

FIVE STAR

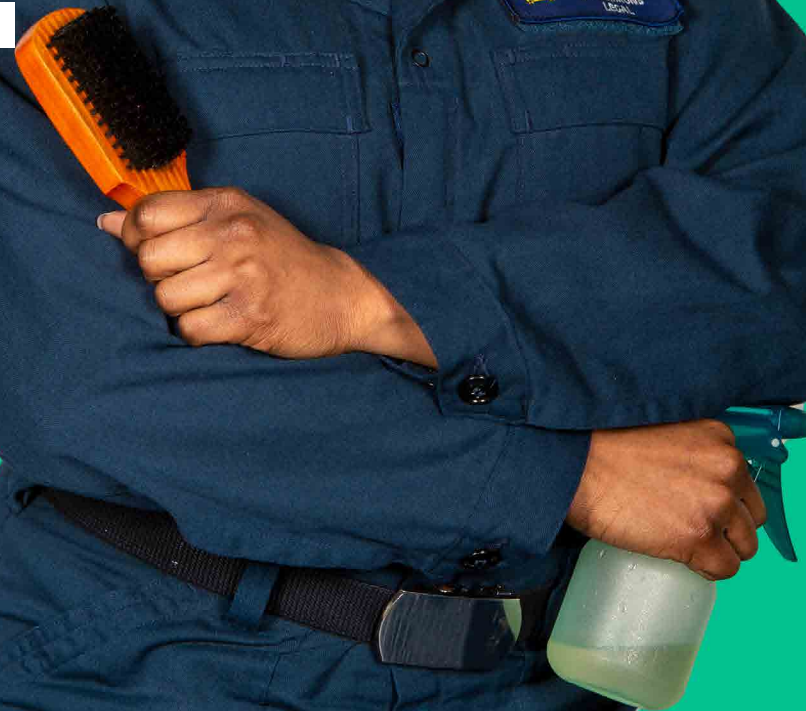
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**IN THIS
— EDITION**

**HAIR TO
SERVE**

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"It's important, as a black woman, to maintain my hair in regulations while being able to wear some of my natural hairstyles."



STORY | PHOTOS BY MC3 ASHEKA LAWRENCE-REID

The Navy began issuing service-wide regulations about grooming in 1841.

Celebrating over a century of growth in Naval grooming standards.

The recent change to the Naval Grooming Instructions has been revolutionary for Sailors across the Navy. The new NAVPERS 15665I instructions have immensely relaxed to allow room for Sailors with varied hair textures to stay within regulations. Now, Sailors are authorized to wear rolls, locks, and ponytail styles. This change is particularly beneficial to the African American/Black community within the Navy. They are now allowed to wear styles that make their hair more manageable while performing their duties.

During the month of February, the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier, USS Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN 69) team has been celebrating black history. This small change in the Navy's regulations create new cause for celebration.

Senior Chief Information Systems Technician Kadesha Perry, a Sailor aboard Ike, recollects how difficult it was to maintain the regulations in her earlier years in the military.

Before Perry had dreadlocks, she said she wore her natural hair. "It was really hard to keep it in regulations when I was in boot camp because it got so puffy," she says.

Perry says she made the decision to dread lock her hair, which was against the past regulations, to make her hair more manageable. Perry admits that she openly defied the grooming standards of the Navy by having dreadlocks and then dyeing them red.

"I refused to change my hair color from red to anything else," said Perry. "It wasn't a garish red. But it was a color that could be seen."

After having "illegal locks" for the first half of her career, Perry says she came to a turning point on her second day at a new command.

"I met this Master Chief LSCM, retired, Gina Scott on the warship USS George W. Bush [CVN 77]," Perry said. "When I got on there, I had my red dreadlocks. She called me to her office and she said to me, 'What do you

want people to see when they see you?'"

Perry acknowledges that she had never considered that question before.

"I thought people saw good work," she said. "I thought they saw thoroughness. I thought they saw a young sailor who was about her business. I never thought anyone was distracted by my hair. I thought it should not matter."

She said it was the first time someone corrected her about her hair, where it made an impact.

