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# The three R's of training

## Enhancing the realism, relevancy and rigor of Navy initial training

By REAR ADM. ANN E. RONDEAU, U.S. NAVY

*"Tell me and I forget; show me and I remember; involve me and I understand."* — Chinese proverb

Rear Adm. Ann Rondeau recently ran through the Battle Stations scenario with recruits for nearly 14 hours.

This simple saying captures the philosophy behind the exploitation of simulation and technology to enhance the three R's of the Navy's initial-training programs: realism, relevancy and rigor. At Naval Service Training Command (NSTC), where more than 150,000 volunteers are transformed each year into naval service professionals, simulation and technology are used with increasing frequency to prepare the Navy's newest sailors for the ever-increasing demands of today's operational fleet.

The chief of naval operations' Seapower 21 strategy emphasizes that crews of modern warships are streamlined teams of operational, engineering and information technology experts who operate some of the most complex systems in the world. Today's

sailors have to process information, make decisions and take action faster than at any time in our Navy's history.

Training for the fleet's increasingly complex systems and operations has never been more important. And for the Navy's next generation of sailors, the training command is the first step on a journey of lifetime learning.

### REVOLUTION IN TRAINING

For nearly a year and a half, the Navy has undergone a revolution to improve the way it trains and educates its people. It is designed to improve mission accomplishment and enhance operational readiness by focusing on the professional and personal growth and development of all sailors.

The revolution created NSTC, which oversees all of the Navy's initial-training programs except the Naval Academy. Previously, a handful of Navy activities around the fleet executed the initial-training mission. Today, the command provides initial training to sailors at boot camp in Great Lakes, Ill., midshipmen in Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps programs across the country, officer candidates in various programs in Newport, R.I., and Pensacola, Fla., and cadets in nearly 600 Naval Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps units at U.S. high schools.

NSTC is working to make initial Navy training more effective and more efficient by giving a single commander responsibility for curriculum development and resource management. The change also enables the sharing of best practices and allows for the consistent application of training policy across all programs.

### BEEN THERE, DONE THAT

Training effectiveness is measured by performance in an operational environment. When sailors encounter a challenge in the fleet, whether during routine operations or during a shipboard emergency, the desired reaction is one in which the sailor feels as if he has experienced the situation before, during training. When that happens, behavioral patterns, ingrained by sound training, take over. Simulation training is an extremely effective tool in the learning process. The realism and rigor that simulation provides make training exponentially more effective. Remember the last line of the proverb: "Involve me, and I understand."

This is precisely why sailors fight live fires in NSTC training programs. It's why we put our recruits aboard mock ships for line-handling exercises. It's why the command floods mock machinery spaces and requires sailors to bring the casualty under control. It's why we send our new chaplains into the field for a week during their training. It's why we expose sailors to tear gas to show them the value of their protective equipment and how to use it properly. And it's why we allow our sailors to shoot round after simulated round in our pneumatic, laser-targeted marksmanship trainers.

Such realistic training, enhanced by simulation, has had a profound and far-reaching impact. When USS Cole was attacked in what was the Navy's introduction to al-Qaida, a year before Sept. 11, 2001, the superstructure of the large destroyer was radically bent by the force of the explosion. Several young sailors were trapped, close to where the main damage was done. They were cut off from the rest of the ship, up to their chests or higher in seawater mixed with chemicals and fuel released by the explosion.

Against insurmountable odds, these sailors, many of whom had less than a year in the Navy, saved their ship. According to after-action reports from the ship's leadership, the sailors reacted instinctively as their training took over.

Indeed, the father of a chief petty officer aboard the Cole sent the following e-mail to the Recruit Training Command staff shortly after the attack: "The training received by the recruits during Battle Stations [boot camp's culminating exercise] is the key thing that [my son] attributes to saving the ship. He could not say enough about how the newest kid on board in his deck force knew what to do, from the moment of the explosion, and acted out of training."

By all accounts, Cole should have come to rest at the bottom of Yemen's Aden harbor, but the young sailors kept their ship afloat for two hours before they were rescued and relieved. This is the value of realistic, relevant, rigorous training. And these three R's are about to increase by a factor of 10 with the addition of a new experience for recruits in boot camp.



### BATTLE STATIONS 21 — THE NEXT LEVEL

With the help of technology, simulation and some of the entertainment industry's top creative minds, Recruit Training Command is poised to make a quantum leap in the evolution of Battle Stations, the de facto "final exam" of the nine-week boot camp curriculum.

