

Surface Warfare

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DIGITAL FEATURE



Ready: Modern Sailor Training for a Modern Global Climate

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CORONADO, Ca. (June 20, 2025) – It's 3:00 a.m. in the Red Sea. An Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer navigates steadily through the dark water. Inside the combat information center in the ship's heart, a team of enlisted and commissioned Sailors man their stations with calm, careful attention. An Operations Specialist Seaman sits at his console watching for radar contacts, ready to act if danger arises. Except, this isn't a destroyer, and this operations specialist is not in Fifth Fleet.

He is sitting in a Virtual Operator Trainer (VOT) at Surface Combat Systems Training Command (SCSTC) Great Lakes, home of operations specialist (OS) "A" school. The VOT is a simulated combat information center (CIC), and it's playing out a real-world-style scenario, allowing him to experience the sights, sounds, and timing of events as they could happen in the fleet. This is as close as it gets to being in a real CIC, and his actions could make or break the outcome of the scenario.



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Welcome to the future of U.S. Navy training. OS “A” school is one of the first schools to be officially modernized with a VOT and other updated curriculum and technology. With its modernization completed in 2022, the school has been sending trained, capable warfighters out into the fleet ready for a seamless transition into real operations thanks to Ready Relevant Learning (RRL). RRL is a fleet-wide effort to modernize accession-level in-rating trainings, such as “A” and “C” schools, for many ratings across the spectrum. This means newer technology in classrooms, virtual reality training experiences with high-fidelity graphics, and immersive real-world scenarios to get new Sailors accustomed to their roles and responsibilities. “I learned a lot about what I was going to be doing in the fleet,” said Operations Specialist 2nd Class Chance Clark, a native of Westminster, Co., about “A” school. “It was

very helpful on what to expect throughout a deployment and how to use the equipment.” Clark graduated “A” school in November 2022, just as the modernization effort received its finishing touches. After that, he reported as an Operations Specialist Seaman to the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Spruance (DDG 111), advancing to Operations Specialist 2nd Class by the time the ship deployed in 2024. By September that year, Clark found himself standing Identification Supervisor (IDS) watch as the ship navigated the Red Sea. IDS monitors air contacts, including the 7 drones and 6 missiles Spruance intercepted during its time in the region. One of those engagements was during Clark’s watch.



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“I just did what I had been taught, like muscle memory,” said Clark. “From having the experience from “A” school and that combat simulation to just doing what we do on the ship, which is train, train, train, it was pretty cool just to know that even in a high-stress scenario, I knew exactly what to do, what buttons to push to execute [the mission] at a high level.”

The vision for RRL is to take full advantage of existing and emerging technology for knowledge transfer and skill development, driving evolution in Sailor development and learning. This is meant to improve Sailor performance and enhance mission readiness by providing Sailors with the

necessary knowledge and skills to compete and win across the spectrum of conflict. According to Clark, that mission is working. He said that while the real-world experience can be frightening, his experience in the simulator gave him the confidence to know he was capable of doing what he had been taught.

The RRL program has been operational for several years as one of the three pillars of the Sailor 2025 initiative. It will continue until all impacted trainings have been successfully modernized.

Sailor 2025, which began in 2016, is the Navy's program to improve and modernize personnel management and training systems to more effectively recruit, develop, manage, reward, and retain the force of tomorrow. Its focus is on empowering Sailors, updating policies, procedures, and operating systems, and providing the right training at the right time in the right way to ensure Sailors are ready for the fleet.

Commander, Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet (CNSP), as the type commander, is responsible for the modernization of training for combat systems ratings such as OS "A" school. Other ratings in the CNSP purview include Fire Controlman, Aegis Fire Controlman, Gunner's Mate, and Interior Communications Electrician.

Chief Fire Controlman Rob Churilla is the Ready Relevant Learning Lead assigned to Commander, Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet. He believes faster and better maintenance in the fleet will be an indicator of RRL's success.

"These ratings are all very maintenance-oriented," said Churilla. "If you look at the learning objectives, it's all about maintenance. So generally, maintenance improvement would indicate improved training. Over the long term, I hope to see an increase in system availability." As RRL continues to spread through accession-level trainings, bringing modernized equipment and education methods, OS "A" school continues to be a shining example of what is to come.

Operations Specialist (OS) "A" school students man simulated Combat Information Center (CIC) watch stations in their capstone event. The students spend their final three days of OS "A" school in the Virtual Operating Trainer (VOT) that simulates the watch stations and scenarios the Sailors will encounter when they report to their first ship. Each student must pass the final scenario to graduate from "A" school.





“The OS “A” School has fully leveraged Ready Relevant Learning in the curriculum and laboratory environments,” said Chief Warrant Officer 4 Jason Fritzler, director of OS “A” school. “Our accession-level graduates learn the basics of the Combat Information Center (CIC) administration, rules of the road, and contact management in an electronic classroom setting; certify as a Voyage Management System Operator; and as a capstone event, they engage in a realistic CIC laboratory setting in our VOT. We have incorporated real-world open-source Red Sea CIC operations into the VOT and progress to General Quarters to ensure our students know what to expect when they get to their ships out in the Fleet.”

RRL directly contributes to the surface force Competitive Edge 2.0 number one line of effort, which is to develop the leader, warrior, mariner, and manager. Investing in Sailor development at the beginning of their career and giving warfighters the tools to succeed in the fleet is exactly the development of warriors and mariners that

the surface force requires. Not only that, but these Sailors will be set up for success in the fleet so they can go on to become well-developed leaders. “Overall,” said Fritzler, “the curriculum changes and updates to OS “A” school have been a success story for RRL and Sailor 2025 to get Sailors to their commands as ready to integrate as they can be.” Back in the Red Sea, this time for real, it’s September 2024 and Spruance is on the move. Clark is manning his IDS station. It is his first real deployment, but he knows the system like the back of his hand. Clark will go on to execute his duties exactly as he was trained, and Spruance will return to San Diego with a combat action ribbon and a proud crew. Clark’s experience, along with many others, are testament that a modernized surface force is a capable surface force. RRL is in full swing updating schools across the fleet, helping to produce trained, capable warfighters who are ready to fight and win at sea. ⚓



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