

**E-PME**  *Enlisted*  
**PROFESSIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION**

**Becoming a Petty Officer 4.B.02**

**Learning Objective(s):** DISCUSS the history and authority of a Petty Officer.

**Why You Need to Know This**

Becoming a petty officer is a significant milestone in your Coast Guard career. As a petty officer in the United States Coast Guard you are part of a legacy that has been passed down by those who served before you. This legacy comes with an obligation to study it and pass it down, untarnished. Therefore, it is important for you to become acquainted with the heritage of this honorable position so you can be a successful petty officer and continue the legacy.

When you become a petty officer, you're not just getting a pay raise - you're also assuming greater responsibility and authority. In the Apprentice Leadership Program (ALP) you learn the meaning of the advancement certificate, which outlines the responsibilities and authorities now entrusted to you as a Petty Officer. This includes the power to command, enforce laws, exact obedience, determine and/or judge.

This lesson will provide you with facts about the heritage of the Coast Guard petty officer and the authority bestowed upon this position.

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**Topics Covered**

This section will cover the following topics:

- Petty Officer Heritage
- Authority of a Petty Officer

At the end of this lesson, you will be required to participate in a learning activity. You are encouraged to first review the learning activity and the sign off requirements located in the “**You and Your Supervisor**” section of this lesson. Reviewing this information before you begin the lesson will allow you to take proper notes and focus on key learning points.

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## Petty Officer Heritage

Historically, the petty officer rate can be traced back several centuries. Originally, the French word “petite” meant something small. Over the years, the word also came to mean minor, secondary, and subordinate. In medieval and later England, villages had several “petite”, “pety”, or “petty” officials/officers who were subordinate to major officials. In essence, petty officers served as assistants to senior officials.

Petty officers served in the British navy in the 17th century, perhaps even earlier. They were assistants to senior officers of the early British warships. A ship’s captain or master chose the petty officers to serve under him. When the voyage ended, or when the crew was paid and released, the petty officers lost their positions and titles. The rate of petty officer became official in 1808.

In the U.S., when the Revenue Cutter Service was founded, captains of the ships also appointed their petty officers. While petty officers served as important members of the Revenue Cutter Service, they did not have uniforms or rate insignia, and usually held their appointments only while serving on the ship whose captain had selected them.

Today’s Coast Guard petty officer’s rate and rating system traces its heraldry and the leadership role of the petty officers to the U.S. Navy.

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## Petty Officer Heritage Timeline

The following timeline provides some historical information relative to petty officers:

- **1841:** Petty officers in the Navy acquire their first rate insignia when they begin wearing a sleeve device showing an eagle perched on an anchor.
- **1866:** The specialty or rating marks become official, though petty officers used them for several years.
- **1885:** The Navy recognizes its three classes of petty officers: First, Second, and Third. The rating badges were approved by the Secretary of the Navy on July 1, 1885.
- **1886:** Petty officers wear rate insignia of chevrons with the points down under a spread eagle and rating mark. The eagle faces left instead of right as it presently does.
- **1893:** The Navy establishes the Chief Petty Officer rate and issues the insignia of three chevrons with an arc and eagle. 1st, 2nd, and 3rd class petty officers begin wearing the present insignia.
- **1915:** The Coast Guard comes into existence when Congress combines the Revenue Cutter Service with the U.S. Life Saving Service.
- **1917:** During World War I, the rates in the Coast Guard become the same as those in the Navy.

**Authority of a Petty Officer**

As a Petty Officer you have specific authorities, which are necessary to carry out the orders of your supervisors. You are entrusted with the authority to delegate as necessary to carry out the orders of your supervisor. As a Petty officer you will be delegating some tasks to other members. Delegation is not always about assigning the job to someone else, it can also be an opportunity to teach him or her how to do a specific job or task. Remember, even though you decide to delegate the assignment, it is still **YOUR** responsibility to ensure it is completed.

