

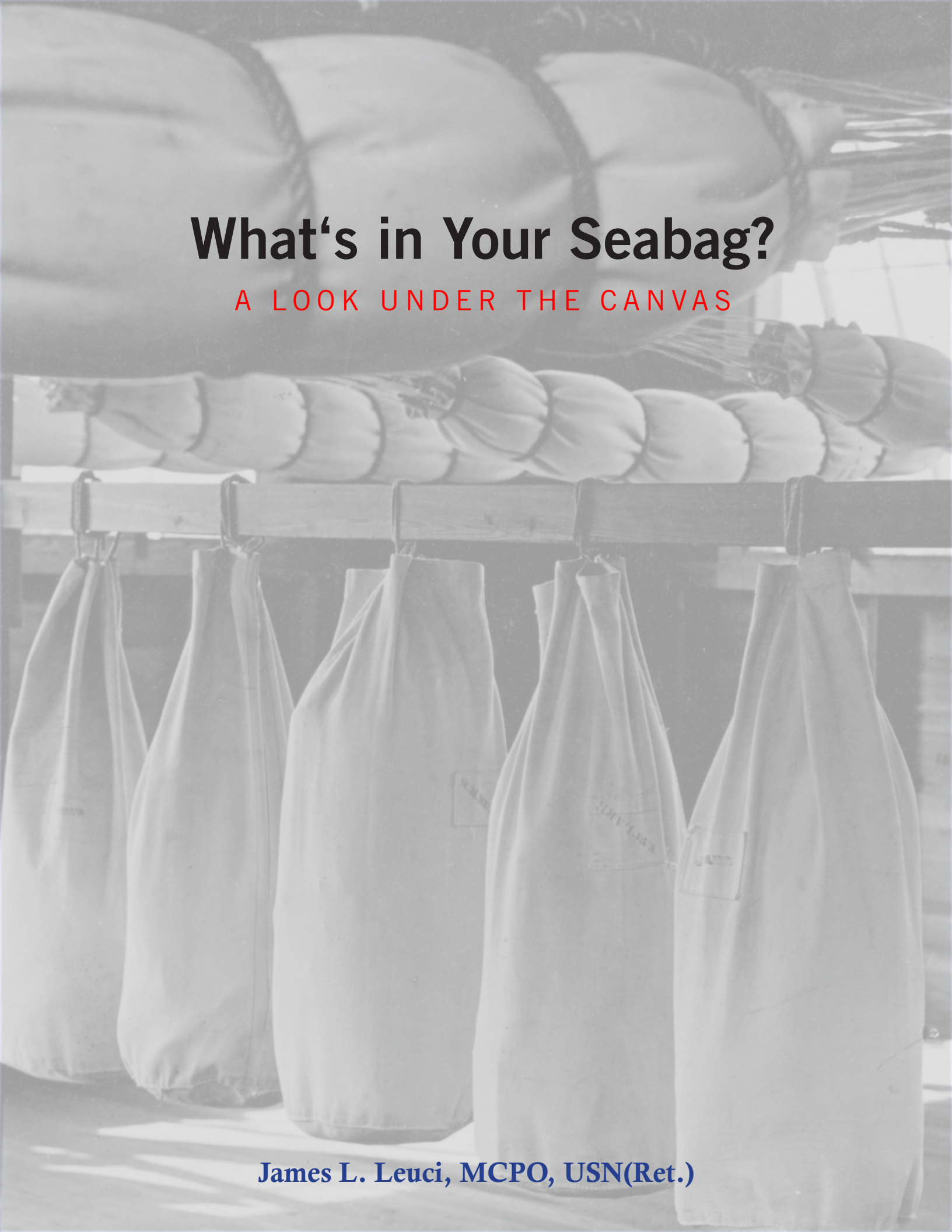


# What's in Your Seabag?

A LOOK UNDER THE CANVAS



**James L. Leuci, MCPO, USN(Ret.)**



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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS PHOTO

1913 New York Naval Militia personnel in ranks for muster with their seabags and hammocks.

The image of a Sailor carrying a white seabag with a hammock lashed on, commonly known as a “lash-up”, is iconic. Images of a Sailors shouldering their bags are usually similar regardless of whether the view is from 1944 or 1894. However, the lash-up included more than just a hammock secured with a line to a seabag. Unseen, other items were folded within the hammock or stowed inside the seabag. They included: a mattress, two blankets, mattress covers, sheets, pillows, and pillow cases--in addition to all the Sailor’s uniforms.

