Chief of Naval Operations Admiral John M. Richardson
Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Russell Smith
Facebook Live All Hands Call
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CNO: Hello, Team. CNO Richardson here with MCPON Smith, and we’re going to talk about something that I think is a real strength of our Navy which is leadership, particularly small unit leadership. We’ve been hearing a great groundswell of questions and concerns and suggestions, to be honest, about some of what I would call basic fundamental types of things. Taking care of Sailors in terms of housing, pay, food, childcare, some of these basic things. And I think this is really the strength of our Navy is founded on the premise, the foundation that these are the exact type of issues that division officers and division chiefs should be getting after.

MCPON: Yes, sir. Absolutely. When Sailors have problems they’re not effective in their work spaces. Chiefs, we know, this is basic chiefing -- getting after, finding out why our Sailors are distracted, whether it’s personal issues, pay and entitlement issues, housing, whatever the case is across our needs, this is what chiefs exist to do is to get in there and solve problems, remove distractions, and provide that opportunity for Sailors to practice their craft and get after the lethality that we need.

CNO: Exactly. In my vision, if a Sailor has a problem, any of our Sailors, they should be able to go to their leader, their LPO, their chief, their division officer, if they’re a division officer a department head, whoever that person is and have 100 percent confidence that that leader will take this on, advocate for the Sailor, and solve that problem.

We’ve recently been seeing concern about housing conditions. Listen, we need to get after this as a Navy to make sure that our Sailors and their families are living in safe and quality housing. So we’ve put out a NAVADMIN recently to really get after this so that leaders, division leaders ideally, can make one hundred percent contact with their Sailors to ask them hey, how are their conditions going. And if there are any concerns at all, to offer to make a visit. And if they’re invited into the home to see what the conditions are, then to turn around and be that Sailor’s advocate to get those conditions fixed.
MCPON: Yes, sir. And in addition to that, not just housing, but pay and personnel issues and all these other things that we run into every day that we constantly get at All Hands Calls. This is stuff that unit level leaders, like the CNO said, division officers, division chiefs, really can get into that space. We’re the ones who can make the biggest gains and the biggest strides toward getting these things solved as fast as possible.

CNO: Let me give you an example of the power of the chain of command. MCPON and I were recently at an All Hands Call and we took a question from a Sailor who identified to us that they had, their most recent paycheck was 17 cents. Right? This was just bad pay math. Right? There was an error in their pay, they decided to take all of that money back in one paycheck, in one lump sum, and the result of it was 17 cents. So obviously that’s completely unacceptable for any of our Sailors.

So I asked the crowd if that Sailor’s executive officer was in the crowd, and they were. They raised their hand and they said that they would get on it. The fact of the matter is, that the XO just went to the back of the room, made a phone call, and within 30 minutes that pay issue was resolved.

So again, the power of that immediate chain of command. Our Sailors just need sometimes an advocate to get these things solved.

So we’ve been out asking for questions and we’ve got a number of great questions in, so we thought we’d take questions. If you’re listening to this live and you have a question, please type it in and we’ll try and get to as many as we can. Sound good?

MCPON: Yes, sir.

CNO: Let’s get after it. You go first.

MCPON: We get a lot of questions on childcare, and specifically the Navy subsidy NACCRRRA and the CDC program. We understand you are looking for transparency of the status of the programs, which is something we would absolutely provide you. So where are we?

Just so you know, we are maximizing our capacity for NACCRRRA, so it’s one out, one in.
CNO: Do you want to explain what NACCRA is?

MCPON: NACCRA is a subsidy program that enables us to use childcare opportunities that are out in town.

One of the toughest problems that we have with childcare is that it’s a nationwide problem. It’s not just a Navy problem. So the Navy, because of our footprint, is actually in some of the hardest hit areas for providing childcare. Even if we were to provide greater subsidies, the in-town market is not necessarily going to be able to support what you want.

So we do have a plan to add about a thousand spaces over the next two fiscal years, so we are getting after some of it, but we still will make up most of the DoD shortfall, the majority of it in fact. So we are looking at other options, partnerships with community partners to see what we can do to add capacity and space, but please rest assured that Admiral Jackson, the CNIC Enterprise and the CNO are all after this issue, because we do understand what a critical enabler it is for our force.

CNO: It’s a big issue for our female sailors, female officers, I mean the whole crowd. Just as the MCPON said, some of the waiting times outside the gate and just in the private sector are more than a year for quality childcare. So this is a nationwide problem.

