The Sailor Cowboy

Providing Comfort for All

USNS Comfort's Secondary Mission
**The Sailor Cowboy**

A ragged breath escapes his lungs and veins bulge on his forearm, as he wraps the rope around his gloved hand. He flexes his grip one last time. The last thing he hears is, “GO!” as the gate flies open, and the ton of solid muscle beneath Interior Communications Electrician 3rd Class Billy Don Dempsy lurches out of the stall. He’s thrown forward, then back, then forward again amid the cheers of the crowd.

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**Up on the Roof**

Up early and late to bed is the standard for these Sailors. They’re expected to work hard. They know the routine and it gets tiresome, but they know they have to get the job done. The working conditions are less than hospitable. It’s hot, hectic and dangerous. It’s the flight deck of an amphib, specifically, USS Torew (LHA 1).
Students and faculty from both Akers and R.J. Neutra Elementary Schools aboard Naval Air Station Lemoore, Calif., show their appreciation for the members of the U.S. military by constructing a human U.S. flag.
As they were digging out from a sand storm, the members of Naval Mobile Construction Battalion (NMCB) 74 were told to pack up in the early morning hours and move out after receiving their first assignment to build a medium girder bridge, in a remote location during Operation Iraqi Freedom.
Speaking with Sailors
Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy
MCPON (SS/AW) Terry D. Scott

These Questions are from a Recent MCPON All Hands Call on NAS Fallon, Nev.

Q: What happened to Task Force Excel?
A: Task Force Excel was originally formed as a result of recommendations by the team established by the CNO, to review how the Navy trained our Sailors. The Executive Review of Navy Training made several large-scale recommendations to change the way we train and invest in our people. The CNO knew we needed a group of forward-thinking people he could reacquaint with and talk about a Navy production line, thanks for all you do.

Task Force Excel was originally formed to review how the Navy trained its people. The Executive Review of Navy Training made several large-scale recommendations to change the way we train and invest in our people.

With the establishment of the Naval Personnel Development Organization (NPOC), TFE turned over leadership role in the Revolution in Training. Many members of the original team and much of the experience gained now resides in that organization. But, that doesn’t mean that TFE faded into the sunset. There is great value added in having a group of people who are passionate about training and education.

Speaking with Sailors is a monthly column initiated by the Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy as a way of reaching out to the men and women of the fleet, whether they are stationed just down the road or halfway around the world.
A vial of the Smallpox vaccine used to inoculate the crew of USS _Constellation_ as part of the fleet’s “Forward Deployed” vaccination program. _Constellation_ was deployed to the Persian Gulf in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

**Natural level of heart attacks that occur among unvaccinated people. But the investigation is under way, “so far shows that these are not connected with usual figures. We’re pleased with the success of the program.”**

President Bush announced a nationwide smallpox vaccination program, Dec. 13, 2002, out of concern that bioterrorists could use the germ that causes smallpox as an agent to attack the American people. The virus had been eradicated around 1980, the germ was kept in two laboratories in the United States and the former Soviet Union for 20 years. Whether the germ is in the wild, whether it is in the wild, or whether it is in the wild, is unknown. DOD would now take an even more focused and targeted approach to its smallpox vaccination program, “he noted. When I talked to them, “ said LCDR Steve Saunders, Gettysburg chaplain, “they were really glad to see us. There were sharks swimming around the boat. After firing off the flares and nobody responding, they began to have thoughts that it might be their last day, they might not be rescued.”

“Lots of people had itching at the vaccination site and swollen lymph nodes under the arms, which are fairly common,” Gravenstein said. “In terms of serious reactions we’ve had few; in fact fewer than we would have expected looking at the historical data.”

The government has suggested that anyone with certain heart-related risk factors not take the vaccine. It continues to examine several suspected cases, including that of a 55-year-old National Guardman who died of a heart attack five days after receiving the smallpox vaccine.

DOD is revising its policy for some military personnel currently receiving the smallpox vaccine are those deployed or deploying to the Central Command area of operation; those who would go into a smallpox outbreak area, such as doctors and nurses treating smallpox patients. Gravenstein said there is no plan to vacate everyone in the military at this time. “It’s a pretty focused and targeted program,” he noted.

**Even with the public concern over the safety of vaccine, he said the recent deaths seem to be in proportion with usual rates of death. “The evidence that we have so far shows that these are not linked in a cause and effect way,” Gravenstein explained.**

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South Florida Welcomes Ships of Fleet Week U.S.A.

Fleet Week U.S.A. recently kicked off in South Florida, as part of what organizers are calling a National Salute to the U.S. Military. The community welcomed five Navy warships featuring Norfolk-based, guided-missile destroyer USS Cole (DDG 67), USS Stout (DDG 55), USS McCollum (DDG 79) and destroyer USS Thoyn (DD-988), as well as the guided-missile cruiser USS Gettysburg (CG 64), based in Mayport, Fla. The South Florida community has welcomed the Navy with open arms. Welcoming activities included a party at the Las Olas riverfront in Fort Lauderdale, where the ship's crews were treated to free food and beverages.

