



# Commanding Officer Detach for Cause Study

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**Naval Inspector General  
Report on  
Commanding Officers Detached for Cause**

### **Executive Summary**

The Vice Chief of Naval Operations directed the Naval Inspector General to conduct an in-depth review of Navy Commanding Officer (CO) Detach for Cause (DFC) cases throughout the past five years to determine if systemic factors contributed to the removals.

A team of four post-major-command Navy captains compiled a list of 78 COs in pay grades O-3 to O-6, who were relieved from command from January 1999 through June 2004. Although not all early removals met DFC processing criteria, our review included every CO who had been “relieved early” as a result of poor performance or behavior.

The team collected case information from a combination of Navy Personnel Command (NPC) databases, type commander (TYCOM) records, hotline investigation files, and corporate memory. The Navy does not have a central database for documenting cases of COs being “relieved for cause,” and most commands did not keep investigation files longer than three years. File data from 1999-2001 is limited to only those names in the NPC DFC database and may not include every CO who was relieved.

The Navy has 1291 non-flag command billets, active and reserve, with approximately 560 changes of command each year. We estimate that 12 COs were relieved per year in 2001 and 2002, equating to a CO relief rate of less than one percent. The number of cases doubled in 2003 with 26 removals, and that increase continued with 12 cases in the first half of 2004.

*Personal behavior* was the category that had the most significant increase in early reliefs, accounting for a full 50% of the 2003-2004 cases. Of those cases, 31% involved alcohol. Reliefs resulting from *significant events* and *command climate* issues increased between 2002 and 2003. *Command performance* reliefs remained steady from 2001 to 2003. All categories of relief, except personal behavior, declined during the first half of 2004. Major command (O-6) COs accounted for nearly half of the 2003-04 personal misconduct reliefs, and over 56% of those involved inappropriate relationships or adultery.

A comparison of demographics, training, and career paths for the 78 COs relieved revealed no significant commonalities. Instead, a CO’s failure to follow established regulation, law, moral, or ethical principles, occasionally after being counseled, was the primary cause of most reliefs.

For our analysis we reviewed the command selection and slating process, PCO training courses, officer career paths and training, in addition to interviewing ISICs, TYCOMs and their staffs. In the end, we found no systemic factors relating to the increase in CO reliefs.

The following recommendations are submitted for the purpose of improving future commanding officer performance:

- Incorporate a 360° assessment tool at the PXO level
- Develop and implement a refresher course for all major command PCOs
- Improve Operational Risk Management training in the SWO PCO pipeline
- Institute command self-assessment training for all DH/XOs, review for PCOs

The Navy continues to hold its commanding officers to the highest of personal and professional standards. Command is demanding, accountability is absolute, and not all will succeed. As one senior flag officer commented, "If there's a flaw [in a person], there's a good chance command will bring it out." This study confirms that the Navy's best officers are being selected for command, and that there is little tolerance for those who fail to uphold its high standards.

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**Naval Inspector General  
Report on  
Commanding Officers Detached for Cause**

**Section 1: Introduction**

**1.A Tasking.** The Vice Chief of Naval Operations directed the Naval Inspector General (NAVINGEN) to conduct an in-depth review of Navy's Commanding Officer Detach for Cause (CO DFC) cases over the past five years and assess systemic factors that may have contributed to the early reliefs.

**1.B Team Composition.** The study was co-chaired by two post-major-command Captains from the NAVINGEN staff and supplemented by two other post-major-command Captains, and for the purpose of this report may be referred to as "the team" or "we." Team members are listed below with designators and prior commands.

CAPT	1310	former Commander, Training Air Wing FIVE
CAPT	1500	former Commander, Defense Contract Management Agency Van Nuys
CAPT	1120	former Commander, Submarine Squadron FOUR
CAPT	1110	former Commanding Officer, USS MONTERREY

**Section 2: Relief Process**

**2.A Initiating a DFC.** A variety of actions may be taken against an officer adversely relieved of command. An officer may be Detached for Cause, relieved early and reassigned elsewhere, disciplined under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), and/or allowed to resign or retire.

The term "Detach for Cause" or "DFC," per Military Personnel Manual 1611-020, is the administrative removal of an officer from a duty assignment prior to the planned rotation date, as a result of poor performance or conduct. There are four reasons for initiating a DFC:

- Misconduct
- Unsatisfactory performance involving a significant event
- Unsatisfactory performance over an extended period
- Loss of confidence

**2.B Prior to a DFC Request.** Before a DFC is requested, the ISIC should have provided correctional guidance (i.e., Letter of Instruction), considered reassignment within the command, and determined that the deficiency can not be corrected by counseling, training, or discipline. An approved DFC waives tour length requirements and releases Permanent Change of Station (PCS) funds. DFC is normally not appropriate if the officer already has PCS orders, if the designated relief is ready to take command, or if the officer can be reassigned in the local area until tour length completion.

### Section 3: Methodology / Assessment Process

**3.A Overview.** The team began by compiling a list of commanding officers, active and reserve, *relieved for cause* during the period 1999-2004. Comprising more than just DFC cases, the list includes all who were relieved of command for an adverse reason, whether meeting DFC criteria or not. The information came from a combination of Navy Personnel Command (NPC) databases, type commander (TYCOM) records, interviews, and hotline investigation reports.

In addition to examining individual cases, we reviewed the command screening and slating processes for each major community, and the training pipelines for all prospective COs, along with officer warfare training received during career progression.

The team visited commands in Millington, Norfolk, San Diego, and Washington, DC, and conducted numerous telephone interviews. A list of commands and personnel interviewed can be found in the "Interviews" section of this report. Additionally, selected COs were interviewed by telephone.

As the study parameters covered only U.S. Navy commanding officers, we did not review Detach for Cause information from other military services. This report contains our findings, analysis, opinions, and recommendations.

