Putting the Tip on THE SPEAR

Expeditionary Security
Sailors Prepare for Deployment
16 Putting the Tip on the Spear

In preparation for each mission, crew members of Boat Division 56, a detachment of MESRON 1 conduct safety briefs. Patrol leaders use toy boats to go over each crew’s procedures while simulating escorts of high value assets.

Photo by MC1(AW) R. Jason Brunson

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12 Taking It To The Seas

The Navy’s role, as a global force, has diversified from traditional blue-water operations to maritime surveillance and security in the near coast, harbors and straits of key regions of the world. Fulfilling this role is a dedicated and professional security force capable of meeting these requirements – the men and women from Maritime Expeditionary Security Force (MESF). Within the MESF is Maritime Expeditionary Security Squadron 1 that was recently preparing to deploy. The Sailors quickly learned that practice makes perfect.

Photo by MC1 Michael B. W. Watkins

24 Damage Control Takes Ownership of Navy’s Newest Carrier

Being assigned to two of the Navy’s newest ships, USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77) and PCU Makin Island (LHD 8), is an education in itself. But the development of these plankowners will set the stage for, and determine, the paths of thousands of Sailors in the future.

Photo by MC1 Nicholas Hall

March

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During a medical training exercise in the Al Jamy'at district of Basra, Iraq, HM3 Wesley Gause, from Waco, Texas, assigned to U.S. Marines 0731 Military Training Team, demonstrates how to properly aim an M-16 rifle to Iraqi soldiers from the 1st Mechanized Battalion, 16th Brigade, 9th Division.

Photo by Marine Corps Sgt. Gustavo Olgiati
Hello shipmates. I've been your MCPON for just over three months, and I've had the opportunity to meet with many of you during fleet visits. Already I've begun to understand what my predecessors meant when they told me that nothing prepares you for the pride that accompanies the privilege of leading the greatest enlisted naval force in history.

I felt a degree of that pride as a young chief aboard submarines, then as a chief of the boat and a command master chief of a destroyer. But it's taken up quite a few notches when it's your job to represent all of you.

Describing what you do, how you do it and how well you do it is the easiest job I've ever had. I've never had a problem bragging about the United States Sailor, so that part comes naturally. The difficulty's going to come when I'm dealing with tough decisions that affect you and your families. You have my word that when I'm faced with those, I'll be asking the input of Sailors all over the fleet.

I value that input, and I'll look for it anywhere I can. I'll stop you on the street, in the exchanges, the barracks, aboard our ships, anywhere I can find you and talk to you. That's who I am. I'm going to do that by emphasizing the importance of some very basic policies, concepts and programs with what leadership calls "Brilliant on the Basics." Two of those programs center around reporting to a command. As a new Sailor you should have been assigned a sponsor who was engaged early and consistently. That relationship should continue well after you've reported aboard.

Sponsorship is a timeless responsibility and is critical to the quick integration of a Sailor on the deckplates. But just because the idea isn't new doesn't mean we can't make it much better. We will.

Also, when you report aboard a new command the indoctrination program should be so effective that you're ready to hit the deckplates running the minute that program concludes. This program is critical to ensuring our Sailors know what is expected of them as Sailors and also what they should expect from us as leaders. You should be prepared to function as a member of that crew. The new sponsorship and indoctrination instruction was recently released and has several changes of key importance.

First and foremost, it specifically states that commands are required to ensure every Sailor departing to another unit has been contacted by that unit's representative. That's 100 percent across the board. In keeping with that, the policy creates a new role for those of you looking to make a big difference in the lives of your shipmates: the command sponsorship coordinator.

It's a big job and there are some criteria you'll have to meet to be eligible, but it has great potential to be very rewarding. I'll be looking for you shipmates. I want to hear about these policies and anything else you have on your mind. Stay focused and stay sharp! HOOYAH Warriors!
Selective Reenlistment Bonus Policy Changes Announced

Sailors will have the opportunity to reenlist with a Selective Reenlistment Bonus (SRB) up to 90 days before the expiration of their active obligated service (AOS) under new policy set forth in NAVADMIN 066/09.

Sailors may have less than 90 days to reenlist for the bonus to appear in the SRB reenlistment in the same fiscal year.

Under old policy, a Sailor could reenlist anytime in the same fiscal year as their EAOS, explained Jeni Busch, head, military pay and compensation policy branch for the chief of naval personnel. Sailors need to carefully read NAVADMIN 066/09 to understand the many rules changes and exceptions and how this policy will affect any possible SRB awarded for reenlisting.

By reducing the time frame for SRB reenlistment the Navy can better project and manage end strength while continuing to provide incentive to Sailors with critical skills and valuable experience to stay in the Navy, Busch explained.

The policy change is part of an overall effort to strategically adjust the force at about 329,000 active-duty Sailors by the end of this fiscal year.

SRB is a targeted, market-based incentive which allows enlisted community managers to strategically adjust award levels as retention needs dictate.

Any Sailor whose request for reenlistment has been received by PERS-8 before the release of NAVADMIN 066/09 will have their reenlistment processed under the old policy. Requests reviewed by PERS-8 after the NAVADMIN’s release will fall under the new policy.

Selected NECs will be allowed to reenlist anytime in the same fiscal year and are listed in the NAVADMIN. Future changes to the list will be released via NAVADMIN.

Some other requirements under the new policy include:

- All SRB reenlistment requests must be submitted to 35 to 120 days prior to the requested reenlistment date.
- SRB requests submitted less than 35 days in advance of the requested date of reenlistment may be rejected.
- Sailors who are eligible for combat zone tax exclusion (CZTE) and have an AOS that falls in the most current fiscal year are authorized to reenlist anytime within the fiscal year. These Sailors along with command career counselors must annotate in the remarks section of the pre-certification request whether they are currently CZTE eligible.

All Sailors are encouraged to read the complete NAVADMIN and the frequently asked questions available at www.npc.navy.mil to understand how the policy changes will affect them.

Navy Revises Short-term Extension Policy

The Navy recently announced a new policy for short-term extensions that will affect Sailors in overmanned ratings, physical fitness assessment (PFA) failures and some Perform to Serve (PTS) applicants.

Short-term extensions are no longer authorized for undersized Sailors, also known as genets, who have not been selected for a rating or converted in the first six months of the 12-month PTF window. Commanders are required to review all short-term extension requests to ensure they are executed for valid program and career management reasons.

Sailors are not authorized to use short-term extensions to remain on active duty or to complete a college course prior to reenlistment. Short-term extensions are not authorized for Sailors awaiting examination results or for Sailors awaiting additional quotas for automatic advancement under any automatic advancement program, such as command advancement program.

“The main reason a Sailor would need a short-term extension is to complete a deployment, match their EAOS [end of active obligated service] to their PPD [projected rotation date] to extend to complete training, or for maternity benefits,” said Master Chief Navy Counselor (5WAV) Tom Albert, assigned to NPC.

Short-term extensions are conditional extensions that extend a Sailor’s enrollment required to contract anywhere from one to 23 months.

