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PRESS RELEASE

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Lovell FHCC Sailors become first active duty Navy military policemen to graduate from the Department of Veterans Affairs police academy

NORTH CHICAGO, Ill. – There was talk about having a Navy Master at Arms from the Lovell Federal Health Care Center (FHCC) attend the Veterans Affairs (VA) police academy, but it seemed to the two MAs serving at the FHCC that the chances of that actually happening were slim.

After all, no active duty Navy sailors had ever enrolled and graduated from the VA's basic police academy course before. "We never thought it would happen," said MA 1st Class Lamont Ransom, Lead Petty Officer of Security at Lovell FHCC. "It was unheard of," said Ransom, who also is the anti-terrorism training officer at the FHCC.

However, as the result of the hard work of many – including a kick-start by the secretaries of the VA and the Department of Defense after their joint visit to Lovell FHCC in the spring of 2012 – Ransom and MA 2nd Class Joshua Lavine last October found themselves at the VA's Law Enforcement Training Center (LETC) in Little Rock, Arkansas, enrolled in the basic police officer course.

"Both of us were honored to be selected to attend," Ransom said. "We are proud to be part of the foundation started for the integration of the VA and the Navy here at the FHCC."

"It greatly expanded my police knowledge," said Lavine, an investigator who will now add "patrolman" to his training experience. "Finally, the two different police entities can work together and be on the same page. I think we can learn from each other. There should be pretty good cohesion."

Graduation day at the LETC after eight weeks of training was an especially proud moment for the two, who were pleased to see a contingent of Lovell FHCC employees in attendance, including their supervisor Physical Security Officer Kenneth Brown, Lovell FHCC Command Master Chief Maurice Coffey, and Lovell FHCC Deputy Director and Commanding Officer José Acosta.

"I've been talking about this back home for weeks – every time I have the opportunity to speak before our FHCC sailors and civilian staff in addition to our stakeholders – because this graduation today of two of our Navy Master-at-Arms sailors from the VA Basic Police Officer Training Course is another exciting first for the Lovell FHCC," Acosta said in his speech at the late December graduation. "Most significantly, it's another sign of what's yet to come at the nation's first federal health care center."

Before the former Great Lakes Naval Health Clinic and the North Chicago VA Medical Center integrated to create the Lovell FHCC in 2010, there wasn't a need for sailors to attend a VA police academy. But after integration, FHCC leaders placed a high priority on seeking approval for MAs to serve as MPs (Military Police) on VA property.

"The graduation of these sailors from this course represents the future of our facility and potentially other FHCCs, as we continue to take care of those who are serving in the military, those who have served and their families ... What a great example of FHCC being one team, putting the safety of our patients and staff at the center of what we do," Acosta said at the graduation ceremony.

Lovell FHCC Chief of Police John Samples said, "This was a long time in coming." Samples added that many people from the FHCC, Navy Medicine East, Navy Bureau of Medicine, and the VA Office of Security and Law Enforcement worked "diligently for over four years for this to happen."

From the first day Brown, a physical security specialist, started working in the Lovell FHCC Protective Services Department in June, 2012, he said he's been impressed with the work of Ransom and Lavine. "We're very proud of them," Brown said, "but I didn't expect anything less. They are two of the sharpest MAs I've worked with."

Class subjects at the academy included use of firearms, batons and pepper spray, driver's education, constitutional law, VA-specific laws and regulations, ground defense recovery, and how to manage suicidal and PTSD patients.

"This was the first time I've been through that type of training before," Ransom said. "We were training with cops with seven, 15, 20 years of experience on street forces ... to have that type of knowledge already there; it was just a good experience."

The training was intense, Ransom said, and not everyone graduated. Together, the two came up with a plan early on to team up, keep up and pass every test. "It was a big accomplishment," he said. "We were right there in the fight the whole way."

In Lavine's mind, one of the most notable things about the course was the instructors' motivation. "They consider everyone they are dealing with as brother and sisters," he said. "They hold themselves to a high level of dignity when it comes to working with veterans. They taught us the importance of understanding the VA mission; to treat veterans with special dignity and respect because of their status as veterans ... They hold veterans in very high regard."

The Navy MAs arrive at the FHCC "highly trained," Samples said. The additional training the MAs received from LETC was focused on a different patient population. "Understanding the veteran patient and the police's methods for special interaction with veteran patients was the primary reason I insisted they get the same training as the VA police."

One of Ransom's best memories from the experience involved earning the respect of an instructor who was himself, a former MA. Trent Pettis presented Ransom and Lavine

with LETC Special Agent Coins. Besides the overall best student, the academic leader and the “top cop” on the firing range, Lavine and Ransom were the only other two in the class of 60 to receive the coins. “He was very proud that we went through the course and conducted ourselves well,” Ransom said.

For more information, contact Lovell FHCC Public Affairs Officer Jayna Legg, 224-610-3132, or email jayna.legg@va.gov. High-resolution photos are available by request or on the Lovell FHCC Facebook page www.facebook.com/lovellfhcc.

About the Lovell FHCC: The Lovell FHCC was established Oct. 1, 2010, as the nation’s first and only fully integrated Veterans Affairs/Department of Defense federal health care center. The center has a dual mission of caring for Veterans and ensuring the medical and dental readiness of U.S. Navy sailors attending training and working at Naval Station Great Lakes. The center also serves military families and retirees.



MA 2nd Class Joshua Lavine conducts a traffic stop during the Veterans Affairs police academy course at the Law Enforcement Training Center (LETC) in Little Rock, Arkansas. Photo by Jason Phillips, LETC.



MA 1st Class Lamont Ransom conducts a traffic accident investigation at the LETC. Photo by Jason Phillips, LETC.



HMC Nikee Martin pins a FHCC Military Police Badge on MA 2nd Class Joshua Lavine at the LETC graduation ceremony. Martin is Lavine's Leading Petty Officer (military supervisor) at the Lovell FHCC. Photo by Jason Phillips, LETC.