

# Duality of a Mustang

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When becoming a Sailor, one has two options; they can choose to enlist or commission as an officer. Then there are the Sailors who choose both paths.

Mustang is a term for a Sailor who transitions from the enlisted ranks to officer. It refers to the mustang horse, a wild animal that has been tamed but maintains its resilience to adversity due to past experiences.

Mustang officers bring a unique perspective and level of experience that make their contribution to their command unmatched.

“Mustangs are hybrids of enlisted Sailors and commissioned officers,” said Lt. Cmdr. Dennis Simpson, the USS Harry S. Truman’s assistant maintenance officer, and the Mustang Association president. “We speak both languages, something that not even the Triad can do, because the CO and the XO have never been enlisted and CMC has never been an officer. We can see things from both sides and translate as needed.”

Mustangs vary from Sailors who receive a direct commissioning. There are Limited Duty Officers (LDO), who are commissioned once they’ve reached the rank of first class petty officer and are selection board eligible for chief, and Chief Warrant Officers (CWO), who commission from chief petty officer and above. Both of whom are specialists in their given field and commissioned to work in a specific job repeatedly regardless of their duty station.

“An overwhelming majority of the officers in the Mustang Association are LDOs and CWOs,” said Simpson. “We’ve all been either chiefs or first classes and bring technical field experience to the table when it comes to running departments and making command-wide policies.”

Sailors have several options to go from enlisted to officer. The in-service procurement programs offered by the Navy give Sailors the opportunity to use the experience they’ve gained to earn a degree from a higher learning institution that applies to their day-to-day job once commissioned.

According to Simpson there are multiple programs enlisted Sailors can utilize to commission; such as Seaman to Admiral-21st Century (STA-21), Medical Enlisted to Commissioned Program

(MECP), Fleet Accession to Officer Candidate School (OCS), or the United States Naval Academy.

Chief Aviation Ordnanceman Desmond Stone, weapons department, G-5 division, QAS, was recently selected for the CWO accession program, and commented on the difficulty of the selection process.

“The process of commissioning is taxing,” said Stone. “It’s almost impossible to even get to the point of being looked at and considered without mentors, without someone who’s done what you’re trying to do and giving you guidance.”

For Sailors who want to commission, the steps you must take to be eligible and competitive are available via Navy sites and apps. MyNavyHR lists multiple programs targeted at different fields that Sailors can access and use to become knowledgeable on requirements and processes before and during commissioning.

“You have to check and make sure you meet the strict requirements to be considered for starters,” said Stone. “Then you need to make sure that your record is correct and up to date. Gain as much knowledge and experience as possible to make sure you stand out from the rest of your peer group. Make sure that you check all the boxes and show that you’re passionate about what you’re doing.”

Commissioning puts Sailors in a better place to help junior Sailors by passing on the knowledge they’ve gathered during their careers, as well as using that knowledge to make policies.

“Whenever I do a board for commissioning, one of the things I ask a Sailor is why they want to commission,” said Simpson. “The most common answer is that they want to help other Sailors. The truth is, regardless of whether you’re a first class, a chief or an officer, if you’re helping Sailors then you’re helping Sailors. But there’s a difference between being in the Chief’s mess and influencing policy, and being in the ward room and making policy.”

According to NAVADMIN 17090.2, LDOs and CWOs offer the Navy proven leadership abilities with technical expertise and management skills from their prior service and gives the Navy a cost effective way to gain new leaders.

“I served for twelve years and was a Chief Aviation Electrician’s Mate before I put in my commissioning packet,” said Simpson. “Now I’m an LDO. My experiences have given me the opportunity to become more technically competent in my field and help my command in ways that an officer straight from OCS can’t.”

The career path of a Mustang is unique because it offers more experience in a specific job than most Sailors get throughout their career by staying either enlisted or as a direct commission.

“Due to the nature and complexity of our particular business, we’re commissioned to work within the realm of the same program over and over,” said Simpson. “By doing this we gain that subject matter expertise that allows us to give specific recommendation to our superiors who may run into something they’ve never encountered while in a position they’ve never held.”

