

"Trust Me: I'm Here To Help You (Woof Woof!)"

The navy assigns officers to their jobs through the detailing process. Each officer has a "detailer," an officer on shore duty at the Bureau of Personnel, who matches open billets navy-wide with the bodies to fill them.

Detailers are drawn from the officer specialty communities they represent. Aviators calling their detailer will be gesturing with a fellow hand-waver, submariners exchange air and neutrons with another bubblehead, intelligence specialists swap vague euphemisms, weather-guessers consult wet forefingers, surface-ship guys struggle to plant daggers in a fellow paranoid-schizo, supply-types try to out-acronym each other, and so on.

Detailers allegedly have critical Inside Skinny on upcoming requirements, i.e., which jobs are currently viewed as "career-enhancing" and which will be filled by those who've impaled themselves on their own carving implements. But as Fonts of Wisdom and Oracles of Future Really Good Deals, however, detailers cannot always be trusted. The nature of their job demands that they are frequently the bearers of bad tidings. Once all the "plums" are gone, someone has to do a job nobody wanted. And someone else has to tell the poor schmuck he's getting orders to the Billet from Hell instead of that Foreign Exchange Program job he wanted as personal trainer to the Swedish Air Force Women's Nude Volleyball Team, because that job just went to Senator Bribeworthy's mistress's homosexual cousin. In the U.S. Navy, that task falls to detailers--every stinking day.

I heard a superb example of this detailer-detailee conundrum in 1983, shortly after joining USS CALLAGHAN (DDG-994). The story was told by the previous Executive Officer, Jay Foley, who had done a tour as a Surface Lieutenant detailer. It went something like this . . .

A detailer had a job he had to sell. A very, very bad job. One of those "You'll never take me alive!" jobs. And

after an exhaustive search, he found just the man to fill it: a senior lieutenant who had somehow managed to "homestead" at a shore command in Georgia for nearly six years. The lieutenant's records were shortly to be reviewed by the Lieutenant Commander Selection Board, and he didn't have a hope of being promoted if he didn't get out of Georgia and back to work. So, the detailer called him with the happy news.

"Lieutenant Smith? This is your detailer, Lieutenant Commander Jones. I've got an urgent fill in front of me, and your name popped up as the best guy to send. Ready to copy? I need a senior Surface Ell Tee with your quals for a three-year accompanied tour as a naval science instructor at the University of West Punjab in Karachi, Pakistan. The orders include a year of Urdu at the language school in Monterey enroute. Whaddaya think."

And the crying starts . . .

"OH MY GOD, NO! NO,NO! I can't *possibly* take that job!"

"Why not--*LIEUTENANT?*"

"BECAUSE OF MY DOG!"

"Dog?"

Then follows the saga of Bowser, the family dog. They got Bowser as a pup twelve years ago. Bowser was raised with their children. Bowser is a central member of their close-knit family. Their kids worship Bowser. And Bowser has arthritis, and a heart murmur, and hip dysplasia, and kidney trouble, and ulcers, and psoriasis, and he's had the same Vet for years, and only that Vet knows exactly what to do for Bowser when he gets sick, and the Vet says Bowser has to live right there in Georgia because of the climate, so Bowser can't be taken out of the country to places beyond the reach of all the expensive care and prescription doggy drugs he needs on a daily basis to stay alive.

After a few fruitless attempts at persuasion, the detailer finally has enough and he snaps.

"*Listen*, Smith, I've gotta fill this billet now, today. You've been ashore for two straight tours, this job counts as Sea Duty, and you're gonna have to show some sea time to be promotable. Now: You're my best option for this fill, and YOU'RE GOIN'!"

"But what about my *DOG?*"

"I'm cuttin' the orders right now: PUT THE DOG TO SLEEP AND PACK YOUR BAGS!"

End of phoncon. The detailer cuts the orders and heads for some extra-crisp martinis. He's earned them.

One dark morning a week later, the detailer's phone rings and a voice in his ear says, "This is Captain Genuflect, Executive Assistant to Admiral Brimstone, Vice Chief of Naval Operations. Hold for the Admiral."

And the detailer is actually standing at Attention behind his desk when the four-star -- notorious inside the Beltway for his volatile temper -- comes on the line in "heat seeker" mode, loudly enough to be heard from across town without the aid of telephonic amplification.

"Lieutenant Commander Jones: Dig out your file on one Legree, Simon, Lieutenant, currently seconded to DNS. I want the worst, the lousiest, the crappiest, the remotest, the longest, the absolute *shittiest* job you've got and I want Legree in it ASAP!"

"Uuuuh, Admiral, sir, I haven't got, uh, I mean, uh, I already detailed an officer to the last really bad job I had..."

"DID YOU HEAR WHAT I SAID, *COMMANDER*? AM I TALKING TO MYSELF? You get OFF your ass, you get this smarmy wise-mouth little piece of shit out of my presence, out of my Pentagon and out of my *COUNTRY*! You cut him orders to that billet by sixteen hundred TO-FUCKING-DAY or I'll send *YOU* instead!"

"YESSIR! YES-SIR, ADMIRAL! AYE AYE SIR, I'M ON IT! CONSIDER IT DONE, SIR!"

Two minutes later the Detailer got "Georgia" Smith on the phone, and the first words out of his mouth were:

"DID YA KILL THE *DOG* YET?"

Post Script: After reading this Bill Doud, an old shipmate (who relieved Jay Foley as XO in *CALLAGHAN*), told me he once got a call from his Detailer that began, "Did you sell the house yet?"