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Groundbreaking launches new NEX Fleet Store

Story and photo by MC3 Robert Stirrup

Navy Region Hawai'i Public Affairs

Commander, Navy Region Hawai'i (CNRH) Morale, Welfare, and Recreation and Navy Exchange (NEX) Pearl Harbor hosted a groundbreaking ceremony for the new NEX Fleet Store and MWR Information, Tickets and Travel and Outdoor Adventure Center onboard Naval Station (NAVSTA) Pearl Harbor on Feb. 12.

The project, located next to Scott Pool, will construct a one-story building providing Sailors with shopping, dining and outdoor gear facilities for recreational opportunities. The new facility will consolidate functions currently located in four different locations onboard NAVSTA Pearl Harbor.

The groundbreaking began with opening remarks from guest speaker, Capt. Richard Kitchens, commanding officer of NAVSTA Pearl Harbor, followed by a traditional Hawaiian blessing for the construction site by Kahu Kaleo Patterson.

"We are all here today because we share a common vision and that is to be the best customer service organization we can be as an installation," said Kitchens.

After the blessing and opening remarks, Kitchens, along with Rear Adm. Dixon Smith, CNRH and Commander, Naval Surface Group Middle Pacific, accompanied Cmdr. Lore Aguayo, head of public works department Pearl Harbor, Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC), Hawai'i; Beverly Hudgins, district manager, NEX Hawai'i; Theresa Phillips, regional program director of MWR and Fleet and Family Readiness; and Fooney Freestone, president of Nan Incorporated; to break ground with ceremonial gold shovels.

From left, Fooney Freestone, president of Nan Incorporated; Theresa Phillips, regional program director of Commander, Navy Region Hawai'i (CNRH) Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) and Fleet and Family Readiness; Beverly Hudgins, district manager, Navy Exchange (NEX) Hawai'i; Cmdr. Lore Aguayo, head of public works department, Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC) Hawai'i; Capt. Richard Kitchens, commanding officer, Naval Station (NAVSTA) Pearl Harbor; and Rear Adm. Dixon Smith, CNRH and Commander, Naval Surface Group Middle Pacific; break ground during a ceremony Feb. 12 for a new NEX Fleet Store and MWR Information, Tickets and Travel and Outdoor Adventure Center onboard NAVSTA Pearl Harbor. Construction of the 24,000 square feet building is set for April of this year and is scheduled to be completed in May 2010.

The 24,000 square foot building will be across the street from Bravo Pier, making it easier for Sailors assigned to Pearl Harbor-based ships to pick up all their necessary items without having to go across the base.

"This will allow the Sailors on the waterfront to enjoy a level of customer service that they do not enjoy right now," said Kitchens.

To accommodate Sailors, the building will also have a barbershop and Enterprise Car Rental outlet, along with Navy Federal Credit Union and Bank of Hawai'i ATM services.

"This will be a great new building that will provide excellent service to the Sailors onboard NAVSTA Pearl Harbor," said Hudgins.

Signing of the final building design and start of construction will begin in April of this year and is scheduled to be completed under the supervision of NAVFAC Hawai'i in May 2010.

Pasadena holds change of command

MC1 (SW) Cynthia Clark

Commander Submarine Force U.S. Pacific Fleet Public Affairs Office

Cmdr. Andrew St. John relieved Cmdr. Douglas Perry as commanding officer of USS Pasadena (SSN 752) in a ceremony Feb. 13 at Naval Station Pearl Harbor.

Capt. Charles Richard, former commander, Submarine Squadron 17 and now on the staff of Chief of Naval Operations Strategic Studies Group, guest speaker at the event, stressed the importance of personal relationships in today's Navy.

"Cmdr. Perry's story on Pasadena is more than a resumé of operations," said Richard. "It is also the one-on-one relationship he forged with each man on the boat. Congratulations on an excellent tour and for the crew of Pasadena, thank you for your service. The service you provide is invaluable and will be more so in the future."

Following the guest speaker's remarks, Capt. Christopher Kaiser, Commander, Submarine Squadron Seven, presented Perry with his second Meritorious Service Medal.

Since assuming command in 2006, Perry led Pasadena through a selected restricted availability and a Western Pacific deployment while maintaining an 85 percent operational tempo, completed four missions vital to national security, and participated in three international theater anti-submarine warfare exercises.

In his closing remarks, Perry told his crew, "Believe in your mission. Know you make a difference today in our nation's security and that your preparation of the battle space enables our readiness for potential future conflict."

