

NOVEMBER 2008

# ALL HANDS

MAGAZINE OF THE U.S. NAVY

## Wounded Warrior

One Sailor's Journey Back to the Front Lines





**[On the Front Cover]**

Lt. John Pucillo runs along the sea wall at Naval Base Newport, R.I., using his prosthetic running leg, one of seven the Navy has provided for him.

Photo by MC1(AW) Brien Aho

**[Next Month]**

All Hands takes a look at the Sailors of Helicopter Anti-Submarine Light 44 in Mayport, Fla., and provides some tips and resources to ensure family readiness.

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# November

## 18 Teaming Up for Humanity

When Tropical Storm Fay and hurricanes Gustav, Hanna and Ike leveled the Caribbean country of Haiti and Ike flooded the island community of Galveston, Texas, the Navy stepped up to the plate to provide disaster relief to both areas.

Photo by MCC Chris Hoffpair



## 24 Wounded Warrior

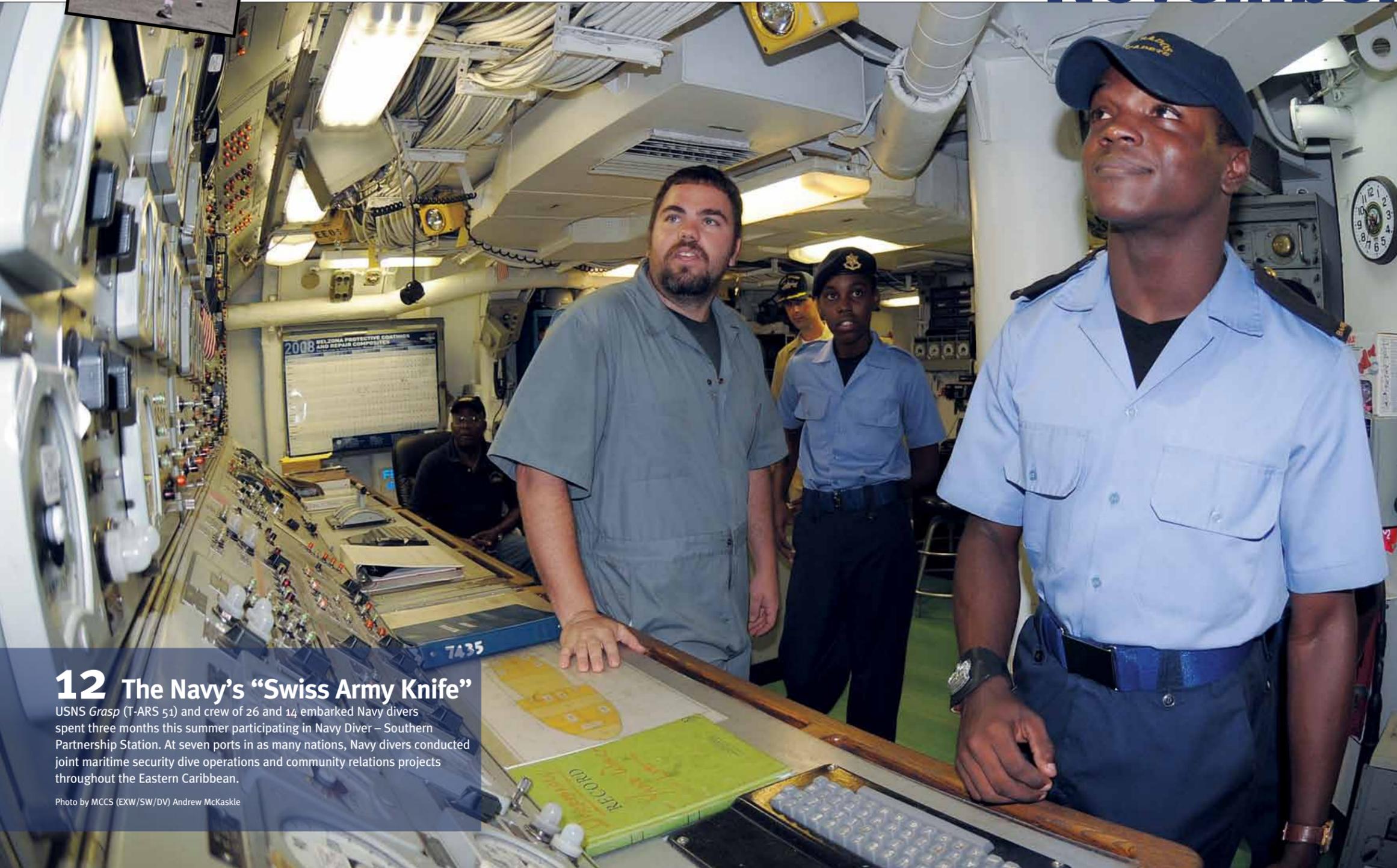


Lt. John Pucillo came back from overseas combat with a significant injury – a below-the-knee amputation of his left leg. It has not slowed him down. He's due to graduate from the Naval War College with a master's degree and head back to the explosive ordnance disposal community ready to lead.

Photo by MC1(AW) Brien Aho

## 30 Among Veterans

In 1954, then-President Dwight D. Eisenhower changed the name of Armistice Day to Veteran's Day. As we honor our veterans, turn to the personal stories of two of the Navy's retired master chiefs.



## 12 The Navy's "Swiss Army Knife"

USNS Grasp (T-ARS 51) and crew of 26 and 14 embarked Navy divers spent three months this summer participating in Navy Diver – Southern Partnership Station. At seven ports in as many nations, Navy divers conducted joint maritime security dive operations and community relations projects throughout the Eastern Caribbean.

Photo by MCCS (EXW/SW/DV) Andrew McKaskle



Crewman Qualification Training (CQT) students secure a simulated casualty to a spine board during a medical training scenario at Naval Amphibious Base Coronado, Calif. CQT is a 14-week advanced training course teaching basic weapons, seamanship, first aid and small unit tactics to Special Warfare Combatant-craft Crewman (SWCC) trainees. SWCCs operate and maintain the Navy's inventory of state-of-the-art, high-speed boats used to support SEALs in special operations missions worldwide.

Photo by MC2 Christopher Menzie

# Speaking with Sailors

Capt. Key Watkins,  
Commanding Officer, Safe Harbor

**A**s an aviator, before going on any flight, I have to know where my safe havens are. Where do I go if I have an emergency? Where do I go if an engine fails in-flight? Where do I go when the weather turns bad?

When the weather is stormy and the seas are rough, every ship in our fleet needs a safe harbor — a place where it can go to get through the tough times. Every one of us needs a safe harbor at times. Sailors who are seriously injured or ill now have a place to turn, a network of support and an advocate who will champion their issues and concerns. Someone who will help.

The Navy's seriously ill and injured support program, Safe Harbor, stood up in 2005. It is a Navywide program under Vice Chief of Naval Operations and the Special Assistant to CNO for Comprehensive Casualty Care to ensure seriously injured personnel and their families receive the best possible support and care when dealing with personal challenges from the time of injury through transition and beyond. This program extends a hand to Sailors and their families and assists with recovery, benefits, exploring career opportunities and readjustment as they return to duty or reintegrate into their community if medically separated or retired.

This year, the mission of Safe Harbor expanded to provide non-medical care management not only to seriously wounded, ill and injured Sailors and their families but also to tracking and overseeing the Navy's non-seriously wounded, ill and injured Sailors.

Eligibility is not limited to only combat-related wounds or injuries but is also extended to those Sailors seriously injured in shipboard or liberty accidents — like motor vehicle accidents — or those who incur a serious illness, whether physical or psychological.

The aim of the program is simple. Safe Harbor provides a lifetime of care. We support and assist Sailors through every phase: recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration. In short, we take care of our own by working with other agencies to make sure our Sailors get the support they need.

The program leverages existing capabilities of established service providers — such as medical treatment facilities, Fleet and Family Support Centers, casualty assistance, retired activities programs, personnel support detachments and the Defense Finance and Accounting Service, Department of Labor (DOL), Veterans Administration (VA), Military



OneSource and the DoD Wounded Warrior Resource Center — to provide a seamless transition for injured Sailors and their families.

Safe Harbor's non-medical care managers assist Sailors and their families by bridging gaps in support and providing information and education to facilitate timely and effective access to required services. Care management support is individually tailored to meet the unique needs of each Sailor and family. Assistance encompasses pay and personnel issues, invitational travel orders, lodging and housing adaptation, child and youth programs, transportation needs, legal and guardianship issues, education and training benefits, commissary and exchange access, respite care, traumatic brain injury or post traumatic stress support services and much more.

The Safe Harbor Care manager will identify and take action to resolve issues or concerns raised by the patient or the family. This continuum of patient assistance by the care manager will remain available upon release from a particular military treatment facility. Navy Safe Harbor non-medical care managers are located at major Navy treatment facilities throughout the United States, VA Polytrauma Centers and Brooke Army Medical in San Antonio.

A key component of the program is to assist Safe Harbor patients as they either return to active duty or seek employment upon completion of treatment. Our goal is for every patient to return to active duty. Regrettably, some service members have sustained injuries that will make remaining on active duty difficult, and many will choose to separate or retire. In these cases, the patient and their families are supported to the fullest extent possible as they transition to veteran's status under the VA. Once a Sailor is enrolled

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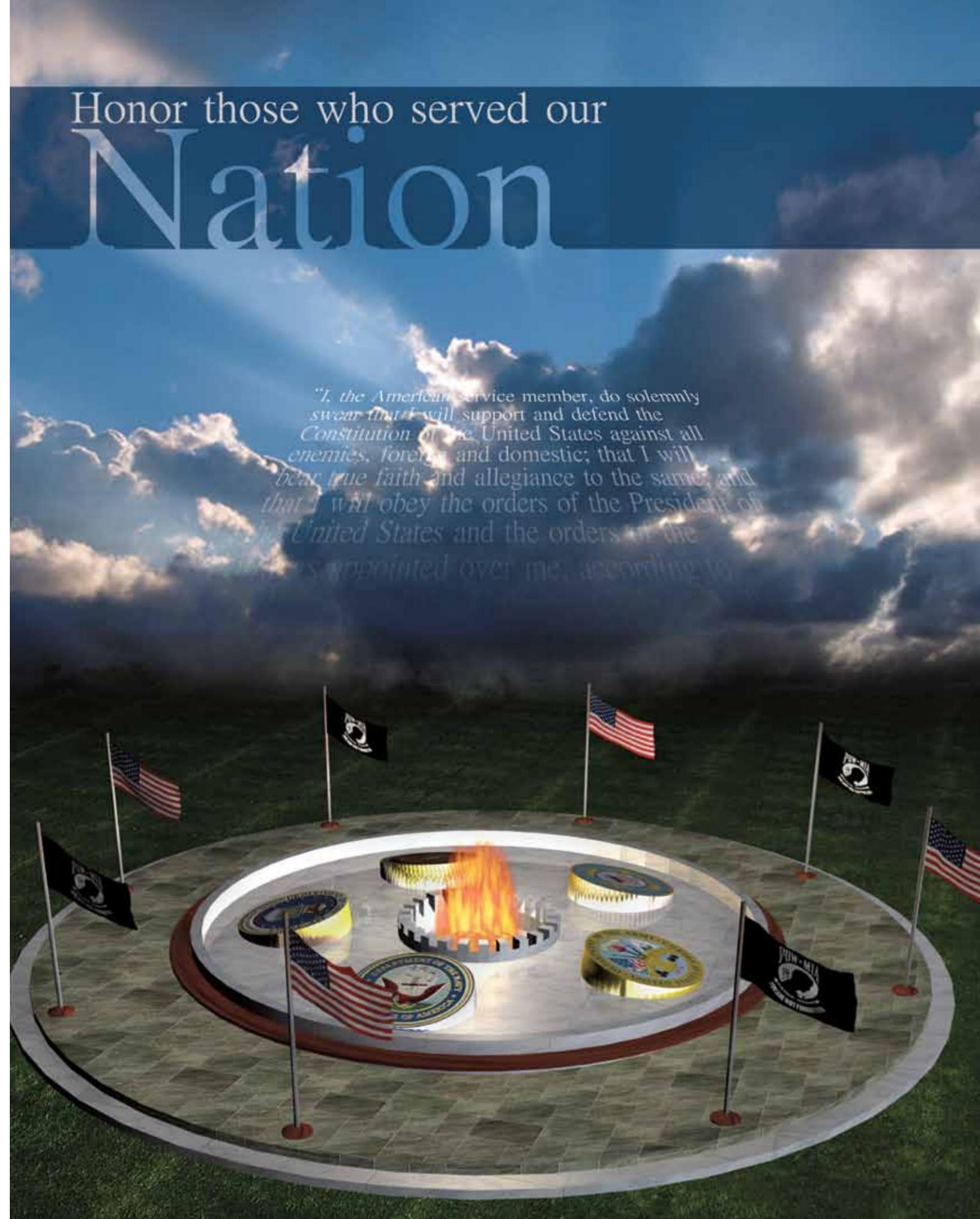
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Honor those who served our  
**Nation**

*"I, the American service member, do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to the laws and regulations of the United States."*

## Navy Personnel Can Update Contact Information on NFAAS

Sailors, civilians and their families need to be aware of Navy Family Accountability and Assessment System (NFAAS), a standardized method for the Navy to account, assess, manage and monitor the recovery process for personnel and their families affected or scattered by a widespread catastrophic event.