Chief Fire Controlman John D. DeAngelis, aboard Cole, said Fleet Week offers the community an opportunity to get a closer look at the Navy. “I think it’s awesome that we’re here. It gives the public a chance to see what the Navy really does.”

In port, Sailors anticipated keeping busy while enjoying their special liberty. “I’m looking forward to meeting all types of new people and seeing everything Fleet Week has to offer,” said Gas Turbine System Technician (Mechanical) 2nd Class Edwin Gonzalez aboard McCollum. Throughout the week, participating ships offered special tours to civic and social organizations, Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) units and school groups, giving them a chance to interact with crew members and learn about the Navy. Students of all ages, junior ROTC cadets and local residents were met by smiling red-jacketed volunteers who led the groups to their Navy escorts, who then led them aboard their respective ship to go on tour. Jessica Montero, a Felix Varela High School (Miami) senior and Navy Junior ROTC cadet, said “I’m really impressed” with her group’s tour of Stout. Retired CDR Charles R. Leo, senior naval science instructor, enjoyed watching the students’ excitement as they climbed from deck to deck.

“We’ve been planning this trip since January,” Leo said. “It’s the first chance we’ve had to visit a ship. It’s a little disappointing that we can’t go into the skin of the ship due to security restrictions, but it’s still valuable training. Hands-on beats classroom learning every time.”

Their visit to the bridge, from where the captain gives directions, was the highlight of the tour, as one student after another posed for photos at the helm or “in the chair.”

The ships were in port for four days before returning to training in preparation for their upcoming deployment with USS Enterprise’s (CVN 65) Carrier Strike Group.

Story by JO2 Amy Pomeroy, who is assigned to the Public Affairs Center, Norfolk, and JO2 Celeste B. Rubenik, who is assigned to NR MOPAT DET 208

Enterprise Flies High in Retention

USS Enterprise (CVN 65) is flying the Retention Honor Roll Pennant for the second quarter in a row, Commander, Atlantic Fleet (COMLANTFLT) awards the pennant to ships that exceed standards of personnel retention during a quarter. Enterprise is one of three Atlantic carriers to win the award.

“During an arduous yard period, Enterprise has still been able to maintain its reten-

tion goals,” said Senior Chief Navy Counselor (SW/AW) Scott T. Ross, command career counselor. “That means a lot to me.”

Ross credits the departmental career counselors with achieving this goal. While not all departments met the standards, winning was a shipwide effort. Ross understands tough working conditions can negatively affect retention rates, but that just creates more opportunity for praise.

The pennant was awarded despite a difficult job involving 12-hour shifts, seven days a week, still retaining more than 60 percent of its Sailors who were up for reenlistment. Their numbers aren’t the highest on the ship, but that’s still a noteworthy achievement, said Ross.

He singled out combat systems (COS) as one of the best departments, retention-wise, both in numbers and progress. With only 1 percent retention, COS is an example of a successful retention program.

“They whole chain of command is involved in making sure their retention programs aren’t taken lightly,” said Ross.

Chief Interior Communications Electrician (SW/AW) John L. Hunt, CSD’s career counselor and former Navy recruiter, said keeping his Sailors informed of programs and incentives is the best tactic for making them want to stay Navy.

“The best thing that any individual in a leadership position can do is make that information available to them,” said Hunt. He said the last thing he wants to hear from one of his Sailors is, “I didn’t know about that program, I would have reenlisted.”

The pennant competition also tracks Sailors who leave the service before they’re up for reenlistment. Anybody who leaves the Navy more than three months before the end of his enlistment is counted under “attrition.”

“A lot of ships didn’t make it because of attrition,” said Ross. Enterprise scored 2.7 percent, well below the maximum allowable of 18 percent.

Ross wants to win the pennant every quarter, but the winning award isn’t the only reason he wants to see high numbers. He sees it as a show of pride.

“I’d like to retain 75 percent of first-termers, because that would tell me people like their jobs,” he said. “Fifty percent doesn’t tell me that.”

Earning the Retention Honor Roll pennant requires a minimum reenlistment of 56 percent of eligible first-termers. Enterprise exceeded that with 72 percent retention.

The pennant carries an additional incentive for continuing excellence. A command that wins the award two quarters in a row for the same fiscal year wins the Golden Anchor Award. Enterprise’s two consecutive awards took place over two separate fiscal years. However, numbers remain high going into the second quarter, paving the way for continuing excellence and possibly earning Enterprise another retention award.

Story by John Fletcher S. Gibson, who is assigned to the public affairs office, USS Enterprise (CVN 65)
Supply Ship Passes Major Milestone
Newscasts these days are replete with images of ships launching Tomahawk missiles and jets taking off from the decks of aircraft carriers. But, behind these scenes is the continuous support that is required to keep these ships and aircraft moving. Ships and aircraft need fuel. Without it, they can’t get to an operating area to complete their mission. The demand for diesel fuel and jet fuel during Operation Iraqi Freedom has been high. USS Rainier (AOE 7) has been meeting that demand every day since her arrival in the Arabian Gulf in December. The Rainier, a support ship, is assigned to the public affairs office, USS Comfort (T-AH 20).

