

The Court Has Adjourned

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The sun finally has set on our traditional chief petty officer initiation. Many changes to the initiation process over the years seem to have been driven by political expediency and have irreversibly harmed both this process and our collective chiefs' mess. We should re-think our position on the conduct of the chief petty officer initiation, and, more important, we should fundamentally change the way we train our subordinates.

There certainly have been changes through the years that have improved our initiation. Alcohol consumption was integral to nearly every initiation event; this is no longer the case. Many charge books were simply paper versions of bathroom stalls, with countless entries consisting of epithets and abusive language. Today's entries are more considered; in addition to congratulatory notes, anecdotal advice and leadership guidance constitute the most popular entries. Chief petty officer indoctrination classes were hurried affairs and seemed to be little more than afterthoughts or requisite diversions from the "training sessions" that took place at various and sundry chiefs' clubs throughout the world. These classes now are methodical and comprehensive and do much more than simply acquaint prospective chiefs with uniform minutiae.

Positive changes notwithstanding, initiation day is a wholly different matter. We have shifted from the courtroom to battle stations. In an attempt to create more chief-selectee-friendly affairs, we have systematically weakened our initiation to the point where many areas hold their transition ceremonies (even the word "initiation" is anathema) using the same premise that is used in the culmination of recruit training. Now we expect sailors to aspire to the pinnacle of enlisted leadership in the Navy—be-

coming a chief petty officer—by going through a modified boot camp exercise. Our senior enlisted leaders have caved in to political convenience and been too worried about bad press instead of "fixin' what's broke" and providing needed oversight.

There is little doubt that nearly every adverse initiation incident can be attributed to poor judgment shown by chiefs and insufficient direction from the command master chief. Training is good and necessary, and valuable training is being delivered to our selectees. Initia-

tion is not the answer. It is not our mess, than to do what we are doing now: performing watered-down pseudoinitiations that provide some training and afford the opportunity for prospective chiefs to participate in DC Olympics or extended physical training.

We chiefs share a common bond—our initiation. This bond is the single common denominator that is one of the most significant factors contributing to cohesion in our collective mess. Knowing this common bond has been severed, mainly because of political correctness, weakens the connection.

A much larger issue has adversely impacted our effectiveness: the development of our sailors. During the past decade or so, we have inexorably pushed decision making and responsibilities to our more senior leaders. Chiefs now routinely fulfill positions our first- and even second-class petty officers routinely performed when most of us were seamen. Today, it appears there is no job or task too insignificant for a chief to oversee personally. If we do not or will not allow our junior leaders to practice leader-

ship, it is no wonder we have more technicians than leaders. The incessant micromanagement of our sailors is a failure of leadership on our part. Our subordinates are perfectly capable—given the training and support they need—of once again accepting the responsibilities we have subsumed, and they will succeed just as we did.

To meet our responsibilities to the Navy and to our fellow chiefs, and to preserve the unique institution that is our mess, there needs to be more reasoned discourse concerning the conduct of our initiation process and the development of our sailors.

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The times they are a-changin'. Chief selectees now undergo training unheard of in the past, such as making "egg divisions" to simulate the sailors they eventually will lead.

tion should go beyond that, however. Seeing that selectees are physically and emotionally challenged serves to demonstrate to their brethren chiefs what they are made of and gives the selectees themselves just a brief glimpse of what is in store for them as chiefs. During the brief few weeks between notification of selection and frocking, generations of chiefs have tried to create adversity and trials to gauge how well selectees react to stress, manage deadlines, and adapt to rapidly changing circumstances. We need to test both their individual and collective mettle throughout the entire process. It is far better to subject prospective chiefs to a small taste of the challenges they will face, while in a controlled environment and while being monitored by their