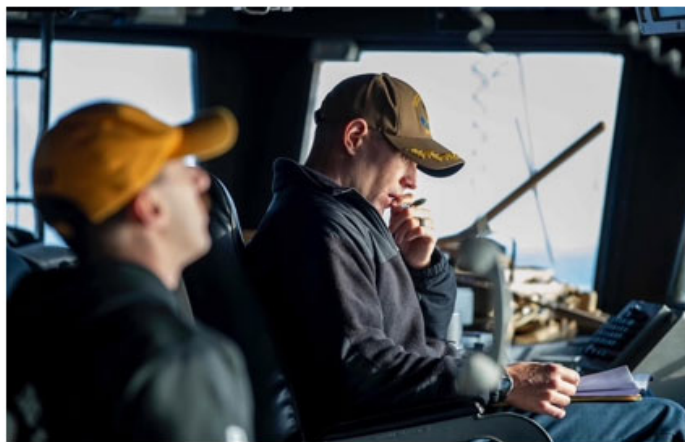


SURFACE WARFARE JUNIOR OFFICER RETENTION PLAYBOOK



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PERS-41**



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INTRODUCTION

Retaining Warfighters: The Key to the Surface Navy's Future

We need a Navy of highly lethal Surface Warfare Officers (SWO) to lead our Sailors and command our ships in countering threats in support of the Joint Force. The Joint Force, our nation and allies, all depend on our Surface ships; therefore, we must continue to retain talented officers, with the right skill sets, in the most critical billets. While we have seen our Basic Pay and compensation packages, including the Department Head Retention Bonus (DHRB) and Lieutenant Commander Bonus increase in the face of growing inflation, these alone are not sufficient to attract and retain the best talent we need to confront our nation's adversaries.



Competitive Edge 2.0 directs the Surface Navy to achieve higher Fleet readiness while simultaneously integrating new and upgraded platforms and capabilities. Recruiting and retaining the talent is necessary to keep more players on the field. The longer we retain a SWO, the more expertise they gain, enabling the Surface Warfare community to strategically place them in roles that align with their strengths and benefit the Fleet. Simply put, the current instability in JO retention from year to year is unsustainable. To maximize the recruitment and retention of skilled SWOs, we must collaborate and adopt innovative approaches, breaking from the status quo.

Commanding Officers are the cornerstone of the Surface Community's retention efforts, particularly among Division Officers and Department Heads (DH). Officer shortages carry steep consequences: prolonged sea tours, shortened shore duty, and a ripple effect that jeopardizes retention. We rely on COs to foster a culture where officers are not just retained but inspired, instilled with a warrior spirit and enthusiasm. By providing engaging and purposeful service, COs cultivate the culture of excellence essential to securing our community's future.

Men and women join the SWO community driven by a desire to lead Sailors at-sea. To honor that commitment, we must fully integrate our officers into our warfighting teams, mentoring them, advocating for their growth, and providing meaningful leadership opportunities. We need to fuel their excitement for a vibrant and rewarding future as Surface Warriors by offering career paths that deliver valuable experience, keep them competitive for key billets, and pave the way for continued professional growth and strong promotion prospects.

WHY SWO RETENTION IS IMPORTANT

The SWO community faces a significant retention challenge – one with profound implications for operational readiness, leadership development, and the overall health of the force. Each year, approximately 900 officers enter the SWO pipeline, with the goal of producing around 300 DHs

by their 8th Year of Commissioned Service. This over-execution is necessary to account for attrition, yet it highlights a critical issue: nearly 600 officers leave the community annually.

This attrition represents more than just numbers as it is a substantial loss of talent, experience, and resources. The Navy invests heavily in every SWO Junior Officer (JO), with training that includes nine weeks of the Basic Division Officer Course (BDOC), ten weeks of Officer of the Deck training across Phases I and II, and the Advanced Division Officer Course. Beyond the classroom, each officer accrues roughly 20 months of at-sea operational and leadership experience before earning their SWO qualification. When a single JO departs, the financial impact alone exceeds \$900,000, a staggering cost to the Navy.

But the cost of attrition extends beyond dollars. High turnover disrupts continuity at sea, depletes institutional knowledge, and places additional strain on those who remain. It affects morale, increases workloads, and challenges the ability to build and sustain effective warfighting teams. Retaining talented SWO JOs isn't just about meeting quotas – it's about ensuring the long-term strength and stability of the Surface Force.



Commanding Officers play a pivotal role in addressing this challenge. The way we mentor, develop, and empower our JOs directly influences their decision to stay or leave. The future of our community depends on our ability to foster a culture where talented leaders see a rewarding and sustainable path forward.

In the coming sections, we will explore actionable strategies for improving SWO JO retention – focusing on leadership engagement, career development, and quality of service initiatives. Retention is not just a policy issue; it is a leadership imperative.

WHY SWO JUNIOR OFFICERS LEAVE

The loss of Surface Warfare JOs poses a direct threat to the Navy's warfighting edge. Each departure represents more than just a personnel number – it is a loss of experience, leadership potential, and operational capability. While some separations are involuntary due to medical or disciplinary issues, the majority are voluntary, driven by a complex balance of career expectations, personal aspirations, and competing opportunities outside the Navy.

At its core, a JO remains in the SWO community when they believe the challenge is worth it, when the rewards of service outweigh the sacrifices. When this balance tips the other way, officers begin seeking alternatives. If left unaddressed, these losses weaken Fleet experience, disrupt unit cohesion, and erode the pipeline of future DHs.

Four Key Factors Driving Voluntary Separation

1. Dissatisfaction & Negative Experiences

Poor command climates, ineffective leadership, unresolved concerns, delayed SWO qualification, and stalled career progression all erode confidence in the SWO career path. When officers feel undervalued or lack professional growth, they look elsewhere.

2. Attractive Civilian Career Alternatives

Competitive private-sector opportunities offer stability, financial incentives, and greater work-life balance, making them appealing to officers questioning their long-term commitment to Navy service.

3. Family Considerations

Life milestones – marriage, parenthood, and educational opportunities – often conflict with the demands of sea duty. Without support or flexibility, JOs may see separation as the only viable option to meet personal goals.

4. Lack of Purpose & Camaraderie

Officers who feel disconnected from their command, crew, or mission are far more likely to leave. A strong sense of belonging and professional purpose is critical in retention efforts. Leaders must be intentional in fostering a team-oriented environment where every officer understands their value to the mission.