What Admiral Jackson is also doing is enlisting all of the creative ideas that you may have. So if you think that there’s something we’re missing, please provide that suggestion. We’ll evaluate anything, any good idea to try and get after this big problem.

All right, with respect to housing, this Sailor asked will we be conducting our own investigations or personally inspecting homes?

This effort to get after this housing matter has several different lines of effort in it. There’s a structured approach. I think most immediately concerning to our Sailors is that we just don’t have a real confident understanding of what the situation is. We have data, but I’m not confident that data’s all 100 percent accurate. So we’re doing a 100 percent survey of Sailors housing. It’s going to be conducted by your chief or division officer. If you’re deployed, we’ll make sure that we contact your family. Your [ISIC] or your [TYCOM] will do that. And we just want to ask how it’s going. If everything’s okay
and you’re satisfied, then we’ll just record that and no issues
and we’ll stay in touch to make sure it stays that way. If you
do have an issue, we’d like to one, understand that issue; and
then if you want your leader to go and visit your home, to see
the conditions that you’re dealing with. If you think that that
would be helpful, then we’re willing to do that. But it’s not
an inspection. It’s a visit to your home by invitation. That
visit team will only look at the places that you invite them to
look at, just to get the best understanding.

We think we’ll get 100 percent better data of our housing
situation by doing that.

**MCPON:** Yes, sir, and that includes UH housing. Uh,
unaccompanied housing, is something that we already had access
to and there’s a routine requirement to inspect. But all the
same, single Sailors out there that are living in UH housing, we
want to hear from you. If your housing is not where it needs to
be, if your facilities are not what they should be, engage the
UH folks and engage the chain of command. We’re here to help
you, whatever your housing situation is.

**CNO:** And then in addition to these visits where we get the on
the ground understanding of the conditions, please be confident
that we’re also going after restructuring, whatever contractual
arrangements we have with the private partner, and to make sure
that both the Navy and the private partner are moving forward in
a productive way with the unified effort to make this a
successful program for the Sailors.

**MCPON:** Can you address the fact that the closing of base PSDs
is making it extremely difficult for personnel to get reimbursed
or to fix pay issues in a timely manner? It has been taking
months for BAH updates and PCS travel claims to be paid. Why is
this acceptable?

First of all, it’s not acceptable. We stood up the My Navy
Career Center in an effort to make access and availability more
easy for the Sailor and certainly to keep you from having to
wait in lines at a PSD somewhere. We want to bring the service
to you, rather than you having to go get it somewhere, because
it’s going to save you time and effort which we want to recycle
back to the deck plates so that you can focus more on that
lethality we were talking about.

So we’re going to post the number for My Navy Career Center in
the comments. In the meantime, we know as we fundamentally
restructure how we provide human resources, services, PSD services to the fleet, we know that this is going to create some gaps and seams as we make this enterprise-wide solution available to 330,000 Sailors all around the world. We need your feedback, and we are standing by to remedy whatever we find to first fix your problem, wherever we find it, and then find systemic issues that may have contributed to it so that we don’t repeat the problem.

So we’re committed to that, but what we require is specific issues of feedback. When we’ve gotten those we’ve been able to take pretty quick and decisive action.

Captain Popham and the NPPSC enterprise have been really good at sending swarm teams out to first fix the problem, and then get to the systemic issue that contributed to it so that we can get that up and running. But I encourage you to use My Navy Career Center and please call the line, give us feedback, whether it’s positive or negative. We do need positive, because we need to know how to repeat what we do well, but give us the negative as well and we’ll take that for action.

CNO: And I’ll tell you what, this is another great opportunity for your immediate leadership, your division officer and your chief, to understand what your pay problem is and so they can advocate for it. Just like that story I told with the 17-cent paycheck. It was just a phone call from the executive officer to make this thing work. So it’s often that easy. Please make sure your chain of command knows about any of your housing concerns or pay concerns going forward, and we’ll get them to pile on and be your sherpa to guide you through this process and get resolution.

MCPON: Absolutely.

CNO: What opportunities will the new Naval University System provide to Sailors?

Let me tell you, the Navy for a couple of years even right now has been diving in and the MCPON has led the effort with all the fleet master chiefs, and he has a full team to get after education. So this Naval University System in many ways already exists.

Certainly we have the university system that consists of the War College and the Postgraduate School. But I think that if you start to get into the details of laying the keel, and the
schools that we’re putting in place for our Sailors right now, it’s a pretty exciting venue. Wouldn’t you say?