Comfort Faces Different War
Since March 20, USNS Comfort (T-AH 20) has performed more than 550 surgical procedures during the five weeks of Operation Enduring Freedom/Iraqi Freedom. That’s at least 250 more than the number of surgical procedures Comfort performed during Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm. While some of the numbers might not be staggering, they should be kept in perspective. During Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm, Comfort was deployed to the region for a total of nine months and performed a total of 337 surgical procedures.

Although these numbers provide a comparison between both iraqi conflicts, they are not the same because the war has changed. "You can’t compare the two wars. It’s like comparing oranges to apples - you just can’t," said CDR Anne Diggs, head nurse of the U.S. Army/NAVSAR and the ICU staff, they are taking care of more critical wounds than in Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm. This includes a total of nine severely burned patients, which is the most Comfort’s ICU has seen. In fact, most major burn units in the United States have rarely taken in nine burn patients at one time.

With more than a decade between the two conflicts, the technology aboard Comfort has changed just as much as the wars are different.

In 1990-91, Comfort did not have the capabilities to perform angiograms. This time, 30 angiograms were performed on Comfort. An angiogram is a type of interventional radiology, which allows radiologists to view and repair blood vessels without having to make an incision. This procedure has undoubtedly saved some of our patient’s lives, said CAPT Jeffrey Georgia, an interventional radiologist aboard Comfort. Radiology is another department that has surpassed the numbers from the last war. In 1990-91, radiology performed a total of 1,240 radiographic studies and performed 141Computed Tomography (CT) scans in nine months. This time, Comfort’s radiology department has performed almost triple the number of radiographic studies and CT scans, with 3,026 and 311 respectively, all in four weeks.

However, the medical field is not the only area where technology has changed. Communications has made vast improvements over the past decade. During Desert Shield/Desert Storm, they only had radios and thieves back home when in regular mode.

Now, Sailors can talk on telephones any time and send e-mail in real-time. There is also satellite television, which allows Sailors to see the news as it’s happening.

"Last time, we only had two televisions without news capability. We had to use the one in the first class officer’s stateroom," said Diggs. "It is totally amazing that we can keep up to date with the local news these days."

"No deployment is ever the same, and this war is definitely not like the last one, " said CAPT Jeremiah Smith, selected as the 2002 Enlisted Instructor of the Year for Naval Technical Training Command. Smith is assigned to the Trident Training Facility, Bangor, Wash., where he serves as lead instructor for the Electronics Technician Maintenance School. He teaches the three phases of instruction for electronics technicians, including classroom instruction, laboratory troubleshooting and component level repairs to electronic circuits. He also holds collateral duties as a testing officer, information systems specialist officer, auxiliary security force member and Intranet Web designer.

**S h i p m a t e s**

**Personnelman and Class (SW) Margaret Bertolino** was named 2003 Sailor of the Year for Personnel Support Detachment (PSD) Newport, R.I. Bertolino is currently the leading petty officer for PSD Newport’s staff section, which handles reenlistments, leave requests, and I.D. cards for Sailors stationed at Naval Station Newport, R.I.

"Our customer list is huge," said CPO2 Michael Ward, Rainier’s fuels officer. "The schedule can change on a moment’s notice, so we often have to add or delete a ship at the last minute. Two of the three aircraft carriers in our area are conventionally-fueled, and they need fuel every four or five days," Ward said. “We need to be there for them. Otherwise, they don’t get on station, and the planes don’t fly.”

With only 10 people, fuels division is one of the smallest on Rainier. “My guys are awesome for a long workday, but they get the job done.”

Along with the enginemen in his division, Ward has a couple damage controlmen lending a helping hand. “They fill up some of the gaps as console and station operators and topside supervisors. I really appreciate what they do for us,” Ward said.

“We pride ourselves on getting the job done safely,” added Engineman 1st Class Brad Yenerich, leading petty officer of fuels division.

According to Yenerich, the consequences of a mishap could be catastrophic. “There are no second chances when we are transferring fuel. We have to get it right the first time,” he explained.

Over-pressurizing a fuel line or failing to stop pumping at the correct time could spoil fuel into the sea or cause a mishap on the receiving ship. "We haven’t spilled a drop in [more than] a hundred million gallons. I think that’s pretty good,” said Yenerich.

**Story by JO2 Bela Poole, who is assigned to the public affairs office, USS Rainier (AOE 7)**

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TM Jeremiah Good and ABl Billy Sunday fire a shot line from the USS Constellation (CV 64) to support their USS Rainier (AOE 7) during a refueling at sea, while Constellation was deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

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T he 14,000 members of the Navy’s cryptology (CNC) community took an exceptional step forward with the recent establishment of the Center for Naval Cryptology (CNC), in a ceremony held at Corry Station, Fla., this spring.

The center will work with the Department of Defense and related agencies to provide the best quality care to our patients no matter who they are or where they come from,” said Diggs.