Through the mid-1950s, the Navy seabag was made of white canvas measuring approximately 36-inches in height and 12 inches in diameter. Bags from the early 19th century were often “Sailor-made” and sometimes black in color, having no carrying straps or exterior pockets. It was secured at the top using a short length of line run through metal grommets. Seabags and hammocks, like all items in a Sailors’ standard uniform outfit, were required to be marked with the man’s name and number.

Prior to 1945, all Navy male recruits were issued a hammock along with the other bedding items. All enlisted Sailors were required to possess, maintain,

and use those bedding materials throughout their time in the Navy. Bedding materials were “issued-in-kind” for “personal use” and remained USN property. Bedding was required to be “turned in” upon discharge from the Navy.

Hammocks were part of a Sailor’s seabag since the days of wooden sailing ships through the end of WWII. Most warships built before WWI through the early 1930s, were equipped with hooks on bulkheads to hang hammocks. For over a century, U. S. Navy sailors slept in hammocks suspended on hooks above the berth-decks of warships. The 1917 *The Bluejacket’s Manual* described a typical routine at reveille aboard a Navy ship as:

*The buglers sound reveille with the stroke of the bell, if occurring on the half-hour. The boatswain’s mates, in concert, pipe their call, “All Hands,” and get the crew turned out quickly. The masters-at-arms make rounds of the berthdeck to see that all men are out promptly and are dressing and lashing hammocks...*

Hammocks were required to be “lashed” and stowed within minutes of reveille unless you were a “late-sleeper” also commonly known as a “Six-Bell

# Hammocks and Lashings Pre-WWI



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS PHOTO

1890 ca. USS *Brooklyn* enlisted crewman's berthing showing hammocks hanging from hooks on the berth-decks



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS PHOTO

1910 ca. Lashing hammocks on USS *Maine*. Hammocks were required to be lashed up immediately after reveille.



# Seabag Inspections



1918 ca. Seabag Inspection during World War I.

NHHC PHOTO



World War I Seabag Inspection layout. Sailors rolled their clothing and secured it with clothes stops through the 1950s. Note the blue “pancake” hat, brush, and boots that were part of a Sailor’s required uniform items.

NHHC PHOTO



NHHC PHOTO

1898 USS *San Francisco* crewmen stowing their hammocks in the hammock netting. Hammocks were required to be lashed and stowed shortly after reveille.

Hammock”. Late-sleepers were Sailors who stood late-night watches and authorized to sleep past reveille until 0700--six bells.<sup>1</sup> Within minutes of “turning-out” a Sailor was required to lash his hammock and stow it. Hammocks were typically stowed by Division in designated locations, known as nettings. However, before a hammock could be stowed it had to be properly lashed and inspected.

Lashing a hammock involved placing the mattress on the hammock and laying the folded blankets in the center of the mattress. Then, the edges of the hammock were pulled together totally covering the bedding materials. Next, the hammock was secured with a hammock lashing--a “12-thread manila rope, one end of which is eye-spliced and the other end whipped.”<sup>2</sup> Seven equally spaced marlin hitches neatly finished the “lash-up” which was inspected by a division petty officer prior to being stowed in the

hammock netting.

Navy ships had defined procedures for stowing hammocks. Generally, each division had a “hammock stower”, usually a non-rated man. He would arrive at the netting before reveille was sounded. Prior the stower’s arrival, and just before reveille, the anchor watch would “trice up”, or roll back the hammock cloths (canvas covers) covering the nettings.”<sup>3</sup> Per-regulation, no hammock could be stowed before reveille. Sailors who “turned out” before reveille waited for the boatswain’s mate call “All Hands” to turn out the crew. Immediately after reveille was passed, the early-riser’s hammocks could be stowed. Once all hammocks were stowed, including the six-bell hammocks, the netting cloths would be “stopped” or tied down until after the evening meal.

