

# A History of Australian Navy Health Sailor Uniforms and Ranks (Part 3)

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## Purpose

More than a century after its establishment, many Royal Australian Navy (RAN) uniforms and ranks continue to reflect those used by the (British) Royal Navy (RN). The first of this three-part article described the history of Navy sailor uniforms since 1509,<sup>1</sup> while the second examined the development of Navy medical and dental sailor uniforms since 1879.<sup>2</sup> This final part explains the evolution of Navy medical and dental sailor rank and rate badges since 1827.

A subsequent article will do likewise for RAN health officers.

## Sailor Rank Badges

The history of RN and RAN rank badges is summarised at Table 1; numbers in parentheses per the following paragraphs also refer.<sup>3</sup>

For centuries, Navy personnel were paid in accordance with their seamanship or other skills, experience and/or responsibilities. Although they were not generally recognisable by their attire, many senior sailors could still be identified by their rattan canes or short pieces of rope used to motivate or 'start' their subordinates. The use of these 'starters' was officially abolished in 1809.<sup>4</sup>

The ranks of Second and First Class Petty Officer (PO) were formally established in 1827. These sailors received red badges on their left upper arm: a plain anchor or 'killick' for the former, and an anchor and a crown for the latter (see (1)). In 1853, the Leading Seaman (LS) rank was added below the two PO ranks and a Chief Petty Officer (CPO) rank was added above (see (2)). The existing badges were used for the two junior ranks, while the two senior ranks received new badges: two crossed anchors and a crown for First Class POs, and an anchor surrounded by oak leaves and a crown for CPOs.<sup>5</sup>

All sailors wore 'square rig' uniform until 1879, when CPOs received 'fore-and-aft rig', with double-breasted jacket, tie and peaked cap with what is now the PO cap badge. The surrounding oak leaves on the CPO arm badge were also replaced by laurel at this time (see (3)).<sup>6</sup>

In 1890, the CPO arm badge was abolished. The black horn buttons on their jackets were changed to gilt and their rate badges were moved from the right upper arm to both jacket lapels (see (4)).<sup>7</sup> This became known as 'Class I' rig, which was worn by all 'civil branch' (non-seamen) CPO and PO equivalents.<sup>8</sup> The Class I rig was extended to all 'military branch' (seaman) POs with more than four years' seniority in 1920,<sup>9</sup> then to those with more than one year's seniority in 1923<sup>10</sup> and to all RAN POs irrespective of seniority after the early 1970s.<sup>11</sup>



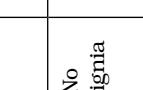






















































1890 also saw square rig for seaman branch personnel being referred to as 'Class II' uniform, while 'Class III' uniform referred to a double-breasted 'fore-and-aft rig', with black horn rather than gilt buttons, for non-seaman junior sailors such as medical and dental personnel.<sup>12</sup> Class III uniforms were abolished in the RAN in 1959.<sup>13</sup>

The coronation of King Edward VII in 1901 led to the St Edward's crown on all Navy badges replaced by the Tudor crown (see (5)). In 1907, the Second Class PO rank was abolished (see (6)).<sup>14</sup>

In 1919, CPOs received a new cap badge, based on their pre-1890 arm badge (see (7)), while POs received the previous CPO cap badge, which is still worn to this day.<sup>15</sup> In 1925, CPOs were also given three ornamental cuff buttons, as a nod to their original function of securing 'turn-back' sleeve cuffs on a range of Navy uniforms during the previous century (see (8)).<sup>16</sup>

The coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953 resulted in all Navy badges reverting to an updated St Edward's crown (see (9)).<sup>17</sup>

Table 1: RN and RAN Sailor Rank Insignia since 1827

	1827 (1)	1853 (2)	1879 (3)	1890 (4)	1901 (5)	1907 (6)	1919 (7)	1925 (8)	1953 (9)	1966 (10)	1971 (11)	1991 (12)	1993 (13)
<b>Ordinary Seaman (Seaman &gt; 1974)</b>	No insignia	No insignia	No insignia	No insignia	No insignia	No insignia	No insignia	No insignia	No insignia	No insignia	No insignia		
<b>Able Seaman</b>	No insignia	No insignia	No insignia	No insignia	No insignia	No insignia	No insignia	No insignia	No insignia	No insignia	No insignia		
<b>Leading Seaman</b>	Rank did not exist												
<b>Petty Officer 2nd Class</b>													
<b>Petty Officer 1st Class</b>													
<b>Chief Petty Officer</b>	Rank did not exist												
<b>Warrant Officer</b>	Not a sailor rank	Not a sailor rank	Not a sailor rank	Not a sailor rank	Not a sailor rank	Not a sailor rank	Not a sailor rank	Not a sailor rank	Not a sailor rank	Not a sailor rank	Not a sailor rank		
<b>Warrant Officer - Navy</b>	Rank did not exist	Rank did not exist	Rank did not exist	Rank did not exist	Rank did not exist	Rank did not exist	Rank did not exist	Rank did not exist	Rank did not exist	Rank did not exist	Rank did not exist	Rank did not exist	

