

MCPON: Sailors Must Be 'Qualified, Astute Technicians'

WASHINGTON – The Navy needs to capture the best talents resident in its Sailors to meet the needs of a future fight, the service's senior enlisted adviser said.

The Navy needs to "find ways to best capture that talent and set it up for success in the fleet," said Master Chief Petty of the Navy (MCPON) Russell L. Smith, speaking Jan. 10 along with Sgt. Major of the Marine Corps Ronald Green at an event sponsored by the U.S. Naval Institute at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Smith pointed out that the Navy needs recruits who are comfortable with high technology.

"The Navy is a STEM service," he said, referring to science, technology, engineering and math as the skills Sailors need to man the ships, aircraft, weapons, networks and other electronic systems used in the modern Navy. "We have to be qualified, astute technicians."

Smith said "bringing that [STEM] talent forward is one of our biggest lines of effort."

He also emphasized that sea-going skills such as damage control and firefighting remain just as important now as ever, noting that Sailors must "first meet the mission, then save their shipmates."

Smith noted that the Navy is in stiff competition with other military services and the other high-tech sectors of the U.S. economy for tech-savvy young adults. However, Smith said that the Navy's retention of Sailors is the highest it has ever

been, upward of 70 percent, better even than after the 9/11 attacks in 2001.

Green said the Marine Corps, which recruits 30,000 people each year, continues to achieve its quotas, attributing that to the ethos of the Marine Corps that attracts people looking to be something special.

Green said that while the Marine Corps is adopting new technology, the focus is "maximizing lethality and not compromising the standard."

He said that the Corps' focus is on the lethality and readiness of the individual Marine.

"The robot is not kicking in the door, the Marine is," Green said.

Smith said that child care for Sailors' families is becoming a conundrum for the Navy. Green seconded that, noting that 49 to 50 percent of today's Marines are married, a situation much different from decades ago.