

ACA Certification and Military Corrections

An interview with
members of the
Navy Consolidated Brig
in Chesapeake, Virginia

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The ACA Certification Program is designed to help develop and deliver the highest quality certification programs that validate mastery in the field of corrections and contribute to the continued improvement of individual and organizational performance. Our team works closely with correctional professionals to ensure that our programs are up-to-date and relevant for today's advances and challenges in the field of corrections.

Recently, Navy Consolidated Brig (also known as Joint Regional Correctional Facility Mid-Atlantic or NAVCONBRIG) in Chesapeake, Virginia became one of the first facilities accredited by ACA to have 100 percent of their staff members certified through our program. The facility, which handles both pre- and post-trial prisoners and is used by all four branches of the Armed Forces and the Coast Guard, committed to following their facility's standards of "safety, security and accountability" to ensure their facility is run properly and to its highest standards. NAVCONBRIG is a facility that has decided to commit to ACA's professional development and to promote the highest standard of excellence through the certification program.

Corrections Today traveled to Chesapeake to interview members of NAVCONBRIG about the ACA certification process and how it has changed their daily operations at the facility. We would like to thank MSgt. Mark K. Archambeau, FC1 Michael Barnhill, AO1 Shanta Brown, EO2 Rebekah Gumm, YN2 John R. LeBaron, CWO2 Christopher Neuen-dorff and QMC Cynthia Penrod, as well as U.S. Air Force SSgt. Daniel Gauer and U.S. Army SSgt. Eloy Huertas for their responses and for taking the time to discuss ACA certification.

Photo opposite page courtesy of the Navy Consolidated Brig; ribbon: istock/Nerthuz

Q&A

CT: How did you first hear about ACA and our certification program?

MSgt. Archambeau: I've known about ACA since the mid-1990's when my facility down in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina went through our first ACA accreditation for the facility. I did not know about the personal certification program until I got here in Chesapeake in 2012.

FC1 Barnhill: I actually heard about it in high school. I went through criminal justice for three years, and once I came here it was brought up again. I told them I wanted to get that qualification to elevate myself and stand out from everyone.

EO2 Gumm: I actually didn't find out about it until I came to corrections. Corrections is not my field of work; I'm a heavy equipment operator, so I deal mostly with heavy equipment like bulldozers, tractor trailers and loaders. When I found out this was my duty station and came here, one of the first things they told me was that I'd be certified as a corrections officer through the ACA program. They gave us the option, but for the most part it's one of those things everyone jumps on board with, and they give us the opportunity, so everyone takes it.

YN2 LeBaron: I heard about [ACA certification] last year when I first checked on board the brig. I've only been here for a year and a half, it's approaching two years now come March. Of course, when I checked on board last year, they were pushing for everyone to get it. It was more or less that they wanted people to get it but if you didn't want to get it, you didn't have to, until our current CO came out earlier this year and stated that he wanted us to do it. I didn't mind because I was going to take it anyways. →



Photos by Alexander Carrigan

NAVCONBRIG has several outdoor programs and features for its inmates, including a community garden (left) and an outdoor gym (right).

CWO2 Neuendorff: I’ve known what [ACA] was for quite some time since becoming a marine corps correctional specialist back in ’06. We saw and heard about accreditation from a regular correctional officer in the brig at Camp Lejeune. Never saw it to the extent that I’ve seen it here at Navy Con Brig in Chesapeake. Here, right off the bat, knowing that we were accredited and understanding that we really try to push most of our individuals to become at least CCOs and get that certification.

CT: What made you decide to pursue certification?

MSgt. Archambeau: Initially, I was still on the fence if I still wanted to maintain a career in corrections when I found out about the program. What changed my mind was actually that the more I got to train people about how to do this job, the more I came to love what I’m doing. I decided I was going to continue on with my pursuit of corrections after the Marine Corps. I realized that a national accreditation would help me out in the civilian world after I retired.

AO1 Brown: I have always looked at things as far as the end of your journey of being in the military, there’s

always something else that you may want to do. Corrections may be something I want to do afterwards.

SSgt. Gauer: To better my knowledge of corrections because I’m not a corrections person. We don’t have a corrections career field in the air force, it’s great to have for my evaluation and to help me to grow professionally in the corrections world.

SSgt. Huertas: I wanted to pursue the certification to not only improve my corrections [career], but to stand and lead amongst my peers who have been certified and have this professional practice and have some credibility to it.