MCPON: Yes, sir. In fact, with TA and all the things that we have available to Sailors, we do encourage education because it teaches critical thinking. That’s a key component of a leader as you build.

What I think that this new system will do as we stand up N7, as we grow this educational enterprise, I think you’ll see that in the beginning we do want you to focus on your technical specialty and doing your job. As an E3 and an E4 we need you to learn how to do what it is we’re asking you to do in a combat situation. If you stay with us for the long haul we’re going to have a program and a plan that’s going to get you more appropriately and more easily to an associate’s degree or better before you leave us. And that’s what this system is going to do. It’s going to do what we’ve already kind of done with ACE and other vehicles to capture what you do and convert that into real training credit or real educational credit. But it’s also going to give us opportunities to better put and steer a degree plan to you and for you that will make a lot more sense.

CNO: So there’s a lot of things in motion. The other thing is, we’re going to stand up leadership training, that’s what laying the keel really emphasizes. It will be down on the waterfront, close to where your command is. As you become more senior we’ll take you out for a day or two. These will be quick courses, just to teach you some of the fundamentals of leadership so that not only can you get the competence part of your career development that the MCPON just talked about, but also the leadership and character development of your career path as well.

So all of this will comprise the university system. There is an Education for Sea Power Program out there. Because there’s a lot of things in motion we’re going to take some time to evaluate that program, see how it would best fit in, maybe make the efforts that we have underway more effective. And so all of that moving forward to make you a better Sailor, a better leader as you’re going forward. In fact, this ready relevant learning is another part of the excitement that’s going on.

MCPON: Yes, sir. Bringing that training closer to the waterfront, in between those times when you have to go back to your training methods. Bringing in not just a computer screen with a mouse like the old days, but really bringing modern
gaming technology and real good robust technologies that give you the look, touch and feel that Sailors learn from down to the waterfront where you are.

CNO: So we’re measuring our way forward using the most advanced technology, the most modern learning science, all of this coming together to build better leaders in our Navy.

MCPON: Yes, sir.

When can the fleet expect the implementation of the new performance evaluation system? When implemented, do you foresee any changes being made to enlisted selection boards, CPO, SCPO, Master Chief Boards?

Yes, we have a plan. The performance evaluation transformation, the new evaluation system, will probably in about another 60 to 90 days be hung on-line on My Navy Portal. You’ll be able to get on there and start getting a feel for how it works. The look, the touch, the feel. Everyone will be able to use it. Instead of a pilot for a few, we’re actually going to roll it out so everybody can get familiar.

We’re anticipating somewhere in December 2019 we’re going to start using it as a counseling tool, because this tool was actually designed to be used more for counseling than evaluation, and it’s a tool that you can use to elicit 360 evaluations and all sorts of other things. But the actual evaluation that we’re going to use, probably closer to December 2020. The reason it’s taking this long is we’ve got to make sure that it informs that talent management system of the boards the correct way so the Sailor resume piece that talks about specific qualifications and things that you’re supposed to have, not a written narrative, but a portion of it that’s written that covers qualifications and things that you need to advance, all that stuff has to be factored in.

So to make sure we do this right and we don’t break the board process, which is the reason for our evaluation system, we’re measuring twice and cutting once to make sure it’s going to work.

CNO: I’d like to take a bit of a different angle.

The reason for the evaluation system, and what we’re hearing from the fleet, is to give you feedback. Right? This is one of the changes of the evaluation system. Certainly it will speak
to the boards and it will help us select our best Sailors. But most effectively, it will provide the Sailor being evaluated with the critical feedback that they need. That’s one of the main fundamental changes of the system.

The other fundamental change is that it talks a lot to character development. So as we develop particularly as leaders, certainly we want to know how to operate our gear, stand our watches, be effective watch standers in operations and combat. But we also need leaders of character. So this evaluation system will get after assessing character so that we advance leaders of competence and character.

The final thing it will do is, it will get rid of force distribution. So there won’t be this ranking process that goes on, which has really given rise to a lot of bad behavior in teams. Right? You don’t want teams competing internally against themselves. So this will get rid of that force distribution system.

Another reason we’re taking our time is we want to understand this as much as possible so that it’s as smooth a transition from one system to the next. So we’ll give it a trial run in this counseling mode and then we’ll turn it on in about a year for official board and promotion types of deals.

**MCPON:** It’s definitely a revolutionary step, not evolutionary. So making that switch definitely has to be done carefully.