For decades, cleaning and airing bedding was part of



# Airing and Drying Bedding

Both afloat and ashore, washing and airing of hammocks, mattresses, and bedding was part of an enlisted man's routine for over 100 years.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS PHOTO

1900 ca. USS *New York* crew airing hammocks and bedding along the rails. The airing of bedding was necessary to help prevent the infestation of bedbugs within the ship.



NHHC PHOTO

Crew members of USS *Lexington* (CV 2) hang out hammocks to dry on 7 May 1928. Hand scrubbing hammocks and seabags was part of a Sailor's routine through WWII.





NHHC PHOTO

1940 ca Naval Training Station (NTS) San Diego Seabag inspection

## World War II Era

By the mid-1930s, new modern warships were equipped with bunks, or “racks,” eliminating the need for hammocks and hooks. Bunks were also being used in most barracks at shore installations. However, Sailors were still required to possess and maintain hammocks, mattress, blankets, pillows, pillow cases and mattress covers. Ashore, the main issue with hammocks was where to store them when they were not needed. Naval Training Station (NTS) Norfolk, Virginia, like most large shore installations, maintained a “Baggage Room.” The NTS baggage room, run by the Provost Marshal’s Department Master-at-Arms, allowed thousands of Sailors to safely store their seabags, hammocks, extra clothing and equipment while not needed or simply for safe-keeping while they were on leave.<sup>4</sup>

The required use of the baggage room at NTS Norfolk was mandated by an Executive Officer’s memo in July 1944. The station order required that Sailor’s

“...bags, hammocks, and personal effects to be turned in to the baggage room...” prior to departing on leave. Further stating, “There has been considerable loss of personal property of late because this order has been violated. To insure against further violations, leave papers will not be delivered to any man until he can show to his Officer in Charge a receipt for turned-in baggage signed by the Master at Arms in charge of the baggage room...”<sup>5</sup>

On Naval Air Station Norfolk, VA (adjacent to NTS) a baggage room was maintained by the Supply Department in Building V-53. The baggage room used to store seabags, hammocks, and cruise boxes was open from 0745 to 1615 Monday through Saturday.<sup>6</sup> At sea, Navy ships also similarly maintained seabag lockers, hammock nettings, and “cages,” as overflow storage areas for enlisted Sailors.





NHHC PHOTO

26 April 1944 NAS Seattle, WA, lashing a hammock for duty, in Barracks 184. Men are (left to right): Coxswain (COX) William Howard Trice; Steward's Mate Second Class (STM2c) James Armstrong; COX Leroy Young, Master at Arms; STM1c, Clifford Summers. Note COX Young's rating badge and Master at Arms shield. A Coxswain was a third class petty officer. The rate of Coxswain was changed to Boatswain's Mate Third Class in 1948.

## Steward's Mate School NAS Seattle, Washington 1944



NHHC PHOTO

26 April 1944 NAS Seattle, WA. Coxswain Leroy Young (right) receiving new men at his barracks, 26 April 1944. Men are (left to right): Steward's Mate Second Class (STM2c) Avery Dowell; STM2c Charles Parker; STM2c George Robertson. Note seabags, lashed hammocks and Young's Master at Arms' shield.



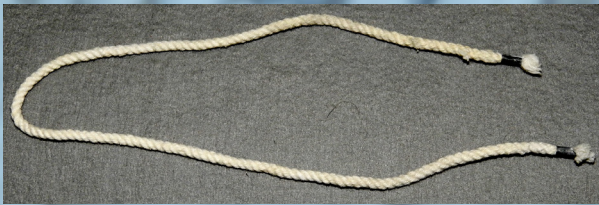
# Clothes Stops



LEUCI PHOTO

A Sailor's mattress cover (shown), sheets, and pillow cases were also secured with clothes stops for storage in a seabag.

