

Great Lakes Bulletin

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Recruit Training Command Holds Change of Command Ceremony

Story by Susan Martin, U.S. Navy Recruit Training Command



Capt. Kenneth J. Froberg relieved Capt. Kertreck V. Brooks as commanding officer of Recruit Training Command (RTC) during a change-of-command ceremony July 18, at Midway Ceremonial Drill Hall.

Brooks, a native of Mount Pleasant, Texas, assumed command in July 2022. Numerous training improvements, policies, and programs were implemented under Brooks' term to create a lasting culture of trust and respect. Many efforts he championed and initiated will come to fruition well into Froberg's tenure.

During his tenure, Brooks was responsible for ensuring the beginning of the Future

Sailor Preparatory Course, a physical fitness training pipeline to help potential recruits meet or exceed Navy accession standards.

"To date, we've had about an 85 percent success rate with those meeting the body composition standard to start boot camp as a recruit. I couldn't be more proud of their success," said Brooks.

Additionally, he oversaw restoration of the recruit naturalization program, which was halted in 2017 due to a change in Department of Defense policy. The program expedites citizenship for qualified recruits, which allows expedited naturalization for aliens and non-citizen nationals serving in an active-status.



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Brooks was witness to 586 recruits and Sailors become naturalized citizens.

He implemented the return of DC (Damage Control) Olympics, formerly known as Captain's Cup, a fun, friendly athletic competition for recruit divisions prior to their graduation that promotes teamwork and camaraderie. The weekly event had been on hiatus since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020.

He also helped implement a process to allow all recruits who failed the run portion of their Official Physical Fitness Assessment (PFA) the opportunity to complete their PFA using an alternate cardio option. This change allowed 1,366 recruits to continue their Navy journey as Sailors and they will help fill some of the current gaps the Navy has across the fleet.

Another program returning from hiatus was the Thanksgiving and Christmas Adopt-A-Sailor, which offers senior recruit divisions the opportunity to spend the holiday off base.

"I was at the command on both Thanksgiving and Christmas talking to all of the recruits that were able to go out in town for the day to be hosted by the many great organizations that adopted them," said Brooks.

"They were very excited to have some time away from boot camp for a day to enjoy some great food and fellowship."

Most recently, Brooks said hosting actor Gary Sinise and the Lieutenant Dan Band for a concert for 4,7000 recruits on the 4th of July weekend was a highlight of his tour. The Gary Sinise Foundation Honors America's veterans, first responders and their families.

"As I've talked to recruits in the weeks after the concert, many have thanked me for allowing them to attend the concert and they've shared how much fun they had on that day," he said.

Brooks expressed how it is bittersweet for him to leave RTC a second time.

"When I left RTC in June 2015, after having served as the executive officer for 28 months, I often told people that nothing else I'd ever do in the Navy would top being the XO of RTC," said Brooks. "The past 13 months has truly been the pinnacle of my nearly 28-year career in the Navy and I'm very fortunate to have had the opportunity for a second major command assignment as a captain."

Capt. Craig T. Mattingly, commander, Naval Service Training Command (NSTC), was the guest speaker and presiding officer for the ceremony and expressed his gratitude for the job done by Brooks.

"Kertreck inherited a command that was undergoing a large amount of change. Our Navy had entered an increasingly challenging recruiting environment. We needed every Sailor that shipped to RTC out in the fleet and we had to figure out creative ways to reduce attrition that didn't sacrifice any quality of those recruits. Kertreck and his team were at the forefront of those efforts."

He also highlighted the hard work of the Sailors and civilians he was able to lead during his time as commanding officer.

Mattingly welcomed Froberg to the NSTC family and to RTC and spoke about his preparations to take command and the phenomenal opportunities at RTC.

"You are the right person at the right time to lead RTC," said Mattingly. "I look forward to getting to know you and your wife, Sarah, better and all that you and your team will accomplish. I have a high degree of confidence that we have found the right leader for the job."

