Protecting the Panama Canal

One Shipyard

Building the Navy

“One Shipyard”

All HANDS
MAGAZINE OF THE NAVY
DECEMBER 2003
There’s No Place Like Home

When the Navy decided to undertake the largest extended selected restricted availability (ESRA) ever with USS John F. Kennedy (CV 67), they kept her moored in her homeport of Mayport, Fla., and brought the shipyard to them.

Looking more like an astronaut than a shipyard worker, Blaster-Painter Wayne Johnson sandblasts submarine parts for the Navy before they are painted. “Sandblasting is the best way to prepare metal for painting,” said Johnson. Less tedious and labor intensive than sanding or nail gun paint removal, the sandblaster is better for the environment because Johnson can recycle the steel grit he uses.

For tourists, the popular seacoast town offers fine seafood and a rich colonial heritage: but for Sailors, Portsmouth, N.H., is far more than just a day trip from Boston — it’s the very cradle of naval shipbuilding, boasting a time-tested reputation as one of the finest shipyards in American history.

From petroleum to coffee, a staggering percentage of goods consumed by Americans on a daily basis are brought to neighborhood stores from shipments passing through the Panama Canal. By transiting the canal, 8,000 miles are cut off transoceanic crossings. This year, Chile and the United States joined Panama for an exercise designed to ensure continued safe passage through and neutrality of the Canal.

Surprising the Competition

By his own admission, one doesn’t think of Religious Program Specialist 2nd Class (Fleet Marine Force) Nelson Lebron as a kickboxer when meeting him for the first time. But as the bell rings, and the diminutive boxer connects with his opponent, it only takes two kicks to the stomach, a crushing right cross to the chin and a mere 14 seconds to bring down a man who is a foot taller than Lebron.
Jerry Weiss, a former Engineman 2nd Class, prepares to talk to reporters aboard his former ship, USS Missouri (BB 63), shortly after the Anniversary of the End of World War II ceremony. Weiss served aboard the battleship from 1948 to 1951 and was one of more than 100 former Missouri crew members who were present at the ceremony hosted by the Missouri Memorial Association in Pearl Harbor.
F/A-18E Super Hornets assigned to the “Black Aces” of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 41 fly over the Western Pacific Ocean in a stack formation. The Nimitz Carrier Strike Group and Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 11 recently returned from an extended deployment.

Super Swarm
Photo by PH2 Christopher L. Jordan
**Speaking with Sailors**

Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy

MCPON (SS/AW) Terry D. Scott

### The following questions are from a recent All Hands Call in Norfolk

**Q:** When Hurricane Isabel hit Norfolk recently, my apartment sustained some damage and I lost some of my personal property. Can the Navy reimburse me?

**A:** I’m glad you asked about this, because this is a topic that is so very important for Sailors to understand. In light of the recent events in the Norfolk area and other incidents during the past couple of months, such as fires, break-ins, etc., around the Navy, I asked about the number of Sailors who had renters insurance. It was surprising to learn how few Sailors have this coverage. It’s estimated that less than 10 percent of Sailors who had renters insurance. I was asked about the number of Sailors who had the mis-conception that the Navy will compensate you for loss of your personal property due to a natural disaster. The fact is, the cost of replacing or repairing your personal property is solely your responsibility. Whether you live in government housing or rent out on the local economy, you should insure your household property just as you would any other valuable asset – just as you do your car.

Of six fires in the past two years, in one particular area, not one of the residents were covered. And of 500 residents affected by a housing flood in 1999, only two families had coverage. When Sailors and their families rent government quarters and move in, they are briefed and encouraged to obtain renters insurance. And I encourage Sailors who rent out on the local economy to also take the proper steps to secure their personal property. This coverage is readily available and generally very affordable.

I really hate to see Sailors lose anything when the fix is so easy and inexpensive. Talk to your insurance provider about the right coverage for you and your family.

---

**U.S. Navy Band Holiday Concert Broadcast 2003**

Join your shipmates for the U.S. Navy Band’s “Happy Holidays” concert, broadcast from DAR Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C.

The Armed Force Network (AFN) will carry the concert on Dec. 25, 2003, as follows:

- **AFN-Atlantic** – 7 a.m. – 8:30 a.m. (Central European Time)
- **AFN-Pacific** – 8 a.m. – 9:30 a.m. (Japan Time)

The program will also appear on Direct to Sailor (DTS) television on Dec. 25, 2003, as follows:

- **DTS-Atlantic** – 7 a.m. – 8:30 a.m. (Central European Time)
- **DTS-Pacific** – 8 a.m. – 9:30 a.m. (Japan Time)

For more information, check your local listings for times, or go to:


If you’re in the area, plan to attend the concert at DAR Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C., on Saturday, Dec. 20, 2003, at 3 p.m.

For information on how to obtain FREE tickets, log onto the Navy Band’s web site at www.navyband.navy.mil
A new method of delivering leadership training to the chief petty officers (CPO) is now part of the continual growth and development of Sailors. In conjunction with the Navy Knowledge Online (NKO), computer-based leadership training is now delivered to every newly selected chief petty officer through a partnership with an online business skills training provider.

The CPO Selecteer E-Learning program consists of three Web-based courses offered by the Ninth House Network.

Story by Jt’s Eileen Kelly Foss, who is assigned to the public affairs office, Commander Navy Region Europe

New Chief Petty Officers Gain Leadership Training Edge

Headquartered in Washington, D.C., CNI began operations Oct. 1. With CNI, Naval Regionwide alignment was set into place when installation management claimants, including Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Europe (COMUSNAV EUR), formalized our administrative installation support responsibilities to this single installation effectiveness by reducing and regionalizing the number of installation claimants. “We’ve got five years of experience thus far in a partial consolidation of our installations. Now we’re going to do a full consolidation under one command,” said Weaver, during a recent tour of Navy Region Europe commands.

“CNI is a piece of transformation at a time when we are expected to transform — and we are expected to transform partly as a result of the war and partly because it’s the right thing to be doing today,” Weaver said. “We can leverage business processes and business

processes to create resources, to generate resources and to reconfigure the Navy. We also need to take advantage of our experience in centralization and consolidation of support services that we’ve been going through.”

“Almost every NII installation is part of our enterprise, so we need to work together in the most efficient way possible.”

In recent cases, the impact of CNI will be transparent to the base level. CNI will improve the ability to provide unified and consistent procedures, standards of service, practices and funding, to manage and oversee installation support to the fleet.

For more information on CNI, visit www.cni.navy.mil. For related news, visit the CNI News/StandPage at www.news.navy.mil/local/cne

Sailors. In conjunction with Navy Knowledge Online (NKO), computer-based leadership training is now delivered every newly selected chief petty officer through a partnership with an online business skills training provider.

