USS George Washington Sailor to attend Naval Academy

Airman among few enlisted Sailors to be accepted without rating

Story and photo by MC3 Stephanie Smith, *USS George Washington* Public Affairs

Airman Felicia Watters, a Sailor aboard the aircraft carrier *USS George Washington* (CVN 73), has been accepted to the U.S. Naval Academy preparatory school after submitting her application in October.

What's unique about the Cheyenne, Wyo. native is that out of the many Naval academy candidates accepted every year, Watters is among the few enlisted Sailors to be accepted without a rating; she's undesignated.

"I spoke to a few graduates of the Naval Academy at the *George Washington* Career Day stand down in 2010 and I thought it was really interesting," said Watters. "There's a lot more I want to do in my life and the Navy offered me a new path."

The Navy offers several officer programs such as Seaman-to-Admiral (STA) 21 and limited duty officer programs. Applying directly to the academy is one such path.

"The whole process took from October to March, March 1 actually, which is the last day to apply," said Watters.

It starts with a lot of paperwork such as a preliminary application, which will be followed by the complete application and receiving a unique identification number if qualifications are met with the preliminary application. Included in all of that is a required essay from the applicant based on a specific theme, a personal recommendation from a former high school teacher, the applicant's high school grades, grade point average and ACT or SAT scores.

"There are also three recommendations that I needed from Navy officers, but I got five," said Watters, with a bit of pride.

"At first I tried to set up interviews through my department head. He helped me a lot because he told me 'No,'" she said, with a smile. "He said 'If you want to be an officer, you have to step up and do it yourself,' so I did."

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His answer gave her the initiative to take the necessary steps she needed to gain confidence in herself and what she was doing.

"The interviews were the hardest part," said Watters. "They ask you so many scenario based questions. You're going in there for a professional interview hoping to get a recommendation, not knowing the outcome."

After months of interviews, piles of paperwork and hours of anxious waiting, Watters finally got word that she had been accepted into the school.

"It started out as such an awful day," said Watters. "I was getting ready for the physical fitness test and was in line all day. My schedule was only going to let me get about three hours of sleep so I went back to my room and lay down and that's when I got the call from my office. I was so excited that I ran all the way from my barracks room to the ship."

Watters was brought up to the commanding officer who congratulated her on her accomplishment and wished her luck.

"I was in my PT (exercise) gear and my hair was a mess but I was so excited I didn't care," she said.

Lt. Cmdr. William Hollis, the assistant maintenance officer aboard *George Washington* and Watters's assistant department head, gave her the motivation she needed to complete the task she set before herself.

"Your motivation, your effort, your willingness to never give up on something you want is in your hands," Hollis said. "If you are interested in the program, stand firm and be committed. You are in control of the outcome."

With the challenge of applying for the academy out of the way, Watters has turned her attention now towards her future, and maybe more.

"I've been looking at several programs and I think I want to go in to aeronautical engineering," said Watters. "I plan on making a career out of this but maybe one day I'll work at NASA."

They don't have an age limit," Watters added, with a laugh.

Her advice for Sailors looking at the Naval Academy program: be committed.

"People have been coming to me and saying 'You made me so motivated, what do I need to do?' Just be motivated to follow through and keep pushing," Watters said. "You may not get it the first time, but keep trying. It's going to be worth it."

According to the U.S. Naval Academy website, since 1845, more than 60,000 young men and women have successfully graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy, taking their hard earned places in America's naval service. Many Naval Academy graduates have achieved greatness and earned a special place in our nation's history during its struggle to grow and preserve its freedom. Their names resonate down through history - Dewey, Halsey, King, Lejeune, Nimitz, Rickover, Spruance, Burke, Stockdale and Carter... to name a few.

Time to verify death gratuity beneficiary

From Navy Personnel Command Public Affairs

Due to a change in the law regarding death gratuity and recent upgrades to the Navy Standard Integrated Personnel System (NSIPS), officials are urging Sailors to verify their designated death gratuity beneficiaries.

"The change in the law allows Sailors to designate their gratuity in 10 percent increments to more than one beneficiary," said John Courtney, Pay, Personnel and Benefits section head, Bureau of Naval Personnel.

The death gratuity is a benefit paid to eligible beneficiaries of a Sailor who dies while on active duty or while traveling to or from such duty. The total gratuity paid is $100,000, and Sailors may designate one or more persons to receive it. The amount paid to each beneficiary is specified on their Record of Emergency Data (Page 2) in 10 percent increments. If a Sailor is married, but designates someone other than the spouse to receive the gratuity, the Sailor's command is required to notify the spouse of the designation in a letter.

"The death gratuity is a different benefit from the Servicemen's Group Life Insurance (SGLI)," said Courtney. "SGLI is a life insurance benefit and those beneficiaries are annotated when a Sailor fills out form 'SGLV 8286' upon initial entry and whenever they want to update beneficiary and settlement option designations, and when declining or reducing coverage."

The ability for Sailors to designate someone other than their next-of-kin on their Record of Emergency Data (Page 2) was announced in Naval Administrative Message NAVADMIN 189/07. A change in the law further modified the death gratuity designation and was outlined in NAVADMIN 134/08.

"All Sailors should access their NSIPS Electronic Service Record and verify their 'Page 2' data," he said.

Sailors who need to change their beneficiary data should contact their Command PASS Coordinator (CPC) or servicing personnel office.

For more information, Sailors should contact their CPC, personnel office or visit the Navy Personnel Command website at www.npc.navy.mil to read the applicable messages.