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BOATSWAIN MATE TRAINING

The Boatswain Mate (BM) rating has undergone tremendous billet growth over the past 18 months following the events of 9/11/01 and is projected to continue this growth over the next several years. This growth has created challenges in training BMs, particularly in the area of entry-level skills.

We had two BM Tiger Teams examine these challenges over the past 12 months. The first BM Tiger Team met in the spring of 2002. The Team identified the striker program as essential to augmenting BM "A" School throughput at least for the next several years. It also recognized that merging the BM and QM ratings would make BM3 advancement requirements more complex. This, in turn, could decrease the number of strikers per year who advance to BM3, resulting in the Coast Guard not meeting its workforce growth requirements.

To remedy this, the Tiger Team recommended that the BM Striker Program be supported with formal training that targets those advancement requirements most difficult for the field to train. As a result, we established a 3-week commercial "C" School that trains navigation and piloting skills. This curriculum is based on a portion of the BM "A" School curriculum at TRACEN Yorktown. Completion of the course satisfies most of the BM3 navigation and piloting advancement requirements. Members return to their units where they finish the remainder of their advancement requirements via on-the-job training. To date, approximately 150 BM strikers have attended the training. We expect about 300 BM strikers will have attended this training by the end of FY03, and we plan to increase this number in FY04. BM strikers will also be better supported in the very near future with the new BM3 Performance Qualification Guide, their new rating correspondence course. This should be available from the Institute in August 2003.

A new 12-week BM "A" School reflecting the BM/QM rating merger commenced in September 2002. However, the new "A" School was limited in throughput by the number of students that could train on the School's 41' UTBs. To increase BM "A" School throughput, an innovative 9-week core and strand curriculum was implemented in January 2003 that prepares graduates for their first unit. The 6-week core covers BM skills that are common across units. There are two 3-week follow-on strands, with one covering Boat Crewman skills for those being assigned to stations and similar shore units, and the other covering navigation and piloting skills for those being assigned to cutters. The core and strand approach has increased annual BM "A" School capacity from approximately 300 to 450 per year with no additional resources. In FY04/FY05, we hope to increase capacity to 600 annually if we are successful in gaining additional instructor resources at play in our FY04 budget.

Even with the new core and strand approach, we still face several challenges with regard to BM training. First, a capacity of 600 meets only about half of the projected annual BM3 production requirement. This creates a large need for

strikers who face more complex advancement requirements. The large number of strikers places a tremendous training burden on the field to deliver BM entry-level skills via on-the-job training. Also, the increased BM "A" School capacity, which heavily utilizes the school's 41' UTBs, has a detrimental effect on Coxswain "C" School capacity, literally reducing it by half. Finally, graduates of the core and strand BM "A" School must still complete the BM3 advancement requirements encompassed in the strand they didn't attend prior to being eligible for advancement to BM2.

To address these issues, we convened a second BM Tiger Team in January 2003. The Team considered these issues and the impact of resources slated for BM "A" School at play in our FY04 budget. The Tiger Team concluded that, even with FY04 resources, bold steps must be taken to achieve a BM "A" School capacity that will meet the projected steady state requirement of 1,200 BM3s annually.

We are currently evaluating a course of action that could produce a BM "A" School capacity of 1200 annually while at the same time doubling Coxswain "C" School capacity. It might also provide additional capacity within the strands so that graduates of BM "A" School would have an opportunity to return to TRACEN Yorktown to complete the strand they didn't originally attend. We'll see how things play out here.

In spite of the many challenges, we are making progress. Our goal is to ensure that the enlisted rating that produces the majority of the Coast Guard's OICs, DWOs and Coxswains will have parity with other ratings relative to entry-level training. I'll keep you informed along the way.

Regards,

RADM Kenneth F. Venuto
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