

Adm. Mike Mullen
CNO Podcast
10SEP07

MC1 MCNEELEY: Welcome to the CNO podcast for September 10, 2007. I'm Petty Officer Chad McNeeley. This is a series of continuing discussions with CNO Adm. Mike Mullen.

Welcome back, sir, it's good to have you here again. It's been a little while since our last podcast, maybe a little bit too long.

ADM. MULLEN: Well, I'm delighted to be here. And I know it's been about a month. I, too, would like to do them a little more frequently. It's been a pretty busy time right now, but I'll certainly make an effort to continue to do this. We're shooting for once a week and we'll certainly try to hit that target.

MC1 MCNEELEY: I know that you've been very busy completing your tour here at CNO. I'd like to find out, get your thoughts on Admiral Roughead who's been nominated as your relief; a timeline of events for a change of command with Admiral Roughead, and a timeline of events for a change of command with General Pace in October, sir.

ADM. MULLEN: Well as you said, Admiral Gary Roughead has been nominated to be my relief. He's just a terrific, terrific naval officer, great leader; I've known him for a long time, and I have every confidence he will take great care of the Navy, our people, our missions, and I'm delighted that he's been nominated by the president.

However, he hasn't been confirmed yet; only the Senate can do that and so we really don't have any specific dates set for that. We had thought maybe by the end of this month, but right now we're just not sure. I'm going to relieve Pete Pace as the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 1 October. That is firm; and so we're headed for that right now. So, in fact it will be about three more weeks that I'll be here at CNO.

MC1 MCNEELEY: We're going to try to get another podcast in before the end of the month?

ADM. MULLEN: Sure.

MC1 MCNEELEY: Good. You talked about how busy things are. Obviously the Navy, every time we open the newspapers or watch the news, the Navy seems like it's everywhere. We sent divers to Minnesota to help with the bridge collapse. The USS Wasp is currently down in Nicaragua helping with Hurricane Felix. Comfort, obviously still in South America. Over in the Pacific, Exercise Malabar is getting ready to wrap up, and the Peleliu's humanitarian mission is also wrapping up. All of that going on; this also, we've got sailors over in Iraq, on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan supporting

over there. Last week, a navy commander in charge of one of the PRTs over in Afghanistan briefed the press on the progress that they are making there.

How do you make sense of all this activity and do you fear at all that the Navy could possibly be overextended?

ADM. MULLEN: Well no, I really don't worry about the Navy being overextended right now. The pace is pretty quick; the op-tempo is up; and sailors, as you indicated, are performing all over the world. You mentioned the sailors on the ground in Iraq. In fact, we've got over 6,000 sailors on the ground in Iraq right now, and over 14,000 in the central command AOR; and they are doing exceptional work.

You talked about the PRT commanding officer. In fact, it was Commander Dave Adams who used to work here on the staff and has been over there since the spring. And I was taken by the fact that he appeared with his provincial governor in this particular broadcast, and how excited he was about what he was doing, how the difference that he and his provincial reconstruction team are making. And that team is typically, depending on where you are in Afghanistan, 80, 90, 100 individuals; and it's a joint command as well as there are individuals from other agencies in the government.

And he marveled at what he's been able to accomplish, he's had good funding, cooperation with his Afghan counterparts. He's paved 80 kilometers of road, dug 300 drinking wells, built 29 schools. And what that's really doing is, I think long term; that's a long-term investment in the Afghan people and what makes a difference. So we're excited to have him there. He's one of six Navy PRT commanding officers and they're all doing really, really terrific work.

Our sailors on the ground in Iraq – just to go back to them – I can't say enough about what they've done. I talked to commanders on the ground there frequently and they talked about what great work our sailors there and in Afghanistan are doing; and I'm very proud of everything that's gone on right there right now.

You mentioned the Wasp and the humanitarian relief down with Hurricane Felix. And she's done great work in that part of the world. The hospital ship Comfort, the high-speed vessel Swift, all of them have engaged heavily in South America this spring and summer and will – in Latin America, sorry – throughout the fall.

In the case of the Comfort, Comfort has seen almost 300,000 patients in the few months that she's been down there, and certainly will exceed that number. And one of the things with Comfort, and we've also got a cruise going on with USS Peleliu out in the Western Pacific – same kind of humanitarian assistance – cruise that has been received exceptionally well and it has seen thousands and thousands of patients as well. And one of the things about that is there are a lot of good things associated with it. But more than anything else, this is the right thing to do, the kind of impact that we can have and it's not just the Navy because there are individuals from other services as well as other organizations.

