Admiral John M. Richardson, Chief of Naval Operations
Naples - All Hands Call
20 November 2018

Admiral Richardson: It’s absolutely fantastic to be back here with everybody. I know that you’re warmed up a little bit with the hooyahs, and I know you’re saving that for one person and one person only, and that is our Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy, MCPON Smith. So give it up for him. Let’s really hear it.

What we’re going to do, I’m going to just lead off with some very, very short remarks and what I really want to do is hear what’s on all of your minds. What we want to do. We’re going to do this together. We’re going to answer questions together. Typically, the way this goes, if it’s an easy question, I will answer it, and if it’s a hard question, MCPON will answer it. But give it to us easy or hard. It’s much better to respond to what you want to know rather than me try and read your mind.

All I really want to tell you is, it is great to be out here, back here, in Bella Napoli, and the 6th Fleet, Naval Forces Europe, Naval Forces Africa theater.

As many of you know, we spent some time here ourselves, me and my family. We were out here for some time. My son was stationed out here as part of CTF-69. So we really feel like we’re back home.

But I’ll tell you what, since we were here a tremendous amount has changed. This theater has become sort of the case study, the leading thinkers, the leading actors in terms of what our Navy is doing. Some of the most exciting stuff that we’re doing. Dynamic force employment with the Harry S. Truman Strike Group. You guys are managing that, defining and redefining the way that our Navy is going to operate going into the future as we reembrace this idea of great power peer competition. So the work that you’re doing is really, really important.

We talk about 6th Fleet operations all the time back in Washington, all the way up to the President of the United States. So I just wanted to pass on how much respect I have for everything that you’re doing, how closely we’re watching it. As I said, you’re sort of getting us back into this game. We’re learning very fast from the lessons that you’re teaching us.
So give yourselves a round of applause for really kind of being the cutting edge for -- [Applause].

The other thing I just want to say is that each and every one of you, every one of you to a person, to a man and a woman, has a lot of choices. We are now appreciating about the 12th consecutive year where month by month we have been able to meet our recruiting and retention goals by and large. We met our recruiting goals. And when you think about that in today’s environment. In the economy, which is recovering, and also the fact that you represent the most talented Navy that we have ever had on record. By every way that you can measure human performance. Whether it’s test scores or athletic scores or fitness or charm and good looks and all those things, you are the most talented Navy that has ever been on record.

You had a tremendous amount of choices when you got out of school or you reached the end of your enlistment, you can do anything. You can go anywhere in the world and pretty much write your own check. And what you have done is you’ve made a choice. You made a choice to raise your right hand and take an oath to support and defend the constitution, which is something noble for sure, something bigger than all of us individually, and it’s a symbol of your commitment to something extremely important. So of all the choices that you have, for you to do this and commit to all of the sacrifices and hard work and everything that that entails, that also on an individual basis, I’ve got to say, people ask me one of those questions, so don’t even ask me, is what keeps you up at night? I say don’t worry about what keeps me up at night. More important is what gets me out of the rack every morning and it is all of you. I kind of spring out of the rack every single morning with you in mind. MCPON and I get together often to talk about what can we do to really make it as easy as possible for you to just do the job that you signed up to do. To remove obstacles between you and mission accomplishment to allow you to reach the maximum potential that you can.

So that’s what we do. We start every day with you in mind, and we circle back at the end of the day to make sure that we stay true to that purpose.

Now it’s complicated, and there are a few layers between you and me and some distance. So it’s not uncommon that things get lost in translation, which is why we come out here to visit you face to face. We want to understand exactly how things are landing.
That’s why I want to have this conversation with you, why we like to come out and see what’s going on.

Again, a tremendous amount of respect for what you do, and keep on doing it. We’re coming on out here just to have this conversation. But that’s probably the most important thing I’ll say all day, is how much I respect what you’re doing, how much I admire what you’re doing, and how much we want to support what you’re doing.

With that out of the way, I’ve kind of become adept at making the rest of the points that I want to make by virtue of your questions. So let’s get this conversation going. What questions can I answer?

**Audience:** Good morning. My name is Chief Petty Officer Herald of CTF-64, BMD. My question for you is, on the 20th of October President Trump declared that the United States would no longer honor the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. So what I would like to know is how will this affect the Navy’s defense and manning of Europe? And how will this affect the United States’ future influence on policies such as the New START Treaty scheduled to renew in 2021?