“With Hurricane Gustav 98.9 percent were accounted for within 72 hours,” said Capt. Ray Pietrzak, Personnel Accountability and Recovery Directorate for Commander, Navy Installations Command (CNIC). “The last percent and a half took a lot more time because we did not have accurate information on these individuals to locate them.”

It is important for Navy personnel to update their contact information with their commands, Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS), or NFAAS so that their needs, due to a catastrophic event such as hurricanes, can be

addressed by the Navy.

“It is critical that we find these individuals that are in a catastrophic event or their families,” said Pietrzak. “The faster we can find the individuals and know that they are OK, the faster we can get them help.”

For questions or to provide personnel accountability by phone, contact the Navy Personnel Customer Service Center at 1-866-827-5672.

Not only is it important for Navy personnel to update their contact information but just staying prepared is a major factor.

“I encourage the ideals of the Operation Prepare, which is to be continuously informed of the things around you: know that a hurricane ... or a potential catastrophic event coming your way ... be prepared by having an emergency essentials kit prepared for you and your family” said Pietrzak. “Thirdly, have that plan for your family to know where you are going to meet together in an evacuation situation.”

For more information about NFAAS, visit <https://navyfamily.navy.mil>. 

*Story by MCSN Richard J. Two Bulls, Defense Media Activity-Anacostia, Washington, D.C.*



▲ The Atlantic Ocean surges at Truman Annex aboard Naval Air Station Key West, Fla., as Hurricane Ike passes within 128 nautical miles of the air station.

## New Fitness Pilot Program Underway for Salty Dogs

A new physical-fitness pilot program named “Shape” hit select Navy installations this fall to optimize performance and increase retention of senior Navy personnel.

“Shape is a fitness program for our active-duty population 40 and over,” Commander, Navy Installations Command (CNIC) assistant program manager, Lisa R. Sexauer said. “We want to see our senior personnel, enlisted or officers, performing at their maximum capability and at the same time, help them fend off the effects of aging.”

“The program attacks physical fitness on two fronts,” Sexauer said, “from a physical activity standpoint and a nutrition standpoint. The program will provide a structured fitness

program where participants can receive a personal trainer, a personalized fitness assessment and counseling on how to increase physical activity outside of structured exercise and incorporating it throughout their day. Contractors carrying out the program will also provide basic dietary guidance, supported by a registered dietician at CNIC headquarters.”

The pilot program was rolled out at Naval Station San Diego; Joint-Forces Staff College, Norfolk; and Pearl Harbor.

“We already have an existing program at the Washington Navy Yard,” Sexauer said. “Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Mike Mullen, along with numerous three and four star admirals and other Navy personnel, participate at the base gym throughout the week.”

“The program is an outgrowth of Vice Adm. Robert T. Conway’s focus on improving our fitness programming across the

enterprise. As he traveled from installation to installation, he noticed there were varying levels of service to some degree. Having had the benefit, among many others at the Navy Yard, of one-on-one, somewhat-personalized service and seeing tremendous gains and improvements in his own health and well-being as a result, he wanted to see the same opportunities at other locations.”

CNIC headquarters provided the program construct and contracted with Indiana University to supply their graduates to carry out the program at each location. The program will be supervised and locally managed at each of the individual installations.

“We’ll be measuring the outcome of every participant,” said Sexauer. “They’ll be going through a baseline fitness assessment, where we’ll take a look at their body composition, their muscular strength, their muscular endurance and their cardiovascular fitness. Within certain prescribed time periods, we’ll re-measure the progression so we’ll have per-individual levels of improvement, and then we’ll roll that all up as an outcome measurement for the program as a whole.”

“We want that [age] 40-plus population to experience an optimal level of performance as they not only finish their time in the Navy but as they move into retirement years. We want them to maintain functionality and health. With successful participation, Shape should achieve an improved health and fitness profile for each of the participants, and at the same time, see a reduction in health care costs within our target

population, increased retention and optimized performance of senior personnel.”

*Story by MC3 Joshua B. Bruns, assigned to Commander, Navy Installations Command, Washington, D.C.*

## Sailors Paying Bills Even in Lean Times

Navy Personnel Command recently released the results of the 2008 Navy Financial Health Quick Poll. The poll was directed by the Secretary of the Navy and administered online by Navy Personnel Research, Studies and Technology this spring. Data was compiled from 3,761 Navy respondents.

The objective of the Quick Poll was to measure the level of financial stress recent economic changes, e.g., increased gas prices, insurance rates and higher housing costs are having on Sailors Navywide. The areas of focus included overall financial comfort, living expenses and how permanent change of station moves affect Sailors financially.

Of these polled, 11 percent of enlisted personnel describe their financial condition as “keeping my head above water” or “in over my head.” This is slightly lower than the 15 percent responding in 2006 Quality-of-Life Survey. The top financial problems for Sailors this past year related to housing costs, increased utilities expenses, insurance costs, property taxes, mortgage or rent.

Of those polled, 22 percent of enlisted and 43 percent of officers are home owners, most of whom have fixed-rate loans. A

Aviation Warfare Systems Operator 1st Class (AW) Jesse P. Hubble stationed aboard USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72), recently received the Navy/Marine Corps Medal by Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Mike Mullen.

Hubble, a member of Helicopter Anti-submarine Squadron 2, earned the medal for rescuing seven crew members from a crash of a Navy HH-60H helicopter off the coast of Southern California, Nov. 9, 2007, when Hubble was embarked during a Composite Training Unit Exercise (COMPTUEX).

According to his citation, Hubble launched in Hunter 610 to conduct a six-and-a-half hour range night combat search and rescue exercise. While returning to Lincoln, wingman Hunter 616 experienced a controllability failure and ditched at sea. Before being directed to do so, Hubble immediately donned his rescue gear and prepared for water entry. Without hesitation, he entered the low-light, no-moon, open ocean to rescue the seven exhausted survivors. “... he remained in 63-degree water for 45 minutes until all seven survivors were safely hoisted aboard the rescue helicopter. By his courageous and prompt actions in the face of great personal risk, Hubble prevented the loss of seven lives,” the citation read.

The San Diego native has been an AW for 10 years and said he really enjoys what he does.

“We train everyday, physically and mentally, for any situation that might happen. We prepare for the worst-case scenario, and that night was one of the worst. You just do what you have to do. I am glad everyone made it out alive.”

*Story by MC2 Arianne A. Anderson, USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72)*



small percentage of Sailors have adjustable or interest-only loans.

The Quick Poll also inquired about a Sailor’s ability to save. Of those polled, 64 percent of enlisted and 82 percent of officers who participated in the poll report contributing to some type of savings account. In addition, 57 percent of enlisted personnel and 58 percent of officers polled contribute to the Thrift Savings Program.

Most Sailors agreed that they are able to pay the bills and meet their financial obligations.

Financial health is important in the Navy because poor finances can impact readiness.

Problems can contribute to loss of security clearance, loss of job assignment, inability to pass overseas screening or other special duty screenings, increase in alcohol consumption, increase in domestic violence, increase in stress causing negative affects on health and could result in an unaccompanied tour.

The top four solutions Sailors recommended to combat financial stress were: subsidize transportation costs, stabilize work schedule for a second job, offer spouse employment opportunities and make child care readily available and more affordable.

Sailors who experience

## Speaking with Sailors

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in Safe Harbor, they remain in Safe Harbor for life. DOL and VA are among the primary providers of employment assistance. However, by maintaining close coordination with the member during the recovery phase, they can benefit from the knowledge of possible civil service opportunities, civilian job opportunities or benefit from assistance in setting employment goals.

My vision for Safe Harbor is to be recognized as the gold standard of care throughout the wounded, ill and injured community because of the customized, world-class support that we provide to each and every one of our Safe Harbor Sailors and their families.

I encourage Sailors who need a safe harbor to reach out to those of us who can — and want — to help. We’re here for you. The Safe Harbor website and toll free number will provide free access to program support, services and information. 

*Editor’s note: Information is available at [www.safeharbor.navy.mil](http://www.safeharbor.navy.mil). The Navy Safe Harbor team can be reached at [safeharbor@navy.mil](mailto:safeharbor@navy.mil) or toll-free at 1-877-746-8563.*



▲ **AT2 Scott Nottingham, assigned to Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 87,** studies technical manuals in the hangar bay of *USS Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71).

Photo by MC2 Nathan Laird

► **HM1 Robert Skibsted, assigned to USS Patriot (MCM 7),** assists MM3 Jeremy Holloway as he flushes pepper spray, from his face after being sprayed during a required force protection non-lethal weapons course in Sasebo, Japan.

Photo by MC2 Joshua J. Wahl



▲ **A Special Warfare Combatant-craft Crewman (SWCC) from Special Boat Team 20** holds a .50-caliber machine gun steady in between live-fire drills on the Pamlico Sound near Piney Island, N.C. Several Naval Special Warfare 11-meter rigid-hull inflatable boat detachments participated in the training, which included training on grenade launchers and .50-caliber machine guns preparing for an upcoming deployment.

Photo by MC3 Robyn Gerstenslager

To be considered for the "Around the Fleet" section, forward your **high resolution (5" x 7" at 300 dpi) images** with full credit and cutline information, including **full name, rank and duty station** to: [navyvisualnews@navy.mil](mailto:navyvisualnews@navy.mil)

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financial stress should consult their chain of command or contact the nearest fleet and family service center.

Navy Personnel Command's Web site [www.npc.navy.mil](http://www.npc.navy.mil) offers tips promoting financial fitness. ❧

**Story by MC2(AW) LaTunya Howard, Navy Personnel Command, Millington, Tenn.**

## Not Updating DEERS Could Cost You Dearly

Navy Personnel Command's Customer Service Center is calling dual-military couples to inform them that their marital status has not been updated in Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS), which could cost them dearly.

"When I call a dual-military family, the usual response is, 'I've already updated my service record.' Most Sailors assume that changing their Record of Emergency Data (Page 2) will automatically update their DEERS status. It doesn't," said Pamela Thomas, customer service representative at NPC. "They are two separate data systems. The Page 2 is a [Department of the Navy] data input and DEERS is for DoD.

"Many Sailors aren't aware of this difference," said Thomas.

"It's an accountability issue," said Cmdr. Reginald Edge, director of Pay, Personnel and Benefits Branch, Bureau of Naval Personnel.

Upon entering the Navy, a Sailor automatically receives Service Members Group Life Insurance (SGLI) coverage. When that Sailor marries or has

a child, the spouse or child is automatically enrolled in Family Servicemembers Group Life Insurance (FSGLI). Both are immediate benefits that start when the service members update their Page 2 or opt to decline coverage.

"On a small scale, if our Navy system shows 100 spouses being covered by FSGLI but only 80 are enrolled in DEERS, we have a problem," said Edge. "DOD is paying for 20 families that it hasn't accounted for. Now on a larger scale, we're not talking about hundreds of spouses, it is thousands, and we're spending millions that could be better appropriated."

The cost is passed onto Sailors as a debt that DoD will collect.

FSGLI is a program extended to the spouses and children of service members insured under the SGLI program. FSGLI provides up to a maximum of \$100,000 of insurance coverage for spouses, not to exceed the amount of SGLI the insured member has in force, and \$10,000 for dependent children.

"The issue of accountability for our dual-military couples is that these couples upon marriage already have identification cards because both are active duty. This means they don't necessarily go into a DEERS site at Personnel Support Detachment or Pass and ID to receive the benefits associated with a new card," said Kathy Wardlaw, DEERS policy analyst, Bureau of Naval Personnel.

"This is where we feel the oversight happens. Most Sailors will update their Page 2 to add their military spouse. And, that's when the automatic enrollment in FSGLI starts; unless the Sailor declines coverage in writing, they are responsible for that premium."

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# Around the Fleet

► **USS Abraham Lincoln** (CVN 72) is moored at Naval Station Pearl Harbor for a brief port visit before completing a seven-month deployment supporting maritime security operations and theater security cooperation in the U.S. 5th and 7th Fleet areas of responsibility.