The CPO Selecteer E-Learning program consists of three Web-based courses offered by the Ninth House Network.
of the city’s military community. Retired Master Chief Boatswain’s Mate Richard McMahon, who sailed on the cruiser USS Borie (CG 74) and the oldest USS Woccon (AO 109).

“Watching these ships parade by brings back many memories for me,” said McMahon, as he and his wife of 46 years watched the “circle around a bollard as a ship enters port.”

The cover of this issue features some of the familiar scenes of Hawaii. We take a look at the sea and shore activities and the work conducted by the “clockwatchers” is essential to U.S. defense efforts and fleet operations.

Story courtesy of the public affairs office, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery.

"The impact on Naval Medicine's blood donation sites, which are part of the AFPB, are the National Naval Medical Center, Bethesda, Md.; Naval Hospital Camp Lejeune, N.C.; Naval Medical Center, Portsmouth, Va.; Naval Medical Center, San Diego; and the U.S. Naval Hospital, Okinawa, Japan. "This new restriction is intended to guarantee that the military's blood products are safe. The restriction also protects the health of the donors and the patients who receive life-saving transfusions," said Libby. "This is a time for new donors to volunteer and for current donors to consider donating more often. Their efforts will go a long way to counter any potential shortages."

For related news, visit the Navy Medicine Navy NewsStand page at www.news.navy.mil/local/mednews.

Story by JO2 Allison Pittam, Fleet Support Detachment, San Diego
S SHOPPERS, WE COME TO EXPECT THAT THE ITEMS we’ve grown accustomed to will always be sitting on the shelves just waiting for purchase at our leisure. But, what if one day they weren’t? Suppose, after saving for months, that high-definition, plasma TV you’d been eyeing was no longer available.

Or, perhaps you finally decided to trade in the old car for a new convertible, only to discover that the price of practically everything – including your new dream car – had tripled overnight.

It’s an unsettling thought, but not an entirely implausible one if commercial shipping through the Panama Canal were to be disrupted due to terrorist activity.

From petroleum to coffee, a staggering percentage of goods Americans consume on a daily basis is brought to neighborhood stores from shipments passing through this canal.
And, the waterway’s importance goes far beyond its commercial value. The Panama Canal also has tremendous strategic importance to the U.S. Navy. Without this shortcut between the Americas, naval vessels transiting from the Atlantic to Pacific Ocean would add an additional 8,000 miles to the journey, skirting the South American continent.

To Panamanians, this canal represents thousands of jobs and millions of dollars in revenue from tourism as well as the tolls collected from passing vessels. In 2002 alone, according to the Panama Canal’s Fiscal Year Traffic report, approximately 2 million tons of cargo passed through the channel, generating close to $590 million in tolls during 2002 alone.

Passage through and neutrality of the canal, combined the technology, skills and efforts of several nations, including the United States, Chile and Panama. "Everyone has the same goal here: defense of the canal and the ships that transit it,” said LT Glen Quast, USS McInerney’s (FFG 8) operations officer. "The Panamanians have the ability to defend the actual canal territorially, and no one is challenging that,” he continued. "The purpose of this exercise is to add an additional layer of maritime defense to existing security. That way, if there were to be a threat from the sea, we’re ready to offer assistance.”

Of course, the planning and execution of such a large-scale operation was no simple matter. First, and foremost, was the monumental task of establishing communications between the navies. "The CAT (Communications Assistance Teams) had to work hard to overcome the language and technology barriers," said Chief Operations Specialist (SW/AW) James Daniels, part of the Destroyer Squadron (DESRON) 6 team embarked aboard USS Stump (DD 978) for Panamax. "Without the ability to communicate effectively with the other ships, this exercise had no chance of succeeding."

Although conducted in the waters of the Eastern Pacific in late July, volunteers from key ratings were selected months earlier for the CATs and deployed aboard the Chilean, Peruvian, Ecuadorian and Panamanian ships with the mission of installing the tactical communication systems, LINK 11 and Battle-Force E-Mail. Once in place, CAT members had the added responsibility of training the international crews on the operation of these systems.

According to CAT member, Information Systems Technician 3rd Class Antonio Arevalo, TAD aboard Zenteno (PFG 8), the biggest struggle came from differences in the Chilean ship’s configuration. “Placing the cables and antennae
Protecting the Waters of the Panama Canal

Protecting the Waters of the Panama Canal and planning put into Panama would have been pointless without an actual target to track and apprehend. For this exercise, the commercial cargo vessel, Balsa (MV 72), and its 18-man crew were contracted to play the role of suspects.

Using reports gathered from ships and patrolling P-3 aircraft, the Combat Information Center (CIC) aboard control ship, Stump, identified Balsa to be demonstrating suspicious behavior. The order was then issued for the search and seizure teams to detain and board the vessel.

As the most potentially dangerous and hands-on phase of the exercise, the detention of the Balsa was an exhausting experience for everyone involved – particularly the container ship’s crew. “It was exciting the first time they took control of the ship,” said Chef’s Assistant Arnel Tarriela as he attempted to clean the galley between boardings. “Now, I’m just trying to keep in touch with.”

Despite their trials and tribulations, each installation team completed their mission and Panama was underway. Now able to securely exchange intelligence reports, the participating ships were able to distinguish one another on radar as well as track the progress of other vessels in the surrounding waters. The objective of these exchanges was to identify any potential threats before they develop.

“Through tracking systems we can follow the paths of different ships in the area. If a ship has been designated as a cargo transport, then we can expect it to behave in a certain manner,” said Quast. “For instance, the captain of any merchant ship will travel from point A to point B in the shortest possible course to cut down on fuel expenditures and to deliver their cargo as quickly as possible. That’s how they make their money. What we’re looking for is unexplainable detours or stops that might denote suspicious activity.”

Of course, all the technology, teamwork and planning put into Panama would have been pointless without an actual target to track and apprehend. For this exercise, the commercial cargo vessel, Balsa (MV 72), and its 18-man crew were contracted to play the role of suspects.

Using reports gathered from ships and patrolling P-3 aircraft, the Combat Information Center (CIC) aboard control ship, Stump, identified Balsa to be demonstrating suspicious behavior. The order was then issued for the search and seizure teams to detain and board the vessel.

As the most potentially dangerous and hands-on phase of the exercise, the detention of the Balsa was an exhausting experience for everyone involved – particularly the container ship’s crew. “It was exciting the first time they took control of the ship,” said Chef’s Assistant Arnel Tarriela as he attempted to clean the galley between boardings. “Now, I’m just trying to keep in touch with.”

Despite their trials and tribulations, each installation team completed their mission and Panama was underway. Now able to securely exchange intelligence reports, the participating ships were able to distinguish one another on radar as well as track the progress of other vessels in the surrounding waters. The objective of these exchanges was to identify any potential threats before they develop.