“Make every member of your team understand the value they bring to your mission... when meaning is not existent, so too is motivation for the work.” - Steve Bartlett

By recognizing and addressing these key retention factors, we can ensure that our talented JOs remain committed to the mission, strengthening the long-term readiness and lethality of the Surface Navy.

UNDERSTANDING JUNIOR OFFICER NEEDS AND CONCERNS

Retaining Surface Warfare JOs requires more than just policy changes – it demands an acute understanding of their needs, concerns, and career aspirations. While there is no single solution to officer attrition, one factor stands out: engagement directly influences retention. A recent Gallup poll found that engaged employees are 87% less likely to leave their organization.¹ Similarly, our data confirms that when JOs feel connected to their command, valued as professionals, and supported in their career progression, they are far more likely to remain in the SWO community.

Recent surveys of SWO JOs reveal both a challenge and an opportunity. Approximately 50% of male officers and 37% of female officers express uncertainty about their career intentions or indicate plans to leave the community.² This means a significant number of JOs remain open to influence. By proactively addressing their key concerns – SWO culture, toxic leadership, career

¹ *Benefits of Employee Engagement*, 2025, <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/236927/employee-engagement-drives-growth.aspx>

² Biggs, A, Seech, T., Russell, D. *Surface Warfare Officer Retention: Attitudes that Predict Intent to Serve in Critical Leadership Positions across the Ranks*

development, and work-life balance – Commanding Officers can directly impact retention and convert uncertainty into long-term commitment.

Key Factors That Influence SWO JO Retention

1. **Culture and Command Climate:** A command's culture is the cornerstone of retention. JOs thrive in an environment where professionalism, inclusivity, and camaraderie are the norm. They want to be part of a team that is ready to fight and win, where respect and meritocracy drive success. COs play a decisive role in shaping this culture by fostering open communication, addressing concerns head-on, and reinforcing shared values through team-building traditions and rituals.
2. **Career Development and Growth Opportunities:** Clear and challenging career paths are essential to retention. JOs need structured mentorship, meaningful at-sea leadership opportunities, and timely progression toward qualifications. COs can reinforce this by:
 - Pairing JOs with experienced mentors who provide guidance and advocacy.
 - Facilitating advanced training opportunities (e.g., Warfare Tactics Instructor programs, JPME, or graduate education).
 - Setting clear expectations for promotion and professional milestones, ensuring officers see a future in the SWO community.
3. **Work-Life Balance and Sustainability:** While sea duty is inherently demanding, excessive unpredictability and unmanageable workloads drive officers away. JOs seek predictable schedules, reasonable in-port hours, and opportunities for shore duty rotations to sustain long-term commitment. COs can help mitigate burnout by:
 - Prioritizing efficient watch rotations to maximize rest and readiness.
 - Advocating for shore-duty opportunities that align with professional development.
 - Promoting wellness initiatives that acknowledge the intensity of sea-duty.

Sustainable work-life balance is not about reducing standards – it is about preserving stamina and resilience to ensure officers remain effective warfighters.
4. **Leadership and Mentorship:** Strong leadership is the backbone of JO retention. Officers seek engaged senior leaders who lead by example, provide clear guidance, and instill confidence. Hands-on mentorship accelerates professional growth and reinforces sense of purpose that keeps officers committed. COs should:
 - Foster a leadership culture that prioritizes development over micromanagement.
 - Ensure JOs receive consistent feedback and coaching from senior SWOs.
 - Encourage peer mentorship, where more seasoned JOs guide junior counterparts.
5. **Compensation and Benefits Awareness:** Competitive pay and financial incentives play a role in retention, but many JOs lack awareness of their full compensation package. COs must ensure their officers understand the financial benefits of service, including retention

bonuses, special pay, and long-term career earning potential. Discussing these aspects transparently reinforces trust and long-term planning.

6. **Recognition and Incentives:** Recognition is a powerful motivator. Milestones such as earning a SWO pin, screening for DH, signing a DHRB contract, or receiving a competitive billet should be publicly celebrated. Highlighting achievements fosters pride, reinforces professional value, and builds momentum toward long-term retention. Gallup's 2021 data reaffirms this: employees who feel recognized are 87% less likely to leave.³

JUNIOR OFFICER RETENTION TEAM

The JO Retention Team is a cornerstone of our efforts to sustain our Surface Warfare community. Comprised of the TYCOM, PERS-41 Detailers, ISICs, COs, XOs, DHs, JOs, and the Command Master Chief, this team is charged with creating and executing a cohesive retention strategy, and their duties encompass setting fleet-wide policies, providing personalized career guidance, fostering mentorship, monitoring morale, building peer support networks, and ensuring a positive command climate. This collaborative approach addresses the wide range of factors influencing retention and strengthens our officer corps.

Type Commander: The TYCOM establishes the strategic foundation for Fleet-wide retention efforts. They analyze retention trends, identify systemic challenges, and develop policies to enhance the SWO experience. By setting the direction for retention initiatives, providing resources, and advocating for change, the TYCOM ensures consistency and effectiveness across commands. They also coordinate with Navy Personnel Command and ISICs to address career concerns and policy gaps, aligning retention strategies with the needs of the Fleet.

PERS-41 Detailers: PERS-41 Detailers focus on individualized career support. Detailers serve as career counselors and advocates, matching officers to assignments based on skills, goals, and personal circumstances. They provide transparency about career paths and opportunities, reducing uncertainty and building trust. By engaging with COs to align command needs with officer placements and advocating for developmental assignments, Detailers are critical in enhancing JO satisfaction and retention.

Immediate Superior in Command (ISIC): The ISIC contributes to the JO Retention Team by bridging TYCOM policies and command-level execution. They oversee the implementation of retention strategies, monitor their impact, and provide mentorship to COs for localized solutions. Fully engaged in analyzing survey results and retention metrics, ISICs ensure actionable plans are in place. They also relay feedback and best practices to the TYCOM, enabling data-driven improvements, which strengthen retention across the command(s).

³ *Employee Retention Depends on Getting Recognition Right*, 2025,
<https://www.gallup.com/workplace/650174/employee-retention-depends-getting-recognition-right.aspx>

Commanding Officers (CO): Arguably the most important member of the JO Retention Team, COs drive retention at the unit level by shaping a supportive command climate. They foster mentorship, ensure professional development, and address individual officer needs to enhance belonging and purpose. Additionally, COs invest in DH development, recognizing the DH role as a primary JO mentors to sustain a positive environment.



