

2011 JOOY Submarine Junior Officers of the Year



Photo by Olivia Logan

It's not every day you find a group of submarine junior officers roaming the nation's capital. But in mid-April, 11 submariners and their families made their way to Washington, D.C., to be recognized as the 2011 Junior Officers of the Year (JOOY), an honor reserved for only the best junior officers each submarine squadron and sub tender has to offer.

The JOOY program recognizes junior officers of the Submarine Force who demonstrate superior seamanship, management, leadership, and tactical and technical knowledge. Submarine candidates are nominated by their ship's junior officers and commanding officer and selected by their squadron commander. Submarine tender candidates are selected by the ship's commanding officer.

Some of the JOOYs said selection for the award came as a bit of a shock, citing the strong competition from other junior officers in the wardroom. "I'm stationed onboard with mainly limited duty officers with 15-plus years of prior enlisted experience," said the USS *Emory S. Land* (AS 39) JOOY, Lt. Brian Bitner, who has been in the Navy for nearly 23 years. "So being named Junior Officer of the Year in a wardroom that is so senior, with that much experience, was quite a humbling experience."

Lt. Arlis Steel, Submarine Squadron Nineteen's JOOY, said he was honored to be nominated from the Gold crew of USS *Michigan* (SSGN 727). "I think every junior officer brings a particular flare to their own submarine," he said. "And for that to be recognized outside of the submarine is a pretty big deal."

The JOOYs' week in Washington began on Monday, April 16. Their daytime agenda included a visit to Capitol Hill for meetings with congressmen and tours of the U.S. Capitol, the Library of Congress and the Supreme Court. They enjoyed a tour of the U.S. Naval Observatory on Wednesday night and a Washington Nationals baseball game on Thursday night. Their visit culminated with the D.C.-area Submarine Birthday Ball Friday evening. They also spent time in the Pentagon, meeting with Rear Adm. Barry Bruner, Director, Undersea Warfare Division; Vice Adm. Richardson, Commander, Submarine Forces; and Adm. Jonathan Greenert, Chief of Naval Operations. "The spirit of this program is admirable," said Adm. Greenert in a Facebook post. "These are outstanding Sailors. Was great to meet all their spouses and children; really nice to see the family connection."

Keeping the family connection strong is not always easy. The JOOYs said family separation was one of the biggest challenges of being a submariner. Lt. Bitner, who is married with five children, recalled that when he first joined the Navy, he only heard from his family in 50-word-limit "family grams," with an allotment of eight per deployment cycle. "Now you can receive e-mail in pretty much real time, depending on what you're doing out to sea," Lt. Bitner said. "It's gotten better, but still, the lack of seeing your family, being able to be home with your family when important things happen, is still always difficult."

Lt. Louis DeMarco, Submarine Group Two's JOOY, explained to his wife when

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they were dating that the submarine lifestyle would be hard. "The separation is the hardest thing to get used to," said his wife Rachel, "but it comes with the job, and you definitely work through it." She added that her husband's JOOY honor has made the sacrifice well worth it.

The JOOYs said the rewards of a submarine career far outweigh the challenges. "Time away from home is a pretty big challenge," said Lt. Steel. "But if the job is cool enough, it kind of drowns that out, let's you keep your mind focused."

The JOOYs emphasized job satisfaction as a big reward of being a submariner, including



Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Kyle P. Malloy

(Opposite) The JOOYs stop to snap photos of the Rotunda during a tour of the U.S. Capitol Building. (Above) The 2011 Submarine Junior Officers of the Year, along with their wives and children, pose with Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Jonathan Greenert during a visit to the Pentagon. (Below) Adm. Greenert talks with the honorees.

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—Lt. Arliss Steel
Submarine Squadron
Nineteen’s JOOY

getting to know a small crew, traveling to different ports, and accomplishing missions. Lt. Steel talked about his time on *Michigan*: “I loved what I did; I loved who I worked with. I loved what we did and when we... went to sea and supported our mission and country. It was very fulfilling.”

Lt. Bitner enjoyed the feeling of coming home knowing he had made a major impact on the defense of the nation. He talked about the satisfaction of repairing deployed subs and returning them to their operating areas in a timely fashion during a deployment in Diego Garcia. “It was always good to see them come in and get a break,” he said, “but

it was also good to see them back out in 100 percent material condition.”

The job satisfaction of a submarine career has already convinced Lt. DeMarco to sign a contract to stay on in the Navy. “I absolutely love this job,” he said. “[Rachel and I] decided together that we love this lifestyle, so [I’m] staying in until at least the 20-year point. We’ll see if the Navy will want to keep me after that, but I’m gonna keep working hard every day.”

Working hard is exactly what the junior officers suggested for those wishing to become a Junior Officer of the Year. “If this is something you would like to do, to have

on a resume or put on an eval, the only thing that I can say is that you have to work really hard on your submarine,” said Lt. Steel. “If the wardroom can depend on you, and you can get the job done right, then you’re on the right track.”

Lt. DeMarco said it’s important that those who are making a difference stick with it. “The good guys need to stay and help make everyone’s life better by being good leaders and taking care of their men,” he said. Lt. Bitner stressed being proactive in qualifications and general knowledge of submarines. “Always look for new methods to perform your job,” he said. “And stay hungry.”