**3.B Criteria.** Following a review of available information, we categorized the cases according to the following criteria:

- Significant event--collision, grounding, aviation mishap, death of a command member, etc.
- Command performance--mission accomplishment, operational performance, or mission readiness significantly below standards and not improving
- Command climate--satisfactory command performance, but poor morale due to an abusive or unhealthy climate attributable to the CO
- Personal behavior--inappropriate conduct/misconduct by the CO

Many of the cases contained elements from more than one category. Often a "significant event" case had indicators of poor command performance or an abusive command climate. For the purpose of this study, the cases were characterized based upon the primary reason that precipitated the early relief.

**3.C Career Comparisons of COs.** A "head to head" comparison of COs relieved in each of the three major warfare communities (surface, submarine, and aviation) was conducted to determine if there were significant commonalities in their career paths. Criteria compared included: officer accession source, year group, gender, age, race, operational background, total sea time, reason for relief, months in command at time of relief, number of ISIC turnovers, and prior command experience. No significant career commonalities were found that could be attributed to the COs being relieved for cause.

**3.D Official Record Screening.** Selected COs' fitness reports were screened to determine if there were prior indications of trouble. While it is unlikely that an officer with documented problems (i.e., alcohol abuse or indications of an abusive leadership style) would screen for command, the possibility could not be dismissed. However, in every case, there was no indication or documentation of prior problems in the fitness report file. On the contrary, fitness reports were uniformly outstanding in every case.

**3.E Command Screen Process.** We reviewed the command screen/slating process for each community to determine its sufficiency. Administrative command screen boards are conducted much like statutory promotion boards. Each community selects its board members from a broad cross-section of highly qualified and experienced officers. NPC distribution division directors all indicated that they spent considerable time educating the board president and members on the precept, board processes, and individual community nuances. To eliminate community bias, records are briefed by members that are randomly selected; aviation records are briefed by members of other aircraft communities.

Officers must be board-selected by their communities before being slated into CO positions. The list of selected officers is then reviewed by PERS-48 using the Officer Performance Access Tracking System database to check for past or pending disciplinary action. This database only contains Request for DFC and Report of NJP data. However, unlike the statutory promotion board review process, the command selection board process (an administrative board) does not screen for personnel who might have a previous substantiated Hotline or an ongoing IG investigation.

We concluded that the current command screen board process is a sound and proven means of selecting the best-qualified officers for command and requires no change.

**3.F PCO Training Pipelines.** We examined the PCO pipeline of each major warfare designator to determine if PCO training—career or pipeline—was related to the increase in reliefs. There is a wide variety of naval commands, and consequently each community tailors its PCO pipeline to best prepare its COs for their unique command responsibilities.

All initial-command PCOs attend Command Leadership School, Commanding Officer Anti-Terrorism School, the Command Legal Course, as well as community-specific courses, as summarized:

**3F.1 Command Leadership School.** The Center for Naval Leadership's Command Leadership School (CLS) in Newport, Rhode Island, is a 10-day course required for PCOs prior to initial command. The course focuses on command leadership principles, with significant emphasis on ethics, core values, developing and mentoring subordinates, positive command climate, team building, decision-making, and inspirational leadership. Additionally, 10-12 case studies of COs recently "relieved for cause" are examined for their "lessons learned" value.

CLS instructor billets are filled by post-command-commanders from various warfare communities. The CLS Director billet was recently changed to require a post-major-command Surface Warfare Officer (SWO) and will be filled with such beginning this fall.



Having a post-major-command SWO as CLS director will ensure the proper perspective and level of experience in the course. We found the current curriculum to be well developed, with a thorough emphasis on ethical and principled leadership and more than sufficient emphasis on recent cases.

**3.F.2 *Submarine Warfare Community.*** Submarine officers pass through several qualification points during their careers, with the following required for command:

a. **Submarine Command Qualification.** A prerequisite for attending the Submarine Command Course, this qualification is typically completed during the department head tour. It requires demonstration of tactical skills, seamanship, operational risk management, and decision-making. The submarine squadron commander observes the officer's performance, and the TYCOM administers a practical assessment before granting qualification. Prior to a department head assignment, the officer must have successfully completed a six-month department head school, which includes classroom and underway training, as well as written and practical examinations.

b. **Submarine Command Course.** This nine-week course, taught at Naval Submarine School, Groton, Connecticut, includes four weeks of lectures and simulators and three weeks at sea, where every submarine mission area is exercised. Throughout this rigorous course, written and practical exams stress operational and planning skills, as well as risk management. PCO course performance is briefed to higher authority. A recent change added the requirement for prospective executive officers (PXOs) to attend the course; they will repeat the course to update and refresh their skills before going on to command tours. After successful completion of this course, PCO/PXOs then attend additional courses based on their submarine type. SSN PCOs attend the Joint Maritime Tactical Training Course as described below for surface COs.

**3.F.3 *Surface Warfare Community.*** Prior to being screened for command, an officer must satisfy all requirements of the Surface Warfare Command Qualification instruction. This includes a ship-handling certification letter from a CO, qualification as Engineering Officer of the Watch, successful service as an executive officer, and passing a command qualification board. The PCO completes a training curriculum tailored to the specific ship class, including the following:

a. **Surface Warfare Command Course.** This eight-week course, taught at Surface Warfare Officer School, Newport, Rhode Island, contains a core package of lessons dealing with generic CO concerns and a tailored program to expose PCOs to the specifics of their prospective ship's class. Areas reviewed are shiphandling, combat systems, material readiness, information technologies, and the tactical employment of the ship. The course also includes modules on legal matters, military justice, fitness report writing, navigation, and self-assessment. Course instructors are post command or post-XO, with recent experience in the same type ship as the PCO. The course culminates with one week of underway training.

b. **Bridge Resource Management Course.** Includes extensive review of navigation and seamanship mishap case studies, plus simulated bridge operations in the Maritime Safety Institute's bridge simulation trainer.

c. Joint Maritime Tactical Training Course. Taught at the Tactical Training Groups, this course is designed to train the composite warfare commander, subordinate warfare commanders, their staffs, and PCOs to plan and execute aircraft carrier strike group and expeditionary strike group operations at sea. The course provides hands-on employment of intelligence resources and operational strategy development and culminates in war-gaming the developed plan. This course broadens PCO war-fighting knowledge in sustained strike group operations at sea.

d. TYCOM briefs. The PCOs spend one to two weeks at the TYCOM staff receiving briefs from the assistant Chiefs of Staff. This training includes significant time with the Type Commander discussing current operations, personal integrity, standards, and recent CO reliefs.