“Through tracking systems we can follow the paths of different ships in the area. If a ship has been designated as a cargo transport, then we can expect it to behave in a certain manner,” said Quast. “For instance, the captain of any merchant ship will travel from point A to point B in the shortest possible course to cut down on fuel expenditures and to deliver their cargo as quickly as possible. That’s how they make their money. What we’re looking for is unexplainable detours or stops that might denote suspicious activity.”

Of course, all the technology, teamwork was tricky, because this ship wasn’t designed for this sort of installation,” said Arevalo, “but we knew that we had to figure out any problems because these systems were the only means of sending secure information exchanges between the ships.”

Fellow CAT member OS2 Jaret Barber had to overcome difficulties as well. “At first, the language difference was a real problem. The CAT groups for each ship had at least one Sailor with them who spoke Spanish to act as a translator, but there were times when the interpreter wasn’t around. So, we communicated with each other by pointing and hand signals,” said Barber. “But, I enjoyed my time aboard. Zenteno’s crew was awesome. I missed my family while I was away, but I also made some friends here that I hope to keep in touch with.”

Despite their trials and tribulations, each installation team completed their mission and Panama was underway. Now able to securely exchange intelligence reports, the participating ships were able to distinguish one another on radar as well as track the progress of other vessels in the surrounding waters. The objective of these exchanges was to identify any potential threats before they develop.

“Through tracking systems we can follow the paths of different ships in the area. If a ship has been designated as a cargo transport, then we can expect it to behave in a certain manner,” said Quast. “For instance, the captain of any merchant ship will travel from point A to point B in the shortest possible course to cut down on fuel expenditures and to deliver their cargo as quickly as possible. That’s how they make their money. What we’re looking for is unexplainable detours or stops that might denote suspicious activity.”

Of course, all the technology, teamwork
During a 24-hour period, the ship was detained and searched nine times by Visit, Boarding, Search and Seizure (VBSS) teams from each of the participating ships. With each group’s boarding, the Balsa’s crew was herded to the boat deck and the entire vessel searched for suspicious materials. Only the bridge crew and engineers were allowed to remain at workstations with a guard positioned to monitor their activity. Although a long and taxing day for the players, the experience of searching an actual cargo ship proved to be quite useful to the VBSS teams.

“It was good to be able to see what we might encounter if actually called to board a suspicious commercial ship,” said Electronics Technician 2nd Class (SW) Chris Cochran, a Stump VBSS team member. “I think it was definitely valuable training for all of us.”

The Chilean VBSS team concluded the search and seizure phase of Panamax the following morning by delivering Balsa to waiting Panamanian authorities (after which, the ship and its exhausted crew concluded their role as suspected terrorists and continued their transit to Houston.)

As with any exercise being conducted for the first time, there were a number of hurdles to overcome, but everyone involved with Panamax agreed upon its importance. “Overall the exercise was extremely successful,” said DESRON Operations Officer LCDR Rich McDaniels. “We met our objectives, and there was excellent inter-operability between the participating nations.”

With the economic stakes surrounding this waterway ever increasing, Sailors can count on similar exercises in the future to support the canal and, subsequently, the laws of supply and demand.

Perhaps security of the Panama Canal isn’t the first thought on your mind as you try on those new running shoes. But, it’s developing security measures such as Panamax that ensure operations through the canal flow smoothly and guarantee that those products will be within reach – both physically and financially – when you want them. Without them, you could easily be looking at a store full of empty shelves.

OS2 Jaret Barber (center), who doesn’t speak Spanish, was aboard the Chilean naval vessel Zenteno (PFG 8) as part of a Communication Assistance Team. He said that the language difference was a problem at first, “So, we communicated with each other by painting and hand signals.”

American influence is easily spotted on Panama’s streets due to the long occupancy of the Panama Canal by the United States. The Panama Canal was relinquished to the Panamanian government Dec. 31, 1999.
Portsmouth Naval Shipyard:
The Cradle of American Shipbuilding

A long the jagged, rocky coast of the North Atlantic, and cloaked by fog as hearty as New England’s best clam chowder, sits the bustling town of Portsmouth, N.H.

For tourists, the popular seacoast town offers fine seafood and a rich colonial America heritage; but for Sailors, Portsmouth is far more than a day trip from Boston — it boasts a time-tested reputation as one of the finest shipyards in American history.

“Without a decisive naval force we can do nothing definitive, and with it, everything honorable and glorious.”

— President George Washington to Marquis de Lafayette Nov. 15, 1781

“Generations of shipyard workers make up Portsmouth’s population, so there’s a great relationship between the Navy and Portsmouth,” said Ann Shaw, president of the Portsmouth Navy League.

Freedom, and everything it took to win it, is never forgotten by New Englanders, who pass along their patriotism like an heirloom — from generation to generation.
Portsmouth Naval Shipyard (PNSY) was established in 1800 and is the oldest operational naval shipyard in America. Technically though, the shipyard – named for its parent city just across the Piscataqua River – isn’t geographically located in Portsmouth or even New Hampshire at all, but in Kittery, Maine. Geography aside, PNSY is home to some of the most sought-after workers in the country – New England shipyarders.

"Any employer worth their salt wants a New Englander to work for them," said Mark Margolis, apprenticeship-training assistant for PNSY. "New Englanders have a reputation for being the hardest-working, most educated, most skilled workers in the country, and the shipyard certainly reflects that opinion."

PNSY is one of four public shipyards under the charge of Naval Sea Systems Command in Washington, D.C. Along with two nuclear-capable private industry facilities, the yards represent a teaming of national ship repair resources that are maintaining the Navy’s culture of readiness as "One Shipyard for the Nation."

"We came to Portsmouth to learn how they repaired their 500 Kilowatt generators because [PNSY] is considered the industry leader," said Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard...

In 1964 Portsmouth Naval Shipyard (PNSY) was the least efficient shipyard in the country. But by the early 1970s shipyard commander, CAPT Elmer T. Westfall, turned PNSY around with then-revolutionary industrial management until it regained its reputation as the leader in submarine repair.

Apprentice Paul Oachon and Test Director Anthony Dell, a 16-year PNSY veteran assigned to Code 920 Structural, perform a soap bubble test on a main ballast tank vent. Like many shipyard workers, Dell thinks his work goes far beyond just being a job – it’s his “patriotic duty to build submarines as well as possible because they are the tools America uses to keep us free.”

An exact replica of the sloop Providence made a port visit to Portsmouth on its way to Cape Cod, Mass. Providence was the first ship commanded by John Paul Jones.
Apprentice, Brede Cambra.

“When it came time for USS Annapolis (SSN 760) to do her shipyard availability,” said Annapolis’s Commanding Officer LCDR Scott Blake, “it was an easy choice to request Portsmouth, because it was close to home for my Groton homeported Sailors. The shipyard does the best work, and my Sailors stay here would be a good experience.”