A short-term extension will be updated quarterly or as needed, and overmanned rating lists will be posted with status of extension requests, procedures, guidance and frequently asked questions which includes Sailors with six to less than six years of service, or Zone A. While most Sailors are permitted to reenlist in their current rate, Sailors in overmanned ratings may be offered reenlistment in an undersized rating and Sailors with a poor performance history may not be granted permission to reenlist. Since Feb. 1, 2009, NAVADMIN 017/09 PTS expanded to include Zone B, which includes Sailors with six to 10 years of service. Also since Feb. 1, all Sailors with an approved PTS application must sign a page 13 within 30 days of message receipt to accept or decline their PTS reservation. During 2008, almost 80 percent of Sailors who applied for PTS remained in their current rating, according to statistics from the Center for Career Development.

Controlling the number of Sailors in specific ratings provides better advancement opportunities for Sailors, while helping the Navy manage manpower requirements.

“When we started PTS in 2003, there were a lot of Sailors whose promotion opportunities were severely degraded because their rating was oversized,” said Senior Chief Counselor Ron Miller, PTS Branch, Enlisted Community Management Branch. “The program that empowers our Sailors to perform to serve is now greatly enhanced through the Navy’s efforts to meet future fleet and manpower requirements.”

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Sailors recite the oath of enlistment during a mass reenlistment ceremony for 117 Sailors aboard USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76). While the ship was deployed to the U.S. 5th Fleet area of responsibility, a total of $2.4 million in selective reenlistment bonuses were distributed among the Sailors.
A U.S. Navy customs agent (SeC), inspects the personal belongings of a Marine at Al Asad Air Base in Anbar Province, Iraq. Marines are currently in a trial process of departing Iraq to a Marine at Al Asad Air Base in Anbar Province, Iraq. Marines are currently

A SH-60F Sea Hawk assigned to Helicopter Anti-Submarine Squadron 3 transports supplies to USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71) during a replenishment at sea in the Gulf of Oman.

Flight deck personnel ready a San Diego Coast Guard HH-60 helicopter for launch on the flight deck of USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72). The helicopter participated in a rescue in which an injured merchant Sailor was medevaced to Lincoln and stabilized before being flown to San Francisco for treatment.

Sailors aboard USS Iwo Jima (LHD 7) tend line during an underway replenishment with USNS Lewis and Clark (T-AKE 5) in the 5th Fleet area of responsibility.

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www.navy.mil/photo_submit.html

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Click on the Navy’s home page, www.navy.mil, for fresh Images of your shipmates in action.

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Navy Makes Preparing for Selection Boards Easier

A new program recently announced by Navy Personnel Command (NPC) makes reviewing records and preparing for selection boards easier by providing online access to their official military personnel file (OMPF). Web Enabled Record Review (WERR), announced in NAVADMIN 011/09, allows Sailors to review documents in their OMPF, which are the same documents reviewed by selection board members when considering candidates for officer advancement, selection for chief, senior chief and master chief and other selection boards.

"There’s no substitute for empowering Sailors with the benefits of personalized access to their official military personnel file," said Jim Laudermilk, head, Military Personnel Records Management and Policy at NPC. Sailors can now access their WERR through BUPERs on Line (BOL). All active-duty and selected Reserve personnel with a BOL account and a CAC-enabled computer with appropriate certificates can now view their OMPF online by selecting the WERR option on the BOL main menu page at www.bol.navy.mil. This application also allows Sailors to download and print service-record documents for personal and professional use.

"[It is] very impressive, user friendly and offers easy access. I was extremely pleased with the availability of my personnel files in WERR and my ability to access and [what I needed],” said Lt. Cmdr. Ricky Small, assigned to NPC.

Story by MCC(SW) Maria Yager, Navy Personnel Command, Millington, Tenn.
advancement in FY10 boards; personnel selected for command senior chief or master chief programs from the FY10 board; personnel with orders to or serving in the first two years of an overseas or DoD area tours at the time of the board convening date; and Safe Harbor participants.

Additionally, personnel holding a nuclear, SEAL (special warfare boat operator, special warfare operator), explosive ordnance disposal technician or diver enlisted classification code, plus fleet, force and command master chiefs are exempt from the board.

Each eligible member is responsible for ensuring their record is correct and up to date with latest evaluations, awards and other appropriate information. Candidates may communicate with the continuation board by submitting a board package. Packages must be postmarked no later than Aug. 17, 2009. Packages submitted to the E-7 through E-9 advancement selection boards will not be presented to the continuation board.

Commanding officers with personnel not selected for continuation will be notified so they may personally and confidentially notify the members.

For more information read NAVADMIN 030/09 available at www.npc.navy.mil/channels.

Story Courtesy of Navy Personnel Command, Millington, Tenn.

Chaplains offer new suicide prevention training

Navy chaplains across the Europe, Africa and Southwest Asia region are now offering a special suicide prevention program to help address the concerns Navy and Marine Corps leadership have regarding one of their top priorities — suicide prevention.

Along with the Navy’s Life Skills/Health promotions mandatory annual suicide prevention training, region chaplains are providing service members and their dependents with the Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) program.

“Suicide is one of the most underestimated problems in our culture,” said Lt. Jason Hefner, the lead ASIST instructor in the region. “It is the third leading cause of death for 17 to 24 year olds in the United States and the tenth leading cause of death for all age groups.”

Hefner added the ASIST program is a great addition to the military’s annual training and will provide a new set of prevention tools to service members.

“The ASIST program provides everyday people with the perspective and skills to empower them to provide effective care for others,” said Hefner.

Hefner hopes to expand the program to all installations in the regions.

“Right now we have certified instructors at Naples, Sigonella and Souda Bay,” said Hefner. “I hope that we can get a certified instructor at every base to increase suicide awareness and develop a strong prevention program.”

Story by MC2(SW/AW) Marc Rockwell-Pate, Commander, Navy Region Europe.
The Navy has more than 6,000 active and Reserve Sailors who make up MESF, a command flexible enough to adapt to new missions in support of maritime security and protection of critical assets. 

MESF provides an expeditionary security force, that provides defensive capabilities and conducts joint security missions. CmDr. Bob Poling, the commanding officer of Maritime Expeditionary Security Squadron (MESRON) 2, Portsmouth, Va., said one of their most important tasks is providing embarked security for Military Sealift Command (MSC) ships and MSC-contracted civilian vessels as part of Operation Vigilant Mariner.

"Embarked security teams are key to the safe transit of MSC ships operating in certain waterways," said Griff Hume, force protection officer for MSC. "These teams help ensure the safe and timely delivery of critical equipment, fuel and supplies to U.S. warfighters ashore and at sea.

MESF is broken into two maritime expeditionary security groups, Maritime Expeditionary Security Group (MESG) 1 homeported in San Diego, and MESG 2 in Portsmouth, Va. Their missions are not strictly reserved for embarked security. In addition to the embarked shipboard requirements, MESGONs also participate in waterborne interdiction, protection of high-value asset ships, force protection, rapid response, convoy security escort, port security and harbor defense.

