

Latrabia Wright
Gunner's Mate (Enlisted Surface Warfare Specialist)
Third Class Petty Officer (E-4)
United States Navy, Ingleside, Texas

Job Description

A gunner's mate is responsible for the overall maintenance does maintenance on weapons; cleaning, storing, and accounting for them. Gunner's mates also train Sailors to load, handle, and shoot guns. The gunner's mate is part of the security team on board a ship or at a Navy command ashore. The Surface Warfare addition to this title refers to additional responsibilities for all aspects operating and protecting the ship and its systems, including weapons, navigation, and damage control systems.

CONCEPT: Geography and culture

When I was in Guam, I think that was the first time I had ever looked at the map to actually see where it was located. And it was pretty far over. I was like, that's a long way from home. So it was like 29 hours by plane to get to and that was interesting because actually cross the dateline. Dateline, to actually get there. So that was interesting. I did not know where – exactly on the map where Hawaii – how far Hawaii was from California. You know. So when I looked at the map I saw where a lot of things were located. China, Hong Kong. I didn't realize how far over on the world I was going. So it was kind of scary, but exciting at the same time.

The most challenging thing is being open to a lot of different things because growing up in the city, you don't really have to be open to a lot of different cultures. You don't have to be open to a lot of different things such as the food. It's different shipping because when you're in the city, you know, you can get in your car and you go to the mall and that's it. But being in the Navy, you can't really say, okay, well, I'm going to do this because when you go on a deployment and you go overseas, it's not like you're going to jump in your car and drive away. Being overseas, I got to see a lot of different things, driving on the wrong side – what we would call the wrong side. That was interesting. Being open to the food, to the food. It's like, well, I'll go to Japan and China and try the food, but I'm going to eat McDonald's the rest of the trip. So you have to be – I think that was the hardest thing for me was being open to a lot of different things.

The most exciting is seeing – seeing the world. That's interesting because when you learn you're going to go to a different place, then you go and research that and see what's there to do, how's the culture, what's the do's and don'ts of that culture? Because I knew in Australia you can't spit gum on the ground. You know. And you wouldn't know that unless you went and read up on it. In Japan it's not good for men to cross their legs. That's disrespectful to them. And once again, reading up on the culture, tapping your chopsticks, that's disrespectful as well. So you learn a lot of different things by reading up and basically getting to understand the culture.

WORK SKILLS: Working with people -- Using judgment

We train people to shoot these weapons, and I was stationed in Guam for three years and we went out to the gun range, and that's when we'd go out to the gun range to qualify personnel to be able to handle these weapons onboard ship. And you go up to the gun range and you get personnel online. And online means you have like five personnel standing there with these weapons and, you know, we tell them, do not shoot unless you're told. Do not put this ammunition into this gun unless you're told. So one guy decided he wanted to go ahead and load the gun and get ready to shoot. You know, that's putting everybody – we have about maybe 300 people out on the range and that one person mistake can cause maybe 20 people their lives, you know, because he decides he want to go and do something that he wasn't told. So then therefore that's when we step in, you know, hand me the gun. And we're in a position where we can take that person down on the ground because we don't know, they [could have loaded] this clip thinking they're going to shoot somebody, so we have to use our security tactics that we've learned to put that person down on the ground. So when that happens, it's like, you know, what are we going to do? This guy [could be] going crazy on us. We're not just going to run up to him and say, give me that gun. So it was like, you know, talking to this person. What's on your mind or whatever? I want you to go ahead and drop the clip on the ground and hand me the gun over. And then we had another situation. Handed the guy the gun and he just started shaking. It was like, why are you shaking? Like, I'm scared. Well, no, you can't be up here with this gun shaking like this, so had to go ahead and kick him off the range as well. So those were – there're only two incidents that I can remember that were really scary to me.

[The first guy was] just being anxious and eager, thinking he knew it all. You know, you get those people because, you know, a lot of people are raised to go hunting and shooting with their grandfather, but you can't use those type of skills on the firing range with 300 other people. So we have to take different precautions with different people. So if you don't listen out on the firing range, then you can't be out there because as gunner's mates, we have to protect those people – the other people that are out there, and they're depending on us for that.

WORK SKILLS: Working with people -- Communication skills

You have to have people skills. You have to have very good communication skills.

People skills meaning that you can work with different types of people, different race, different gender, and not having that will power to do it yourself. You have to have somebody to help you do something because you're not – you don't know everything. And somebody that knows a little bit more than you, and if you're not willing to accept different people, then being in the military is not a job for you because you have to work around different type of people on a daily basis. Communication skills. Dealing with guns, you have to have some type of communication skills.

JOB/CAREER: Job overview

My name is Latrabia Wright. I'm GM3, Surface Warfare, on the U.S.S. Inchon. GM3 stands for Petty Officer Third Class, Gunner's Mate. [The Surface Warfare addition to Wright's title basically means that she is a qualified enlisted surface warfare specialist in all aspects of operating and protecting the ship and its systems, including weapons, navigation, damage control systems.]

Basically, I train shipmates onboard the ship to shoot weapons. I also do maintenance on weapons, clean guns. And when I say train, I'm involved with other shipmates in my rating to help personnel onboard the ship basically learn how to shoot a gun, load it, what to do in a – any type of situation that will put their lives in danger,

The rating is the job description that you would do. That's where you get your title from, GM, EW, ET, SM. Basically what you're going to be doing in the military. So I – see, I love attention so I figure gunner's mate, female, really didn't mix because there were – at the time there were no female gunner mates and so I was like, okay, I'll give it a try.