Being the best is an honor that was bestowed upon Portsmouth during America’s youth, when the only steel on Navy ships was found in the nerves of their captains like John Paul Jones, the father of the American Navy.

Jones, a man known for his attention to detail in shipbuilding praised the craftsmanship of the Portsmouth workers when they built the man-of-war, America, in 1782.

Portsmouth Naval Shipyard: The Cradle of American Shipbuilding

Portsmouth is a well aware of its role in educating Americans about its rich revolutionary history, and has done much to capitalize on tourism while maintaining a small town charm.

New Englanders, like 26-year shipyard veteran Dick Ruel, are patriotic. From hanging colonial flags from their porches, to treating visiting Sailors with unequalled respect, the American spirit lives well here.

“I have had her bottom opened up in several places and find it perfectly sound, the timber seasoned, and the work everywhere a masterpiece,” Jones said regarding the quality of work produced by the shipyard workers. At that time, America was under construction at Hackett’s Boatyard on Rising Castle Island along the Piscataqua River.

Jones loved more than just the craftsmanship – he loved the town because Sailors were always welcome.
Portsmouth Naval Shipyard:  
The Cradle of American Shipbuilding

“I reached Portsmouth just when they began to light the candles after tea, and the dancing did not stop until after two in the morning,” Jones wrote in his journal. Portsmouth’s affinity for Sailors and all things from the seas is no accident.

“Since we’re the only city on the water, it makes sense to be friends with the people who call the seas their home,” said Eileen Foley, former mayor of Portsmouth and a Portsmouth Naval Shipyard worker. But the relationship between the Navy and Portsmouth runs much deeper than sharing good times and exchanging warm smiles. They understand each other’s contributions to the fight to earn and keep our freedom.

“There’s no doubt that shipyard workers here are patriotic,” said Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Lonnie Peterson, a pharmacist’s assistant at the PNSY clinic that treats Sailors, retirees and shipyard workers alike. “We Sailors are still fighting the fight they started for freedom more than 200 years ago.”

“We know that the work we do here in the shipyard translates into Sailors being able to keep us free,” said Tim Drake, 16 year PNSY veteran and test director for code 920 structural. “We make sure every seam is welded, every wire connected and every ship that visits us is better able to fight, because we know what we do is more than just a job – it’s our patriotic duty.”

Sailors who are fortunate enough to pay a visit to the “cradle of American shipbuilding” during their tour in the Navy, quickly find out that it may very well be one of the best-kept secrets in the Navy. This is not because of the great seafood, unlimited wilderness or even the knowledge any Sailor can receive from shipyard workers with generations of experience; no, Sailors beg to stay in Portsmouth because they’re treated like everyday heroes.

“I cannot tell you how good it feels to march in a parade and hear the crowd clap only when you walk by,” said Peterson. “The first time it happened to me, I thought the salesman finds out you’re military, it seems like everywhere I’ve been, he tries to jack the price up, but not here in Portsmouth,” he said. “When the salesman found out I was military, he started knocking the price down.

According to Peterson, the smile you find welded to the faces of most Sailors walking around PNSY is because of an attitude that New Englanders seem to have about the military in general. “People here always want me to be happy, safe and feel important,” said Peterson. “Maybe it’s because the Navy brings a lot of work here for the shipyard, but I think it’s much deeper than that. I think the people here love America like no one else can and anyone who helps keep their country free is a hero and gets treated accordingly.”

Peterson’s experiences with Portsmouth hospitality even occurred when patriotism wasn’t the theme of the day. “What Sailor doesn’t dread trying to buy a car?” said Peterson. “Once that salesman finds out you’re military, it seems like everywhere I’ve been, he tries to jack the price up, but not here in Portsmouth,” he said. “When the salesman found out I was military, he started knocking the price down.

According to Peterson, the smile you find welded to the faces of most Sailors walking around PNSY is because of an attitude that New Englanders seem to have about the military in general. “People here always want me to be happy, safe and feel important,” said Peterson. “Maybe it’s because the Navy brings a lot of work here for the shipyard, but I think it’s much deeper than that. I think the people here love America like no one else can and anyone who helps keep their country free is a hero and gets treated accordingly.”
It was true when you were nine years old, nervously spending your first night away from home at your best friend’s house, and it’s true now as Sailors—coming home and being home warms our hearts like nothing else can.

Being home makes Sailors happy, and happy Sailors are better, safer, more productive workers. So, when the Navy decided to undertake the largest extended selected restricted availability (ESRA) ever with USS John F. Kennedy (CV 67), they kept her moored in her homeport of Mayport, Fla., and brought the shipyard to them.

Long after the majority of the crew and all of the first shift shipyard workers have gone, duty section personnel continue to work to get Kennedy back to an operational status. Even standing duty, according to some Sailors, is better when it is in your homeport. According to CDR Scott Rettie, ESRA coordinator, “Keeping Sailors focused in a shipyard environment is tough, but having a shipyard in your own backyard makes going to work a lot easier. You look over the flight deck, and you see the surf and your homes. Sailors wouldn’t be able to do that if they were moored in the Elizabeth River. That’s very motivating.”
Watchstanding and casualty drills continued to be part of the daily routine for JFK's crew members. Here, Duty Section 2 musters on station well before sunrise, just as shipyard workers make their way to the flight deck for another day of work.

Thomas, Combat Systems 9, whose wife, Johnetta, gave birth to their first child, 5 lb. 10 oz. Taylor Arianna Thomas, at Naval Air Station Jacksonville Hospital Aug. 9. Thomas was able to be at the birth of his first child and spend a week with his new family, thanks to Kennedy being minutes away in Mayport.

“Having Derrick here for the birth would have been impossible,” said Johnetta, “because the baby came three weeks early. I was glad he was here, not just because he got to see the birth of our baby, but because he is home every night to help me even after his leave ends.”

“JFK had to go to Norfolk, the only time I would have had with my new family would have been the baby leave the ship gave me,” said Thomas.

Being home for the birth of your child is something you can’t put a price on, but the Navy sent the shipyard to Mayport. “More than $300 million has been devoted to the repair, modernization and maintenance of Kennedy,” said Rettie. “In addition to the money being spent on the ship itself, hundreds of millions of dollars are being spent in Jacksonville’s local economy, because the Navy decided to revitalize JFK in her homeport instead of Norfolk,” he added.

Rettie went on to explain just how the economic impact of doing an ESRA on a scale like the Kennedy’s works. “Sailors are home to spend money; local shipyard and ship-repair industries buy gas, clothes, even vehicles while they’re here.”