Poling said Sailors, who had recently returned from the Northern Arabian Gulf, spent their deployment riding patrol craft and while embarked on an aircraft carrier. "There really is nothing established for what we do here, because there is no Navy ship that can bring us to our required operations capabilities and projected operating environment," Rupp explained. "The average MA who checks in here will go through our school that can bring us to our required training. Lt.j.g. Christopher Rupp, Det. 221 security officer with MESRON 2, said the real training starts there. "There really is nothing established for what we do here, because there is no Navy ship that can bring us to our required operations capabilities and projected operating environment," Rupp explained. "The average MA who checks in here will go through our school that can bring us to our required training. Lt.j.g. Christopher Rupp, Det. 221 security officer with MESRON 2, said the real training starts there.

Training for members of the MESF varies by the detachment to which Sailors are assigned. For example, a master-at-arms (MA) Sailor assigned to an EST will attend standard shipboard reaction force school and weapons training. Lt.j.g. Christopher Rupp, Det. 221 security officer with MESRON 2, said the real training starts there.

"There really is nothing established for what we do here, because there is no Navy ship that can bring us to our required operations capabilities and projected operating environment," Rupp explained. "The average MA who checks in here will go through security reactionary force, basic and advanced,
“They are working hand-in-hand with the Iraqi marines to provide defense to both platforms. Also, at both platforms our security detachments send a sweep team on board the tugs and large tankers, hand-in-hand with the Iraqi marines.”

The training being provided to local assets has helped members of the security teams complete their missions more effectively. During his most recent deployment, Otis boarded more than 30 boats and served as a subject matter expert in the area providing training to other country’s boarding teams. At no time, he said, did the boardings become hostile.

“I think we didn’t meet a lot of resistance because the local area and community are used to seeing the Navy. The shared allied boardings regularly happen,” Otis said. “We did a lot of cross-training with our allies. I think that, just like when you get stopped for a speeding ticket, if you have an officer who presents himself poorly, you are more apt to think less of his authority. I believe our training provides a firm foundation. I think our training is what led us to have a lower resistance rate.”

The job these men and women sign up for is beyond what they could have expected when placing orders. As a first class petty officer, the responsibility as mission commander is within reach. Poling said the confidence he has in his petty officers, and the responsibility for which they are entrusted, is unique and lends credibility to the training they have received and the trust put in them.

Leadership within the MESGs has found this approach effective and has not elevated the level of seniority within the detachments. MACXS(Exw) Chris Long, Det. 221’s senior enlisted advisor, said the men and women who work for him are self-motivated and willing to accept extraordinary responsibility.

“The level of responsibility that we put on our E-5s and E-6s, who are willing to accept that responsibility, is tremendous,” Long said. “It’s a unique opportunity that we can put them out there on these ships as the tactical supervisor, or patrol leader in charge of the boats, providing the waterborne security. There is a lot of responsibility in that. You’re responsible for the weapons [and] weapons release. You’re responsible for the conduct of the crew, the equipment and the people who have been willing to take that responsibility have been successful.”

The life of a MESF Sailor can be exciting and action-packed. But Poling said it’s crucial for people to remember these same Sailors, who ensure the waterways are safe for shipping, do so while living in arduous conditions.

“The Sailors on the oil platforms in particular are restricted to something that is 1,500 yards long, and these guys are going to be out there for six months,” he explained. “They are living in conex boxes. These guys are out there on these ships as the tactical supervisor or patrol leader in charge of the boats, providing the waterborne security. There is a lot of responsibility in that. You’re responsible for the weapons [and] weapons release. You’re responsible for the conduct of the crew, the equipment and the people who have been willing to take that responsibility have been successful.”

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“The Sailors on the oil platforms in particular are restricted to something that is 1,500 yards long, and these guys are going to be out there for six months,” he explained. “They are living in conex boxes. These guys are out there on the platforms, day and night, in the heat, the cold, the rain, the sandstorms, providing security. It’s not all cool guys, running around, shooting weapons and all day excitement. It’s tough work, and it’s some very tough environmental conditions.”

MESF Sailors serve all over the world. Abroad, they protect high-value assets, perform harbor security in primary ports of debarcation and serve as waterborne security for Navy vessels through choke points like the Panama Canal. Missions also continuing on the home front, such as providing port security when ex-USS John F. Kennedy (CV 67) conducted her final port visit to Boston, as well as augmenting security for the Democratic National Convention in August 2008. As Poling said, “Those [Sailors] are doing it well and making it look easy.”

AbleHilton is assigned to Navy Expeditionary Combat Command, Norfolk.
PUTTING THE TIP ON THE SPEAR

Crew members of Boat Division 56 return pier side from a simulated escort of high-value asset USNS Henry J. Kaiser (T-AO 187). After each mission, training team members debrief the crews. The squadron is in the Unit Level Training Readiness Assessment (ULTRA) phase of preparation for deployment. ULTRA is designed to evaluate the command training team's ability to train its personnel.

The exhausted Sailors lined both sides of the pier jutting out toward the Coronado Bay Bridge. The days spent on the water were long, and sleep … well, there would be time for that later.

For now they take a break from the endless man overboard drills, first aid training, incident-at-sea scenarios and security maneuvers. During this brief cease-fire from the roar of the boat engines, they sit and enjoy a quiet meal, but not for long.
The seemingly endless days of pre-brief then drill then post-brief and start all over again until everyone gets it right, can take their toll on the most motivated of Sailors.

Preparations for deployment are never easy and no exceptions were made for the men and women of Maritime Expeditionary Security Squadron (MESPON) 1 as they readied for deployment.

The squadron, comprised of Navy and Coast Guard Reserve units from all over the United States, had converged in San Diego during September with one goal in mind — assemble a group of dedicated individuals into a single unit ready to handle anything providing harbor security at the tip of the spear could throw at them.

One of those individuals is Quartermaster 1st Class (EXW) Kenneth Wofford of Eugene, Ore. With more than 20 years experience in the Navy Reserve community, Wofford said getting his job done means representing qualities such as hard work, leadership, commitment and the loyalty to the mission at hand.

“I am a small boat coxswain with weapons release authority,” Wofford said, “and my job is to provide security for high-value assets (HVA’s) and other important missions that the Navy and our government deem necessary to fight the war on terror.”

The role of a small boat coxswain is absolutely essential. “If we deter or stop any attack on our waterborne assets worldwide, then we have succeeded in our mission,” Wofford said.

He worked hard to become a coxswain, he said, because it gives him the rewarding opportunity to lead while embracing a great challenge to serve his country in a unique role. It requires a command presence, and authority, and most importantly the ability to put the crew in the best position to carry out the mission.

“Being a small boat coxswain in the United States Navy carries a large responsibility and one that I take very seriously,” Wofford said. “It is one of few positions in the military, that an enlisted man, like myself, can command his or her own boat.”

Wofford said he loves the work he does in his civilian life. He is a horticulturist and arborist for a Park and Recreation District in Eugene, Ore., where he has lived all of his life. However, he said, the talent and diversity of people that the Navy brings together are hard to find elsewhere.

