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## Royal Navy Ranks and Positions

Royal Navy rank on board one of His Majesty's vessels in 1745 was confusing to a new sailor and to most civilians, including many merchant sailors. While some aspects of the rank structure were easily understood, there were a wide range of 'rated' positions not found anywhere else.

### Officers

Three broad categories of officers were found on His Majesty's vessels. The first and senior were the **commissioned officers**. These included the Captain and all Lieutenants on board a ship. On most ships of the line at that time there were only a maximum of two Lieutenants. The 1686 establishment allowed only one Lieutenant for a 50 gun 4th rate. This was changed to allow two Lieutenants in June 1686. A third Lieutenant was added in 1712 establishments. By 1794, four Lieutenants were allowed. The Marine officers on board a ship also held a commission.

The second category of officers included officers issued a **warrant** by the Navy Board. These were the Master, the Surgeon, and where carried, a Chaplain. Included in this category was the Purser, although the purser was not paid by the navy - instead he was authorized to make a commission from the sale of all the provisions he provided to the ships' company.

The third category of officers was **Standing Officers**. These individuals were highly skilled in their respective areas and were permanently assigned to the ship. The Gunner, Boatswain and Carpenter were the typical standing officers on any ship.

The officers all reported directly to the Captain, but for the bulk of normal operations, passed information to the captain via the First Lieutenant.

### Rated Positions

All other positions on the ship were considered men, although there were a significant number of 'rated' positions which equated to petty officers. All 'rated' positions were filled by the captain. This provided the

captain with the authority to make or break an individual occupying one of these positions.

The first and foremost of these positions were the **Midshipmen**. Originally, midshipmen were petty officers, but after 1686, they were seen as officers in training. To become a commissioned officer, it was necessary to have six years of service before taking the Lieutenant's examination. Many of the midshipmen were from good families, and in a class conscious society, couldn't be seen mingling with the rabble. It was necessary therefore to berth them in a separate area away from both the officers and men, called the gunroom or more commonly, the cockpit. Other senior positions such as the Master's Mates, Surgeon's Mates (if carried), and Captain's clerk were also berthed with them, as these positions had equivalent status on board the ship.

Senior Petty Officers such as the Armourer, Ropemaker (if carried), Caulker, Master at Arms, and in most cases the Sailmaker (although not considered senior on some ships) was another category of rated men. All of these positions reported to one of the Standing Officers.

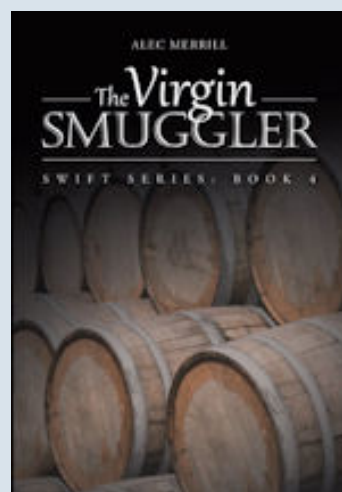
Lesser rated positions, such as mates for all the standing officers were considered petty or junior petty officers and paid accordingly. Depending on the conditions of the ship they either messed with the men, or separated into their own mess, but not separate from the men such as the officers were aft.

### Men

There were three separate ranks for the men. The first was landsmen, which was a probationary position for one year. After one year, men were considered to have obtained sufficient knowledge to be rated as ordinary seamen. If a seaman obtained greater skill, they could be rated as Able seaman. The First Lieutenant and Boatswain generally tested the individual before elevating the man to Able seaman. There also had to be positions available, as most ships only had a set number of able positions.



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