In exercising their duties, petty officers have authority to issue orders. Deliberate failure to obey a lawful order violates Article 91 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). Failure to obey a lawful order may also violate Article 92 of the UCMJ.

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**Article 91**

***Article 91 – Insubordinate Conduct Toward an Officer.*** As a court-martial may direct, any warrant officer or enlisted member shall be punished for any of the following actions:

- Striking or assaulting a warrant officer, noncommissioned officer, or petty officer, while that officer is in the execution of his or her office Willfully disobeys the lawful order of a warrant officer, noncommissioned officer, or petty officer
- Treats with contempt or is disrespectful in language or deportment toward a warrant officer, noncommissioned officer, or petty officer while that officer is in the execution of his or her office.

***Article 7-Apprehension*** Commissioned officers, warrant officers, petty officers, and noncommissioned officers have authority to quell quarrels, frays and disorders among persons subject to the Uniformed Code of Military Justice and to apprehend persons who take part in any of these events.

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**Article 92**

***Article 92 – Failure to Obey Order or Regulation.*** As a court-martial may direct, any person subject to this article shall be punished if he or she commits any of the following actions:

- Violates or fails to obey any lawful general order or regulation
  - Fails to obey any other lawful order issued by an Armed Forces' member if the person has knowledge of his or her duty to comply
  - Is derelict in the performance of his or her duties
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**Statutory Authority**

After Prohibition, Admiral Russell R. Waesche, Sr., Coast Guard Commandant from 1936 to 1945 oversaw the addition of many responsibilities; the most sweeping of which was Congressional authorization for the Coast Guard to enforce all U.S. laws at sea and within territorial waters.

As a result, title 14, United States Code (USC), Section 89 gives the Coast Guard its law enforcement authority and establishes who may exercise that authority. Under this standard, petty officers, in the performance of official duties, may board any vessel under the jurisdiction of the United States at any time. For such purposes, commissioned, warrant, and petty officers may at any time go on board any vessel subject to the jurisdiction, or to the operation of any law, of the United States.

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**S.E.A.S.I.I.**

In accordance with 14 USC, Section 89, Petty Officers have the authority to:

**S**earch the vessel and question personnel on board

**E**xamine the ship's documents and papers

**A**rrest persons violating the law, when warranted

**S**eize contraband if necessary

**I**nspect to ensure Recreational Boating Safety (RBS) Carriage Requirements are met

**I**nquire about compliance prior to boarding

It is important to note that probable cause is needed to conduct searches and to make seizures and arrests. The minimum force necessary to compel compliance must be used.

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**Coast Guard Members Who Do Not Have Statutory Authority**

Coast Guard personnel who do NOT have authority under this standard are:

- Non-petty officer enlisted members
  - Auxiliarists
  - Academy Cadets
  - Officer Candidates who are not prior-enlisted Coast Guard petty officers
  - Reservists not on orders
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## Learning Activity



To successfully complete this requirement you will need to discuss the history and authority of a Petty Officer with a First Class Petty Officer or above or your supervisor.

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## For You and Your Supervisor

In order to meet the sign-off requirement for this lesson **YOU** must perform the following:

1. Prior to meeting with your supervisor review the contents of this lesson and organize your thoughts.
2. Discuss your chosen topic.

Before signing off on this requirement your **SUPERVISOR** must:

1. Make sure the member knows what it means to be a petty officer.
  2. Provide the member with corrective feedback and answer any questions they may have related to this topic.
  3. Sign-off the check-off sheet on the Record of Enlisted Professional Military Education (E-PME) Performance Requirements.
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## References

The references used to develop this lesson can be found at CG Directives (CG-612), [www.uscg.mil/directives](http://www.uscg.mil/directives):

- Military Justice Manual, COMDTINST M5810.1(series)
  - [Manual for Courts-Martial \(MCM\), United States Ch. 47](#)
  - [Uniform Code of Military Justice \(UCMJ\), 10 U.S.C. §§ 801 – 946 \(as amended\)](#)
  - [Coast Guard Publication 1 \(CG Pub 1\)](#)
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