“We have good Sailors who work extremely hard and don’t hesitate to step forward when their country needs them,” Wofford said. “Most of us are drilling Reservists who have been recalled to active duty for a period of one year leaving jobs and families behind. But we do it, because we see the opportunity and challenge.”

In December, more than 400 personnel from MESPON 1 deployed to critical coastal and inshore areas of Iraq and Kuwait to provide seaward surveillance and security forces in littoral areas and harbors.

The process of preparing for a mobilization such as this is not an easy one according to Senior Chief Storekeeper (EXXW) Ray Jeno, command senior enlisted advisor, Boat Division 56; but from a chief's perspective, it was made easier because of the caliber of the Sailors they have.

Jeno said the boat crews worked eight-hour rotating shifts, around the clock, during the six-week training period prior to the deployment, which led up to two weeks of qualifications and testing. “They all had to qualify to stand their individual watch positions, and then as a unit.”

He said as soon as a crew member earns a qualification, it is time to move on to the next. The hours and nature of the job are also physically demanding. “They do it, because they want to do it. It’s kind of addictive, and it’s a lot of fun. But to have that fun you have to [do a lot of hard work],” Jeno said. “It is a pleasure to be around these Sailors, because they are so motivated.”
Guard Reserve for 13 years. He is currently assigned to Port Security Unit (PSU) 311, which is attached to MESRON 1 for their deployment. He qualified as a coxswain in 2001, when he was activated for two years following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. He was in search and rescue, working with the Navy. He said going into the initial phases of training he was concerned about visibility and tactical control. You become a valuable asset to your unit.” The skills that many citizen Sailors bring from their civilian job make a positive impact to the military mission.

“The integration of the Reserve component with the active component becomes an essential tool allowing the Navy and Defense Department to meet ongoing operational commitments,” Wright said.

Story by M.C. Ryan Hill, editor The Navy Reservist magazine

Guard Reserve for 13 years. He is currently assigned to Port Security Unit (PSU) 311, which is attached to MESRON 1 for their deployment. He qualified as a coxswain in 2001, when he was activated for two years following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. He said his background prior to transferring to PSU was primarily in search and rescue, and law enforcement.

As an experienced coxswain, he said, the challenge wasn’t as much how to do his job, as it was adjusting to a different type of mission. “It’s completely different, the search and rescue mindset [was all about assistance and rendering aid],” Tredo said. “Where as now, there is kind of a line [drawn] in the sand ‘or rescue mindset [was all about assistance and rendering aid],’ Tredo said. “Where as now, there is kind of a line [drawn] in the sand ‘or rescue mindset [was all about assistance and rendering aid],’ Tredo said. “Where as now, there is kind of a line [drawn] in the sand ‘or rescue mindset [was all about assistance and rendering aid],’ Tredo said. “Where as now, there is kind of a line [drawn] in the sand ‘or rescue mindset [was all about assistance and rendering aid],’ Tredo said. “Where as now, there is kind of a line [drawn] in the sand ‘or rescue mindset [was all about assistance and rendering aid],” Tredo said. “The focus for our force is three-fold: support to the fleet, support to our Sailors and support to their families.” Reserve Force Master Chief (FMF) Ronny Wright agrees.

“Since Sept. 11, 2001, more than $2,000 mobilization requirements in support of global war on terrorism operations. Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom have been filled by Selected Reservists,” said Wright. “On any given day, more than 37,000 of the 68,000 Navy Reservists are providing fully integrated, global operational support to the fleet and combatant commanders. Critical skill sets include cargo handling, special warfare, customs inspectors, medical support, intelligence, aviation and myriad mobilization assignments.”

With a fully Integrated Reserve component, there is seamless service provided to the support of the maritime strategy. At any given time, up to 90 percent of the Navy Reserve is providing global operational support. Reserve Sailors like Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Gino Flores have had diverse experience in active-Reserve integration. Flores mobilized to active duty twice; once to Guantamano Bay, Cuba, in 2008 and once to Kuwait in 2005. He credits his Reserve training in helping him prepare for the tasks he faced during his mobilization.

“In the Reserve, we are constantly reviewing and updating training requirements that may be applicable to real world situations,” said Flores, who drills with the Public Affairs Center in Jacksonville, Fla. “In being mobilized to active duty, we have the opportunity to put that training into practice. You become a valuable asset to your unit.”
that they would have issues bringing the two elements together, but those concerns are long gone now.

“Those guys are squared away. Where I thought there might be issues, there really weren’t any,” Tredo said, “so it worked well.”

According to Tredo, in addition to the normal crew development, the coast guardsmen are actually looking forward to being able to earn the Navy’s Expeditionary Warfare qualification while on deployment.

Information Systems Technician 1st Class Mike Kasper of Rathdrum, Idaho, is the leading petty officer in the training department for Detachment 562 to form Boat Division 56. Kasper explained the progression of the boat crews get hands-on experience working with the supporting elements such as the communications personnel, and embarked security teams to bring all of the elements together as a cohesive unit. They encounter any number of situations swimmer attacks, man-overboard drills and equipment failures. They also conducted multiple HVAs.

Kasper said the challenge from the training department’s perspective was bringing all the different units together.

“They all have different training concepts,” Kasper said. “[To integrate the various units into one] you pull in representatives from each of those commands and really work closely with them, ahead of time, to gather ideas. Then you lay out the best training package you can knowing what strengths and deficiencies each unit brings to the table.”

Immediately following the work-up phase, Unit Level Training Readiness Assessment (ULTRA) began. ULTRA is designed to evaluate the command training team’s (CTT) ability to train its personnel. The next step, once ULTRA was completed was the Final Exercise Problem, which is the method for evaluating members going forward to ensure battle readiness.

In the end, the objective was to equip, train and qualify 24 Navy boat crews, plus 12 Coast Guard boat crews along with all of the support elements.

Kasper said being able to watch the members develop both as individuals and as a crew is very rewarding.

“I get to watch the coxswains mold the crew members individually. They start out green,” Kasper said. “The next thing you know they are pulling up pier-side, throwing lines 25 feet away, hooking the cleat on the first try, tying off the way they are supposed to. You can see the unit cohesion on the boat. It really is a pleasure to witness that, because then you know the hard work, and the 18-hour days you are putting in, are paying off.”

Electrician’s Mate 2nd Class (SW) Eric Mend, a qualified coxswain, is relatively new to the small boat community. He said the work-up phase started out necessarily slow.

Mend said personnel had to spend some time making sure they were squared away administratively and medically. Uniforms and gear were issued. They then went into a classroom environment for some basic seamanship to ensure everyone was on the same page before moving out onto the water. It was at that point, he said that the training schedule began to ramp up.

“We have done pretty much everything here that we’ll be doing once we get in country, standing watches, looking out for surface contacts, man-overboard and safety drills,” Mend said. “I’m new to the community. I don’t have much experience. So, everything I’ve learned here has been important for me.”

