

MCPON: Some Responses to Pandemic Will Remain as Good Processes



Hospitalman Tkcatherzline Blackwell conducts a temperature check at the entrance of Branch Health Clinic at Naval Air Facility Atsugi, Japan. U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Jacob Smith

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy’s top enlisted leader said the COVID-19 pandemic is teaching the sea service that personnel need as much focus as machines as the Navy works its way to separate processes that work from those that need to be cast aside.

Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy (MCPON) Russell Smith spoke July 15 during a webinar, NatSec 2020: Coronavirus and Beyond, co-sponsored by the Navy League of the United States, the Association of the United States Army and Government Matters.

“We knew going in that we were going to find some better practices, some efficiencies with the way we do business,” Smith said.

He noted that the Navy’s recruit training center at Great Lakes, Illinois, “has had [fewer] cases of pneumonia, severe flu and hospitalizations than we’ve ever had right now, even in COVID, because of the way we’ve handled people and the way we’ve prevented that inter-exchange of colds and things that all happen when so many people from so many different parts of the country all come together and start sharing their germs.”

“The way we handled things from a hygiene perspective and some other efficiencies that we certainly learned in this process of bringing [recruits] in will probably stick,” he said.

“That’s the COVID writ large for us as a Navy,” he said. “We’ve absolutely learned some things that we stopped doing because of COVID that we probably won’t start doing again. Some things we’ll have to go right back to doing as soon as we can, but there are some things – by not having to do them for a while – as an efficiency, we probably don’t need to go back to doing [them].”

“Where there is challenge, there is opportunity,” said Navy League Executive Director Mike Stevens, Smith’s predecessor as MCPON, also speaking in the webinar. “What I’ve seen in both the private sector and in [the Department of Defense] taking the challenge, looking for these new opportunities, and, primarily where we capitalize on these opportunities in the areas of technology, I think those thing are going to stick.”

“We’ve learned how to work efficiently from places other than our normal places of duty or work,” Stevens said. “We’re much more effective than I thought we would be.”

Smith pointed out that the Navy is an expeditionary service, “and when we immediately moved to nearly everyone teleworking, we found out how much our basic services lack the agility that they require for us to dis-aggregate and work remotely. We have to be able to do that far better than we do today. A lot of these forced processes made us catch up quickly.”