U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Luciano Marano

Cmdr. Douglas G. Perry is piped ashore after being relieved as USS Pasadena (SSN 752) commanding officer by Cmdr. Andrew B. St. John in a change of command ceremony Feb. 13 at Naval Station Pearl Harbor. Throughout its proud and illustrious 20-year history, Pasadena has deployed to and conducted operations in virtually every part of the Pacific Ocean.

Perry continued to thank his crew for all the day-to-day operations they did in support of that mission. "It has been an honor to serve as your commanding officer," Perry concluded.

While assuming command, St. John, a 1991 Rice University Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps (NROTC) graduate, told his crew, "I am honored to take command of such an outstanding fast attack submarine. I look forward to great days ahead."

Perry's sea tours include USS Pittsburgh (SSN 720), Submarine NR-1 and as executive officer of the USS Maine (SSBN 741) Gold. Perry is a 1989 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy.

Sailors and Marines assigned to commands in the Hawai'i region participate in the Sounds of Freedom division at the start of the 25th Annual Hawaiian Telcom Great Aloha Run at Aloha Tower in Honolulu on Feb. 16.

Hawai'i Sailors participate in Great Aloha Run

Story and photo by MC2 Michael A. Lantron

Navy Region Hawai'i Public Affairs

Sailors assigned to commands in the Hawai'i region represented the Navy in the Sounds of Freedom division during the 25th Annual Hawaiian Telcom Great Aloha Run, held Feb. 16 in Honolulu, Hawai'i.

The event served as an opportunity for Hawai'i-based service members to come together as a massive group by competing in the annual 8.15-mile run.

"It's important to show the colors and be part of the great military community," said Cmdr. Paul O'Loughlin, assigned to 21st Dental Company stationed at Marine Corps Base Hawai'i. "It shows solidarity amongst the services and is a great opportunity to show our athletic ability in this Hawaiian event."

The Sailors joined more than 2,200 Sounds of Freedom runners for the event, which began at the Aloha Tower in downtown Honolulu. The course took the participants along Nimitz Highway, past Naval Station Pearl Harbor, and finished at Aloha Stadium.

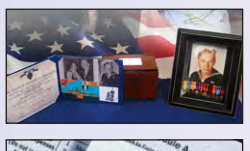
For Lt. Ryan Murphy, also assigned to 21st Dental Company, participating in the Great Aloha Run meant running with a fractured radius.

"This is my first run and I heard so many good things about it from other people. It wasn't something I was going to pass up just because of the injury," said Murphy.

After crossing the finish line, Murphy was proud to complete one of the most popular races in the country.

"I definitely felt a great sense of achievement crossing the finish line," said Murphy. "To finish the race as part of the Sounds of Freedom team is an excellent accomplishment that I'm proud of."

The Sounds of Freedom division is composed of all military branches running together as a group in formation, sounding off to cadence throughout the course. Since 1985, the Great Aloha Run has raised more than $7.6 million for more than 150 non-profit health and human service organizations and community groups throughout Hawai'i.


Navy honors Pearl Harbor survivor
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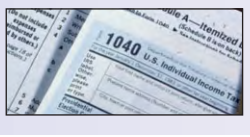
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High rollers strike up all-Navy team
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Navy honors Pearl Harbor survivor

Story and photos by MC3 (AW) Eric J. Cutright

Naval Public Affairs Support Element West

A Pearl Harbor survivor was honored Feb. 12 by Sailors and family alike during a burial at sea at USS Utah Memorial at Naval Station Pearl Harbor.

The ashes of Alphonse Eckel were scattered into the harbor along the memorial in accordance with his wishes.

Alphonse Eckel enlisted in the Navy in December 1940 and was a boatswain's mate second class aboard Farragut-class destroyer USS Aylwin (DD-355) during the attack on Pearl Harbor.

"He was a very proud Sailor and proud of what he did for his country back during World War II," said Alphonse's nephew, Jim Eckel.

Alphonse Eckel served two tours in the Navy, on active duty six years from 1940 to 1946 when he joined the Navy Reserves, and then again on active duty from 1951 to 1953 during the Korean War.

"He was a warrior during the war," said Dennis Eckel, another of Alphonse's nephews. "He was never there. He was always out to sea. He spent 20 to 23 months out without really having set foot on land."

During his time in the service, Alphonse took part in some of the Navy's most historical engagements, having fought in the Battle of the Coral Sea, Battle of Midway, Battle of Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands and the Mariana Islands.

"Wherever there was a scrape going on, he seemed to be stuck right in the middle of it," said Dennis Eckel.