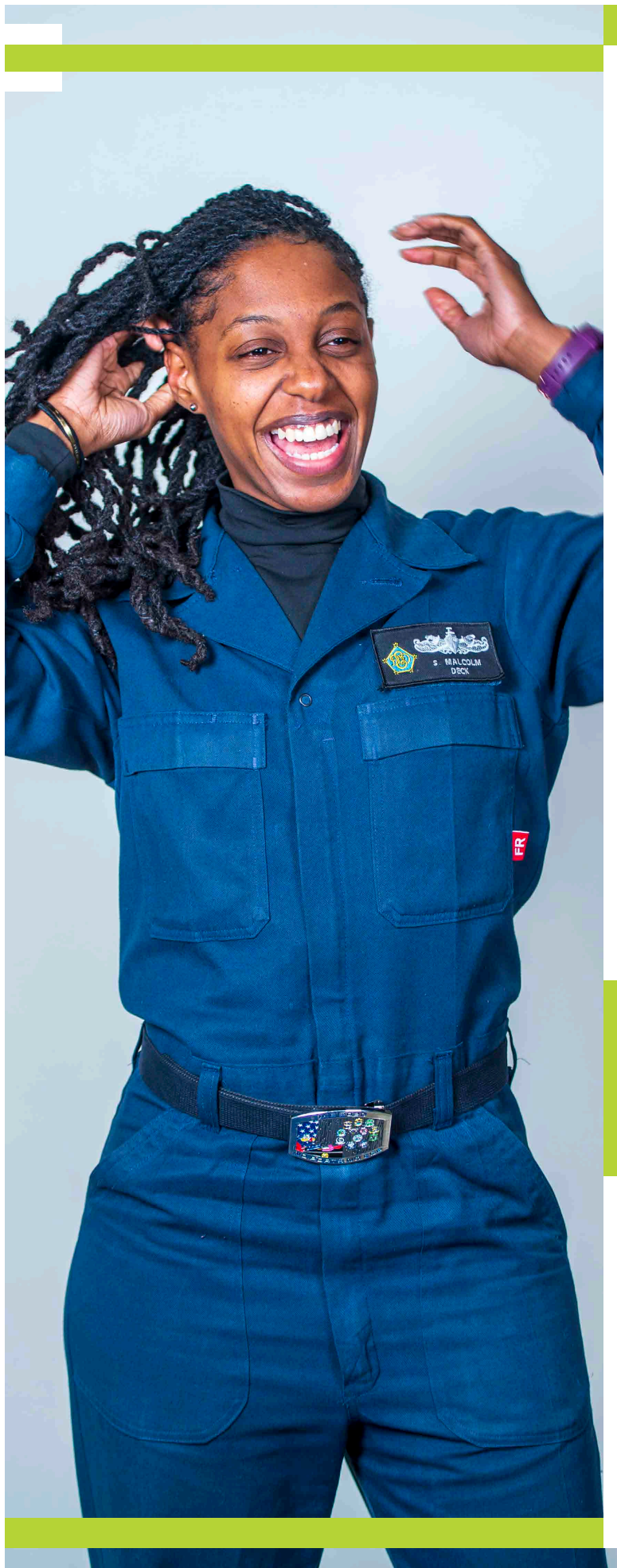
"I want them to see a woman who is about her work," Perry said. "I want them to see a person who is here to walk in God's grace and do the best I can for these Sailors and for these Sailors to believe in me. And who was I to tell them to do the right thing when there was this one thing that I would not come off of."

Perry said she had to remind herself that what she is trying to accomplish in the Navy is more important than her hair, and decided to cut it short before the new regulations came out.

She admits to being slightly regretful after being afforded the opportunity to have dread locks, however, it has not changed her mind. "I have no intention of growing back my dreadlocks," she says. "I don't want to. I rarely hustle backwards and do the same thing twice. So, I am content with my short hair."

Sailors, Perry said, have begun to create their own interpretation of the hair regulations rather than following the guidelines they are given. "I believe you can wear your crown in glory in many different ways when you are off duty," she says. "I do think though, that because you signed up to conform in a certain aspect and leave a little bit of your individualism behind, I believe it is your duty to respect your crown and get it in regulation as it is written."

The regulations, as they are now written, allow room for Sailors to simultaneously



maintain some of their individualism and their professionalism. Ensign Kenya McCarty, a Sailor of the Fighting Swordsmen (VFA 32), attached to the Ike, compared the current regulations to when she joined the Navy in 2004.

“When we entered into boot camp, they cut everyone’s hair. They gave you this lopsided bob and they also didn’t allow you to relax [straighten] it so it looked very rough and we just looked terrible for those couple of months until the end.”

McCarty said that natural hairstyles often look faddish to some people because they are not used to seeing it.

“We as a Navy have come a long way from the time you enter boot camp and they just cut your hair without asking, to allow braided hair, ponytails, natural hairstyles, and even dreadlocks,” McCarty said. “There are so many people that are happier because their particular style that they like to wear is more acceptable now. They don’t have to cover up who they are or how they feel based on the way their hair is done.”

Legalman 2nd Class Dionesha Simmons has maintained her natural hair in the Navy for 8 years.

“Being in the Navy as a naturalist is harder because there are certain styles that can only be worn in civilian status,” said Simmons.

However, Simmons said that the Navy is moving in the right direction with the regulation change.

She said the old regulations that once restricted female Sailor’s relationships with their hair, have changed to help many females embrace their natural hair.

“It’s important, as a black woman, to maintain my hair in regulations while being able to wear some of my natural hairstyles, because I still want to look professional and be taken seriously, regardless the status of my hair,” she says.

Simmons asserts that she prides herself in being a professional and takes comfort in the fact that her natural hair can be accepted as professional in its natural state.

“When I wear my hair in an afro that’s in regulations, you know I’m professional,” she said. “I just want all females, not just black women, to embrace their hair. Still be professional, but take care of your crown.”

