

STARS AND STRIPES[®]

Navy's oldest sailor ends service with ceremony

By [Sandra Jontz](#), Stars and Stripes
European edition, Friday, January 26, 2007



Courtesy of U.S. Navy

Master Chief Petty Officer Doug Forziati carries a folded American flag after it was passed during the "Olde Glory Presentation," a naval retirement tradition in which the text of the ceremony is read to music. It is divided into the number of segments needed to represent each of the ranks held by the retiring member during his or her career.



Sandra Jontz / S&S

Forziati walks through a formation of "sideboys" Thursday at his retirement ceremony after he had asked Adm. Harry Ulrich, commander of Naval Forces

NAPLES, Italy — Master Chief Petty Officer Doug Forziati seems to have something in common with Michael Jordan, Brett Favre and Cal Ripken — and as a U.S. sailor in his 60s, that something has nothing to do with sporting talent or salaries.

The famed athletes “are” their respective sports, said Adm. Harry Ulrich. “And Doug, you are the U.S. Navy,” the commander of Naval Forces Europe said Thursday at Forziati’s retirement ceremony.

“You’ll leave, and the Navy will go on,” Ulrich said, “but will go on because of what you left behind. We’re here to celebrate not your departure, but what you’ve left behind.”

What Forziati is leaving behind is a legacy of strong leadership by a master chief who genuinely cared for his sailors and their families, said Lt. Cmdr. Stephen Trzcinski, director of the Allied Forces Band Naples.

At 64, Forziati not only predated sailors in Naples, but those around the world. Until Thursday’s retirement, he held the title as oldest serving sailor in the U.S. Navy.

Which means he knows a thing or two, Forziati said.

“He knows sailors’ names, even those not in trouble,” Trzcinski said in a speech laden with jokes. “He knows their families’ names. He knows that making music is a really good job, and making music for our country ... is really important.”

Forziati’s retirement proved “a sad day” for Ulrich, he said. “Not because you’re retiring — I couldn’t care less,” the admiral joked. “But now, I’m the oldest Navy person in the Naples area.”

And so, on his last day of active duty, Forziati shared a top 10 list of things he learned during 47 years as a musician — nearly 30 of which have been with the Navy. Forziati joined as a trumpet player in 1960, left in 1964, and then rejoined in 1981.

His lessons-learned included how to get 10 tons of musical equipment up a mountain and that camaraderie is key in the military.

He vowed not to cry during his retirement ceremony, and when it came to addressing his wife, Sally, he kept his message short to stave off the tears: “I love you.”

Forziati left the crowd of more than 200 with this: “Whether you think you can, or whether you think you can’t, you’re right.”

Europe, permission to go ashore one final time.



Sandra Jontz / S&S

Forziati delivers a top 10 list of things he learned after spending nearly 30 years in the U.S. Navy. The list culminated with his notion that camaraderie is key in military service and the camaraderie through the years never changes. He also leaves the title of the oldest serving member of the U.S. Navy.



At 64, the oldest sailor in the Navy prepares to walk offstage

By [Sandra Jontz](#), Stars and Stripes
European edition, Monday, December 18, 2006



Sandra Jontz / S&S
Master Chief Petty Officer Doug Forziati, 64, is the oldest serving sailor in the U.S. Navy.



Sandra Jontz / S&S
Visitors to Master Chief Petty Officer Doug Forziati's office usually will find him with his feet propped on his desk. "My door is always wide open," said Forziati, who routinely dispenses advice to younger sailors.

NAPLES, Italy — Master Chief Petty Officer Doug Forziati says he's as old as dirt. That might be debatable. But what isn't in question is that the 64-year-old assistant director of the Allied Forces Band Naples is the oldest serving sailor in the U.S. Navy. Bar none. "Yeah, that's me. I'm old as dirt and the oldest sailor in all the Navy, in all of the world. "And at several formal functions, Adm. [Harry] Ulrich doesn't miss a chance to say that and embarrass me," he quipped.

The nearly 30-year veteran, who split his naval career with a 17-year hiatus between 1964 and 1981, loves being a mentor. "I love to talk, and a benefit of being older is that people come to you for advice." When young military musicians ask whether they should continue their military service, he has them detail what he thinks are the benefits

of serving: free medical care, travel and educational opportunities, a steady paycheck. Then he has them list what they'd get out in the civilian world — and if they stay in music, a highly competitive civilian world. That column is usually much shorter. "Some of the best musicians out there are driving taxi cabs."

Some of his subordinates tap into his wisdom or poke good-natured fun. "He's been through everything and he's really up to date, in spite of his age," said Petty Officer 3rd Class Christopher Bourgeois, 24. "You can literally talk to him about everything." Well, barring technology and computer-related issues, for which he relies on others — younger others — for help. "You do know he just started using an ATM this year?" Chief Petty Officer Scott Davis asked Bourgeois. "Maybe, but just yesterday I saw him with an MP3 player," the young French horn player responded. Forziati, he continued, "has been to the bottom of the barrel and been at the top, and that covers everything for a young sailor, whether they're being counseled or rewarded."

There's little romance behind the story of Forziati's 50-plus years of playing the trumpet. As a youngster, he wanted to play in the school band. His elementary teacher needed a trumpet player. Later, his trumpet teacher — who taught Forziati when the Massachusetts native first started playing when he was 7 or 8 years old — planted the notion of a military music career. "He told me, 'You're a good musician and you need to join the Navy music program' and he wrote me a letter of recommendation," said Forziati, who still writes his former teacher Christmas letters.

Forziati enlisted in 1960, attending the Navy's music school in the Anacostia section of Washington, D.C., before shipping out to his first sea duty tour aboard the USS Hancock. "Then, I didn't appreciate the job, and I figured I'd be like others and get out and make it big." That was 1964.

For five years, by day, he worked as a machinist making pistol parts for Smith & Wesson in a Chicopee, Mass., factory. By night, he played in rock and jazz ensembles. He later moved to Hartford, Conn., and worked for Pratt & Whitney building airplane engines. Until 1981, when his marriage failed and he needed something better to support the family, which included three children.

One evening, while he played in a club, he walked a senior chief petty officer recruiting for the Navy. Forziati was sold. Another sailor, Chief Mike Mitchell — later Cmdr. Mike Mitchell and a former head of the Navy’s music school — “spent many months getting waivers,” Forziati said. “It was the best thing that ever happened to me.” He re-entered as a third-class petty officer, one pay grade lower than when he’d left the service 17 years earlier. After three tours in Naples, Italy, spent between the Allied Forces Band and 6th Fleet Band, Forziati and his wife of 21 years, Sally, are hoping to make it their home after he retires on March 1. He’s looking for a supervisory job with the U.S. government “where I can manage my brains out,” said Forziati, who holds a bachelor’s degree in psychology from Westfield State in Massachusetts and a master’s in urban education from Norfolk State in Virginia.

Forziati has a leadership style “they don’t and can’t teach in any school,” said Davis, the band’s leading chief petty officer. “Everyone who works for him ... does what he says because they love him,” Davis said. “His retirement is going to leave a great void in NATO and in the band.” His retirement ceremony is scheduled for Jan. 25 at Joint Forces Command Naples in Bagnoli.

