

**Vice Admiral Robert Burke**  
**Chief of Naval Personnel**  
**& Vice Chief of Naval Operations**  
**National Defense Week**  
**16 October 2016**

**National Defense Week:** Welcome to National Defense Week for the week of October 16, 2016. I'm your host, Francis Rose, with news and analysis from the world of national defense, national security, and military issues.

On this week's program the real reasons behind the Navy's new rating system that has some enlisted sailors in an uproar. The Navy's 241<sup>st</sup> Birthday message from the CNO and the MCPON. The first results from the Defense Innovation Unit Experimental [RN], a top DIUx advisor and experienced Pentagon leader tells you what they mean. And, the first meeting of the Defense Innovation Board includes remarks from Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter. You'll hear a highlight of those remarks.

First, though, the Navy's preparing for its second career symposium for sailors and civilians by reviewing the results of the first one that happened in Virginia Beach in August. The leader of the event was the Chief of Naval Personnel, Vice Admiral Robert Burke. In an exclusive conversation with National Defense Week Admiral Burke explained the mission and goals of the career symposia and why the Navy wants to help sailors and civilians shape their careers more proactively.

**CNP - National Defense Week - 10/16/16**

**VADM Burke:** It was really meant to be an opportunity to have an open, in some cases formal, and in many cases informal dialogue about career opportunities, career tracks for our sailors. Just to let them, know what the opportunities were out there, and really to talk with them about our intent for what we're going to do with the Navy's people programs going forward.

We're in the middle of a very large initiative. We're almost two years into it and it's going to be a multi-year effort. We call it Sailor 2025. It's really aimed at modernizing our entire approach to our personnel programs. Everything from how we manage assignments and promotions and pays, to how we do training for our sailors to get them ready for their jobs in the fleet, all the way to things with basic health and wellness, life-long fitness goals, all designed to make our sailors more resilient throughout life. Not just life in the Navy. So it was a great opportunity to talk to them about that.

And in the process, we had a rare opportunity to bring all of our career specialists under one roof for these sailors that attended. So community managers that really sort of managed the puts and takes of individual occupational specialties for our sailors, you know, how often they're at sea, what the ratio of sea duty to shore duty, what the career progression, the things they have to learn before they go on to next levels of responsibilities. So those kind of larger strategic thinking

**CNP - National Defense Week - 10/16/16**

policy folks. As well as what we call in the Navy detailers. Those are the folks that make their assignments and write their orders for their next job.

So it was an opportunity to get all of them under one roof. Sailors could engage individually, face to face, which is increasingly difficult to do. We do it by email and by other electronic means all the time, but it was just good to put that personal touch on things.

So it was a very exciting opportunity to get all those things out and about.

**National Defense Week:** There are two things about this that jumped out at me, Admiral. One of them is that this was not here in Washington, it was in Virginia Beach. So you got outside the Beltway to really hear what both sailors and civilians are thinking about. And the other is the idea of the Navy 2025, as you mentioned it.

What should sailors and civilians take away from that idea that you're thinking nine, and I imagine longer than that, years out from today and not just thinking about what we should do today to make things better.

**VADM Burke:** Thanks for those questions as well.

**CNP - National Defense Week - 10/16/16**

The thought behind going to a fleet concentration area, it's just more opportunity to get wider participation by our sailors. And our intent is to eventually rotate which fleet concentration area we would do it in. Maybe San Diego next year. Maybe Pearl Harbor the year after. And then if this continues to be successful and useful to our sailors, we'll do them more frequently so that every sailor will have this opportunity much more frequently.

In terms of the Sailor 2025 effort, which as you rightly supposed, it's really a longer strategic outlook, but 2025 is sort of our in-close goal for doing some major overhauls. But we're in sort of a unique environment right now in the people market. The Navy's in very good shape people wise. We just made our 113<sup>th</sup> consecutive month of meeting our recruiting goal which is relatively unprecedented for the Navy, and I think to a degree with some of the other services as well.

Our retention continues to do relatively well. Historically, as unemployment has come down our retention has suffered. We're not seeing that right now. And for a long time we thought that there was a lot of linkage between sort of post-9/11 patriotism and things like that. We're starting to look at second and third order variables like wage growth for 18-34 year olds. And that's starting to go up, and our retention still isn't going down.

