

ADMIRAL MIKE MULLEN
Podcast Transcript
09JUL07

MC1 MCNEELEY: Welcome to the Chief of Naval Operations podcast for July 9th, 2007. I'm Petty Officer Chad McNeeley. This is a continuing series of discussions with CNO Admiral Mike Mullen. This week, we will discuss the proposed 5-3 sea-shore rotation plan, its possible effect on families, and what the Navy plans to do to support the rotation, and the newly added rates to the sea duty incentive pay program.

Good afternoon, sir.

ADM. MIKE MULLEN: Hi. How you doing?

MC1 MCNEELEY: Good, sir. I trust that you had a good Independence Day last week, sir?

ADM. MULLEN: I actually had a great Independence Day. And I'll just take this opportunity to wish all the men and women in the Navy a belated happy Independence Day, and their families as well.

MC1 MCNEELEY: I had an interesting question from a family member yesterday wondering what the CNO does on Independence Day. I think they were a little surprised that we didn't have some official duties that we needed to go partake in.

ADM. MULLEN: Actually, it's a holiday. And I took it off with my family. Had a large number of friends over for a barbecue, and I cooked hot dogs, burgers, and we had a little fireworks display in our front yard preceded by the big fireworks display, which we can see out from the backyard of our house, which was a great view. So it was really a fun evening.

MC1 MCNEELEY: Sounds like what happened at my house – barbecue and fireworks.

ADM. MULLEN: Yeah.

MC1 MCNEELEY: All right, on to the business at hand, sir. Vice Admiral Harvey, the Chief of Naval Personnel, told career counselors at a meeting last week that he was going to propose a plan to move forward with the 5-3 sea-shore rotation, meaning that a sailor would spend five years at sea and three years ashore. Can you verify that this was the plan that was proposed and tell us a little bit more of the thinking behind it?

ADM. MULLEN: Well, I'm not sure verify is the right word. I certainly am aware of what Admiral Harvey spoke about. And I've spoken about sea-shore rotation in nearly

every all hands call for the last two years. And I expect us to continue to evolve, which I think is what the message Admiral Harvey is sending out.

And first and foremost, I just want to – it's a reminder – or sea-shore rotation is a reminder that we are a war fighting, seagoing service. It's what we do; it's why we have a Navy. It's what the country expects us to do. We're about ships, and ships go to sea. And I've been talking a lot about how we are going to become a more sea-centric force. And I think we have to, given the threats that are out there and the world that we're living in.

There's an awful lot going on at sea in the maritime domain. If you look today at the 2.0 carrier presence we have in CENTCOM right now, or the pirates we're fighting off the coast of Africa, or sea-based missile defense testing, which has been very successful for the Navy, or the current humanitarian assistance and training operations we've got going on in the Pacific and South America, and later on this year in the Gulf of Guinea off of Africa, we're just very busy at sea and I expect that's going to continue to go on. And we're performing exceptionally well.

So we've got a responsibility to stay ready at sea; that's what the fleet response plan is all about. And I believe as it's matured, it's worked magnificently. We recently surged, as an example, the Ronald Reagan strike group for two months on short notice, which was a terrific example of our flexibility. And the Reagan strike group performed magnificently.

And we've done this at the same time we've been bringing down the total number of sailors in the Navy and the number of shore billets that we have as well. We're really trying hard to make sure the work we have sailors do ashore is the right work, is meaningful work. And I need every sailor I have, but I can't afford one more than I need. And I need to make sure that the same level of readiness and flexibility exists on the people side, so we are looking at how best to adjust sea-shore rotation to get there.

Let me add just one more thing. And I know one of the options here is, you describe as a 5-3 rotation. But that would be more of a fleet standard, an upper limit, if you will. It doesn't mean that every rating will follow the same scheme. Some may spend more time at sea, others less. As Vice Admiral Harvey told the Navy Times last week, we're not in a hurry to make this happen and we aren't going to artificially increase tour lengths to meet a standard number. We know one size doesn't fit all here. But I think we are headed in this direction. And the emphasis, again, is right. We're a seagoing service. We need to focus on the fleet. And we need to make sure we get that right to be able to carry out our mission as we are so well today in so many places.

MC1 MCNEELEY: Moving on with the idea that one size may not fit all in talking about the sea duty incentive pay pilot program, can you tell us how the program is going?

ADM. MULLEN: The sea duty incentive pilot program was a program we started a few months ago. And the whole idea was to incentivize, where we need it, keeping some sailors at sea. And it really comes from some of my background, which is – I've known

sailors throughout my career who would stay at sea forever. And I've talked to sailors in recent years, particularly I've had some discussions in chiefs' messes, and I've found chiefs that would stay there forever, certainly, if you could incentivize them correctly.

And so, what we're trying to do with sea duty incentive pay is offer some sailors in certain pay grades and ratings a monetary incentive to either extend a tour at sea or to leave shore duty and go back to sea early – terminate their shore duty. Again, it's back to who we are and what we do for the nation at sea. It pays up to \$750 a month extra, which can be as much as \$18,000 a year, and you can get it in a lump sum. It started out with a limited number of mainly senior enlisted sailors in ratings like aviation boatswain's mate, fire control techs and engine room.

We just recently added some additional pay grades within the aviation ordnanceman rating, as well as damage controlman, surface electricians, and submarine navigation ETs. The initial response from qualifying sailors has really been positive. Feedback from the fleet helped in our decision to add new rates to the program, and we've received 34 requests so far for the program.