Executive Officers (XO): XOs in partnership with the CO are responsible for implementing retention strategies every day on the ship. They must manage daily operations to reduce stress on JOs and DHs, oversee mentorship programs, and monitor morale. Their ability to build strong relationships with JOs and their position as a trusted advisor ensures command retention efforts are responsive and effective.

Department Heads (DHs): DHs directly influence retention as JO supervisors. They provide mentorship, assign meaningful tasks, and deliver performance feedback to foster growth and recognition. Through daily interactions, DHs shape officers' experiences, cultivating a positive and supportive work environment. By acknowledging individual contributions and advocating for their officers' career progression, they enhance JO satisfaction and commitment.

Junior Officers (JOs): JOs themselves are integral to the JO Retention Team through their peer support network. They build camaraderie, offer informal mentorship, and create a wardroom culture that fosters belonging. By supporting each other through shared challenges, JOs strengthen community ties, directly influencing their peer's decision to stay in the Surface Warfare community.

Command Master Chief (CMC)/Chiefs Mess: The CMC plays a strategic role in JO retention by fostering a positive command climate, serving as a trusted advisor to the CO and XO, and overseeing mentorship programs. Specifically, the CMC strategically matches JOs with experienced Chief Petty Officers to optimize their skills and build strong teams. Chiefs, in turn, directly affect JO development through daily mentorship, providing technical expertise, and sharing practical experience. This combination of strategic oversight from CMC and direct mentorship from Chiefs, cultivates a sense of belonging, increases professional competency, and demonstrates a genuine investment in JO development.

DH RETENTION CAMPAIGN PRINCIPLES

The SWO Department Head Campaign: Building the Future of the Surface Force

The SWO Department Head Campaign is a deliberate and strategic initiative designed to strengthen the Surface Warfare community by retaining its top-performing talent. At its core, the campaign sets a clear objective: every afloat Commanding Officer achieves a 45% retention rate among their DH-screened JOs.

This is more than just a quota, it is a critical investment in the future of the Surface Navy. These DH-screened JOs have already demonstrated the skill, leadership, and resilience necessary to succeed in demanding operational environments. Losing them not only weakens individual commands but erodes Fleet-wide readiness by depleting the next generation of warfighters.

Retaining these high-potential officers requires a proactive, leadership-driven approach. Much like a championship sports team competing to keep its best players, COs must build a command culture that motivates, develops, and retains future DH. That effort begins on Day One, ensuring JOs receive meaningful leadership opportunities, structured mentorship, and a professionally rewarding experience that reinforces their decision to stay Navy.

“All of our new first-tour DIVOs toured the ship with a first-tour prior to their arrival onboard (most cases a visit we coordinated with them during BDOC). They were asked what department/job they would like to have as their first job and, to the best of our ability, we flexed to accommodate them. We also provide them on day one with a binder with all requisite qualification to attain their SWO Pin.”

- CAPT Rosie Goscinski, USS KEARSARGE (LHD-3)

This early commitment fosters trust and engagement, key factors in retention. Research in organizational behavior shows that structured onboarding and mentorship within the first 90 days significantly increase long-term retention.⁴ For JOs, early, purpose-driven engagement counterbalances the intensity of sea tours, helping them build the resilience and motivation to stay the course.



Tailoring Growth Opportunities: A Personalized Approach to Retention

Retention is not just about holding onto as many JOs as possible – it’s about retaining the right talent and ensuring they see a future in the Navy. Every officer brings unique strengths, career aspirations, and motivations. COs must recognize and cultivate these talents by tailoring career development opportunities that align with each JO’s potential and goals.

“We typically move the DIVOs who have been acting in a supporting role into a leading role to assume a job like AUXO or 1st LT after they have been onboard for 12-18 months. Being the assistant DIVO gives them a chance to focus on qualifications, and I believe it makes them better DIVOs when it’s their time to take the helm.”

- CDR Aaron Jefferson, USS JASON DUNHAM (DDG-109)

This leadership approach mirrors successful talent management strategies used in top-performing organizations. A 2018 Gallup study found that employees whose managers tailored their roles to their strengths were 8% more engaged and 15% less likely to leave.⁵ In the demanding SWO environment, where challenging sea duty can lead to burnout, personalized career development serves as a powerful retention tool.

⁴ Don’t Underestimate the Importance of Good Onboarding, 2025, <https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/talent-acquisition/dont-underestimate-importance-good-onboarding>

⁵ Employees Want a Lot More From Their Managers, 2025, <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/236570/employees-lot-managers.aspx>

For example:

- Assigning a tactically skilled JO to an Anti-Submarine Warfare Evaluator role not only enhances the ship's warfighting capability but reinforces that officer's value to the team.
- Facilitating advanced training opportunities (e.g., Warfare Tactics Instructor programs, JPME, or graduate education) builds expertise while offering JOs a long-term incentive to stay.
- Providing clear pathways to leadership roles early helps officers see a future in the SWO community and instills a sense of ownership in their career trajectory.

Retaining Elite Performers: Winning the “Talent War”

It's not enough to retain those simply willing to stay; COs must identify and actively retain the high-impact performers who will lead the Navy into the future.

“We offer increased responsibility for DHRB-signed Division Officers... We message very clearly that the CO/XO owe more mentorship to 1110s that are committed to the community than those who are not. Our OOD qualification onboard is ‘owned’ by DH-committed SWOs. They sit the board with me as CO; they conduct the murder boards, and they come up with the scenarios that are asked in the board. They have jumped at the ownership, and honestly, the board process is slightly more difficult than when the Department Heads owned it.”
- CDR Ray Miller, USS BAINBRIDGE (DDG-96)



This principle aligns with organizational talent management strategies, often referred to as the “Talent War”.⁶ In the corporate world, top performers are highly sought after, and organizations compete aggressively to retain them. The same is true in the Navy; elite SWOs are scarce, highly trained assets, and losing them creates gaps in leadership and operational effectiveness.

To maximize retention, COs must:

- Provide top performers with early leadership roles and meaningful responsibilities.
- Offer competitive career incentives, including tailored shore duty assignments and key billets.
- Recognize and reward outstanding performance publicly to reinforce the value of commitment.

The Bottom Line: Investing in the Future of the Surface Force

The DH Campaign is not just about hitting a 45% retention target – it's about building a warfighting community that officers want to be part of for the long haul. As seen in Figure 1 of the appendix, there appears to be a shift in retention trends for YG 20 and junior following the implementation of DH retention campaign. Additionally, Table 1 shows 28% of ships met or exceeded DH retention goals for CY24. This proves the active engagement and mentorship by Seniors officers is critical. By creating a culture of excellence, engagement, and professional fulfillment, COs can ensure that the Surface Navy retains the best and brightest officers to lead the Fleet into the future.

