

What are you going to do? Selecting a Service

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One of the advantages to Navy ROTC is the wide range of opportunities available after graduation. On the flip side, this means that you have to understand the options and choose well. This article is designed to give a brief introduction to most of those options.

Towing the Line

With a couple of exceptions, every NROTC graduate must enter what is called the “unrestricted line,” or “URL.” (Not to be confused with “Uniform Resource Locator,” for the techies playing along at home.) This term harkens back to Ye Olde Days of Saile, when “ships of the line” would form an impenetrable line of canon attack. To this day, if one is an “unrestricted line” officer, one is a warfighter—eligible (eventually) for command at sea.

This is in contrast to the “restricted” or “staff” corps communities, such as the JAG corps (the Navy's lawyers, of the TV series and *A Few Good Men* fame), the supply corps (the guys and gals who keep us well-armed and fed), intelligence officers (not Mensa grads but, rather, spies), public affairs officers (damage control experts of a different kind), etc. Note that none of these jobs entails shooting at an enemy. In fact, many non-line officers are not even allowed to wear swords with their dress uniforms, to emphasize the fact that they are not warfighters, but rather support the warfighters.

Exceptions, or Drawing Outside of the Line

As alluded to earlier, there are two major exceptions to the “only URL jobs” rule:

First, a select number of midshipmen are selected each year to go into the Navy Medical Corps, either at the Uniform Services University of Health Sciences (USUHS) in Bethesda, MD, or a civilian school via the Navy Health Professions Scholarship (NHPS). This is obviously an attractive option for you premed types, as you get your education all the way through medical school for free! Note that this extends your service commitment an extra 4 or 7 years.

Second, people with strong technical, science, or math backgrounds are eligible to become a Naval Reactors Engineer. This involves working in Washington, D.C. designing and testing the Navy's nuclear reactors.

More Non-URL Stuff

There are three other ways you could end up in a non-URL job:

First, anyone with a warfare pin can apply for a “lateral transfer” to another community, including restricted and staff communities. For example, Ensign Schmoie decides after he gets his SWO (Surface Warfare Officer) pin to apply to become a Public Affairs Officer. He submits the paperwork, and if the stars are aligned correctly, he transmogrifies into a PAO.

Second, there are two SWO options which *guarantee* one a lateral transfer: the Engineering Duty Officer and Oceanography Officer programs. Basically, you sign up for one of these options before you commission, and after your first tour you are re-assigned to one of these communities (although you also have the option to stay SWO). EDO people run the Navy’s shipyards and help design ships and ship systems (“sharpening the tip of the spear” according to their propaganda); oceanography people do...well, oceanography. Our sterling BXO, MIDN Contemprato, is doing the EDO option, so talk to him for more information about how this works.

Third, if you are eligible for commissioning but somehow are found physically unqualified to be a URL officer, you may be put directly into a restricted or staff corps billet.

URL: A Three-Minute Tour

All this being said, the vast majority of y’all will be quite happy being warfighters in the Unrestricted Line. Here is a brief tour of your options:

Surface Warfare Officer (SWO)



SWO daddies and mommies form the backbone of our Navy. A host of ships—cruisers, destroyers, frigates, amphibious vessels, and combat support ships—support national policies and project naval power ashore using their Tomahawk cruise missiles, Marines, and the like.

SWOs have the shortest training cycle (what used to be a 6-month stint at Surface Warfare Officer School, or SWOS in Newport, RI is now mostly done “on the job” through the “SWOS at Sea” program), and thus hit the Fleet earliest, exercising leadership right away. One’s commitment (four years) technically means two tours, so the sooner one reports to one’s ship, the sooner one’s “clock is ticking.”

Because of the wide variety of ships (and, perhaps more important, home ports) available, a special system is in place to help prospective SWOs choose their future ships. Early in your senior year, you will be reduced to a number based on several factors, such as your GPA (including Naval Science), your most recent eval, and your PRT score. (See LT Parker for the details.) Later in the year, all the prospective SWOs in all the ROTC units across the country will be ranked based on this number. Whoever is at the top of the list gets to choose from the list of ships at <http://www.bupers.navy.mil/pers41/> Then the second person chooses. Then the third. As you might imagine, if you are at the bottom of the list, there may not be any more shiny new DDGs out of San Diego available.