A clothes stop was an 18-inch piece of line that was crimped or lashed on both ends. Clothes stops, also known as "tie-ties", were used to secure rolled clothing. They were also used to secure washed clothing to a clothesline.



LEUCI PHOTO

An 18-inch clothes stop was a common item in an enlisted man's seabag through the early 1960s. A typical enlisted man would have 50 or more clothes stops.



NHHC PHOTO

1942 Seaman Second Class (SN2c) seabag layout World War Two. Sailors continued to roll their clothing and secure the rolls with clothes stops.



LEUCI PHOTO

WWII Era enlisted man's white jumpers and trousers rolled and secured with clothes stops. Sailors rolled their clothing until the mid-1950s.



## Two-Section Clothing Bedding Bag



A two-section clothing bedding bag was introduced in early 1945 to replace the white canvas seabag.

One section was designed to stow a Sailor's mattress. This was necessary because the hammock, where the mattress was previously stowed, was no longer carried by Sailors.

The new container was never adopted because Sailors were no longer required to carry a mattress after 1945.



NAVAL HISTORY AND HERITAGE COMMAND PHOTO

1954 Navy Receiving Station Norfolk, Virginia. Sailors reporting for duty. Sailors were no longer required to carry a hammocks and mattresses after 1945.

## Post-World War II

When WWII ended in the late summer of 1945, there were 3 million enlisted men in the Navy--equating to millions of hammocks and mattresses. Since modern Navy ships were now equipped with bunks, a decision was made to stop issuing hammocks to recruits. At the same time, the Navy Bureau of Ships (BuShips) announced the development of a replacement of the existing seabag with a new "clothing-bedding bag." The new bag consisted of two sections and would hold a man's complete outfit, bedding, mattress, and other miscellaneous gear. Since Sailors would no longer be carrying hammocks, the new bag was designed to stow a Sailor's mattress, which they still carried, inside the bag.<sup>7</sup> The two-section clothing bag was not widely available and initially only issued to recruits.

ALNAV 278-45, (Navy Department Bulletin, 30 Sept. 45-1283), announced that effective 15 October, 1945 mattresses in the possession of Sailors would become USN property. Mattresses would no longer be issued to recruits. Ships and shore installations would provide mattresses and hammocks for their assigned personnel. Sailors were directed to turn-in hammocks and mattresses in their possession prior to transferring to another command.

Sailors were not compensated when turning in their hammocks and mattresses since they were technically Navy property issued for personal use. However, a provision was provided for Sailors who previously purchased a mattress with their personal funds and wished to keep it. In order to retain a purchased mattress, an entry of that fact was made in the man's service record. Naval enlisted personnel were still required to retain individual ownership, along with mandatory use, of mattress covers, blankets, sheets, pillows, and pillow cases.<sup>8</sup>

Also, the end of Sailor owned mattresses eliminated the need for the new clothing bag. The two-piece clothing-bedding bag, announced in the summer of 1945, was never widely adopted for general use. The existing white canvas seabag, continued on as the Sailor's seabag through the next decade. No longer having to carry a hammock and mattress, the post-WWII Sailor now had a less-bulky and lighter seabag. Over the next 15 years, the Navy slowly transitioned towards a policy of providing and maintaining all bedding materials as organizational issued items.