CWO2 Neuendorff: This is my career. Marine Corps corrections is my career, I’ve been doing it for 12 years. I figured it’s time, not really to get with the times, but to modernize — see what else is going on out there and really understanding what a civilian association as yourself with military committees and really understanding what it is you all look for, what you all see in us and what I can learn from the civilian sectors as well.

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Graphic quotes: istock/filo

QMC Penrod: I have a background in corrections, but my credentials have expired, so I figured this was a good failsafe if something did happen or I had to get out.

CT: What did you most enjoy about the certification process?

MSgt. Archambeau: Most of it I had been working with for years, so what I found most interesting was how my doctrine that governs how we run military corrections is mirrored up with ACA and how the certification program proves that. With what it is I've been trained to do since day one, my experiences and how the facilities are run, it seemed like an easy fit because this is what I've been doing for years.

AO1 Brown: The actual exam is nothing farfetched. There's nothing left field or anything. It's strictly corrections, and if you actually work in corrections, when you get to the test, you're like, "Okay. I got this."

E02 Gumm: The immersion into corrections. It was very easy to do the written exam and become certified because of the things we do day in and day out here. Most of the stuff that was on the test was things that we do every single day, so it was very easy to get certified because, after a year of being in corrections, you're basically taking an exam on your daily work.

YN2 LeBaron: There's a lot about corrections. There really is. Just stuff I was unaware of. The study guides were helpful. I'm not going to lie, I didn't study a lot, but the study guides were helpful. Obtaining qualifications here within the brig, everything you have to do behind the wire, really helped with gaining knowledge as well. The test is on things that everyone does behind the wire anyways. And of course, MSgt. Archambeau was helpful pushing me in the right direction with regards to what to study, what to focus on, things to prepare better for the exam. →



Photo by Alexander Carrigan

ACA certification specialist Arnela Hadzisulejmanovic (center) met with MSgt. Mark Archambeau (left) and FCSC Jeff Davis (right) to discuss NAVCONBRIG's commitment to certification and professional development.

CT: How did you feel when you learned you were officially ACA certified?

SSgt. Gauer: It felt cool. It's a cool feeling to have that certification. I'm coming up on 15 years with the air force, so 14 years ago I never thought I'd get correctional certification through the military. Not many people in the air force have that accomplishment.

EO2 Gumm: Relieved. Kind of amazed, because it was super easy to get certified. The Navy helped, the ACA program helped, and I knew it was something I could carry to the civilian world, so for me, it was like having another tool in my toolbelt that I could use not only here, but that I've done something and got certified for it, and I can carry it with me even if I don't stay in the Navy.

YN2 LeBaron: It felt great. It was that sense of accomplishment, knowing that I passed it, knowing that I had that certification, because it will help me in the long run for what I'm eventually doing with my ultimate career goal.

CWO2 Neuendorff: It was good. It let me know that I somewhat know what I'm doing. I'm really staying up-to-date and understanding what it was I studied and what it was when it came to that case law that I knew I had actually soaked it up and was able to utilize it.

CT: How have you applied what you learned from the certification process to your daily routine?

MSgt. Archambeau: I see the benefit in the certification program, so I push the certification program to the new members here. Because even if they're not going to become full time corrections professionals, the certification program gives them recognition as achieving a professional standard outside their normal skill level, which will definitely work for them wherever they go.

Having that certification and the other qualifications that go along with it, to me, that looks really good on a resumé no matter where you apply.

— YN2 LeBaron

AO1 Brown: Of course, every day with corrections, it's day in, day out working with prisoners and working with staff and just working at corrections alone, you learn much more about corrections. Not just the basic understanding, it's more to it than just standing and watching.

EO2 Gumm: It's everyday application. From what I learned in corrections and the ACA books and program, it's the same things we use every day. It's basically a how-to manual to do your job.

SSgt. Huertas: It's more trying to mix the ACA exam with the standard operation procedures that the military has. I can use the info for papers for college since I'm majoring in criminal justice and we discuss corrections.

YN2 LeBaron: I'm not going to lie, even though I have a certification, I don't work with the prisoners on a daily basis like everyone else. But having that knowledge when I do go have to go back behind the wire and associate with the prisoners or have to help out with the set personnel, I know what to do, what not to do, what's allowed, what's not allowed, what the prisoners are allowed to do and what the prisoners are not allowed to do. Obviously, I won't know as much as the other people that work back there that actually incorporate that in their daily routine, so I do have people who know that I can ask in case I am stumped a little bit or if I come into an issue.