Froberg, a native of Rhode Island, previously served as the U.S. Navy liaison to the Royal Navy in London and is now ready to lead RTC.

"This is a daunting task and responsibility, but one I accept humbly with a vision of building a better tomorrow with you all," said Froberg. "RTC is not just about training recruits, but also about mentoring staff to mature into the leaders who will be charged with maintaining the peace through strength, our world so desperately needs. "We are tasked with providing the very best leaders and Sailors, and we will redefine through practice, engagement, and policy, our critical role in mentoring the fleet today, tomorrow, and into the future."

Brooks, who next heads to Washington D.C. to become the Deputy Director of MyNavy HR Transformation with the Enterprise Support Organization, expressed

he'll miss informing Sailors of their advancements, among other aspects.

"It was always a range of emotions sharing this information from happy tears to screaming, and even disbelief at times," he said. "I'll also miss my Friday afternoon walkabout visiting ships to talk to staff and recruits. This is how I was able to best connect with the staff and also give recruits an opportunity to meet and

talk to their CO in person. We have some of the best and Sailors and civilians in the Navy at RTC and I will always appreciate and cherish the opportunity I had to lead this great team. The Navy made an excellent choice in selecting Capt. Froberg for this assignment, and I'm very confident he will continue to lead the RTC team to even greater success."

SECNAV Outlines Naval Education Strategy, Prepares DON to Meet Evolving Warfighting Challenges

Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro released his Naval Education Strategy (NES) today, which provides guidance to modernize naval education to meet our Nation's security needs. The strategy provides the framework for the Department of the Navy (DON) to deliver more effective, efficient, and integrated naval education to the total force in support of President Biden's national security priorities and the National Defense Strategy (NDS).

"Education is a critical warfighting enabler," said Secretary Del Toro. "We will continue to strengthen our Department's culture, policies, processes, talent management, and investments to reflect education's key role in force development."

Secretary Del Toro outlined the NES during remarks at the Naval War College change of command ceremony, where Rear Adm. Peter A. Garvin relieved Rear Adm. Shoshana Chatfield as President.

"Shoshana, I cannot thank you, and your husband, David, enough for your tireless efforts these past four years as you both dedicated your time and energy to supporting our War College family. The War College is a key component to developing our warfighters' intellectual edge to achieve warfighting advantage," said Secretary Del Toro.

The Naval War College is part of the Naval University System (NUS), which is the primary way that the DON delivers education to its force. Other DON academic degree granting

institutions include the United States Naval Academy (USNA), Marine Corps University, Naval Postgraduate School (NPS), and the United States Naval Community College (USNCC).

The Naval Education Enterprise (NEE) consists of the NUS, Naval Reserve Officers' Training Corps, Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps; Flag Officer, General Officer, and executive education programs; Voluntary Education/Tuition Assistance (TA) programs, and other DON-funded scholarship, fellowship, and graduate education programs.

The DON uses a combination of these programs and education delivery methods to form a continuum of learning that addresses the Service's unique requirements, and addresses the dynamic security environment's complex issues within curricula.

The NES provides a framework to prioritize and invest in these programs and institutions.

"Our naval education institutions are the primary way that we develop our warfighters' intellectual edge to achieve warfighting advantage. We must increase investments in our education institutions and training programs to ensure they fulfill that responsibility," said Secretary Del Toro.

Sailors, Marines, and DON civilians at all levels are expected to contribute to the Department's culture of continuous learning, embrace opportunities to develop professionally, and seek opportunities to improve our combat readiness, Secretary Del Toro added.

Department of Navy Expands Support Services for Sexual Harassment

Secretary of the Navy (SECNAV) Carlos Del Toro signed a new policy, June 9, expanding available support services for victims of sexual harassment.

Effective immediately, uniformed military personnel who experience sexual harassment are eligible to receive the range of support options available to victims of sexual assault through the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) Program. The new policy implements requirements of the FY 2022 National Defense Authorization Act and Independent Review Commission recommendations.