1947 U. S. Navy Uniform Regulations defined the "Prescribed Outfit" for enlisted men at sea--which



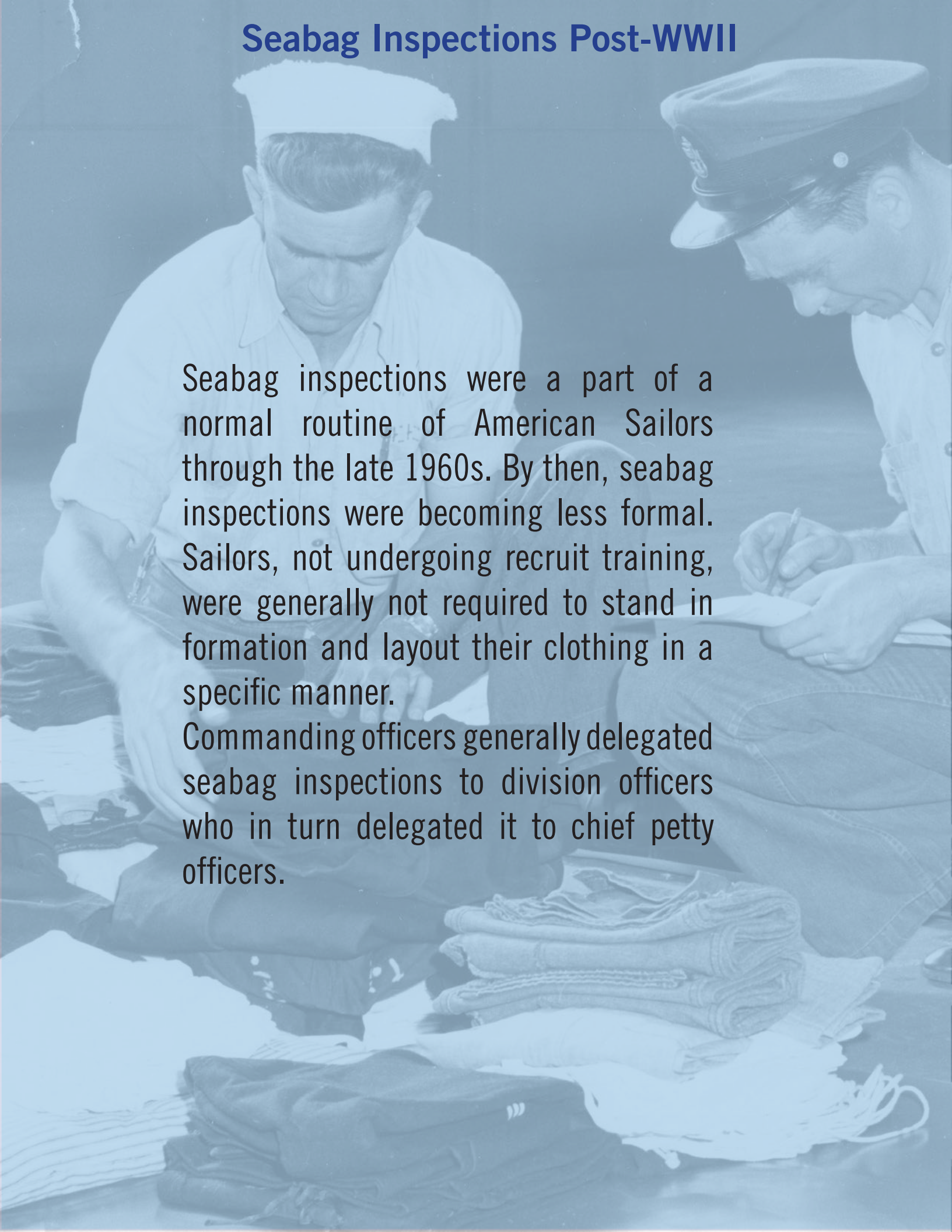


1955 Sailors checking into a barracks at  
Naval Station Norfolk, Virginia.

WACHOWSKI E.R.  
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## Seabag Inspections Post-WWII

