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

**INFORMATION:** Sailor of the Quarter/Year Program

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**History Segment: BMC James E. Williams**

MOST  DECORATED  ENLISTED  MAN  IN  NAVY  HISTORY

James Elliott Williams, a Native American Cherokee from South Carolina, entered the Navy in July 1947 and before retiring in April 1967 gained the distinction of becoming the most decorated enlisted man in Navy history.  When he retired from active service he was employed with the Wackenhut Corporation and in 1969 was appointed to the U.S. Marshal Service in South Carolina.  He also became an instructor at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, Glynco, Georgia, and also served at the U.S. Marshal Service Headquarters in Washington, D.C., until his retirement from Federal Government Service.

ALL  HANDS  MAGAZINE  -  JULY  1998

Boatswain's Mate 1st Class James Elliott Williams never intended to be a hero -- he just wanted to be a Sailor.  "When I was 16, I convinced the county clerk to alter my birth certificate so I could come into the Navy.  I thought there was nothing better than servin' my country and gettin' paid for it.”  But, Williams first experience at sea was less than glorious.  In fact, it was downright boring.  "The first ship I drew, I was the most disappointed man in the world.  I'd joined the Navy to see the world -- and doggonit, I wasn't moving.  I'd got orders to an LST that just sat around a buoy in San Diego harbor."  But, from that experience, Williams learned a valuable lesson about discipline and leadership.  "An old chief told me, 'Son, you got to learn to take orders, even if you disagree with them.  That's the first step to being a good sailor and a good leader.  If you can't take orders now, you certainly won't be respected when you give them later.'  Well, I got the message.  Learning discipline was the springboard that helped my Navy career.  From then on I had the sharpest damn knife and the shiniest shoes in the Navy.  That's what I was taught.  That's what I believed in, being a good Sailor.  The proudest day of my life had nothing to do with medals, ribbons, citations.  It was when they made me a patrol officer.  That position was held only by chiefs and officers.  It showed the trust the Navy had placed in me.  I always wanted the opportunity to show what I could do.  This Vietnam thing was it for me.  The Navy gave me the chance to do my job."

On his first day out, Williams didn't disappoint.  "October 31, 1966, was supposed to be a restful day in the steamy, heartland of the Viet Cong.  But it's one of those times I won't never forget, no matter how hard I try.  We were on a day patrol, kind of like the 'relax and recreation' patrol -- nothin' too heavy.  We were only gonna check a few boats coming down the Mekong River for contraband.  We were just moseying on down the river minding our own business when our forward gunner hollered, 'There's two fast-speed boats crossing ahead of us.'  We had learned if you saw one of these sampans, it was something.  It usually meant there was some high-ranking North Vietnamese officer on board -- and that meant trouble; as soon as the Viet Cong spotted us, they started firing."  The two boats split, one headed for the north bank, the other went east.  Williams and his crew broke off with the north-bound boat and sank it before it could reach the river's edge.  The thirty-six-year-old Williams, affectionately called Old Man by his crew of mostly 19 and 20 year olds, then turned for the second boat.  Just as he was about to open fire the sampan made a sharp turn into an eight-foot-wide canal in front of a rice paddy.  Williams and his crew of Patrol River Boat-105 couldn't follow.  "I looked at the map and saw that I could go to the right maybe for a third of a mile and come back to where he would have to come out.  We wanted to get them real bad. I went around that corner at max sped to cut him off -- and, lo and behold, I looked up and didn't see nothing but boats and people and more boats and more people."