Tactical Boat Coxswain, Sonar Technician Submarines 2nd Class (SS) Shane Watanabe of Salt Lake City rejoined the Reserves after 9/11. He said he chose small boats because he wanted to serve in a community that would put him out on the front lines.

Watanabe said he could see firsthand why the training had to be so aggressive. As a coxswain, he is responsible for the safety and success of his crew.

“That’s why we do everything over and over again,” Watanabe said. “This way it becomes second nature.”

Like Watanabe, Engineman 2nd Class Kpaku Palay of Dallas, was preparing for his second small boat deployment. He said it was a great opportunity for him, because on his last deployment he was able to advance in his qualifications from crewman to engineer and then to navigator. This deployment will give him the opportunity to earn his coxswain qualification.

“On an active-duty mission like this, it could take four to six months,” Palay said, “and back in the Reserve unit it can take years,” only because you aren’t on the water as much.

The men and women of Maritime Expeditionary Security Squadrons 1, which is comprised of Navy and Coast Guard Reserve units from all over the United States, prepare for deployment to critical coastal and inshore areas of Iraq and Kuwait. In the end, the objective was to equip, train and qualify 24 Navy boat crews, plus 24 Coast Guard boat crews along with all of the support elements.

It was a hard job according to Senior Chief Warrant Officer 1 (SWO) Ray Benko, command senior enlisted advisor, Boat Division 56, but it was made easier by the caliber of the Sailors they have. 

Brunson is assigned to Defense Media Activity – Anacostia, Washington, D.C.
Being a damage controlman (DC) aboard an aircraft carrier means constantly keeping your finger on the pulse of the ship. DCs stand watch at Damage Control Central, maintain repair lockers and are able to respond in a moment’s notice to any dangerous situation that threatens not only the ship itself, but the lives of her crew. However for the DCs commissioning a new ship the mission is not only keeping a finger on the ship’s pulse, but also being there to help start its heart.

USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77), the Navy’s newest aircraft carrier as well as the 10th and final carrier of the Nimitz class, was commissioned Jan. 10. The first crew bringing the ship to life is also the crew setting the standard of how the ship will respond to any threatening situation for virtually the remainder of its service life.

Even after the ship was commissioned, the DCs continue the training and preparations while the ship goes through acceptance trials and begins operations in the fleet.

“Not only do you bring everything (damage control related) on to the ship, but you also have to get everybody trained up and qualified to actually take ownership and then eventually take the ship out to sea,” said Damage Controlman 1st Class (SW) Gregory F.M. Greene. “And that basically sets the fundamentals for how the ship is going to be 50 years down the road.”

As schedules comprise and checklists expand, a unique set of challenges arises.

“For the DCmen on board it’s hard. They’re

Damage Controlmen
Take Ownership of Navy’s Newest Carrier

By MC2 Michael Tackitt

USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77) participate in a firefighting drill in a simulated at-sea environment to prepare for upcoming crew certifications.

DCFN Benjamin M. Vanagen adjusts the first-stage regulator nozzle on a self-contained breathing apparatus in preparation for a training brief aboard Bush.

Sailors assigned to USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77) participate in a firefighting drill in a simulated at-sea environment to prepare for upcoming crew certifications.

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**NEW GENERATION OF PLANKOWNERS**

Woman of the Week

LH8: A New Hybrid Era for the Amphibious Navy

Engineer 2nd Class (SW) Rebecca Lucero is making history. The things she’s doing today will set the stage for thousands of Sailors in the future. And she knows it. “I feel like an asset to the Navy,” said Lucero, work center supervisor for Pre-Commissioning Unit (PCU) Makin Island’s (LHD 8) auxiliaries division’s (A-Div) elevators and hydraulics shop. “It’s something to be proud of because I am a part of the history of bringing a ship to life.”

Makin Island is the first LHD to get underway on both gas turbine engines and electric propulsion motors. The ship’s new hybrid propulsion system is expected to provide substantial fuel savings and increased operational flexibility during the life of the ship.

Story and photos by MC2 Justin Webb

▶ Photo by MC3 Micah P. Blechner

▶ Photo by MCSA Joel S. Kolodziejczak

▶ Flight deck personnel aboard Bush receive a training pre-brief. All plankowners throughout the various ship’s departments undergo intensive training. Every Sailor has a role to play when it’s time to respond to an emergency.

DC2(SW/SC) Javin N. riley

▶ DC2(SW/SC) Javin N. Riley adjusts a piece of damage control equipment before a training brief aboard Bush.

DC2(SW/SC) Justin N. Riley

▶ ENS2(SW) Rebecca Lucero cycles through the alarm summary page while GSM1(SW) William Toten explains the operating parameters of PCU Makin Island (LHD-8) reverse osmosis (RO) control unit. The ship’s four RO units can produce over 200,000 gallons to supply the ship and provide for any necessary humanitarian mission.

E N 2 0 0 8 • A L L H A N D S
Lucero has nine years in the Navy and LHD 8 is her third shipboard tour. This assignment is characterized by the development of each Sailor on board as well as the bringing to life of a new chapter in the history of the amphibious Navy.

Makin Island is the eighth and final Wasp-Class amphibious assault ship to be built. At the same time it’s also the first U.S. Navy ship to house a hybrid gas turbine-electric drive propulsion system (MCS). For engineers, that’s the type of on-the-job experience that increases the stakes of being a plankowner.

“As engineers [aboard Makin Island] we are required to have a working knowledge of all areas within the department,” said Lucero. “We not only hold training within our own divisions, but we also must have a basic understanding of the machinery control system (MCS), mainspaces and other engineering spaces, and equipment throughout the ship.”

And there’s more. Lucero spends around 50 percent of her time on board the ship performing quality assurance (QA) checks and all associated administrative paperwork. The other half of her typical 10-12 hour work day is divided amongst firefighting training, crew familiarization (CREWFAM) courses and other in-rate and general military training (GMT).

Regardless of rate or rank, the 1,100 Sailors that will make up Makin Island’s crew will all be proficient in general shipboard firefighting, aircraft firefighting, basic damage control (DC) and 3M [maintenance and material management] by the time the ship is delivered to the Navy,” said Senior Chief Navy Counselor (SW/AW) Steve Cullen.

Throughout the construction process, Makin Island’s crew was divided into two groups of Sailors: one group attending formal schools at the fleet concentration area at Naval Base San Diego and the other comprising a ship-specific training unit at Northrop Grumman Shipbuilding, Gulf Coast, in Pascagoula, Miss. Despite the thousands of miles that separated the two halves, the command as a whole was able to train and evolve as a cohesive team.

In December, more than 100 Makin Island Sailors from both units experienced what most of them called the most significant training they received since reporting on board. These crewmembers were able to go to sea with the ship when the shipbuilder got Makin Island underway for the first phase of Builder’s Trials. NGBR personnel used the trials to test the vessel’s propulsion, communications, navigation and mission systems, as well as all related support systems. At the same time, Makin Island Sailors used the opportunity to gain insight into how LHD 8’s transformational systems operate at sea.

