

AG Rating Celebrated 90th Birthday July 1

By George Lammons, Naval Meteorology and Oceanography Command Public Affairs

STENNIS SPACE CENTER, Miss. (NNS) -- July 1 is the 90th birthday of the Aerographer's Mate or AG rating, established for the Navy's fledgling aviation enterprise to ensure the Navy had a dependable source of weather forecasting for aviation safety.

Although AG's still forecast the weather for flight operations, they have added considerably to their portfolio during the last 90 years. New areas of support include hydrography, oceanography, unmanned underwater vehicle (UUV) operation and sonar data processing. As part of the Information Dominance Corps, AG's enhance battle-space awareness by providing the characterization, forecast and impacts of the environment.

"Our mission sets grew and changed as the needs of the fleet changed and we continued to expand our capabilities. But the one constant through that change is that we serve as the Navy's operational scientists," said Master Chief Aerographer's Mate Ken Walker, Naval Meteorology and Oceanography Command (NAVMETOCOM) Master Chief, the Navy's senior AG.

Using the latest technology and in addition to aviation, the Navy's approximately 1,000 AG's play a vital role in all of the Navy's traditional warfare areas, as well as the new realm of Information Dominance. They also support safety of navigation, the Navy's humanitarian aid/disaster relief efforts and safety at sea.

They have become the Navy's accepted experts in the operation of UUVs, which they use extensively in mine warfare operations and hydrography, or, bottom mapping for access routes and charting.

"AG's are the backbone of Operational Navy Oceanography. As a group, they are smart and technologically adept. They have always been willing to accept new and additional duties - whatever they have been asked," said Rear Adm. Tim Gallaudet, NAVMETOCOM commander. "That's why the job has expanded so much into oceanography, hydrography and Information Dominance - because they were willing and able to learn new things and take on new responsibilities. The U.S. Navy is a more safe and effective fighting force because of the AG's - and I know this to be a fact from my firsthand experiences with AG's in the Persian Gulf, Western Pacific, and Mediterranean, Arabian, Yellow and Red seas."

The rating has come a long way from the first seven-man AG class of 1925 to today's technologically-savvy members who forecast the entirety of the natural environment and analyze the impacts of specific environmental conditions on a particular platform, weapons system or operation. In 1925, balloons carrying instruments into the atmosphere and airplanes with recording data and weather instruments attached to the wings were considered high tech; the first electric programmable computers were still 20 years away.

Some things have not changed, as AG's still forecast environmental conditions for battle-space awareness. But, more importantly, AG's throughout their history have integrated new technologies into environmental data collection and have continually found more and better ways to optimize warfighting.

Walker said the biggest change in the work of AG's during his 29 years in the Navy is centered on the junior Sailors. "When I came in the Navy, our A-school graduates were weather observers. The predominance of our work was taking observations, launching weather balloons, plotting charts, tearing teletype data and using communications gear to receive facsimile charts," he said. "With the ever-growing technological advances a great deal of that work became obsolete. AG-A school was revamped to reflect those changes and the graduates now head to the fleet as Apprentice Forecasters. This change has allowed us to expedite the timeline for getting our Sailors into AG-C school and back out to the fleet as Journeyman Forecasters."

The Navy established the AG rating to ensure a cadre of educated weather forecasting professionals would be available to forecast the weather for the new naval flight operations. Naval aviation started in 1910, but the weather forecasting rating didn't start until 1924.

In 1923, Lt. Francis Richelderfer, a pilot, weather officer and head of the Navy weather desk, recognized that an enlisted rate offering advancement potential was needed for Navy weather forecasting to prosper. The weather office had been plagued by high attrition rates of its enlisted personnel into other specialties or out of the Navy.

The enlisted forerunners of AG's were quartermasters with an aviation specialty. Formal instruction in aviation-related weather courses for the Navy was first taught by Alexander G. McAdie of Harvard University. McAdie coined the term "Aerographer," so the name of the rating is a constant reminder of the rating's roots. The rating, initially known only as "Aerographer," became Aerographer's Mate in 1942.

The size of the rating has expanded and declined through the years, but the importance of environmental forecasting has not been challenged since the days of McAdie. Environmental forecasting plays a key role in battle-space awareness, one of the three pillars of Information Dominance, so don't be surprised if AG's are still forecasting the impacts of the environment in another 90 years.

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