My responsibility onboard the Inchon is basically to train people and watch how to handle a weapon, basically do maintenance on the weapons because you know, you can't protect yourself with a weapon that really doesn't work or a weapon that's not clean. Basically, we – I'm a part of the security team that they have onboard. When I say security team, you have to have somebody – a team that's onboard to protect and the people that are on there, the materials that we have onboard, we're there to protect. You know, we're trained in that field and people depend on us to do that. And if we're not knowledgeable as to how this gun works or how to load ammunition into that gun, then people are not going to trust us. And then in this rating, you have to have confidence, trust. You have to be honest basically because people depend on you to do that. You walk around a ship and it's like, oh, that's the gunner's mate. How do I take this jammed bullet out of this gun?

It's very routine. It's not difficult, but it demands a lot of patience, a lot of teamwork, basically, because you have to train people. You're dealing with people's lives basically. You have to have patience.

JOB/CAREER: Typical day

A typical day is you go in the armory. Once you get into the armory, you get a set of keys, which is about maybe 40 keys. And once you go in – you have to go to all the spaces on the ship that pertain to your rating. You check this temperature gauge on the thermometer and you're logging it in a temp card that's on the – in that space and you're initialing it. Doing an R rating is considered a – a high clearance or – I shouldn't say high clearance, but you have to have authorization to go into all of our spaces on a ship. Go ahead.

You make the rounds; you're logging everything in. You're initialing everything, and you do this once a day. Then you go back and you clean your spaces because if we're not training people to shoot guns, then basically we're doing maintenance on them. So you go – you get the maintenance card for a 25-mm. gun and you go and basically ... take this gun apart. You have to know basically where every part goes.

JOB/CAREER: Career path in the Navy

I studied day in, day out, did a lot of on-hands training. On-hands training, meaning you actually go into that rate, you know, and go into the workspace where they're actually working and participate in things that they're doing.

When I took the test the first time, I didn't advance in the rate. That was disappointing and it becomes discouraging because you know you have worked so hard for it, but I didn't let that bring me down. I used that as more motivation to do what I needed to do, so I studied again and did a lot of OJT and six months later I took the exam again and I

advanced. You know, I made rate, and that was really rewarding to me because not only did I make rate, but the pay increases, so that was a big motivation for me. So –

I got a lot of attention because, for one, I was their only female gunner's mate on the ship at the time, and now that I'm stationed on the U.S. Inchon, I was the only female gunner's mate on there when I checked onboard. So I got a lot of attention on that, you know, carrying a weapon around. Seems like, oh you know, I didn't know we have female gunner's mates in the Navy. You know, we're very rare, so I chose that rating because, you know, I love the attention and being a female, you know, it was like, whoa, I didn't know they even exist.

Staying in is an option, but I would like to better myself and bettering myself would mean advancing in rating. I'm looking forward to putting in many officer packets.

I have a degree in sociology and psychology, double majors, so that was a good side of the Navy, too, because I was – I went to college for a year and a half. I left college and I came into the military, so by coming into the military, I was able to finish my degree. So that was a big thing for me. I did that while I was stationed overseas in Guam. It was a lot of hard work because it's not like I was able to sit in a college classroom and the ship was underway in Japan for two or three months. I had to stay on the ship and do college classes on the computer, do college courses on the computer, mailing essays. I had to stay up late to finish a course on the computer that was due like in three weeks, you know, and it's not easy when you have to work from 7:00 in the morning to 8:00, 9:00 at night being overseas. And that was something that I had to – to focus on, you know, doing many hard hours of working in the cold and the rain, but I knew where my focus was and I knew what my goal was, and that was to get a college degree.

JOB/CAREER: Seeing the world

I just reported onboard the U.S.S. Inchon, so I haven't had a chance to travel with them. But this is my second ship and the first ship that I was on, I can literally say I have seen the world. I don't know many people that I graduated with that can say they've seen the world. I've been to the Philippines, Japan, Thailand, Singapore, Australia, Hong Kong, Korea, and on and on. Now that I'm back stateside, it's kind of a culture shock because I've been overseas so long, you know, and seen different – different other cultures. Japan was my favorite because I am fluent in Japanese and you don't find too many people that are fluent in Japanese, and that was a trade that I got from high school. I took it for six years as a foreign language in high school.

JOB/CAREER: Seeing the world

My mother always taught us those values and to keep God in your life and then anything goes wrong, always thank God or pray to God, you know, to help me get through this. And my wife, she's there to help me out a lot. And being that I have two kids, ages 10 and 11, I wanted to be a good role model for them so whenever they come home with their problems, I sit there, talk to them about it, and try to help them the best I can. And now that stuff that they're learning in school now, I really need to stay up to speed with it because they come home and ask me questions about it. So I want to be there for them, but I also don't want to look dumb in front of them, try to, you know, stay up there with them and stuff so I can help them out.

Well, you have to have good communication skills, oral, a good oral and/or written command of the English language. Writing skills are very important as well. And it's something inside. You've just got to have that drive, just want to excel, keep excelling because in this day and age, everything is changing rapidly and stuff, so you have to have resources out there where you can go back. You know, teachers. Then and there is a helpful is you can go out there and check new information out as it comes along.