“Builder’s Trials are the best training platform you have prior to taking custody of the ship,” said Gas Turbine System Technician (Mechanical) 1st Class (SW) William Toten, main propulsion division leading petty officer. “I learned so much those couple of days because I finally got to see everything work together.”

The trials, by design, also accomplished the job of identifying discrepancies and areas requiring further attention before the ship is delivered to the Navy. Although some engineering phases of the trials were moved to a second underway period, ship’s company learned some significant lessons about their future warship and advanced systems.

“On the bridge we were observing the plant status on the machinery control console when we had to reduce speed on one shaft,” said Capt. Robert Kopas, prospective commanding officer. “This gave us the opportunity to learn one of the unique features of MCS in that the system automatically brought the other shaft up to compensate and keep the ordered speed. On most other ships you would have to manually order that to happen."

After completion of all Builder’s Trials evolutions, the shipyard, along with the supervisor of shipbuilding (SUPSHIP) and the Makin Island crew, worked in preparation for a one-week evaluation of the ship by the Board of Inspection and Survey (INSURV) called Acceptance Trials.

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Simultaneously, the crew continues work on qualifications and ensuring the ship is fully manned, and that all personnel are ready and trained in preparation for the delivery of Makin Island to the U.S. Navy.

While monitoring the construction and testing of the ship is important, Kopas is quick to point out that it is only part of the pre-commissioning crew’s job.

There are four pillars of pre-commissioning,” he said. “They are: manning, equipping, training and production. The pre-commissioning crew has to develop all four pillars for the ship to be ready to join the fleet.”

The crew of Makin Island has truly been a valued team member with the SUPSHIP Gulf Coast LHD project office during all facets of Makin Island’s construction and testing,” said Fred Hoffmeyer, Deputy LHD Project Manager. “They have shown a willingness to get involved, which demonstrates they have an accelerated mindset to be ready to accept ownership of Makin Island and all her systems. This hands-on approach by a knowledgeable and enthusiastic crew has substantially helped in getting Makin Island ready for sea.”

“It’s rewarding to know I was part of this experience … the extra knowledge I gained in my job and about the Navy,” Lucero said, reflecting on everything it took to bring a warship from the planning stages to commissioning. “No future engineers will probably ever know as much about this ship as we do.”

Lucero and her shipmates aboard LHD 8 have experienced something that few other Sailors in the Navy ever will. On commissioning day, the hundreds of hours of training, CREWFAMs, drills, QA inspections and underway periods will give each crewmember of USS Makin Island the right to call themselves ‘Plankowners.’

Webb is assigned to PCDU Makin Island (LHD 8).
CNO and MCPON Visit Troops in Afghanistan

Hawaii Commands Participate in First Middle Pacific Group Sail


CNO thanked the troops and their families for their service, citing 14,000 Sailors in the Middle East, a number almost equivalent to the Marine Corps service members within the same theatre. He also expressed gratitude for the reports he receives from other military services about the level of service the U.S. Navy is giving.

“Everywhere I’ve gone over the past couple of years, in Pacific, Atlantic, and then the year past where I’ve been the CNO, the comments that I receive universally from Army, Air Force, Marine Corps and even the Navy commanders, cannot say enough about what our Sailors do - day in and day out, and the way that you do it,” said Roughead. “It’s that desire and competency that you bring whenever assigned that makes a huge difference, and that is something we are going to continue to do as long as we are engaged in this light.”

During his visit, Roughead took the opportunity to award four Sailors and Marines the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, one the Joint Service Achievement Medal, another the Joint Service Commendation Medal, and trocked a petty officer to the next pay grade. He also introduced MCPON West to the troops and the two held a question and answer session.

“The CNO’s visit was excellent for morale,” said U.S. Navy Chief Hospital Corpsman George Ayala from Pueblo, Colo. “We had a lot of questions that he had the right answers for. For those people who are here for the first time, it’s a little scary coming here. It’s reassuring that the upper chain of command is concerned about us.”

West held a separate chief’s call following the all hands call at ISAF HQ.

Pearl Harbor-based ships and aircraft recently participated in the first Commander, Naval Surface Group Middle Pacific (CNSG MIDPAC) Surface Combatant Group Sail off the coast of Oahu, Hawaii.

USN Hopper (DDG 70), USS Chosin (CG 66), USS Paul Hamilton (DDG 60), USS Chung-Hoon (DDG 93) and USS Russell (DDG 59), along with assets from Commander, Submarine Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet, Helicopter Anti-Submarine Squadron Light 37 and Patrol and Reconnaissance Wing 2, conducted the two-day evolution.

The sail supports the Pacific Fleet’s new Mid-Pacific Surface Combatant Operational Employment program, which calls for nine of the 11 Hawaii-based surface combatants to conduct their group training with strike groups. Future plans are for the ships to conduct their intermediate and advance training and support operations in the Western Pacific, taking advantage of the strategic location in the Middle of the Pacific.

“The Middle Pacific ships that are homeported in Hawaii have been made to face west more than they have in the past, and by that means that they’re more ready for sea on a day-to-day basis. We focus their maintenance and their training on that readiness for sea,” said Adm. Robert F. Willard, commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet. Capt. Timothy Smith, commanding officer of USS Chosin (CG 65), has seen many group sails during his naval career and commented that this sail was an excellent opportunity for the Pearl Harbor ships to train together near their homeport.

“These are always great events because they energize the crew, they are a forcing function for excellence because it demands precision, readiness and having your head in the game and that’s exactly what it’s about as we deliver combat readiness around the world,” said Smith. “It’s a great proving ground for us in that every day we’re increasing our individual and collective readiness.”

Story and photo by MC1 Michael A. Lantron, Commander, Navy Region Hawaii, Pearl Harbor.
Navy Announces Decision on Mayport Homebase

Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Installations & Environment, B.J. Penn, recently signed a Record of Decision for the Mayport Homeporting Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

The Navy’s decision is to implement the preferred alternative, which is to homeport a single nuclear powered aircraft carrier (CVN) at Naval Station (NavSTA) Mayport, and to complete associated infrastructure modifications. These include dredging, infrastructure andeward improvements, and construction of CVN nuclear propulsion plant maintenance facilities.

“We have studied this issue very carefully and considered multiple factors,” said Donald C. Winter, Secretary of the Navy. “This allows the Navy to obtain the benefits of fleet dispersal without negatively impacting our carrier capability or operations. Homeporting a carrier in Mayport best supports the Navy’s mission and safeguards our nation’s security needs.”

Homeporting a CVN at NAVSTA Mayport reduces risks to fleet resources in the event of natural disaster, manmade calamity, or attack by foreign nations or terrorists. This includes risk to aircraft carriers, industrial support facilities, and the people that operate and maintain these crucial assets.

Mayport allows for advantages of fleet dispersal and survivability without impacting operational availability. On the West Coast, the fleet accepted some reduced operational availability associated with homeport dispersal. Ships lose operational availability during the additional transit time required to reach operational and training areas from the Pacific Northwest.