For Kennedy Sailors to stay home, it meant that the shipyard workers, at least some of them, had to deploy to Mayport. In fact, according to Rettie, of the 2,500 shipyard workers employed on Kennedy, about one-third were imported from naval shipyards throughout the country. For some shipyard workers, like Price Vickers Jr., a sandblaster from Mobile, Ala., that meant a short stay in a local hotel. For others, like Puget Sound Naval Shipyard electrician Ron Bleily, it meant packing up his entire life, including his family, wife Missy and 5-year-old daughter Madison, and taking them with him from Washington State to Jacksonville.

For the Bleilys, housing is not a problem as the Navy pays for them to live in a contracted, fully furnished apartment throughout the duration of the nine-month ESRA. They brought whatever belongings they could pack in their station wagon. Then the Bleilys decided to go home school Madison, so this move, and future moves, would have a minimum impact on the quality of her education.

“Missy Bleily, wife of shipyard worker, Ron Bleily, helps their five year-old daughter, Madison, learn the letters of the alphabet. This Bleily’s home school Madison because of the hectic schedule required of traveling shipyard workers.

For some shipyard workers, like Price Vickers Jr., a sandblaster from Mobile, Ala., that meant a short stay in a local hotel. For others, like Puget Sound Naval Shipyard electrician Ron Bleily, it meant packing up his entire life, including his family, wife Missy and 5-year-old daughter Madison, and taking them with him from Washington State to Jacksonville.

For the Bleilys, housing is not a problem as the Navy pays for them to live in a contracted, fully furnished apartment throughout the duration of the nine-month ESRA. They brought whatever belongings they could pack in their station wagon. Then the Bleilys decided to go home school Madison, so this move, and future moves, would have a minimum impact on the quality of her education.

“This is absolutely the best way to do an availability for the crew,” said ESRA Coordinator CDR Scott Rettie. “These Sailors were already gone for more than 10 months because of post 9-11 operational commitments. Adding another nine months because of post 9-11 operational commitments. Sailors were already gone for more than 10 months because of post 9-11 operational commitments. These people get stationed there they want to stay there. By being home,” he added, “the Sailors avoid the physiological impact of not having to transit to a shipyard.”

“Leaving for a shipyard is just as traumatic as leaving for a deployment, because the Sailors aren’t home—regardless of whether or not they are at sea,” said Mary Abbott, Morale Welfare and Recreation (MWR) coordinator for Kennedy. Abbott’s point is well taken especially for one Kennedy Sailor, Electronics Technician 3rd Class (SW) Derrick Price. Duty sections trained daily.

For the ship’s final light off assessment (LOA) by conducting casualty drills throughout the ship. Here, AS3 Mark Zebal, AIMD IM4, takes a break while wearing his firefighting ensemble (FFE) and Scott AirPak SCBA.

said Rettie: “They’re eating at restaurants, buying gas, clothes, even vehicles while they’re here.”

For Kennedy Sailors to stay home, it meant that the shipyard workers, at least some of them, had to deploy to Mayport. In fact, according to Rettie, of the 2,500 shipyard workers employed on Kennedy, about one-third were imported from naval shipyards throughout the country.

For some shipyard workers, like Price Vickers Jr., a sandblaster from Mobile, Ala., that meant a short stay in a local hotel. For others, like Puget Sound Naval Shipyard electrician Ron Bleily, it meant packing up his entire life, including his family, wife Missy and 5-year-old daughter Madison, and taking them with him from Washington State to Jacksonville.

For the Bleilys, housing is not a problem as the Navy pays for them to live in a contracted, fully furnished apartment throughout the duration of the nine-month ESRA. They brought whatever belongings they could pack in their station wagon. Then the Bleilys decided to go home school Madison, so this move, and future moves, would have a minimum impact on the quality of her education.

“This is absolutely the best way to do an availability for the crew,” said ESRA Coordinator CDR Scott Rettie. “These Sailors were already gone for more than 10 months because of post 9-11 operational commitments. Adding another nine months because of post 9-11 operational commitments. Sailors were already gone for more than 10 months because of post 9-11 operational commitments. These people get stationed there they want to stay there. By being home,” he added, “the Sailors avoid the physiological impact of not having to transit to a shipyard.”

“Leaving for a shipyard is just as traumatic as leaving for a deployment, because the Sailors aren’t home—regardless of whether or not they are at sea,” said Mary Abbott, Morale Welfare and Recreation (MWR) coordinator for Kennedy. Abbott’s point is well taken especially for one Kennedy Sailor, Electronics Technician 3rd Class (SW) Derrick Price. Duty sections trained daily.

For the ship’s final light off assessment (LOA) by conducting casualty drills throughout the ship. Here, AS3 Mark Zebal, AIMD IM4, takes a break while wearing his firefighting ensemble (FFE) and Scott AirPak SCBA.

said Rettie: “They’re eating at restaurants, buying gas, clothes, even vehicles while they’re here.”

For Kennedy Sailors to stay home, it meant that the shipyard workers, at least some of them, had to deploy to Mayport. In fact, according to Rettie, of the 2,500 shipyard workers employed on Kennedy, about one-third were imported from naval shipyards throughout the country.

For some shipyard workers, like Price Vickers Jr., a sandblaster from Mobile, Ala., that meant a short stay in a local hotel. For others, like Puget Sound Naval Shipyard electrician Ron Bleily, it meant packing up his entire life, including his family, wife Missy and 5-year-old daughter Madison, and taking them with him from Washington State to Jacksonville.

For the Bleilys, housing is not a problem as the Navy pays for them to live in a contracted, fully furnished apartment throughout the duration of the nine-month ESRA. They brought whatever belongings they could pack in their station wagon. Then the Bleilys decided to go home school Madison, so this move, and future moves, would have a minimum impact on the quality of her education.

“This is absolutely the best way to do an availability for the crew,” said ESRA Coordinator CDR Scott Rettie. “These Sailors were already gone for more than 10 months because of post 9-11 operational commitments. Adding another nine months because of post 9-11 operational commitments. Sailors were already gone for more than 10 months because of post 9-11 operational commitments. These people get stationed there they want to stay there. By being home,” he added, “the Sailors avoid the physiological impact of not having to transit to a shipyard.”

“Leaving for a shipyard is just as traumatic as leaving for a deployment, because the Sailors aren’t home—regardless of whether or not they are at sea,” said Mary Abbott, Morale Welfare and Recreation (MWR) coordinator for Kennedy. Abbott’s point is well taken especially for one Kennedy Sailor, Electronics Technician 3rd Class (SW) Derrick Price.

Duty sections trained daily.

For the ship’s final light off assessment (LOA) by conducting casualty drills throughout the ship. Here, AS3 Mark Zebal, AIMD IM4, takes a break while wearing his firefighting ensemble (FFE) and Scott AirPak SCBA.

said Rettie: “They’re eating at restaurants, buying gas, clothes, even vehicles while they’re here.”