**3.F.4 Aviation Warfare Community.** While surface warfare and submarine community officers attend a six-month department head school, aviation department head training is currently conducted on-the-job (OJT), with the exception of a few billet-related courses (maintenance officer, aviation safety officer, etc.). Plans are underway to develop and incorporate an aviation department head course at the Aviation Center of Excellence, as part of Naval Aviation Schools Command in Pensacola, Florida.

Unlike the surface and submarine communities, there are no specific “command-required” qualifications prior to being selected for aviation command, except standard warfare qualifications and a competitive record of performance.

Officers selected for aviation squadron command "fleet up" to CO after a tour as the XO. PXO/PCOs receive aircraft refresher flight/tactical training at the fleet readiness squadron (FRS) just prior to commencing their tour. PXO/PCOs also attend the following courses:

a. Aviation Safety Command Course. This course, currently taught at the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, teaches principles of aviation safety from a command perspective, as well as fulfills Aircraft Mishap Board Senior member training requirements. It includes 12 hours of Operational Risk Management (ORM) training.

b. Joint Aviation Supply/Maintenance Material Management course. (Optional for PXO/PCOs).

c. Senior Officers' Course at Naval Strike and Air Warfare Center. (HSL squadron commanding officers only).

d. TYCOM PCO course. Includes an aviation maintenance/metrics course (Airspeed), a business case analysis module, a “leadership roundtable,” and personal discussions with the Type Commander.

e. BUPERS training. Includes selection board processes, fitness report writing, squadron manning, detailing/placement, etc.

**3.F.5 Naval Recruiting District (NRD) Command.** Commander, Navy Recruiting Command (CNRC) sponsors an NRD command course for PXOs, who will "fleet up" to CO following their XO tours. PXOs receive four weeks of NRD pipeline (Pensacola), one week at CNRC headquarters in Millington, and one week working alongside an XO at an NRD. PCOs return to CNRC for one week just prior to assuming command.

**3.F.6 Major Shore Command.** The four week Navy and Marine Corps Shore Station Command Seminar emphasizes all aspects of shore installation management and includes briefings on ethical leadership, human resources, civilian personnel law, civilian career development, and legal case studies.

**3.F.7 Aircraft Carrier (CV/CVN) Command.** Conventional powered aircraft carrier (CV) PCOs attend the SWOS command course and receive one week of TYCOM briefings. This training emphasizes the 3M system, command spot-checks, and self-assessment and broadens CV PCOs' knowledge of shipboard maintenance processes. The course is particularly beneficial, since the disestablishment of the Senior Officers Shipboard Maintenance and Repair Course (SOSMRC), and given the fact that recent CV CO reliefs have been primarily due to poor INSURV performance. This training brings CV PCO maintenance training more in line with the training of CVN PCOs, who go through the nuclear power training pipeline.

We concluded that each individual warfare community's PCO pipeline training is properly tailored and more than sufficient to ensure a successful command tour.

#### **Section 4: Interviews**

**4.A Personnel Interviewed.** We conducted face-to-face, or telephone interviews with the following senior personnel and their staffs to gain their perspective on the increase in reliefs:

- Commander, Naval Surface Forces and staff (COS, N1, JAG, etc.)
- Commander, Naval Submarine Force Atlantic and staff
- Commander, Naval Air Force Atlantic and staff
- Commander, Naval Surface Force Atlantic and staff
- Commander, Naval Recruiting Command and staff
- Commander, Amphibious Group Two and staff
- Commander, Amphibious Group Three
- Commander, Carrier Group One
- Current and former submarine and surface squadron commanders
- Commanding Officer, Center for Naval Leadership
- Director of Command Leadership School and coordinator of the Shore Station Command Seminar
- PCO course instructors/coordinators for surface, submarine, aviation, recruiting, reserve, and special warfare communities
- BUPERS distribution directors, various placement officers, and detailers

**4.B Interview Focus.** Questions focused primarily on the following:

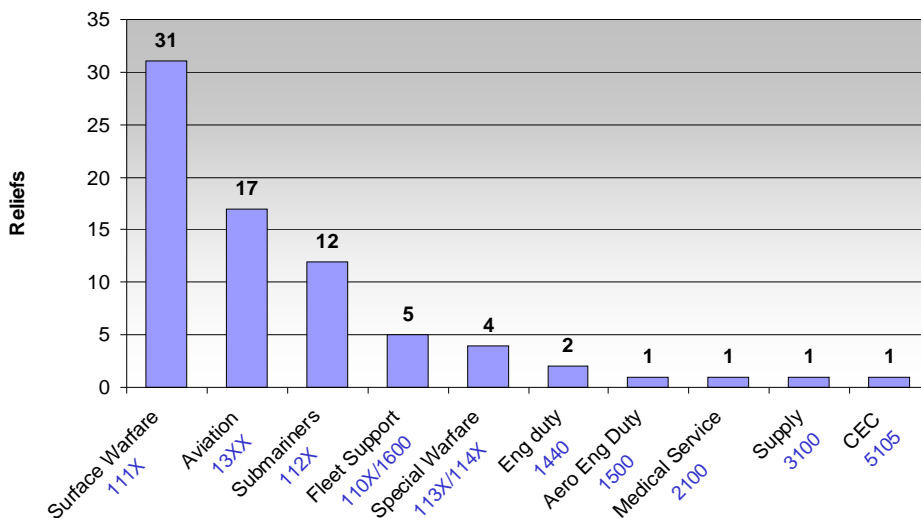
- ISIC oversight, particularly with respect to command performance metrics and indicators
- Identification and documentation of character issues, particularly alcohol abuse prior to command
- Training and mentoring of PCOs and COs, particularly regarding Operational Risk Management, and assessment of command performance and climate
- Real or perceived changes to the standards of performance (personal and professional) while in command
- ISIC/staff perspectives on reasons for the increase in CO reliefs