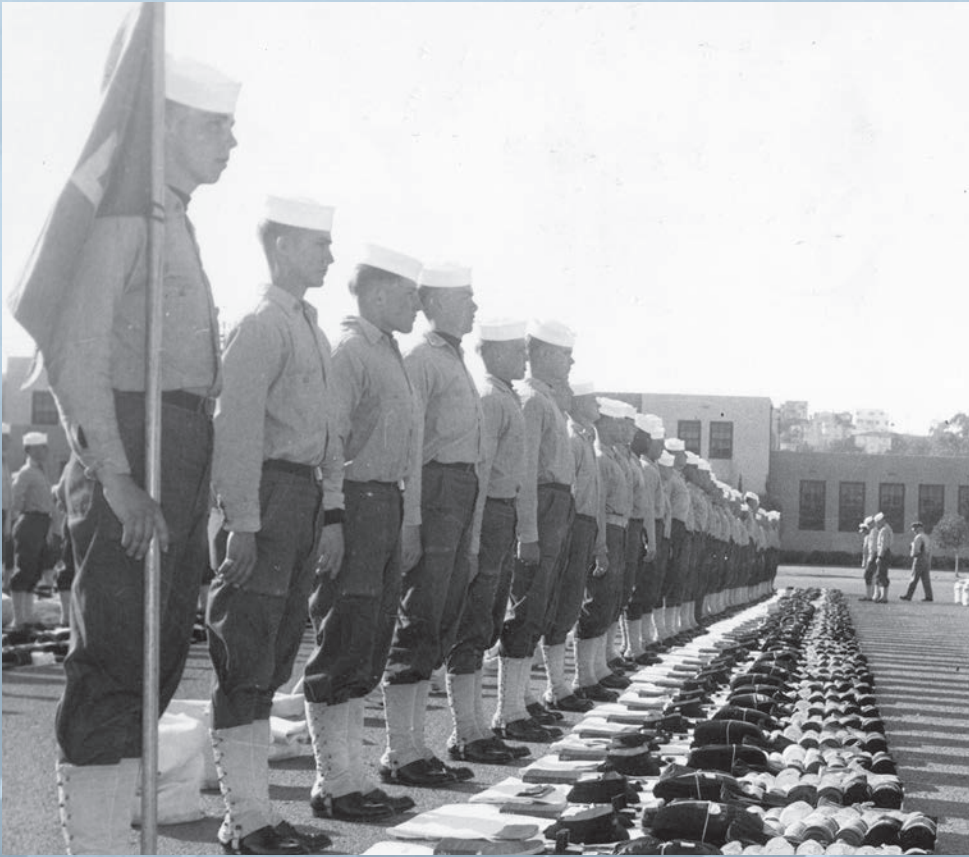
A blue-tinted photograph showing two sailors in uniform. The sailor on the left is wearing a white sailor's cap and a white short-sleeved shirt, looking down at a seabag. The sailor on the right is wearing a dark sailor's cap and a white short-sleeved shirt, holding a pen and writing on a piece of paper. In the foreground, there are several stacks of folded clothing, including a dark jacket and a white shirt. The background is dark and indistinct.

Seabag inspections were a part of a normal routine of American Sailors through the late 1960s. By then, seabag inspections were becoming less formal. Sailors, not undergoing recruit training, were generally not required to stand in formation and layout their clothing in a specific manner.

Commanding officers generally delegated seabag inspections to division officers who in turn delegated it to chief petty officers.



# Seabag Inspections Post-WWII



1948 Seabag Inspection at Recruit Training Center (RTC) San Diego, California.

NHHC PHOTO





included chief petty officers. Article 7-50 listed the minimum outfit of clothing which included required bedding items consisting of two mattress covers and two blankets. Pillows and pillow covers were also listed but as optional bedding items.<sup>9</sup>

### **Korean War Era and Beyond**

During the early 1950s the white seabag was improved with the addition a carrying strap and outside pocket along with a system to lock the bag using a padlock. In 1952, an olive-green canvas version of seabag was introduced. The seabag design still included the over-the-shoulder carrying strap and an outside pocket. The color was now olive drab since all U.S. Armed Forces were now using the same type bag. Naval personnel still referred to the clothing container as a “seabag”--to all other armed services it was a “duffel” bag.

On 1 July 1952, the Navy stopped issuing blankets and pillows to recruits. Ships and shore stations would now “issue-in-kind” two blankets and a pillow “for individual use and custody.” All personnel were required to sign a custody receipt indicating that the blankets and pillow were to be returned to the Navy upon separation, or release to inactive duty. Mattress covers and pillow covers remained “items of individual ownership.”<sup>10</sup> Later, in July 1956, Sailors had even less to carry when pillows and blankets became organizational issued items. However, mattress covers and pillows covers remained in “individually owned” status.