For Kennedy Sailors to stay home, it meant that the shipyard workers, at least some of them, had to deploy to Mayport. In fact, according to Rettie, of the 2,500 shipyard workers employed on Kennedy, about one-third were imported from naval shipyards throughout the country.

For some shipyard workers, like Price Vickers Jr., a sandblaster from Mobile, Ala., that meant a short stay in a local hotel. For others, like Puget Sound Naval Shipyard electrician Ron Bleily, it meant packing up his entire life, including his family, wife Missy and 5-year-old daughter Madison, and taking them with him from Washington State to Jacksonville.

For the Bleilys, housing is not a problem as the Navy pays for them to live in a contracted, fully furnished apartment throughout the duration of the nine-month ESRA. They brought whatever belongings they could pack in their station wagon. Then the Bleilys decided to go home school Madison, so this move, and future moves, would have a minimum impact on the quality of her education.
All Hands

www.news.navy.mil

was done

in her homeport of Mayport, Fla., Sailors, like

ET3(SW) Derrick Thomas, were able to witness

the birth of his first daughter, Taylor Arianna,

who was born three weeks early.

Though still in her homeport, Sailors, who would normally call the living quarters aboard

USS John F. Kennedy, reside on a barge moored next to the conventionally-powered aircraft carrier.

Sailors, who would normally call the living quarters aboard USS John F. Kennedy, reside on a barge moored next to the conventionally-powered aircraft carrier.

Though still in her homeport, Sailors, who would normally call the living quarters aboard USS John F. Kennedy, reside on a barge moored next to the conventionally-powered aircraft carrier.

IC3 Linton McClain, V-2 VLA, “but it seems like a waste of money to me, considering I don’t have the option of single BAH to live out in town here.”

“I could stay out in town if I wanted,” said IC3 Linton McClain, V-2 VLA.

Though still in her homeport, Sailors, who would normally call the living quarters aboard USS John F. Kennedy, reside on a barge moored next to the conventionally-powered aircraft carrier.

There’s No Place Like Home

familiarity to an otherwise unfamiliar world.

For the Bleilys, that family friend is the Engel family — Matt, a forklift operator for Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, his wife, Jessica, their six-year-old daughter and best friend to Madison, Rylee, and 28 month-old Dolvin.

The two families recently spent a night out at a popular family restaurant, and Sailors could have easily had the same conversations: health care, stories about visiting different ports, like Kings Bay, Ga., Pearl Harbor; and San Diego; to fix ships; how to take care of their families when they move them; their experiences in apprentice-ship schools; and of course work.

“We talk about the same things Sailors probably talk about when they are shipped to a new duty station,” Ron Bleily said.

“We all want the best for our families.”

The crew believes it was able to maintain a high level of morale throughout the traditional shipyard period, because it was doing it from its homeport with an eight-section duty rotation, and working hours of 6 a.m. to 5 p.m., and no weekend work-days, which Kennedy’s Commanding Officer, CAPT Ronald H. Henderson Jr., allowed the crew to set.

“When I addressed the crew about what we wanted to accomplish with this ESRA,” said Henderson, “I made it clear that this availability was much more than a recapitalization of the ship; it was a

One of the advantages of a carrier, especially in a shipyard environment, is the ease with which large quantities of items get moved around. Here, a pallet of soft drinks is set on a hanger bay elevator.

Because Kennedy’s ESRA was not in vain as he, along with Naval Sea Systems Command, the city of Jacksonville, Naval Station Mayport and other local authorities began planning for the shipyard period in the spring of 2002. The brainstorming sessions led to several changes in and around Mayport, including the establishment of satellite parking for what was expected to be a 20 percent increase in the base’s population due to the ESRA; rerouting of commercial traffic to ease the congestion coming into and leaving Mayport Naval Station; establishing a variety of fast-food restaurants within walking distance of C-2 Pier; and establishing mass transit systems using a vanpool, the first of its kind in Northeastern Florida.

More than 2,500 shipyard workers, 70,000 man-days of ship’s force labor, mass transit systems, 11 hour days and uprooted shipyard worker families, all so Sailors
If you have ever seen a Rocky movie, it is a scene that you can appreciate: a seemingly over-matched competitor of small stature walks down the aisle of a half-empty arena, ready for the fight of his life with a man at least a foot taller than him.

That very thought makes him uneasy; he's really not scared, but definitely nervous. He has a reason to be. With that height advantage, his opponent could easily push him around the ring and use his long arms to batter him.

But as the bell rings, the uneasiness fades, as the diminutive kickboxer connects with two quick kicks to the stomach before landing a crushing right cross to the chin a mere 14 seconds into the fight, knocking the giant out in the process. As the referee raises his hand in victory, those in attendance can't believe it.

It’s a feeling Religious Program Specialist 2nd Class (Fleet Marine Force) Nelson Lebron is used to. Lebron has surprised many people in his life by making a big name for himself in the sport of kickboxing. But by his admission, one doesn’t usually think of a kickboxer when meeting him for the first time.

“People are a bit surprised when they find out what I do in my off time,” Lebron said while working in the Chaplain’s Office at Naval Special Warfare Group (NSWG) 2 in Little Creek, Va. “I can’t blame them though. Most people think of a kickboxer, or any type of fighter, as a big guy like a heavyweight boxer.”
If someone is using a heavyweight boxer like Lennox Lewis or Mike Tyson as a standard, then there’s no real reason to believe Lebron is a fighter. His physical frame, even when wearing his Navy-issue camouflage and boots, is a less-than-intimidating 61 inches and 120 pounds. And his demeanor is not what one would expect from a man who spends his off time giving and receiving flurries of punches and kicks to the head and body; as a soft-spoken, polite man, he’s more likely to offer your grandparents an escort across the street than a right jab to the chin.

But that is only one side of Lebron, a 10-year military veteran during two stints with the Navy. While most Sailors and Marines know Lebron as a well-liked worker and NSWG 2’s recent Sailor of the Year, those unfortunate enough to be in his way while he participates in his favorite pastime know him a bit differently.

“I’m known for being a tough fighter,” Lebron said. “The main thing is I never quit. When I fight, I may not win every time, but you will always know I was there. I take the fight to them.”

With a toughness acquired while growing up in Brooklyn, N.Y., Lebron has taken that fight a long way. In the four years since he made the move from boxing to kickboxing, he has been on a steady uphill climb. That climb culminated last year, when Lebron won national championships for three different kickboxing organizations and took home a bronze medal at the International Amateur Kickboxing Sport Association World Championships in Kissimmee, Fla.

“The success I’ve had is unbelievable to me sometimes,” Lebron says of the momentum he’s been gaining in the kickboxing ranks. “It’s not that I don’t think I deserve it, but every now and then I feel overwhelmed. And there’s more to come.”