The first sailor getting SDIP is now serving USS Ross, DDG 71. So it's another indication that we're prioritizing this sea duty, and we want to incentivize it. And we think this pilot is off to a great start and we'll see where it goes. And like all pilots, we'll evaluate the plusses and the minuses and make a decision down the road about whether we want to make this a permanent program.

MC1 MCNEELEY: Sir, I have some experience with five years at sea. Granted, it was my first tour on the USS Tarawa; it was a while ago. But I remember it just seemed like a very, very long time. And I'm concerned about how the families are going to react to it, with the emphasis on more sea time. What is the Navy doing to make sure the families aren't going to be too stressed out by this, by sailors being at sea longer?

ADM. MULLEN: Well, I think we – I don't certainly dismiss that concern. I've been at sea a lot. I've been with ratings who were at sea, in fact, that long, and in some cases longer. So there is always a balance here; and certainly none of us are going to succeed unless we have the kind of support we do today from our families, and that we as an institution support family readiness, which has been a priority for myself, my wife Deborah, in everything that we've done. And I'm fond of saying in our business that nobody can do it alone, and that includes me. And I can certainly understand why some of the family members may be concerned about this shift. And the working group that Admiral Harvey has put together is looking at the family piece very hard.

We have four desired outcomes for their effort that this group is looking that we know are critical to our families. Geographic stability, deployment predictability, increased professional and personal development, and increasingly, satisfied work. And we don't have all the answers to all those things right now. But for me, it's a key piece we have to have right before we can move forward.

And I would add that with regard to the first two, geographic stability and deployment predictability, we already have in place with our employability and deployability program made some progress. And it's all about making sure we can be there when and where the combatant commanders need us, and that we can meet those commitments quickly while at the same time giving our people and their families some measure of predictability. And I want to emphasize some measure – it's pretty difficult. We live in an uncertain world. I think it's going to be more uncertain, not less, in the future, and being perfectly predictive is going to be difficult.

Six-month deployments will still be the norm. There's a possibility they could go longer. And that, of course, wouldn't happen without my approval. And in fact, some of them, recently, have actually been shorter. It also means that the Navy will maintain a one-to-one dwell ratio, keeping ships in port at least as long as the length of their last deployment. And only I can approve any unit's home port tempo dropping below 50 percent. The longer sea duty time we're looking at will also help sailors plan a bit more at whatever home port they're stationed that can allow them to settle in more, keep their children in the schools that they want them in, improve a spouse's chance of hanging on to a good job, and allowing them all to become a stronger part of their local community.

I read an article just a week or so ago in the Virginia Pilot about how much the Navy contributes to the economy of Hampton Roads. It turns out; it increased from almost \$11 billion in 2005 to over \$12.5 billion in 2006. It's a real testimony to just how much we've become a part of the fabric of a city or a county or a state. But it doesn't tell you about all the hours our people and families volunteer at local hospitals, coach at Little League, and contribute in their places of worship. Truth is, we're good neighbors wherever we are. And this approach – this new approach to sea-shore rotation – will help improve that even more.

I'd like to add just one more thing. And that's a brief discussion about our new enhanced parenthood policy we just came out with that will allow a new mother in the Navy the opportunity to defer her deployment after 12 months after delivery. Also, after 21 days – excuse me – also, it offers up to 21 days of TAD time to handle an adoption, provided for – and it also provides for better childcare. We know that Navy life can sometimes make it hard to start a family, and we're committing to helping.

MC1 MCNEELEY: Sticking with this real quick – geographic stability – how will that apply to overseas, specifically to assignments in Japan? We heard from sailors a couple weeks ago on the trip to Misawa; he'd been stationed in Japan for, I think, up to 14 years. And it was clear that he wanted to stay. Not specific to that sailor, but if they want to stay overseas, how will this geographic stability affect them?

ADM. MULLEN: Well, I think we'll have to blend all that in. I've spoken to this before. I think, as in many things, we'll have a balanced approach here. So there's not a one size fits all or one answer. I think it will be a combination of those who have that kind of geographic stability infused with what I think is important in all places, including overseas, which is some fresh blood – people that haven't been there before that bring

new ideas. So I think clearly it will be supported in our overseas assignment policies as well. That said, the policies we have right now, which are in place for consecutive overseas tours, I think will remain in effect for the foreseeable future.

MC1 MCNEELEY: Can you explain this – the new approach to the sea-shore rotation to people that aren't in the Navy – the American public and families?

ADM. MULLEN: Well, sea-shore rotation – more than anything else – is the underpinning for, obviously, career development, being able to balance what you do personally and professionally, providing the kind of environment in which you can raise a family and have a great future for yourself as well as a robust future for your family.

But in the end, this is all about what we do for a living. It's having a Navy, which can respond around the world, around the clock, and that we know that's what our job is; that's really what our focus area is. I said in my CNO guidance that a major focus area for me this year would be war fighting. And this new approach we're talking about, to being more seacentric, is all about making us better war fighters, a more capable Navy, and focusing on that critical piece, which is war fighting.

MC1 MCNEELEY: Very good. Any final thoughts, sir?

ADM. MULLEN: No, it's just good to be with you, and I look forward to this each week. It's an exciting time, exciting time to be in the Navy, exciting time to be providing the kind of capability that the Navy provides, and to be engaged around the world making a difference. And as always, I am incredibly appreciative of the thousands and thousands of sailors who are making a difference and their families who are doing the same.

MC1 MCNEELEY: Thank you very much.

ADM. MULLEN: Okay, thanks.

MC1 MCNEELEY: You've been listening to the Chief of Naval Operations podcast for July 9th, 2007. Check back next week for an updated edition. Thanks for listening. I'm Petty Officer Chad McNeeley.

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