

CPO 365 Series: Significance of the First Class Petty Officer

By MC3 Antonio P. Turretto Ramos, NAS Oceana Public Affairs | Posted: Thursday, July 12, 2012 11:01 am

Military organizations are managed by a command structure; links in a chain that connect the most senior commanding officer to the most junior deck seaman. Through this chain of command, orders are passed and solutions executed to complete any given military mission.

The rank of petty officer first class, one such link, plays a unique role in the chain by providing a balance of military leadership and knowledge with technical expertise and performance. The role of first class petty officers in today's Navy is being even more strongly emphasized through the Chief Petty Officer (CPO) 365 program. CPO 365 is a three-phased program, which helps prepare board-eligible first class petty officers in making the transition to chief.

"Being a first class is one of the hardest jobs in the Navy because you're in a position where you have to take care of your junior Sailors and get them to a point to become senior Sailors, but at the same time you're preparing to becoming chief," said Interior Communications Electrician 1st Class (SW) D'Angelo Harrison, Naval Air Station (NAS) Oceana command urinalysis coordinator and limited duty coordinator. "You have to begin to distance yourself from the junior enlisted and start making connections with the chiefs."

A first class petty officer should predict future expectations and balance day-to-day work, while adjusting to meet those expectations, according to Senior Chief Electronics Technician (SW) Kevin Hartless, Oceana administrative department leading chief petty officer. They should be solution oriented and either know the answer or know where to find the answer to any given problem.

"I expect my first class to be able to look at any given situation and apply logic, common sense and regulations to make a decision," said Hartless "A certain level of confidence has to be there to make decisions. The worst decision is the one you don't make."

Fire Controlman (FC) 1st Class (SW) Alcinda A. Kordecki is one of Oceana's recently frocked Sailors who is taking her responsibilities as a new first class petty officer very seriously. "The responsibility I have now to guide and protect my subordinates is even greater. A first class can impact the decisions of the fellow first classes and the chiefs' mess a lot easier than a junior Sailor when the opportunity arises to get deserving Sailors awards and positive performance evaluations, or even when it comes down to handling disciplinary actions for minor things, without heavily involving the upper chain of command," she explained in an email.

According to Hartless, "What separates the good from the great in first class petty officers is their ability to push subordinates to the potential that they, as a leader, see in them; to push a Sailor past what they see in themselves."

To newly frocked first class petty officers, Harrison says, "Expect to be a part of what you may have perceived before to be the problem. Expect the complaints to come to you now and be

prepared to answer the questions of your junior Sailors. They are looking to you now. You are that guy.”

Harrison says that it’s no longer your responsibility to let superiors know of a problem, it’s now your job to find a solution. “If you are a good first class, you need to know your programs and be able to guide a Sailor to the solution to a problem. You have to know where to find the answers.”

Kordecki, who is Oceana’s quarterdeck assistant leading petty officer, is looking forward to learning more about her new role, as well as being part of CPO 360. “I expect to grow a stronger bond with fellow first classes and the chiefs’ mess through CPO 365... CPO 365 will allow me to have an opportunity to grow by asking questions of the right people, questions that I might have learned answers to later in painful lessons and trial and error situations.”

Editor’s note — This story is part of an intermittent series on CPO 365. The Jet Observer will feature more articles in coming weeks.

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CPO 365: Oceana Sailors Prepare for Selection

By MC3 Antonio P. Turretto Ramos, NAS Oceana Public Affairs | Posted: Thursday, August 2, 2012 10:07 am

In today's Navy, first class petty officers are being prepared all around the fleet to don the coveted anchors worn by the rank of chief petty officer (CPO) through a training program called CPO 365.

Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy (MCPON) (SS/SW) Rick D. West established general guidance, released in 2010, with additional notes highlighting lessons learned from the previous cycle. Command master chiefs (CMCs) are the overseers of the program.