And in fact, one of the great stories about Comfort's visit, there was a woman in Guatemala that had heard about the United States Navy hospital ship coming to Guatemala and she walked six days to get this medical help – just indicative of the kind of impact you can have on people's lives. And certainly, in that case, it was truly, truly tremendous.

All of these efforts are tied to an initiative that I've talked about for the last couple years called the 1,000-ship navy. It's a very powerful idea, very powerful construct to engage, create partners, other navies, other coast guards, but really other agencies and other countries as well. International navies understand each other. So this is an exciting time for us; it's a busy time; and I think it's going to stay that way for the foreseeable future.

MC1 MCNEELEY: I'd like to ask about family support. We talked, obviously, a great deal about IAs and how hard they're working. Are you satisfied that the Navy has a good handle on family support, for them in particular, but also across the board?

ADM. MULLEN: When I first came in at CNO a couple years ago, the first crisis we had on our hands was Katrina. And we had almost 88,000 of our sailors and their families very significantly affected. We set up a task force called Navy Family. And that task force ran for about six months to assist our families, and had a tremendously positive impact. And the reason we sent that task force up is because the Navy is so big as an organization, sometimes it's difficult to really create the kind of focus we need to help those kinds of families; and it was tremendously successful.

There are a couple messages that come from that. One is – tremendously important that we support our families. Family readiness I equate to readiness to do our mission. And we've got to keep focus on that. The second thing is that because we are so big, you need to set up a task force to go do something like this.

We've been – to fast forward to our current situation – we've got about 10,000 individual augmentees throughout the Navy, individuals who have volunteered and/or are serving overseas, in some cases away from their spouses and their families for a year; and I haven't been happy with how we've supported either the members or the spouses. I've asked the leadership of the Navy, the three and four stars, as recently as last week to really take a hard look at how we're doing this.

For us, it's almost a cultural thing; it's an outside-the-lifeline, different kind of deployment, and we're not as familiar with it. There was a letter in the Navy Times a couple weeks ago from a spouse who indicated that she hadn't had any support. There was another one this week in the Navy Times, a follow-up to that first letter that indicated the same thing. We've got to reach out to these spouses; we've got to remember that even though the unit isn't deployed, that that family member is deployed and we've got to create that kind of support.

There's also a tremendous focus here now in this area, that's got to be applied on our shore side. Most of our individual augmentees come from our shore side and not our sea side. And I'm concerned that we're not focused enough for sure on these families; and that's something we've really got to improve on.

Again back to – this is about readiness; it's about retention; it's about the kind of focus that we need to make sure we have for our families. There are a lot of institutional programs in place at our fleet and family support centers; our expeditionary combat readiness command has established a hotline. That toll-free number is 877-364-4302.

Navy Services Family Line has also produced an IA Family Handbook, which is available for downloading; and also the Naval Services Family will get you a hard copy if you want one. In fact, there are a great number of resources; we've just got to make sure we'll use them. Anyway, that's probably too much said about this, except to say this is a really important issue to me and to our leadership, and we've got to make sure we get it right.

MC1 MCNEELEY: Any final thoughts? Tomorrow is the sixth anniversary, obviously, of the attacks on our country. Where we stand in the global war on terror and the future, sir?

ADM. MULLEN: Well I've said for some time that this is going to be an extended conflict, a long war; and it continues to be. I think 9/11 certainly brings into very, very vivid focus what we went through; we should never forget the sacrifice of those who died that day. We lost over 3,000 American citizens in the largest attack on our country ever; and we must be vigilant to make sure that it doesn't happen again.

I think all of us have to give pause and give thought to the families, to the members, to those people who have given their all so that we might live the way we want to live in our society in the future. That said, that threat is still out there; and we must be ready to face it, and vigilant in terms of making sure that it never happens again.

MC1 MCNEELEY: Very good. Thank you very much, sir, and we'll talk to you again soon.

ADM. MULLEN: Thanks MC1.

MC1 MCNEELEY: Thanks for joining us for this edition of the CNO's podcast. Check back soon for our next installment. I'm Petty Officer Chad McNeeley. Thanks again for listening.