**CNO:** Exactly.

What about making a graduate degree worth more than just a bachelor’s degree for enlistment advancement? It recognizes hey, there’s more work to it, you learn a higher degree of knowledge, that sort of thing.

First of all, if you’re out there getting advanced education of any type, keep on going. We want people who are as educated and focused as possible, particularly if that education helps us be more effective in our jobs. So keep on going.

The advancement system will recognize education up to a point. Beyond that, we just have to do it because it’s the right thing to do, and the rest of the system will take care of itself. I think that’s the best answer to that question.
MCPON: With the availability of fire-retardant materials and the fact that fire retardant versions of the NWU exist, wouldn’t it be more prudent to issue fire retardant versions of the current uniforms instead of developing new fire-retardant uniforms?

Fleet Forces actually has the lead on this because we’re looking at this as organizational clothing. Rather than a uniform, right now at least, organizational clothing is a smarter way to go. It costs the Sailor nothing out of pocket. There’s of course a bill to the Navy, but it puts the uniform exactly where we need it. And more importantly, it doesn’t where we don’t. So getting the right uniform, getting the right materials, making sure that it’s going to fit well, that Sailors can use it, that it’s going to function the way you expect. Meaning you can go home with it, you can stop at a restaurant if you need to, you can stop at the store if you need to or get gas. All those things are being factored in. And right now Admiral Grady and the fleet overall are working through what will soon be the next wear test and I think you’ll see something soon.

CNO: This is another PSD problem. PSD in Norfolk backlogged thousands of page two updates because of the closure of the PSDs.

I want to address that right up front. Also, this Sailor is waiting for BAH, causing substantial financial strain. Got married last year and found out that the Sailor’s wife is pregnant with twins. So a lot of financial stress. Right? This financial stress has got to be amazingly distracting to this Sailor in terms of doing their job. So I would just, again, encourage you to make sure that your chain of command knows about this and they will weigh in, right? I am confident that your chief and your division officer will advocate for you, get this BAH situation turned on and make sure that we are doing the right thing by you and your family. Particularly as you’re expecting your family to grow by two children here in no time.

MCPON: And congratulations on twins.

CNO: Yeah.

MCPON: Whoever you are.

CNO: Your life’s going to change. For the better.
The other thing is, I know it sounds ironic that we’re actually shutting down PSDs and this will make the situation better. It’s just what the MCPON talked about with this My Navy Portal. We’re putting you directly in charge, in contact with the people who can do your finances right away. And I’ll tell you, we are asking for feedback and the feedback is up around 90 percent positive. Most of these pay situations are resolved within 24 hours, and the rest of them are resolved within two or three days. So please call that number. But most important, make sure that your chief and division officer know your situation and they can check up on things, follow up for you, help you, guide you, whatever leadership action is required, we’ll get on it.

MCPON: Can there be consideration to reducing the requirements to just a set number of required time to serve 10, 15, years, et cetera, before you can transfer your GI Bill benefits?

The problem is, so we recently had a change, as most of you know. Beyond the 16 year point you cannot transfer your GI Bill benefits.

It’s important to remember that the GI Bill was not created as an entitlement to be shared with a spouse or with a dependent. It was created to help ease the transition of military back into the civilian work force. They gave us some flexibility, Congress gave us some flexibility for a while, and we were able to use that to our benefit, and I think that a lot of families benefited from it. We love that. The fact is, that’s not what it was created for, and if there’s another entitlement we should be looking at, and there are some other options for spouses, especially of our junior Sailors and our junior officers to receive some educational benefits. But the MGIB or the GI Bill period, really was developed to help us transition back into the civilian work force and they’ve put us back on track. Congress has put us back on track to use it for just that.

CNO: It’s still a great benefit, so please take advantage of it. There is a considerable amount of flexibility with the system as it is.

Why do Navy civilian companies and contractors do the hard job of building our ships instead of regular Navy building our own ships?

This has been the way our Navy has done it since, almost since we began as a Navy. One way to think about it is that our
shipbuilding industrial base is part of our strategic partnership in the nation to build the most powerful Navy on earth. So we have traditionally partnered with private companies, shipbuilders, to design and build ships to the specifications and requirements that we want. And then through their life cycle, there’s sort of a shared responsibility with respect to maintaining them. Some of our ships are maintained in Navy public shipyards, some of our ships are repaired and maintained in private shipyards. But I think what we want to do is try and consider this as a strategic partnership going forward, one where we both benefit from making that partnership as healthy as it can be.