As mentioned earlier, there is also the option of going straight into the EDO or Oceanography communities after one's first tour.

Submarines (and Nuclear SWO)



Submariners, or “the Silent Service,” are those kinda’ dorky people portrayed in great movies like *The Hunt for Red October*, *Crimson Tide*, and *Down Periscope*. (Many people have told me that *Down Periscope* is the most accurate portrayal of submarine life!) You get to choose either SSNs or SSBNs: the former are attack submarines, which spy on people, attack land and sea targets, and hunt other submarines; the latter are ballistic missile submarines, which lay in wait for the call to blow up the world. Note that, because of concerns over berthing arrangements and other political concerns, the submarine community is not yet open to women.

Because all of our submarines are nuclear powered, every submarine officer is nuclear trained. But, you ask, almost all of our surface combatants are turbine-generator powered, yet why aren't SWOs turbine-generator trained? Well, let us just say that if the Navy were to have a turbine-generator accident, the public wouldn't get into a hissy fit, trying to cut every last bit of funding in Congress. Submariners thus start their career at Nuclear Power School in Charleston, SC, during which they get the equivalent of a masters in nuclear engineering in six months. As the saying goes, “It's like sucking water through a firehose and not being allowed to spill a drop.” This is followed up by six months of “Prototype,” during which one works on an actual reactor, in either Charleston or upstate New York. Finally, one finishes up with two-and-a-half months of Sub school in Groton, CT. There is thus a year of extra training compared to SWOs, and this year does *not* count towards one's four years of obligated service, so submariners really have five years of commitment. However, one does get well-paid for this extra training: there is a \$10,000 (before taxes) signing bonus, followed by a \$2000 bonus upon completion of training and an additional monthly “sub pay” bonus added to one's salary (not to mention the extravagant signing bonuses one can receive if one stays in beyond the minimum five years).



Because of their common nuclear training, submariners are often grouped into the same proverbial (although not literal) boat as Surface Nukes, or “SWO – Nuclear Option.” This option means that one goes to a regular surface ship like every other SWO, but afterwards, one goes to nuclear power school and has one tour doing nuclear things on a nuclear surface ship (i.e. an aircraft carrier). The advantage here is that one's first tour is guaranteed to be a “topside” (non-engineering) tour, one gets extra nuclear training, and one gets the same nuclear bonuses as the sub guys (except sub pay). Like submarines, one's commitment is extended to five years, although unlike submarines, the community is open to women.

Yours truly decided to go subs after hanging out on an SSN over spring break...for me, the biggest plusses were the small crew and the kind of people I met. Talk to LT Parker about arranging a “nuclear visit” if you’re interested.

If you want to be a nuke, the process is both harder and easier than being a SWO: It’s harder because you have to go to Washington, D.C. to get interviewed by a bunch of people including a four-star admiral. It’s easier because they actually are hurting for people now so the interviews aren’t all that difficult, and once one is selected then there’s nothing to worry about. For submariners, it’s especially stress-free, because one’s ship/port selection isn’t done until after nuclear power school.



Note that submariners also have the option of going to dive school after commissioning, which consists of a five weeks of people trying to drown you. According to LT Parker, a dive school alum, “The most fun parts are the parts where you almost die!” (For more information on dive school, see the separate document, “Hooyah! Dive School Gouge.”)

SpecWar and SpecOps



Special Warfare Officers are Navy SEALs, who train rigorously for cool stuff such as unconventional warfare, counter-guerilla warfare and clandestine operations. The “frogmen” (despite *G.I. Jane*, SpecWar is still not available to women) are known for their difficult training, known as Basic Underwater Demolition School (BUD/S).



Special Operations consists of some of the same stuff as Special Warfare, except without killing people. SpecOps is often called “EOD” (Explosive Ordnance Disposal), because of its most popular specialty, but it also includes Expendable Ordnance Management, Diving and Salvage, and Mine Countermeasures. Unlike SpecWar, SpecOps is open to women. EOD personnel start off at Dive School, qualifying as a Basic Diving Officer, and, after some follow-on training, report to a ship, where they work on their SWO pin...thus making it an interesting mix of conventional SWO and special operations training.