Assembled in an empty warehouse in 1997 with plywood, sweat, makeshift plumbing and sailor ingenuity, Battle Stations has evolved gradually yet considerably from its humble beginnings. Now entering its seventh year, the 14-hour exercise pushes recruits to their physical, mental and emotional limits, requiring them to draw on every aspect of their training to date.

Hundreds of thousands of today's fleet sailors have its 13 events — and presumably its lessons — indelibly etched into their memories. Indeed, few ever will forget the emotional completion ceremony, during

**Officer Candidate** Laura Guillot, top, takes the con of the Yard Patrol ship. Officer candidates, above, rush toward a flooded compartment to perform emergency repairs.

## ... Insider's view



A recruit pulls a "victim" through part of a maze in the "Shaft Alley Rescue" portion of the Battle Stations drill.

which recruits trade their "recruit" ballcaps for those with "Navy" emblazoned across their fronts, in the symbolic transition from recruit to sailor.

Now, with the help of the world's leading experts in the entertainment industry, the Navy is working to make Battle Stations more realistic, more convincing and even more unforgettable. Through the use of technology and simulation, we are taking the scenarios we have in place today and creating a more memorable, interactive experience, thereby increasing its teaching value.

With that overarching guidance, the Navy and Disney-MGM Studios recently completed the first phase of the project — creative development of a Battle Stations story line that plays out in a shipboard environment. Their tasking was to fashion the Battle Stations experience in the form of a story, incorporating scenarios that are taught today. Our aim is to have recruits so immersed in the Battle Stations story that it becomes real. Reality leads to what we call "experiential learning" — a very effective learning technique.

Under the Battle Stations concept, recruits are marched to a pier, where they are dwarfed by the mock ship Trayer. Bird calls, tug whistles and other ambient noises of a busy port echo from speakers nearby. Part of creating the Battle Stations experience, after all, is establishing the setting and building the expectation.

Once aboard Trayer, recruits receive briefings on the night's mission. The scenarios then begin to unfold in a continuous sequence along the story line. Routine operations come first. Gear is stowed, stores are loaded and, once those tasks are complete, the order is passed to execute an emergency sortie — 20 minutes to get the ship underway. The aggression scenarios follow. General quarters is sounded. Recruits battle shipboard fires, exit from a damaged compartment, move ammunition from a flooding magazine and rescue injured shipmates from smoke-filled compartments.

But it is the exponential increase in realism that sets the new Battle Stations apart from the old. The objective is to maintain a "suspension of disbelief" throughout the entire evolution, keeping the stress level up.

The Battle Stations project carries with it some interesting facility and contracting challenges. Its scenarios must be "refreshable." We have a predictable customer in the fleet, but not a predictive one. Ten years ago, anti-terrorism force protection was not as significant a part of our training curriculum as it is today. We need to anticipate what our training priorities will be 10 years from now and build in the flexibility to adapt to them.

When it is completed in 2006, Battle Stations 21 will be the premier training experience in the Navy, a model of technology that will take full advantage of the use of simulation to enhance the training value of the evolution. And while Battle Stations 21 will be at boot camp, its essence and objectives will be exported throughout all of NSTC's initial-training programs. Indeed, a Battle Stations exercise recently was incorporated into the curriculum at Officer Indoctrination School in Newport, where it serves to instill the warrior ethos in newly commissioned staff corps officers.

### COVENANT TRAINING

Adm. Vern Clark, our chief of naval operations, espouses a concept called "Covenant Leadership," under which Navy leaders and sailors make commitments to one another. Our people promise to support and defend the Constitution of the United States. They commit to serve. Clark believes there should be a commitment from the leadership for the promise sailors make to us. This includes making sure people have the tools they need to succeed.

One of those tools is training — the best training available — to prepare them for success in the fleet. That success can be measured in many ways: advancement in rate, a professional certification or saving a ship after a terrorist attack.

"Covenant Training" represents a commitment from NSTC to the Navy's newest sailors that they will receive the most relevant, realistic and rigorous training we can give them, in exchange for their promise to serve. The training we provide them represents an investment in their futures. In the years ahead, simulation and technology will help make that investment even more valuable. ■

Rear Adm. Ann E. Rondeau is commander of the Naval Service Training Command, established in February with headquarters at Naval Station Great Lakes, Ill.