Williams had unwittingly stumbled into a first staging area and there was no way out but straight ahead.  With bullets flying and guns blazing, Williams slammed the throttle down and pulled the wheel hard left, creating a large wake which slapped against the hull of the sampan and disrupted the enemy's aim.  Williams then took PBR-105 at full speed through the middle of the formation, causing mass confusion.  "Fire came from all directions. But their aim was off that day 'cause they was shootin' and hittin' more of each other than we was."  With some crafty boat handling, Williams zigzagged his way through the staging area while his crew returned the enemy's fire.  But, the cliché, "out of the frying pan and into the fire," was about to become much more real for Williams and his crew.  "We get through this area and I'm trying to high-tail it back.  We got around the next corner and by God! there's another staging area.  We had to just fight.  There was no way out.  I twisted, crisscrossed and turned that PBR.  I did whatever I could to get them off our backs."  The fight lasted for three and a half hours. When it was all over, Williams, with just two boats and 10 men, had sunk 65 enemy boats and eliminated 1,200 enemy troops.  "It's hard to believe the first day we were out, we got blasted to hell and back and nobody got killed."  For his heroic actions that day, Williams was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.  But he is quick to admonish anyone who wants to talk about his awards.  "You gotta stop and think about your shipmates.  That's what makes you a great person and a great leader - taking care of each other.  You've got to think -- team. It takes a team to win any battle, not an individual."  But on one particular day in 1966, this individual made the team unbeatable.

MEDAL OF HONOR CITATION:

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty.  BM1 Williams was serving as Boat Captain and Patrol Officer aboard River Patrol Boat (PBR) 105 accompanied by another patrol boat when the patrol was suddenly taken under fire by 2 enemy sampans.  BM1 Williams immediately ordered the fire returned, killing the crew of 1 enemy boat and causing the other sampan to take refuge in a nearby river inlet.  Pursuing the fleeing sampan, the U.S. patrol encountered a heavy volume of small-arms fire from enemy forces, at close range, occupying well-concealed positions along the river bank.  Maneuvering through this fire, the patrol confronted a numerically superior enemy force aboard 2 enemy junks and 8 sampans augmented by heavy automatic weapons fire from ashore.  In the savage battle that ensued, BM1 Williams, with utter disregard for his safety exposed himself to the withering hail of enemy fire to direct counter-fire and inspire the actions of his patrol.  Recognizing the over whelming strength of the enemy force, BM1 Williams deployed his patrol to await the arrival of armed helicopters.  In the course of his movement he discovered an even larger concentration of enemy boats.  Not waiting for the arrival of the armed helicopters, he displayed great initiative and boldly led the patrol through the intense enemy fire and damaged or destroyed 50 enemy sampans and 7 junks.  This phase of the action completed, and with the arrival of the armed helicopters, BM1 Williams directed the attack on the remaining enemy force.  Now virtually dark, and although BM1 Williams was aware that his boats would become even better targets, he ordered the patrol boats' search lights turned on to better illuminate the area and moved the patrol perilously close to shore to press the attack.  Despite a waning supply of ammunition the patrol successfully engaged the enemy ashore and completed the rout of the enemy force.  Under the leadership of BM1 Williams, who demonstrated unusual professional skill and indomitable courage throughout the 3 hour battle, the patrol accounted for the destruction or loss of 65 enemy boats and inflicted numerous casualties on the enemy personnel.  His extraordinary heroism and exemplary fighting spirit in the face of grave risks inspired the efforts of his men to defeat a larger enemy force, and are in keeping with the finest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service.

Williams died on October 13, 1999, and was buried at Florence National Cemetery in Florence, South Carolina.  The Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy, speaking at the funeral said, “We will forever be grateful for the leadership and commitment he showed his sailors.  Petty Officer Williams was an amazing sailor.”  Following his death a retired Rear Admiral who commanded Williams in Vietnam remarked, “Willie did not seek awards.  He did not covet getting them.  We did not seek to make him a hero.  The circumstances of time and place, and the enemy’s presence did that.  I know through personal investigation of each incident that he never placed his crew nor his patrol boats in danger without first ensuring the risk was calculated and that surprise was on his side.  He always had the presence of mind not to endanger friendly villages.  He inspired us all, junior and senior alike.  It was my greatest honor to have served with the man who truly led us all with his example of unselfish devotion to duty.”  In December 2004 the USS JAMES E. WILLIAMS (DDG-95) was commissioned in his honor.