**Admiral Richardson:** We’ll start off with an easy one. [Laughter].

Let me just say that all of that is still in motion. To be honest, those are excellent questions. I’ll tell you what, this also goes -- that’s a pretty smart question. If I went to the National War College, that’s the type of question they would ask kind of their graduate-level seminar. Again, it shows you sort of the level of talent and education that we’ve got. That’s a pretty sophisticated question.

The answer to that question is, it’s still very dynamic. All of that is still settling down.

I don’t mean to kind of put your question off, but it’s just too early to answer it. It’s a big question. We’ve got to do a lot of work both domestically, and then we’ve got to do a tremendous amount of work with our allies and partners in that regard. We can’t do this in a vacuum. So those discussions are still going on.

But as you alluded, something like that has potentially big implications. And not only in this theater, but really...
globally. That’s the best I can do for you right now. It’s just too soon to answer that one.

**Audience:** I understand.

**Admiral Richardson:** Thanks. And you get a coin for being brilliant on your question and being the first guy.

**Audience:** Good morning, sir. AC1 Moore with Task Force 63. I know a lot of people here do important jobs, but without us 6th Fleet would fail. Yeah I said it. Our job is so important, it kind of disturbs me that we’ve been having a lot of --

**Admiral Richardson:** Where do you serve? [Laughter].

**Audience:** That’s a trick question. Because our job is so important, we’ve been having some issues getting billets advertised and replaced.

My question is, is there a trend in the Navy of people having the same issues?

**Admiral Richardson:** While MCPON gets his mike working, overall, it’s a Navy that’s growing. When I became CNO we had about 272 ships. Right now we just crossed through 287 with the commissioning of the USS Sioux City in Annapolis just last Saturday. We’re on our way to more. The target is 355.

The Navy is growing worldwide. We did a number of studies a couple of years ago that all converged -- the Navy did a bunch and other centers of intellectual excellence did studies as well, and everybody concluded that we need more naval power to exercise and fulfill the responsibilities that the nation put in us. This is a maritime century. We are looking at a period of time that’s going to put tremendous responsibilities on the United States Navy and other allies and maritime forces. So we’re in a growth business right now. In fact we are growing as fast as our system can absorb the recruits. We can’t bring any more on because our boot camp and A schools really can’t push them through any faster than we’re growing right now.

So overall, a demand signal that’s growing.

With respect to specific billets, I’ll let MCPON address that.

**MCPON Smith:** I don’t want to lose you in the length of the answer, and I’ll try and keep this as short as I can.
What the CNO said was a great answer. I want to emphasize a few other things, though.

One thing we’ve never done before this CNO is pay for the, we have about 324,000 sailors in the Navy. We’ve always paid for those. What we’ve never paid for are the 30,000 or so of you that are in training, transit, or somewhere not in a job at any given time. And under this CNO we have now fully funded the manpower account and we’re paying for those people. Because when we haven’t, what’s happened is we’ve tried to with that 30,000 away, and through efficiency we’ve managed to get that down to about 15,000, about 8500 of that showed up as gaps at sea. And when we have to fill those deployers, guess where those gaps are going to come from? It’s the shore infrastructure. It’s you. So this is where you’re going to feel it the most.

Now we are headed for about 87.9 percent manning. We pulled on a lot of levers. To the chagrin of some of the Chiefs, we decided not to send people home who were failing a couple of PFAs because the PFA is a wellness check. It’s not a combat fitness test. You can still do your job. We’re not going to let you out of your commitment early. And by the way, if you want to stay, we can get you healthy really quick, and keep you on the team. But we had to do that because we needed people.

We increased higher tenure in order to, because as the CNO said, we’re sort of limited by what we can [inaudible]. To grow, you can’t just grow from the bottom, you have to grow at all levels. So we pulled on the higher tenure level levers and we’ve kept people E4, E5, E6.

Now any Chief Petty Officer, Senior Chief or Master Chief that wants to go back to sea, you can stay behind your higher tenure.

So we have adjusted things. We brought 860 or so Reserves to active duty in order to ensure that we could meet manning goals. So we’re working as fast as we can not only to meet the CNO’s growth potential and what we want to get to, but just to get healthy, to where we knew we already needed to be. So that takes time and we’re getting there and we’re working on it, but I think we’re going to be probably into FY20 before you see that manning level get to about 96, 97 percent, where you’re going to feel it on the shore infrastructure side as well. Does that make sense?
Audience: Yes, sir.

Audience: [Inaudible]. I have a question that has to do with [inaudible]. Is there a way for any [inaudible]?