Photo by MCC David Rush



▲ **Region Hawaii Ceremonial Guard** forms up in preparation for a burial and ash-scattering ceremony to honor Pearl Harbor survivor Chief Carpenter's Mate Herbert B. Power at USS *Utah* Memorial on historic Ford Island. Power, a diver and crewmember aboard the minesweeper USS *Widgeon* (AM 22), was credited with saving the lives of numerous Sailors trapped aboard the battleship USS *Oklahoma* (BB 37) during salvage operations, Dec. 7, 1941.

Photo by MC James E. Foehl



▲ **ABHAN Robert Reveles**, from Bell Gardens, Calif., marks aircraft movements on the "Ouija Board" in flight deck control aboard USS *John C. Stennis* (CVN 74).

Photo by MC3 Josue L. Escobosa



▲ **Chief Aviation Boatswains Mate (Fuel) Joseph Garrido**, a high-risk instructor at the Center for Naval Engineering, Learning Site Yokosuka, exits the fire fighting trainer after lighting a fire for a team training exercise.

Photo by Yeoman Senior Chief Ivan Rivera Jr.

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The cost to the average Sailor is \$5.50 per month for a spouse under 35. That's \$66 annually. If the dual-military couple has been married for 5 years, \$330 is owed in back premiums for each member.

Sailors must update DEERS within 60 days of any life-changing event such as marriage, divorce, birth of a child or adoption. Failure to do so could result in breaks in eligibility for that family.

For more information on FSGLI coverage, visit <http://www.npc.navy.mil/CommandSupport/CasualtyAssistance/FSGLI/>, or call 1-866-U-ASK-NPC.

*Story by MC2(AW) LaTunya Howard, Navy Personnel Command, Millington, Tenn.*

## Savings Deposit Program Builds Wealth for Sailors Deployed to Combat

Sailors can earn a guaranteed 10 percent interest on their savings annually while deployed to or in support of a combat zone.

Uniformed service members can participate in the Savings Deposit Program, which is administered by the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS), after 30 consecutive days of being deployed outside the United States as long as they are receiving hostile fire and imminent danger pay.

"The Savings Deposit Program is an excellent way for Sailors and other service members to set aside some money and earn a great guaranteed interest rate while serving in a combat zone," said David DuBois, deputy director, Fleet and Family

Support Programs, Commander Navy Installations Command (CNIC), Washington. "It's a great alternative to a low-interest savings or checking account."

To make a deposit into the fund, Sailors need to contact their military finance office. According to DuBois, the last day to make a deposit into the fund is the date of departure from the overseas assignment. However, interest will accrue up to 90 days after return from deployment.

"Don't confuse this program with the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP)," added DuBois. "TSP is available to everyone in the military. The Savings Deposit Program is available only to those serving in designated combat zones."

Sailors can contribute more than \$10,000, but interest will not accrue after that amount, he said. Also, withdrawing the money before leaving the combat zone is not authorized, unless there is an emergency.

"The savings program originally provided Vietnam veterans a way to earn extra money while on their Southeast Asia tours," said DuBois. DoD reopened the program to *Desert Storm* troops in 1991, and extended it to troops in Bosnia in 1996. The program was further expanded in 1997, 2001 and 2003.

*Story courtesy of Fleet and Family Readiness, Commander, Navy Installations Command, Millington Detachment, Millington, Tenn.*

# The Navy's "Swiss Army Knife"

## Completes Southern Partnership Station Mission to Caribbean

Story by Laura Seal

**W**ith the surface of the Caribbean Sea glistening in the bright sun above him, Navy Diver 1st Class Overton Pierce swam inches above the sandy ocean floor off the coast of Antigua this summer. As Pierce swam, he could hear the sound of his every inhale and exhale through his SCUBA apparatus. Pierce's hand clutched a rope along the ocean floor while his dive partner, a Regional Security Service diver from the Commonwealth of Dominica, swam alongside. Together, Pierce and his partner were conducting an underwater search drill using the rope to guide their trajectory.

▲ NDCS Billy Gilbert, assigned to Mobile Diving and Salvage Unit 2, uses a pipe wrench to remove a damaged propeller on a small patrol boat while ND3 Kyle Duncan, assigned to Explosive Ordnance Disposal Expeditionary Supply Unit 2, and a member of the Saint Kitts and Nevis coast guard watch.

► Global Fleet Station's mission is to maintain strong multi-lateral partnerships, support the goals of the U.S. Maritime Strategy and enhance regional stability and security by promoting multinational working relationships.



▲ ND2 Brian Elkins-Barkley (right), stationed with Mobile Diving and Salvage Unit 2 and Antigua Regional Security Service Ordinary Seaman Julio L. Charles prepare to leave the surface to inspect the hull of USNS *Grasp* (T-ARS 51) on a training dive during Navy Diver-Global Fleet Station 2008 in St. Johns, Antigua.



▲ ND1 John-Elisha Andrews from Mobile Diving and Salvage Unit 2 provides direction to a group of divers made up of U.S. Navy and Antigua Regional Security Service divers during a hull inspection and training dive on USNS *Grasp* (T-ARS 51).



▲ USNS *Grasp* (T-ARS 51) sits pierside in Antigua in support of Navy Diver- Southern Partnership (ND-SPS). During the three-month ND-SPS deployment, *Grasp* visited seven nations in the Caribbean supporting engagements with partner nation militaries and communities.

Five days later ashore, civil service mariner Rob Alvarado dipped a paintbrush into a can of pink paint and applied it carefully to the wall of a 60-year old classroom at a school for the deaf and blind. All around him, Alvarado's shipmates busied themselves improving the school – power washing the

exterior, gathering trash and landscaping the grounds. Pierce and Alvarado were part of a unique, three-month international outreach and maritime security mission to the Caribbean aboard Military Sealift Command rescue and salvage ship USNS *Grasp* (T-ARS 51) that began

when the ship arrived in Antigua and Barbuda early July and ended when *Grasp* departed St. Georges, Grenada, the first part of September. At seven ports in as many nations, *Grasp's* crew of 26 civil service mariners and 14 embarked Navy divers participated in Navy Diver – Southern Partnership Station

(ND-SPS). Together, they conducted joint maritime security dive operations and community relations projects throughout the Eastern Caribbean. Dive operations with partner nation defense forces safely disposed of an underwater World War II-era unexploded ordnance, assisted host nations with goodwill projects ashore, delivered donated goods and mentored two groups of young sea cadets from the Barbados and St. Vincent Coast Guards.

ND-SPS is a U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) directed operation implemented by Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command (NAVSO) and the recently re-established U.S. 4th Fleet. Many of these activities fall outside of *Grasp's* traditional missions – recovering large objects from the sea, towing, firefighting and de-beaching – but for a ship nicknamed “the Navy's Swiss army knife,” it was little challenge for both crew and platform to adapt to this newly-assigned mission.

“This is a great opportunity to demonstrate the range of missions that this ship is fully

capable of doing, from recovering gear to assisting a ship in distress to towing vessels and, now, hosting dive operations in coordination with our international partners,” said Capt. Jose Delfaus, *Grasp's* civil service master for the first leg of the deployment. In a routine crew rotation, Capt. Doug Casavant took the helm as master aboard *Grasp* later in the deployment. Typically, *Grasp* and MSC's three other

rescue and salvage ships deploy on specific salvage or towing missions. Before this deployment, *Grasp's* most recent missions included recovering two downed U.S. Air Force F-15C fighter jets from the Gulf of Mexico earlier this year and recovering more than 90,000 pounds of debris from the harbor in La Maddalena, Italy, in 2007.

This mission, however, had a different set of goals – to enhance maritime security in the Caribbean and build partnerships. To do this, *Grasp* and a complement of U.S. Navy divers deployed to conduct dive operations and joint training evolutions with their colleagues from the defense forces, police departments and coast guards of each nation visited – Antigua and Barbuda, St. Kitts and Nevis, Dominica, St. Lucia, Barbados, St. Vincent and The Grenadines, and Grenada.

*Grasp* is operated and navigated by civil service mariners (CIVMAR), while specially trained rescue and salvage divers conduct diving operations. The divers were from the Navy Expeditionary Combat Command's Mobile Diving and Salvage Unit (MDSU) 2 and Explosive Ordnance Disposal Expeditionary Support Unit 2, both out of Norfolk; Underwater Construction Teams 1 and 2, respectively based out of Norfolk and Port Hueneme, Calif.; and Explosive Ordnance Disposal Operational Support Unit (EODOSU) 7, based out of San Diego.

*Grasp* also has a permanent detachment of four Navy Sailors who operate the communications suite. Because of the unique nature of this deployment, a mission commander, Navy Lt. Cmdr. Bobby Greene from EODOSU 7 was also embarked to coordinate the overall effort.

**Partnerships with Host Nation Divers**

At the core of *Grasp's* mission were the joint maritime security dive operations, which included two main components: sharing diving procedures with host nation divers and completing maritime security projects in each nation. All operations were requested by and coordinated with the partner nations so that the projects could be specifically tailored to meet regional needs.

“As I was developing our joint training schedule, I went on an advance team visit to each country to find out what their particular needs were,” said Navy Diver Senior Chief Billy Gilbert, a master diver from MDSU 2 who was one of the primary developers of the dive schedules for each country. “From there, I was able to develop a schedule that addressed the specific needs of the groups we were working with.”

Gilbert and the other planners determined that two levels of joint training were needed: basic and advanced joint training. Each had elements of classroom indoctrination and

dive operations. The two, two-week basic training evolutions covered emergency diving procedures, dive planning, hull and pier inspection techniques and search methods.

The first basic course was held in Antigua and Barbuda with 13 divers from Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica and St. Lucia. The second basic course was held in Barbados with 22 divers from Barbados, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Grenada.

During the follow-on, two-week advanced course, held in Barbados, U.S. and 27 partner-nation divers shared information and techniques on more in-depth topics including self-contained underwater breathing apparatus, commonly known as SCUBA, maintenance, operational planning and advanced medicine. They coordinated on dive planning and also gained hands-on experience with the recompression chamber to treat dive-related illnesses.

“I have learned an exceptional amount about diving over the last month,” said Jihan Lampkin, a Regional Security Service diver from St. Vincent. “This has been a very pleasant experience, and I look forward to working with the U.S. again in the future.”

Gilbert noted that there were tangible results to the joint training. In Antigua and Barbuda, two days after *Grasp’s* departure, local divers used procedures they had practiced with *Grasp’s* dive team to locate some small arms that had been lost in Antigua’s coastal waters.

“This makes me feel like we really gave them something they can use,” said Gilbert.

In addition to the joint training, in each nation, *Grasp’s* divers conducted requested maritime security operations. In most nations, the Navy divers worked with local divers to conduct and videotape antiterrorism/force protection pier surveys. In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, two specially trained U.S. Navy divers from EODMU 2 joined *Grasp* to detonate an unexploded World War II-era ordnance that had been located by a recreational diver.

### Reaching Out to the Community – Projects Ashore

With the Navy divers conducting continual, joint dive operations, *Grasp’s* civilian mariners and permanent military detachment led the effort to conduct community relations projects ashore. The ship’s masters and chief



▲ Civil Service Mariners and Sailors, from the USNS *Grasp*, remove debris and improve landscaping at a home for battered women while participating in a community relations project during Navy Dive – Southern Partnership Station 2008.

mate Sean Tortora coordinated with the U.S. Embassy in Barbados to identify and organize shoreside infrastructure repair projects in Antigua and Barbuda, St. Lucia and Grenada; the delivery of donated goods in Barbados and Grenada; and an interactive tour of *Grasp* for sea cadets in Barbados and St. Vincent. The embarked divers – occupied most days with dive operations – also assisted with all of these projects as available.

“CIVMARs have been front and center in community relations, which is outstanding,” said Tortora.

In Antigua and Barbuda, *Grasp’s* crew spent three days and more than 445 man-hours doing improvement projects at a 60-year-old school for the blind and deaf. The ship’s crew pressure washed the building’s exterior; painted all interior and exterior walls – a surface area of more than 11,000 square feet; removed 21, 55-gallon lawn bags of trash; and landscaped the school’s courtyard.

“This project is important to me because I am happy when I see my students happy, and they appreciate these things,” said Natasha Frances, one of the school’s teachers.



▲ Chief Mate Sean Tortora, a civil service mariner on board the USNS *Grasp*, gives Barbados’ Sea Cadets a tour of the bridge during Navy Dive – Southern Partnership Station 2008.



▲ ND2 Brian Elkins-Barkley, from Mobile Diving and Salvage Unit 2, Company 2-3, participates in a community relations project with Barbados’ Sea Cadets aboard USNS *Grasp* during Navy –Dive Southern Partnership Station 2008.

About three weeks later, *Grasp’s* crew spent two days in St. Lucia partnering with Peace Corps volunteers, local residents and St. Lucian Forestry Service representatives to clear a nature trail on a mountain that had been littered with industrial debris.

“It took us about an hour or so just to hike up there, and it was really hot, humid and rainy,” said Deck Machinist Joel Tano. “It was worth it, though.”