MILITARY  DECORATIONS

Medal of Honor

Navy Cross

Silver Star (with one gold award star)

Legion of Merit (with “V” device)

Navy and Marine Corps Medal (with gold award star)

Bronze Star (with “V” device and two gold award stars)

Purple Heart (with two gold award stars)

Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal (with “V” device and gold award star)

Navy and Marine Corps Presidential Unit Citation (with bronze service star)

Navy Good Conduct Medal (with four bronze service stars)

Navy Expeditionary Medal

National Defense Service Medal (with bronze service star)

Korean Service Medal (with two bronze stars)

Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal

Vietnam Service Medal (with two bronze service stars)

Korean Presidential Unit Citation

Vietnam Cross of Gallantry (with gold star and palm)

United Nations Korean Medal

Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medan

Korean War Service Medal

**I. Introduction**

A. Attention (Everyone NEEDS positive re-enforcement. It’s a fact of life and an important tenet of leadership. The Sailor of the Year program is an incredible mechanism for satisfying what we have previously quantified as a need!).

B. Motivation (Junior Sailors should understand this program and how to navigate it’s execution so that when you ARE nominated for your sustained superior performance, you’re prepared to take advantage of an important opportunity.)

C. Overview (I was originally planning on going back to more a leadership theory topic since we’ve hit two policy or program type topics in a row, but this one seemed appropriate. Tis the season, as I’m in the middle of preparing Sailor of the Quarter packages myself as many of your Chiefs are as well. But also, this one was a request from a listener so it seemed timely. So, here we go…)

**II. Body**

A. Main Point 1 (OPNAVINST 1700.10 SERIES [N])

1. Sub-point (Reference) – This is the governing reference so take the time to go over it! ESPECIALLY is you’re in a position to sit boards, make nominations or prepare packages. In that case, it’s required reading. Keep in mind when reviewing THIS instruction, that this is discussing the SOY program on a Navy-wide level. At this level, there are 4 SOYS: ATLANTIC FLEET, PACIFIC FLEET, SHORE AND RESERVE. These Sailors are meritoriously advanced to CHIEF when selected. That’s the impact the program CAN have.

2. Sub-point (Command Instructions) – Your command will have an instruction specific to your unit that delineates how YOUR program is administered. This is the one my junior level leaders should be reviewing. In this you will generally find a WEALTH of information, including the sheet they use to score your package and board. REVIEW THIS. Knowledge is power and this thing isn’t a secret. Prepare yourself and your Sailors for success.

3. Sub-point (Levels) – The program has different levels. They may be found in the same or separate command level instructions, but either way, ensure you’re aware of all of them. These are things you have probably already seen on board your ship or unit. The program runs year round on a fiscal year schedule (October 1st through September 30th), and each quarter you have different levels of the award: Bluejacket of the Quarter, Junior Sailor of the Quarter and Sailor of the Quarter. I’ve seen some slightly different iterations (i.e. Senior Sailor of the Quarter) but this is the commonly used construct. BJOQ is generally frocked E4 and below, JSOQ E4-E5, SOQ E6. Some commands will allow senior E5s to compete for Sailor of the Quarter and even year, but again, generally this is the construct. Unit composition plays a role. This then leads to the yearly awards for each category when the fiscal year comes to a close (end of September).

B. Main Point 2 (The Process)

1. Sub-point (Sustained Superior Performance) – The number one criteria for nomination and eventually selection, is this. You will consistently hear this phrase as your career progresses, all the way to my level. EVERYONE evaluating you will be looking for SUSTAINED SUPERIOR PERFORMANCE in your primary duty first, then collaterals, then the extra stuff (college, community service, etc.). It’s not a moving target, and it seems like people feel that it is. Sometimes a command will put a little too much stock in something that seems less important that they feel it is, but by and large, this is an extremely consistent theme. And as we’ve talked about previously, there’s no secret - show up early, with a positive attitude, in a stellar uniform and bust your butt working hard. That’s it. It’s so simple people think it’s a damn secret. IT’S NOT.