That success doesn’t come so easy for Lebron, however. Between working as chaplain’s assistant for NSWG-2, training as a field-qualified religious programs specialist and maintaining his kickboxing workout regiment, he often finds himself working as much as 17 hours a day.

“That’s the part of my life that no one really understands,” Lebron said concerning his intense daily schedule. “I enjoy the things that I do, but it can get hard to keep it up sometimes. I really have to stay on myself a lot.”

The day typically starts between 4:30 and 5 a.m., when Lebron rises and almost immediately goes on a two-and-a-half to three mile run. After returning home and showering, he then hits the gym, where he concentrates on endurance and stamina exercises ranging from working over a punching bag to dead lifts with high repetition. After another shower, it’s finally off to work.

“That’s when I normally meet up with the chaplain and start doing whatever tasks I have to do that day,” he said. “After I get off around 4 p.m., I go back to the gym for some regular weightlifting, usually a body part a day.”

For most people, that would constitute a full day, but not for Lebron. After his second gym trip of the day, he finally begins his kickboxing-specific training.

“I’ll get to the kickboxing school at about six o’clock and start working on boxing and martial arts training. I’ll be there until at least 9 or 9:30 p.m.”

All in all, Lebron says he works out a total of six days a week, with anywhere from three to six hours a day going toward training. He also works in two nights a week at Tidewater Community College, where he holds a 4.0 average. It’s a rough cycle to say the least, and, as one could imagine, it has led to many sacrifices on his part.

“It’s a very long day even for me,” he says. “It doesn’t leave me much chance for anything else. I’m 28-years-old, and I’m not married and don’t have much of a social life. I stay as focused as possible because when I am done with this part of my life I want to be able to say, ‘I did that, I didn’t take the easy way out.’ I want to go as far as I can.”

And many people seem to believe Lebron can go very far. Fellow kickboxer Shannon Hudson, a teammate of Lebron’s on the U.S. World Championship Team, thinks the sky’s the limit for Lebron’s potential. “From what I’ve seen of him in tournaments around the country, he can go as far as he wants. He just keeps improving and improving,” Hudson said, adding that Lebron’s military experience gives him an advantage. “I’m not in the military, but you can tell he’s very disciplined. It’s

A height of 61 inches is rarely an advantage in the ring. “When someone new sees me fight, I always feel like I need to show them something because of my size,” Lebron said.

**A Kickboxers aren’t accustomed to fighting in front of packed houses, Lebron says. A half-empty arena hosting the world championships in Orlando, Fla., attests to that.**

**A kickboxer’s preparation for a fight begins long before the opening bell rings. All fighters wrap their fists and begin shadowboxing well before their fight is on deck.**
Lebron’s head-spinning training cycle leaves him and his coaches looking for a break at times. “He’s one of the hardest trainers I’ve been associated with in 35 years of martial arts experience,” said Lebron’s personal kickboxing coach, Craig Smith. “If there were 25 hours in a day, he would use them all to train.”

Lebron has made sure to excel in his rating. As a field-qualified RP, Lebron is responsible for more than just scheduling church services and community relations projects. He must be adept at artillery handling and hand-to-hand combat in support of his ultimate mission—keeping an unarmed chaplain alive in the battlefield.

“People tend to take the RP rating lightly, but any RP who is Fleet Marine Force needs to know how to handle himself and his business. I take that very seriously,” he says. “It’s hard enough to keep yourself alive in a combat situation, and it becomes twice-as-hard to do it when you are protecting another person as well.”

“I’m just seeing where life takes me. There’s no reason for me to have a long-term, big picture view of my future. If I did I would risk setting my expectations too high and falling off my big ladder. It worked for me so far.”

If that’s the case, you can expect Lebron’s hand to be raised in victory many more times in his life.

Ludwig and McCoy are photojournalists assigned to All Hands.

Unlike many fighters, Lebron does not travel with his own corner team. At the World Championships in Orlando, Fla., teammate Shannon Hudson and the father of one of his other teammates provided between-round care.

A typical day for Lebron at least a 12-hour marathon incorporating general exercise, Navy duties and exhausting workout routines for boxing and kickboxing training. The constant grind leaves him without time for much else in his life.

“People tend to take the RP rating lightly, but any RP who is Fleet Marine Force needs to know how to handle himself and his business. I take that very seriously,” he says. “It’s hard enough to keep yourself alive in a combat situation, and it becomes twice-as-hard to do it when you are protecting another person as well.”

“I’m just seeing where life takes me. There’s no reason for me to have a long-term, big picture view of my future. If I did I would risk setting my expectations too high and falling off my big ladder. It worked for me so far.”

If that’s the case, you can expect Lebron’s hand to be raised in victory many more times in his life.

Ludwig and McCoy are photojournalists assigned to All Hands.

Unlike many fighters, Lebron does not travel with his own corner team. At the World Championships in Orlando, Fla., teammate Shannon Hudson and the father of one of his other teammates provided between-round care.
Minutes north of Memphis, Tenn., Sailors vigilantly patrol along barbed wire fences and check the identification of all personnel entering Naval Support Activity (NSA) Mid-South, Millington, Tenn. The duties of the master-at-arms force are the same here as at any base in the world — “To protect and serve.”

“We have 65 master-at-arms, DOD police and an auxiliary security force (ASF) who make up the police unit that enforces the law and protects the base population and property,” said 39-year-old Master-at-Arms 1st Class Chris Pace.

Pace arrived in Millington in the capacity of a patrolman after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. “I got out of the Navy and was in the Reserves as a construction electrician after serving 14 years as a sonar technician in submarines. I have always wanted to be an MA, but my sonar rating was critical and I was not afforded the opportunity to cross-rate,” said Pace. Fortunately for him, during his tour in the submarine community, he was able to get the NEC 9545 Physical Security. Then, when the terrorists attacked the United States, he had the required training to be activated and assigned to NSA Mid-South.

The small base offers a hometown atmosphere where approximately 5,000 Navy personnel, family members and civilians work and reside. The base is home to Naval Personnel Command, Navy Recruiting Command and Navy Manpower Analysis Center.

According to Pace, the assignment has been everything he expected, “and then some.”

“Team definitely pleased with the assignment here,” he went on to say, “We have a really good team of professionals working here around the clock.” After a year and a half on patrol, Pace is now the Security Operations Officer, he is subject to a 24-hour recall in the event of any emergency on top of his administrative duties, supervising his team during 12-hour shifts starting at 5 a.m. Although it took him longer to get where he wanted to be, he feels it was worth it.

Pace submitted a package and cross-rated to MA, his third Navy rating, and is looking forward to the opportunity his new rating offers. “As an MA, you can go just about anywhere in the Navy. Ever since 9/11, security is a priority so the opportunities are almost unlimited.”