"This policy reflects the Department's commitment to creating a culture of dignity and respect, and strengthening victim support services," said Secretary Del Toro. "We take victims' experiences seriously, and we are committed to creating an environment where victims of sexual harassment are heard, validated, and feel safe to report their experience and receive supportive services." Victims of sexual harassment now have the option to receive crisis intervention, safety assessments, counseling resources,

victim advocacy support and to discuss reporting options with SAPR personnel.

"Preventing sexual harassment within an organization requires a comprehensive and multifaceted approach," said Andrea N. Goldstein, acting director, DON Office of Force Resiliency. "We will continue to implement policies and procedures that clearly define sexual harassment, improve victim response, and educate members on the importance of bystander intervention, to reduce the likelihood of sexual harassment occurring."

The policy clarifies that while victims of sexual harassment may receive victim support services from SAPR Program Office, the Military Equal Opportunity (MEO) Program will continue to process and track military sexual harassment complaints. Additionally, in accordance with the DON No Wrong Door policy, a victim of sexual harassment may contact any victim care and support office to receive services or, with the victim's permission, receive a warm hand-off to the appropriate service provider.



Distinguished Visitor Program Offers Pride, Connection, and Unique Experiences for District 187 Superintendent

Story by MCI Joseph Montemarano, Naval Station Great Lakes Public Affairs

It is not often one is able to see first-hand the effect that their time with someone has caused but, unexpectedly, that is just what happened to Dr. John P. Price earlier this summer. As the superintendent for North Chicago District 187, Price had the unique opportunity to visit the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71) on June 5, 2023 in San Diego, as a part of the US Navy Distinguished Visitor Program. As a Distinguished Visitor, Price experienced a first-hand look at what life aboard an aircraft carrier is really like.

Price remarked “I am not sure who nominated me for the program, but I am very grateful for the opportunity and thankful to the person/s who did...”.

The Roosevelt and her embarked Carrier Air Wing aircraft serve as outstanding instruments of peace. Anytime and anywhere TR reports for duty, she brings 4.5 acres of sovereign U.S. territory and 97,000 tons of diplomacy. With a crew of 5,500 Sailors, the ship is similar to a floating city, including an ATM, laundry facilities, a post office, shopping facilities, and even a barber shop.

Price spent 24 hours aboard the Roosevelt and was able to experience multiple locations within the ship – including navigation, flight and air control, deck control, and was even able to be on the deck to observe flight operations up close. But the experience didn’t stop there, he received a complete overview of the ship’s operations including aircraft maintenance and repair, ordnance preparation, and maintenance and operation of the arresting cables for the ship. During his visit, Price was able to truly experience all that carrier life has to offer, dining in the enlisted sailor’s mess, the Chiefs’ mess, and even the officers’ ward room.

While the entire experience was an amazing opportunity for

4 Price, some of his highlights were a little closer to home.

While aboard, Price was able to reconnect with former students and Sailors whom have not only been a part of his North Chicago Community High School (NCCHS) NJROTC program, but have passed through the walls of Naval Station Great Lakes. While on his visit, a 2022 graduate of his NJROTC program, Seaman Muhica recognized the logo on his shirt and called out to him.

“To see Seaman Muhica on board and thriving there on the TR was a real pleasure. Our students are capable of great things, and she chose the Navy as her first step after graduation. It was gratifying to see her and get the chance to talk to her. North Chicago plays an important role in the Navy family. We prepare our graduates for service, and we host [Recruit Training Command] RTC where the Navy prepares recruits to be Sailors ... It was humbling to really feel the role and the importance of the role that our community plays in preparing Sailors.”