⁶ Michaels, et al., 2001, *The War for Talent*.

Retention is not a passive process; it is a daily leadership effort. By making the SWO career path rewarding, challenging, and purpose-driven, we strengthen the warfighting effectiveness of our Fleet and secure the Navy's future leadership.

RETENTION CAMPAIGN TOOLS

Single Longer Tour (SLT) is a 36-month commitment where an officer serves their Division Officer tour on a single ship. Unlike the traditional 48 month split-tour model, selected officers sign a letter of intent agreeing to stay onboard for 36 months, during which they must accumulate 600 hours as a qualified OOD, qualify Surface Warfare and Engineering Officer of the Watch (EOOW), and sign the Department Head Retention Bonus (DHRB) contract after screening for DH. The command initiates by asking the JO to commit to SLT between the 12-18 month mark of their initial tour, ensuring time to plan and meet milestones. SLT participants go ashore earlier than their peers, transitioning potentially as Lieutenant Junior Grades allowing for ample time to complete graduate education, Warfare Tactics Instructor training, or unique shore duty opportunities. This program gets qualified and committed JOs to shore earlier while providing ships stability in reduced turnover of qualified officers.

Example: This early commitment and accelerated shore transition shape the SLT's value, as seen with a LTJG from USS SPRUANCE (DDG-111). After thriving as the First Lieutenant her first year onboard, she was identified as a top performer by the Commanding Officer and was approached about committing to the SLT Program. Following her acceptance to the program, she earned her SWO and EOOW qualifications, logged 600 OOD hours, and signed DHRB once screened. Finishing her tour at 36 months, allowed her to come to PERS-41 as a Detailer with follow-on plans to become a Warfare Tactics Instructor (WTI) and complete a production tour prior to starting the Department Head pipeline. This early SLT decision, prompted by the command kept SPRUANCE's wardroom strong while giving her a head start on shore, blending operational impact with career growth.

The *Division Officer Fleet-Up* program is a 48-month sea commitment where JOs serve both their first and second Division Officer tours on a single ship, enhancing continuity and deepening their operational experience. JOs commit to a 30-month first DIVO tour and then return to the same ship for an 18-month second DIVO tour. The command typically asks the JO to opt into Fleet-Up around the 12-18 month mark of their First tour, capitalizing on their growing attachment to the ship and crew. Unlike SLT, Fleet-up JOs are not required to commit to signing DH upon selection. For JOs, this offers a chance to pick their Second Division officer assignment, obtain geo-stability, build camaraderie, while the ship benefits from reduced turnover and sustained leadership stability. This is a useful retention tool for those who



are not ready to commit during their First Division Officer tour as our data has shown approximately 50% of those who Fleet-up commit to DH.

Example: This extended shipboard journey shapes the Fleet-Up's appeal, as seen onboard USS LASSEN (DDG-82). The CO noticed the Repair Officers enthusiasm and positivity for ship life and asks him to fleet-up to Navigator after 16 months onboard. After agreeing to fleet-up, he earned his SWO pin and logged significant bridge time during his First tour. Returning to LASSEN as the Navigator, he served an 18-month second tour, refining his skills, training his peers, and strengthening the ship's wardroom. His decision to fleet-up ensured LASSEN retains a skilled officer across two tours, boosting warfighting readiness while providing geo-stability.

Talent Management Board (TMB) is a formal administrative board convened each summer by PERS-41 to place Division Officers rolling to shore duty into competitive career-enhancing assignments. The board offers access to competitive opportunities like Personnel Exchange Program (PEP) tours with allied navies, Graduate Education at top institutions like NPS, NROTC Instructor billets, and SECNAV Tours with Industry. When PERS-41 releases the annual list of available talent management positions, CO/XOs must step in as career coaches; sitting down with their JOs to determine transfer timelines and interest that could shape trajectories. These conversations, paired with CO nominations, ensure JOs pursue paths that match talent to task.



Example: The positive retention impact of the TMB can best be seen by an Officer who was selected via the TMB to be an NROTC instructor at the University of Virginia (UVA) following two successful Division Officer tours. After arriving at NROTC UVA, she reapplied to the TMB for Graduate Education financial assistance. She was selected once again and is completing her Masters at UVA (tuition free) while teaching NROTC.

Compensation, benefits, and incentives reward JOs with four years of service for their steadfast grit in the Navy's fight. JOs command a robust financial package; around \$85K annual base pay for an O-3, plus \$4K/month BAH in high-cost ports, \$261/month Sea Pay, the DHRB's potential \$150K for DH-screened warriors signing before YCS-4 plus one day, Tuition Assistance (\$4,500/year) for tactical mastery, TRICARE health coverage (no premiums), 30 days leave every year, Family Separation Allowance (\$250/month), and TSP with 5% matching, along with a defined benefit retirement plan. A civilian peer four years post-college – say, an engineer earning \$80K-\$90K with a 3% 401(k) match but shelling out \$15K/year for health insurance and scraping by with 15 vacation days – can't match the Navy's total haul of cash, career boosts, and family stability. COs can lock in JOs by trumpeting this edge; pay for the grind, bonuses and education for the fight, and support for the home front while keeping them primed to lead and win.



Department Head Retention Bonus (DHRB) is a financial incentive crafted to commit SWO JOs to the community by securing their commitment shortly after screening for DH afloat and ensuring the Surface Navy retains top talent for vital leadership roles. Eligible officers must be qualified SWO, have completed at least one Division Officer tour, screen for DH, and agree to serve either two afloat DH tours or a single longer DH tour through YCS-10, whichever is later. Note YCS-5 is defined as YCS-4 plus one day, marking the point where total compensation drops if the contract is not signed by YCS-4's end. Payments stop if an officer becomes unfit for sea duty (e.g., limited duty or legal hold), but resume once


fitness returns. Career Intermission Program participants pause payments during their break. This bonus ties JOs to the Fleet early while aligning to the DH Campaign's 45% retention target.