"CPO 365 in concept isn't new," said Naval Air Station (NAS) Oceana Command Master Chief (AW/SW) Bill Smalts. "The reality is we have less time to do some of the important things and that's mentorship of the first classes, and it was recognized at all levels of the Navy. So a process was laid out to incrementally prepare our first classes to be chiefs all year long."

CPO 365 is a three-phase, year-long development and training program designed to test prospective chief petty officers (PCPOs) mentally, physically, personally and professionally.

Phase one began Sept. 17, and is used to build the foundation for the year of training to come. This phase, in which all first class petty officers participate, is meant to spark the teamwork and initial training to engage PCPOs on their road to becoming CPOs.

"In my experience, I met a lot of senior and junior E-6s and everybody seemed to want to do things together as one team. It gave us a chance to really network and I took a lot out of it because although I have 13 years in the Navy, I learned some things I didn't know," said Aviation Maintenance Administrationman (AZ) 1st Class (AW) Jihadah Murray, assistant command security manager at NAS Oceana.

Smalts explained that during phase one, training is kept to the fundamentals, such as writing evaluations. PCPOs are given fitness and nutritional assessments to develop training plans that foster sound physical readiness, participate in community service events with CPOs and participate in training at Fleet and Family Support Center (FFSC) and Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society offices.

"It's really not always about the P.T.," said Smalts. "It's about the rules, the regulations, it's about working with your peers; having that courage to walk up to a peer and say, 'didn't the guidance say we're all supposed to have our shirts tucked in?' Getting past those little hiccups that people seem to continue to miss or wait for the chief to walk up and correct when really honestly, anyone could have corrected it without having to be told, but it's hard to do sometimes when you're among your peers, but hard is authorized, as we say in the Navy."

Phase two begins when board eligible results are released. It's designed to build upon phase one and further prepare personnel to cross into and be productive members of the CPO mess. Career development boards (CDBs) are conducted for those non-eligible first classes to concentrate on what they need to work on for their continued development.

"I think CPO 365 is molding us to become better leaders," said Air Traffic Controller (AC) 1st Class (AW/SW) Leslie Wallace, assistant leading petty officer and radar supervisor at Oceana Air Operations, Air Traffic Control Division, who is a board eligible first class petty officer. "I can say one thing for sure: CPO 365 is here to stay. I believe that because I have learned so much in the program just so far. It helps you build a lot more confidence as far as working with the senior leadership."

Smalts explained how every year, the first classes who have been selected for CPO worry about the chiefs being the adversaries in the process and he has to reassure them the CPOs are not adversaries.

"The most important thing phase two starts to do for them before phase three, is as it starts, is to get them to come together as a cohesive group and find ways, through interpersonal and professional skills, to be able to work together through problem solving, and to meet mission capability and goals," said Smalts.

Phase three, known as induction season, begins when first class petty officers are selected to become CPOs. It is the final training period to better prepare a selectee for his or her entry into the CPO mess.

"Induction is important to us as a mess and also to the Navy. It rejuvenates our chiefs while we prepare thousands of Sailors to join our ranks. More importantly, it prepares those leaders to uphold the credibility of our community and lead Sailors on the deckplate," wrote West in a release regarding 2011-2012 CPO 365/Induction Guidance. "At the end of phase three, when our selectees have earned their anchors, I expect they will look back at CPO 365 as one of the most challenging, yet rewarding experiences of their career."

According to ACCS (AW/SW) Holly Dingle, air traffic control training chief at Oceana Air Operations Air Traffic Control Division, and this year's induction season coordinator for Oceana, first class petty officers are expected to perform at the level of CPO and induction season teaches selectees how to function as a CPO mess.

"I think those are the big things to know when they leave the induction season, that we're charged with making sure that when they say 'go ask the chief,' you are now the chief and know that you have an enormous amount of resources available to you and those are the resources that you're going to need to lead your Sailors," said Dingle. "There is distinct line between the first class petty officer and being a chief and now you're crossing over into the chiefs' mess."

AZCS(AW/SW) Gregory Hornsby, quality assurance supervisor at Fleet Readiness Center Mid-Atlantic Oceana and also a coordinator for this year's induction season, said that with CPO 365

in its second year, first classes are more prepared for the responsibilities that come with wearing anchors.