Price felt it was powerful for him to be able to connect with one of his graduates in the middle of a vast ocean on board an enormous ship. He was even able to bring a little bit of NCCHS to the ship as well. Price presented the triad of the ship with hats and shirts from the NJROTC group as well as a flag of their unit. Experiencing life at sea and seeing his own graduates only strengthened his support of the US Navy. Price stated “the Navy provides an opportunity for young people to experience real responsibility, a great deal of independence, and travel far from home.” and that all of the Sailors he met while on board were highly skilled and committed people, striving for personal improvement. He also highly recommends for other educators to take part in a similar experience! The experience not only gave him insight into the life of sailors underway, but filled him with a sense of the importance of his school district’s mission to serve not only Navy families, but all military children while they are in North Chicago.

Department of Navy Implements Brandon Act

Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro directed the immediate implementation of the Brandon Act on Tuesday, July 11, in alignment with Department of Defense Directive-type Memorandum 23-005, "Self-Initiated Referral Process for Mental Health Evaluations of Service Members."

The Brandon Act honors the life of Petty Officer Third Class Brandon Caserta by allowing service members to seek help confidentially for any reason, at any time, and in any environment, thereby reducing the stigma associated with seeking mental health care.

The directive underscores the critical role of engaged leadership in prioritizing, normalizing, and promoting mental health. It charges commanding officers and supervisors to:

- Ensure service members understand the procedures to request a referral for a mental health evaluation (MHE);
- Ensure service members who request a MHE are referred to a provider as soon as practicable;
- Treat referrals for MHEs in a manner similar to referrals for other medical services, to the maximum extent practicable;
- Maintain privacy protections and reduce stigma by not requesting information from mental health providers regarding the results of the MHE except for information that may be disclosed to a command in accordance with DTM 23-005; and
- Receive sufficient training to recognize personnel who may require MHEs based on behaviors that indicate the individual may be an imminent danger to self.

"High-performing teams start with leaders who model trust, connection, respect, and teamwork," said Del Toro. "Leaders have a tremendous impact on their followers; sharing positive experiences with the behavioral health system, maintaining the privacy and confidentiality for team members who seek care, and promoting the process for self-referrals can significantly reduce service member concerns around seeking help."

Implementation of the Brandon Act empowers Sailors and Marines to directly seek mental health services as desired from various medical and nonmedical mental health resources.

"Seeking help is a sign of strength," said Capt. Christine O'Connell, acting director, Department of the Navy Office of Force Resiliency. "It requires courage, vulnerability, and a deep understanding of our own humanity. It is a powerful act that fosters connection and ultimately propels us toward personal and collective growth."

Mental health services are available at military medical treatment facilities, within operational units, and virtually. Non-medical mental health resources are available through:

- Fleet and Family Support Centers
- Marine Corps Community Services
- Chaplains
- Military and Family Life Counselors
- Deployment Resiliency Counselors

"Maintaining naval superiority requires leaders to establish psychologically safe environments, as well as foster team members who promote each other's well-being and the personal self-awareness to know when they need increased support," said Del Toro. "We have a duty to normalize mental health conversations and focus on mental fitness with the same determination we use to foster physical health."

Leaders are encouraged to utilize the Navy's Mental Health Playbook. Rolled out in February 2023, the playbook is designed to assist in preventing, mitigating, and addressing mental health issues within their commands.

The DON also provides a comprehensive Civilian Employee Assistance Program (DONCEAP), which provides work-life resources for childcare, finances, eldercare, identity theft, legal services, alcohol and substance abuse, and more. Services are offered at no charge and are confidential within the limits of the law.



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DOD Officials Highlight Risks to Force Posed by Senate Nomination Hold

Story by Joseph Clark, DOD News

Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III underscored the risks to national security posed by the ongoing blanket hold on Senate confirmations for hundreds of military nominees in a brief phone call today with Sen. Tommy Tuberville of Alabama.

During the conversation, which took place at the secretary's request, Austin explained the impact the lawmaker's holds are having on military readiness and uncertainty within the force, Department of Defense Press Secretary Air Force Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder said during a briefing at the Pentagon.

"This conversation also follows a call initiated by Secretary Austin earlier this year, as well as ongoing engagement at the staff level," Ryder said. "The two did agree to speak again next week."

