

## The Navy Has the Best Coffee and the Best Food

Written by Nick Sanders

Monday, 31 August 2015 00:00

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It is a widely accepted fact that the U.S. Navy brews the best coffee of all the military services. For example, see [this article](#) by Chief Journalist Earl Smith (USN, of course). In it he wrote—

Sensitive-palate coffee quaffers admit that when it comes to preparing the delicious beverage, U.S. Navy men have no peers. Experience is undoubtedly one reason behind this superior brewing talent for no group on earth drinks more coffee than sailors. Currently they are gulping almost a million cups per day. In many places aboard ship such as the bridge, radio shack, machine shop, engine and firerooms, the formula for preparing a particular distinct flavored coffee is a jealously guarded secret.

(Astute readers may have noticed the article from which we quoted is nearly 70 years old. No matter. The truism is still true.)

But if it's a widely held truism that the Navy has the best coffee, it is perhaps less well-known that the Navy also has the best chefs and the best food.

We know this because Navy Senior Chief Petty Officer Derrick D. Davenport was recently named 2015 Chef of the Year by the American Culinary Foundation. (See the [news feature](#).) Senior CPO Davenport is the executive chef for the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the United States. He is also the senior enlisted aide to the Chairman of the JCS, Army General Martin E. Dempsey.

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After joining the Navy in 2000, Senior CPO Davenport's career included five years aboard a fast-attack submarine and a 14-month tour of duty in Afghanistan. According to the article—

Davenport was selected for the chairman's staff because they needed a chief who could both cook and lead. The test was they gave him a basket of food and said he had 30 minutes to craft a menu and make a three-course meal. 'I did seared tuna with an Asian slaw, chicken breast risotto and a Grand Marnier mousse for dessert,' he said. 'I was hired on the spot.'

Senior CPO Davenport has been with the Joint Chiefs for several years. He served former JCS Chair Navy Admiral Mullen for three years, and then stayed to serve Army General Dempsey. Some might find it unusual for an Army General to have a Navy Senior CPO as an executive chef and enlisted aide, but that is probably a feature of the "jointness" of the JCS. Plus, you know, why get rid of a top-notch chef? That would be foolish and, clearly, General Dempsey is no fool.

How did Davenport become Chef of the Year? According to the article—

For the Chef of the Year competition, Davenport first had to compete regionally. He won that competition in Buffalo, New York, in January. The secret ingredient he had to cook was rabbit. In Orlando, the secret ingredient was squab and frog. That competition was like Iron Chef in front of an audience of chefs. The rules are four courses in one hour with no advance prep.

The first course was tomato consomme with tomato compote and a frog fritter on top of that. 'The second course was a smoked squab breast ... and a small salad and some pickled fruits with citrus vinaigrette and a goat cheese soufflé,' he said. 'The third course I sort of paid homage to my Dad and grandmothers -- those good Southern cooks -- so I was thinking shrimp and grits, but I couldn't use shrimp so I substituted frog legs.' The fourth course was squab with the dark meat made into a sort of sausage and the breast meat in the center. Davenport had two apprentice chefs helping, but they could not touch the secret ingredient.

The article ended with the sad news that Senior CPO Davenport will be retiring next month, after 15 years of service. We salute him and thank him for his service.

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Somehow, we don't believe he'll have any trouble finding a post-military job. We suspect he'll have no trouble whatsoever.