

Nimitz Sailor to Become Flying CWO

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USS Nimitz, At Sea -- When Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Handling) 2nd Class (AW) Amy Blades steps into the cockpit March 9, 2008, she'll be one of the chosen few to take to the air through the Navy's new Flying Chief Warrant Officer Program.

Blades has served in the Navy for more than nine years and has always wanted to be an officer and a pilot. Blades has been interested in flying since the first time she took off in a commercial airliner from Los Angeles International Airport as a child.

"I've always loved flying; always been intrigued by it," Blades said. "It's always been my goal in the Navy to do this, whatever it takes."

As one of 30 selectees for the Navy's Flying Chief Warrant Officer Program, Blades will train as a naval flight officer in either the SH-60 Seahawk or the P-3 Orion. The new program is the first time that Sailors below E-7 will have the opportunity to become chief warrant officers, and the first to allow any Sailor to be commissioned to chief warrant officer as a pilot or naval flight officer.

"It's an outstanding program," Blades said. "It's strictly flying and instructing others to fly. There's no emphasis on following a set career path and eventually becoming a division officer, department head and so on. Flying is all I want to do, so it's perfect for me."

For Blades, becoming a flying chief warrant officer is a perfect next step in a career that started in crash and salvage aboard USS John F. Kennedy (CV 67).

Following Kennedy, she, attended the Goodfellow Air Force Base Fire Academy, reporting to the Naval Auxiliary Landing Field Fentress before finally donning a yellow shirt as an aircraft director aboard Nimitz.

"I'll miss working the flight deck -- I love the adrenaline and excitement of the flight deck," Blades said. "Now I'll still have that excitement, but with more responsibility."

It was during a deployment in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2002 that Blades received the inspiration to give her all to chasing down her dream. She received an exhilarating ride with the "Patriots" of Electronic Warfare Squadron 140 in the backseat of an EA-6B Prowler. That ride remains burned into her memory to this day.

"We took off and flew for an hour and a half," Blades said. "The pilot really worked me over. He went up, down, left, right, and I remember I threw up twice before we made our arrested recovery. I loved the sheer excitement of it and I knew then that I'd do whatever it takes to do it."

Blades took that ride when she was an E-4, and it convinced her to reenlist. Thinking she was ineligible for Seaman to Admiral-21 Program and needed to make E-6 to apply for Officer Candidate School, she continued to work hard in every responsibility she was given to climb the enlisted ladder. The night she reenlisted again, her mentor told her about the Flying Chief Warrant Officer program, and she saw it as a way to accomplish both her goals at once.

She was not selected the first time around, nor the second. But when it was discovered that one of this year's selectees had been picked up for both programs and could only accept one, Blades was offered the other appointment Sept. 26 and accepted it that same day.

"It's an affirmation of everything I've worked so hard for -- between earning my degree, everything I did with crash and salvage, then earning my yellow shirt," Blades said.

In her pursuit of a commission, Blades has earned the respect of the officers she works for. In his recommendation letter for the program, Nimitz Commanding Officer, Capt. Mike Manazir called her a confident, talented and enthusiastic leader who stands ahead of the pack.

"Some people have 'it,' others do not, and Petty Officer Blades has 'it' in spades," Manazir said. "She is ideally poised to tackle the challenges of a career in Naval aviation head-on and prevail with ease."

Lt. Regina Rogers, V-1 division officer and Air Bos'n, also had strong words of praise for Blades.

"Her package spoke for itself," Rogers said. "She has outstanding military bearing, is very professional and handles herself well in a dangerous environment."

Blades said the timing of her selection is even better, with her father Darrell and best friend Steffanie on board for Tiger Cruise 2007.

"I told Steffanie by handing her the letter and letting her read it out loud," Blades said. "She started screaming, then my dad started crying. For me, that day was euphoric. It's still that way. I'm not going to tell the rest of my family until we go out to dinner when I get home. There's going to be a lot to celebrate!"

Blades will report to Chief Warrant Officer Indoctrination in Pensacola, Fla., in March. From there, she will continue on to Aviation Preflight Indoctrination in August and prove that, sometimes, it pays for a kid to have her head in the clouds.

Nimitz is the flagship for the Nimitz Carrier Strike Group (CSG). The Nimitz Carrier Strike Group is returning to San Diego after a six-month deployment to promote peace, regional cooperation and stability in the Western Pacific and Middle East.

The Nimitz CSG includes its embarked air wing, Carrier Air Wing (CVW 11); embarked Destroyer Squadron 23; guided-missile cruiser USS Princeton (CG 59); guided-missile destroyers USS Pinckney (DDG 91), USS Higgins (DDG 76), and USS Chafee (DDG 90); Helicopter Anti-submarine Squadron Light (HSL) 49 "Scorpions," (HSL) 37 "Easy Riders"; and Explosive Ordnance Disposal [Mobile](#) Unit 11, Det. 3.

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