Story by JOSN Erica Mates, who is assigned to the public affairs office, USNS Comfort (T-AH 20)
Up early and late to bed is the standard for these Sailors. They're expected to work hard. They know the routine and it gets tiresome, but they know they have to get the job done. The working conditions are less than hospitable. It's hot, hectic and dangerous.

"The flight deck isn't a job for everyone," said Senior Chief Aviation Boatswain's Mate - Handling (AW/SW) Rene Blake, V-1 division flight deck leading chief petty officer aboard USS Tarawa (LHA 1). "A lot of people look at us like we're crazy and say, 'How can you work like that?' But for us, it's a point of pride."

"Working on the flight deck is dangerous, very dangerous," said Blake. "You've got hundreds of people up there on deck, and if you don't know what you're looking at, you'd think it was chaos. To us it's controlled chaos."

The core of this highly trained and effective team is an unlikely source – undesignated Sailors. Most are young, inexperienced and just out of high school, but on the flight deck, they are in charge of multimillion dollar aircraft and the lives of their shipmates.

Buffeted by the rotor-wash, ABH1(AW/SW) Luke Willdigg, one of Tarawa's LSEs, lands a Marine MH-53 on the deck.
“We’ve got a lot of undesignated personnel. Air and deck are the departments that get the majority of the undesignated Sailors,” said Blake. “We get a few designated ABHs, but a lot of the undesignated end up becoming yellow shirts, and some strike out to other rates.”

And with the harsh working conditions, you’d think most would try to strike a different rate as soon as possible. “We get a lot of people who come in thinking they want to be a yeoman or some other kind of office job, but after they learn the ropes up on deck, they realize that they really love it up there and decide to stay,” said Blake. “We encourage them to go for whatever job in the Navy they want. I don’t push the flight-deck rates, because what’s right for me might not be right for the next person.”

“I came in right out of high school,” said ABHAN Christina Duvall, “and when I joined, I had seen all the Navy commercials showing the flight deck guys, and that’s what I wanted to do.” Before the Navy, she worked at K-mart—now she lands Harriers and helicopters.

While the desire to work on the flight deck may be born of TV commercials, the flight deck safety rules are born out of necessity. The most important rule on the flight deck is safety. There’s always an opportunity to get hurt up there. You can get run over by a tractor, flattened by a helicopter or knocked around by a Harrier. Keeping situational awareness at all times is paramount. “We keep pounding it into their heads about the dangers of working up on deck,” said ABH1 Luke Willdigg, one of Tarawa’s senior yellow shirts. “It doesn’t matter who you are—from E-1 to O-9—you still have to keep your head on a swivel.”

Sometimes that’s hard to do for young Sailors, but those who have been around awhile are always there to keep an eye on their junior charges. “We had a big turnover after the last deployment, but the new, young Sailors have done a great job filling in the holes,” said Blake. “They’ve done nothing but impress me at all times, and I’ve got my little group of veterans who keep everything in line. They keep me worry free.”

No one sets a foot on the flight deck before they know what’s going on. “When they first get here, they spend some time up on Vultures Row, just watching and learning how things work and who does what,” said Willdigg. “Later, they’ll spend a few weeks shadowing someone doing their job up on deck to get a hands-on feel for it.”

“The flight deck crew takes its jobs very seriously, as they are responsible for other people’s lives and multimillion dollar aircraft. The flight deck crew is a scene of controlled chaos.”

“The days up on the roof start early and end late. A landing signal enlisted (LSE) launches the first aircraft of the day on Tarawa.”

The closeness of Tarawa’s flight deck crew, at work and off the job, helps them perform even more smoothly when they are called to fight for their country.
“My junior Sailors are a good bunch of people,” said Blake. “I’m pleasantly surprised at the attitude that they possess. For having to do some of the worst jobs on the flight deck — cleaning, chocking and chaining — they keep in really good spirits. I think the upper ranks have instilled a sense of pride in them about their job, and that if they work hard at some of the less interesting jobs, one day they can become yellow shirts.”

The closeness of Tarawa’s flight deck crew, at work and off the job, helps them perform even more smoothly when they are called to fight for their country. “The people I work with up here are the greatest. They make it all worth-while,” said Duvall. “We’re a really close team, we’re all best friends. We hang out together – some of us live together – we do everything together, and that closeness just makes our jobs easier.”

Being deployed is hard. Sailors miss their families and friends. They miss their homes, but they are out there doing something important. “I feel great about being out here supporting the war,” said Duvall. “I get letters from my family and friends every day telling me how proud they are of me. They worry, but they know I’m pretty safe.”

From the newest recruit to the most senior leader, the flight deck crew has a feeling of pride that more than makes up for the long hours and the time spent away. “The flight deck guys are all really proud of what we’re doing over here. We’re out here defending our country,” said Blake. “Some of the younger guys may not know what it means to them now, but as they get older, they’ll feel it just like I do.”