After the Navy, Alphonse worked for the U.S. Post Office for more than 30 years and then as a longshoreman. He was also an avid reader and enjoyed spending time at the horse track.

"He was a generous uncle. He loved the ponies. Every time he had a good day at the races. he'd tend to give out money to his nephews," said Jim Eckel.

Alphonse was 84 years old when he passed away at his home in Long Beach, Calif. His burial at sea was attended by his daughter, DeAnn Chernis; nephews, Charles and Billy Hughes, and Jim and Dennis Eckel. Extended family and friends were also there.

Alphonse's military achievements include a Purple Heart, American Defense Medal, Asiatic/Pacific Medal with 19 stars, American Area Medal, WWII Victory Medal, Philippine Liberation Medal with two stars, and The Navy Good Conduct Medal.

"I can say that I am really proud of him," said Jim Eckel.

Photo illustration

Got Questions?
Write to us at hnn@honoluluadvertiser.com

Hawai'i Navy News Editorial

Observance of National African American History Month

Office of the Chief of Naval Operations

The year 2009 has historical significant for America and our diversity history. First, it is the centennial of the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Additionally, Jan. 20 marked a major milestone with the inauguration of our first African American president, Barack Obama.

Both past and present, the U.S. Navy has been privileged with numerous African American heroes and role models. Our Navy's past includes heroes like Petty Officer "Dorie" Miller, a messman who served with distinction on USS West Virginia during the attack on Pearl Harbor, earning the Navy Cross for heroism.

Others answering the call were Lt. j.g. Harriet Ida Pickens and Ensign Frances Wills, the first two African American women accepted for volunteer emergency services (WAVES), and Phyllis Mae Dailey, the Navy's first African American commissioned nurse.

Sixty years ago, Wesley Anthony Brown became the first African American who answered the call and served with distinction in our Navy.

Today, we have four African American three-star admirals serving on active duty—the most ever: Vice Adm. Derwood C. Curtis, Commander, Naval Surface Forces; Vice Adm. Adam M. Robinson Jr., Navy Surgeon General; Vice Adm. Melvin G. Williams Jr., Commander, U.S. 2nd Fleet; and Vice Adm. Anthony L. Winns, Navy Inspector General.

More than 94,000 African Americans serve in the Navy's total force - active, reserve and civilian. These talented shipmates ensure our Navy continues to succeed in challenging missions at sea and ashore around the globe.

All personnel are strongly encouraged to take advantage of opportunities during African American/Black History month and engage in activities that enhance the public's perception of African American opportunities and successes in the Navy. Programs, exhibits, publications and participation in military and community events recognizing the diversity of our American heritage are excellent ways to deepen our commitment to that legacy.

Presentations and other information are available on the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI) Web site www.deomi.org/SpecialObservance/Presentations_category.cfm. Many other resources are available online to plan your events. More information on diversity conferences, events, awards and observances are available at the Navy diversity Web site at www.npc.navy.mil/commandsupport/diversity.

Pacific Fleet promotes tenets of Navy Ethos

Bill Doughty

U.S. Pacific Fleet Public Affairs

In his two most-recent Rat-Pac Report podcasts, posted Feb. 11 and 18, Adm. Robert F. Willard Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet focused on two key elements of the Navy Ethos – "integrity" and "decisive leadership."

Both terms are prominent in the third paragraph of the Ethos statement: "Integrity is the foundation of our conduct" and "decisive leadership is crucial to our success."

Willard chose his President's Day podcast and blog to address integrity.

"We would like to think that presidents of the United States, across the board, have been men of integrity and will continue to be men and women of integrity as long as we are a nation," Willard said.

He discussed how Presidents Washington and Lincoln demonstrated integrity and decisive leadership despite the challenges they each faced.

"Integrity is imbued in our presidents just as it should be imbued in the leaders within the Navy," Willard said. "When we think of credible leadership, one of the words that comes to my mind is the integrity of the man or woman who sits in that leadership position."

In his latest podcast, "Decisive Leadership," Willard said, "I think that it's part of Navy culture that our leaders be decisive – not to the exclusion of listening, not to the exclusion of other good advice, not to the exclusion of a studied approach to a problem, but there's a time and a place when a decision must be made."

Speaking to all Sailors throughout the Navy, Willard said, "Decisive leadership is a tenet that we often take for granted. You, in your career, will see leaders that are more or less decisive. They're worth learning from. You'll see the leader that you would want to emulate one day, who in a studied fashion when the chips are down and everyone looks to them for the decision, can make it and can make it well."