By establishing a second CVN homeport on the East Coast, the Navy gains the dispersal advantage without the increased transit time. The proximity to training areas and transit time of operational areas is about equal from Norfolk and Mayport.

West Coast CVN homeports and maintenance facilities are not viable options in planning for Atlantic Fleet CVN assets in the event a catastrophic event occurs in the Hampton Roads area. The nuclear powered aircraft carriers are too large to transit the Panama Canal, requiring a 12,700 nautical mile voyage around South America to reach the closest CVN homeport on the West Coast in San Diego.

The EIS examined potential environmental consequences of constructing and operating facilities and infrastructure associated with homeporting additional surface ships at NAVSTA Mayport. It assessed 13 alternatives, including a “no action” alternative. The EIS evaluated resources in the Mayport area that may be affected by the proposed action, such as air and water quality, biological resources (such as marine mammals and threatened and endangered species), land use, cultural resources, and socioeconomic. The EIS also accounted for cumulative impacts from other activities in the Mayport area.

Story courtesy of the Navy Office of Information.
CVN 77 Ordnanceman Lives the Dream of Racing on Weekends

Sailors sometimes joke with each other that they’re “lives” the dream, but Aviation Ordnanceman 1st Class (AW) David Steele assigned to USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77), works on his Victory Lap Late Model Series race car in his garage. Steele races the car at Virginia Motor Speedway in Jamaica, Va., during his off-duty hours.

Steele, who’s been assigned to the nation’s newest aircraft carrier since June 2007 as the aviation department G-3 leading petty officer, races in the Victory Lap Late Model Series at Virginia Motor Speedway in Jamaica, Va., in his off-duty time during the summer fulfilling a dream he’s had since he was a child.

His racing is no surprise to anyone in his family, as he has been watching short track racing since he was a teenager, I wanted to race on the dirt tracks.”

Being a small time circuit, the racers at Virginia Motor Speedway seem to be more interested in the love of racing than to make a buck, according to Steele.

“I’ve had a lot of volunteers help to keep the car going,” he said, noting that his fellow racers were quite helpful in giving him advice to make the car run better. “There are a whole lot of variables in getting the car set up just right — tires, shocks and camber (angle at which the tires are suspended from each axle). I’ve had people from the command, friends and family helping get the car ready.

His wife, son and daughter help. In fact, Steele said his daughter “thinks we’re famous” because of his race car.

“He, my daughter is eaten up with it,” he said. “I can be under the car and ask for a wrench, and she knows where to find it and hands it to me. They’re [all three] on top of it.”

Steele’s mother is involved too.

“My mom signed for the race car and said ‘now you can be race poor, too!’” Steele said.

“But she said to do it. I can’t wait for them to see it.”

That wasn’t the first time he listened to his mom. A retired hospital corpsman, Steele’s mom steered him toward aviation ordnance (AO).

“It was an appealing job to me,” he said. “I knew I wanted to go into the Navy. My mom told me [AO] was a tight-knit community, and she was right.”

Nearly nine years after joining the Navy, Steele gets to live the dream both on and off duty.

Last year, he finished as high as 11th in only a handful of races and never finished last. He finished the season 32nd out of 43 racers in the Late Model Series and said he feels he has a pretty good shot at rookie-of-the-year honors in his first full season next summer.

“My dream is the suffering and to achieve my educational goals while helping get the car ready.”

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Something to Think About

A GI Bill for the 21st Century

Story by MC2(AW) Jonathan W. Hutto Sr.

former Presidents Gerald R. Ford and George H. W. Bush served in similar ways. Both were vice president and president of the United States, and were World War II veterans. Not as widely known is they both received their educations with funding from the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944-commonly known as the GI Bill. This bill also helped to educate current U.S Senator Frank Lautenberg and former Senators Robert Dole and Daniel Patrick Moynihan.

In 1944, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, flanked by members of the House, Senate and President of the American Legion Mr. John Stelle, signs the original Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944 commonly known as the GI Bill.

With the increased focus on education, now is the time for all Sailors to have a plan to obtain higher education. The last advancement cycle witnessed Sailors gaining as much as four points for college education. The new GI bill, coupled with existing programs under Navy College and NCPACE, places higher education within reach for all Sailors.

The new law takes effect Aug. 1, 2009. All post 9/11 veterans having served at least 90 days on active-duty, Reserve or National Guard can qualify for the new benefits. Those veterans serving at least 36 months qualify for the full benefit which includes full tuition not exceeding the highest amount of a public university in their state, a housing and book stipend including reimbursement for those veterans relocating for school from rural areas. The law also gives incentive to private institutions to match dollars with the federal government if their tuition exceeds the highest amount for a public institution in their state. The training approved under this bill includes undergraduate and graduate degrees, vocational and technical training along with reimbursement for approved tutorial assistance, licensing and certification tests.

The benefits also extend to current active duty. For those in active duty having served at least 90 days post 9-11, the benefits can be used to fund their education while serving. The tuition will be paid based on how long the member has served. Under current guidelines, those serving at least six years and agree to serve at least four more years, may be eligible to grant the benefit to their spouse or family member.

In recent times, the current Montgomery GI bill has been outpaced by the enormous costs of private and public institutions. Thousands of Iraq War vets are seeking higher education with the current benefits. In response to the economic challenge faced by these veterans, former Navy Secretary Senator Jim Webb, served as the lead sponsor of the “Post 9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act.” This new GI bill was signed into law by President George Bush in June 2008.

Originally signed into law in 1944 by President Franklin Roosevelt, veterans used the original GI Bill benefits immensely. By 1947, veterans of World War II accounted for roughly half of all college admissions. By the end of the original GI bill in 1956, nearly half of the 16 million World War II vets had participated in an education program with millions taking advantage of the guaranteed home loan provision.

For more information, contact the United States Department of Veterans Affairs at www.gibill.va.gov.

Hutto is assigned to Defense Media Activity – Anacostia, Washington, D.C.

Decisions, Decisions, Decisions—Which GI Bill Is Better?

Military members thinking about or already enrolled in college may have a decision to make when planning for their education.

The Post-9/11 Veterans Education Assistance Act of 2008, also known as the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill or Chapter 33, will take effect Aug. 1. It does not replace the Montgomery G.I. Bill, also known as Chapter 30, but both education benefits cannot be used at the same time.

Members already receiving the Montgomery G.I. Bill can switch to the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, but they cannot switch back. More importantly, both bills generally provide up to 36 months of assistance. Therefore, any time already used under the Montgomery plan will be deducted from the Post-9/11 plan.

So, which program is best?

“It’s not one program fits all,” noted Candice Rice, director of the Navy College Office at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. She explained that factors such as the state, school and program affect the overall benefits available.

The Post-9/11 Bill, for example, covers tuition based on the highest public university tuition rate in that state. It also includes basic housing allowance at an E-5 rate for the zip code of the college, as well as a yearly $1,000 stipend for books and supplies. But, unlike the Montgomery Plan, the tuition coverage is paid directly to the college and not the service member. Also, if the state already provides military veterans with free tuition benefits for in-state schools, the Post-9/11 plan would only offer BAH and the stipend.