Tuberville has placed a hold on Senate confirmation for hundreds of general and flag officers throughout the DOD over disagreements with the Pentagon on its uncovered reproductive health policy.

As many as 265 general and flag officer nominations have been delayed in the Senate as a result of the hold.

Among those general officers pending the Senate's confirmation, is Marine Corps Gen. Eric M. Smith, who earlier this week took over as acting Commandant of the Marine Corps.

Smith replaces Marine Corps Gen. David H. Berger who relinquished his position after four years of serving as Commandant.

The last time the Marine Corps had an acting commandant was more than a century ago, when Col. William Biddle served as in acting capacity from Dec. 1, 1910, to Feb. 2, 1911.

Austin underscored the negative impacts further delays in confirming the next commandant would have on Marine Corps and on national security during the Berger's relinquishment of command ceremony on Monday.

"Smooth and timely transitions of confirmed leadership are central to the defense of the United States and to the full strength of the most powerful fighting force in history," Austin said.

"We have a sacred duty to do right by those who volunteer to wear the cloth of our nation," he said.

Should the hold remain in place, as many as 650 critical leadership positions could be vacant by year's end, Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh said during a briefing earlier this week. In an interview with Fox News' Neil Cavuto following today's call between Austin and Tuberville, Singh said the impact to military readiness caused by the holds comes at a critical time.

As the U.S. faces the growing pacing challenge posed by China and responds to Russia's ongoing assault on Ukraine, "we need our best team on the field," she said.

"These are our nominees who have incredibly important jobs all around the world, who are working with our partners and allies," Singh said. "And it sends a message to our adversaries."

Singh said Pentagon officials are hopeful that their ongoing engagement with Tuberville continues and encourages the Senator to lift his hold.

She added that DOD policy surrounding uncovered reproductive care has not changed, and that the Pentagon is not "making concessions or changing our policy" in light discussions over the Senate holds.

"Our policy is very clear, we're trying to ensure equity across the service to all of our service members who live in states that they have the same rights as service members that live in other states," she said in an interview with NBC's Chuck Todd.

"This is not a political fight," she added. "This is about our general and flag officers, our nominees — from four-star generals down to one-star generals — who deserve to be in the positions that they have been selected in."

DOD Destroys Last Chemical Weapons in Arsenal

Story by Jim Garamone, DOD News

Defense Department employees made history Friday by destroying the last chemical weapon in the U.S. military arsenal at Blue Grass Army Depot, Kentucky.

The destruction ended decades of effort to eliminate chemical weapons, said Douglas Bush, assistant secretary of the army for acquisition, logistics and technology, during a Pentagon news conference today.

"The U.S.'s destruction of declared chemical weapons stockpiles in a safe, secure and environmentally responsible manner was a difficult task, requiring many years to complete," he said.

The Senate ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention in 1997, and DOD employees began the process of safely demilitarizing the weapons.

"Through last Friday, the United States destroyed over 30,000 metric tons of declared chemical agent contained in nearly 3.5 million chemical munitions, over 22,500 one-ton containers containing chemical agent, and over 50,500 bottles and containers containing chemical agent," said Kingston Reif, deputy assistant secretary of defense for threat reduction and arms control.

Nearly 90 percent of the weapons were eliminated by 2012. The last 10 percent was a greater challenge involving a complicated approach of neutralizing these chemicals. The last mustard gas munition was destroyed last month at the Army's Pueblo Chemical Depot in Colorado; Blue Grass destroyed the last missile loaded with Sarin nerve agent last week.

"This is an important moment — not only for the United States, but also the entire world," said Mallory Stewart, assistant secretary of state for the bureau of arms control, verification and compliance. "This achievement is indicative of the important role that international cooperation and transparency play in arms control and disarmament."

The destruction cements U.S. compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention by the Sept. 30 deadline. This is important, Reif said, "for the viability of the convention and for our moral and diplomatic leadership. The most important action the United States can take to contribute to a world free of chemical weapons and lead by example is to follow through on our own treaty commitments. With verifiable completion of destruction

operations, last week, we have done just that.”