Willard's latest Rat-Pac Report is his 76th consecutive weekly podcast. The next Rat-Pac Report, scheduled for Feb. 25, will highlight "Women in the Navy," on the eve of Women's History Month.

To hear Willard's podcast or read his blog, go to www.cpf.navy.mil.

Commentary

Chapel Pennant

Slam dunk your funk

Lt. Scott Carlson, CHC, USN

Pearl Harbor Memorial Chapel

Buffalo Bills Tight End Kevin Everett reminds us that life is full of challenges. Already recuperated from an ACL tear that occurred during the first practice of his pro career, he now has the greater challenge of learning how to walk again.

How do we get back on our feet? No one is responsible for what happened to them, but we are all responsible for what we're going to do about it. Action is the key and the human body is a great example.

Get real with it. It's a universal truth that struggle is a necessary part of life, from the tussle between dawn and dusk to the subatomic tension between protons and electrons. At the tissue level, if we want to get in shape we have to go through some growing pains. Muscle fibers must break down in order to get bigger. The cardiovascular system must be stressed for maximum output. No pain, no gain.

When we own the reality of our challenges, we've already triumphed over them. As Holocaust survivor Dr. Viktor Frankl wrote from life in a concentration camp, "Emotion, which is suffering, ceases to be suffering as soon as we form a clear and concise picture of it." He discovered that it really does not matter what we expect from life, but rather what life expects from us. The sooner we get real with our challenges, the sooner they're behind us. It's mind over matter. If we don't mind, it "don't" matter. Rise above your funk.

Get on with it. Finding meaning in difficult circumstances maximizes empowerment. As Hanoi Hilton survivor Navy Capt. (ret.) Gerald Coffee discovered, "I had to stop asking 'Why me?' and start asking 'Show me.'" To quote the philosopher Nietzsche, "He who has a 'why' to live for can bear with almost any 'how.'" Find meaning in your funk.

To get on with it means refining our focus, rediscovering our successes, and getting better at what we do best. This means redirecting our energies from negative and destructive thought patterns to positive ones. Personally, I got in the best physical condition and achieved the most financial success in my life when I was in the middle of the deepest funk in my life.

Use your negative energy in a positive way to overcome your funk. In the advice of sports medicine and personal trainers, start slowly. Muscles need to be warmed up and gradually stretched. Don't try to do anything more than you can do today. Work only one body part at a time and don't expect miracles in your first session.

As Jesus put it, "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." (Matthew 6). Do everything you can in your power each day to deal with your funk.

Get past it. This is where core values and faith come in. Frankl discovered that to restore a man's inner strength in the camp, he had first to succeed in showing him some future goal. As a doctor, he pictured himself on the platform of a well lit, warm and pleasant lecture room giving a discourse on the psychology of the concentration camp. By doing this, he rose above the situation and observed it as if it was already a thing of the past. Picture your life past your funk.

Kevin Everett's doctors have now revised their first prognosis and say it is likely he will walk again. That which does not kill us will make us stronger. Periods of crisis can be opportunities in disguise. Use your faith and core values to get past your funk. Get out there and discover those opportunities. It may take what seems like forever, but you will eventually unearth those opportunities and maximize them to your advantage.

USS Indiana (BB 58) at Pearl Harbor after collision

U.S. Naval Historical Center photograph

USS Indiana (BB-58) at Pearl Harbor on Feb. 13, 1944, showing damage to her starboard side received in collision with USS Washington (BB-56) on Feb.1, 1944. Tug YT-471 is assisting. Note the "cage" mast mounted ashore in the left distance. It was removed from USS California (BB-44) while she was being salvaged following the Dec. 7, 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

Hawai'i Navy News

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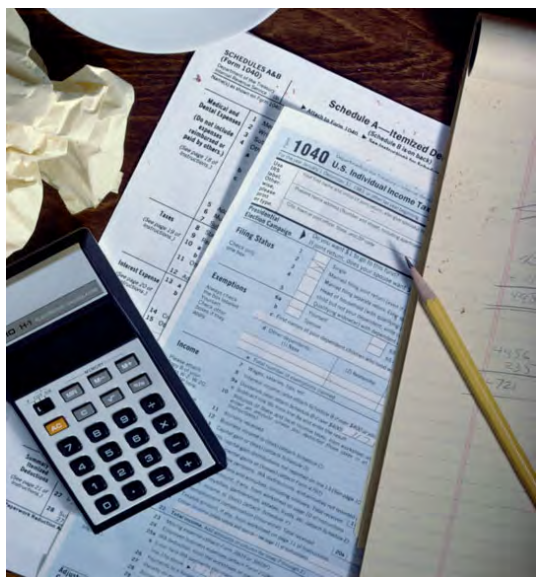
Tax help is available for military personnel

Randy Dela Cruz

Contributing Writer



It's that time of the year, when Uncle Sam calls upon the country's citizens to file their income tax returns.