RAN uniforms followed RN practice until 1966, when 'Australia' flashes were added to both shoulders (see (10)).<sup>18</sup> The rank of Warrant Officer was added above that of CPO in 1971 (see (11)),<sup>19</sup> while the rank of Able Seaman received its own dedicated badge, to differentiate them from the Seaman rank, in 1991 (see (12)).<sup>20</sup> The first Warrant Officer of the Navy was appointed in 1993 (see (13)).<sup>21</sup>

All day-to-day or 'working' square rig and fore-and-aft rig uniforms had red badges until 1990.<sup>22</sup> RAN winter ceremonial uniforms have since had only gold badges, while summer uniforms or 'whites' continue to have dark blue. The current soft rank insignia (SRI) slides for these and other uniforms have used embroidered 'old gold' coloured thread since 1991.<sup>23</sup> Matching camouflaged SRIs were used with the grey Proban® overalls, and are also used by Navy personnel who wear the Australian Multicam Camouflage Uniform (AMCU), worn by Army members since 2014.<sup>24</sup>

## Good Conduct Badges

Chevrons on the left arm were introduced below the rank badge to recognise good conduct (or undiscovered crime) in 1849. From 1860, up to three stripes were awarded after three, eight- and 13-years' service (four, eight and 12 years from 1950).<sup>25</sup> While each stripe initially earned an additional one penny per stripe per day, the RAN de-linked these pay increments from the badges and renamed them Long Service Badges in 1971.<sup>26</sup>



*Bosun's Mate, c1812.<sup>27</sup> Note the rope 'starter' in his right hand, and the ship's name and badge painted on his hat.*



*RN First Class Petty Officer, 1827<sup>28</sup> Note the rank badge on his left arm.*



*RN First Class Petty Officer in Class II 'square rig', 1896.<sup>29</sup> Note the rank badge and Good Conduct Badges (chevrons) on his left arm.*



*Victorian Naval Forces CPO James Ovenden, c1870s.<sup>30</sup>  
Note the 1879-1901 cap badge and the rank badge on his left arm.*



*RN CPO, 1880s.<sup>31</sup> Note the rank badge on his left arm.*



*RN CPO, 1920.<sup>32</sup> Note the lapel rate badges identifying him as a stoker or stoker mechanic, and 1901-1919 cap badge, which became the current PO cap badge thereafter.*

## RAN Medical and Dental Rate and Sub-Rate Badges

The history of RN and RAN medical rate and sub-rate badges is summarised at Table 2, and that for dental rates and sub-rates is at Table 3.

The first RN seamen to be given a dedicated job description or 'rate', were those who qualified from the gunnery school aboard HMS *Excellent* in Portsmouth (later moved ashore to Whale Island) in 1830.<sup>33</sup> In 1860, these 'gunnery' sailors received identifying badges on their upper right arm, with other branches receiving their own rate badges over the next 30 years.
























RN sick berth attendants have worn a red cross on the right upper arm since 1879, while Australian colonial and RAN medical sailors did likewise until 1974.<sup>34</sup> RAN dental sailors had their own rate badge from 1922 until 1942, when it was replaced by the SBA badge with a 'D' for dental assistant and 'DM' for dental mechanic badge above. On forming into their own branch in 1948, dental rates reverted to their previous badge the following year.<sup>35</sup>
























Both medical and dental rate badges changed to the present caduceus insignia (the latter with a superimposed 'D') in 1974. This is despite the fact that a winged staff entwined by two serpents has been used for millennia to represent trade, eloquence, negotiation, alchemy and wisdom, rather than medicine. The caduceus was first misapplied by the US Army's Medical Corps for its badge in 1902 and continues to be misused throughout much of America since. The correct medical symbol is the Rod of Asclepius, which consists of a *single* serpent entwined around a staff *without* wings, as per the RAN Health Service crest.<sup>36</sup>

The RAN has a long history of specialist health sailors or 'sub-rates', the number and nature of which has waxed and waned according to requirements. At present, the RAN only has underwater medicine or 'U' rates and a small number of 'O' or theatre rates.