Admiral Richardson: Okay, this is ship maintenance thing. The tone of your question is something that I just sort of want to address. Hold these shipyards accountable. Those are other Navy employees. It’s not an us versus them. We’re all in this together. Everybody’s working very hard to try and deliver ships on time. Everybody realizes that as maintenance is delayed, then training is delayed, then deployment is delayed, and it puts a shock wave through the system.

But you raise a point that I make a lot, which is this idea of geometry. And what pronouns we use. We are, as we say often, we are really one Navy team. Teams that hang together realize that we use pronouns like we, and we use pronouns like us. We don’t use pronouns like them. It’s all one team.

So are we addressing the shipyard situation? Yes. But they are us. Those are Navy employees that man our shipyards, so yeah, we’re addressing that. Thanks.

Audience: Good morning, sir. [Inaudible] from NCTS Naples. My question is, [inaudible] people so I [inaudible] modernization that’s going out to 2025, and that’s going to help us [inaudible] and technical skills together for [inaudible]. However, being [inaudible] a lot of standards that [inaudible], really great standards, that aren’t particularly satisfied within your grade, it’s like across grades. And technical skills that’s not as easy to achieve.

So my question is, how can you help with keeping those [inaudible] standards, they want to stay in the Navy but [inaudible] other field.

Admiral Richardson: The question is, if you didn’t hear it way back in the Army hinterlands back there, is this idea of hey, I’m somebody who wants to stick around and stay in the Navy and I’m in a particular rating and I see another rating that looks exciting as well, and how easy would it be to maybe cross-train over to that rating.

So this is what rating modernization really is all about. If you think about everything that we’ve done, whether you’re a Sailor or a civilian to kind of bring you into the Navy, and we
bring you through Great Lakes, we get you up and sailorize you, if you will. Then you do go through a number of technical schools for whatever rating you’re in. Boy, we can really -- and if you want to try something different, we have two choices. One, we can say sorry, that’s too hard, see you later, and then bring in somebody brand new and go through all of that again to get to that rating. Or, much smarter I think, is to give you some kind of a transition path over to that other rating. Normally, if it’s a technical rating there’s an awful lot that you can take advantage of that you’ve already learned. You just need a bit of school to get you over to that other technical field.

So this is exactly what rating modernization is about. It’s going through rate by rate. We’re getting these modules in place. And then it gives you a lot of flexibility. So if you kind of maintain your credentials in your original rating and your new rating, the idea is that well you can compete, you can be transferred, all those sorts of things under both.

So this is the end state of where we’re going. We’re in transition right now. This is about a year old. You can probably imagine the level of effort required to get all of those schools and training modules in place. But that’s the end vision.

How many people out here have wanted to go to a particular home port and were told, hey listen, we’ve got no room for your rating in that home port so you’re going to have to pick again. Has that happened to anybody?

Everybody raise your hand, up to the full extent that your hand can go up. Everybody. I want to see all hands -- okay, so they all work.

How many people have confronted a situation where your promotion opportunity has been limited because everybody kind of sticks around in your rating and there’s just not a lot of room to promote into? Who’s seen that?

So it would at least maybe double your chances if you could compete in two ratings. If you’re, let’s say a yeoman and you want to go to San Diego but there’s no room for you. Well, if you’re also sort of a certified legal man or something like that, there might be another way to get you down to your desired home port.
So it provides you a lot of flexibility. I’ve got to say, it provides me a lot of flexibility too. Right? Because you become detailable into a lot of, you know, twice as many places. And oh by the way, I leverage all of that training that you’ve got already in terms of what it means to be in the Navy and all those sorts of things as well. So I think that this is a win/win, but it’s still something that’s going on.

You don’t look like you’re a believer though. She’s not going to let me off on this.

But wait, there’s a second part to my question.

**Audience:** Yes, sir. So when I say the technical --

**Admiral Richardson:** And just be mind that there’s a lot of people behind you that also want to ask questions, so we don’t need to get a PhD in this.

**Audience:** Roger that, sir. So when I say the personnel and technical field, so I mean like an SCA that wants to now become a corpsman. That’s what I mean when --

**Admiral Richardson:** That might be a long path. That’s kind of a big jump. It’s kind of near adjacent. Similar types of ratings at the division there, not to kind of completely recast what you want to do.