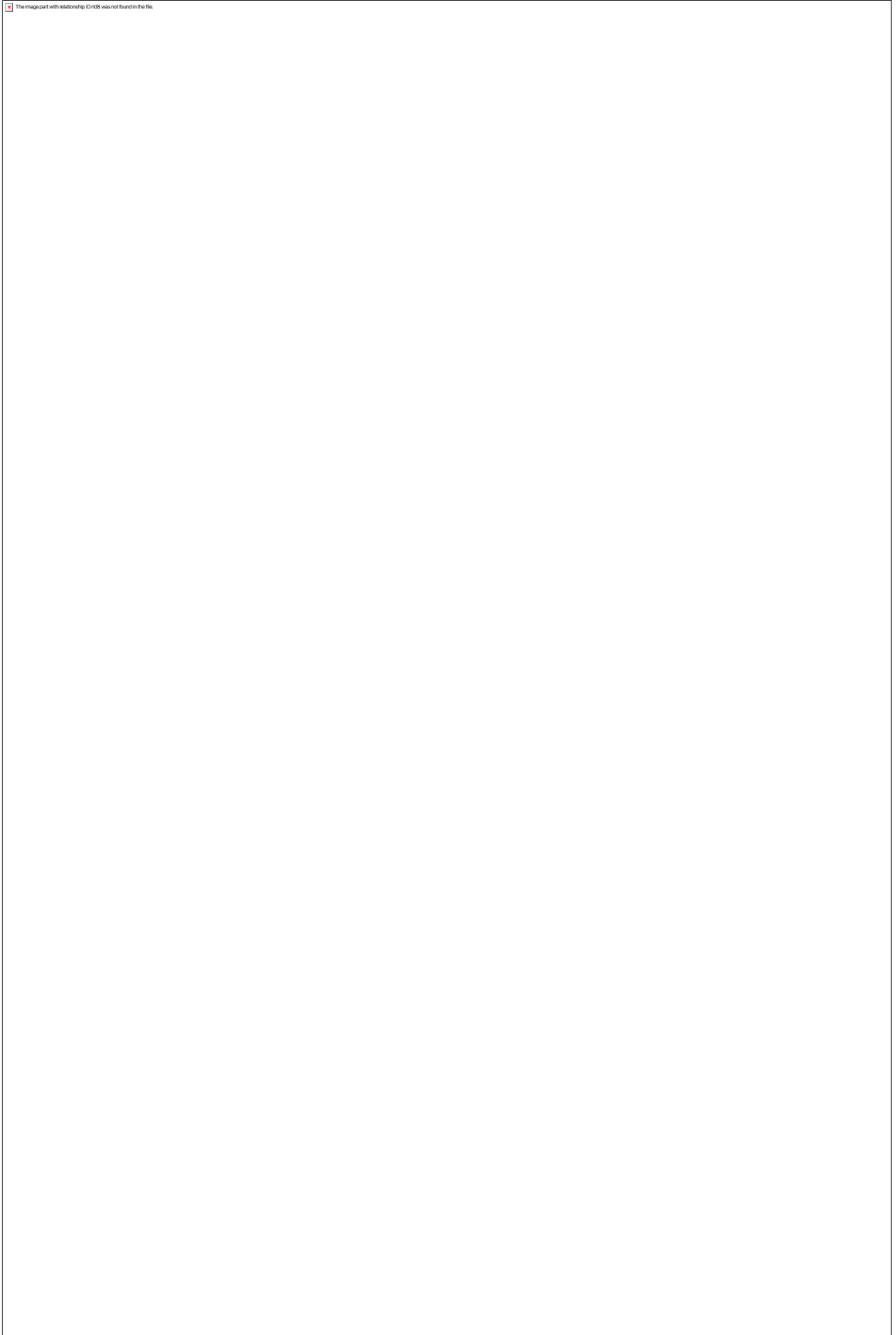
By doing the same job repeatedly, regardless of the command they’re assigned to, Mustangs are put in the position to make policies for their departments and their command as a whole.

“We all have to do a job for the first time, to include the Triad,” said Simpson. “But there’s always that LDO or that CWO in a situation who’s encountered whatever issue comes up before, and can give perspective to the situation based on their past experience. That’s what Mustangs bring to the table.”

While commissioning is a great personal goal for an enlisted Sailor, the time the mustangs have invested in the Navy benefits more than just themselves. It benefits everyone they come in contact with as well.

“I tell all of my Sailors that this is my payback tour,” said Simpson. “I plan on retiring at around 30 years. Anything I’m doing now isn’t for me, but for my Sailors and for the command. I want Sailors to know that there are people in the ward room that have come from exactly where they are, that have experienced exactly what they’re experiencing, and are making changes that not only coincide with the mission but will benefit them as well.”

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