In Barbados, *Grasp* delivered two pallets – about 1,500 pounds – of donated Project Handclasp toys, skateboards, rollerblades, knee pads and safety helmets, as well as toiletries and personal care items, to Auntie Olga’s Needy Children Fund. The fund was founded in 1953 by “Auntie Olga” Lopes-Seale, who has been accepting donations and distributing them to local needy children for more than 55 years.

“These things will not only bring joy and happiness to the children’s lives but a sense of relief for the parents,” stated Lopes-Seale. “I can’t tell you enough how grateful I am for all the donations the USNS *Grasp* has made here.”

Also in Barbados, *Grasp* hosted 13 sea cadets and two officers from the Barbados Coast Guard for an interactive tour of the ship. The cadets, ranging in age from 11 to 20, got a comprehensive, hands-on look at the deck department, engine department and dive locker.

With the ship’s master, chief mate and first engineer providing direction, cadets on the bridge and in the engine room started up

the main engines, shifted power from one generator to another and communicated with each other throughout the process.

“Our goal was to not just take the cadets around the ship like a museum tour, but also to get them some hands-on experience with what it’s like to work aboard a T-ARS,” said Casavant.

On deck, several cadets got to don full firefighting gear and immersion suits as well as the 25-pound deep-sea dive helmet.

“It was so cool to have the cadets on the ship,” said Engine Utilityman Vincent Ransom. “We’re away from home all the time, so we miss our families, and being around those kids was a plus.”

In fact, the day was such a success that *Grasp’s* crew organized a similar event with 19 sea cadets from the St. Vincent Coast Guard.

In Grenada, the ship’s crew conducted repairs to a battered women’s shelter. They also donated 750 pounds of Project Handclasp goods to the shelter and to local government officials for further distribution.

“We want these people to look at the United States as friends, so for the CIVMARs to lead the charge in organizing and completing these projects has added greatly to the success of the mission,” said Greene. **NS**

– Seal is the public affairs officer, Military Sealift Command, Washington, D.C.



Photo by MCC Erik Barker

# Teaming Up for Humanity

*Nassau and Kearsarge Provide Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief at Home and Abroad*

Story by MCC (SCW/SW) James Pinsky and MC2(SW) Elizabeth Viahos

▲ Residents of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, started to rebuild their homes and neighborhoods after recent damage from Hurricane Ike. America's contribution to the relief efforts are coordinated by the United States Agency for International Development and its Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance. The amphibious assault ship USS *Kearsarge* (LHD 3) was diverted to conduct hurricane relief operations in Haiti.

Mother Nature can be quite temperamental. Her playful breeze can quickly transform into the brutal sucker-punch of a howling gale – or worse. When Tropical Storm Fay and hurricanes Gustav, Hanna and Ike leveled the Caribbean country of Haiti and Ike flooded the island community of Galveston, Texas, some of the residents were left adrift, wondering what to do next.

This is when USS *Kearsarge* (LHD 3) and USS *Nassau* (LHA 4) stepped up to the plate, ready for whatever pitch was headed in their direction.

The Maritime Strategy takes Mother Nature's mercurial temperament into account when expanding the core capability of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

"Building on relationships forged in times of calm, we will continue to mitigate human suffering as the vanguard of interagency and multinational efforts, both in a deliberate, proactive fashion and in response to crises. Human suffering moves us to act, and the expeditionary character of maritime forces uniquely positions them to provide assistance. Our ability to conduct rapid and sustained non-combatant evacuation operations is critical to relieving the plight of our citizens and others when their safety is in jeopardy," states the Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower, released in 2007.

The mission laid out in front of *Kearsarge* and *Nassau* was clear — to ease human suffering in their respective assigned areas and save lives.

The pitch was thrown. Game on.

## Two Ships, One Mission of Hope

*Kearsarge* was engaged in *Continuing Promise* (CP) '08 in the Caribbean Sea when the unholy quartet of Fay, Gustav, Hanna and Ike leveled Haiti.

On Sept. 5, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) requested assistance and Southern Command directed Commander, 4th Fleet to divert LHD 3 from her humanitarian/civic assistance (HCA) mission in Colombia to help the organization mitigate human suffering and loss of life due to the storms' effects. *Kearsarge* wasted no time, pulling in on the tail end of Ike's remnants.

When Hurricane Ike made landfall Sept. 13, *Nassau* was already at sea conducting routine operations. Ike laid waste to Galveston, Texas, and the surrounding communities. LHA 4 was immediately directed south to operate off the Florida coast before receiving orders to move into the Gulf of Mexico to assess the unsavory conditions that the hurricane had left in its wake.



Photo by MCS Joshua Adam Nuzzo

◀ Service members embarked aboard the amphibious assault ship *USS Kearsarge (LHD 3)* unload food and supplies for delivery to areas affected by recent hurricanes. *Kearsarge* has been diverted from the scheduled *Continuing Promise 2008* humanitarian assistance deployment in the western Caribbean to conduct hurricane relief operations in Haiti.



Photo by MCC James G. Pinsky

◀ Lt. j.g. Albert Gembara (right), Officer-in-Charge of Maritime Civil Affairs Team (MCAT) 205, speaks with United Nations and World Health Organization (WHO) logistical workers, Juan Francois Milhaud (left) and R.B.M Tomaszek at the United Nations compound in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

Galveston and Haiti were swamped by Sailors wanting to make a contribution in one way or another.

*Kearsarge* Sailors volunteered in droves to be placed ashore first at an emergency distribution center in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti's capital city, then throughout the country as they invested their sweat, muscle, knowledge and compassion in the Haitian people.

"This is truly a team effort," said *Kearsarge* Commanding Officer Capt. Walter Towns.

"Everyone from the craft masters, helicopter pilots, flight deck and well-deck crews, to the unsung heroes on the working parties carrying hundreds of pounds of food and water supplies ... They do it all without complaint because they know their efforts are saving lives."

In Galveston, *Nassau's* crew hit the ground ready to roll up their sleeves and get their hands dirty.

Amphibious Construction Battalion (ACB) 2 hit Galveston's beaches via landing craft units, where they immediately put their large equipment and versatile capabilities to use, providing emergency debris clearance around critical infrastructures.

Steelworker Construction Recruit Lane Adger and Hospital Corpsman 1st Class John Southwell emphasized the importance of working as a team to help the residents of Galveston.

"Everybody in the unit will play a huge part, ensuring we all handle our individual responsibilities for the team and coming

together as one to help those we are here to help," said Adger.

"We have a very good team, and it's one team, one fight," Southwell concurred. "Everyone's skills are augmented through one another, and there's so much training involved to help prepare us to step in at any time and get the job done."

The immediate needs of both ravaged communities - food and water - remained the same.

The day *Kearsarge* arrived in Haiti, the "Condors" from Marine Corps Air Station New River, N.C., flew two relief missions to the island, delivering 12-metric tons of pre-packaged food such as flour, beans, rice and high-energy biscuits from the World Food Program, the food aid branch of the United Nations.

"Assisting those in need due to a natural disaster is something we've been prepared to do since the onset of the Caribbean phase of *Continuing Promise 2008*," said Capt. Fernandez Ponds, *Continuing Promise* mission commander.

*Continuing Promise* worked with other agencies off the ship to assist with palletizing and loading supplies onto the helicopters then throughout Haiti, offering their sweat and even their sympathy for their fellow human beings. On numerous occasions *Continuing Promise* workers handed relief supplies to the Haitians themselves who donated as much of their own sweat to their homeland as did their international friends.

According to Capt. Bob Lineberry,

mission commander, Navy Task Group Ike, approximately 200 Sailors were out in Galveston each day, helping distribute essential supplies, clearing debris and cleaning up areas of the city.

"Our primary focus was on key infrastructure," Lineberry explained. "We spent a lot of Sailor and Marine manpower out at the port facility and airport. I'm very happy to hear both sites will be open soon. It was essential for city officials and our nation to get the key infrastructures going so commerce can start flowing."

## Air Support

Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 28 played an instrumental role in Galveston and Haiti. HSC 28 brought members of Amphibious Squadron 6 and Tactical Air Control Squadron (TACRON) 21 aboard *Nassau* while she was en route to Galveston, and different detachments conducted supply transport and medevac operations in both affected areas.

Lt. Robert Holihan, a pilot for HSC 28, Det. 5, recalled the rescue of an American citizen in Haiti.

"The initial planning stage noted that she was an elderly woman with diabetes," said Holihan. "She was out of insulin, running low on food, and she was bad off. We had a corpsman with us who did an assessment when we picked her up. She was able to walk, but you could tell she was in pain. The ambulance was waiting for us



Photo by MCS David Danals

▲ Hilary Warren, a pediatrician from Project HOPE, examines a child during medical aid operations at a neighborhood school in Gros Morne, Haiti.

when we landed to take her to a hospital."

Holihan went on to describe the conditions from which the unfortunate patient was rescued.

"There were parts of the town where she lived that were washed out," he explained. "You could see trucks, cars and buses that were stuck in the mud, and people were wading in streets filled with water."

Playing a key support role in the air was the 21-person detachment from TACRON 21, based out of Naval Amphibious Base Little Creek, Virginia Beach, Va. They flew aboard *Nassau* to support air operations as it became clear that the terrain where the helicopters would be landing was unusual at best.

Lt. Cmdr. Jason Arganbright took charge of his personnel, spearheading successful efforts to establish a landing zone (LZ) with advisory air traffic control service at Galveston's Ball High School and Galveston Scholes International Airport, whose tower was out of service. Establishment of those LZs enhanced the safety of the helicopters involved in the relief efforts.

"We are here to ensure safety for those aircraft being used so they can safely take off and land in

this unusual area," said Arganbright. "We are a large portion of the air puzzle, providing services from air planning all the way through execution afloat and ashore. Without our services, transport by air from the sea to this area would have assumed a higher risk."

## The Impact on the Sailors

Many Sailors aboard *Kearsarge* quickly understood how lucky they were.

"The countryside is ravaged by flood waters," said Seaman Scott Polk, while flying over farmland and small towns outside Gonaives. "People are walking in almost knee-deep flood water, and families are sleeping on the rooftops of their homes. This [humanitarian relief] is hard work; it's hot, and the bags of rice weigh almost 100 pounds [each], but my worries don't even compare to those of the Haitian people. So, I'll push through this day and bring relief to those who are in need."

"We came to the site to assess their situation and found that they had fairly good nutrition but were on the brink of running out of food," said Cmdr. Nathan Uebelhoer,

a medical augmentee embarked aboard *Kearsarge*. "Our main mission [now] is to bring them food and also attend to some of their acute health issues."

For a handful of *Nassau* Sailors in Texas, the impact of the disaster - and the importance of the Maritime Strategy - hit home for the first time.

"The last time I was home to visit was in July," said Quartermaster Seaman



Photo by MCS Erik Barker

▲ BU2 Christopher Woods, embarked aboard *USS Kearsarge (LHD 3)*, unloads construction materials for a four-hole burnout for use during engineering projects. *Kearsarge (LHD 3)* is providing disaster relief support to Haiti.



▲ Medical personnel from USS *Kearsarge* (LHD 3) carry medical supplies to a nearby church in the village of Marose, Haiti. *Kearsarge* is supporting humanitarian assistance/disaster relief in Haiti after a series of tropical storms devastated much of the country.

Adalberto Fuentes, a native son of Galveston. “Everything looked good and conditions were normal, like they have always been. Now as I sit here assessing the effect Hurricane Ike has had on my house and the neighborhood I’ve loved over the years, I see nothing but devastation and destruction.”

“A lot of individuals in the area were affected by Hurricane Ike, including my parents and the house I grew up in,” said Aviation Ordnanceman Airman (AW) Cody Blair, from Laporte, Texas. “My aunt was also affected by the storm, and her vacation home was ruined, but no one was hurt or injured. It feels really good to know I can help make a difference in restoring the area I once called home.”

Senior Chief Aviation Electronics Technician (AW/SW) Raul Castro, quality assurance officer on board *Nassau* and a Houston native, is the only one in his family who left the area.

“The rest of my family still resides there,” said Castro. “The majority of [my family] did lose power, suffer structural damage and other effects from the storm, but they’re all okay.”

“I was shocked to see how bad my home was really hit,” Fuentes continued. “As I walked through the neighborhood and saw some of the houses weren’t bad, I was hoping mine wouldn’t be too bad either. Then, as I arrived at my home, I was greeted by fences being knocked over, trees laying on the ground, broken windows and debris all around. It was a devastating sight to see.”

For members of both crews, the surrounding devastation motivated them to pitch in as much as they possibly could.

“I am glad to be here helping the people of Haiti,” said Canadian Air Force Capt. Jolene Cook, a medical augmentee embarked aboard *Kearsarge*. “As a doctor, I hope to treat as many people as I possibly can, but I will be happy to help these people out in any way possible.”

