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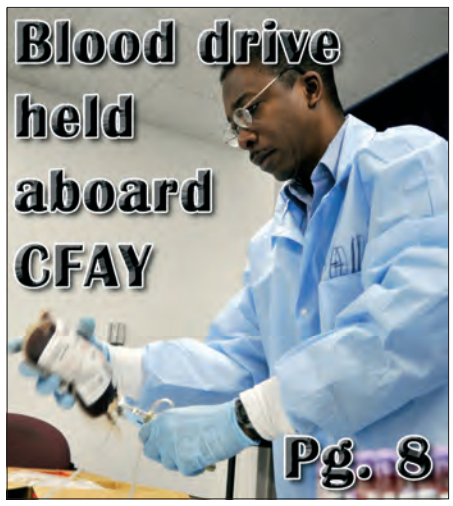

CPO birthday celebration reflects on past, prepares for future

By Ben Avey, CFAY Public Affairs

Four chief petty officers approached the mast to raise the national ensign with the crisp and polished precision that has come to be expected of their rank, a tradition as old as the Navy and just a bit older than the event which they have come to commemorate, the 116th birthday of the chief petty officer.

Chief petty officers (CPO), senior chief petty officers (SCPO) and master chief petty officers (MCPO) celebrated their birthday aboard Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka with an early morning physical training session, participation in and observance of morning colors and a cake-cutting ceremony at the Commodore Matthew C. Perry General Mess April 1.

According to the official U.S. Navy historical Web site, the CPO grade was officially established April 1, 1893. Since that time, the core function of the CPO community, or "chief's mess", has remained the same.

"We make the Navy run," said Commander U.S. Naval Forces Japan (CNFJ) Command Master Chief Robert Shannon. "The officers fight ships; we run the ships, that's what chiefs do."

But, the birthday of the CPO grade is more than just another day on the calendar or a cake cutting ceremony at the galley; it is an opportunity for Sailors across the world to reflect, review and evaluate what has made the CPO community great and what they must do in order to continue the drive for excellence.

"In the few short years that I've been wearing these anchors, I've seen our chief's mess grow professionally and just become fine examples of leadership and our Navy continues to go down that path," said Shannon.

CNFJ Regional Career Counselor, Senior Chief Navy Counselor Johannes Gonzalez viewed the birthday as a chance to celebrate past CPO success and collectively prepare to carry those successes into the future.

"Just to think that I'm following the steps of all the chiefs, senior chiefs and master chiefs that have gone before me and carrying on that tradition is overwhelming," said Gonzalez. "It's a beautiful way to remember where we come from and where we're going."

The best way to ensure success in the CPO community has been a widely discussed topic recently as many CPOs, SCPOs and MCPOs prepare for continuation boards in the coming years.

According to NAVADMIN 030/09, performance-based senior-enlisted continuation boards call for an annual performance-driven review of Sailors who hold the rank of CPO, SCPO and MCPO with more than 20 years of service and three years time in grade.

The goal of the boards is to help stabilize and shape personnel end strength, ensure continued advancement opportunity and retain top performers.

A goal which many see as the best way to continue improving a community which has stood for excellence for 116 years.

"I've never been prouder to wear this uniform and wear the anchors of a chief petty officer," said Shannon. "Happy birthday chiefs!"

(Left) MMC Brian Russell, PSCM Terry Miles, YNC Timothy Willis and BMCM Raynard Kidd render salutes during morning colors as one part of several celebrations in recognition of the 116th chief petty officer birthday aboard CFAY April 1.
Photo by Ben Avey

Chief petty officers from Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka sea and shore commands celebrate the 116th birthday of the chief petty officer rank with a cake-cutting ceremony at the Commodore Matthew C. Perry General Mess April 1.
U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Gabriel S. Weber

MCPON CPO birthday message: Anchor up chiefs

By Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy MCPON(SS/SW) Rick D. West

"On April 1st, our entire mess will pause to celebrate the 116th birthday of the United States Navy chief petty officer. Traditionally, this is a time for each of us to look at the honored traditions of our mess and the heritage associated with it.

In the days leading up to our birthday, I've taken some time to read up on many of my predecessors. One I'd like to discuss with you this year is our fifth Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy, MCPON Billy Sanders.

Twenty five years ago, MCPON Sanders was leading an enlisted force that was gradually downsizing, and he was stressing a need to keep our ranks filled with the best possible people.

He turned his attention to the senior enlisted and said that there was no room for mediocrity. He addressed the entire group and told the master chiefs, senior chiefs and chiefs that, "it's clear from your years of service that you have made a career decision to remain in the Navy — that's not enough. It's time to be a professional military man or woman."

"It's time," Sanders wrote, "to be Navy."

What a statement, and look at how relevant it is today as we reach the end of a time where our force has grown smaller. Leadership at the CPO level has never been more important, and Sanders' words still apply.

I'd recommend each of you take the time to read up on the history of our mess. I think you'll find, as I did, that the lessons from our past have remained current to this day.

Happy birthday shipmates. I really appreciate the hard work you do every single day.

Don't forget those who have gone before us and the standards they set for us all. Keeping our heritage alive is a [chief's] mess responsibility.

Thank you for your leadership.

Anchor up and hooyah Navy chiefs!"