Admiral John M. Richardson, Chief of Naval Operations  
MCPON Russ Smith  
Facebook Live - All Hands Call  
14 December 2018

Admiral Richardson: Team, CNO Richardson here with MCPON Russ Smith. Kind of an end of year wrap-up, to wrap up a terrific 2018 and even more important, already start to look forward to 2019. So it’s great to be here on Facebook Live.

MCPON, have you got anything you want to say to the team before we get rolling?

MCPON Smith: I’m just grateful, sir, for this opportunity. As much as we travel, to reach those that we can’t through Facebook Live. So thanks for this opportunity.

Admiral Richardson: Great. I think a lot of people have signed on. We’ve got some questions ready to go so we’ll get right to Q&A, and then what we’ll do is we’ll have kind of a wrap-up at the end, just about how to set our minds for the holiday. Okay? Thanks.

First question. This just in.

Will future deployments look like Truman’s deployment? They came back to homeport halfway through their deployment. Will future deployments be similar?

So as you may know, the new National Defense Strategy and our new way of doing business is to be less predictable. We call this dynamic force employment. So naval forces inherently, maneuver forces, we do our best when we are moving around the globe and causes our rivals to think about what we’re doing and respond. We want our rivals responding to what we’re doing.

Now the Harry S. Truman strike group was the first strike group to go out with a dynamic force employment plan, and we went to places that we haven’t taken a carrier in a long time. We took the carrier above the Arctic Circle for the first time since 1991. We did a tremendous amount of work. High end naval exercising and training with some terrific allies and partners. All of that just to try and exercise our full maneuver capability as a naval force element.
Listen, it’s about being a big unpredictable for our rivals. So this time the Truman came back and did a working port visit in the middle of their deployment and they did that in Norfolk.

That’s not going to be the plan every single time. So we’re going to have to build some adaptability in, build some flexibility in, and all the while keeping this as under control and informed as possible for our allies and partners, and most importantly, for our families.

So we’ll look forward to doing more of this going forward. Certainly in 2019 we’re going to learn a tremendous amount from the Truman strike group’s deployment and well roll all those lessons going forward. Okay? So it’s going to be a bit of a new way of doing business. We’ll make sure that we do it in a sustainable way, and we’ll keep everybody as informed as possible. Thanks, great question.

MCPON Smith: Great way to start.

Is the Navy encouraging sailors to opt in to the [blended] year retirement system?

We don’t really have a stand on whether you want to opt in or opt out. It is a fact that about 80 percent of the sailors that join us don’t stay for retirement, so the BRS does offer sailors a lot more opportunity to walk out the door with something rather than nothing if you don’t stay to retirement eligibility.

What I would encourage you to do, and we’ve been asking you to do, is make a deliberate decision. If you don’t opt in by December 31st the system will automatically opt you out. If you’re going to opt out, that’s okay, but it’s better that you make the deliberate decision that you’re going to have to live with by getting in, logging in, and making that decision yourself.

I encourage you to go to our Fleet and Family Support Center. Talk to our certified financial planners. Go to your financial institutions, wherever you do your banking. Get some really good informed advice to make a really good decision for you, because it’s your retirement and you’re going to have to live with the consequences.

So be smart. Talk to people that can help you make smart decisions and make the decision that’s right for you.
Admiral Richardson: I couldn’t add anything more to that. Everybody has their own situation. There’s lots of advice out there. Make a deliberate decision rather than just let the system default to it. It’s a great answer.

CNO, it seems like freedom of navigation ops in the South China Sea have increased in the last year. Is this something we can expect going into the future?

Let me put these freedom of navigation opts into a little bit of broader context. First of all, there is a system of international rules and norms out there. The United Nation Convention on the Law of the Sea. There are laws out there. And the United States Navy will continue to fly and sail and operate wherever those international laws apply and allow. And furthermore, we’ll advocate for those laws for our allies and partners, and in fact everybody. This is a system that has enabled a tremendous surge in prosperity for the world.

So as part of that advocacy, as part of that support for those laws, we do these freedom of navigation ops, and we do dozens of them around the world. It is not just a thing that we do in the South China Sea.

So it’s an important part of our advocacy for these laws that we do these freedom of navigation ops, and we’ll continue to do them going into the future. So you can expect that.

MCPON Smith: What is the shift in focus regarding collateral duties?