“These first classes bring a lot of experience and leadership with them already but they do need to learn the small intricacies of leadership that they may not always get,” said Hornsby. “A lot of these guys are wrench turners; they’re great at their job, but sometimes their one-on-one with the Sailor just needs a little fine tuning and that’s what CPO 365 brings together.”

According to Dingle, CPO 365 has helped prepare first classes for the administrative responsibilities of CPO, especially in technical ratings, where they may have less experience in evaluation and award writing.

“When you put those anchors on, you’re not ‘I’m a chief now.’ No! It’s too late, you should have figured it out by now and I think that’s what we’re doing with CPO 365,” said Dingle. “It’s giving them a chance to figure it out because once you put these chief’s anchors on and you’re walking down the street, Sailors will come up to you, and they don’t know you’re a brand new chief.

“The part that’s most important is the way we interact with each other in the chiefs’ mess. Getting the first classes to realize that their biggest hurdle is going to be their teamwork, their efforts together and coming together as one,” said Smalts.

According to West’s release regarding 2011-2012 CPO 365/Induction Guidance, CMCs remain ultimately responsible for the safe conduct and successful execution of all three phases of training, and are actively involved from beginning to end.

“The CMC’s leadership reinforces the idea that CPO 365 is instrumental to the ongoing professional development of Sailors and relevant to command esprit de corps,” wrote West in the release. “CPO 365 is serious business designed to build new chief petty officers through controlled, constructive mental and physical stress.”

“Becoming a chief starts the day they put anchors on. That’s where the real training happens. You can’t walk a day in the chief’s shoes until you’re wearing anchors and you’re in the chief’s shoes. We’re just trying to do a better job to prepare them for that job,” said Smalts. “It takes a little of our personal time, but it’s all Navy time anyway.”

Editor’s note — This story is part of an intermittent series on CPO 365. The Jet Observer will feature more articles in coming weeks.

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CPO 365: Group Events Build Camaraderie for Oceana Selectees

By MC3 Antonio P. Turretto Ramos, NAS Oceana Public Affairs | Posted: Thursday, September 6, 2012 9:55 am

The annual tradition of breakfast and uniform fitting for chief petty officer (CPO) selectees at Naval Air Station (NAS) Oceana Aug. 14 represented much more than just a chance to enjoy a hot breakfast and have their new uniforms ready for the CPO pinning ceremony Sept. 14.

The event, established many years ago by the Oceana Chiefs' Mess and made possible by the Oceana Navy Exchange and Commissary, is part of the last of three phases of CPO 365, known as the induction process.

The purpose of the group uniform fitting is to help selectees transition into the rank of chief petty officer and foster a sense of heritage and camaraderie, explained Chief Aviation Electronics Technician (AW/SW) Gary Ammons, instructional systems development (ISD) leading chief petty officer and the uniform committee chairman for this year's induction season at Oceana.

"They transition as a group," said Ammons. "It helps them to operate as one unit and one mess."

Ammons defines the induction process as the molding of Sailors into the leaders that chief petty officers are expected to be.

According to Ammons, group events like these are designed to reinforce the overall theme of induction season, to ensure that selectees come together as one to be prepared to meet the new challenges and expectations of their soon-to-be title.

The selectees go through the fitting process together so that the 'uniform day' is a shared experience that sticks with them for the years to come, said Ammons.

After the selectees mustered into formation and marched into the Oceana NEX singing "Anchors Away," they were addressed by NAS Oceana Commanding Officer Bob Geis and NAS Oceana Command Master (AW/SW) Chief Bill Smalts before enjoying a buffet-style breakfast.

"Four weeks full of milestones. This is one of the most significant, the transition of your uniform," said Smalts, referring to CPO 365, which prepares selectees for their new leadership roles. "However, it's not the uniform that is going to make you a chief. If you think the uniforms today are going to automatically make you a chief, you are sadly mistaken," Smalts added as he reminded the selectees of the responsibility they'll soon shoulder.