Table 2: RN and RAN Medical Sailor Rate Badges since 1879






















<p>1879-1974</p>	 <p>Junior Sailor SBA Winter Dress</p>	 <p>Junior Sailor SBA Winter Working Dress</p>	 <p>Junior Sailor SBA Summer Dress</p>				
<p>1901-1953</p>	 <p>Senior Sailor SBA Winter Dress<sup>1</sup></p>	 <p>Senior Sailor SBA Winter Working Dress</p>	 <p>Senior Sailor SBA Summer Dress</p>				
<p>1953-1974</p>	 <p>Junior Sailor SBA Aviation Medicine<sup>2</sup></p>	 <p>Junior Sailor SBA Hygiene<sup>2</sup></p>	 <p>Junior Sailor SBA Laboratory<sup>2</sup></p>	 <p>Junior Sailor SBA Masseuse<sup>2</sup></p>	 <p>Junior Sailor SBA Operating Theatre<sup>2</sup></p>	 <p>Junior Sailor SBA Underwater Medicine<sup>2</sup></p>	 <p>Junior Sailor SBA X-ray<sup>2</sup></p>
	 <p>Senior Sailor SBA Winter Dress</p>	 <p>Senior Sailor SBA Winter Working Dress</p>	 <p>Senior Sailor SBA Summer Dress</p>				
	 <p>Senior Sailor SBA Aviation Medicine<sup>1</sup></p>	 <p>Senior Sailor SBA Dispensary<sup>1</sup></p>	 <p>Senior Sailor SBA Hygiene</p>	 <p>Senior Sailor SBA Laboratory</p>	 <p>Senior Sailor SBA Masseuse</p>	 <p>Senior Sailor SBA Mental Nurse</p>	 <p>Senior Sailor SBA Registered Nurse</p>










<p>1953-1974 (cont.)</p>	 Senior Sailor SBA Unknown	 Senior Sailor SBA Operating Theatre	 Senior Sailor SBA Psychiatric Nurse (1) Physiotherapist (2)	 Senior Sailor SBA Unknown	 Senior Sailor SBA Underwater Medicine	 Senior Sailor SBA X-ray	 Senior Sailor SBA Unknown							
<p>1974-</p>	 Junior Sailor MED Winter Dress	 Junior Sailor MED Winter Working Dress <sup>3</sup>	 Junior Sailor MED Summer Dress	 Junior Sailor MED Operating Theatre <sup>2</sup>	 Junior Sailor MED Underwater Medicine <sup>2</sup>									
  								Senior Sailor MED Winter Dress	Senior Sailor MED Winter Working Dress <sup>3</sup>	Senior Sailor MED Summer Dress				
   								Senior Sailor MED Aviation Medicine <sup>2,3</sup>	Senior Sailor MED Dispensary <sup>2,3</sup>	Senior Sailor MED Hygiene <sup>2,3</sup>	Senior Sailor MED Masseuse <sup>2,3</sup>			
   								Senior Sailor MED Registered Nurse <sup>2,3</sup>	Senior Sailor MED Operating Theatre <sup>2</sup>	Senior Sailor MED Underwater Medicine <sup>2</sup>	Senior Sailor MED X-Ray <sup>2,3</sup>			

Notes:

1. The red central jewel in the Tudor crown was replaced by blue in 1920.
2. Not all sub-rate badges were in use throughout the periods indicated. Post-1974 winter badges indicate current sub-rates as of 2018.
3. All uniforms with red post-1974 insignia were abolished in 1990.

Table 3: RAN Dental Sailor Rate Badges since 1922

1922-1942				
	Junior Sailor DA Winter Dress	Junior Sailor DA Winter Working Dress	Junior Sailor DA Summer Dress	
1942-1949				
	Senior Sailor DA Winter Dress	Senior Sailor DA Winter Working Dress	Senior Sailor DA Summer Dress	
1949-1953				
	Junior Sailor DA Working Dress	Junior Sailor Dental Mechanic Working Dress		
1953-1954				
	Junior Sailor DA Winter Dress	Junior Sailor DA Winter Working Dress	Junior Sailor DA Summer Dress	
1954-1955				
	Senior Sailor DA Winter Dress	Senior Sailor DA Winter Working Dress	Senior Sailor DA Summer Dress	
1955-1974				
	Junior Sailor DA Winter Dress	Junior Sailor DA Winter Working Dress	Junior Sailor DA Summer Dress	
1974-1975				
	Senior Sailor DA Winter Dress	Senior Sailor DA Winter Working Dress	Senior Sailor DA Summer Dress	Senior Sailor Dental Mechanic Working Dress 1

1974-					
	Junior Sailor DA Winter Dress1	Junior Sailor DA Winter Working Dress (1) 1,2	Junior Sailor DA Winter Working Dress (2) 1,2	Junior Sailor DA Summer Dress	
					
	Senior Sailor DA Winter Dress1	Senior Sailor DA Winter Working Dress (1) 1,2	Senior Sailor DA Winter Working Dress (2) 1,2	Senior Sailor DA Summer Dress	Senior Sailor Dental Hygienist 1

Notes:

1. Not all sub-rate badges were in use throughout the periods indicated. Post-1974 winter badges indicate those in use as of 2018.
2. All uniforms with red post-1974 insignia were abolished in 1990.