The DHRB's payment structure varies for designator (1110/1117) and signing timeline, maxing out at \$150,000 for Active Component (1110) officers and \$60,000 for Training and Administration of the Reserve (TAR, 1117) officers. For AC SWOs, signing between YCS-3 and YCS-8 yields annual payments on their YCS anniversary: up to \$150K if signed on or before YCS-4 (e.g., \$10K at YCS-4, \$15K at YCS-5, \$25K each from YCS-6 to YCS-10), dropping to \$135K if signed at YCS-5 (YCS-4 plus one day), and down to \$75K at YCS-8. TAR SWOs receive \$12K annually from YCS-6 to YCS-10, totaling \$60K. For example, an AC SWO on USS MASON (DDG-83), completes her 36-month SLT and screens for DH on her second look, prior to her YCS-4 anniversary. Signing her DHRB on or before YCS-4, she secures the full \$150K—\$10K at YCS-4, \$15K at YCS-5, \$25K each from YCS-6 to YCS-10 – locking in her commitment through two DH tours or a single longer DH tour and strengthening her ship's leadership pipeline by meeting the critical YCS-4 deadline for maximum compensation.

Metrics and Success Indicators are the Surface Navy's battle gauges; arming COs with the data to track JO retention and ensure the warfighting force is stacked with future DHs. These numbers let COs measure if their crew is forging warriors or losing ground.

Key Performance Indicators:

The Key Performance Indicators (KPI) scorecard, delivered quarterly by PERS 41, is a CO's aide for tracking JO retention and sharpening the wardroom's warfighting edge. This snapshot of metrics – like the 45% DH retention goal, or the ship's calendar year DHRB sign-ups – hands COs a clear read on where their JOs stand against fleet benchmarks. They should wield it to pinpoint gaps (e.g., lagging SWO pin qualification



USS Bainbridge (DDG 96)

"Competence, Dedication, Discipline"

CO: [REDACTED]

XO: [REDACTED]

Homeport: NORFOLK
ISIC: CDS 2
Status: BASIC PHASE

Coach's Corner


2 DVOs onboard are eligible for DHRB but have not committed yet! Engage and continue to mentor them!

2024: 5 signed DHRB onboard
2025 GOAL: 3 DHRBs

Total DVOs currently onboard	28
P-Nuclear / Option DVOs onboard	1 / 0

Division Officers from YG 19-24

DHRB Commitments (YG 19-21)	11
DHRB Percentage (YG 19-21)	50.00%
SWO Qual Time (months)	19.32
Single Longer Tour (onboard)	7
Fleet Up (onboard)	1
EOOW Quads (onboard)	2
WTI graduate (KW1-4)	1
WTI selects (KWS onboard)	2



As of 24MAR2025

average), rally the team to hit targets, and adjust mentorship or billet pitches to lock in warriors. By briefing the crew on wins and shortfalls, COs turn these numbers into a battle plan, driving retention that keeps the Surface Navy lethal and ready.

The KPI should be used as a strategic tool for ISICs and TYCOMs to steer the Surface Navy's retention battle across the fleet. Armed with assigned unit's metrics, they can spot fleet-wide and squadron-wide trends and take action to help lagging commands. ISICs should drill down, mentoring COs to help them hit targets. By synchronizing efforts, we can ensure that every unit does its part in driving retention and warfighting readiness.

Metrics for Retention Success: Metrics are the Surface Navy's scorecard for winning the retention war, giving COs hard data to gauge how well we are keeping JOs and DHs in the fight. Key indicators include:

DH Retention Goal: 45% retention of DH screened JOs, crediting commands for every JO signs a contract

Annual DH Conversion: Sets ship-specific goals for DHRB contracts

SLT Conversion: Aims for 96% of SLT JOs screening for DH on their first look

SLT OOD Hours: 100% of SLT JOs attain 600+ OOD Hours

DIVO Fleet-Up: 50% of Fleet-UPS commit to DH

Talent Management Board: Each ship field at least one JO applying for TMB

Talent Management: 90% selection-to-acceptance rate

Success Indicators for Warfighting Readiness: Success indicators focus in on the skills and commitment that keep JOs battle-ready, giving COs a pulse on retention beyond raw data.

- **SWO Pin** - 90% of JOs qualifying before their 1st look for DH
- **Minimum OOD Hours** - 100% of 1st Tour DIVOs log 50 or more hours before OOD Phase II to develop strong seamanship and navigation skills before departing their first ship
- **WTI Selects** - One red chip issued per command annually
- **WTI Select Conversion** - 50% of selectees completing the Warfare Tactics Instructor Course; continues investing in warfare excellence by design

These markers, paired with DHRB sign-up timing and Talent Management wins, signal whether JOs are committed to the SWO community or eyeing the exit. COs can harness these to stoke proficiency, crush skill gaps, and produce a wardroom of warriors ready to dominate the next fight.

NUCLEAR SWO RETENTION

Top Tier Talent with Tactical and Nuclear Experience

Nuclear Surface Warfare Officers (SWO(N)s) possess unique skills, supporting both the Surface Warfare Officer (SWO) community and the naval nuclear enterprise. Certified as engineers by the Department of Energy, SWO(N)s operate Naval Nuclear Propulsion Plants in challenging environments without oversight from international regulators—a distinction unmatched by any other nuclear engineering entity worldwide. Selected by Naval Reactors through rigorous technical interviews prior to commissioning, these officers complete a “tactical” tour on a conventional ship, followed by a nuclear division officer tour on a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier (CVN). During the CVN tour, officers become fully nuclear-qualified by passing the Prospective Nuclear Engineering Officer (PNEO) assessment at Naval Reactors, screening them for continued nuclear service. For the remainder of their careers, SWO(N)s alternate between conventional and nuclear-powered ships. On CVNs, they leverage technical training, tactical knowledge, and SWO problem-solving skills to employ engineering systems in support of strike group maneuvering, flight operations, and combat operations, providing a forward-deployed strategic combat logistical platform and air support. The Navy is committed to retaining this top-tier talent while fostering their tactical and nuclear expertise as future Commanding Officers and CVN Reactor Officers.

Connected Engagement Retention Strategy

The SWO(N) Community heavily relies on connected mentorship engagement in each era of an Officer’s career to retain talent.

SWO (N) Accession Sources: Nuclear program candidates are identified early and mentored by nuclear accessions teams at commissioning sources preparing them for nuclear interviews and first tour SWO challenges.

