

This Is What a Gender-Neutral Navy Looks Like

In an effort to create a “gender neutral” environment, the U.S. Navy is reportedly planning to do away with 241 years of history and tradition, angering many current and veteran enlisted service members in the process.

As *The Navy Times* reports:

The Navy deep-sixed all of its 91 enlisted ratings titles Thursday, marking the beginning of an overhaul of the rigid career structure that has existed since the Continental Navy in a radical shift sure to reverberate through the fleet and the veteran community beyond.

Sailors will no longer be identified by their job title, say, Fire Controlman 1st Class Joe Sailor, effective immediately. Instead, that would be Petty Officer 1st Class Joe Sailor.

Officials say the controversial move will improve sailors' lives and ease their transition into the civilian workforce by broadening their skills in this tectonic shift in Navy's personnel system to redraw the traditional lines between enlisted job specialties—a massive shake-up that is only beginning. Within the next three to four years, earlier if possible, the service plans to allow sailors to retrain in related skills, expanding their worth to the Navy while reaping broader assignment opportunities as well as increased advancement changes and greater access to special pays and bonuses that come with the most critical skills.

Navy officials concede they knew the move would be controversial when they proposed it. Chief of Naval Personnel Vice Adm. Robert Burke said, “that’s going to be a large cultural change, it’s not going to happen overnight, but the

direction is to start exercising that now.”

The removal of naval occupational ratings doesn’t just change the parlance of the military service. It will have an impact on the appearance of Navy military uniforms, particularly for enlisted non-commissioned officers, who have a rating insignia displayed centrally on their rank badges.

For Hospital Corpsmen, it was a medical symbol. For Machinist Mates, it was a propeller. For Information Systems Technicians, it was sparks. Each of the 91 ratings had a symbol that served as a specific identifier.

As *The Navy Times* reports:

[T]his move will disband these ratings entirely and reorganize sailors into Navy Occupational Specialties, or NOS, that will define the peer group they compete with for promotion. Under this new system, for example, Gunner’s mates will be identified as B320 and quartermasters will be B450 ...

Burke says the Navy’s new occupational specialties will be regrouped under broader career fields, an improved version of the 13 communities the service ratings these specialties had been grouped into. Where a NOS falls in those career fields will be driven by the individual skills within that field and not traditional lines, he said.

Still, the part of this discussion that hasn’t been brought up by anyone involved is the cost of changing all of these uniforms—again. This will mark the third—and arguably, the biggest—major enlisted uniform overhaul for the Navy in the past two years.

And while service members receive an annual stipend that offsets the cost of repairing and replacing worn-out uniform pieces, it will only cover a fraction of the cost of full replacement. The majority of that cost will be borne by the

sailors themselves.

A seaman (paygrade E-3) with less than 4 years' experience makes less than \$25,000 a year. But that brings up another interesting point. Junior enlisteds (paygrades E-1 through E-3) will still have "man" in their rank titles:

- E-1: Seaman Recruit
- E-2: Seaman Apprentice
- E-3: Seaman