You must submit a special application to join SpecWar or SpecOps; there is a strenuous physical test, along with various recommendation forms. Interested male midshipmen should consider doing Mini-BUD/S (which, as the name implies, is a miniature version of BUD/S) for their 1/C cruise.

Aviation



You've all seen *Top Gun*. (What? You haven't? What are you, some kind of Communist?) By far the sexiest career opportunity, naval aviation can involve anything from flying F/A-18 jets off of carriers to flying SH-60B helicopters off of cruisers to flying P-3 anti-submarine planes off of...well, the land. Aviators are known for being laid back and really loving their jobs.

When it comes to naval aviation the big question on everybody's mind is *eyesight*. Right now, the regulations state that pilots have to have uncorrected 20/40 vision correctable to 20/20. If you're like me and have to use coke bottles to see your hands, let alone across the street, there may still be hope for you. A limited number of waivers for certain kinds of corrective eye surgery (especially PRK surgery) are now available, although the extent and number of waivers seems to vary substantially from year to year.



Even if you don't get the surgery waiver, you can still get in on the whole naval aviation business by being a Naval Flight Officer or NFO. NFOs sit in the back seat (and thus are sometimes called "Rios") and "do the real work while the pilot just drives," in the words of one NFO. Think Goose (played by pre-*ER* Anthony Edwards) in *Top Gun*. NFOs have the same vision requirements as the rest of the Navy, so bespectacled midshipmen needn't give up their dream of flying off of a carrier.

Both pilots and NFOs have to go to an extensive flight school training at Aviation Schools Command in Pensacola, FL; they then have an 8 or 6 year commitment, respectively, after they earn their "wings." If you're interested, talk to your advisor early in order to arrange for the requisite extra tests required for aviation.

The Marine Corps



The *Teufelhunde* (Devil Dogs) among us are probably asking why I haven't mentioned anything about them. That's largely because the Corps has a completely different conception of officer training. Every Marine is trained in infantry at The Basic School (or "TBS," in Quantico, VA), and *then* gains additional Marine Occupational Specialties, which roughly correspond to the Navy's warfare communities. One's choice of MOS is largely determined at TBS. Thus, there is no "service selection" process equivalent to the Navy's, at least not until after commissioning.

It is possible to get a “flight contract” which guarantees one an aviation MOS; veteran MO MIDN Miklos received just such a contract. However, he is not obligated to choose aviation; he could go “signals” or “admin” or “artillery” or any other MOS when he gets to TBS. I will not go into detail about each MOS, as there are over 40 occupational specialties with a number of sub-specialties (moreover, much of TBS is designed to introduce marines to these specialties). One item of note, however: A number of URL MOSes correspond to what would be restricted line or staff corps jobs in the Navy. For example, one can be a Public Affairs Officer or a Supply Officer in the Marines as an unrestricted line officer. (The Marine JAG Corps, however, is restricted to people who have already gone to law school.)

If you are a Navy option midshipman interested in converting to “the Dark Side,” as MIDN Miklos did less than three years ago, talk to the MOI.

Graduate School

Another “career opportunity” of sorts for midshipmen is the chance to go to graduate school. You may be interested in order to pursue a field of study that sparked your interest as an undergrad, or to help advance your career (both in and out of the military). Most of the Navy and Marine Corps graduate school programs are for people who have finished their first tour; for example, junior officers at NROTC units usually are able to work on a masters degree. For the purpose of this article, I will focus on those opportunities that exist to do graduate school before your first tour:

- Finish in four years

Hot-running midshipmen who can squeeze in masters requirements as well as their BS/BA can finish in four years. This usually works best for humanities majors; for example, now-LTJG Deal finished both a bachelors and masters degree in English at Stanford in four years.

- Finish in four-and-a-half (or four-and-a-third) years

Another option is to take a personal leave of absence for one semester/quarter, but continue to take classes (often at another university, which can be cheaper). Since the Navy “owes” you four full years of tuition, this gives you an extra quarter/semester to finish up your graduate school. MIDN Moses did this option, studying in Australia during his LOA.

