



By Adm. Phil Davidson, Commander, U.S. Fleet Forces

“*The news that some Sailors and Marines are using social media to denigrate, abuse, and bully their shipmates online is undermining that trust and our team.*”

The following message is to be posted and read at quarters for all hands.

When I travel throughout the Fleet, I am frequently asked, "*What is it that makes the best commands better than the rest?*" I always say, "*Two things: unwavering commitment to the Navy's mission, and clear communications.*"

Our Navy's mission is quite simple, "to be prepared to conduct prompt and sustained combat incident to operations at sea." Make no mistake: it is our job to succeed in that mission, to be ready to not just fight, but to win. The nation depends on it. And it requires every one of us to pull together as a team to be successful in that mission.

The only way to develop a winning team is to communicate. And not just down the chain of command. Clear communications are required up and down the chain, and across the command, in order for all of us to be successful. A destroyer captain depends upon proper communications from his or her officer of the deck to understand the surface traffic around the ship. An aviation electronics technician depends upon the clear communications of a logistics specialist to understand whether a needed part will make their jet an up jet for a mission. A submarine captain relies on the underlying reports from First and Second Checkers that the ship is rigged for dive before giving the order to submerge.

Every one of us in every command depends upon the clear communications of others in order to carry out our duties and deliver success. It is the only way we can develop the shared understanding – the trust and teamwork – necessary to effectively fight and win.

The news that some Sailors and Marines are using social media to denigrate, abuse, and bully their shipmates online is undermining that trust and our team. To restore that trust, it is time for open and honest communication.



Message from the Commander, U.S. Fleet Forces



The Best Navy: Trust and Teamwork

You have seen reference (a). In it, the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) has called on all of us to come together in small groups to talk about what respect for our teammates looks like at work, at home, and online. In those groups, I expect all of you to clearly communicate the behaviors that are acceptable and unacceptable on the deckplates and online, to commit to each other the forceful backup needed to intervene to prevent or eliminate toxic behaviors, and to understand the inherent wrong done to individuals and our unit cohesion – our teammates and team – when we undermine their value and contribution, or degrade their reputation. I encourage everyone to achieve a more effective and ongoing dialogue.

I will start the conversation. Destructive online behavior is wrong and weakens our team. It should be obvious to everyone that secretly filming or photographing others when their inherent privacy is expected is not a prank; it is a crime. In the last two years alone, there have been several convictions under the *Uniform Code of Military Justice* for this conduct with punishments, including bad conduct discharges for enlisted, dismissals for officers, and confinements for up to three years. The nature of this misconduct is clear.

What we must emphasize is that encouraging, requesting, or soliciting others to obtain these photographs or videos is also wrong. Making an indecent comment online is wrong. Sailors should also be mindful that these acts may constitute bullying, hazing, or sexual harassment in violation of Navy policy and regulations and may be punishable under the UCMJ. Conduct meant to shame and degrade fellow Sailors is inexcusable, contrary to our values, and detracts from our mission. Such behavior should not be excused as a new societal norm – it is unacceptable. Commanders should share and refer to reference (b) for guidance on these and other scenarios, as well as the possible accountability tools available for maintaining good order and discipline. While Sailors may be held accountable under the full spectrum of administrative and disciplinary actions available to commanders, the inherent wrongness of such acts and the obvious harm it does to the team are real.

Complacency perpetuates this problem. To accomplish the Navy's mission, we must understand that we have a duty to actively protect each other. Sailors should not dismiss a questionable online posting about a teammate just because they did not post it or comment; ***stand up for one another***. We cannot expect to be an effective warfighting team if Sailors cannot trust their teammates to defend against attacks against their basic human dignity.



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The Best Navy: Trust and Teamwork

Navy professionalism does not end when we are online; our behavior is a reflection upon our service 24/7. Be mindful of your conduct, the message it communicates, and how your messages could be used by others. When we post comments or materials online, we lose control and there is potential for further exploitation. Even using recommended privacy settings does not mitigate all risk. There is no back button. Reference (c) provides tips and guidance for using social media safely and responsibly. Please share this guidance with each other.

For a Sailor who trusted someone with an intimate photograph or video with the expectation that it would remain private and subsequently had that trust betrayed, they need to know that leadership and their fellow teammates have their back. That is why it is vital for all lines of communication to remain open and honest to foster a safe environment for people to report, take action, and/or seek justice.

Doing the right thing and confronting peers is not always an easy task. Sailors must have the courage to respond to and report online abuse that they witness. It will only make our Navy team stronger. Reports can be made to leadership throughout your chain of command, with the Command Managed Equal Opportunity (CMEO), the Fleet & Family Support Office (FFSO), or law enforcement, including the NCIS tip line: <http://www.ncis.navy.mil/ContactUs/Pages/ReportCrime.aspx>.

This is not a problem that will be solved with General Military Training (GMT) or a one-time discussion. We must continue to engage each other in a constructive dialogue about the detrimental impact that inappropriate social media conduct and all toxic behaviors in and out of the workplace have on our team. Everyone must be a leader in driving out these behaviors. Additional messages and guidance will follow.

I have been in the Navy for 35 years. It has been the great privilege of my life to be associated with a U.S. Navy team made better by the diverse and outstanding men and women who serve it in peacetime and war. We are not going backward. We never will. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. I do recognize the vast, vast majority of you are upholding our Navy values and supporting your teammates. But we still have a job to do; the strength of the chain is dependent upon each link. We need to make our Navy team even stronger by communicating the trust we require of all of us, and deepening the bonds that make us ready to fight and win.

References

- Reference A: NAVADMIN 062/17 CNO Personal for – No Bystanders
- Reference B: OJAG Memorandum – Commander's Options Concerning Conduct on Social Media
- Reference C: Navy Public Affairs Guide for Sailors