“There are a lot of small wounds on these individuals that have occurred within the last

aboard *Nassau*, jumped at the chance to lend a hand in Galveston.

“It feels great to be here helping out,” said Bellock. “I joined the military to help out, and to be able to participate in something like this is rewarding for so many reasons.”

“I was born in San Antonio and lived in the Sugarland area as well,” said Lt. Cmdr. Eric Lull, training and readiness officer for Amphibious Squadron 6. “It’s great to be back and be able to help out.”

“I’m serving as the liaison officer for Navy Task Group Ike. I’m going to be on land in Galveston coordinating any information *Nassau* will need to help them complete their mission in supporting the relief efforts.”

“We are always prepared for any and every mission,” said Chief Boatswain’s Mate Carl Lemois of Assault Craft Unit (ACU) 2, attached to *Kearsarge*.

“Essentially every mission we are tasked with is the same whether it is planned or not. We move stores, gear and personnel onto the beach; we just have to have the flexibility to get the job done.”

“It makes me feel good to be apart of a mission that is really making an impact on peoples’ lives,” said Engineman 3rd Class



▲ An MH-53E *Sea Dragon* helicopter assigned to Helicopter Mine Countermeasures Squadron 15 embarked aboard USS *Nassau* (LHA 4) lands on the football field at Ball High School in Galveston, Texas.

few weeks that have not had any treatment,” Uebelhoer concurred, “We are here for any acute issues we may see. We have the ability to do minor surgical procedures, but we are here to try to see as many of the critical patients as possible.”

Operations Specialist 3rd Class (SW/AW) Terrance Bellock, a Texas resident embarked

Photo by MC3 Kenneth R. Hendrix



Photo by MCSA Joshua Adam Nuzzo

Galen Russell, also of ACU 2. “We are helping keep the people of Haiti strong by supplying them with everything we possibly can.”

### Leaving Their Mark

*Continuing Promise’s* contributions to Haiti’s recovery have amounted to more than 17 million metric tons of relief supplies,



Photo by MC3 Kenneth R. Hendrix

▲ EN1 Robert Chapman, assigned to USS *Nassau* (LHA 4), carries water and ice to pass out to Galveston residents during a food convoy to supply people affected by Hurricane Ike with basic items.

including delivering 26,000 gallons of water to devastated communities like Gonaives, Jeremie, Port-de-Paix, Les Cayes, Saint Marc and outlying populations and transporting three Americans and one Dominican Republic citizen to safety. The team also conducted more than 10,245 sorties and more than 36 surface missions.

In the wake of Mother Nature’s wrath, Haiti and Galveston discovered what the United States already knew - that *Kearsarge* and *Nassau* were, in addition to being warships dreaded by America’s enemies, forces equally willing and capable of extending their hands to those in dire need.

Overall, *Nassau* provided aid to Galveston by clearing 1,075 cubic yards of debris, treating 14 minor medical cases and sending a total of 1,129 Sailors ashore. They also helped local, state and federal agencies distribute approximately 27,440 Meals Ready to Eat, 22,135 cases of water and 44,285 bags of ice to 6,878 families at two Federal Emergency Management Agency points of distribution. Galveston’s city manager, Steve Leblanc,



Photo by Lt. Jsg. Lydia Bock

▲ Sailors assigned to Amphibious Construction Battalion 2, embarked on USS *Nassau* (LHA 4) clean up damage caused by Hurricane Ike at the Galveston Regional Airport main terminal building.

◀ AC2 Earle Huskinson, assigned to the amphibious assault ship USS *Nassau* (LHA 4), gives bags of ice to Galveston resident Lloyd Smith during a food convoy to various neighborhoods to supply people affected by Hurricane Ike with basic items. *Nassau* anchored off the coast of Galveston to support civil authorities in disaster recovery as directed in the wake of Hurricane Ike.

was very grateful for *Nassau’s* assistance.

“It was critical to have the [machinist mates] from the ship who were able to make the parts we needed to help fix and operate our water system,” Leblanc explained. “I’d like to say a very special thanks to the Navy.”

“I’m extremely pleased with the performance of all the Sailors and Marines,” said Capt. James Boorujy, USS *Nassau* commanding officer. “Every day we had a long line of Sailors ready to come ashore and help out in any way possible.”

“Everything went great with our recovery efforts and aid. It’s going to take some time to restore Galveston, but I think the assistance of state and federal agencies as well as the Navy helped jump start the effort.”

This is one of those missions you will always remember,” said Marine Capt. Clennon Roe, *Kearsarge* combat cargo officer. “Even though we are a fighting force, I believe we have proved ourselves to effectively be able to deliver humanitarian support to various countries around the world when we are needed.”

In that aspect, *Kearsarge*, *Nassau* and their embarked units hit a grand slam out of the ballpark. ☞

**Vlahos is assigned to Defense Media Activity - Anacostia, Washington, DC, and Pinsky is assigned to NECC Combat Camera Det. Atlantic, Norfolk.**

# Wounded Warrior

One Sailor's Journey Back to the Front Lines

Story by MC2(SW) Elizabeth Vlahos, photos by MC1(AW) Brien Aho

**W**hen Lt. John Pucillo gets up in the morning, he goes through his usual routine. He takes a shower and shaves, and then puts on his leg, his clothes and his sneakers.

"Some people, they brush their teeth in the morning or they may add some mouth rinse or something like that," he says. "Me, I have to add a leg."

Pucillo, an explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) officer and a junior class student at the Naval War College in Newport, R.I., is one service member who has come back from overseas combat with a significant injury – in his case, a below-the-knee amputation of his left leg.

Despite an injury that most people would consider career-ending, though, his career hasn't even slowed down. He's due to graduate from the Naval War College with a master's degree in national strategic decision making and naval studies. With this degree, he hopes to leave for his next command as a better-rounded officer. He plans on heading back to the EOD community as a leader.

Not surprisingly, though, he did none of this alone. Pucillo relied on the Navy, his family, his shipmates and everyone who assisted in his rehabilitation.

## Safe Harbor

Pucillo's quest to reclaim his career was made more achievable with the Navy's Safe Harbor program. Safe Harbor provides non-medical care management to wounded, ill or injured Sailors. The program focuses on the Sailor's pay, administrative, and personnel needs so the Sailor can concentrate fully on recovery.

"Safe Harbor helps Sailors and their families have access to services that already exist throughout the Navy and throughout the Department of Defense," said Capt. Key Watkins, commanding officer for the Safe Harbor program. "I see the program really as a four-star concierge service, possibly with a kick, because sometimes we have to be a little bit more forceful, get doors open where they wouldn't necessarily open for a normal Sailor under normal circumstances."

At the Safe Harbor call center, Chief Yeoman Byron Britt answers the phones. He

finds the job professionally and personally satisfying – and full of surprises.

"When the phone rings you never know who is going to be on the other line," Britt said. It could be a service member or their mother or wife. The one guarantee is that whoever it is you will be able to help them through a difficult time."

On a typical day, Britt might help a family member resolve an injured Sailor's pay problem or help a family with a Tricare issue. Some days, he gets even more personally involved with families who are dealing with life-altering injuries.

"One my most memorable moments while working on the call center was when we had the honor of meritoriously promoting a petty officer who was severely wounded while he was serving in Iraq," Britt said. "His mom and wife were so proud ... Moments like that make me realize just how important what we do is."

In addition to Safe Harbor, the Department of the Navy has the Wounded Warrior Regiment, run by the Marine Corps. A similar 24/7 service is offered by the Department of Defense Military OneSource:

The Wounded Warrior Resource Center provides a centralized telephone number and e-mail address for service members and their families and ensures families and caregivers have a number to call at any time, if they have concerns or other difficulties during their recovery process.

"Safe Harbor was huge," Pucillo remembers. "They were there from the start. Along with my EOD brethren, the [command master chief at my follow-on command] worked closely with them and my wife. They would give me all these opportunities, and I owe them a lot. It was great to pick up the phone and say 'I'm having a problem here. Can you do something about it?' and normally it was resolved in two to three weeks, if not days. When I get the chance, I'd like to say 'thanks' and also do whatever I can for them if I'm ever able to repay them. They were very on point with what was going on in my life, and I appreciate that."

Pucillo's most memorable experience with Safe Harbor came from the highest possible source in the armed forces.

"Admiral (Michael) Mullen came to my

bedside and he asked me, 'Is there anything I can do for you?'" said Pucillo. "I said, 'Admiral, I want to stay in the Navy.' He said, 'Done. It'll happen.' I never really thought any more about it because I had so many people come through."

However, the Navy did not have a procedure to get amputees back into active duty even if they proved they were capable of performing their duties. Getting the paperwork straight was a unfathomable challenge.

"As it turns out, he was keeping an eye on me," said Pucillo. "I got a call one day from Admiral Mullen, and he asked me 'What's going on, what's the status of your [request]?' I told him about [the problems I was having], and he said, 'All right, enough. You tell them I want a report at the end of the day about where you're at and your status.'

"I called these people later, and I just talked to them, and one lady was like, 'Oh, you want to stay IN the Navy!' Five days later I had a message out saying I was good-to-go, the waiver was in my hands, and everything was done."

From there, it was onward and upward for Pucillo – he not only proved himself again in the diving and explosives communities, he was also accepted to the Navy's parachuting school and passed.

## The Defining Moment

Pucillo remembers his 'alive day,' as he calls it – May 19, 2006.

"We were driving along Route Senators in Baghdad," he recalls. "The enemy let four different vehicles by ahead of us, and as soon as we got within the danger zone, they lit off the IED."

The improvised explosive device (IED) that struck their vehicle actually ricocheted off the transmission before entering the vehicle and detonating.

"When the projectile hit the vehicle...first you get the shock," he continued. "[That shock] takes whatever is inside the vehicle and turns it into dust, like fragmentation. There's intense heat, and no one's really thinking clearly."

A routine post-IED self check revealed that something was seriously wrong.

"I started doing the finger-toe check, and



▲ Pucillo puts on his running prosthetic before going out to jog aboard Newport Naval Base. He earned the purple heart during his time spent in Iraq. "They took my leg, but not my spirit," he added.

unfortunately the left leg wasn't giving me any response," Pucillo recalled. "I tried to avoid looking down at it because [I was] already freaking out about it. If I looked down and discovered that my leg was missing, I would have gone into an unrecoverable shock."

The doctors at the Baghdad hospital confirmed the bad news.

"The doctor looked over me, and he said, 'Look, you're going to be fine...but your left leg is gone. Is that OK?' I was like, 'Yeah. Stop the pain.' And then, I was out."

## The Long and Winding Road to Recovery

Pucillo's rehabilitation started in Baghdad, when his left leg was amputated.

"I was stabilized, flown to Balad, stabilized again and flown to Germany for three days," he recalled. "They checked me to make sure

I didn't have any back injuries or any hidden ailments before they [flew me to] Bethesda."

Part of the process that Pucillo went through in Bethesda was a procedure known as a washout – washing out shrapnel, cloth and other debris embedded in a wound or blown into the skin.

After a few weeks, he was transferred to Walter Reed, where he started to get fit for a socket roughly three weeks later.

"The rehabilitation process is different for everyone, but I look back on it now, and I can't believe I had the strength to do that," said Pucillo, "especially at that time when I had had all the strength taken out of me. But it's just something you accept and you move on."

Despite the daunting circumstances, Pucillo



◀ Pucillo participates in a class discussion of maritime strategy at the Naval War College in Newport, R.I.

"There were many nights where I sat in bed – you get depression, it's normal. I knew it was normal; I knew why it was happening, but still – you can't escape from that type of depression in that type of situation.

"They took my leg, and I can't do anything about that. That's done. That's history. But

every day and every minute that I don't make the most out of my life, then they take more from me. I decided to define my disability and not let it define me – in that way, I feel like I'm fighting back. They may have taken my leg, but they didn't take my life. Once I had [that] epiphany, then anger would set in, and I would use that anger to force myself through some really tough rehabilitation."

Even with a positive outlook, certain situations can potentially throw the rehabilitation process off track. In this case, the curveball in question was a looming painkiller dependency.

"They put me on these painkillers, which I'm thankful they had at the time," said Pucillo, "The problem is, once you get past that, your body normally wants to keep that drug in you."

"I had about eight weeks where I'd have three hours of sleep a week, no exaggeration. My depression started again at that point, because if you have no sleep, it's obviously going to affect your rehab."

Pucillo fought through this roadblock and eventually succeeded.

## Combating Operational Stress and More

In a wartime situation, the high level of adrenaline and uncertainty in a battlefield

situation can be stressful enough alone.

Evolutions such as direct armed combat or personnel recovery – retrieving bodies of those killed in action – don't fade easily from one's memory, and such memories usually come back to trouble those who experienced the initial trauma.