**MCPON Smith:** Certainly at the apprentice level it’s going to be a lot more possible to move between more diverse fields. But as you approach journeyman, master level, you really are going to narrow into -- have you seen the YouTube video? If you haven’t had a chance, we’ve posted the Detailing Marketplace video on YouTube. You can go on and kind of see where you click, and it will pull down there easy choices that are within your current rating. There are medium choices which are something related to your field but maybe a little bit different. There are some that are hard. Like an AW may use the same equipment as an ST on a submarine. The difference is one is aviation, the other serves on submarines. If you’re willing to switch and maybe go to sub school if you’re young enough, maybe you can do that.

So there are things we’re looking at but the more senior you get, the harder it’s going to be to do the switch between those fields and that’s going to be the key to this.
**Audience:** Right now when commands are speaking with Fleet Forces for their billet prioritization it’s at 12 months which is when requisitions are also released. My recommendation would be to consider looking at the efficiency of the process, the way that we do career way point, we’re proactive with it. We know 16 months out if that member’s got the intent to stay Navy and they get that quota.

So maybe if we start looking at least at our shore billets 15 months out instead of 12 months out for prioritization, if a command like 6th Fleet doesn’t get a billet prioritized the way that we want it to, then we have some buffer to have negotiations with Fleet Forces before the billet isn’t posted.

**Admiral Richardson:** First of all, let’s just give [NTC] a round of applause here for, you have a solution. I love that.

Overall, we’ve been going towards a situation where we are, I would say there’s two major goals in Sailor 2025. One is, we want to take advantage of predictability where it exists. A lot of what we do just by the nature of our job is a bit unpredictable, but a lot is predictable, too. So when it’s predictable like in those situations you just described, we should not walk away from that predictability, we should leverage it and take advantage of it.

The other thing is, and MCPON alluded to it, is that through things like Detailing Marketplace and all of that, we’re trying to show you more earlier and put more in your hands. And eventually, in the not too distant future, this is all going to be able to be done on your phone. So increased transparency and more predictability is kind of the trend that we’re going.

MCPON, you’ve got some ideas about the time lines here?

**MCPON Smith:** We’re looking at things like bundled orders as a means of predictability. I’m going to guarantee you that you’re going to get the next two sets of orders so that we know where you’re going. That’s going to remove some options from you if you want to change your mind after that first tour. It’s like, I’m sorry, you committed to this. But it’s done to get after that predictability that the CNO’s talking about. For some of you, that’s going to appeal to you a lot, because you’re in Norfolk and you want to get your child through high school and you know you can do that if you stay in the same place for the next five years, you’re willing to do that.
There may be ways that we can do tailored compensation. Maybe you take a little bit less of your SRB if you’re willing to get that geographic stability you’re after. Or if you take this easy tour for me now, I’m going to make you go to FDNF next because you’re going to take this tour for now.

So there are lots of things we’re doing to increase that predictability, give you some options up front, and certainly Detailing Marketplace and the future of that and the way, when you look at the video I think you’ll kind of see what I’m talking about when you look through it. It’s giving you the option which we have to start about 15 months out. That’s the goal is about 15, because you can’t do it at the year point.

So the year is out because of the system we have, but as the technology comes on-line, as we get more proficient with this, we’re very nascent in our delivery of this. So as we get more mature in it, it’s going to get a lot better.

Admiral Richardson: And I think what we’re talking about is like a year. We’re not talking some distant ten-year goal. This is in the next year or so all of this stuff should be moving much more to your smart device and allow you to do that. So thanks for the suggestion. You get a coin, too, for having an answer.

Audience: Thank you.

Audience: Leslie Howard. Just on your statement last year saying that we need to toughen up, I just want to ask, could you expand on that for me please?

Admiral Richardson: Toughen up?

Audience: Yes.

Admiral Richardson: The question was what do we mean when we have this attribute of toughness? So there’s sort of four core attributes that we’re after. There’s integrity, accountability, toughness, and so what about this toughness business? What do we mean by that?

As we think about great power competition and we think about what this could mean for naval forces at sea, it could put some demands on us that we haven’t seen for some time.
I’ve got to tell you, one of the things that kind of locked me onto this was I was seeing a lot of young sailors who were just out of boot camp. They would come up to me and say you know, CNO, that was kind of a lot easier than I thought it was going to be. And you hear that a dozen or so times and you wonder, what are we doing up there in Great Lakes if nobody’s really feeling like it was challenging?

So we’ve changed what we do up at Great Lakes. We’ve made it I think more challenging across the board, and we’re refocused it so that it’s delivering Sailors that are much more prepared to go down on board a ship and be a meaningful part of that crew. Whether they’re ready to be part of a watch team, ready to be part of a damage control party, you name it.

