

Uniform History



In 1865 a Navy regulation reestablished the term chief petty officer. The term was first used for the ship's Master-at-Arms. It made him responsible for preservation of order and obedience to all regulations.

This, however, did not establish the term chief as a rate. It was merely a function rather than a rate. Petty officers were divided into petty officers of the line and petty officers of the staff. Chief referred to the principal petty officer of the ship.

A significant change to uniforms and rating badges occurred in 1886. The first class petty officer wore a double-breasted sack-style jacket, while petty officers second class and below retained the traditional tunic-style uniform. The first class rating badge consisted of an eagle, three chevrons, and a specialty mark. The Master-at-Arms rating badge, however, consisted of an eagle, three chevrons, a specialty mark, and three arcs or rockers. This jacket along with the Master-at-Arms rating badge falsely led many people to believe this was a chief petty officer uniform.

On 25 February 1893, President Benjamin Harrison issued an executive order outlining the pay scale for Navy enlisted personnel. This executive order was issued to the Navy as General Order Number 409. This general order divided the pay scale into rates and for the first time listed CPOs. Both General Order Number 409 and U.S. Navy Regulation Circular Number 1 listed chief petty officers as distinct rates. These documents went into effect on 1 April 1893. All evidence indicates this as the date the chief petty officer rate was actually established.

On 24 September 1894 General Order Number 431 was issued. This general order changed the three rockers on the Master-at-Arms rating badge to one rocker. We know this as the rating badge of the CPO today.

