

The 2018 Surface Warfare Officer of the Year Sounds Off on Surface Readiness Improvements

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Last week we congratulated Lt. James Ballingall – an officer currently assigned to the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Milius (DDG 69) – on his selection as the 2018 CNSP Surface Warfare Officer of the Year!

Check out <https://go.usa.gov/xmGP4> (<https://href.li/?https://go.usa.gov/xmGP4?fbclid=IwAR3Ge8eEaVOd4m70ht3YBFHpaUno5vgzWii6vuu6p51WXOZ8KuwsboTNGJM>) to find out what it took for this outstanding #SurfaceWarrior ([https://href.li/?https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/surfacewarrior?source=feed_text&epa=HASHTAG&__xts__\[0\]=5B0%5D=68.ARCai_eYzbbf1NAFq-Cfzv3mjNiMNdUx81KFwOQK2rQuM8FErxp0z9wSLqjxrp4O0enPLLMUTKn3HAMj0WeU7d9k-np3HmxXrflvKtkwLQRR9s9iAs9YKXzdU_Ge7zQq88acnm6gjW6p9zDMXIFvdNQL3B2VzuAb_eAtRws5SzIPzJHSImbitORL5-GEOPe4b6nhilow5jXdf6NSPQIP-5yR2YYcwlVWJlIa5JIRGHmfkU5jKwCXEx5rUVRrMVMqJegHKNpb7miehDwNxX4-JA-cwZq5f34Fu0g55lwFvzY3HMIADe1ljmZ_29YR7WUMGjHViGud926&__tn__=%2ANK-R](https://href.li/?https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/surfacewarrior?source=feed_text&epa=HASHTAG&__xts__[0]=5B0%5D=68.ARCai_eYzbbf1NAFq-Cfzv3mjNiMNdUx81KFwOQK2rQuM8FErxp0z9wSLqjxrp4O0enPLLMUTKn3HAMj0WeU7d9k-np3HmxXrflvKtkwLQRR9s9iAs9YKXzdU_Ge7zQq88acnm6gjW6p9zDMXIFvdNQL3B2VzuAb_eAtRws5SzIPzJHSImbitORL5-GEOPe4b6nhilow5jXdf6NSPQIP-5yR2YYcwlVWJlIa5JIRGHmfkU5jKwCXEx5rUVRrMVMqJegHKNpb7miehDwNxX4-JA-cwZq5f34Fu0g55lwFvzY3HMIADe1ljmZ_29YR7WUMGjHViGud926&__tn__=%2ANK-R)) to earn this accolade.

Here is his winning essay on what he thinks has been the largest recent improvement to Surface Force readiness:

The release of the Surface Force Training and Readiness Manual (SFTRM) is the most significant readiness improvement to the community and for Milius in the past year because: it shifts the focus of training directly to the watchstanders, instead of the training teams; it buys back time for ship's Commanding Officers and leadership to train their crews; and, it extends the certification interval for Forward Deployed Naval Force Japan (FDNF-J) ships to 36-months and better codifies the Basic Phase training entitlement.

The new SFTRM was promulgated by Commander, Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet (CNSP) and Commander, Naval Surface Force, U.S. Atlantic Fleet (CNSL) in November 2018. It replaces the Surface Force Readiness Manual (SFRM) and lays out how we will train and certify our ships in the Basic Phase of the Optimized Fleet Response Plan (OFRP).

The SFTRM re-emphasizes the prioritization of training and certifying watchstanders to do their jobs, rather than on evaluating the ship's training teams, while elevating the training standards for the ship's training teams. Under the SFTRM, the Afloat Training Group (ATG) in each fleet concentration area, CNSP's executive agent for Basic Phase training, assumes the role of the training team in a phase termed "mission area certification." Once the crew is certified in that mission area, the training team undergoes more training and evaluation to attain a separate training team certification. The training team members, however, are required to attend all of the same training as the watchstanders. This benefits the ship and enhances training in three primary ways: it allows the most experienced members of the crew to serve as "drilling watchstanders" through the mission area certification; it allows ATG to model effective training team techniques to the crew; and, it relieves the ship of the administrative burden associated with training team functions during mission area certification. This

better allows ships to "train (and certify) as they would fight" out at sea.