We’ve been talking about this for a while now. A few years ago the Chief of Naval Personnel de-weighted the weight that collateral duties have at a selection board. We can do that and we’ve done that at the selection board process. The problem is some command teams, not all, in fact not most, but some command teams in their ranking boards at the local level are still making decisions on sailors based on collateral duty and performance. Unfortunately, that can disadvantage a sailor when that eval goes in and it goes to the selection board and the master chiefs sit down and they rack and stack and they compare, and we’re looking for technical expertise. We’re looking for the rating experts that are going to help us get after the high-end fight.

I need everybody out there in the hinterland to really look at the evals that they’re doing and look at the way they’re
evaluating their personnel and make sure that you’re picking the
eating experts. Make sure you’re picking the sailors who are
doing the job we’re paying them to do primarily, and that’s the
thing that you’re using to grade them and determine who’s the
best and most fully qualified at your local level when you rank
them and send those evals into the board, and that’s how we’re
going to pick the best talent.

Admiral Richardson: Did you say hinterland?

MCPON Smith: I did, sir.

Admiral Richardson: Okay. MCPON has it just right. It’s
really all about becoming a functional sailor that is focused on
the warfighting and operational problem that faces us. So be a
solid member of that operational team. Be ready to fight your
command. And that’s what we want to be evaluated on. That and
our character. Right? Our character and integrity. We want to
make sure, particularly as we get into leadership positions,
that we’re putting the right types of people in front of our
sailors. The people that know their job, that are experts, but
also are the type of people from an integrity and character
standpoint that live a life of honor, courage and commitment.
Those are the types of people we want leading our sailors.
Great question.

All right, as it stands, CNO, gloves can only be worn with the
parka. Can we change the instruction to include wearing gloves
with the fleece when it’s worn as a stand-alone outer garment?

Okay, so this is one of those CNO moments, I guess, that I’ve
got to decide whether the Navy can wear gloves with the fleece
if it’s worn as a stand-alone outer garment. It’s a
tremendously weighty decision. I’m going to give it a few
moments of though.

MCPON, any thoughts? What do you think?

MCPON Smith: I think it’s a great idea, sir.

Admiral Richardson: You think it’s a great idea?

MCPON Smith: I do.

Admiral Richardson: Okay, done. You can wear gloves with the
fleece when it’s worn as a stand-alone outer garment. Easy.
Merry Christmas.
MCPON Smith: MCPON, why can’t we negotiate for follow-on orders if we are selected for a dependent restricted tour?

The system right now only really allows us to look at prioritized billets out to 12 months. So doing that won’t really allow us to do bundled orders.

The good news that you’re going to love, and in the comment section if you look down you’ll see a link to this, that our people have placed. You’ll see a detailing marketplace link that you should look on which will allow you to get a quick look at how detailing marketplace is going to look.

What Chief of Naval Personnel has put together with detailing marketplace is going to do something we call tailored compensation which is going to give you the opportunity to do some things like bundled orders, and give you some geographic stability or the ability to take a little bit less SRB and get follow-on orders to maybe a different location that you want. Take a hard tour for us in Bahrain, maybe you get follow-on orders to Norfolk if that’s where you want to go. It allows us greater detailing flexibility. It will allow you to move around perhaps between different skill sets that are related. It will allow you to do a lot of different things. But we’re moving towards a system that will allow whoever asked this question to get closer to what you’re talking about with bundled orders and geographic stability. We’re just not quite there yet.

But we’re also not talking about, if you look at that link, about a Jetson’s future. We’re talking about the next 18-24 months when we get this IT on line and we really get the ability to do what we want to do.

Admiral Richardson: So coming right down the pike. One to two years. We’re going to be moving into this new regime which really allows us to have a lot more transparent and informed conversation. Certainly about how we meet our mission as a Navy, but also about how we can tailor our approach, tailor your career, to make you contribute to the Navy’s mission. But also address your priorities.

If you want to go to one operational tour after another, we’ve got lots of jobs like that. If you want to get some stability for putting your children through school or something like that, we’ve got opportunities like that. Maybe you want to get some education. We’ve got opportunities,
So as we grow to understand your priorities better, we can then tailor an approach that allows us to first and foremost meet our mission as the most powerful Navy on earth, and then also meet our mission to serve our sailors and their priorities as best we can. Coming down the pike very soon.