Finally, in July 1958, it was announced that mattress covers and pillowcases would become “organizational” instead of “individual” issue items effective 1 July 1959.<sup>11</sup> At that time, all Navy



1952 NARTU NAS Norfolk CPO Geagan conducting seabag inspection on Airman House. Conducting Seabag inspections was a responsibility of Chief Petty Officers by the late-1950s.

NHHC PHOTO



# U. S. Naval Training Center Great Lakes Recruit Training “Tie-Ties”



LEUCI PHOTO

Navy enlisted blue and white jumpers and trousers were equipped with holes for clothes stops through the early 1960s.



NHHC PHOTO

1950s Recruit at Great Lakes uses a clothes stop to secure a chambray shirt to a clothesline.



commands assumed complete responsibility for issuing, maintaining, and cleaning all bedding items. This included mattresses, mattress covers, pillows, pillow covers, blankets, sheets, and bedspreads. Since then, the Navy continues to be responsible for issuing and maintaining bedding at sea and ashore.

## Vietnam Era

By the mid-1960s Sailors were still stuffing “10 pounds of uniforms into a 5-pound bag.” Uniforms were now folded and no longer rolled. Clothes stops were only used by Navy recruits to secure their hand-washed uniform items to clotheslines.

The lack of storage space for an enlisted Sailor was a common condition ashore but especially acute aboard ship. The standard 2-drawer aluminum locker was still the in use aboard many ships. Most ships had seabag lockers where a Sailor could store excess uniform items.

Older ships were also being retrofitted with bunks that had a locker below the mattress. A modern design of that feature is still in use throughout the fleet today--commonly known as “coffin lockers.”

In the early 1970s, Sailors were first authorized to possess civilian clothing at shore stations and aboard ship. Authorizing the possession of civilian clothing, for E-6 and below, disrupted a system that had been

in place for nearly two hundred years. The lack of space at sea was magnified by the introduction of civilian clothes. Sailors now needed more than one seabag to store all their gear.

By 1975, the problem was made worse with the introduction of new dress blue uniforms, with combination caps, for E-6 and below males. The new blue uniforms were of the same design as chief petty officers except for the buttons and insignia.

Most ships did not have lockers suited for a combination cap and “coat and tie” dress blue uniforms. On many ships, enlisted berthing spaces became cluttered with a mix of uniform items and civilian clothing that couldn’t fit in a locker.

Sailors were still required to maintain a defined number of uniforms. However, it wasn’t uncommon for a Sailor to spend more money on civilian clothes than on the upkeep of their uniforms. However, this was a time when a Sailors uniform allowance was only a few dollars a month. Ironically, by the end of the 1970s, regular seabag inspections were becoming a thing of the past. Generally, unless you were in boot camp or in the brig no one was checking to see that you had a complete seabag. The general assumption was that if you wore a serviceable uniform for a personnel inspection then you probably had a full seabag--similar to the rules for chief petty officers.



1969 Seabag layout. Sailors were no longer required to roll their clothing and secure it with clothes stops.

NHHC PHOTO

# Seabags and Sailors of the 20th Century



1945 Sailors with seabags. Hammocks and mattresses were no longer issued to naval enlisted personnel after WWII.



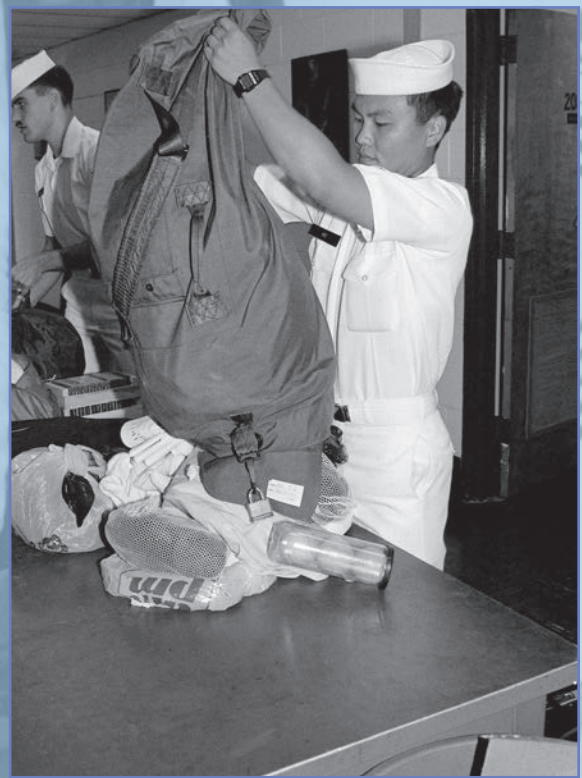
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS PHOTO