2. Sub-point (Nomination) – You will usually find out you’re nominated when you’re told about the board. THIS IS AN IMPORTANT PIECE OF INFORMATION. Why? Because sometimes people forget to tell you about stuff - and that will NOT delay the board. So, have your dress uniform ready AT ALL TIMES. Have it clean, starched and pressed with your inspection ready dress shoes all polished up so that you are ready. Because it will probably happen at some point - it happened to me.

3. Sub-point (The Board) – The board is extremely important in that, usually, each candidates packages are in the same ball park. That being said, the board is used to see who rises to the top. As states before, the grading sheet used by the board members is NOT A SECRET! Get in your command’s instruction and take a look! It will at the very least, make you aware of what they are looking at which is a huge leg up.

The basic structure of the board begins with you outside with your dress uniform on, either dress whites or blues. You are prompted to enter the board at which time you enter the venue covered, make the proper facing movements to arrive in front of the board chairperson and report. This is something like “Good afternoon Chief, FC3 Timmy reporting for Junior Sailor of the Quarter board as ordered”. At this time, you’re usually given some orders so the board can conduct a uniform inspection (Shoe shine story). They will order you to uncover, about face, one step forward, about face, then instruct you to have a seat. They do this NOT JUST TO SEE YOUR UNIFORM, but to gauge your military bearing. If you botch a facing movement (ABOUT FACE), they will ding you! Practice in your room! Prior to sitting, UNPROMPTED, they will expect you to a) CALL THE ROOM TO ATTENTION and b) RECITE THE SAILOR’S CREED. Now, when you call “Attention to the Sailor’s Creed”, do it with some gusto. Nothing get’s me pumped more than someone who belts out a motivated Creed and MEANS IT. I had a young lady at an awards board yell that out from deep down in her chest and told me “I AM the fighting spirit of the Navy!” and I got damn goosebumps. Let them know. Be motivated! It counts!

So now, you’re seated sweating bullets. CALM DOWN. Sit smartly “at attention”, but RELAX. If you’re sitting there having a mini panic attack, it’s going to make this WAY harder than it needs to be. EVERYONE in that room wants you to do well, so chill. Now, that does not mean completely relax. Again, smartly maintain your military bearing, but it’s okay to laugh at joke. Hopefully you understand the balance here. Each board member will ask you at least one question, all boards vary slightly. The topics generally include: Navy History, Current Events, Navy Policy and potentially some type of scenario. The only real way to “study” is to be acutely aware of what is happening in the Navy. You should do this anyway! BE INFORMED! Read the Navy Times, Navy.mil, All Hands Magazine, etc. Like things on Facebook! Like the MCPON and CNOs pages, the Navy Advancement Center, etc. These things will alert you to new policies, things being discussed, current events, etc. Navy History and Heritage Command is the go to resource for Naval history and I encourage you to visit their site and YouTube channel to learn more about your heritage, not just for these boards - but it will help here too!

When the board concludes, you will be prompted to stand, cover, and be dismissed. So now, lets talk about something that is not often trained on but is a huge consideration when boarding…

C. Main Point 2 (Boardsmanship)

1. Sub-point (Titles and Sandwiching) – First, how do you address the board members? Well, assuming you know them, you just address them by their title! CS1, FC1, Chief, Senior Chief, etc. That’s always your best bet. If you don't know them all, which can happen, stick with Petty Officer and Chief/Senior Chief/Master Chief. Can’t go wrong. Sandwiching is a technique used to stay professional but provide you with a bit of a road map you aren’t ad-libbing every answer when you’re nervous. Goes like this:

Q: “What is the Navy Chief’s birthday?”

A: “Chief, the Navy Chief’s birthday is April 1st, 1893, Chief.”

