

MCPON Remarks to NC Symposium 6/19/2009

Good morning and thank you for that warm welcome and for the invitation to be with you today.

I know how much work goes into an event like this but I believe the effort is worth it when you consider the value of getting an entire community like yours together that affects a large majority of our Navy.

Because in the end, it's our men and women (our Sailors) who gain the most, as you take this week's exchange of information, put it to good use and look for opportunities to engage our warriors.

Shipmates I've been in this job for six months and I'll tell you that it's different than I ever could have imagined.

Within my first thirty days I'd testified before congress. Within sixty I'd been to the oval office to brief President Obama on what we're doing to support our Sailors and Navy families.

Tough spots for a new guy? You bet. And here's why. I found out very early that there's no safety net when you're the MCPON. You're expected to know everything about every Navy program and you're on the spot every time you talk to a Sailor.

Does that sound familiar? It should, because our Sailors have those same expectations of you.

And it's not just the junior folks on the deckplate.

I don't have to tell you that when it comes to caring for the careers of our Sailors...Command Master Chiefs, Chiefs of the Boat, CO's, XO's and every member of a wardroom or Chief's mess...we all know precisely who to turn to...and that's you. If it isn't happening....I expect you to work that and I expect the CMC's to be onboard.

We trust you. We trust your knowledge of programs and policies and more than anything we know that you have the Sailor's best interests at heart. And that's what makes each of you so important to our Navy.

I look at each of you as more than Navy and career counselors. I look out at you today and I see the very definition of Navy leadership.

Each of you shares a criteria I feel is critical...and that's compassion for the men and women who wear our uniform. You understand them, because you've been where they are now.

You treat each of them as individuals, each with their own set of goals and obstacles. You realize that all our Sailors have career decisions to make and that every one of them is important.

You also see in them something I've been talking about to anyone who will listen...these Sailors are doing amazing things. Unprecedented things.

Look at the men and women we lead...they're on the flight deck of our carriers, at night, in the Persian gulf...120 degree heat, pushing planes off the bow every forty seconds while their shipmates recover them just a few hundred feet away.

And aboard those carriers? They're averaging just under twenty years of age.

I told that to some folks in Chattanooga last week and you should have seen the looks on their faces. These are good patriotic people and they love their military...

But they had no idea we give so much responsibility to our Sailors at such a young age. We need to get the word out.

Well, they know it now.

And they know we have men and women on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan, taking the fight to terrorists alongside the Army and the Marine Corps.

Think about that...we trained these Sailors to drive ships, to live above, on and below the sea and to fight in our most comfortable domain....the world's oceans...and yet we have more than thirteen thousand of them with their boots in the sand, supporting operations in one of the most dangerous areas on earth.

And that number, those thirteen thousand Sailors? That's more than we have aboard ships in the Persian Gulf.

That's just part of the Navy mission.

It's what is being asked of our Navy and you are succeeding because it doesn't matter what kind of uniform you wear, whether it's utilities, coveralls, desert cammies, or khakis.

At the end of the day it boils down to the flag you serve under. The American Sailor is very aware of the role you play in the security of our country and will do anything and go anywhere to preserve our freedoms.

This week aboard USS JOHN PAUL JONES and USS SIROCCO...our Sailors are partnering with the Coast Guard keeping an eye on the Northern Arabian Gulf.

At the same time a platoon of EOD warriors from Mobile Unit 2 are supporting Army special operations forces a few hundred miles inland.

And halfway across the world in the eastern Pacific, Sailors onboard JARRETT, GARY, CARR, SIMPSON and the USNS ROBERT E. PEARY are stopping drug traffickers and letting any potential bad guys see some traditional U.S. Navy sea power up close and personal, just in case they have any ideas.

Our men and women are doing more though. They're all over the world representing you and every other American citizen. To entire populations in places like Africa, Indonesia and South America...the United States Sailor is the friendly face of our nation.

Two weeks ago, the COMFORT wrapped up a ten-day visit to Panama, which was the hospital ship's fourth of seven stops in support of Operation Continuing Promise, a four-month humanitarian and civic assistance mission to Latin America and the Caribbean region

During their time there, the medical staff onboard COMFORT saw 13,758 patients, performed 173 surgical operations, filled 24,503 prescriptions and treated 1,065 animals with veterinary services.

Now, when we talk about surgical procedures aboard COMFORT and our other hospital ship, the MERCY? It's not just the minor stuff...

...I've talked to doctors and corpsmen who've told me about life saving operations, one where doctors aboard comfort performed an operation that literally gave someone their sight back.

To many of the world's citizens, when they board the COMFORT or the MERCY? That's the first hospital they've laid their eyes on. And the first medical professionals they meet? United States Sailors.

Those are the men and women you lead and advise. Those are the destroyer Sailors and the Seabees, the Corpsmen, EOD techs, Cyber Warriors and the Airdales...all of them are Sailors who look to you for the most important kind of wisdom and guidance.

There's a phrase in the Navy, and I've heard it very recently, that every Chief Petty Officer is a career counselor. Do any of you disagree with that?

I'd hope not because it is a critical responsibility of any Sailor who wears khaki. I expect my mess to be able to help our Sailors make the right choices for themselves and their families.

But part of being a good Chief is know who to turn to and when. My Chiefs know who you are, where you are and what you offer our Navy, our commands and our Sailors.

And they need to be leveraging the huge amount of knowledge you bring to the table because not a day goes by that I'm not stressing brilliant on the basics however I continue to have CPO's that look at me strange when I mention that...

If you don't know it already, that is a program designed with you in mind...designed for you to take and run with.

Career development boards, sponsorship, mentorship, recognition, indoc and ombudsman. You should be involved with all of these.....

Those are six very basic and very traditional areas I expect us all to focus on, especially within the Chiefs Mess.

But I need you to help them. Now more than ever.

You have to be the experts in each of those areas and you have to fill the traditional role of the Navy counselor better than you ever have.

I appreciate what you do. I value it, not only as your MCPON, but as a CMC, and a Master Chief who's been on the deckplates and realizes just how important you are.

I realize the great potential each of you have to affect the lives of our Sailors and their families...I say potential because it's not automatic.

You know as well as I do that we all have to find a way to reach the individual Sailor and their family, because they're all different.

It was President Eisenhower who said that "leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it."

In your case, the art is getting our Sailors to do what is best for each of them. I have faith that each of you know how to do that, and the drive to get it done.

Thank you shipmates. Thank you for your dedication, your compassion and your knowledge.

But most importantly, thank you for continuing to lead our Sailors.