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National VP for Junior Officers

Battle Stations 21

We are first and foremost a fighting, sea-going service – the guardians of a rich heritage of bravery in battle and courage under fire.

— ADM Michael Mullen, from “CNO’s Guidance for 2006”

We can learn to be more effective leaders by understanding the training that all prior-service enlisted sailors must complete. The U.S. Navy’s only Recruit Training Command (RTC), or boot camp, is in Great Lakes, IL. One of the more important changes going on at RTC is the design and construction of a new, \$82 million, 171,000 sq. ft. facility to be known as Battle Stations 21 (Twenty-First Century). It will replace the current, low-tech Battle Stations scenarios that are spread among five different buildings. According to Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC) Midwest, which is leading the project, it is scheduled to open for the first recruit class by summer 2007.

In the past decade, the U.S. Air Force, Army, Navy, and Marines all instituted a uniquely challenging, real-world exercise that recruits must complete in order to pass basic training or boot camp. For the recruits, it is the final rite of passage. Marine Corps recruits endure “The Crucible,” a 54-hour-long ordeal that tests them to their limits. The Army’s “Victory Forge” – patterned after the Marines’ Crucible – is a 72-hour exercise in which recruits participate in tactical scenarios as a team. “Warrior Week” has Air Force recruits demonstrate their ability to endure combat conditions in the field.

Since the mid-1990’s, Navy recruits must complete the 18-hour Battle Stations exercise during the final days of boot camp. After the terrorists’ attack on *USS Cole* (DDG 67) of 12 October 2000 in Yemen, a Sailor credited the Battle Stations training received by the newest members of the crew with saving the lives of their shipmates and keeping their badly damaged ship from sinking. Recently, Navy leadership recognized that the new generation of Sailors is brought up using video games designed with technologies that are more advanced than those available just ten years

ago. NAVFAC Midwest has subcontracted Academy Award winners BRC Imagination Arts in California, along with half-a-dozen special effects teams around the country to create the most advanced, realistic combat and casualty scenarios possible with today’s digital effects technologies.

Recruits will enter “Pier 8” to begin Battle Stations 21, which features a descent along a walkway to a below-grade entrance, providing the illusion of a far-away port, down to the sounds and smells of shipyard activity. The building will house a 500-foot-long replica of a guided-missile destroyer, floating in a moat with the scent of seawater in the air. Dubbed the *USS Trayer*, it is the centerpiece of Battle Stations 21. Through set design, lighting, and a variety of special effects including piped-in aromas, recruits will experience horrifying realism from mass casualties to a burning ship. Built-in MP3 players triggered by infrared technology will make “injured” dummies scream and moan. Twelve scenarios will test recruits’ problem-solving, leadership, and other essential skills, with realistic consequences – good and bad – for their actions.

The Battle Stations 21 experience will begin once recruits are in their racks for the night. The general quarters alarm is sounded over the 1MC instructing all recruit teams to man their battle stations within five minutes. In no particular order, the events are:

ABANDON SHIP

Recruits are briefed about the *USS Indianapolis*, a heavy cruiser that was attacked at midnight on 29 July 1945 by a Japanese submarine. Recruits simulate abandoning ship by jumping off the high-dive platform and mustering in the water in groups.

EMERGENCY SORTIE

Based on the experiences of ships’ crews that got their ships quickly underway on 20 September 1989, prior to Hurricane Hugo whacking Charleston. Recruits must demonstrate basic deck seamanship skills under duress.

FORRESTAL ESCAPE SCUTTLE

Recruits are briefed about the flight deck

fire caused by a weapon exploding on *USS Forrestal* in July 1967. Each team must pass each member through a “hot” vertical escape scuttle without touching the sides.

INVESTIGATE AND RESCUE

Based on a hazardous material spill onboard *USS Holland* (AS 32) during a shipyard overhaul in 1992. Recruit teams don OBA’s and investigate a smoke-filled, dark compartment to rescue shipmates.

MAGAZINE FLOODING

Recruit teams in a magazine store room are required to move 100 cases of three-inch rounds to another store room while the magazine is flooding. Based on what happened when *USS Tripoli* (LPH 10) struck a mine in the Persian Gulf on 17 February 1991.

MASS CASUALTY SCENARIO

Based on the 12 October 2000 terrorist attack on *USS Cole* (DDG 67) in Aden, Yemen. Recruits must provide first aid to injured shipmates and transport them to safety, navigating obstacles in a dark, noisy environment.

REPEL BORDERS

Actual experiences of a river patrol boat commander on the Mekong River in Vietnam make up this scenario. Recruits must shoot the M-16 and 9mm pistol in low-light conditions while wearing a gas mask.

SHAFT ALLEY RESCUE

Recruits utilize stretchers to move a victim through an obstacle course in the engineering spaces. Based on the rescue of hundreds of sailors from below decks on the *USS Oklahoma* on 7 December 1941.

STORES ONLOAD

Based on the loading of stores on *USNS Comfort*, which left its berth in Baltimore just 24 hours after the WTC attacks on 11 September 2001 to provide assistance to victims and rescue workers in New York Harbor.

SHIPBOARD FIRE FIGHTING

Recruit teams must organize as a fire party and extinguish fires. Based on the actions taken by the crew of *USS Stark* (FFG 31), which had to fight shipboard fires after being hit by two Exocet missiles during the Iran-Iraq war in 1987.

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COMPLETION (CAP) CEREMONY (always last)

Recruits are assembled in ranks in a large room with three displays highlighting the Navy's core values: Honor, Courage, and Commitment. Recruit Division Commanders then replace their "RECRUIT" ball caps with "NAVY" ball caps. This is a pivotal moment for the recruits, because it signifies the end of boot camp; and they have earned the right to be called United States Sailors.

*LT Michaels is open to ideas for future articles so email him at ensignsting@yahoo.com.
He wishes that whoever moved his cheese would hurry up and put it back.*