



August 6, 2018

Defense Primer: Department of the Navy

One Military Department With Two Military Services

The Department of the Navy (DON) is a single military department that includes two military services—the Navy and the Marine Corps. As such, DON has a single civilian leader, the Secretary of the Navy, and two four-star military service chiefs—an admiral whose title is the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), and a general whose title is the Commandant of the Marine Corps. Although the title “Secretary of the Navy” includes only the term “Navy,” the secretary serves as the civilian leader for both the Navy and Marine Corps. The CNO and the Commandant of the Marine Corps are members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS).

“Naval” Refers to Both the Navy and Marine Corps

Although the term “naval” is often used to refer specifically to the Navy, it more properly refers to both the Navy and Marine Corps, because both the Navy and Marine Corps are naval services. Even though the Marine Corps sometimes operates for extended periods as a land fighting force (as it has done in recent years in Afghanistan and Iraq), and is often thought of as the country’s second land army, it nevertheless is, by law, a naval service. 10 U.S.C. 5001(a)(3) states that “The term ‘member of the naval service’ means a person appointed or enlisted in, or inducted or conscripted into, the Navy or the Marine Corps.” DON officials sometimes refer to the two services as the Navy-Marine Corps team.

“Navy” in DOD Budget Documents Can Mean Department of the Navy

DOD budget documents that divide the DOD budget into four military departments often label those departments as Army, Navy, Air Force, and Defense-Wide. In using data from such documents, it is important to remember that the category called “Navy” in these cases refers to the Department of the Navy, and thus includes funding for both the Navy and Marine Corps.

“Blue Dollars” and “Green Dollars” in the Department of the Navy Budget

People who work with the DON budget sometimes refer to “blue dollars,” meaning funding in the DON budget for the Navy, and “green dollars,” meaning funding in the DON budget for the Marine Corps. Of the more than two dozen appropriation accounts that form DON’s budget, many contain funding specifically for either the Navy or Marine Corps. For example, the Operation and Maintenance, Navy (OMN), appropriation account contains operation and maintenance funding for the Navy, while the Operation and Maintenance, Marine Corps (OMMC), appropriation account contains operation and maintenance funding for the Marine Corps.

A few DON appropriation accounts include funding for both the Navy and Marine Corps, even though their titles refer only to the Navy. For example, the Aircraft Procurement, Navy (APN) appropriation account funds the procurement of both Navy and Marine Corps aircraft, and the Research, Development, Test, and Evaluation, Navy (RDTE) account includes research and development funding for both the Navy and Marine Corps. The Procurement of Ammunition, Navy/Marine Corps (PANMC) account includes funding for procuring both Navy and Marine Corps ammunition.

The Navy’s shipbuilding account, known formally as the Shipbuilding and Conversion, Navy (SCN) appropriation account, funds the procurement of various types of ships, including amphibious ships. Although amphibious ships are Navy ships operated by Navy crews, the primary function of amphibious ships is to transport Marine Corps personnel and equipment and support Marine Corps ship-to-shore movements and Marine Corps operations ashore. The Navy’s amphibious ships are sometimes referred to informally as the “Gator Navy,” a shortening of the term alligator, an animal that, like the Marine Corps, can move from the water to land, and then back into the water.

The Coast Guard in Relation to the Department of the Navy

Unlike the Navy and Marine Corps, which are covered (along with the Army and Air Force) in the U.S. Code primarily in Title 10, the Coast Guard is covered primarily in Title 14. This title states that the Coast Guard “shall be a military service and a branch of the armed forces of the United States at all times.” (14 U.S.C. 1) The four-star admiral who heads the Coast Guard, called the Commandant of the Coast Guard, is not a member of the JCS.

Title 14 states that the Coast Guard “shall be a service in the Department of Homeland Security, except when operating as a service in the Navy.” (14 U.S.C. 3(a)) Title 14 states further that

Upon the declaration of war if Congress so directs in the declaration or when the President directs, the Coast Guard shall operate as a service in the Navy, and shall so continue until the President, by Executive order, transfers the Coast Guard back to the Department of Homeland Security. While operating as a service in the Navy, the Coast Guard shall be subject to the orders of the Secretary of the Navy, who may order changes in Coast Guard operations to render them uniform, to the extent such Secretary deems advisable, with Navy operations.” (14 U.S.C. 3(b))

The last time the Coast Guard operated as a service in the Navy was during World War II. The possibility that the Coast Guard might at some point operate as a service in the Navy is why legislation concerning the Coast Guard sometimes uses phrases such as “the Secretary of the Department in which the Coast Guard is operating.”

Unlike the Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps, the Coast Guard is not only a military service and a branch of the armed forces, but also a law enforcement agency. For this reason, Navy ships whose operations create a distinct possibility of encountering potential law enforcement situations sometimes embark detachments of Coast Guard personnel.

The Coast Guard’s budget is funded primarily through the annual DHS appropriations act. DON’s budget sometimes includes small amounts of funding to support the Coast Guard’s national defense mission. In addition, the procurement of one of the Coast Guard’s polar icebreakers (*Healy*) was funded primarily through the SCN account, in FY1990, and 33 of the Coast Guard’s 49 Island-class 110-foot patrol boats were procured under a Navy contract that included FY1990 SCN funding. The Coast Guard’s reserve end strength (but not its active end strength) is authorized in the annual National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

The Navy and Coast Guard have mechanisms, including a Navy and Coast Guard (NAVGARD) Board, to coordinate matters of joint interest. The Navy and Coast Guard on at least three occasions (2002, 2006, and 2013) have issued National Fleet policy statements on the coordination of their procurement and operational activities.

The Three Sea Services

The Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard are sometimes referred to collectively as the sea services. The three services in recent years have from to time issued joint maritime strategy documents.

Relevant Statutes

Title 10, U.S. Code, Subtitle C – Navy and Marine Corps

Title 14, U.S. Code, Chapter 1 – Establishment and Duties of the Coast Guard

Other Resources

Department of the Navy, *Highlights of the Department of the Navy FY2019 Budget*, accessed August 6, 2018, at http://www.secnav.navy.mil/fmc/fmb/Documents/19pres/Highlight_s_book.pdf

Department of the Navy Budget Materials, accessed August 6, 2018, at <http://www.secnav.navy.mil/fmc/fmb/Pages/Fiscal-Year-2019.aspx>

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