Okay, coming back to me, the collateral duty question again. I think MCPON addressed this, again, this is coming right off Facebook Live. How do I think about collateral duties? MCPON nailed it. It’s a matter of what do we really prioritize as we choose our leaders and those people who want to advance going forward. So we want those people to be chosen based on their primary warfighting and operational assignments. Collateral duties are very important, but we don’t want them to be a distraction to that principle focus on becoming a more lethal Navy.

**MCPON Smith:** I’ve heard a lot about change to boot camp, can you explain what those changes are?

**Admiral Richardson:** This is a great question.

**MCPON Smith:** Absolutely. We put a lot of work in. We got a lot of feedback that bootcamp wasn’t focused on turning out sailors that were ready for the fleet environment, and after taking a really long look, and sending a team of folks up there to look at what we do and how we do it, deconstructing the syllabus that we have, we made a lot of structural changes and in short, we stress the recruits out, we take a knee, we give them the opportunity to learn how to cope with that stress, and then we gradually increase pressure and decrease predictability, much like the fleet environment over the time that they’re there until they get to the BST-21 trainer, and then when they get to that BST-21 trainer, they’re actually graded on what they do. They’re not new skill sets that they see for the first time. They actually are doing things that they have been trained to do. They’ve touched, they’ve felt. All the damage control training, all of the firefighting training, the medical drills. They’ve done all those things in the ships and compartments. It’s no longer 96 sailors watch while 4 sailors do. Everyone gets repetitive touches on all this stuff and they get ready to do it. There’s a forming standard, a PT standard they have to meet, and there’s a higher PT standard to graduate from boot camp. With the Warrior Toughness Pilot, we’re turning out a sailor who is better equipped and better raw stuff for the fleet to turn into that combat ready sailor.
Admiral Richardson: Just as MCPON said, we’re actually turning out sailors who are tougher. This program has gotten more challenging. But the other thing is, the recruits are really rising to that challenge, aren’t they?

MCPON Smith: Yes, sir.

Admiral Richardson: There is less attrition. Fewer people dropping out now than there were before. So it’s really kind of a win/win. We’re getting a sailor who’s more ready to report to their command and contribute to watch standing, contribute to damage control, be part of that operational team, and our graduation rate is actually going up. So it’s really a terrific program.

MCPON Smith: Like you say, they want a challenge. They come to us wanting that challenge, and we’re giving it to them.

Admiral Richardson: That’s why we join, right? Great question.

All right. How’s the Navy handling personnel who seem to avoid sea duty? Some of us are doing back to back sea duty while shipmates are doing years on shore.

This is a great question. If you think about some of the major personnel trends, the major trends of the Navy, there’s probably two that we should keep in mind as we answer this question.

One is, our Navy is growing. In fact we are bringing in as many recruits as the system can bear right now. About 40,000 recruits a year are going through boot camp and on to A school and that’s about the system limit right now, and we’re looking to see if we can grow that.

But bottom line, the Navy is a growing organization right now to meet our responsibilities to the nation.

Second, at the end of the day the Navy is about going to sea. That’s why we exist. We exist to exert influence in the maritime domain. We go forward. We protect America from attack at sea. We promote our interests around the world at sea. And we promote and increase our prosperity by keeping sea lanes open, getting access to markets at sea. So this is the fundamental business of the Navy.
As we have taken a look across the naval force, all the fleets, we are prioritizing and incentivizing all of those opportunities to go to sea.

So these are two big trends. One, we’re growing; and two, we’re getting back to our sea-going purpose. We’re getting our sea legs back. So you’ll find that there’s a lot of prioritization to fill all of those billets at sea, and we’ll take a little bit of risk on the shore. So those are the big trends.

This is another uniform question. I’m not really prepared to answer it right now. It’s another thing to do with fleeces. Let me take this one under consideration for a little bit and make sure I understand it. If it’s an easy one, we’ll get right back out to you before the holidays. Okay? Thanks.

Okay, so this is a good question. Is there a plan to speed up the process for obtaining a security clearance? The wait times have been out of control long and it’s really starting to affect our ability to do our jobs and hire on new people.

That is true, and that’s not just the Navy’s issue, that’s really across the department. We have a focus of the entire department’s leadership on that. Certainly I’m focused on it. MCPON’s focused on it. We’ve had some success with some sort of tiger teams that go down to fleet concentration areas and help people fill out the paperwork. Sometimes these delays really come from just the paperwork wasn’t filled out right. And you know how long it takes just to get it out and get it back.

