

Silver ticket gives AT1 a second chance

Targeted Reentry Program offers separating Sailors options.

By Gene H. Hughes

Navy Personnel Command Public Affairs Office

MILLINGTON, Tennessee -- Navy veteran Michael Trendley had served a decade in the avionics field and after much soul searching, had left the service in search of new professional and business opportunities.

However, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic his plans hadn't turned out exactly how he'd envisioned.

"Everything was actually going pretty well," he said. "I was working for a (certified public accountant) firm in St. Louis when all the lockdowns started to happen. Business slowed down. I was let go, and from there, I looked around for other job opportunities, but it didn't really work out."

At that point, Trendley remembered his separation from the Navy, and a little-known recommendation that had held the door of his future open for him.

"The decision to get out was a hard decision" he said. "I didn't particularly want to. It was more of a career development issue, personally, not just in the Navy, but, you know, pursuing a field that pertained to my undergraduate studies. But I thought back to when I got out and received the approval for my silver ticket."

Thanks to that silver ticket in the Navy's Targeted Reentry Program (TRP), Trendley, the second Sailor to redeem his ticket, is back in the Navy after less than two years, reinstated at his former rate (Aviation Electronics Technician 1st Class) and a member of an active Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron with a bright future ahead.

One of the initiatives of Sailor 2025, TRP is designed to revolutionize and improve recruitment and talent retention. It specifically focuses on Sailors, officers and enlisted, who make a commitment to leave the service at the end of active duty service. It allows commanding officers to recommend Sailors be considered for one of two types of ticket, gold or silver.

"The golden ticket allows guaranteed return to active duty within one year of separation," said Capt. Doug Howell, director of Reserve Personnel Management at Navy Personnel Command (NPC). "The silver ticket gives head-of-the line privileges to expedite a return. As long as there's a need for your skill set in the Navy, or approximate skill set, we can fit you in."

Capt. Dave Whitehead, director of Military Community Management at NPC, monitors community health making sure that the enlisted and officer communities remains healthy. His team issues the tickets once commanders recommendations have been investigated. He said that TRP has been a concerted and highly worthwhile effort.

"It's exactly what we need to be doing," Whitehead said. "Once the tickets are offered, whether it's officer or enlisted, we'll verify those tickets. We make sure these are exactly the kind of Sailors we want to have a golden or silver ticket, to include that there's no conduct issues or security issues."

It's not as intimidating as it might sound. To date, the Navy has approved every ticket recommendation, approximately 600 tickets on the enlisted side, and 47 on the officer side. Not all tickets offered are ultimately accepted by the Sailor, because the program is completely voluntary.

Sailors don't have to accept the offer. Commands typically choose their best performing sailors to nominate. Once the offer is accepted, Howell's staff sees the ones who accept the offer, maintaining monthly contact throughout the process.

"We put them in touch with their detailer, and then while ramping up to come back on active duty, typically between two and four weeks," Howell said. "When the time comes, they have orders in hand and they'll flow right to their next active duty station."

"These are sailors and officers who are of such high caliber that it pains us to see them leaving the service," Whitehead said. "We want to give them the opportunity to change their mind, for whatever reason, to come back in."

One of the benefits to the Navy is that commanders gain an experienced Sailor who doesn't require a great deal of training to get back up to speed. It's an easy choice for Cmdr. Eric Hutter of Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron (HSM) 78, Trendley's new commanding officer.

"I am sure I would not have to sell it very hard to commanders, especially if the process works as it did with us," Hutter said, "not just with qualifications, but the qualifications on the specific type of aircraft we fly. That allows for him to step right in, do some moderate level of qualification verification, and he can be a productive member of the squadron right away."

"I will tell you that every commander I can think of would be ecstatic to get this kind of talent, with this kind of experience. This is a very valuable program, and probably one of the more impactful ways that we as leaders can affect the long-term health of the Navy. After talking to Trendley about the program, I was driven to action to go and initiate a silver ticket for an aircrewman who is leaving the Navy"

For Trendley, it's one of the best decisions he's ever made.

"There's no downside to accepting a ticket," he said. "There's no obligation to come back. When I separated, I had no intention of coming back, but unforeseen circumstances kind of contributed to my decision. There's no telling what might come up in a sailor's life, so it's always good to have a back-up plan."