- Graduate School LOA

A relatively obscure section of the NROTC Administrative Manual (NAM) notes that one can apply for a year’s LOA in order to pursue graduate studies. As you are on leave of absence, it is up to you to pay for tuition and living expenses. You have to send in a copy of your acceptance letter to the graduate program, as well as a letter from the CO, at the

start of your 1/C year. I did this option, and will be finishing up my masters next spring, to be commissioned with the now-2/C midshipmen.

- “Scholarship Program”

The Navy offers a “Scholarship Program” allowing a select number of midshipmen to attend graduate school after being commissioned but before going to their first duty assignment. As a prerequisite, you must have received acceptance to graduate school as well as a scholarship that covers at least 25% of your tuition. The advantage of this program over the LOA is that you are commissioned, so you receive full pay and benefits. The disadvantage is that you incur additional service obligation, three years for each year you’re in graduate school. However, this service is served concurrently with your existing NROTC obligation, so if you finish your grad school in one year, there is effectively no additional obligation! See the “Resources” section of this article for more information about the Scholarship Program.

- Aviation Immediate Graduate Education Program

A final option for engineering students who will be naval aviators is getting a masters in Aeronautical Engineering at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) in picturesque Monterey, CA. MIDN Cross will be enrolling in this program; talk to him to learn more about this opportunity. (Note that the Naval Academy version of “IGEP” is also open to future SWO and submarine candidates who major in technical fields. It is possible that similar opportunities exist for NROTC midshipmen, although I’ve been unable to find information about them.)

Another option, which one applies to during NROTC but in which one doesn’t actually attend grad school until after one’s first tour, is the Burke Program (see OPNAVINST 1520.18G). Note that people interested in grad school should look into taking the GRE, or Graduate Readiness Exam, which is like a slightly more difficult version of the SAT. As for professional degrees (like Law or Medicine), see the earlier part of this article on the restricted line and staff corps.

Conclusion

This article should have given you a broad overview of the kinds of opportunities that await you after commissioning. During your time in NROTC, ask questions and learn as much as you can, so you can make an informed decision! Your advisors especially can help you sift through the various options—that’s why they’re here.

Resources

The following websites can give you more details about the various Navy and Marine Corps career opportunities:

http://www.cnet.navy.mil/nascweb/ocs/ocs_designat.htm

explains officer designators and has a list

http://prodevweb.prodev.usna.edu/SVC_Assign/homepage.htm

is for the academy but has good info about the different communities [seems to be restricted access now??]

<http://neds.nebt.daps.mil/>

is the Navy's directive system, where you can find the following:

SECNAVINST 1500.8 and 1520.8 detail the USUHS and NHPS medical school programs

OPNAVINST 1420.1 appendix O summarizes information about designators and communities

OPNAVINST 1520.24B details the "Scholarship Program" for graduate school

http://buperscd.technology.navy.mil/bup_updt/508/milpers/1212-010.htm

MILPERSMAN 1212-010 details information about lateral transfers

<http://www.mediacen.navy.mil/pubs/allhands/jan01/warfarepins.htm>

shows all the different kinds of warfare pins that exist

<http://members.tripod.com/navyvalpo/offprogs.html>

has pictures of shoulder boards

http://www.thefontman.com/mos_chart.htm

is a chart showing all the MOSes, including a "T" next to the ones available for officers

<http://www.usmc.mil/directiv.nsf/9d816d546727ed748525651700581631/4744c049b38f2baf85256af1005cf8fd?OpenDocument>

the Marine Corps MOS Manual, which details what each MOS entails. Yes, it's a long and confusing address, but that's the Corps for you.

<http://www.persnet.navy.mil/pers440/>

is the homepage for the Navy's various officer graduate education and professional development opportunities

<http://www.nps.navy.mil/Code031a/>

is a bit confusing, but it combines a number of resources about graduate school, put out by the Naval Postgraduate School

<http://www.nadn.navy.mil/GraduateEducation/>

is the Naval Academy's graduate education homepage, some of which doesn't apply to us, but which is nevertheless a useful reference, particularly in figuring out one's commitment