“Being out here in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom is incredible!” said Willdigg. “I tell people it feels like I’ve been practicing my whole career for the big game and now I get to play. It’ll be a feeling of pride, plain and simple, to be able to go home and tell my son that his daddy helped liberate a nation. You just can’t beat that. It’s dangerous, but you have to put that beside you so you can keep a good head on your shoulders. You can’t run around scared all day. You have to keep alert. No matter what.”

Houlihan is a photojournalist assigned to All Hands. He’s part of a little group of veterans who keep everything in line. They keep me worry free.”

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It’s a fast-paced place to work with no room for error. These Sailors can’t afford to make mistakes. Lives are at stake. “They grow up real fast here on the flight deck,” said Blake. “A lot of my troops were in study hall at this time last year, but they’re doing a good job of it.”

With the war going on and aircraft moving everywhere, the emphasis is usually on the machines, but it’s the people behind those machines that make things work.
While coalition forces were fighting their way toward Baghdad, Iraqi citizens tried to go about their lives in as normal a fashion as possible. Unfortunately, at times, their everyday life is as perilous as it is during wartime.

A young Iraqi boy was in his house and accidentally knocked over some cans of kerosene, starting a fire. He and his parents were badly burned. Coalition forces found the family and rushed to have them med-evac. In the haste to save their lives, the family was separated.

Imagine the terror this young boy felt, as he suddenly found himself surrounded by people speaking a foreign language, taking him off to who knows where.

Providing Comfort for All

USNS Comfort’s Humanitarian Aid
Although he didn’t know where he was going, he also didn’t know how lucky he was to be going there. As the helicopter touched down on the deck of USNS Comfort (T-AH 20), a team of emergency medical technicians, including Hospital Corpsman Matthew Moritz, met him and the other patients on the flight deck.

“It’s hard to get through the language barrier. It’s more body language, and you try to talk calmly to them so they know we are trying to help,” said Moritz. “The translators told me after I had tried to calm down an Enemy Prisoner of War (EPW) and keep him on the stretcher, that he thought we were going to kill him. Some thought that was why we brought them here. That of course was not the case; we’re trying to heal them. We give everyone the same treatment here.”

When Comfort left her homeport of Baltimore in February, the crew knew they would treat war casualties. They didn’t know how large a role they would play performing their secondary mission — humanitarian aid.

“We weren’t expecting to get that many civilian patients, but we got them,” said CAPT Charles Blankenship, commanding officer of the Medical Treatment Facility on Comfort. “At any one time, we have had close to 150 Iraqi patients, both EPW and civilian.”

Several of those patients spent a lot of time working with HM2 Bobbi Bowman. Bowman is a physical therapist whose job is to help patients with wounds from car accidents, gunshots, to rocket-propelled grenades.

“We used translators when we were building a relationship with the patient and all the barriers were up. We asked them to come in and try to communicate what we are trying to do to help. Once we facilitated a trust between a provider and a patient, it then became working one-on-one with them.”

A lot of the simple things that might only take five minutes in the United States, like crutch training, become nearly
impossible with a person who speaks another language. "You're not only trying to tell them how to do something," Bowman said, "you're telling them to do something they have never seen before."

One of her examples of the challenging cases they worked with was a teenage girl the crew nicknamed "Admiral," the Arabic word for princess. "At first, dealing with this girl was difficult for me because I have a young daughter of my own," said Bowman. "This girl was very young and beautiful, and now her whole world has changed because of her injuries."

Dealing with a fractured femur is difficult. So is learning how to walk all over again. But when someone who doesn't speak your language is trying to provide that care, it makes it all the more difficult. "In our world," Bowman continued, "if we try to explain to a child why we are doing something and they understand, it makes our job a little bit easier, but you still have to develop the whole tough-love syndrome.

When we first started working with this girl, she wanted nothing to do with physical therapy. Through translators, we were told that she felt we were trying to torture her, because she had never been exposed to people coming in and trying to help heal something before."

Something as simple as taking a bath or a shower was very frightening to this young girl. Bowman later found out that "Admiral" had never been in a shower before. "The whole concept of water pouring out of the wall and someone holding her up there was completely different to her."

Bowman said there is a definite learning curve when working with the Iraqis. "My first instinct as a (medical) provider, and even as a mother, is to try to help this child – to make her pain go away."

One thing that Comfort's crew doesn't have to worry about while working with their Iraqi patients is the work environment. Comfort is not your typical ship. It's the size of a large tanker,
and if you can imagine removing the insides and placing an entire hospital in its place, then you have a pretty good picture of this floating building. The halls – not p-ways, but halls – are wide enough to wheel hospital beds side-by-side in some places.

Some of the upgrades the ship has received recently have already paid for themselves on this mission. A newly installed angiography suite, which is used to take pictures of blood vessels, helped save the life of a Marine by helping to stop bleeding from a massive pelvic injury.

Saving lives may be the reason *Comfort* was sent to the Middle East, but it is not the only thing the crew is doing to help the lives of patients on the ship.

LCDR Patricia McKay, an orthopedic surgeon, has been using her sewing machine to make dresses for some of the young girls on board. "I enjoy sewing as a hobby and brought a sewing machine on board anticipating some free time," McKay said. "As it turned out, I didn’t have much opportunity to use it.”