Operational stress, post-traumatic stress (PTS) and traumatic brain injury (TBI) are not exclusive to combat situations or to military personnel, said Rear Adm. Garry White, the former special assistant to the CNO for comprehensive casualty care. Any traumatic event, such as a car accident, violent personal assault, terrorist attack, or natural disaster, has the potential to cause physical or psychological injury to anyone involved.

"If we can get to where we can prevent [post-traumatic stress disorder] PTSD by treating the stress so that hopefully it will never become the disorder, that's what we want to strive to do," said White. "There's a great effort being put forth to make that happen, but it takes effort. The goal of operational stress control is to manage stress so that it does not become a disorder."

Pucillo finds it helpful to not just himself, but also to others to talk about it to other people. After returning from Iraq, he was the readiness and training officer at Naval Explosive Ordnance Disposal Division, Indian Head, Md., in charge of training to do post-blast work in Afghanistan, which involved lots of pictures of severely burned and injured people and other forms of devastation.

"At times when we'd show these slides, people would say, 'Is this bothering you? Are you OK?' I got it enough times that I said, 'OK, look, here's the deal. I'm going back into the military. I'm going to be an EOD officer. I'm going to overcome this disability. If I can't talk about what happened to me or how it affected me, if I can't look at another picture of something happening to someone else, then I am useless to the military – I shouldn't even be here.'

Pucillo also remembers being screened for post-traumatic stress upon his return stateside.

"I'm a very Type A personality, so the doctors took it as that I might have TBI or PTSD," he recalled. "I said, 'Look, guys, I



▲ Pucillo listens to fellow students during class discussions.

had a goal in mind.

"I had decided already that no matter what was going to happen, I had enough of me left to stay in the Navy, to actually be a contender and to actually do what I did before – differently, most likely, but at the same time, I wasn't done."

Rehab is never easy – the road to recovery is paved with grit and sweat. With the peaks in his determination, though, come the inevitable emotional valleys.

know what you're doing, I know it's good that you're doing this, but here's the deal: I was arrogant and irritable before I got blown up, I'm arrogant and irritable now – that's not going to change!' We had a good laugh about that, but they realized I was fine. They sent me on my way, and I appreciated that."

## A Family Affair

Many of the effects of trauma – physical and emotional – are permanent, but with the right support, individuals can adapt and learn how to cope.

"I accept that there are some things that I can do really well, and that there are some things I can't," Pucillo said. "I came back to swimming 95 percent almost immediately after the hit. Walking, I came back 95 percent within three or four months. Running is a little bit longer. I started running really quick, about five months after the hit, but I'm still struggling with consistency, [pacing], and [balance]. I'm still relearning how to run."

When it came to being open with his daughters about his disability, Pucillo knew how to temper it with a little humor.

"One time, my [youngest] daughter was curious about my leg," he said. "She wanted to touch it, and she asked me if it would hurt if she did. I told her of course it doesn't hurt, but as soon as she touched it, of course I went 'AUUGGHH!'"

Pucillo laughs at the story. "I kind of freaked her out, but she understood that I was kidding with her, and that just broke the ice."

The role of family in a patient's recovery cannot be overstressed.

"Family members need a lot of support and are a tremendous resource, too, so involving the whole family in the process is extremely important," said Dr. Maria Mouratidis, a neuropsychologist at National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda. "We teach patients and their families the process of skills training, how to work on some of the skills that they may have lost."

As much as he used his sense of humor to facilitate his recovery, Pucillo didn't sugarcoat every aspect of his rehab.

"When I was going through my rehab, they felt the ups and downs," he recalled. "When



▲ Pucillo and his daughter talk about her art class as he adjusts his prosthetic before heading to the gym.

I was up, family life was as normal as it could be. They were still trying to get used to me walking around with my crutches, or putting on a leg to go outside. When I was down, at one of my low points, they felt the brunt of that."

Despite the challenges thrown in his direction due to his injury, Pucillo has no regrets about his "alive day."

"I was set back, and I overcame that setback," said Pucillo. "I have done, I think, a tremendous job in overcoming and adapting to my disability, and I won't give that up. If it means getting my leg back, just so I can give up the success here, then I say no."

"Not only that – and here's where it's more important – if you asked me, would you do it all over again, well, you're really asking me, would I give my leg back so my buddy next to me would get hit? That's what you're really asking me, and that answer will always be no. I will never get my leg back – matter of fact, I will give you my other leg if it means keeping my buddy safe or my boy safe. And that has always been my paramount goal." ❧

**Vlahos and Aho are assigned to Defense Media Activity-Anacostia, Washington.**



▲ Pucillo sits in front of a photo of he and his wife at their home in Newport, R.I.

# Caring for the Invisible Wounds of War

Story by MC2(SW) Elizabeth Vlahos

The challenge some wounded Sailors face is to identify problems and receive appropriate treatment at an early stage. Whether it is operational stress and post-traumatic stress (PTS) at the mild end of the spectrum, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI) at the most severe end, these injuries are not visible; their scars are hidden. But through timely screenings and an aggressive post-deployment health assessment program, the Navy is striving to manage operational stress and PTS through early support and intervention.

The root of the problem is trauma, whether physical or psychological. The physical aspect of trauma can stem from an explosion or an improvised explosive device (IED) or a mortar shell, or it can stem from a vehicular casualty — a crash or a rollover. The psychological aspect of trauma stems from the Sailor's experiences.

When a Sailor is evacuated out of theater and sent to the National Naval Medical Center (NNMC), Bethesda, Md., he or she is subject to a multi-disciplinary battery of tests gauging his or her cognitive and mental capacities.

"A group of doctors from different areas of medicine, psychology and rehabilitation all come together to understand what's going on for this particular service member so that we can have a treatment plan that suits [the Sailor] and their family," said Dr. Maria Mouratidis, a neuropsychologist and subject matter expert at NNMC, where she helped develop operational-related stress and brain injury programs.

One of the recent breakthroughs is the ground breaking for the National Intrepid Center of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury at NNMC. The Intrepid Center will be an advanced facility dedicated to research, diagnosis and treatment of military personnel and veterans suffering from PTSD and TBI.

"The National Intrepid Center of Excellence is going to be a center that will collect all the traumatic brain injury modalities of therapy, all the complex psychological injury and illnesses that can occur into one clinical center

that will be multi-service," said Surgeon General Vice Adm. Adam M. Robinson Jr. "It will use the expertise of [Navy, Army, and Air Force], plus many of our civilian universities, the National Institute of Health and the National Institute of Mental Health in order to come together and look at best practices for traumatic brain injury, deployment practices throughout communities and Veteran's Affairs hospitals around the United States.

"Traumatic brain injury has been thought to be the signature injury of this particular war, usually related to IEDs, and we have felt that the National Intrepid Center for Excellence would be a wonderful way to harness

### The symptoms of PTS or Operational Stress include:

- Sleep Disturbances
- Irritability
- Uncharacteristic Behavior
- Problems with Interpersonal Relations
- Anxiety

### Symptoms of more severe PTSD or TBI include these "red flags:"

- Nightmares
- Flashbacks
- Excessive Alcohol or Drug Abuse
- Aggressive Behavior
- Disciplinary or Legal Issues

*Sailors should watch for these symptoms not just in their shipmates but in themselves as well.*

the amount of research and medical power we have in order to take care of these individuals."

Once a patient has been officially diagnosed with PTS or TBI, the course of treatment to follow depends on the Sailor's condition.

According to Mouratidis, diagnosis of a brain injury is followed by neuro-psychological tests to understand how the brain is working. There are a range of treatments available. Sometimes the simple things can facilitate recovery as well. Exercise can release endorphins that can combat the body's natural fight-or-flight response to stress.

TBI treatment varies depending on the severity of the brain injury and also on if the

person has depression or PTS, depression being more common.

"That's why a good evaluation is the roadmap to helping to inform a multi-disciplinary treatment approach."

One of the biggest obstacles Sailors may face in seeking treatment is the perceived stigma attached to seeking professional help in the first place. Many Sailors and Marines are afraid to take that critical first step out of fear that it will reflect badly on their character or adversely affect their careers or their eligibility for a security clearance.

"We're working very hard to get rid of that," said Rear Adm. Garry White, former special assistant to the CNO for comprehensive casualty care. "None of us would hesitate, if we went out and broke our leg, to go to the doctor and get it set. So if we go out and, through no fault of our own, suffered a break or trauma to our brain, then we should probably get the experts to help us out there, too."

"In recruit training, people need to be told from day one that there are emotional and mental ailments that need their attention, and that we have personnel and professionals who are there to help them," said Robinson.

To facilitate the removal of the stigma surrounding mental and neurological treatment, DoD has approved revisions to question 21 on the Questionnaire for National Security Positions, Standard Form (SF) 86, regarding mental and emotional health counseling. It is no longer a career-killing situation to have received this type of treatment.

The question is revised to stress that mental health counseling in and of itself is not a reason to deny or revoke a clearance. The person filling out the SF 86 is directed to reply "no" if the counseling was "related to adjustments from service in a military combat environment."

"It's time we made everyone in uniform aware that the act of reaching out for help is one of the most courageous acts — and one of the first steps — to reclaiming your career and future," said Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Michael Mullen. ❧

**Vlahos is assigned to Defense Media Activity-Anacostia, Washington.**

# Among Veterans

## Reflections on service

Story and photos by MC1 R. Jason Brunson

*“Therefore, I do hereby call upon all of our citizens to observe Thursday, November 11, 1954, as Veterans Day. On that day let us solemnly remember the sacrifices of all those who fought so valiantly, on the seas, in the air, and on foreign shores, to preserve our heritage of freedom, and let us reconsecrate ourselves to the task of promoting an enduring peace so that their efforts shall not have been in vain.”*

— Dwight D. Eisenhower,  
President of the United States of America

On October 8, 1954, President Eisenhower issued a proclamation officially changing the name of Armistice Day to Veterans Day.

Across the nation, schools teach our children special lessons in the days leading up to Veterans Day. Communities everywhere hold a variety of observances and commemorations in honor of heroes of yesterday and those still serving in uniform.

Veterans Day provides an opportunity to reflect on our heritage, the weave of experiences of those who came before us and who have in many different ways shaped the culture and traditions of the Navy and even the history of our nation. Their personal stories have been captured in movies, books, pictures and captivate people of all walks. They are the stories of people who bravely face adversity to preserve and advance the American way of life.

If today's military is more and more a reflection of our nation, it is due to trailblazers like Master Chief Carl Brashear who fought intolerance and prejudice to become the first black deep sea diver, the first black master diver and the first person in naval history to be restored to full active duty as an amputee, the result of a leg injury he sustained during a salvage operation.

Today in the U.S. military, women serve in almost every capacity. But, this has not always been the case. In the past, those who stepped up and chose to make the military a career advanced the cause of equality and literally paved the way for female service members of today. Among those who had the courage to go first is retired Master Chief Yeoman Anna Der-Vartanian.

Der-Vartanian began her military service in 1942 as a member of the Women's Army Corps (WAC). In 1943, she had the opportunity enter the Navy with the establishment of the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVE) program. She went on to serve 20 years in the Navy and retired in 1963.

Der-Vartanian said she had always loved the idea of being in the Navy. She recalled the first time she saw “a handsome young naval officer” in uniform. She was just a little girl at the time, but from that day forward the Navy always appealed to her.

“We got into the war with the attack on

Pearl Harbor,” Der-Vartanian said. “Sometime thereafter, the WAC came into being, and I was just burning to join up, so I did.”

Der-Vartanian said her father was like typical fathers at the time. He didn't understand her decision to join the military, but like many other men would throughout her career, he had to learn to accept it.

She was assigned to the Bureau of Naval Personnel for the duration of WWII. She said when the war ended she was given the option to get out of the Navy, but she liked what she

as a normal development in a merit-based system that rewards individuals for their contributions and hard work and not on the color of their skin or gender.

Today, women are essential to the operations and mission of the Navy even in areas that were traditionally dominated by men; such is the case of Damage Control Chief (SW/AW) Shakira Tucker, of repair division aboard USS *Bonhomme Richard* (LHD 6).

“I feel that I have contributed to the Navy by showing my junior Sailors that yes being





▲ HM3 Mark Hacala deployed to Lebanon in 1983.

“If you really want something then you will have to make the decision to go for it and set the goal and achieve it.”

Porter says that pioneers like Der-Vartanian are inspirational because they show others that it can be done.

“It gives me the motivation that I can achieve any goal that I set my mind to in the navy because someone else was able to do it as well,” says Porter

Despite the challenges Der-Vartanian encountered along the way, she said, she loved the Navy. She enjoyed duty stations in many places throughout the United States and abroad, including Hawaii and Paris. She has a treasure chest of memories, from meeting several movie stars, to simply serving with some wonderful people.