**Section 5: Data Analysis / Findings**

**5.A Database.** Seventy-eight COs, pay grades O-3 to O-6 and in designators listed in Figure 1, were relieved of command from January 1999 through June 2004.

Since not every relief met DFC processing criteria, the review expanded to include every CO who had been relieved, whether or not DFC action was appropriate. Consequently, the term “relief” or “relieved” in this report indicates all COs who were adversely relieved for cause.

BUPERS does not track COs whom the ISIC “rolled early” (adjusted the PRD forward in lieu of being relieved for cause), and most commands do not keep investigative files longer than three years. Although confident we reviewed every CO relieved from 2002-2004, our cases for 1999-2001 are limited to those names in the BUPERS database.



**Fig. 1 - Reliefs by designator**

**5.B Command Billets.** Figure 2 is a breakdown of command billets for the three major warfare communities, commands filled by all other designators, and the “shared” commands that can be filled by any designator.

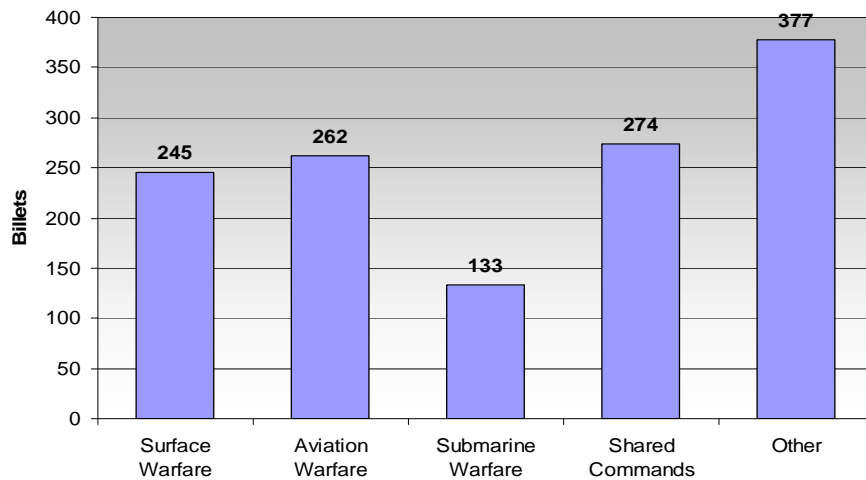


Fig. 2 - Command billets by designator

**5.C Relief Rate.** There are 1291 non-flag command billets, active and reserve, all designators, with an average command tour length of 28 months. Available data indicates 12 COs per year were relieved in 2001 and 2002, which equates to a relief rate of slightly less than one percent. However, the number more than doubled in 2003, with 26 COs relieved early, and that rate continued for the first half of 2004 with 12 reliefs through 30 June (Fig. 3).

Additionally, we found 21 COs who remained in command after problems were reported. These 21 cases came primarily from Inspectors General hotline files and are likely just a percentage of COs who had significant issues, but rectified the situation and remained in command.

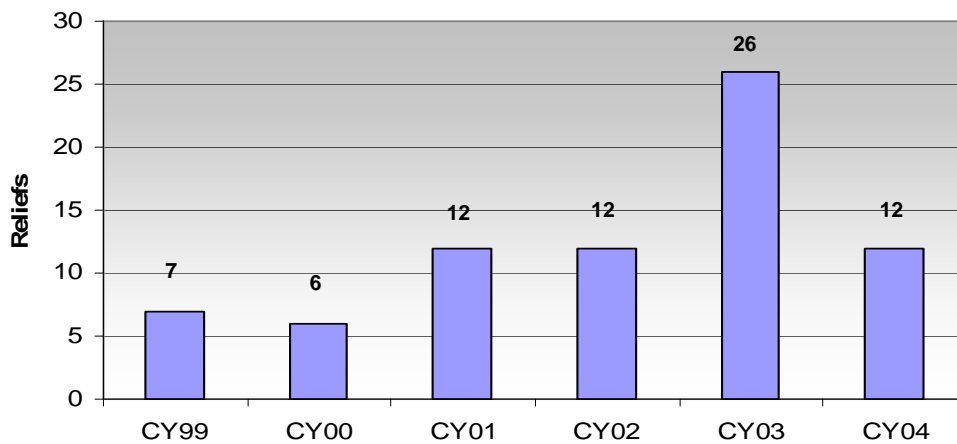


Fig. 3 - Reliefs by year

**5.D Data by Category.** Of the 78 officers relieved, there was enough information available to categorize 75, as shown in Figure 4. Three cases from 1999-2000 were not included in comparison statistics due to incomplete information.

