**Episode 14 – Captain’s Mast Outline**

**INFORMATION:** What Captain’s Mast is and pull the curtain back on some of the proceedings leading up to and effects of afterwards.

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**History Segment:** Captain’s Mast

http://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/o/origin-navy-terminology.html#cap

The term "mast" refers to the ceremony that takes place when the captain awards non-judicial punishment for regulation infractions or official recognition for "jobs well done." In the days of sail, ceremonies were held under the mainmast on a regular basis and usually on a Sunday morning just before divine services. Consequently, the ceremony came to be known as "mast" in recognition of the locality of the presentation.

The "Captain's Mast" is a disciplinary event hailing from the age of sail where a ship's captain and other officers publicly shame and sentence sailors who have broken some rule in a manner severe enough to warrant public discipline but not enough to require a full legal proceeding.

**Naval Nonjudicial Punishment**

As in any organization dependent on members' obedience to certain rules and other governing principles, maritime agencies and the navies of the world generally have a partially informal process of enforcing discipline among the ranks that does not resort to official legal channels. The United States Navy is no different. The military equivalent to a trip to the HR department goes by several names depending on the service branch - in the Army the Article 15 process covers nonjudicial punishment meted out by officers and senior enlisted soldiers, and the Navy's equivalent is the "Captain's Mast".

The Captain's Mast is a disciplinary process initiated and carried out by the military chain of command without resorting to criminal proceedings involving the JAG corps or other official legal channels. It is used for infractions of discipline and law that are relatively minor - being late for duty or a mandatory formation, appearing in a deficient uniform, not promptly following the orders of a superior. Few incidents like these warrant the time and effort that goes into a full on court martial, and there is a strong incentive on the part of the officers and senior enlisted personnel in a particular command to take care of discipline in house.

Traditionally the proceeding takes the form of a public meeting held at a focal point on a ship, and all sailors not on duty are expected to be present. What follows is effectively a ritual shaming of offending sailors accompanied by a final determination as to the disciplinary measures to be taken, often involving extra, rather unpleasant duty and a temporary loss of rank. It can be harsh, but is generally preferred by all parties to a court martial proceeding, which can levy harsher sentences.

**History of the Captain's Mast**

So why the colorful name as opposed to something dry like the US Army's Article 15, which generally has the same function and simply refers to the UCMJ section that authorizes military nonjudicial punishments? The answer, according to official Navy sources, goes back to the days of sailing ships, where the United States Navy derives many of its traditions

Before steam engines became standard in the nineteenth century the most efficient means of moving a ship across the sea was to harness the power of the wind by means of attaching a canvas sail to a wooden pole known as the mast. Larger ships would have several masts, and the number of masts as well as their configuration and the shapes of their many sails came to define the types of the various sailing ships, from the clipper to the man-o-war.

Sailor's lives depended on the function of these masts and sails, and much of the maintenance work needed to keep ships in working order involved these essential components of period vessels. It is no surprise then that they came to be a focal point of naval culture and a convenient meeting place for the crew when one was needed.

**Under the Mainmast - Ceremonies for the Crew**

The Captain's Mast appears to have come about as a result of the need to maintain discipline and to address the majority of the crew at once. Meetings of this nature were held under the mainmast, and eventually any crew meeting came to be known as a mast. The masts eventually began to be named according to the officiating officer's rank, and so there are admiral's masts and chaplain's masts.

The Captain's version was traditionally held prior to religious services and served as both a disciplinary event in front of the entire crew and as a forum where exemplary behavior could be praised or official news shared with the crew. Once it became so common to be held as a tradition, even as the vessels switched from sail to steam power the event was still held in a convenient meeting area, and given the same name.

**I. Introduction**

A. Attention (Standing on the carpet. Going to see the “old man or lady”. Laying the green table cloth. We’re going to talk today about Non-Judicial Punishment, or Captain’s Mast).

B. Motivation (Junior Sailors should understand the process, what exactly they’re getting themselves in to by making poor choices and the negative AND POSITIVE effects of Captain’s Mast.)

C. Overview (I was really struggling this week to choose a topic, then fate intervened. This week, for the second consecutive week, I spent the majority of my time on Mast proceedings for some young, wayward Sailors. It struck me how little we know about the proceedings that can have such a profound impact on our careers and the careers of our charges.)

**II. Body**

A. Main Point 1 (Manual for Court Martials, 2012 Edition)

1. Sub-point (Reference) – This is the governing reference and should be treated as that. The Manual is EXTREMELY large, so don’t try to read this cover to cover. The points of interest should be Part V which deals specifically with Non-Judicial Punsihment, or NJP (Captain’s Mast). This section contains general information, who may impose NJP, right to demand trial by court martial, procedures for NJP, authorized punishments, suspension/mitigation/remission and setting aside punishments, appeals and records.

2. Sub-point (Legal Counsel) – I will absolutely, positively NOT give legal advice. Why? Because I’m not an expert. All I did was read a book. I’ve been a Preliminary Investigative Officer, or PIO on numerous occasions and have executed the paperwork to charge Sailors. That I’ve done. That does not an expert make. If you have questions about ANY of this, especially if you are in the midst of the process or plan to appeal (which you must do within five days of being awarded punishment), TALK TO YOUR LEGAL OFFICER.

3. Sub-point (You’re not an expert, either) – Seriously. You’re not an expert. Even if you have a photographic memory and read the entire MCM. Don’t try to sea lawyer your way out of something, it will most likely make it worse. Be informed, however, and ask the experts (legal) questions. If you’re not satisfied, as a lawyer questions. But still, stick with the expert.

B. Main Point 2 (When is it time for NJP?)

1. Sub-point (Types of Captain’s Mast) – Let’s talk about the lesser known version. Meritorious Mast.

2. Sub-point (What merits it?) –

3. Sub-point (Why?) – “What if it happened to you?” is my go-to counter.

C. Main Point 2 (Impact of NJP)

1. Sub-point (Career) –

2. Sub-point (Confidence) –

3. Sub-point (Good Order and Discipline) –

**III. Conclusion**

A. Summary (We talked about…)

1. The history and policy behind Captain’s Mast – BE INFORMED…

2. When it’s time for Captain’s Mast, what it means, and why…

3. The impact of NJP on a Sailor’s career, confidence and good order and discipline at the command level…

B. Re-motivation (Junior Sailors should understand the process, what exactly they’re getting themselves in to by making poor choices and the negative AND POSITIVE effects of Captain’s Mast.)

C. Closing –

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