1913 Sailor and his "lash-up"



NAVAL HISTORY AND HERITAGE COMMAND PHOTO

1960s Navy Recruit shouldering a green canvas seabag with a single carrying strap..



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE PHOTO

1990 Midshipman Candidate Joons Ko empties his seabag during an inspection for prior enlisted personnel entering the Naval Academy Preparatory School. His seabag has two shoulder straps attached and is constructed primarily of nylon.





DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE PHOTO

2007 Sailors and Marines from squadrons attached to Carrier Air Wing NINE (CVW-9) carry sea bags and squadron equipment aboard USS *John C. Stennis* (CVN 74) for a scheduled deployment. The seabag was modified in the mid-1970s by adding two carrying straps in order to carry it like a backpack.

## Today

To a pre-Korean War Sailor, a squared-away lash-up was a routine requirement. To a new recruit, the proper way to lash a hammock was required learning. Today the “lash-up” is a long lost art.

However, tradition continues on in a new form. The Navy seabag has been enhanced over the previous decades but is still basically the same as it was seventy-five years ago. During the mid-1970s, the seabag was fitted with two carrying straps enabling it to be carried like a backpack. Later, the Navy seabag was made more of nylon than of canvas but the basic design and functionality remained the same.

Sailors are still issued olive-green seabags during basic training. However, Sailors of today are more likely to be seen coming down the brow carrying a black, Navy-issued backpack instead of the green seabag. The image of a Sailor carrying an olive-green seabag, like a back pack, is maybe less iconic today than before. However, when asked “What’s in your Seabag” a Sailor’s response would gladly not include “a mattress, a pillow, two blankets, mattress covers and pillow cases...”



DOD PHOTO

2010 Boatswain’s Mate (Fuel) Airman Recruit Connor Laughlin, from Shreveport, Louisiana, unpacks his seabag in one of USS *John C. Stennis*’ (CVN 74) berthings during crew move-aboard.





2012 Chief Engineman Saul Gomez conducts a seabag inspection with chief petty officer (CPO) selects attending the USS Missouri CPO Legacy Academy.

DOD PHOTO



2018 A Navy Recruit at Great Lakes folds his new seabag.

DOD PHOTO



**20200408 Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup>The Bluejacket's Manual 1917 contained a sample daily routine at sea which in part described, in detail, procedures for lashing and stowing of hammocks on pages 146-150.

<sup>2</sup>The Bluejacket's Manual 1917

<sup>3</sup>The Bluejackets Manual 1917

<sup>4</sup>The Norfolk Seabag May 1945

<sup>5</sup>The Norfolk Seabag July 15, 1944

<sup>6</sup>The NAS Norfolk Dope Sheet 11 November 1944

<sup>7</sup>All Hands Magazine July 1945

<sup>8</sup>All Hands Magazine November 1945.

<sup>9</sup>All Hands Magazine November 1947.

<sup>10</sup>All Hands Magazine August 1958.

<sup>11</sup>Navy Times July 1958.



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE PHOTO

2017 Navy Recruits at Great Lakes shown marching while wearing the Type III Navy working uniform and carrying black packs. Today, the Navy-issued black backpack has become a common sight along the water front at Naval Stations.





DOD PHOTO

2012 Chief petty officer (CPO) selects unload seabags and personal items in a staging area during the first day of week two of USS Constitution's CPO Heritage Week. The CPO selects will live and train aboard USS Constitution, the world's oldest commissioned warship afloat. USS Constitution has seen every type of seabag that Sailors have used for over two-hundred years.