The SFTRM also gives ships the ability to work ahead in mission area certifications – once they successfully demonstrate a Certification Exercise (CE) for ATG, they do not need to demonstrate it again. In the words of Vice Adm. Richard Brown, CNSP Commander, this allows COs and crews to push the envelope and foster a culture of "excellence over compliance." It allows them to advance the goal line beyond completion of SFTRM CEs and Repetitive Exercises (REs) and get after tailored-training specific to that ship, that crew, and their individual needs. The benefits of this initiative are already being realized all over the force in ships, such as USS Harpers Ferry (LSD 49), USS Pinckney (DDG 91), and USS Charleston (LCS 18) (<https://href.li/?https://www.public.navy.mil/surfor/lsd49/Pages/Surface-Ship-Readiness-Rewarding-a-Culture-of-Excellence-Ships-Crews-Can-Now-Earn-Certification-Early.aspx>). [1] (https://37404C3A-9CC1-4200-AECC-90F6A4BE0AD2#_ftn1) This natural incentive will drive ships to lean forward into their Basic Phase events, certify early, then innovate and build on that training to make their watchstanders more proficient – truly embodying a culture of excellence. While Milius has not been in the Basic Phase since the release of the SFTRM, they have worked with ATG Western Pacific and Naval Surface Group Western Pacific to follow the intent and spirit of this change while undergoing Certification Validations during the Sustainment Phase. The Milius crew prepares thoroughly for Limited Training Team (LTT) visits and executes CEs for trainers, which eliminates the requirement to demonstrate them again for the CV.

Finally, the SFTRM extends the FDNF-J OFRP to 36-months for training certifications, an extension from the 24-month OFRP under the previous SFRM. This aligns the FDNF-J ships' training OFRP with that of their stateside counterparts. It also means that they will have more time to train and that Basic Phase certifications earned by FDNF-J ships will now be granted for 36-months. The SFTRM also codifies a dedicated 18-week Basic Phase entitlement and goes as far as to stipulate that other major events cannot be scheduled concurrently.



Before these changes, ships, such as the Milius, were getting less mileage (24-months as opposed to 36-months) than their stateside counterparts for earning the same certifications. Other FDNF-J ships routinely had operational tasking, Continuous Maintenance Availabilities (CMAVs), and other significant conflicts overlaid on their Basic Phases. The SFTRM's FDNF-J realignment maximizes return on the significant investment made to get FDNF-J ships through the Basic Phase. The return on that investment is realized by the crew, the force, and the operational commanders. Simply put, extending the FDNF-J OFRP generates more readiness.

That's what it's all about. It's the mission of CNSP, and it ought to be the mission of every Sailor across the force. Every time a mission area certification is earned, every time a training team runs a drill and re-validates an RE, and every time a ship innovates a smarter way to train in a mission area beyond what is written in the SFTRM, they are generating readiness. As Vice Adm. Brown has told us, "We don't build readiness for 'readiness' sake. We must turn that readiness into lethality. And we do that through an unrelenting pursuit of excellence over compliance." [2] (https://href.li/?https://37404C3A-9CC1-4200-AECC-90F6A4BE0AD2#_ftn2) The SFTRM inspires that culture of excellence in the Surface Force – a culture that can permeate all facets of shipboard readiness and operations.

– Lt. James Ballingall is the 2018 Commander, Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet Surface Warfare Officer of the Year. He is assigned to the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Milius (DDG 69).

[1] (https://href.li/?https://37404C3A-9CC1-4200-AECC-90F6A4BE0AD2#_ftnref1) "Rewarding a Culture of Excellence, Ships; Crew Can Now Earn Certification Early." Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet, 6 Mar. 2019, www.cpf.navy.mil/news.aspx/110674 (<https://href.li/?http://www.cpf.navy.mil/news.aspx/110674>).

[2] (https://href.li/?https://37404C3A-9CC1-4200-AECC-90F6A4BE0AD2#_ftnref2) VADM Brown, Richard. "State of the Surface Force." Surface Navy Association National Symposium. 15 Jan. 2019, Arlington, VA.

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