Easy, right? But what if you don’t know the answer? DON’T SHOOT FROM THE HIP. If you don’t know, it’s okay. Just answer “Chief, I don’t have that answer at this time but I will get back to you, Chief”. Done.

2. Sub-point (Eye Contact) – This is graded. When I ask you a question, I expect you to make eye contact with me. But when answering, take time to make eye contact with the other board members as well. While you’re answering my question, you are addressing the entire board. Don’t ignore them. Just glance for 1-3 seconds at each board member, naturally, then end with who asked you the question.

3. Sub-point (Nerves) – Nervousness does a lot of people in. Harness it. Everyone is nervous in these things, it’s completely natural and expected by the board members. But learn to deal with it productively. Refrain from bouncing your feet or knees up and down, wringing your hands, shifting uncontrollably in your chair. TAKE TIME TO THINK. It’s okay to pause and think before you answer a question instead of running in headlong and getting lost. Make sure you UNDERSTAND the question. It’s also okay to ask them to repeat part or all of the question. Then take time to think, gather yourself, then sandwich your answer with some killer eye contact. It’s that easy.

D. Main Point 2 (Pulling back the curtain…)

1. Sub-point (Chiefs at the board) - I was specifically asked to address how the process works in the Chiefs Mess in relation to boards, be it these or ranking boards for evaluations. What I can tell you, as I stated at the beginning, is what’s required for you to rank high is NOT A MOVING TARGET. It’s not. For my FCPOs, read the Chief Precepts on NPC, it lays it out like a map. Literally lists what they’re looking for in a Chief.

Here’s the thing. What I always tell the folks that work for me, is when I walk into a ranking board there had damn well better be bullets in my gun. GIVE ME THE AMMUNITION TO FIGHT FOR YOU. I want to. I will. But if I have a bebe gun and they have a bazooka…well, I’m loosing that fight every time. BE UNDENIABLE. I’m a convincing fellow and will argue tooth and nail for my Sailors, but what is sometimes missed is that I’m a Chief on the ship, and I want all Sailors to do well. So as the Cook Chief, if there’s a Mechanic that deserves to be ranked over my guy, he deserves it. I’m not going to try to run someone over out of some kind of selfish motivation to “take care of my guys”. I take care of you by ensuring you understand what’s expected. What it takes to get an EP and rank high. It’s up to you to do it. To load my gun. If you give me the ammunition, I’ll win. Because those other Chiefs, begrudgingly at times, but still - THEY WANT YOU TO SUCCEED TOO. Are there E7s out there that do this wrong? YES. We’ve established that. There are poor leaders everywhere, but this isn’t some big conspiracy Navy wide. I promise. What is often perceived as a Chief “not taking care of you” is, in reality, him taking care of exactly who should have been. Another part of this process is understanding that you don’t have to be an EP to promote. It’s okay to not be that guy, even if you’re striving to be. There aren’t cheat codes to this, it’s just sawtooth progression. But that’s another story for another time.

**III. Conclusion**

A. Summary (We talked about…)

1. The policy governing the Sailor of the Quarter and Year awards program

2. The steps in the process from nomination to selection

3. Then dove deep into the concept of “boardsmanship”

B. Re-motivation (Junior Sailors should understand this program and how to navigate it’s execution so that when you ARE nominated for your sustained superior performance, you’re prepared to take advantage of an important opportunity.)

C. Closing – This program is an opportunity. It’s an opportunity for leaders to recognize the outstanding performance we are constantly seeking of our charges. It’s an opportunity for you to shine. To be recognized for that outstanding performance. These awards are heavy hitters. These affect your eval and ranking among your peers and Sailor of the Year in block 43 at the Chief’s Board is BIG. Understand that this program plays a role in your self-actualization. It’s a piece of the overall performance evaluation and advancement puzzle and it’s a simple one for you to understand and seize when the opportunity presents itself - and it will.

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