**MCPON:** Can we start emphasizing and implementing ways to encourage better fitness culture? One recommendation is instead of [documenting] a P on the eval should say the PFA score, or add PFA points value to the advancement points.

So it’s important to remember that the physical fitness program that we have and the PFA system, it’s really a wellness check. It’s not a combat fitness test. So using that as a means to determine who is best eligible to advance and who we want to move into a greater leadership opportunity, probably not what we’re after. We do want to emphasize health, and in fact the CNO and I just received a brief on just how important health and sleep really are to our functioning as leaders. So it is something we’re placing more emphasis on. It is something we’re going to be talking about more. With the Go for Green and the menus and the food choices that you should be seeing already on ships and deployed units, I think that we’re making strides. But it’s going to be a never-ending thing as we continue to chase this and make things better.

**CNO:** The mindset that we’re trying to get to is that every one of you should be thinking of yourselves and we should be thinking of you as almost like high performance athletes, right? So what are your nutrition choices? You should be thinking of your body as a temple and only eating those things that are going to really tune that up to highest performance. With respect to getting the amount of rest that you need, drinking water, getting the exercise that you need to stay fit. It really is, just like the question said, a culture of fitness. And so we need to come at it from a comprehensive standpoint. And that includes psychological fitness which is, again, feeling part of a team, feeling connected to somebody. I’m connected to MCPON here. If I’ve got a problem I always know I can call up MCPON Smith and he can give me a great sounding board. Right?
And it just helps me a great deal to have someone to be able to talk to like that.

So from every aspect of health, we’re going at this. But making PFA competitive or a contributing factor, I think we just need to take a more balance approach to that.

We’ve got a thousand versions of this question. Would you authorize the brown fleece for optional wear with or without the parka? And since we’ve got a thousand versions of this question, I am committing with MCPON that we will dive into this question in detail. Okay? So I have to understand what that would mean, how many fleeces would that result in, can the system even make that many fleeces, how would we pay for them, who would pay for them, get them into the exchanges. We’ll have a full, comprehensive answer within a month. I’ll get something back out to you on our Facebook page.

So for all of those thousands of people that are interested in the brown fleece, the answer’s coming soon. Thanks.

Here’s our last question. What is being done about the lack of training and understanding of navigation up and down the chain?

First of all, I think there’s a great amount of understanding of navigation up and down the chain of command. Our ships are out there by and large navigating very, very safely in some pretty challenging situations sometimes, and so we have to make sure that we start from that perspective.

But we’re doing a number of things to improve our ability to navigate, particularly navigate in conditions of EMCON, conditions of maybe denied GPS, et cetera. And going back to building those navigational skills. This ready relevant learning is a part of that. It’s going to bring advanced technology and advanced learning science down to help us go through and learn the skills of navigation. We’re doing more team trainers and simulators. Very high-fidelity simulators to teach our Sailors how to plan and execute a voyage plan. Then enhancing the schools, the pipeline schools. And actually having a rigorous exam at the end of that school to pass. All of these efforts are going to start to layer on so that we become better and better navigators over time.

MCPON: And sir, it’s ironic that we’re standing here in the National Museum of the United States Navy, and we look behind us at the replica fighting top of the Constitution, and think about
the fact that we’ve reintroduced celestial navigation into a lot of our navigation courses. We have an assistant navigator course that our QMs, OS’s and others can attend up at SWOS. We’ve got so much going on in the realm of safe navigation training. We are using our partners in the Coast Guard who do this so well. We’re leveraging any and every opportunity to get after better, safer navigation.

**CNO:** So you should start to see that. If you’re not seeing it already, then I’d ask you again to talk to your chain of command. I’m sure that they’re dialed into these efforts. Which is a great way I think to close out.

Again, our message started at hey, there are some sort of basic issues that we need to make sure that we are linked together as small teams. We are most effective as a Navy when we are fighting and operating as small teams. The first call that our Sailors should make, the first person that they should want to contact is their division leadership, their platoon leadership, their chief, their division officer. And they should have 100 percent confidence that that will be a helpful interaction and that that command team will dive in and support and advocate for each one of our Sailors with vigor until their problem is resolved, and we’ll get that done urgently.

**MCPON:** Yes, sir. That’s what chiefs live for, that’s what we train to. And that’s our basic mantra is to take care of Sailors and enable us to meet the mission.

**CNO:** Yeah. And for every one of you leaders, it will make you a lot more effective as a leader and make you feel better as a person. So let’s go get to it.

Thanks very much.