So you might think that in response to raising the bar and making it more challenging at boot camp, that we would get more attrition and people would struggle through it. Exactly the opposite is happening.

What we’re seeing is that our new sailors are rising to that challenge. Just like you, they joined the Navy to be challenged. They joined the Navy because they had this sense of excitement and they wanted to get after it. So we’re actually seeing more people stick around, even as the physical and mental and intellectual and every requirement across the board goes up. And they’re reporting to their ships. And the feedback from the ship has been great too. These folks are effective members of a damage control party. They know what to do in a repair locker, et cetera, right off the bat. This is coming back from the Chief Petty Officers.

Chief Petty Officers raise your hands please. Good. I love the hooyah, but let’s get down to business, be experts in your jobs and lead your teams. I need Navy Chiefs who know how to fight their teams at sea. So I got the cheering, but if it’s not backed up with some serious leadership to make your teams more combat effective, then that’s all it is is cheering.

So as you are in your work centers, I need you to think about how to make your teams more tough, more combat effective, more resilient. And when you do that, we need to make sure that we are building strength in our teams. We save all of our destructive energy for the enemy. We don’t want to be so hard on ourselves, on our own teams that we start to eat away at our effectiveness, so I need you to be very thoughtful about building toughness and combat capability in your teams.
We have 30,000 U.S. Navy Chiefs, and if they all committed to this, it would be a force that would be more powerful than the biggest tsunami you could think about. So I need you to take this on.

So that’s kind of what I mean by building toughness. We need to be sure that when combat at sea comes that it is our ships that sail away victorious and it is the enemy’s ships that go to the bottom.

**Audience:** I’m IT2 Wooly with NCTS Naples. I have a question, is the Navy still trying to push getting rid of Navy rates or do you foresee in the future that we’ll be getting rid of rates?

**Admiral Richardson:** The Navy is not trying to get rid of rates. [Applause]. You might be just a little bit behind in the reading, but we did try that, didn’t we? And what I found out was that our Navy sailors have a tremendous amount of loyalty to their rates, a remarkable amount. And so what we found is that in response to that feedback. I talk a lot about being a learning organization. And in response to pretty clear feedback, we learned. And we went back. It was all wrapped up in this rating modernization and we found that we could get all the rating modernization without taking away the rate.

Now I’ve got to tell you -- now I know why it’s the last question, because we are out of battery.

As you think about that rating modernization possibility, and maybe now you’re certified and competitive in one, two, three rates. But which one are you going to identify with? I don’t know. It’s kind of the one that you’re assigned in. But hey, that’s over to you to decide. We’re not going to be taking away any rates.

So hopefully I’ve answered your question.

I’ll take one more question.

**Audience:** [Inaudible]?

**Admiral Richardson:** The question for everybody who didn’t hear it was what’s the relative, what’s the proper role for collateral duties and how does that compare to, it kind of goes back to this toughness question, right? Us becoming experts in our field, experts on watch, experts at repairing our gear,
experts at operating our equipment. And so it seemed to me that it was just a little bit too [inaudible] towards collateral duties. There’s kind of this, I would say, unhelpful competition within divisions for advancements. You had to sort of break out in this crazy force ranking distribution. So what we’re doing to really get after that is one, we’ve killed a lot of collateral duties that were just distracting us from our primary duty. Our primary warfighting responsibilities. That’s got to be what we are assessed on, graded on if you will, and all of our screening and advancements and all that stuff should be based on our primary warfighting duties.

If you’ve got collateral duties or any other thing that you think distracts you from that, I wish you would feed that up through your chain of command and let me know, and I will cancel that. I will cancel it. I make you that promise.

Now I make you that promise, and I’ve been for a number of years and I’ve gotten very little feedback. So help me out here. You know better what is a waste of your time than I do. Tell me what’s wasting your time and we’ll stop doing that.

The other thing that we’re doing is we’re changing our evaluation system. So this is coming out. We’re going to trial it in sort of a counseling role very soon here, and so why do we need to change this?

One, I think we had the wrong audience for our evaluation system. It seems to me that if I was interested in just being the best sailor that I could be I’d want somebody to evaluate me where I’m the primary audience, right? So we’re changing the primary audience. The real purpose of the evaluation system is to tell each one of us how we can be better at our job. So you are the primary audience of your evaluation. It’s not a promotion board or a screening board or anything else like that. It’s you.

The second thing is we’re going to be very clear in our language. If you’ve done the evaluation business or fit rep business for a while you know that sometimes it’s not as clear as it could be, so we’re going to be very clear in our language.

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