When she would go down to see her patients though, many of whom were
wearing only pillowcases with holes cut out for their arms, or torn sheets around their heads to cover up, she realized she could make a difference. “It seemed a shame to have all this fabric and a sewing machine and not use it,” said McKay. “So we started making clothes for the children on board.”

She said one of her biggest concerns when they were heading over to the theater was that the Iraqi civilians were going to suffer the brunt of the war. “I’m glad we were able to help them through their suffering in some way, make their lives a little better, and do a little diplomatic work for the United States. We can show them we are not bad people, and I’m glad to be a part of it.”

McKay is not the only one who used her free time to help make the patients more comfortable. Many of the crew spent the few off-hours they have in the wards, collectively called, “The Village” because of the community and family atmosphere. Some have even made friendships they want to continue after returning home.

While some of these patients will make a full recovery, many will need extra care for a long time to come. “These are devastating, life-changing injuries that have happened to some of these people,” said CDR Claude Anderson, one of four orthopedic surgeons on Comfort.

“Regardless if they were Iraqi soldiers, coalition forces or Iraqi civilians, these are things that could affect them the rest of their life and be a permanent part of them getting around. What I’m saying is that war is hell. We go in saying, ‘we are going to war and I’m going to do what I’m trained for.’ But, the things that happen to people are devastating, and as a surgeon, as the doctor taking care of them, it hits home.”

The civilians and EPWs who were brought to this floating hospital are aware of just how lucky they are to get this level of care and skill. Anderson said these patients told him

Even though the identities of the Iraqi patients were known by many crew members, all were documented as Jane or John Doe to protect their identities from media coverage.

Providing Comfort for All

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Physical therapy technician, HM2 Bobbi Bowman (right), brushes the hair of a young Iraqi girl before starting physical therapy. Bowman and HM3 Erin Murphy have been working daily with recovering patients to increase the speed of recovery.

If someone gives you a job, you do it to the best of your ability,” said Bowman. “In the medical field we are trained to provide health care, and we will do it to the best of our ability, whether it is for an Iraqi or for coalition forces. If we want to be able to lay our heads down at night, then we need to look beyond who they are. We need to do our jobs well, because this is why we are out here.”

McCoy is a photojournalist for All Hands

During off hours, the crew of Comfort can visit their steel beach to work on a tan or just relax.

As an Army Blackhawk lifts off the deck of USNS Comfort a teenage boys waves goodbye to friends he made during his stay.
A ragged breath escapes his lungs and veins bulge on his forearm, as he wraps the rope around his gloved hand. He flexes his grip one last time.

Spurs used in rodeos are required to be square and dull so no animal can be injured.

Bulls weighing close to 1,500 pounds seem gentle until they enter the chute. They seem to know it’s time to work.

Dempsey gets set before the chute opens and the eight-second thrill ride begins.

“Go!” The gate flies open, and the ton of solid muscle beneath Interior Communications Electrician 3rd Class Billy Don Dempsey lurches out of the stall. He’s thrown forward, then back, then forward again amid the cheers of the crowd. The arena is a blur as the bull beneath him spins and bucks.

“Ride him; Ride him, Billy Don!” yells a cowboy standing on top of the chute. Steam and saliva spew from the mouth of the huge animal as he tries to dislodge his unwelcome passenger. The bull leaps and turns, becoming horizontal in the air. As the bull’s hooves dig into the earth, Dempsey’s leg is thrown high, and he hangs onto the side of the beast, dangerously close to the horns. Another spin and his grip is gone, leaving him in a pile on the ground. A cloud of dust envelops him as the hind legs of the bull kick just over his head. The enraged bull spins to attack his

Story and photos by PH1 Shane T. McCoy
Unlike the sports many of us are used to, cowboys are cowboys all the time. It’s not a thing they leave behind when they leave the arena. From the cowboy boots, pressed jeans and huge belt buckles, to the “Yes, ma’am” and “Thank you, darlin,’” the cowboy culture runs deep in these men and women.

Why else would they risk injury to ride a bull or horse for eight seconds? Most people wouldn’t even contemplate doing it. Dempsy admits he was scared the first time he climbed atop a bull.

"I can’t remember what it was like not riding," said Damage Controlman 2nd Class Adam Fisk, one of two SRA cowboys stationed aboard USS Normandy (CG 60). “It’s all I think about now – what I’ve done and how to get better. I’m a rookie still, so for me, it’s more losing than winning, but everyone has to pay their dues.”

According to Dempsy, it’s a big “adrenaline rush” that’s over in a flash the first few times you ride, but after you have a few rides under your giant belt buckle, it almost seems to happen in slow motion.

"I can see his shoulder drop, I can see the turn of his head and know I need to be over there. I track him the whole time, and the eight seconds seem forever."