“You have to crunch your own numbers,” advised Ernest Houston, a Veterans Administration program coordinator. “You’ll have to look at this individually.”

The new G.I. Bill covers graduate and undergraduate degrees; vocational and technical school training offered by an institute for higher learning that has been approved for G.I. Bill benefits; tutorial assistance; as well as licensing and certification testing reimbursement. On-the-job training, apprenticeship, correspondence, flight and preparatory courses might also be covered.

Those who qualify for the Montgomery G.I. Bill or the Reserve Educational Assistance Program (REAP) are eligible for the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill. Active-duty service after Sept. 11, 2001 determines the benefit received which members are eligible. Individuals who served between 90 and 180 days of active duty, for example, are eligible for 40 percent of total education benefits under the new bill. Those who have served at least 36 months since Sept. 11, 2001, are eligible for 100 percent of benefits. All who qualify are eligible for benefits up to 15 years from the last period of active duty of at least 90 days.

Qualifications for the new G.I. Bill also include honorable discharge; placement on the retired or temporary disabled retired list; transfer to the Fleet Reserve or Fleet Marine Corps Reserve; or discharge due to hardship, condition interfered with duty or existed prior to service.

Other considerations include the $600 kicker payment made into the Montgomery plan, which is not recoverable if the member transfers to the Post-9/11 plan. Also, if a student loan repayment plan was in force during any of the service member’s post-Sept. 11 active-duty time, that time does not count toward the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill eligibility.

Houston cautioned that all the bugs have yet to be worked out of the latest G.I. Bill, and recommends visiting www.gibill.va.gov for more information.

Story by Army Sgt. 1st Class Vaughn Laine, Joint Task Force Guantanamo, Cuba.
Shining STAR

Story by MC2 (SW) Elizabeth Vlahos, photo by MC1 (AW) R. Jason Brunson

Taking a bite out of the Recruiter of the Year competition wasn’t enough for Electrician’s Mate 2nd Class (SW/AW) Curtis Bembow. The enterprising Sailor from Naval Recruiting District Miami went back for seconds as Diversity Recruiter of the Year.

“It’s an accomplishment, a pinnacle that I have never reached in my life,” said Bembow. “I got there (through) a lot of hard work. Everything you put into recruiting, you’re going to get out [of it] … the hours, the time.”

As much as Bembow looked forward to hometown recruiting, coming home after serving in the fleet presented its own challenges.

“Knowing I could make a difference came in [recruiting] school, because I knew wherever they put me, I could make a difference. When I got home, I didn’t know how I was going to make a difference. Things change; the same people aren’t the same people.

“It’s hard, but you have to go out there and reestablish yourself trust-wise, because they don’t know you from Adam. I didn’t know I was making a difference until people started talking to me, [saying] ‘You’re doing great!’ When you get that first parent to come and hug you after coming from their child’s graduation, when they come and talk to you, you know you’re doing something great.”

Bembow recognized the importance of diversity in the Navy as a potent recruiting tool.

“Everyone has their own idea of what a military member is,” he explained, “so when they see that we’re actually human, it helps not only in the Navy but it helps us all in the military. It takes an individual and [shows you] that he’s normal. It shows that it’s a regular job but it has benefits, and it adds a bigger pride factor into it. It helps overall, especially for the minorities.

“It’s kind of hard for the minorities to believe anything that anyone tells them nowadays, and when they see [one of their own] who’s actually successful, well-spoken, and carries himself [with pride], it gives [everybody] hope.”

Bembow was quick to point out the professional benefits a Sailor can reap from recruiting duty.

“If you love the Navy, and if you want to give back to the Navy as much as they’ve given to you, then yes, you should come recruiting,” he said. “It’s rewarding for the Navy, because they’re going to get their work out of you. It’s also rewarding for you, because it turns you into that 4.0 Sailor. It makes your admin [and] communication skills better, [and] it makes you a better supervisor.

“If you can conquer this beast, when you go back to the regular fleet, you’ll be a better Sailor.”

“Story by MC2 (SW) Elizabeth Vlahos, photo by MC1 (AW) R. Jason Brunson

March 2009 • All Hands

When you get that first parent to come and hug you after coming from their child’s graduation, when they come and talk to you, you know you’re doing something great.”
A World of Possibilities
Navy Lieutenant Gets
Settled On The Ground In
Afghanistan
Individual Augmente
Story by the All Hands staff

"You feel like you owe it to your fellow members of the military to be out there with them doing the dangerous work." Petsyok will be in Afghanistan until August 2009. After that, he expects to report back to USS Whap (LHD 1) and begin his transition off of active duty and onto graduate studies back in his home state of Illinois.

"I don’t know exactly what the future holds for me here, but I do know I am happy to be here, and I know this upcoming year will be one of the greatest, if not the greatest, experience of my life."

"One of the interesting things about the Navy Individual Augmentation (IA) process is that many times, Sailors don't know what their job will be until they actually arrive at their base. This is due to the dynamic nature of working in a war zone. The needs of the coalition forces serving here change on a daily basis, and as members of the military we understood that it is our job to fill in wherever we are needed," he said in a recent recap of his experience to date.

And filling in where needed is exactly what he’s doing. For three years he has served as a logistics and services officer, but now at Camp Phoenix, he works in the police advisory office. This office helps coordinate, plan and track training for the Afghan National Police forces in the entire country. Sometimes it can be a challenge gathering all the necessary information from the guys downrange and presenting it to the commanders in charge who make the decisions that largely shape the path of progress here in Afghanistan. Connectivity limitations and overall mission objectives make it very difficult for guys in the field to complete the frequent reporting requirements we push down to them.

"Life as an IA with the Army is a bit different than his shipboard experience. He’s gone from replenishments at sea to convoys with ground forces.

"I have to be honest: I was a little nervous and wasn’t sure what to expect," he said of his first convoy which requires full body armor, loaded weapons and armored SUVs.

"There are no traffic laws in Afghanistan. I couldn’t believe how erratic the locals were driving their cars, bicycles, mopeds, and even carriages pulled by donkeys. The Army major I was riding with seemed completely at ease as we swerved in and out of all the moving obstacles. After an adventurous ride, we made it to our destination. We were there to attend a few meetings to discuss the progress and issues with the police training." To date, his job entails personnel and equipment reports, capability and milestone tracking (the critical metric for police training progress), and weekly updates to higher command which requires numerous meetings, plenty of work behind a computer and not much time on the field encountering enemy contact.

"Being stationed on Camp Phoenix, one of the safest bases in the country, makes my family happy and allows me to sleep well at night, but at times you do find yourself thinking about all the training we go through prior to coming over here."

Lt. j.g. Ryan Petsyok (right) takes a quick break with Lt.j.g. Luke Tarbi, an IA from USS Chosin (CG 65).

"I don’t know exactly what the future holds for me here, but I do know I am happy to be here, and I know this upcoming year will be one of the greatest, if not the greatest, experience of my life."