Reif praised Michael Abaie, the program executive officer of the Army’s Assembled Chemical Weapons Alternatives, who led the team of thousands of DOD civilians and contractors in the \$13.5 billion effort. He said when Abaie took over the program in 2018, it was uncertain whether the deadline could be met. Abaie worked with Congress, the Environmental Protection Agency, state offices, the local communities, scientists and others to devise safe and efficient means of destroying the chemicals.

“The program’s turnaround is a major acquisition success story,” Reif said. It is “defined by proactive risk management, resourceful problem solving and technological innovation. And

it has been a team effort. The completion of the mission means that the significant resources spent on demilitarization can be redirected to support other high priority department missions.” Two years of efforts remain to ensure the facilities used are safe before turning out the lights. Officials said that will cost another \$2.5 billion.

DOD officials also worked with other nations to help them destroy chemical weapons, including Russia, Syria, Albania and Libya. Still, there are questions about whether Russia and Syria have destroyed all their chemical weapons as both nations have used them against their own people, Stewart said.



American Bar Association Honors Navy Boot Camp Naturalization Program

Story by LTJG Nicholas Lingo, U.S. Navy Recruit Training Command

The American Bar Association, the Standing Committee on Legal Assistance for Military Personnel presented the Legal Assistance Distinguished Service Award to Region Legal Service Office Midwest (RLSO), Recruit Training Command (RTC), and United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Chicago Field Office for outstanding contributions to legal assistance for military personnel, their families and other eligible persons.

The presentation was held July 13, at RTC’s Chapel during a bi-monthly naturalization ceremony where 50 recruits and three Sailors in “A” School from 24 countries, spanning five continents were naturalized.

“The naturalization program at RTC is a highly functioning inter-agency effort to identify Recruits who desire US citizenship, and then shepherd them through the process as efficiently as possible so that they can graduate from boot camp ready to train and deploy as Americans,” said Executive Officer of Region Legal Service Office Midwest Cmdr. Craig Thedwall.

USCIS and RLSO work with RTC to expedite citizenship for U.S. Navy recruits who are qualified under the Immigration & National Act, which allows expedited naturalization for aliens and non-citizen nationals serving in an active-duty status.

“RTC and USCIS are the best possible partners, because each one understands their mission and work in concert to get a lot of work done on a short timeframe,” added Thedwall.

When a recruit’s application for naturalization is granted, RTC’s naturalization team coordinates a ceremony with USCIS and the

District Court of Illinois. From start to finish the process takes about eight weeks. RTC typically holds two of these ceremonies a month. The execution of this feat is reliant on the RTC naturalization team which is made of all volunteers who take on this added responsibility on top of their normal duties.

“I am so pleased for the recognition of these Sailors for their tireless efforts to see these recruits to the finish line,” said the Commanding Officer of Recruit Training Command Capt. Kertreck Brooks. “This award is an amazing way to recognize these Sailors who volunteer their time, in an already packed work schedule here at Recruit Training Command, that all their hard work is genuinely appreciated.”

As of March 2023, RTC naturalized more than 250 recruits and assisted more than 1,400 recruits with their N-426 and N-400 forms since the program was reinstated in October of 2021.

“We get to see firsthand the smiles and joy on the faces of these recruits and Sailors each month when they are sworn in and have the opportunity to not only walk away as United States Sailors, but also as naturalized U.S. citizens,” said Brooks.

Boot camp is approximately 10 weeks and all enlistees into the U.S. Navy begin their careers at the command. Training includes five warfighting competencies of firefighting, damage control, seamanship, watchstanding, and small arms handling and marksmanship along with physical fitness and lessons in Navy heritage and core values, Warrior Toughness, Life Skills, teamwork and discipline. More than 40,000 recruits train annually at the Navy’s only boot camp.