**CNP - National Defense Week - 10/16/16**

So all those things put together with our fleet manning and our all-time relative high, folks joining and staying Navy at about the numbers we want, we really thought it was time to take the strategic opportunity to get ready for the next potential storm. You know if we have another equivalent of the dot-com boom in the '90s where our recruiting and retention suffered tremendously, as it did for all of the services, we want to be ready for that. And we really took a hard look at the fundamentals. Our Navy personnel system has been adjusted many times throughout our 241-year history, but we really haven't fundamentally changed our approach to how we do personnel programs since the draft went away in the '70s.

So we're still very much partly constrained by law, partly constrained by our own thinking and policies, operating on the assumption of we've got this large base of people that we can bring in with the snap of a finger because the draft used to provide that to us. The all-volunteer force, we're still doing that, but is it the most cost-effective way to do it and would you have a pyramid structure the way we do it today if you wanted to sort of optimize things? You know, is up or out the right model? You either get promoted or after a period of time you go home and you lose that training investment, that experience and all those sorts of things.

**CNP - National Defense Week - 10/16/16**

So it was really born out of those philosophical questions. Here we have an opportunity, things are good, the machines are running well right now. We sure would like to be able to respond in a much more agile fashion if the market for talent changes drastically. And there is a very competitive market for talent. We happen to be competing well today, but we don't have the flexibility of having money to throw at the market when it gets tougher.

And more to the point, you know, we're increasingly sensitive to the fact that it's not about money, especially with our younger generation folks. They want a sense of service, they want a sense of participation in their decisions. They want a sense of having a say in things going forward. They want transparency, they want flexibility, they want choices. So that's really what Sailor 2025 is about, providing those things.

So it's things like the Career Intermission Program which we've been piloting for a couple of years now and just expanded significantly, allows sailors to take up to three years of essentially a sabbatical to go do whatever things they need to get done in life. It was originally conceived to allow folks to start a family in and around sea duty. They take that time out and they come back in. And they don't go back in with their peers, but they go back in with the people that are the point

**CNP - National Defense Week - 10/16/16**

they were when they started their sabbatical, so there's no promotion or experience penalty for taking time off.

**National Defense Week:** Vice Admiral Robert Burke, the Chief of Naval Personnel. More of my conversation with him coming up in a moment.

Coming next, the real reasons behind the Navy's new rating system that has some enlisted sailors in an uproar. Admiral Burke explains them next, on National Defense Week.

(Break)

**National Defense Week:** Welcome back to National Defense Week, the Navy's announcements that sailors would no longer be referred to by rating but only by rank has caused a little bit of an uproar among the force. Some sailors hate the idea, while others prefer the concept to the old way. Vice Admiral Robert Burke, the Chief of Naval Personnel was one of the key players in making the decisions that led to the switch. In this highlight of my exclusive National Defense Week interview with Admiral Burke he explained the genesis of the change.

**VADM Burke:** This year was another turning point for all the military services, the Navy included, in that we opened the last remaining occupations that had been closed to women because of

**CNP - National Defense Week - 10/16/16**

combat duty exclusion laws and then policies after that. So this year, that went away. So regardless of race, religion, ethnicity or gender, you can do anything you want to do, if you are qualified to do it, in the United States Navy.

Toward that end, we knew we had to take a look at the ratings that we had just made some adjustments to, and consistent with this larger effort of Sailor 2025, which is all about transparency, flexibility, choices, we wanted to take the opportunity to leverage that holistic look through that lens as well.

So today when a sailor comes in the Navy, partly based on what we need on that day when they go in the recruiting station -- you know, we're getting much more sophisticated about that, but may folks that came in, that was the case -- partly based on their skills and likes and aptitudes, you know, we put them into an occupational specialty. And with very few exceptions, once you start there it's not possible to move out of that occupational specialty. And as the Navy's ship designs, aircraft designs, what have you changed, our manning needs in a particular occupational specialty ebb and flow as they would with any corporation in America, your opportunities for promotion, for increased responsibility, all those things will also ebb and flow.



**CNP - National Defense Week - 10/16/16**

So it's been one of our constant struggles, you know, we call our occupational specialties ratings, in the Navy there was a "choose your rate, choose your fate" mantra. And to a certain extent, that was very true. Your fate could be that we are now overmanned in that area and you may not be able to reenlist. So the solution is change into something else.