“If I could do it again I would,” Der-Vartanian said. “It’s a very rewarding experience; I think the Navy was very good to me.”

Der-Vartanian is 87 years old and still an involved and proud Navy veteran. She often is a guest speaker at Navy events and is very impressed with the Sailors she meets.

“The Sailors,” she said, “they are what I’m the proudest of.”

As a WWII veteran, Der-Vartanian

experienced one of the last conventional wars, with identified contenders and defined frontlines. WWII was a war that ended with a formal surrender and a declaration of victory by Allied nations. Today, veterans are involved in a much different type of war: one in which the enemy is concealed among civilians, and the victory and defeat is not just a function of combat action. Some of the first indications of this war could be trace back to Lebanon, 25 years ago.

By the time Master Chief Hospital Corpsman Mark Hacala joined the Navy in 1981, the nature of the conflicts had morphed, emerging into the first terrorist attacks against civilians in the Middle East.

When Hacala reported as an HM3 for duty at the division surgeon’s office, 2nd Marine Division, he said, they seemed very excited, and he couldn’t quite figure out why. The young man helping him check in, grinned when he told him he was going to “one-eight.”

“What’s that?” Hacala asked. “It sounds like a fraction.”

The young man replied he was going to Beirut.

I asked when, Hacala said, and he just looked at his watch. He then knew that he didn’t have much time. As it turned out, Hacala would have to assimilate with his Marines at 1st Battalion, 8th Marines in only a matter of weeks.

“I was assigned to Bravo Company, 2nd Platoon. I had to get oriented very quickly to how things operated, how things worked,” Hacala said.

In May, of 1983 he boarded USS Austin (LPD 4) and headed over to Lebanon. At that time, Beirut was immersed in a bloody civil war. Marines were slated to deploy to Lebanon to help form a multi-national presence in hopes of quelling some of the strife that had been going there for a number of years.

“I think they did as best they could to prepare us for what we would encounter there,” Hacala said. “But, very early on, I think everybody determined that there were so many different factions involved in this that there wasn’t going to be a very clear idea of what it was that we were supposed to be doing, exactly.”

He said they were given briefings and drilled to try and prepare for what they weren’t sure of.

“What we did know was that in April of that year, only a month and a half before, the

American embassy had been blown up by a terrorist bomb,” Hacala said. “So, it was not looking like it would be the safest place in the world, but by the same token we did not know that we were going into combat.”

Hacala said initially, each of the companies was deployed to one of three main positions, with satellite positions to each of them.

“For the first several months, most of the units would take turns patrolling throughout the different areas of Beirut,” Hacala said. “We were just looking for anything suspicious, showing the flag... for the most part it was relatively friendly.”

But things were taking a turn for the worse. In late summer, tension over the Israeli presence in Lebanon, which did not have a lot of support back in Israel, forced the Israeli prime minister to resign. Hacala said with the prime minister’s resignation the Israeli forces started to move south and opposing militia began fighting for space within the area.

“It was typical for us to see the tracers and hear the gunfire from this fighting going on at night. Then one day the fight came to us,” said Hacala.

“This day it was different, it was during daylight, we heard the gunfire. It was due north toward the city, and it started walking its way closer and closer to us,” Hacala said. “Eventually the rounds started coming over head and directly at us. For quite some time we were taking direct fire. You could here it whizzing right by you, you could here it impacting into the Olive trees behind us.”

He said they got the go ahead to return fire on targets, and after a limited and much disciplined engagement the fighting subsided.

The next day the fighting worsened for one of the other platoons, when they started receiving some shelling. Hacala said their platoon sergeant was killed and several others were wounded.

“This was sort of the beginning, on August twenty-eighth and twenty-ninth, of a ground war that continued for two months, leading up to the bombing,” Hacala said.

He said his platoon was engaged very heavily in September. They were taking small arms fire, mortars and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) from three directions. This is when his platoon suffered its first casualty.

“One of my Marines, Sergeant Jose Lopez was wounded, so I moved forward

to his position and treated him. It wasn’t bad enough that it was immediately life threatening, but he was definitely going to need to get out of there,” Hacala said. “However the fight continued on well into the night, so we ended up evacuating the out post the next morning and we medevaced him by helicopter at the same time.”

“It doesn’t matter what kind of training you have had,” Hacala said, and with a long pause he continued... “When the moment comes and you hear the call ‘corpsman up’ there is a shock. It’s almost as if your heart stops for a second. You realize this is for real. It’s a powerful moment for anybody.”

This is feeling that has not changed much throughout the years and remains strong among the hospital corpsman serving alongside Marines; however, the lessons learned from past conflicts have greatly improved their training.

“The training these days is very focused on combat trauma and with the high possibility that you could have to put it to work, it makes wanting to learn that much more intense,” said Hospital Corpsman Senior Chief (SW/SCW/FMF) Brad Kowitz, medical department leading chief petty officer aboard USS Bonhomme Richard. “The trauma training gives you the tools, but individuals respond differently to stressful casualty situations. I’ve seen quiet, reserved corpsman excel beyond expectations in trauma situations.”

The situation in Beirut got worse on Oct. 23, 1983. At 6:22 a.m. a large delivery truck sped through the barbed-wire fence and two sentry posts, through the gate, and into a building housing U.S. and French forces, killing 241 Marines and 18 Sailors.

Hacala said it was actually an office building that was being used as the battalion headquarters, and it just happened to be that many of the Marines assigned the headquarters and service companies were also living in the building.

He said because of the nature of the mission, the building wasn’t as heavily fortified as it would probably have been had they been there for a combat mission.

“The Marines who were on watch there at the time, there is no way they could have stopped the vehicle; it just couldn’t have happened,” Hacala said.

As a corpsman serving today aboard an



## CNO, USCG Commandant Address Global Maritime Senior Enlisted Symposium

**The second Global Maritime Senior Enlisted Symposium hosted by Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy (MCPON)(SW/FMF) Joe R. Campa Jr. and Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard (MCPOCG) Charles "Skip" Bowen, recently brought senior enlisted leaders from more than 40 nations to Honolulu for three days of interaction and discussion.**

The second day of the symposium, Sept. 23, featured remarks from Chief of Naval



▲ Adm. Gary Roughead, Chief of Naval Operations

Operations Adm. Gary Roughead and Commandant of the United States Coast Guard Adm. Thad Allen. In separate, prerecorded messages to the attendees, the CNO and Commandant both stressed the critical role chief

petty officers and senior enlisted leaders play in developing enlisted Sailors and junior officers.

Roughead discussed the International Seapower Symposium held last October in Newport, R.I., and said the Senior Enlisted Symposium will have the same kind of long-term effect.

"That was the largest collection of maritime leaders in the history of the world. Your efforts and discussions here will add greatly to that," said Roughead. "I believe it's your perspective, your views and understanding of your Sailors that will allow us to build better relationships and seize the opportunities ahead of us."

Roughead; Allen; and Gen. James T.

Conway, Commandant of the Marine Corps unveiled "A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower" in Newport last year. During his remarks to the senior enlisted leaders in Honolulu, Roughead referenced that document.

"As we issued our strategy we added capabilities that will be increasingly important in the future," said Roughead. "One is maritime security. How do we come together with maritime forces of other countries to develop protocols that will allow all of us to have a greater understanding of what is moving on above and below the oceans?"

Allen's remarks were similar as he stressed that the success of the cooperative strategy will hinge greatly on the efforts made by enlisted leadership on the deckplate.

"We developed a Maritime Strategy that focuses on working together and with our global partners. Senior enlisted people play a huge role in that. In the Coast Guard, our senior enlisted are invested with extraordinary responsibilities, and it takes a strong core of chiefs to create a base from which officers can gain support." ❧

**Story by MCCS(SW/AW) Bill Houlihan, assigned to Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy, Washington, D.C.**

### McInerney Returns After Six-Month Counter-Drug Deployment

USS *McInerney* (FFG 8) and attached Helicopter Anti-Submarine Squadron Light 44, Det. 8, returned to Mayport, Fla., last month after a six-month, counter-illicit trafficking deployment in the Eastern Pacific Ocean.

The highlight of the deployment came Sept. 13, when the crew and embarked U.S. Coast Guard Law Enforcement Detachment 404 captured a Self-Propelled, Semi-Submersible (SPSS) vessel containing 7 tons of cocaine

and four suspected illicit-traffickers. Throughout their deployment, *McInerney* intercepted 22 tons of cocaine.

*McInerney* left Mayport April 4, en route to the U.S. Southern Command area of focus, and made her first port visit to Honduras, where crew members brought fresh water to more than 30 homes in La Colonia, and donated two pallets of Project Handclasp materials to a local clinic.

While in Central and South America, *McInerney* made stops in Panama, Ecuador, Peru, Costa Rica and Jamaica. The ship's last port visit was in Cartagena, Colombia. To



Photo by Lt. Justin Cooper

▲ USS *McInerney* (FFG 8) tows a self-propelled, semi-submersible (SPSS) craft seized by Coast Guard Law Enforcement Detachment 404. The SPSS was carrying 7 tons of cocaine when seized during a night raid about 350 miles west of Guatemala.

prepare for the stop, *McInerney* assembled an entire bridge watch team of Spanish speakers who navigated the ship into Cartagena giving commands only in Spanish.

"This was *McInerney's* final tribute to all the amazing people we met throughout Central and South America during the past six months," said Commanding Officer, Cmdr. C.K. Wheeler. "[It was] also a demonstration of our commitment to strong maritime ties with allies in the region." ❧

**Story by Lt. Kelly Chufo, assigned to USS *McInerney* (FFG 8).**

### Africa Sports Diplomacy Team Paints, Plays for Libreville Students

The European region U.S. Navy soccer team painted rooms in two schools while Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Europe (CNE) brass quintet performed in Libreville, Gabon, during their recent 11-day Africa Sports Diplomacy Tour to West and Central Africa.

Soccer players also painted four rooms



Photo by MCz Marc Rockwell-Pate

▲ MU2 Allison Baine, a member of the U.S. Naval Forces Europe Band, plays as students at the Prytanee Military School in Libreville, Gabon, march around her during a community relations project.

at the Prytanee School, a military boarding school, as well as one room at the Martin Luther King School.

Eric Honore Diboh, director of the school, thanked the U.S. Navy for their efforts at the school.

"This will take care of the children of the poor families here," said Diboh.

The CNE band brass quintet also performed for the children, with ages ranging from 3 to 12, leading the children in marches around their schools.

In addition, the team delivered Project Handclasp donations - including school supplies, soccer balls, stuffed animals, hygiene items and medical supplies - to the Martin Luther King School during a ceremony.

"I'm really happy to be doing this; growing up in a third-world country, no one ever came to paint my schools or donate school supplies," said Hospitalman Andre Huggins, a member of the soccer team originally from Jamaica. "I feel fortunate to be able to do this for these kids. I've been in the Navy a year and a half, and this is what I wanted to do for people."

The 37-person diplomacy team toured three West African nations - Cape Verde, Cameroon and Gabon - as an addition to the Africa Partnership Station (APS) initiative. Their goals are to build understanding and develop goodwill between the United States and its emerging partners through sports, music and community relations projects.

The tour provided the opportunity for soccer players to interact with their counterparts and build a foundation of trust through continuous presence and cultural awareness.

The APS initiative began in 2007 with USS *Fort McHenry* and HSV2 *Swift*. It is a U.S. Naval Forces Europe-led endeavor focused on enhancing cooperative partnerships with regional maritime services to achieve common international goals such as stability and security. ❧

**Story by MCz(SW/AW) Rosa Larson, Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Commander, U.S. 6th Fleet.**

### Seabees Construct School in Moroni

A Seabee detachment from Naval Construction Battalion (NMCB) 4 is building a new school house for the Hamramba School

in the Comoros Island town of Moroni as part of the unit's six-month deployment to the Horn of Africa (HOA).

The project consists of the construction of two individual buildings, each will have two classrooms, a storage area and an office space. A separate bathroom facility is also being constructed.

Due to the limited space on the school property, the Seabees were unable to use heavy construction equipment. They completed the excavation for all three buildings by hand, which required the removal of massive amounts of lava rock. Once the excavation was complete, the steel-reinforced concrete foundations were hand-mixed and placed using buckets and wheelbarrows.

"This project is different from any other of its kind," says Builder 1st Class (SCW) Adam Beardsley, NMCB 4's Det. Comoros project supervisor. "Since the earth we are working with is 90 percent lava rock, and with the limited space, the challenges are unlimited; however, it will provide my crew with the knowledge and experience to execute future projects of this nature."

With the foundations complete, the Seabees of Detachment Comoros will work on completing the bathroom facility and preparing the other two buildings for the placement of the floors and walls. The project is scheduled to be completed in July 2009.

