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Deciphering the Mystery of the NOBC

An NOBC, or Navy Officer Billet Code, is simply a four digit code that describes a particular skill or qualification. According to Part C of the *Manpower Guide*, NOBCs “identify officer billet requirements and officer occupational experience acquired through billet experience or through a combination of education and experience.” Although extremely important, it is probably the least understood factor among officers applying for billets on the annual APPLY Board; and for that reason, we will now review the important facts and functions of this code.

One of the most important things to realize about NOBCs is that the processes for obtaining and administering them changes when an officer leaves active duty. On active duty, NOBCs are credited automatically, without action on the part of the qualifying officer. The *Manpower Guide* notes that “assignment of an NOBC on all officer billets is mandatory.” The NOBC code appearing in the first column of an Officer Distribution Control Report (ODCR) transfers automatically to an officer’s record upon assignment to a billet identified by the NOBC.

Additionally, an officer on active duty may qualify for several other NOBCs, including watches (e.g., Officer of the Deck Underway) and job requirements (e.g., CIC Officer or Shipboard Electrical Officer). These qualifications are documented and then submitted for addition to the officer’s electronic record when that officer transfers from that command. This should happen without any action on the part of the involved officer. An officer’s automated record can hold a maximum of 30 NOBCs (from active duty), which will reflect his/her most recent billet experience. NOBCs earned on active duty become a part of the Inactive Manpower and Personnel Management Information System (IMAPMIS) data file for Reserve officers.

Once an officer enters the Reserve Component, the process changes. The impetus for submitting the NOBC request moves from the active duty command to the individual officer. The experience and job qualifications used to assign an NOBC must be collected by the requesting officer and submitted using a standard letter for consideration. The procedure for doing this is fairly simple, and an example of this letter can be found in Chapter 9 of the BUPERSINST 1001.39 instruction.

The first step of the application process is a self-validation of the NOBC definition and requirements. The NOBC listing in the *Manpower Guide* provides four-to-five skills for each and every NOBC listed. You should review this section carefully to insure that you meet the requirements specified, and that you can back that up with documentation from billets, courses, civilian employment, etc. Do not assume that NOBCs are granted via “rubber stamp.” They are not. If you do not have sufficient proof of your abilities, you will be denied your request; so put in the effort on the front end to prove your skills.

Within your letter, make sure to discuss the billet(s) you held that provided you with the requisite skills and knowledge. If you performed ATs to other commands that provided additional knowledge in this area, list them. However, you do not need to include FITREPs as proof within this letter. Don’t forget to talk about schools (both Navy and civilian), correspondence courses, and any other pertinent qualifiers that will help to build your case. Make sure to obtain copies of any civilian degrees, professional certifications, licenses, etc., that apply to the NOBC before you write/submit your letter.

Once you have collected your documentation and drafted your letter, you will route the package up your chain of command to Commanding Officer, Navy Reserve Personnel Center (N512). It will go via your unit and Navy Reserve Activity COs, and then via your supported command. This last step may vary on a case-by-case

basis, as some communities have specific requirements for the certification of qualifications. Also, some Reserve units have maintained copies of successful packages from previous requests. These can serve as a good template for your own application.

OK, so you’ve assembled your package and placed it in the hands of Uncle Sam’s mail service. What next? Assuming that your chain of command endorsed your application and forwarded it in a timely manner, it should arrive at NRPC (Code N512) fairly quickly. There, it will be reviewed and adjudicated. The response time is fairly quick: you should receive a yes or no within two weeks of receipt. You may also receive a letter informing you that they require additional information or documentation before making their decision. (Remember, this is not a rubber stamp!) You will then receive a letter at your home address informing you of the final results. Then, you should see your new NOBC reflected on your OSR within three-to-seven days after approval.

OK, quickly, let’s discuss some strategies for using your newly acquired NOBCs. First of all, your OSR can only display 12 NOBCs. So, if you are applying for a billet that demands a specific NOBC, make sure that it is visible on the OSR that will be displayed in the tank. This is “adjustable,” and can be rearranged on your OSR to display certain high profile NOBCs. I will discuss how this is done in a future article. The other option is to send a letter to the Board with any newly acquired NOBCs, which will insure that they are viewed and considered for your high-priority billet selections.

Finally, review your past year’s applications and check which NOBCs were required for the jobs you really wanted. Then, GET GOING NOW and apply! Apply for those NOBCs which appear again and again within the database. You’d rather do that now than wait for the application process to begin.

OK, good luck, and we’ll see you next month for the start of the APPLY season! ↴