental health resources for the crew once the ship returned to the United States a month later. As a Seaman, the mandate provided relief from the stigma Ponciano felt in seeking help. His PTSD diagnosis allowed him to name his trauma and deal with it. Through counseling, he learned to manage his emotions and recognize when he needed to employ coping strategies. He credits the support of his leadership, friends, family and mental health coaching as contributors to his success.

"I was extremely head strong," said Ponciano. "I didn't connect my anger to the PTSD. I remember going to a counselor after being stationed in Bahrain and she would make me tell the story every single time I saw her. I had to learn to express it. To let whatever anger I felt about the story ... to let it out."

According to multiple military studies, stigma remains a barrier to seeking mental healthcare. Reasons range from concerns regarding how leadership and peers will react, to fear of losing their security clearance. ITs, like Ponciano, manage complex network computer systems to

ensure communication across the Fleet to support mission completion. The career field requires Sailors to hold security clearances to access information and equipment to properly operate the network. Therefore, they undergo multiple background investigations throughout their careers.

"We get the question a lot about PTSD. 'Is having a diagnosis of PTSD going to impact my clearance ... or ruin my chances at getting a clearance?,'" said Dr. Elisabeth Jean-Jacques, staff Psychologist at the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency (DCSA) – the Defense organization responsible for adjudicating security clearances. "There is no specific medical diagnosis that is automatically disqualifying." She also said PTSD is not a mandatory condition to report during the security clearance process.

"If there is a myth out there that: 'If I go to behavioral health [services] it will be a career killer,' ... it's to the contrary; we at adjudications very much see participating in treatment as a favorable thing," said Dr. Michael Priester, chief psychologist at DSCA. Instead, DSCA adjudicators look for behaviors of concern.

"That can be things like risk for violence, erratic behaviors, or a tendency to not be truthful in a characterological, rather than incident specific, way," said Priester. "The kinds of things that alleviate concerns with psychological conditions is when someone has sought treatment ... and certainly if they complied with treatment."

"I am proof. Look at me now," said Ponciano. "I am a master chief."

Oct. 12, 2000 was just another day for the crew of the Cole. The ship had pulled into Aden, Yemen to refuel. Two al-Qaeda terrorists traveling in an inflatable speedboat, detonated a bomb alongside the ship, blowing a 40-foot wide hole in the hull. At the time, Ponciano was in line for chow.

"The XO [Executive Officer] came over the 1MC and said that we were refueling faster than expected so we were going to start early chow and then get underway," said Ponciano. "They then called early chow and Seaman [Timothy] Gauna and Seaman [Craig] Wibberley were saying, 'Hey, let's go to the front of the line and say we have the next watch.' I remember it was like yesterday ... saying no one would believe ITs had the next watch so I stayed behind."

Minutes later, there was a loud blast. The ship shuddered. The crew quickly moved throughout the ship to report to their battle stations, otherwise known as general quarters.

"From the recollections of other people, the ship actually came up out of the water and came back down," said Ponciano. "As people were coming from the [direction of the] loud explosion and the impact, you could see the smoke. The XO was coming down the passageway telling everyone to go to their GQ [General Quarters] stations; that we've been hit. When I reached my repair locker, there was an officer there directing people to go to the aft repair locker. During all this running, everyone was setting Zebra. We set zebra in less than four minutes, much better compared to what we were doing during the drills, saving a ton of lives."





As Ponciano made his way to the aft repair lockers, he wondered about the other ITs and Sailors he knew. Being on a destroyer with 330 people, he said he did not know every person on the ship, but he knew their names and faces. As he made his way through the mess decks, he came across a covered body.

"I lifted the blanket and I couldn't recognize the body because it had metal throughout but you could still see the name tag. It was Signalman [Cherone] Gunn. He was one of the guys I used to hang out with when we went on liberty. That's when it hit me. Seeing that, I just got on my knees and started crying. I just kept crying. I don't remember who it was, but somebody tapped me on the back and grabbed me and said, 'He's gone. We need to save the ship.' I snapped back to reality. If I wanted to get back ... I needed to make sure that we didn't sink and stayed alive."

When Ponciano was being recruited into the Navy, he wanted to be a chief because he thought the uniform looked good. His admiration swelled after he witnessed the actions and leadership of the chiefs onboard Cole.

"I saw the empowerment they had, and put into other people. Most of what happened at the time was directed by the chiefs. I always looked up to that."

He witnessed the ability of chief petty officers to achieve results under any circumstance.

"Talking to the chiefs now, they said they cried too, that they were nervous, but I never saw that," said Ponciano. "You only saw them giving direction and being part of the team. The BMC [chief boatswain mate] – with a broken leg – donned firefighting equipment and was rescuing people and saving lives. I couldn't even tell he was hurt."

The leadership and commitment of chiefs encouraged Ponciano to always strive to be a better person. As Ponciano moved through the ranks and served at different commands, ashore and afloat, he realized there was a piece of him he wanted to be better. As a 1st Class Petty Officer, Ponciano volunteered to serve onboard a destroyer, the same class of ship as USS Cole, to face his fear and ensure he could lead through remnants of the trauma.

"Every year, we had an anniversary for the Cole and I literally would not go aboard. I would stay on the pier. Even

when she came back after the very first deployment after being repaired, I waited on the pier. I just couldn't go onboard. One of the things a counselor said over the years is that I had to face my fears. She didn't think that I would take actual orders to do it, but she said I had to face my fears and I dove right in."

The PTSD diagnosis did not define Ponciano. He leaned on his professional skills and experiences, family, and mental health coaching to seize success. After 11 years, he was promoted to chief petty officer and served another two years onboard his second destroyer, USS Forrest Sherman (DDG 98).

"I had the tools I needed to deal with anything that came my way," said Ponciano.

Ponciano says that his mother, Ursula Colon, is his inspiration and his children are his motivation to be the best version of himself, and to expect the same from others.

"As a leader, I'm tough, I'm very demanding, but I will give you the same. I won't ask you to do anything that I'm not willing to do myself or haven't done," said Ponciano. "I get that from her. She didn't graduate from college and barely finished high school but she wouldn't allow me to just do that. She wanted more for me. That's what I try to do for my Sailors. We all have a different 100 percent, and I will try to get them to their 100 percent."

"She's my inspiration. From being a single parent for a period of time, to coming to the United States without being able to speak any English ... she gave me and my brother everything we needed and then some. I have it easy compared to the things that she's gone through. To this day, anything and everything I do, I do it for her and my children."

Inspiration from his mother, the Chiefs Mess and mental health counselors enabled Master Chief Ponciano to serve in the United States Navy for 22 years with PTSD, climbing to the highest ranks. His advice to Sailors: "Know yourself, and trust those who know you and care about you." Today, at U.S. Fleet Cyber Command, Ponciano leads Sailors who work on the leading edge of cyberspace – defending the nation against foreign adversaries, unaffiliated hackers and terrorists.

**YOU ARE NOT ALONE.**

**IT'S YOUR CALL. REACH OUT.**



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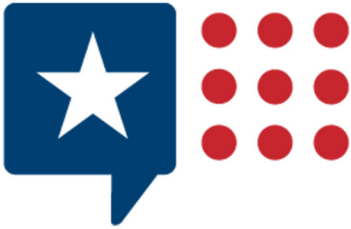
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