Ammons said that there has been a positive change in the last few years in the readiness of the selectees. They are now more prepared for the job they will soon take on.

"I have so much respect for who you are, and who you will become through this continued evolution. In a few short weeks, you will no longer be first class petty officers. It will be a part of you, but that's not who you will be. You will be the chief," said Geis. "So remember back all

those times, ever since you swore your oath, how many times you asked yourself, ‘What am I supposed to do? Well I’m going to go ask the chief,’ ... You will now be that person that people are going to come to and expect to have the answer. ... This is the beginning of the next stage of your life that you will continue to work at....Learn every day and continue to evolve and be the best leader you can possibly be.”

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End of CPO 365 Means New Chapter for Chiefs

By MC3 Antonio P. Turretto Ramos, NAS Oceana Public Affairs | Posted: Thursday, September 20, 2012 9:59 am

The culmination of Chief Petty Officer (CPO) 365 training took place when the 61 chief selects of fiscal year 2013 marched into the Naval Air Station (NAS) Oceana Aerotheater and marched out newly-pinned chief petty officers Sept. 14.

CPO 365 is a three-phase, year-round training regimen that prepares first class petty officers for the demands and expectations that come with advancement to chief petty officer. The chief's pinning ceremony is the end of phase three, the induction season, and signals the end of training and the beginning of the newly-selected chief's responsibilities and entry into the chiefs mess.

"Lord, we give you thanks for these men and women who today demonstrate yet again their desire for even greater responsibilities and challenges. Grant each of them and those they love at home your wisdom, strength, courage and success as they enter the unique fellowship of the chief's mess," said Lt. Richard Smothers, Carrier Wing 3 chaplain during the invocation.

"It feels great! It's feels great to finally arrive and get to this point," said Chief Aviation Structural Mechanic - Equipment (AW/SW) Thomas West of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 15. West said that CPO 365 helped to prepare him to become a chief by going into depth about helping Sailors and making sure they have completed their personnel qualification standards (PQS).

CPO 365 training is intended to prepare the next generation of chiefs to step out onto the deckplates and lead Sailors, but being pinned is only the beginning..

"I'm sure from all these last six or so weeks you've learned wisdom, you've heard tomes, you've heard how to be a chief petty officer," said Capt. Bob Geis, commanding officer of NAS Oceana. "Be the chief! Your level of responsibility just went up dramatically. Your junior Sailors, your junior officers and even your skippers will come to you with all kinds of questions; some good, some bad, some crazy. Know the answers or if you don't know the answer, know where to get it. You're on duty 24 hours a day. You are turning the page of an already hugely, hugely successful career so don't take off the path. In fact, cinch down the straps, grab more water, get your compass out, take a bearing, press forward."

"One, I need you to understand a couple of things; that being a chief petty officer is not a nine-to-five job. It requires you to be a chief petty officer 24/7, 365 and you need a course adjustment in your life because it is a lifestyle change," said Force Master Chief (AW/SW) Garry McClure from Commander, Naval Air Force Atlantic before calling the chief selects to attention and asking if they understood him.

"Being a good chief is more than just wearing a clean uniform. It's being on the deck plate, it's leading, it's earning the faith and the trust of the Sailors that work with you. Notice I said with you and not for you. It's developing those Sailors, it's working with your officers and

understanding the needs of the mission. You will do that, won't you new chiefs?" McClure asked.

The chief selects respond in unison, "Yes master chief!"

"It was our intention to test you, to try you, and to accept you. Your performance has assured us that you will wear 'the hat' with the same pride as your comrades in arms before you," said Command Master Chief (AW/SW) Robert Rose, command master chief of Fleet Logistics Support Squadron (VR) 56, while reciting the Chief Petty Officer's Creed at the pinning ceremony. "We take a deep, sincere pleasure in clasping you hand, and accepting you as a chief petty officer in the United States Navy."

Editor's note — This story is the final installment of the CPO 365 series, published during the past several months.