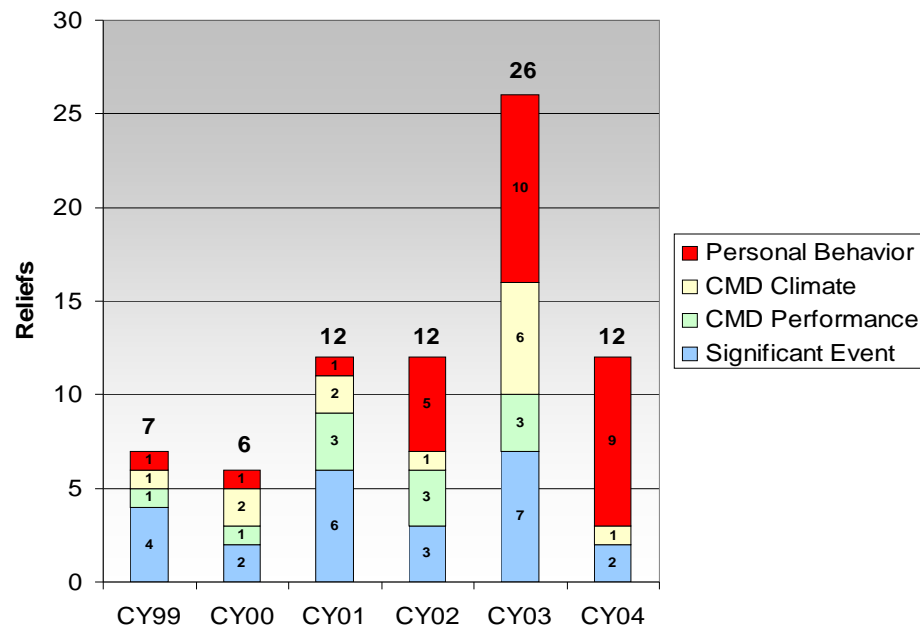


Fig. 4 - Categories by year

**5.D.1 Personal Behavior/Misconduct.** These cases accounted for 27 of the 75 early reliefs (36%), with alcohol a factor in 9 of these cases. This category had the most significant increase in early reliefs, doubling from six of 24 (25%) in 2001-2002 to 19 of 38 (50%) in 2003-2004. Although some cases contained several charges, the primary causes of the 19 reliefs in 2003-2004 were:

- Adultery/inappropriate relationships (6)
- Assault/harassment/sexual assault (5)
- Alcohol/DUI (3)
- Falsifying documents (2)
- Computer pornography (2)
- Orders violation (1)

**5.D.2 Significant Event.** Twenty-four of 75 CO reliefs (32%) were characterized as due to significant events (collisions, groundings, crew death, or aircraft mishap). Poor operational planning and the lack of a structured operational risk management process were the primary causes in most of these events.

However, ship and submarine CO reliefs due to navigation and seamanship-related significant events declined from six in 2001-2002 to three in 2003-2004, likely as a result of increased TYCOM and ISIC visibility and training emphasis.

**5.D.3 Command Climate.** Thirteen reliefs (17%) were the result of command climate issues, with nine of those occurring at shore commands. Telephone, email, or hotline complaints were a factor in nearly half (44%) of command climate cases.

**5.D.4 Command Performance.** Eleven of the 75 reliefs (15%) were the result of command performance issues. These reliefs were primarily due to INSURV failures, poor material readiness, or poor mission performance.

### **5.E Data by Warfare Community:**

**5.E.1 Surface Warfare.** There were 31 surface warfare COs relieved. Twenty-four of these 31 reliefs (77%) were commanding ships when relieved. Groundings, surface collisions, ship collision with a buoy, and crew deaths accounted for 14 of the 31 reliefs (45%). Twelve of these 14 reliefs (86%) were a direct result of navigation and seamanship failures. Figure 5 is the breakdown of reliefs by community.

Personal behavior/misconduct accounted for 10 of 31 (32%) of the SWO reliefs, and alcohol played a role in 5 of these cases.

Two of the 3 reliefs due to poor command performance were because of poor INSURVs, and one was due to the CO's inability to correct shipboard maintenance and material deficiencies.

Three of the four SWO command climate related reliefs were COs of Navy Recruiting Districts.

**5.E.2 Submarine Warfare.** There were 12 submarine COs relieved. Six of the 12 reliefs were the result of 4 significant events—two collisions and two groundings.

Three of 12 submariners (25%) were relieved due to personal behavior—one was alcohol related and two were for inappropriate relationships.

Two of 3 command performance reliefs were submariners commanding submarines and one was the CO of a Navy Recruiting District.

**5.E.3 Aviation.** Seventeen aviators were relieved of command. Eight of the aviation early reliefs (47%) were due to personal behavior.

Three reliefs were due to aircraft mishaps directly attributable to poor ORM planning at the command level. Four of the 17 were due to command performance, and two of those were due to INSURV failures. Two of the reliefs were due to command climate issues.

**5.E.4 Other Designators.** All other designators combined accounted for 15 CO reliefs. Seven of these were due to command climate related issues, predominantly at shore commands. Six were for personal behavior, one involved a significant event, and one was a command performance issue.

Of note, command climate was the primary characterization for all five reliefs in the former Fleet Support Officer community (110X/1600 designators). Each case had elements of an abusive or hostile work environment, poor leadership, or poor command morale.