CO Mentorship During Conventional tour and Nuclear Training: COs, XOs, and DHs who mentored SWO(N)s during their conventional tour should maintain contact through Nuclear Power School and prototype training. This mentor/mentee relationship is critical, as most SWO(N)s screen for DH during this period. Graduating Power School, qualifying as Engineering Officer of the Watch (EOOW), and being selected for DH are pivotal milestones that can solidify an officer’s commitment to DH service. Those SWO(N)s who are ready for the challenges of DH should be encouraged to commit as early as possible. Ongoing engagement from leaders under whom the officer earned their SWO pin fosters a personal connection and provides encouragement during this demanding phase of their development.

DIVO Detailing: The SWO(N) Detailing Team tracks every SWO(N) providing a one-on-one career experience and focused detailing. Once an officer completes PNEO and become a fully qualified SWO(N), the SWO(N) Detailing Team, Reactor Department Triads, and CVN CO heavily engage the officer with focused mentorship on future service as a SWO DH and CVN Principal Assistant to support making a decision in continued service.

Post-CVN DIVO Shore Tour: If an officer is on the fence when considering continued future service, the SWO(N) Detailing team will slate an officer for a nuclear shore tour supporting continued mentorship engagement by strong nuclear leadership.

Continuous Geographic Mentorship: After commissioning, SWO(N) Geographic Leads run quarterly local mentorship events for SWO(N)s at all levels of the career path to mentor and build community connectedness. SWO(N) Geographic Leads and SWO(N) JO mentors are critical in assisting undecided officers, both on shore or CVNs, to make informed decisions on how to navigate the SWO(N) career path and the benefits of being a SWO(N).

Intrusive Shipboard Engagement by SWO (N) Leaders: CVN Principal Assistants (PAs) serve as vital mentors for JOs, guiding them through leadership and technical challenges during their first nuclear tour. Daily engagement highlights the rewarding aspects of SWO(N) service, fostering shipboard camaraderie and community connectedness. Similarly, Reactor Department Triads play a pivotal mentorship role throughout the tours of CVN PAs, leveraging their expertise and leadership experience to ensure PAs are fully prepared and inspired for the challenges of Commander Command and Reactor Officer positions.

Experienced and Knowledgeable SWO (N) Network: The SWO(N) Flag Mess assists in mentorship of SWO(N)s throughout their career by engaging officers at all levels from Division Officers to post-Reactor Officer served SWO(N)s discussing future milestones and career advice.

Identify and Foster Top Tier Talent Early: Officers demonstrating superior technical and leadership performance are identified as SWO(N) Excellence Candidates resulting in more focused mentorship from Reactor Triads, the Detailing Team, and Flag mentors early and often throughout their career.

Compensation for Skill-based Talent

Due to the unique skill sets SWO (N)s possess, they are heavily compensated monetarily providing a tool to retain top talent for continued service. After completing PNEO, SWO(N)s are eligible to receive Nuclear Officer Continuation Pay (COBO) signed in 3-7 year increments for \$50,000 per year, in addition to all SWO retention bonuses. Upon commencement of their Major Command tour, this bonus increases to \$60,000 per year. Over the course of a 30-year career, SWO(N)s may receive up to \$1.6 million for their continued service. Bonuses remain a critical tool in retaining top talent supporting both SWO(N) and SWO Communities.



Example: SWO(N) LT journey highlights the power of mentorship in retention: Their first CO in USS MASON (DDG 87) recognized their leadership and technical aptitude, mentoring them through SWO qualifications and recommended them for DH. When this CO called to congratulate them on screening DH, the LT was excited by the news and agreed to sign a DHRB contract. During their 28-month CVN division officer tour and shortly after passing their PNEO exam becoming a fully qualified SWO(N), the LT had a

conversation with the NIMITZ RO about their career intentions. During that discussion, the RO emphasized the impact of their SWO(N) leadership and strong technical knowledge of the propulsion plant. Inspired by the leadership opportunities and community impact, the LT signed a 7-year COBO contract, aligned with their DHRB commitment, supporting a nuclear shore, Department Head, and Principal Assistant tours. Their retention bolstered CVN readiness and showcased the value of sustained SWO(N) mentorship.

SWO RETENTION MYTH BUSTERS: SEPARATING FACT FROM FICTION

Retention myths oversimplify why JOs leave or stay, leading to missteps in how we mentor, develop, and retain talent. These outdated assumptions ignore hard data. Let's set the record straight.

Myth #1: "If a JO commits to Department Head, they'll stay for a 20-year career."

Reality: A DH commitment isn't a lifetime contract – officers still leave. In reality, roughly 20% of SWOs exit after DH tours, despite promotion opportunities and incentives. The Blended Retirement System (BRS) has made leaving more financially feasible, accelerating mid-career attrition. The fix? COs must actively mentor JOs to build a deep bench of future XOs and COs. Retention isn't just about DH numbers; it's about sustaining long-term leadership.

Myth #2: "Compensation alone determines whether JOs stay."

Reality: Money matters, but it's not the deciding factor. The 2022 and 2024 JO surveys show that family pressures, unpredictable schedules, and work-life balance outrank pay as top reasons JOs leave, even with hefty bonuses on the table. Our SWO(N)s earn the Navy's largest bonuses yet have the lowest retention rates, proving money alone isn't enough to keep talent. What does tip the scales? Supportive leadership, meaningful assignments, and a culture where JOs feel valued.

Myth #3: "JOs should go ashore before deciding on DH to get a 'balanced view' of Naval service."

Reality: There is risk to sending JOs ashore before committing to DH as only about 20% return to sea duty. Shore duty, with its predictable schedule and lower operational tempo, often makes it easier to transition. And since ashore COs aren't always SWOs, JOs lose direct mentorship from fleet leaders, weakening their connection to the Surface Navy. If a JO is still undecided about DH, the best time to mentor them is while they're still at sea.

Myth #4: "Earning a WTI patch means a JO will stay long-term."

Reality: Being a WTI doesn't lock in retention. In 2024, only about 50% of WTIs opted for DH, despite gaining elite tactical training. Why? WTI selection doesn't require a DH commitment; while it's a valuable milestone, it isn't a contract. Civilian employers actively recruit WTIs, offering competitive pay and better work-life balance. The key to retaining these warfighting experts? COs must stay engaged and emphasize the leadership opportunities that come with staying SWO.

Myth #5: “Only CRUDES JOs should pursue SLT.”

Reality: JOs on Amphibious ships (“Amphibs”) and LCS gain critical SWO skills like their CRUDES counterparts. Amphib officers master complex multi-mission operations, while LCS officers hone agility in near-shore combat. SLT isn’t about ship type prestige, it’s about building expertise and resilience across the Fleet.

Myth #6: “SWOs eat their young.”