RAN Health Service badge.<sup>37</sup> Note the Staff of Asclepius on the Red Cross.

Summary

Rank badges for Navy sailors were first introduced in 1827 (30 years before standardised uniforms to put them on), and assumed more-or-less their current form in 1853. Part Two of this article describes how most of the changes since were mostly limited to the CPO uniform, which only assumed its current form in 1925.

The first RN seamen given a specific job description or 'rate' were gunnery personnel from 1830, who received the first identifying rate badges in 1860. Dedicated SBAs were introduced in 1833 and they received their rate badge in 1879, while the RAN

introduced dental rates with their own badge in 1922. The rate badges for RAN medical and dental sailors assumed their current form in 1974.

It is suggested there is something appealing in the idea that a very young Trafalgar veteran not only could have easily lived long enough to see the first standardised Navy uniforms but could still identify today's sailor rank badges – although their rate badges may require some additional explanation!

Author

Dr Neil Westphalen graduated from Adelaide University in 1985 and joined the RAN in 1987. He is an RAN Staff Course graduate and a Fellow of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, the Australasian Faculty of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, and the Australasian College of Aerospace Medicine. He also holds a Diploma of Aviation Medicine and a Master of Public Health.

His seagoing service includes HMA Ships *Swan*, *Stalwart*, *Success*, *Sydney*, *Perth* and *Choules*. Deployments include DAMASK VII, RIMPAC 96, TANAGER, RELEX II, GEMSBOK, TALISMAN SABRE 07, RENDERSAFE 14, SEA RAIDER 15, KAKADU 16 and SEA HORIZON 17. His service ashore includes clinical roles at *Cerberus*, *Penguin*, *Kuttabul*, *Albatross* and *Stirling*, and staff positions as J07 (Director Health) at the then HQAST, Director Navy



Occupational and Environmental Health, Director of Navy Health, Joint Health Command SO1 MEC Advisory and Review Services, and Fleet Medical Officer (2013-2016).

Commander Westphalen transferred to the Active Reserve in July 2016.

### Acknowledgements

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### Disclaimer

The views expressed in this article are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of the RAN, or any of the other organisations mentioned.

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### Endnotes

- 1 Westphalen N. A History of Australian Navy Health Sailor Uniforms and Ranks (Part 1), JMVH. 2018 Apr;26(2):14-24 available from <http://jmvh.org/article/a-history-of-australian-navy-health-sailor-uniforms-and-ranks-part-1>
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- 3 See Royal Navy Substantive Rates for Seaman, available from <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~pbtvc/Uniform/Ratings.html>
- 4 Baynham H. Before the Mast: Naval Ratings of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Hutchinson: London 1971 p 22
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- 10 Australian Naval Order 191/23, available from [http://www.navy.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/Commonwealth\\_Naval\\_Orders\\_1923.pdf](http://www.navy.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/Commonwealth_Naval_Orders_1923.pdf)
- 11 Personal communication 26 Dec 17, Mr John Perryman, Director Strategic and Historical Studies, Sea Power Centre – Australia. His research indicates that the practice ceased with the issue of ABR81 in July 1972. The plates in that publication make no reference to petty officers wearing class II rig.
- 12 1890 Uniform Regulations, available from [http://www.pbenyon.plus.com/Uniform/1890\\_Uniform\\_Regs.html](http://www.pbenyon.plus.com/Uniform/1890_Uniform_Regs.html)
- 13 Personal communication, CMDR Phil Davies (Rtd), 15 Dec 17. CMDR Davies joined the RAN as a junior sailor in 1958, and changed branch from dental assistant to sick berth attendant in 1960. He had to change from Class III to Class II rig as part of the process. He refers to a three-year transition.
- 14 See Royal Navy Substantive Rates for Seaman, available from <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~pbtvc/Uniform/Ratings.html>
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- 22 Personal communication 26 Dec 17, Mr John Perryman, Director Strategic and Historical Studies, Sea Power Centre – Australia. It would appear that red badges were phased out in 1990 around the same time that red woven badges for foul weather jackets were discontinued.
- 23 Seataalk, 3/1997, p 7
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