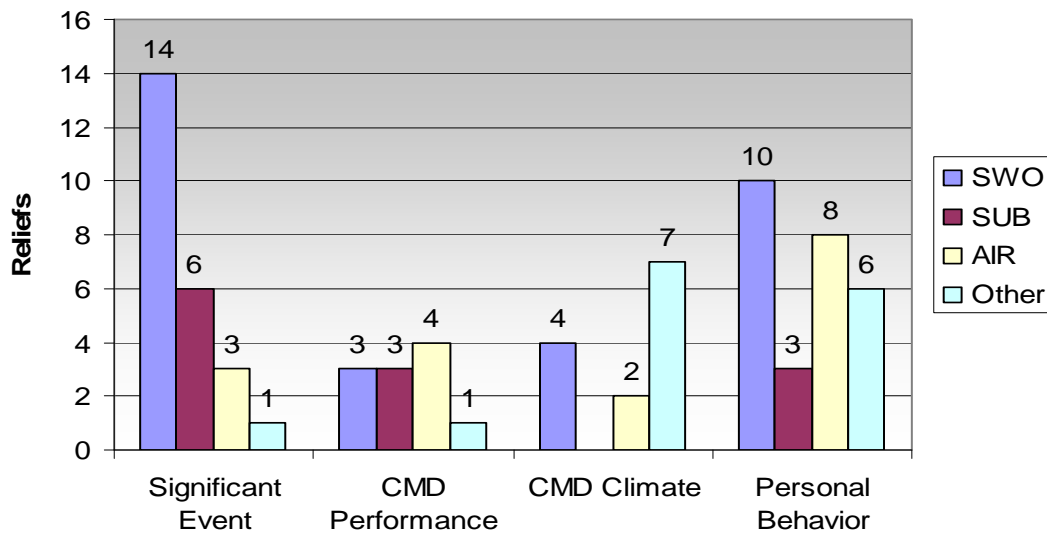


Fig 5. Early reliefs by category and community

**5.F Captains.** Navy 0-6's accounted for 31% of all early reliefs, with an increase from 9 (24%) in 1999-2002 to 14 (37%) in 2003-2004. Nearly half (47%) of the personal behavior/misconduct early reliefs in 2003-2004 were captains, with over half of those (56%) involving adultery or inappropriate relationships.

**5.G Other DFCs.** As part of the tasking, we compiled DFC statistics for all pay grades. BUPERS recorded 170 total DFC requests during the period 1999-2004. In addition to 40 COs, 130 other officers in all ranks from chief warrant officer (CWO2) to captain were processed for detachment for cause.

## Section 6: Assessments / Opinions

The following assessments and opinions are based upon our collective review of the cases, interviews with senior Navy leadership, and internal team discussions.

**6.A Personal Behavior.** Commanding officer personal behavior or misconduct is largely responsible for the significant increase in CO reliefs between 2002 and 2003. No other category of relief has had as sizeable an increase.

Many of the early reliefs in this study resulted from poor judgment on the part of COs who should have known better. The standards of personal behavior, and the emphasis on personal accountability for those in command, are thoroughly addressed throughout most communities' PCO training pipeline, especially during CLS. In nearly every case, the officers relieved for personal behavior clearly knew the rules. In some cases, they had been specifically counseled, but ultimately chose to violate the regulation.



The increase in the number of captains being relieved is particularly troubling, as most of those officers are in their second or third command tour. The majority of O-6 personal misconduct reliefs (56%) in 2003-2004 involved inappropriate relationships, fraternization, inappropriate actions of a sexual nature, or adultery. In our interviews we found that there was a few cases of “hostile” divorces, whereby a disaffected spouse reported the CO’s misconduct to the ISIC.

Command is difficult, often lonely, and a CO without family, peer COs, or close friends nearby is potentially more vulnerable to abusing alcohol or developing an inappropriate relationship. We believe that a few of the personal misconduct cases might have been averted had that CO had a viable support system nearby.

We could not conclusively determine whether the significant rise in reliefs from adultery and alcohol related incidents was due to a recent increase in such behavior, or rather, from a growing intolerance for such behavior in COs. Subordinates today have a greater level of awareness of the CO’s behavior and are much less reticent to report misconduct. Greatly improved connectivity with the Internet, email, and hotlines have made it nearly impossible for a CO’s personal indiscretions to remain private.

**6.B Alcohol Abuse.** Documentation of performance in fitness reports (FITREPs) appears sufficient, with the possible exception of alcohol abuse.

With officer populations spread out over greater geographic areas, an officer with a DUI or alcohol-related incident may go unnoticed by the command unless self-reported. Likewise, with less and less wardroom socializing, particularly while ashore in CONUS, there is potentially less command-level visibility on officer alcohol use or abuse.

We suspect that the desire to ensure an otherwise strong officer remains viable for promotion may preclude some reporting seniors from documenting an alcohol incident in the fitness report. Consequently, we found more than one case where COs had a history of alcohol incidents, one while in command previously. Current behavior is often indicative of past behavior, particularly with alcohol.

Once known by the command, COs must hold officers accountable. Even when there is a valid requirement for treatment, if an officer continues to abuse alcohol or related incidents continue, fitness report documentation is a necessary requirement.

Alcohol was a factor in 2 of 6 (33%) personal behavior reliefs in 2001-2002 and 6 of 19 (31%) of the reliefs in 2003-2004. Clearly, a CO with an alcohol incident while in command has severely compromised his/her authority and forfeited any capacity to discipline Sailors for similar incidents.

**6.C Command Climate.** We found shore commands had a higher incidence of command climate issues and accounted for 9 of 13 command climate reliefs. A review of hotline complaints indicates that members of operational commands are less likely to call the hotline than those in shore commands. This could be due to the presence of civilians ashore and the tightness of unit integrity afloat.

Shore commands, particularly those with a large number of people spread across a wide geographic area, (e.g., Navy Recruiting Districts), are at a higher risk for poor command climates that may well go unrecognized by the ISIC. This can be attributed to a variety of factors, including:

- Lack of previous experience in that type of command
- High stress environment with limited interaction with peer COs
- Lack of frequent direct observance of the command by the ISIC
- CO's reliance upon telephone and e-mail interaction with subordinates

COs who abused their authority, or created hostile work environments, likely had exhibited those same poor leadership attributes in the past, but they were not documented in FITREPs. Often COs who “get the job done” are rewarded by ISIC's who may not be aware of the prevailing command climate. We were surprised at the number of command climate related reliefs and are convinced those COs' negative leadership styles existed well prior to command.