Reality: This old-school trope paints the SWO community as cutthroat and unforgiving, but the reality is far different. Programs like the JO Training Symposium, Talent Management, and WTI training prove the Navy is investing in JOs rather than burning them out. Yet, this myth still lingers, especially outside the community on college campuses, in wardrooms, and in casual conversations. It’s time to shut it down. The best way to bury the stereotype? COs leading by example who mentor, develop, and advocate for their JOs.

Myth #7: “I don’t want to complete Command Qualification because I am not sure I want to be a Reactor Officer or Commanding Officer.”

Reality: Completing Command Qualification opens more opportunities for officers to reset, recoup, and reflect during their post-DH shore duty. Those who earn this qualification are eligible for a wider range of post-DH shore assignments and are better positioned to achieve personal goals ashore. Furthermore, achieving Command Qualification preserves the option to pursue command later in their career, demonstrating a proactive approach to career management.

Myth #8: “I don’t compete as well on the Shore Slate as a SWO(N) Division Officer.”

Reality: SWO(N) Division Officers are highly competitive on the Shore Slate. When SWO(N)s complete the nuclear training pipeline, they are awarded the Steam Engineering Officer of the Watch (EOOW) AQD (LC1/KD1). For Division Officers who earn the CVN EOOW AQD (LC5), this equates to similar slate points as TAO, enhancing the officer’s shore slate ranking. Notably, Division Officers who sign a DHRB are slated first for executively slated first, a benefit that also applies to SWO(N)s. In 2024, all SWO(N) Division Officers who competed for shore duty successfully secured a billet within their top five preferences.

Myth #9: “My technical number limits what CVN PA (2DH) billets I can do.”

Reality: All SWO(N)s are eligible for any CVN PA billet with technical number informing the slating process. During the CVN PA slate, billets are carefully detailed for talent to task, fleet weaknesses, and officer timing needs. Technical numbers are available for release; any nuclear officer can request their technical number from the SWO(N) detailer.

Myth #10: “SWO(N)s cannot sign any retention contracts until they pass PNEO.”

Reality: DH Retention Bonus (DHRB) and the Nuclear Officer Continuation Bonus (COBO) are independent. SWO(N)s may sign a DHRB contract when they earn their SWO pin, prior to reporting to the CVN. Nuclear officer must complete their Prospective Nuclear Engineering Officer (PNEO) assessment to qualify for all nuclear contracts.

Bottom Line

With SWO retention continuing to hover around 35% for CY 24, there's no silver bullet to pinpoint which retention lever ensures success. However, dispelling the above myths while focusing on mentorship, work-life balance, and career growth will keep more top-performing JOs in our community.

CONCLUSION

The future of the Surface Navy depends on meeting our mandate: a lethal, ready force driven by SWOs who transform cutting-edge platforms into warfighting dominance. Achieving that vision depends on retaining the top talent to lead – a challenge this **Junior Officer Retention Guide** addresses head-on.

The strength of our community hinges on **Department Heads** – battle-tested warfighters forged from our **Junior Officer cadre** through deliberate retention efforts. The **DH Campaign's 45% target** isn't just a number – it's the baseline for a fleet built to fight and win. This guide arms **SWO Commanding Officers** with the tools to make it happen:

- **Single Longer Tour:** A 36-month path with early shore duty rewards to sustain engagement.
- **Fleet-Up Model:** A 48-month commitment on a single platform to maximize leadership development.
- **SWO Talent Management Board:** A gateway to high-value tactical billets, PEP, and graduate education.
- **Department Head Retention Bonus (DHRB):** A \$150K incentive to secure top-tier, DH-screened talent before they walk away.

Each of these levers reinforces the same mission: provide JOs with a professionally rewarding experience, tailor their growth to sharpen our warfighting edge, and retain elite performers to secure the Surface Navy's future.

Retention starts with you. COs must identify talent early, have the tough but necessary conversations, and create a command culture where JOs thrive. **This is the fight for our future, and it's one we must win.**

APPENDIX

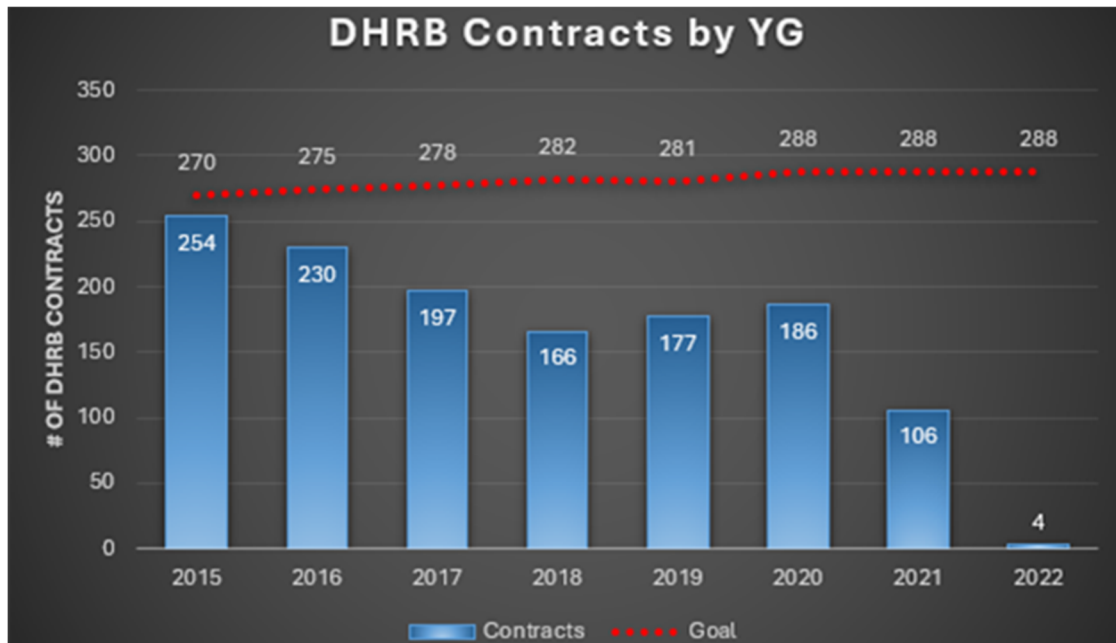


Figure 1: Number of DHRB contracts by Year Group with PERS-41 Goals

Figure 1 shows the total number of DHRB contracts by Year Group with the minimum required DHs per year required to meet future manning requirements. The SWO Community continues to fall short of retention goals. The DH Retention Campaign was designed to correct this trend. The red Goal line is based on having at least 288 DHs for YGs 2020 and junior.

