

04/03/2012 Navy News by MCC Terrina Weatherspoon

The United States Navy Memorial hosted the official kick-off of the Year of the Chief and the 119th birthday celebration of the chief petty officer during a ceremony April 2.

For the first time in history, the Navy Memorial is casting a spotlight on the history, heritage and contributions of chief petty officers.

The guest speaker for the event was **Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Adm. Jonathan W. Greenert**. Remarks were also given by both **Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy (MCPON) (SS/SW) Rick D. West** and former **MCPON James L. Herdt**. Former MCPON Duane R. Bushey was also in attendance.

"The chief is the center of gravity," said Greenert. "There is not a seaman, petty officer or officer out there who cannot turn and say, 'I had a chief petty officer take care of me and get me where I am today.'"

The ceremony was attended by chiefs from across the nation who came not only to be a part of the official kick-off, but also to see the Memorial transformed into a Chiefs' Mess, resplendent with history and memorabilia spanning 119 years.

"We are becoming a part of history today," said West. "I see retired veterans in our midst and I am proud to carry on down a path they've laid for us so long ago. I couldn't be more pleased to be spending this day with representatives from so many commands. To stand in front of a sea of fouled anchors as your MCPON, and know that we are as much making history as we are a part of it ... I am truly humbled."

After the ceremony, guests were invited into the Memorial for the cake cutting. Visitors were then encouraged to walk through the Memorial, which has been decorated to reflect historical uniforms, anchors and other iconic symbols from the colorful heritage of CPOs.

"Happy birthday chief petty officers, you've earned it," said **Greenert**. "Absorb the moment, have a great year, remember your legacy and what got you here."

West added his expectations and appreciation for chiefs serving today.

"You are bold and accountable, executing the Navy's mission wherever you are, and developing the next generation of Sailors," West said. "Thank you shipmates - including those who have gone before us and those who are no longer with us - you have served your country well and will continue to do so as long as we sail the seven seas."

NAVY CHIEFS

An excellent sailor tribute to our Chief Petty Officers....and quickly add an Attaboy for their very subtle and tactful contribution to the leadership training of JO's (Junior Officers) as they take them under their wings and provide daily "suggestions and guidance"....hope their very effective methods and positive influences have not been compromised by the DOD trend to the PC BS culture of today....CB

"CPO Standards"

Contributed by: Mike McCaffrey, Admiral (retired USN)

Never forget this, a Chief can become an Officer, but an Officer can never become a Chief. Chiefs have their standards!

Recollections of a Whitehat.

"One thing we weren't aware of at the time, but became evident as life wore on, was that we learned true leadership from the finest examples any lad was ever given, Chief Petty Officers. They were crusty old bastards who had done it all and had been forged into men who had been time tested over more years than a lot of us had time on the planet. The ones I remember wore hydraulic oil stained hats with scratched and dinged-up insignia, faded shirts, some with a Bull Durham tag dangling out of their right-hand pocket or a pipe and tobacco reloads in a worn leather pouch in their hip pockets, and a Zippo that had been everywhere. Some of them came with tattoos on their forearms that would force them to keep their cuffs buttoned at a Methodist picnic.

Most of them were as tough as a boarding house steak. A quality required to survive the life they lived. They were, and always will be, a breed apart from all other residents of Mother Earth. They took eighteen year old idiots and hammered the stupid bastards into sailors.

You knew instinctively it had to be hell on earth to have been born a Chief's kid. God should have given all sons born to Chiefs a return option.

A Chief didn't have to command respect. He got it because there was nothing else you could give them. They were God's designated hitters on earth.

We had Chiefs with fully loaded Submarine Combat Patrol Pins, and combat air crew wings in my day...hard-core bastards who remembered lost mates, and still cursed the cause of their loss...and they were expert at choosing descriptive adjectives and nouns, none of which their mothers would have endorsed.

At the rare times you saw a Chief topside in dress canvas, you saw rows of hard-earned, worn and faded ribbons over his pocket. "Hey Chief, what's that one and that one?" "Oh hell kid, I can't remember. There was a war on. They gave them to us to keep track of the campaigns." "We didn't get a lot of news out where we were. To be honest, we just took their word for it. Hell son, you couldn't pronounce most of the names of the places we went. They're all depth charge survival geedunk." "Listen kid, ribbons don't make you a Sailor." We knew who the heroes were, and in the final analysis that's all that matters.

Many nights, we sat in the after mess deck wrapping ourselves around cups of coffee and listening to their stories. They were light-hearted stories about warm beer shared with their running mates in corrugated metal sheds at resupply depots where the only furniture was a few packing crates and a couple of Coleman lamps. Standing in line at a Honolulu cathouse or spending three hours soaking in a tub in Freemantle, smoking cigars, and getting loaded. It was our history. And we dreamed of being just like them because they were our heroes. When they accepted you as their shipmate, it was the highest honor you would ever receive in your life. At least it was clearly that for me. They were not men given to the prerogatives of their position.

You would find them with their sleeves rolled up, shoulder-to-shoulder with you in a stores loading party. "Hey Chief, no need for you to be out here tossin' crates in the rain, we can get all this crap aboard."

"Son, the term 'All hands' means all hands."

"Yeah Chief, but you're no damn kid anymore, you old coot."

"Horsefly, when I'm eighty-five parked in the stove up old bastards' home, I'll still be able to kick your worthless butt from here to fifty feet past the screw guards along with six of your closest friends." And he probably wasn't bullshitting.

They trained us. Not only us, but hundreds more just like us. If it wasn't for Chief Petty Officers, there wouldn't be any U.S. Navy. There wasn't any fairy godmother who lived in a hollow tree in the enchanted forest who could wave her magic wand and create a Chief Petty Officer.

They were born as hot-sacking seamen, and matured like good whiskey in steel hulls over many years. Nothing a nineteen year-old jay-bird could cook up was original to these old saltwater owls. They had seen E-3 jerks come and go for so many years; they could read you like a book. "Son, I know what you are thinking just one word of advice. DON'T. It won't be worth it."

"Aye, Chief."

Chiefs aren't the kind of guys you thank. Monkeys at the zoo don't spend a lot of time thanking the guy who makes them do tricks for peanuts.

Appreciation of what they did, and who they were, comes with long distance retrospect. No young lad takes time to recognize the worth of his leadership. That comes later when you have experienced poor leadership or let's say, when you have the maturity to recognize what leaders should be, you find that Chiefs are the standard by which you measure all others.

They had no Academy rings to get scratched up. They butchered the King's English. They had become educated at the other end of an anchor chain from Copenhagen to Singapore. They had given their entire lives to the U.S. Navy. In the progression of the nobility of employment, Chief Petty Officer heads the list. So, when we ultimately get our final duty station assignments and we get to wherever the big Chief of Naval Operations in the sky assigns us, if we are lucky, Marines will be guarding the streets, and there will be an old Chief in an oil-stained hat and a cigar stub clenched in his teeth standing at the brow to assign us our bunks and tell us where to stow our gear... and we will all be young again, and the damn coffee will float a rock.

Life fixes it so that by the time a stupid kid grows old enough and smart enough to recognize who he should have thanked along the way, he no longer can. If I could, I would thank my old Chiefs. If you only knew what you succeeded in pounding in this thick skull, you would be amazed. So, thanks you old casehardened unsalvageable son-of-a-bitches. Save me a rack in the berthing compartment."

Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass. It's about learning to dance in the rain.

Submitted by LCDR Bruce DeWald USN RET