It has been a long road to get where he is today, but he is optimistic about his career. “I really like my job and I’m always looking forward to my next assignment and possibly getting some advanced training as an investigator,” said Pace. Goal oriented, he has earned his associates degree at sea through the PACE program but remains focused on finishing his bachelors’ degree and making chief petty officer.

Pace, along with the master-at-arms force and their auxiliary security force counterparts, is one Sailor protecting and serving his fellow shipmates, his Navy and his country 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
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. 20373-5189

**Fast Service**

Sailors move cargo ropes to a safe area as a CH-46D Sea Knight from Helicopter Support Squadron (HS) 11 delivers cargo from the combat support ship USS Sacramento (AOE-1) during an underway vertical replenishment.

*Photo by PH2 Damon Moritz*

---

**Naval Strike**

Navy junior slot back Eric Roberts stretches for a pass in front of the end zone as Eastern Michigan University (EMU) defenders Jerry Perry, left, and Nate Brooks, middle, add pressure. Navy scored 28 points in the second half to put the game out of reach of EMU, 39-7.

*Photo by PH2 Damon Moritz*

---

**Safety Line**

Sailors aboard USS Briscoe (DD 976) prepare the ship to ride out Hurricane Isabel on the pier at Naval Base Norfolk. More than 40 ships left the naval station to avoid potential damage from high winds and seas generated by the hurricane.

*Photo by PH1 Shawn Eklund*

---

**Proud Son**

An eager boy breaks from the gathered crowd to congratulate his father, a newly-frocked chief petty officer, assigned to the Naval Support Activity Gaeta, Italy.

*Photo by PH1 Paul Phelps*

---

**X Center Square**

A young visitor to the Naval Air Station (NAS) Oceana Regional Air Show plays a game of Tic-Tac-Toe with a scuba diver at the Explosive Ordnance Disposal display.

*Photo by Kevin Graves*
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.

1960
A Sailor operates the firing control of the hedgehog mount while another crew member sets automatic controls.

1960
BMC Olin Austin shows Sailors how to make fenders from Manila line.

1972
The chief master-at-arms instructs his crew as they prepare to refuel the destroyer USS Dvess (DD 880).

1939
Seamen are taught how to tie the knots at NAS Memphis, Tenn.

1947
American Sailors enjoy a glass of milk provided by the USO in Kingston, Jamaica.

U.S. Navy Photos Courtesy of the Naval Historical Center
A Navy Cereal Selling Machine?

Story by JO2 Charles L. Ludwig

Shhh! I don’t want to say this too loud, because I don’t want anyone who has been hiding under a rock for the last 90 years or so to hear.

Okay, here it goes; just try not to keel over because of the shock: America is completely, insanely in love with athletes! Shocking, isn’t it?

Okay? Well maybe not entirely shocking, but it’s definitely true. If you need proof, take a leisurely stroll down your local commissary’s cereal aisle. I did the other day, and it felt like I was walking into a who’s who exhibit at a sports museum. Sammy Sosa, Tiger Woods, Michael Jordan and Mike Piazza, all household names, were making appearances there that day.

And they were joined by a new addition to their all-star, cereal-selling machine – Navy LTJG Henry Nuzum.

I know what you’re all thinking. I had no clue who he was either until I saw the box of Cheerios sitting on the shelf, and I’m as big a sports nut as you’re going to find.

Nuzum was one of five military athletes featured on a special commemorative Cheerios box. Army, Marine Corps, Air Force and Coast Guard athletes were also featured on the box, which included action pictures of each with a short biography.

It ends up Nuzum has some credentials, though. As a rower on the 2000 U.S. Olympic team, Nuzum managed an eighth-place finish in the heavyweight double sculls in the Sydney Games. He is also currently working toward making the 2004 team that will be competing in Athens.

Having trouble figuring out how an eighth-place rower managed to get a spot among so many sports immortals? So is he.

“I really don’t know how this happen,” Nuzum laughingly told me. “You’d have to ask someone else. I’ve been on the Olympic team, but that wasn’t really high profile. Maybe they were looking for someone who had some real-world Navy experience. That’s my only guess.”

Nuzum, a former Tomahawk missile officer aboard USS John S. McCain (DDG 56), is likely the only U.S. Olympian who was deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. But he still says that as an eighth-place finisher, he’s not one of the top rowers on the globe. Having a small spot on a cereal box hasn’t changed that attitude.

“I’m not going to kid myself. This is probably the pinnacle of my fame in life,” he said. “But I keep it in perspective. I’m not on the box for my athletic prowess, but normally athletes of any level don’t get this chance. So while I take some humor in it, it is an honor.”

The box, which hit commissaries exclusively in September, was designed to bring visibility to the Armed Forces Sports Program, which recently embarked on a partnership with General Mills, Inc., the parent company of Cheerios. Also as a part of that partnership, Nuzum and the other featured athletes participated in autograph signing sessions at commissaries throughout the United States in September.

“That’s just funny,” Nuzum said about the signings, which he did at the commissary near Lakehurst Naval Air Engineering Station in New Jersey.

Having trouble figuring out how an eighth-place rower managed to get a spot among so many sports immortals? So is he. “I really don’t know how this happen,” Nuzum laughingly told me. “You’d have to ask someone else. I’ve been on the Olympic team, but that wasn’t really high profile. Maybe they were looking for someone who had some real-world Navy experience. That’s my only guess.”

Nuzum, a former Tomahawk missile officer aboard USS John S. McCain (DDG 56), is likely the only U.S. Olympian who was deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. But he still says that as an eighth-place finisher, he’s not one of the top rowers on the globe. Having a small spot on a cereal box hasn’t changed that attitude.

“I’m not going to kid myself. This is probably the pinnacle of my fame in life,” he said. “But I keep it in perspective. I’m not on the box for my athletic prowess, but normally athletes of any level don’t get this chance. So while I take some humor in it, it is an honor.”

The box, which hit commissaries exclusively in September, was designed to bring visibility to the Armed Forces Sports Program, which recently embarked on a partnership with General Mills, Inc., the parent company of Cheerios. Also as a part of that partnership, Nuzum and the other featured athletes participated in autograph signing sessions at commissaries throughout the United States in September.

“That’s just funny,” Nuzum said about the signings, which he did at the commissary near Lakehurst Naval Air Engineering Station in New Jersey.

Nuzum is currently assigned to the Naval Recruiting Command in nearby Philadelphia. “I mean, people lining up to get an autograph from someone who competed in a little-known Olympic sport? It doesn’t make a whole lot of sense to me, but it’s pretty cool.”

And it’s not a bad deal for an eighth place finisher, either.

Ludwig is a photojournalist assigned to All Hands.