So we can expedite and optimize this process by making sure that we fill the paperwork out right the first time and that smooths the way of getting through. But we’re hiring on more people. We’re taking a very, very focused look at what we need to do to get that time crunch down. But we hear this loud and clear. I 100 percent agree that it’s taking too long. And we’re getting after it.

MCPON Smith: Is there anything being done about sailors who are in closed-out rates?

If by closed-out you mean closed down rates like we’re rolling zeros for advancement, NPC makes every opportunity available to sailors in rates that have very little advancement. Admiral Hughes in CNP goes over quotas for every single rate, every single advancement cycle, and we do everything we can one, to avoid big swings between up and down numbers for advancement;
and two, where there is opportunity and we can take some risk where there is a rating that has zero opportunity, we try to provide at least one or two quotas.

We only had, I think, one or two ratings that had zero quota opportunities, and that was just in rates where either they’re about to close or we just can’t promote growth because, frankly, there’s no opportunity and we don’t want to damage a rating far into the future. We’re trying to work out opportunities for growth in the future.

So for ratings that are closing, there are processes to cross-rating the related skill sets or other opportunities. And like I said earlier with detailing marketplace, that process is going to become a lot easier in the future.

**Admiral Richardson:** Is this something where rating modernization might --

**MCPON Smith:** Absolutely, sir. Yes, sir. Finding those related skill sets. Again, especially at the apprentice level where you can find a quicker way to move over into something that’s less backed up and provides greater opportunity to move up into greater positions of leadership is what we definitely want.

**Admiral Richardson:** So I think bottom line, working together, you working with the Navy, with us, we can find a path forward and we want to find a path forward. We’ve invested a tremendous amount in you, you’ve invested a tremendous amount in the Navy, and it would just be a shame if we had to take that investment and just kind of cast it aside. So let’s find a way forward. Let’s work together to find a transition plan.

CNO, can you tell us what we can expect from a possible government shutdown?

I think we’re going to be okay there. Everybody’s working on moving forward. It’s hard to predict the future, but we’re going to do everything we can to take care of our own and make sure that we have the least disruption there.

**MCPON Smith:** Can we please provide feedback and/or scoring from chief selection boards?

Unfortunately, the bar is different every year. The criteria is slightly different. But certainly the competitive pool of sailors that competes every year is different because some are
selected, some are not, some retire, some move on to other programs, so to compare and contrast and say hey, you were the first non-select this year does not mean that you should have any expectation that you will be selected next year because the competitive pool may be different next year.

To give you that false hope, to have you second-guessing the board or somebody else second-guessing what the board did, if you’re not in there and a part of that debate, it’s a little bit unfair and that’s why we don’t provide that narrative post-board.

There are always post-board briefs that talk about selection highlights, things that you should do. When we talk about back to back shore duty, back to back sea duty is usually something that plays very well in the selection board. Taking those challenging jobs and succeeding in positions of technical expertise, and leadership, and focusing on those positive attributes that we look for. Those are always published and they’re always available. Those enlisted career paths that we publish long before a board that gives you an idea that those are briefed at a selection board. They’re not a secret. Those are the things that you should be focusing on as the things that you do to prepare yourself for a selection board in defining advancement and selection.

**Admiral Richardson:** Said another way, the other thing to make sure we consider is that the proceedings of the board are sealed. Those are not to be talked about outside the board room itself. So the details are just, the board members take an oath that they protect those conversations. You can imagine some very, very specific and personal matters are talked about.

But just as MCPON said, the general trend, the sustained superior performance at sea in those hard jobs, those things have lasting value, will always set you up for goodness in terms of advancing, getting the types of jobs that you want.

CNO, wouldn’t it be cheaper to upgrade the Kitty Hawk than buy a new CVM?

The answer is no. Oh, by the way, we’ve got to be thinking into the future.

If you think about the future systems that are coming on-line, the future weapon systems, they need a new sort of power generation system, right? One configured for pulse power.
Think about the new air wing. It’s going to consist of a number of different types of aircraft. So the Gerald R. Ford class is configured for that future. It is ready to be that carrier that is relevant for the next 50 or so years. It gets to be very, very expensive to keep these older ships at sea in proper materiel condition. And it’s impossible to upgrade them in some cases to be ready for the future.