Today’s cowboys can trace their roots back to long trail drives and the following round-up. Ranch hands would have friendly contests to see who could rope and tie a calf the quickest, or who could stay on an unbroken horse or bull the longest. From there, it grew to challenges against the best riders and ropers in the area, then the state, and soon the country. Since those first days of rodeo, the sport has gone international. You can now find cowboys in many countries around the world.
The Eight seconds may seem a long time for the riders, but to the children in the crowd who have never seen a rodeo before, those seconds last a lifetime. Wide-eyed and awestruck, children line the arena watching “Cowboys” – real live cowboys. These are the heroes who were only seen on television and read about in books. Many of the children who ask for autographs, or have their parents ask, can only watch, awestruck, as their hat, photo or paper is signed.

“I think it’s pretty neat when a guy who has a long drive in front of him, who should be getting on the road, takes the time to stop and visit with some kids. They look up to us, and they’re the future of rodeo,” said Dempsy.

“I end up signing quite a few autographs. Getting to compete is just a bonus; the reason people come is for the show, and it’s the fans who pay our winnings.”

In a sport where winning really depends on the luck of the draw – determining which bull or bronco you get – you know that money is not the draw for these Sailors. They just have the need to continue riding the unridable, and will go to any length to pursue it.

In the morning, Dempsy wakes up in the huge cab of his pickup truck, which he calls his “Cowboy Cadillac.” Sitting there with his dog Jed, he isn’t thinking of how sore he is, or the long drive home, his thoughts are focused – on the next weekend; the next bull; the next eight-second ride.

DC2 Adam Fisk and IC3 Billy Don Dempsey are two of the four Sailors who ride in the Southern Rodeo Association.

“I’ve thought I had been on well over eight seconds, pulled my rope and jumped off, just to find out it’s only been six seconds and I didn’t get a score. In fact, I’ve done it more than once.”

Fisk also tells stories about just how much can happen in eight seconds.

“When you come out, it’s just you and him. I don’t hear the crowd. I don’t hear my buddies on the fence. It’s just the two of us, and I’m trying to match him move for move. I get so focused on what he’s doing that everything else just goes away.”

McCoy is a photojournalist assigned to All Hands.

As the gate opens, bull and rider burst into the arena.

Maurer gets his rigging in place before his bare-back bronco ride.

Young bulls streak past a cowboy on their way to a pen outside the arena.
Precommissioning Unit (PCU) Ronald Reagan crewmembers recently took part in a series of damage control training scenarios, developed by the ship’s Damage Control Training Team. The training, as part of the ship’s crew certification process, was designed to reinforce basic damage control skills and build the crew’s ability to work as a team to combat fire, flooding and any other threat to the ship.

According to CDR Jene Nissen, Commander Naval Air Force U.S. Atlantic Fleet (COMNAVAIRLANT) Aircraft Carrier training and readiness officer, “Ronald Reagan Sailors passed their Phase II Crew Certification with flying colors. The ship did extremely well,” he added.

Crew Certification determines the ability of the crew to evaluate its own training, and its competency to train to Type Commander objectives. Ronald Reagan Sailors not only passed the certification process, but also saved valuable resources in the process.

“We are the first PCU aircraft carrier to perform Crew Certification from assets taken strictly from our own crew members,” said CDR Judy Lee, training officer. “All previous carriers have had contractor support costing approximately $5 million dollars that our crew members saved by doing it themselves.”

Lee credited ABCM(AW) Dwayne Dubie with much of the success. “He headed up the Crew Certification Cell and has invested two long years in preparing for today’s success,” she said. “The crew has to be trained and qualified to perform all tasks and functions in a coordinated manner to accomplish its operational mission,” Lee said. “Crew Certification is a three-step process that focuses initially on administrative accomplishments (completion of Ship’s instructions, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and watch bills), the Level of Knowledge tests, and culminating in assessing the ship’s ability to successfully perform Phase Two required drills on the schedule the ship writes for itself. Almost every functional area was reviewed to ensure Ronald Reagan crewmembers are ready to take the ship to sea - safely, professionally and on time.

“This is the kind of event that allows us to press on and get this warship ready,” said Commanding Officer CAPT Bill Goodwin. “The Sailors on the deck plates did a great job getting themselves ready. The drive was for a sense of excellence, not to settle for second best,” Goodwin said.

Just on the timeline horizon lies Builder’s Sea Trials and Acceptance Sea Trials after which the event many crewmembers have been waiting for — the commissioning of the Navy’s newest aircraft carrier on July 12.
Eye on the Fleet is a monthly photo feature sponsored by the Chief of Information Navy Visual News Service. We are looking for high impact, quality photography from Sailors in the fleet to showcase the American Sailor in action.

To be considered, forward your high resolution (5” x 7” at 300 dpi) images with full credit and cutline information, including full name, rank and duty station. Name all identifiable people within the photo and include important information about what is happening, where the photo was taken and the date.

Commands with digital photo capability can send attached .jpg files to: navynewsphoto@hq.navy.mil

Mail your submissions to:
Navy Visual News Service • Naval Media Center
2713 Mitscher Rd., S.W., Anacostia Annex, D.C. 20373-5819

Awaiting Orders
USS Boxer (LHD 4) waits pierside with a full deck of aircraft, hours before she deploys to conduct missions in support of Operations Enduring Freedom/Iraqi Freedom.