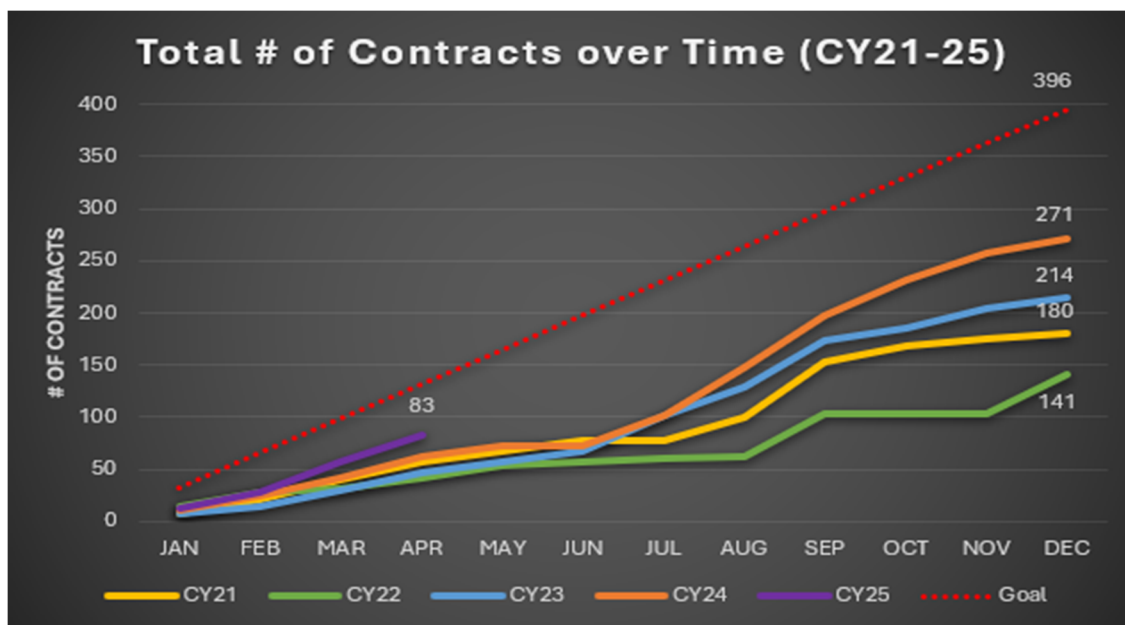


Figure 2: CY21-24 DHRB Contracts over Time with PERS-41 Goal

Figure 2 shows the number of contracts attained by month for calendar years 2021-2024. The Red line illustrates the PERS-41 established goal. The DH Retention Campaign accounts for under execution of calendar goals by some commands each year.

DH Retention Campaign Performance by Ship Class

What the data is telling us: PERS-41 has established contract goals by ship class to be achieved per calendar year.

DH Retention Campaign Performance by Ship Class					
Platform	DHRB Goal	# Met or Exceeded	# With 0 Contracts	# Ships in Class	% Met or Exceeded
CG	3	2	2	9	22.2%
DDG 51	3	15	22	75	20.0%
DDG 1000	2	0	0	2	0.0%
LCC	2	0	2	2	0.0%
LHA	2	0	2	2	0.0%
LHD	2	2	1	7	28.6%
LPD	2	4	5	13	30.8%
LSD	2	4	2	10	40.0%
MCM	1	6	2	8	75.0%
LCS Hull/Crew	1	16	18	33	48.5%
Fleet Totals		45	56	161	28.0%

Table 1: CY24 DHRB Performance by Ship Class

A look at CY24 DHRB data shows that 45 ships met or exceeded goal, which equates to less than a 1/3 of the ships in the fleet meeting the CY goal. Fifty-six ships achieved no retention. The DH Retention Campaign was designed to highlight these areas of strong performance, take their lessons, and pass them along to the under-performing ships.

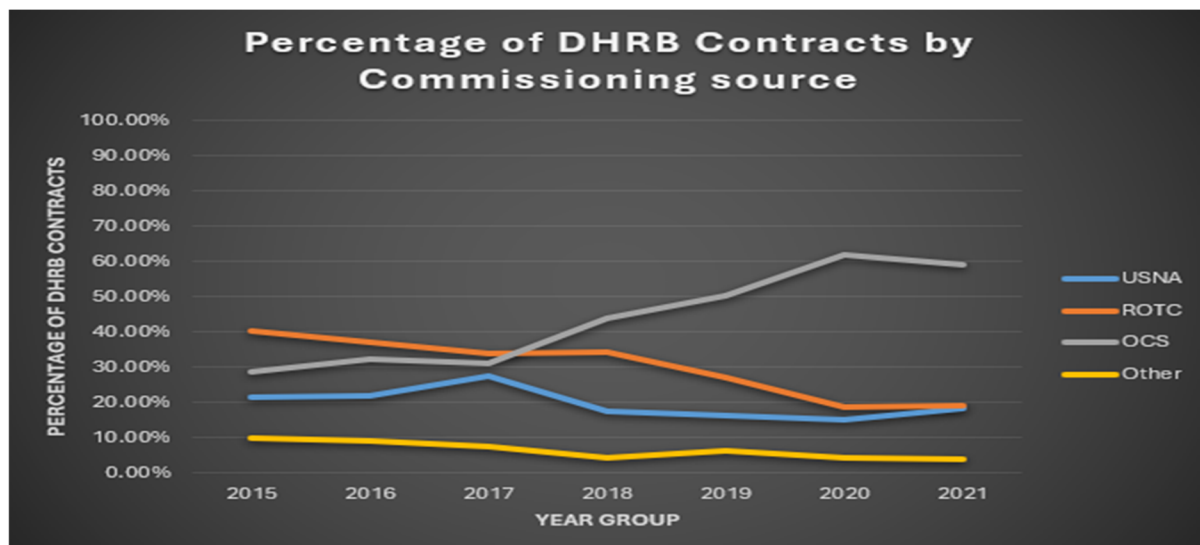


Figure 3: Percentage of DHRB Signers by Commissioning Source

For recent year groups, OCS officers continue to make up the majority of DHRB contracts signing on average 10.93% above their year group population percentage. USNA and ROTC graduates are underrepresented by 8.44% and 4.98% respectively for YG15-21 DHRB contracts compared to the makeup of the population.

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