CT: Why do you think other corrections professionals should pursue certification?

FC1 Barnhill: It helps you develop not only mentally but professionally. You're going to be more secure in your answers when you're dealing with prisoners who you're dealing with in certain situations and you'll have that backing up to know that you know what you're talking about and you're not second guessing yourself.

SSgt. Gauer: They should pursue certification because it's a great boost to your career. It will make you stand out

amongst your peers if you have it and they don't, and it's just a rewarding process.

EO2 Gumm: Because it's so good for your career. Being a corrections officer puts you in a leadership role, if you've never had leadership out in your field or where you work, this is the fastest way to get there. To be in charge of a bunch of people, to make sure that they stay safe, to make sure that the things you are doing and the conduct that you carry yourself and encourage others to carry themselves, it's nothing but good for yourself.

SSgt. Huertas: I feel like the corrections professionals should pursue [certification] because it provides cred for their work, especially if they're trying to go to civilian corrections, since many require the ACA exam. It'll be good overall to have some cred with the career they're taking in military corrections.

YN2 LeBaron: They should pursue it only because it's something you most likely won't obtain or get a chance to obtain again anywhere else, because working here is a special duty operation for Navy personnel, so this is the only place that we can obtain a qualification or certification of this nature unless someone would get out and pursue a corrections job in the civilian world. But having that certification and the other qualifications that go along with it, to me, that looks really good on a resumé no matter where you apply. It could even be at Walmart and you could put on there that you have an American Correctional Association certification and I feel like that would be something that would stick out better than someone that doesn't have certain qualifications.

CWO2 Neuendorff: Certification is a way to display to everyone else and to yourself that you have the credential, you have the know-how, and allows you to be seen as more of a professional. Without a certification, you can be doing a job and be considered someone who has the know-how, but when you receive that credentialing and that certification that says "Yes, you are certified. You know what you are doing at this level of administration." It really offers that feel-good to you and shows everyone else, "Hey, this guy is 'certified' in this." I guess the word "certify" is what does it.

QMC Penrod: It's eye-opening, minor things you normally wouldn't pay attention to; it kind of shines a light on you.

CT: What advice would you give to anyone pursuing certification?

MSgt. Archambeau: Focus on the training that you've received, how you've applied it to your day-to-day operations, and how your facility's policies reflect how ACA guides you to do the job properly. →

“There's no downside to being able to get certified like this. It helps in every aspect of your career, and it doesn't take long.”

— EO2 Gumm



Photo courtesy of the Navy Consolidated Brig

Members of NAVCONBRIG lower the American flag at sunset.

AO1 Brown: Make sure you study. Just take the time out to study. You never know down the line. I know I've met people who want to do corrections after, and I think this is a really good step to take so that you have a better understanding of it.

EO2 Gumm: Immerse yourself in the program. Stick with it. Learn all you can with it. There's no downside to being able to get certified like this. It helps in every aspect of your career, and it doesn't take long. So, if people are on the fence or having second thoughts about it, just jump in with both feet. That would be my advice.

YN2 LeBaron: Study, know your material, obtain the qualifications that are required of you because they will help. If it wasn't for obtaining the qualifications that we

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— CWO2 Neuendorff

are required to get here and I had just taken the test, I wouldn't have passed the first time around.

CWO2 Neuendorff: The materials provided by the ACA were quite advantageous. I know a lot of people tend to think “Okay, I've been doing corrections for this long, I know what I'm doing, I don't need to study for this exam.”

But I would really advise them to pay attention to those study materials that are provided, because they are going to show you a side of corrections that you may not know and that you have never been exposed to. And when it comes to that certification, those things are what is really going to help you out in the future. Study those things that you think you don't know because you don't know them. If you don't have your certification, push for it. Professionally, it's going to help you out not only in the correctional field, but for our military development and promotions systems, when they see that you've done something for this level for an association as large as the ACA. It's really going to show up on your record that you went above and beyond and sought out that certification.

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If you are interested in pursuing certification, please contact us at acaprodev@aca.org for more information.



Photo by Alexander Carrigan

NAVCONBRIG's indoor court allows inmates to stay in shape through team sports like basketball and volleyball.