So we do this type of analysis every time we think about a new class of ship, and we do that kind of cost/benefit analysis as part of that. That shapes the decision to be made.

So right now our best bet is to go forward into the future with the Ford class carrier and that’s going to be relevant and a major part of our Navy for as far as we can see.

MCPON Smith: Can we please speed up the process for single sailors to receive BAH after they apply?

What I will tell you, and this is my shameless plug for NPC and for CNP is the My Navy Career Center. If you haven’t had a chance to give them a call, please do. It’s around the clock, 24-hour service. It’s replacing the PSE process which can be cumbersome and absolutely had customer service hours. These people will help you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They’re standing by for your call. Call them and use that.

I don’t have the number, but we’ll post it in the comment section so you have it available. But the reason that we’re going to this model is so that you can get that kind of help when you need it, where you need it, anywhere you are around the globe, because we are a 24-hour operation and sailors deserve that 24-hour service.

So if you find it’s not working, we want your feedback. I’ve been saying that everywhere we’ve gone because all we’re getting so far is a lot of positive feedback. So if there is negative feedback we want to tweak the machine to make it work. But we’ve been getting a lot of positive feedback. So please keep flexing that system because we know as we start to close PSE’s down, that we’re going to continue to sort of cause that change in the system that will throw people off. We’re going to get commentary.

So help us help you make that more robust and work well, but use that number. My Navy Career Center will help you.
Admiral Richardson: We’ve had thousands and thousands of people use My Navy Career Center, and just as MCPON said, the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. People are getting their problems and issues fixed there. And we’re listening to feedback, as the MCPON said, to make it even better. That’s a great answer and a great plug for that capability.

We’re going to go to the last question now, and it’s for MCPON.

MCPON Smith: What do you say to sailors and their families who think that asking for help with their mental health may affect their career or their security clearance?

I really appreciate the opportunity to answer this question. The holidays can be tough. Any time of year can be tough with what we do as a business, between deployments, and even being at home during the holidays, sailors carry a heavy burden and we recognize that.

Over the course of my 30-year career, I’ve maintained an SEI clearance and I have used clergy, I have used our counseling services, and I’ve done that to find a balance in my life. And I’ve maintained my security clearance throughout because I’ve used those rather than turning to other means to self-medicate and find relief.

It’s okay not to be okay. It’s not okay not to ask for help.

We need to be good ship mates and team mates to ourselves and to each other, to be able to look at each other and listen and recognize when sometimes we just need to be a good ear and sometimes recognize when being a good ear is not enough because what that friend of yours is dealing with is a little bit too heavy and you need to get an expert who deals with that professionally involved and get them some help.

So this is where we need that knee cap to knee cap, eyeball to eyeball help from each other to look out for each other, because that’s what we do. We’re team mates. We’re sailors. And we look out for each other.

Admiral Richardson: I’ll tell you what, I’ll just leverage off of that and kind of bring our Facebook Live session to a close here.

We are a team. And the highest performing teams, the world champion teams, and many of you out there know what I’m talking
about because you’ve been part of champion teams before. They come together. They know what’s on their team mates’ minds, what their team mates are going through. They support one another. Right? So this is what world championship teams do. This is what makes them world champions.

So as we move into the holidays I want all of you to know that you are members of the world’s best Navy. We are the world champion Navy. Members of a world champion team, they carry themselves differently. They understand that they’ve got to come to practice, they’ve got to come to training, they’ve got to be part of that team so that when that moment arises when you’ve got to really deliver, you have prepared with your team to be your absolute, very best at that moment.

So as we go into the holidays, everybody find some time to get a little bit of rest. It’s a great leave period. But do so mindful of one, do so responsibly. Okay? Make sure you get rested, but we need you to come back. The new year is going to take off and accelerate very quickly and we need you to come back rested and ready to go.

Two, even on leave, let’s stay in touch with one another. Make sure we’re reaching out, we’re taking leave and resting as a team so that we can come back and be stronger as a team in 2019.

There will be a lot of stuff coming out to talk about the forward direction in 2019. I’m going to be putting out a message that sort of focuses on the way ahead. And we need every player to be at their full strength to maintain the United States Navy as the most powerful in the world.

Everybody go on out there and have a happy holiday. Enjoy yourself, spend some time with your family. Spend some time with your ship mates. And we’ll see you in the new year. Let’s get to it.

MCPON Smith: Hooyah Navy.

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