Up, Up and Away!
AG3 Mandy Fetterman launches a 100-gram weather balloon as part of her duties to gather and record weather information aboard USS Preble (DDG 88).

Stable Repairs
AEAN Paul Bailey performs maintenance on a stabilizer actuator assembly of an SH-60 Sea Hawk in the hangar bay of USS Nimitz (CVN 68).

Quicksilver
An F/A-18 Hornet makes a night-time catapult launch from the flight deck of USS Harry S. Truman (CVN 75).

SAR Sim
Helicopter Combat Support Squadron (HC) 8 and Explosive Ordinance Disposal Mobile Unit (EODMU) personnel, AD2 Joseph Harris (left) and AT2 Chad Black, are hoisted upward to the CH-46 Sea Knight helicopter, as part of a search and rescue training exercise.
Putting Aside Our Differences

By EWSN Thomas J. Gianadda

I'm a relatively young Sailor, but I've seen and learned quite a bit so far during my two and a half years in the Navy. I've been exposed to people within the Navy, not only from many parts of the United States, but from all over the world. Serving on the only U.S. ship out of six during a six-month Standing Naval Forces Atlantic (SNFL) deployment, I have been exposed to a variety of people and cultures from other navies as well.

Initially, being introduced to so many new and different people, places and cultures was overwhelming, and in some ways shocking. It was quite an adjustment. Honestly, it still is an adjustment to get used to this ever-changing lifestyle.

I have found it to be very interesting at times, but also very difficult. I have been forced to humble myself and just bite my lip and take a deep breath to avoid conflict in certain situations. I've learned that there are always going to be differences in interests and opinions, and that we all have to learn to adjust and to respect each other.

This is not always an easy thing to do by any means. In fact, it has proven to be difficult more often than not. Factors such as where we're from and how we were raised influence every aspect of our lives. I've noticed that people have a natural tendency to get along better with those with whom they have things in common.

I am fortunate though, that my Navy experience has taught me how to exercise patience and tolerance with people so that I'm able to work with them, despite our differences in interests and opinions.

I know that the military isn't for everyone, but it does offer an excellent working and learning experience and many valuable life lessons. As I've heard this first hand. From talking with people from other navies, I've learned that many countries have a mandatory policy of military service for a minimum of two years for all eligible citizens. I think it's a great idea to have such a policy. The military is based on principles such as respect and discipline for one's self and for others. I think this is one of the main reasons why citizens and/or voters often prefer the leaders of our country, including the President, to have previous military experience before they are truly qualified to fill their political positions.

Despite all our differences, on Sept. 11, 2001, a positive display of unity and togetherness was displayed, not only in our military, but also throughout our entire nation. We were forced to drop everything we were doing and share a common fear.

Days, weeks and months after that infamous day, we all came together as one nation and one military, and put all of our differences aside to focus our concern on our nation's recovery and well-being. It has since been a time of healing and an amazing display of patriotism and brotherhood, not only within our country, but also among our brothers and sisters throughout the world. Maybe it shouldn't have taken an incident so extreme and drastic for this to happen, but sometimes that's just what it takes for us to truly realize how precious life and liberty really are.

Out of all of this, the most important lesson that I have learned is that we must put aside our differences and disagreements - whether it is race, religion, sex, etc. - for us to reach a common goal. We all need to learn how to work together as a team to strive for efficiency and success.

Putting our differences aside and helping others, especially in time of need, is what life is all about. This is a difficult task and a constant battle, but I firmly believe that by disciplining ourselves to work together as one, it is the only way to achieve true peace and happiness. So, let our differences go by the wayside, and let us live and work as a successful team and nation.

May God bless our country and may God bring peace throughout our world.

Gianadda is assigned to USS Samuel B. Roberts (FFG 58)

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Eye on History

Eye on History is a monthly photo feature sponsored by the Naval Historical Center. For more photos pertaining to naval history, go to www.history.navy.mil.

1974
AC1 J. E. Shaffer loads sonobuoys into a mount for deployment during Operation Springboard ‘74, at Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico.

1953
On board USS Manchester (CA 83) in Korean waters, MM2 Stanley Ograysko turns out a spare part on a lathe in the machine shop.

1944
PhM2 Betty Shute and PhM1 E. L. Johnson perform an X-ray scan of PhM3 M. L. Moache at Bethesda, Md.

1926
Instructors and students of a 1926 photo class at the Naval School of Photography pose for an informal group photo outside Building 256, the combined photo school and station photo lab.

1967
Standing on the signal bridge of USS Alstede (AF 48), SM1 Glen Braden sends a message to a fellow signalman on board USS Northampton (CLC 1). Braden recently returned from South Vietnam where he received the Silver Star and Navy Commendation Medal for action against the Viet Cong, while commanding a river patrol boat.

1953
On board USS Manchester (CA 83) in Korean waters, MM2 Stanley Ograysko turns out a spare part on a lathe in the machine shop.

U.S. Navy Photos Courtesy of the Naval Historical Center