**6.D Uniqueness of Command.** Despite the many command metrics available, a CO's success cannot always be predicted. COs face diverse challenges, many of which they may have never dealt with before. Depending upon previous experience, any number of new challenges can set the CO up for failure. The ability to successfully deal with new and varied challenges is the very essence of command.

Although the submarine command course does an overall assessment of each PCO in a brief to the TYCOM, it is still not an ironclad predictor of success. According to one flag-rank submariner, when analyzing to predict success or failure, the results have proven to be "all over the map." While some individuals flourish under the pressure of command, others are unable to lead on this higher plane.

Surface ship and submarine “driving” is a team effort. Those COs, who—because of experience, personality, or overconfidence—become “a one man show” easily stifle subordinate input and deny themselves often-critical assistance. Similarly, those COs who don't fully develop their bridge team's total skill-set, along with developing team cohesiveness and loyalty, will have undermined themselves when an underway evolution becomes problematic. The submarine community's concept of “forceful backup”—whereby everyone has the responsibility to speak up—has proven invaluable in averting significant events like groundings and collisions.

Command calls for the ability to lead a diverse group of individuals on a level well above that previously required. Consequently, the stressors and unique challenges of command may manifest behavior that was up until that time suppressed, or of an insufficient degree to be noticed. Command may cause character and leadership flaws to be exposed for the first time. Officers who once conducted themselves “above reproach” now, as the CO, may somehow feel entitled to “bend the rules.” The command environment often plays a role here, as subordinates typically want to please the CO. Consequently they may be reluctant to challenge questionable decisions or may not be aware that the CO's actions might be wrong. COs who lack personal

discernment, or who are not keenly aware of their subordinates' actions, can find themselves unduly influencing or even abusing command authority.

We found several cases in which a CO's blatant disregard for established standard operating procedures, or deviation from higher authority's guidance, resulted in a significant adverse event. Typically, the command's lack of a deliberate risk assessment process was a factor and contributed to the CO's failure to fully consider the potential consequences of deviating from policy.

Across the board, we found more awareness and less tolerance for substandard performance at the command level. Drawn to a standards-based organization as many military personnel are, subordinates expect a CO to uphold the highest of personal and professional standards. Additionally, TYCOM interviews revealed a growing reluctance to "suffer through" a weak CO, especially if there is no viable assessment process and no clear command-level plan of action to improve overall command performance.

**6.E Prospective CO (PCO) Training Pipeline.** Overall, each community provides more than sufficient PCO training to permit successful command tours. The marked differences that communities provide in formal PCO training can be explained by the relative risks associated with the different types of command. Clearly, the consequences of a catastrophic event in a nuclear-powered submarine are potentially more calamitous than those of a conventionally powered surface ship or aircraft, and their increasingly rigorous PCO training reflects that fact.

Both the surface and submarine communities revamped their PCO training pipelines using lessons learned from mishaps in 2001-2002 and, as a result, saw a significant reduction in collisions and groundings in 2003-2004.

A number of the significant event and command performance reliefs could be directly attributed to a weak or non-existent command self-assessment process. In several cases it was clear that had the CO instituted a robust program of command self-assessment, whereby the command effectively scrutinized its practices, and improved its training and policies accordingly, the outcome would have likely been different.

Interviews throughout our study indicated a need for improved ORM training in the SWO community. There were concerns that current training courses were giving more "lip service" to ORM than actually teaching the fundamentals. Consideration should be given towards enhancing ORM training, particularly from the CO's perspective, with increased emphasis on application and team planning.

We found the current Command Leadership School to be an exceptional preparatory course for PCOs. While there, COs are led through the process of developing a personal command philosophy, and are taught how to cultivate a positive command climate. They exchange ideas on leadership, decision-making, ethics, core values, discipline, command performance, leadership in combat and crisis, as well as participate in modules and case studies on the CO's responsibility, authority, and accountability.

There is currently no structured course for all major command-bound PCOs, although elements are covered in the Shore Station Command Seminar, as well as the surface and submarine major command PCO courses. Clearly there are major command-specific topics—mentoring COs, writing CO FITREPs, the DFC process, assessing subordinate units, and a review on personal conduct—that would well serve our major command bound COs.

**6.F ISIC Leadership.** We found no propensity to relieve COs on the part of ISICs, and no relief that appeared unwarranted.

Additionally, we found no evidence that multiple ISIC turnovers contributed to any command failures. ISIC oversight appeared satisfactory overall, and most ISICs were well aware of systemic problems in subordinate commands. In more than a few cases, ISIC intervention was key in helping turn around a troubled command.

Fleet Review Board decisions to eliminate unnecessary command inspections reduced surface ISICs' opportunities to "get aboard" squadron ships. Both ISICs and COs had considered this to be a valuable assessment tool, particularly early on in the CO's command tour.

We did note several cases, both afloat and ashore, in which an ISIC should have been aware of a command's troubles, but was not, and ultimately failed to intervene before the CO had to be relieved.

In general, we found high levels of chain-of-command engagement in making the agonizing decision to remove a CO who had failed to meet the standard.

In interviewing selected COs, we found at least one who felt a lack of respectful treatment after the ISIC decided to relieve him.

**6.G Fitness Reports.** The current FITREP system is sound. Obviously, the quality of reports submitted, more than anything else, determines the quality of officers being selected for command. Our lengthy discussions with BUPERS' distribution division directors and Navy leadership confirmed their general satisfaction with the FITREP process and the quality of most reports. Most PCO pipelines include BUPERS' training on how to write them effectively.

More importantly, COs must consider every aspect of an officer—leadership capacity, operational competence, personal integrity—then articulate why that officer, over all others, is most qualified for command. Finally, COs must understand that FITREPs are intended primarily for selection board communication, and that they must write them clearly and unambiguously.