And our mechanism for changing your occupational specialty today is sort of a one-way street. And you can only do it once. You can't go back to where you came from. And now you're at a disadvantage because you're six, eight, ten years less experienced for somebody of your equivalent rank and pay and all of those things.

So the idea of our rating modernization was to clear those lines. We have a lot of jobs that are very similar. I mentioned there's 89 occupational specialties today. We've got them divided into 12 career fields that evolved over the last 241 years and not many of them make much physical sense in today's world.

So our first effort is going to be to redefine career fields. An example would be if you're a jet engine mechanic on a helicopter versus a jet engine mechanic on an airplane. Two different ratings today. Why is that? If you're a jet engine mechanic, you're a jet engine mechanic. We'll give you the additional

**CNP - National Defense Week - 10/16/16**

training to work on both different engines and allow you to move back and forth.

From the sailor's perspective, now they're eligible for a lot more jobs, maybe more home port choices, maybe more special pay, so higher pay and incentives if that particular thing is in need for the Navy on that day.

For the Navy's part, we get more opportunity to get the right sailors with the right skills in the right place at the right time. So it ends up being a win/win and that's the idea behind it.

So then the conundrum is, if you're two different things in the Navy, what do you call yourself? Let's call ourselves by our rank like the other services do. And that's what our solution is going forward.

We've changed the Navy rating system hundreds of times in the last two centuries. So change is part of our tradition as well. When it does something to increase our combat effectiveness, our sailors' effectiveness at doing their jobs, or their quality of life and quality of service. And that's what this is about.

**National Defense Week:** You told the Navy Times recently that you want to redraw those career field lines with two major

**CNP - National Defense Week - 10/16/16**

objectives. One is regrouping the Naval occupational specialties, and you talked about that a moment ago. But one of the things that I thought was striking is the desire to help sailors with civilian certifications, so that whether they stay in the Navy or not, they've achieved qualifications that are recognizable anywhere they go.

What's the benefit to the Navy to folks being able to take a credential out of the Navy and go back to the private sector?

**VADM Burke:** It's a little bit counter-intuitive at first. But the thought process is that it becomes a recruiting vehicle for us to say you can leave the Navy as an FAA certified air traffic controller, for example, you know, which would be one of the things we would work for. We have many air traffic controllers on our aircraft carriers today that do the same thing that air traffic controllers in the civilian world do in a slightly different environment that could easily be trained. So why not bring in the FAA's requirements into our training programs and also our promotion, you know, link it to the promotions as well.

The retention hook then becomes okay, don't leave when you're an apprentice. Leave when you're a master, and we'll take you through all the steps from apprentice to journeyman to master in that field.

**CNP - National Defense Week - 10/16/16**

And then there's the greater good philosophy of we think sailors, whether they retire or get out after their initial term of service, we think they will be good citizens and we're happy to contribute to better citizens.

**National Defense Week:** Why do you think the backlash has been as vocal as it has been to this decision? Is it mostly traditionalism? Or do you think there are other factors there that maybe you recognize, don't agree with them, but at least recognize?

**VADM Burke:** Well, philosophically you have to be careful about saying that the backlash is any worse than it ever is. I think social media and the tools that are out there can lead you to that perception.

What we're finding though is like anything else, when it's new there are many questions. And you know, some people read into the details right away. Others don't get there until a little bit later. And after we have the option where you sit down with our sailors, with their senior enlisted leaders, with their commanding officers, whoever it might be that takes the time to sit down with them, a light bulb goes on in terms of here's where this can help me and I understand it.

**CNP - National Defense Week - 10/16/16**

We have many loyalties and things that identify us in the Navy, just like the other services do. Ratings is one of them but ships, our warfare specialties within the Navy. But ultimately, we're all part of one Navy team defending our nation, and I think the American public, when they talk to any sailor -- officer, enlisted, whatever their profession might be within the Navy, they don't see Aircraft Ordnanceman First Class Smith; they see United States Navy Sailor. And that's kind of the message we're sending. We're all sailors, we're all one team. We can still identify with our division, with our trade, our craft, whatever it might be. The name is what's important, and the one Navy team.

**National Defense Week:** Vice Admiral Robert Burke, Chief of Naval Personnel in his office here in Washington. You can read more about the ratings change and listen to my exclusive conversation with Admiral Burke again at [NationalDefenseWeek.com](http://NationalDefenseWeek.com).

# # # #