When the Seabees are not working on the project, they spend time volunteering within the local community. On Monday and Thursday evenings, Construction Electrician 3rd Class (SCW) Joshua Cruz and Construction Mechanic 3rd Class Matthew Bosch participate in an English discussion group at one of the local schools, teaching English to the local community members.

The Comoros Islands consist of a group of seven islands in the Mozambique Channel, about two-thirds of the way between northern Madagascar and northern Mozambique.

NMCB 4 is based out of Naval Base Ventura County, Calif., NMCB 4, Detachment Horn of Africa is deployed in support of Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa and is completing missions in various countries in Eastern Africa. ❧

**Story by MCz(SCW/SW/AW) Ronald Gutridge, Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 4, Det. Horn of Africa, Moroni, Grand Comore**

# Warrior Transition Program (WTP)

Story by MC2 Jason McCamack and MC2 Lenny Francioni

Fighting a war with two active fronts has transformed the military in many ways – including how the Navy supports Army and Marine Corps forces on the ground. It is also changing the way the Navy cares for its Sailors after they leave combat zones.

The Navy implemented the Warrior Transition Program (WTP) to help Sailors readjust to life outside the combat zone. The program was established by the Seabee's First Naval Construction Division in 2006 to address the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of Sailors as they returned home. The Seabee model would later be used by the Expeditionary Combat Readiness Center (ECRC) to help all Sailors redeploying from the Central Command area of operations.



Photo by MC2 Kenneth W. Robinson

▲ Seabees assigned to Naval Mobile Construction Battalion (NMCB) 27 make their way from an Air Force transport aircraft at an airfield in Western Iraq to start support operations in al-Anbar province area of responsibility. NMCB-27, known as the “Skibees,” is deployed to Iraq and other areas of responsibility supporting Operation *Iraqi Freedom* and *Enduring Freedom*. When they return home, like many other Sailors, they will go through a Warrior Transition Program.

“In the old days we would send our troops off to combat and then they would get on a ship where it took 30 to 40 days to get home,” said Navy Expeditionary Combat Command (NECC) Force Chaplain, Capt. Emilio Marrero. “During that time on the ship they would have lots of downtime and the ability to talk to one another, and it was a time to decompress. When they got home they had spent a significant amount of time thinking about where they’d been, what they encountered, what they were going to be facing in the future, and they had a chance to chit-chat in a very informal manner.”

“With Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom we had our troops coming home overnight – one day they’re in the combat zone and just 24 or 48 hours later they would be home.”

The Warrior Transition Program provides Sailors returning from a boot-on-the-ground deployment in the Central Command area of responsibility a four-day cushion in Kuwait before they return to their loved ones. The Navy is committed to a “continuum of care” for all Sailors and Marines who return home with physical or mental wounds.

“We wanted to give people a process where they could slow down and mentally and emotionally shift to where they could prepare themselves to come home,” said Marrero. “As a result, we’re hoping to reduce some stress and give them an understanding of what their resources are and identify some of the symptoms so that they can not only take care of themselves but look after one another.”

Besides turning in their gear and taking care of paperwork, Sailors also have the opportunity to complete the first post-deployment health assessment. The Deployment Health Assessment (DHA) process is designed to identify health concerns after deployment and to facilitate appropriate care. The DHA consists of:

- A pre-deployment health assessment (pre-DHA, DD form 2795), conducted within 60 days prior to deployment.
- A post-deployment health assessment (post-DHA, DD form 2796), conducted within 30 days before or after return to home station.
- A post-deployment health re-assessment (PDHRA, DD 2900), conducted between 90 and 180 days after return to home station. PDHRA can be done in conjunction with the periodic health assessment if time frames coincide.

The DHA captures the necessary data to monitor the health of the force in order to proactively identify and manage health issues. Sailors access and complete DHA forms electronically at <https://www-nmcphc.med.navy.mil/edha>. For questions or assistance, EDHA helpdesk at (757) 953-0717/DSN 377 or e-mail: [nedha\(at\)nmcphc.mar.med.navy.mil](mailto:nedha(at)nmcphc.mar.med.navy.mil).



# A World of Possibilities

SK3 Kevin O’Neal  
Individual Augmentee

Story and photo by MC2(SW/AW) Jason McCamack

**In today’s Navy, Sailors aren’t just stationed on ships, patrolling the seas. More and more, they’re serving as individual augmentees (IA) and global war on terrorism support assignment (GSA) Sailors, becoming boots on the ground and doing jobs that may not be part of their Navy ratings.**

Storekeeper 3rd Class Kevin O’Neal’s world view opened up in a big way when he became an individual augmentee (IA). Prior to his IA experience his naval experience was limited mostly to his job at Helicopter Antisubmarine Squadron (Light) (HSL) 60, where he served as a storekeeper, working in the squadron’s tool room and hazardous material control room on base at Naval Station Mayport, Fla. Camp Lemonier in Djibouti on the Horn of Africa was a life-changing experience for this Sailor.

“My IA deployment was the first time I have ever deployed, and it was a great experience,” said O’Neal. “I was nervous at first, but once I got there and got settled in it really was something I’ll never forget. It’s good to get out there and see another part of the world with your own eyes. It’s great to see these things firsthand and interact with the people. You learn so much more that way than just watching it through the media. It opens up a whole different view and outlook on life.”

O’Neal worked at the base supply office at Camp Lemonier. The work was similar to his job with HSL-60, but he had to learn to adapt to a more Army-centric approach to supply.

“Luckily, I got a job at base supply, but it was Army supply so I had to learn some of the

Army’s supply systems, but it was kind of like having that Navy supply though.”

O’Neal played a key role in keeping the deployed seamen adequately supplied with items he had to order from around the world.

“I put in orders for everything from food, water, night-vision goggles – anything someone goes downrange to need. I had to touch with stateside or Europe and fast I could get supplies. The mission, support troops.”

Prior to deployment



at Augmentee Combat Jackson, SC. He said the while during his time in

of possible threats g at Fort Jackson. They ea of what we’d be looking It was definitely an eye- It gave me the ability that happen, I would be ready how to react.”

Neal took advantage of opportunity afforded while serving as an IA in ibouti. He took college courses in his extra time at Camp Lemonier, and by the time he returned stateside he had dramatically improved ancial portfolio. ade a lot more money e. I was gone six months, got back I had paid off lit card debt, paid down here I only owe \$3,000., lly had money in the

*Editor’s note: Information on GSA billets is available on Career Management System-Interactive at <https://www.cmsid.navy.mil>*

**McCamack is assigned to Media Activity – Anacostia, Washington, D.C.**

# Partnering in Education

Story and photo by MC1(AW) R. Jason Brunson

**O**n Feb. 12, 2008, Chief of Naval Operations, Adm. Gary Roughead spoke about his priorities as CNO, the maritime strategy and building the future Fleet in a brief for the Pentagon press corps.

“As I look at the future and my role as CNO, I lump it into three very simple things – to build tomorrow’s Navy, to maintain the readiness of today’s Navy and to ensure that the policies that we have in place for our people continue to attract, recruit and retain the young men and women of America who can come to the Navy and fulfill themselves,” Roughead said.

One Sailor who has taken this task to heart is Operations Specialist (SW) 1st Class Jonathan Lane of Nashville, Tenn. Lane is assigned to Surface Combat Systems Center (SCSC) Wallops Island, Va., as the Air Intercept Control (AIC) supervisor.

On the job, Lane controls aircraft, and in addition, he is the command’s partnership in excellence coordinator.

According to Lane, the program gives the Navy a good face in the community, and helps build strong relationships between Sailors and the people in their community.

There are approximately 400 military and civilian personnel who work at SCSC, Lane said, and many of them have kids going to the local schools.

The goal for Partnership in Excellence is to focus on at least one school and really make a difference, which he said creates a win-win situation.

“It helps the military as well as the community,” Lane said.

Throughout the school year at Kegotank Elementary School, Lane said, volunteers from his command do a lot of landscaping. They have a couple of courtyards they have renovated and continue to maintain.

“One of the local nurseries donated like 2000 plants, Lane said. “We brought 10 or 12 people over there and spent a whole day out there re-planting their

beds, up front and all the way around the building.”

SCSC has engineers, scientists, electronics experts and other technical specialists on board, who volunteer to help the kids through tutoring, mentorship and even judging the occasional science fair.

They also participate with the kids just for fun. “We just did a field day event, which we have every year,” Lane said. “We help out with a lot of the events like the 3 legged races and tug of war, stuff like that. We’ve done a lot here.”

Lane said they had 28 volunteers this year, both military and civilian, who dedicated more than 450 hours of community service here at the school this past year.

The school’s Assistant Principal, Shawn O’Shea said, there is not a week that goes by without these guys around and they always come around on a moment’s notice.

“On field day we changed the date three times during the week because of weather, everyday they still showed up,” O’Shea said.

The school had a Hawaiian-themed faculty luncheon, where different members of the staff, including Lane and SCSCs Partnership in Excellence program were recognized for their special contributions to the school.

Principal Faye Williams said soon after she transferred to Kegotank Elementary one of the first agencies to contact her was the Navy.

“Mr. Lane called and asked us if there was anything the Navy could do to help us,” Williams said. “Throughout the school year they have come to student events, faculty events, and if we are not contacting them to help us, they are calling us asking, ‘what do you need us to do now?’ It has been the most amazing, productive relationship I have had with any agency, and we really appreciate them. We consider them part of our staff.”

*Brunson is assigned to Defense Media Activity – Anacostia.*

Focus on  
**Service**

## Swashbuckling Explorer Was No Diplomat

Story by MC2 Geraldine A. Hawkins

**N**avy Capt. Charles Wilkes, is best known for discovering Antarctica, and he holds an honored place in history for sighting land on Jan. 30, 1840, and calling it the “Antarctic Continent.” He was the first person to realize that Antarctica was actually is a separate continent and not merely a sheet of ice. In 1912, the shore he sighted was named Wilkes Land.

His heroic adventure when he seized a British ship 21 years later, however, nearly started a war between the United States and Great Britain.

Wilkes took command of USS *San Jacinto* Aug. 27, 1861, in Monrovia, Liberia, while the frigate was part of the Africa Squadron, whose mission was to suppress the slave trade. With the outbreak of the Civil War, *San Jacinto* was ordered to track down CSS *Sumter*, a Confederate cruiser prowling the Atlantic Ocean to disrupt Union shipping. *San Jacinto* chased *Sumter* throughout the Caribbean but the Confederate commerce raider, under Capt. Raphael Semmes of the Confederate States Navy (CSN), eluded them.

While *San Jacinto* was replenishing her coal supply at Cienfuegos, Cuba, Wilkes learned that although northern ships were blockading southern ports, two former U.S. Senators, James Murray Mason of Virginia and John Slidell of Louisiana, were now Confederate envoys and had escaped from Charleston, S.C., aboard the blockade runner *Theodora* en route to Havana. There they planned to board the British mail steamer HMS *Trent* as far as St. Thomas and then to book passage on a British liner to London. Mason’s mission was to enlist Great Britain’s assistance for the Confederate cause, and Slidell intended to accomplish the same with the French.

*San Jacinto* sailed speedily to Havana but arrived one day too late to intercept *Theodora*. *San Jacinto* then raced 230 miles east of Havana to the Old Bahama Channel to ambush *Trent*. On November 8, a boarding party from *San Jacinto*



captured Mason and Slidell and their secretaries, then allowed *Trent* to continue her voyage.

One week later, when *San Jacinto* arrived in Norfolk with her prisoners, Wilkes was a hero throughout the North and his exploit was hailed as a great triumph for the Union. Both the Navy Department and U.S. House of Representatives formally congratulated him.

The British government, however, construed his unauthorized seizure of *Trent* to be an act of war. President Lincoln realized that since England was a neutral nation, Wilkes’ action was in fact a violation of international law, and it took the diplomatic skill of Ambassador Charles

Francis Adams to calm Her Majesty’s government, which had ordered 8,000 troops to Canada for its defense should there be war with the United States.

“Upon realizing that the alternative to surrender of the commissioners must be war with England, [Secretary of State William] Seward, in a communication December 26, ‘cheerfully liberated’ them,” wrote one historian.

Secretary of the Navy Sumner Welles ordered Wilkes to take Mason and Slidell to Boston aboard *San Jacinto*. They were detained at Ft. Warren, Mass., until their release on New Year’s Day, 1862. Afterward, the two Southerners were taken to Provincetown, Mass., to board HMS *Rinaldo* for London.

Mason, who had drafted the Fugitive Slave Law that became part of the Compromise of 1850, never succeeded in convincing the British to aid the Southern cause. Slidell was no more successful in France than he had been in Mexico in 1845, when President James K. Polk sent him on a secret mission where Mexico’s refusal to meet with him was ultimately one cause of the Mexican War. **SE**

*Hawkins is assigned to Defense Media Agency - Anacostia, Washington, D.C*

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