**6.H Career Progression.** We found no significant indications that a lack of operational experience due to career progression requirements (e.g., staff/joint duty, NPS) contributed to command failures. However, officers are being selected for command with less experience than what was once the norm, and compressed Inter-Deployment Readiness Cycles (IDRC) allow less opportunity for weaker COs to "grow into the job."

## Section 7: Recommendations

We found no systemic issues with the command selection process or PCO pipeline training. However, as previously stated, the most significant factor in the increase in reliefs has been CO misconduct or inappropriate personal behavior. Senior leadership must continue to underscore the “special trust and confidence” it bestows upon its commanding officers and the unwavering requirement for those privileged to command to exercise high personal, ethical, and moral standards.

Implementation of the following recommendations for improving commanding officer performance may potentially reduce future CO reliefs:

1. Incorporate a form of the “360° review” performance assessment tool, as championed throughout industry, into the PXO training track of all communities. Among other things, the “360° review” provides true performance feedback from non-traditional sources—an officer’s subordinates, as well as peers. While the SWO community is currently piloting such an assessment tool for a portion of its junior officers, a “360° review” for PXOs of all communities would be affordable, yet provide an exceptional performance-counseling tool for officers likely destined for command.
2. Establish a short refresher course for all major command PCOs. Training should include assessing and mentoring subordinate COs, writing CO FITREPs, the DFC process, assessing subordinate units, civilian personnel matters, and pertinent issues from a major command perspective.
3. Incorporate into the surface warfare PCO pipeline a course on Operational Risk Management (ORM). The module should emphasize planning using a methodical, risk-based decision making process, with an increased emphasis on practical application. Include a rigorous exercise to demonstrate proper use of ORM principles during complex operational evolutions.
4. Institute formalized, command self-assessment process training beginning with the DH/PXO tour, to include a command self-assessment process review in all PCO pipelines. PCOs going to platforms or commands other than the type they spent their career in would especially benefit from this training.

## Appendix A: Tasking Letter



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY  
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS  
2000 NAVY PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20350-2000

IN REPLY REFER TO  
3 Jun 04

MEMORANDUM FOR NAVY INSPECTOR GENERAL

Subj: IMPLEMENTING DIRECTIVE FOR STATEMENT OF WORK

Encl: (1) Statement of Work - Commanding Officer Detach For Cause

1. Enclosure (1) is forwarded for your action. The purpose of this study is to conduct an in-depth review of Navy's Commanding Officer Detach for Cause (CO DFC) cases over the past several years. You will review databases of CO DFC cases as indicated in enclosure (1), to assess systemic factors that may have contributed to CO DFC cases; review officer fitness reports and other pertinent official documentation; review screening processes; and training pipelines. You will conduct interviews of individuals who have personal knowledge of an officer's performance.

2. You are directed to provide regular updates, with the first required one month from date of this memorandum. Completion timeline is within four months from date of this memorandum.

3. My point of contact is [REDACTED]. He can be reached at [REDACTED], or email at [REDACTED].

Copy to:  
CNO (DNS, N1, & N09BL)

### Commanding Officer Detach For Cause

**Purpose of study:** To review Navy's CO Detach For Cause (DFC) cases over the past five years and determine if there are underlying systemic reasons. Also, to provide DFC trends across the Navy for all paygrades, not just those in command.

**Scope:**

- Review DFC cases for past 5 years by category (professional incompetence /failure, personal misconduct, loss of confidence, etc.) (PERS 4834C/D data bases)
- Benchmark against historical DFC rate. (Compare historical rates with past 15 months: Jan 03-Apr 04). Analyze recent trends including by warfare community.
- Interview key individuals as available (e.g. previous CO, ISIC, TYCOM N1/ EA's, DFC COs, peer COs/contemporaries, their DH's when they served as XO) to analyze specific causal factors for DFC
- Review FITREPS/"other" fitness data (PRT/Fiche 5/Hotline case files, etc.) of DFC COs. Compare/assess for previous "indicators" of trouble
- Review ISIC oversight (prior counseling, mentoring, understanding of Command Climate, etc.) of DFC CO's
- Review command screen/selection process
- Review PCO training track
- Review SWOSCOCOM, PCO Ashore, Command Leadership School for curriculum content
- Analyze data/determine if systemic causes (training, admin screening, experience base, optempo).
- Make actionable recommendations.

**Team Composition:** Core team of 2-3 senior IG officers with augmentation from Fleet, PERS 4/8, N1, NETC. (NAVIG Team Lead is post major command O-6 with an O-6/1520 as deputy.) Heavy reliance on augmentees is vital. Total team 5-7.

**Duration/Cost:** Jun – Sep 04 (4 months)...approx \$50K TAD.

**Recommendation:** NAVINGEN staff form core team and augment from N1, PERS 4/8, NETC, fleet commands.

Enclosure (1)

## Appendix B: Relief Summary Data Table

Designator	Category	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	Total
SWO	Significant Event	3	2	3	2	2	2	14
	CMD Performance	0	0	0	1	2	0	3
	CMD Climate	0	1	1	0	1	1	4
	Personal Behavior	1	0	0	1	4	4	10
SUB	Significant Event	0	0	2	1	3	0	6
	CMD Performance	1	1	0	1	0	0	3
	CMD Climate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Personal Behavior	0	0	0	0	1	2	3
AIR	Significant Event	0	0	1	0	2	0	3
	CMD Performance	0	0	3	1	0	0	4
	CMD Climate	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
	Personal Behavior	0	1	0	1	5	1	8
Other	Significant Event	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
	CMD Performance	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
	CMD Climate	1	1	0	1	4	0	7
	Personal Behavior	0	0	1	3	0	2	6
		7	6	12	12	26	12	75