And once again, the Naval Legal Service Office (NLSO) Pacific Detachment Pearl Harbor is working hard at the Military Volunteer Tax Assistance Center (VITA) to assist active-duty military, their family members and military retirees with the laborious task of preparing their tax returns.

In 2008, more than 3,000 returns for service members and their families were filed by the VITA Center, which saved $150,000 in tax preparation fees and assured approximately $2,000,000 in timely returns.

This year, in addition to helping clients file their returns, the VITA Center also provides training on e-filing and information on the resources that are available in getting the job done.

"Our main goal is to teach Sailors and their families how to prepare their own taxes," said Lt. j.g. Matthew Negrete of the NLSO. "Especially for single Sailors that don't have any kids and are on their own, they don't need to be paying anyone to get their taxes done. They have the know-how to do that. They just need the confidence."

Since the VITA Center opened for service on Feb. 2, Negrete stated that there have been 150 returns or more that were prepared by volunteers from several commands in the Hawai'i region, retirees and civilians.

"The training that we receive is IRS-based," affirmed Negrete. "It is the same training that all the VITAs receive."

The center accepts appointments, but walk-ins are also welcome to take advantage of the free service.

Negrete noted that clients should be prepared by bringing their W-2 forms, bank statements, forms for retirement or miscellaneous income, and last year's tax return.

While volunteers are trained to handle simple single filings and more complex returns, Negrete pointed out that there are restrictions.

"There is a limit to what we're allowed to do, according to the VITA guidelines," he said. "Some of the more complicated ones that we do are tax returns that involve rental properties from families that got stationed out, but don't want to sell just yet. We will also assist someone who owns a business or works as a contractor."

The center will even give the once over on completed tax returns from clients, just to make sure that nothing is missed.

"A lot of it is not knowing what credits they are eligible for," said Negrete. "Sometimes people contribute to a retirement plan at work and they don't realize that the information is on their W-2. So they don't know to look for the retirement credit. That's a very common example."

If people are planning to visit the VITA Center for assistance, Negrete advised that late February or the month of March is a good time to stop by.

"It's always busy the first two weeks that we open and the final two weeks leading up to April 15," he maintained. "We have plenty of availability in March."

The VITA Center is located at building 679 in room 135 and is open every Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Call 473-4717 or 473-1771 for more information.

Ensigns graduate from SWO INTRO Inaugural Class

Lt. Jennifer Valle

Afloat Training Group Middle Pacific Public Affairs

Seventeen ensigns graduated Feb. 13 from the first Pearl Harbor-based Surface Warfare Officer Introduction (SWO INTRO) Course, convened by Afloat Training Group Middle Pacific (ATG MIDPAC).

The new four-week course was designed by Surface Warfare Officer School (SWOS) to be taught in fleet concentration areas by the ATGs. The course material is focused to give the new ensigns (many reporting directly from their commissioning sources) the basics of being a naval officer prior to their first division officer tour.

To kick off the course, the Surface Navy Association (SNA) sponsored a luncheon at Lockwood Hall for the newest naval officers at Pearl Harbor. The SNA Pearl Harbor chapter took special interest in introducing the new officers to the surface Navy community here in the area and more than 85 surface warriors were in attendance.

Lt. Latisha Robinson, the SWO INDOC course coordinator, said, "The luncheon was a huge success. Our goal was to expose the students to Pearl Harbor's surface warfare professionals, enable them to network, foster relationships, and promote camaraderie to carry throughout their careers. The support of the SNA, our waterfront and our senior surface warfare officers spoke volumes to these 17 junior officers."

Ensign Gerry Mauer III, assigned to USS Chafee (DDG 90), was one of the graduates of the SWOS INTRO course and attended the SNA luncheon. He said the event was "a great chance to meet colleagues and counterparts on the waterfront and provided a venue to exchange thoughts and ideas."

The SWO INTRO Course highlights included discussion panels with fleet commanding officers and chief petty officers, field trips to the firefighting school and Battleship Missouri Memorial, seamanship training in a state-of-the-art ship simulator, and an unexpected but exciting opportunity to meet Pro Bowl players who stopped by for a tour of ATG.

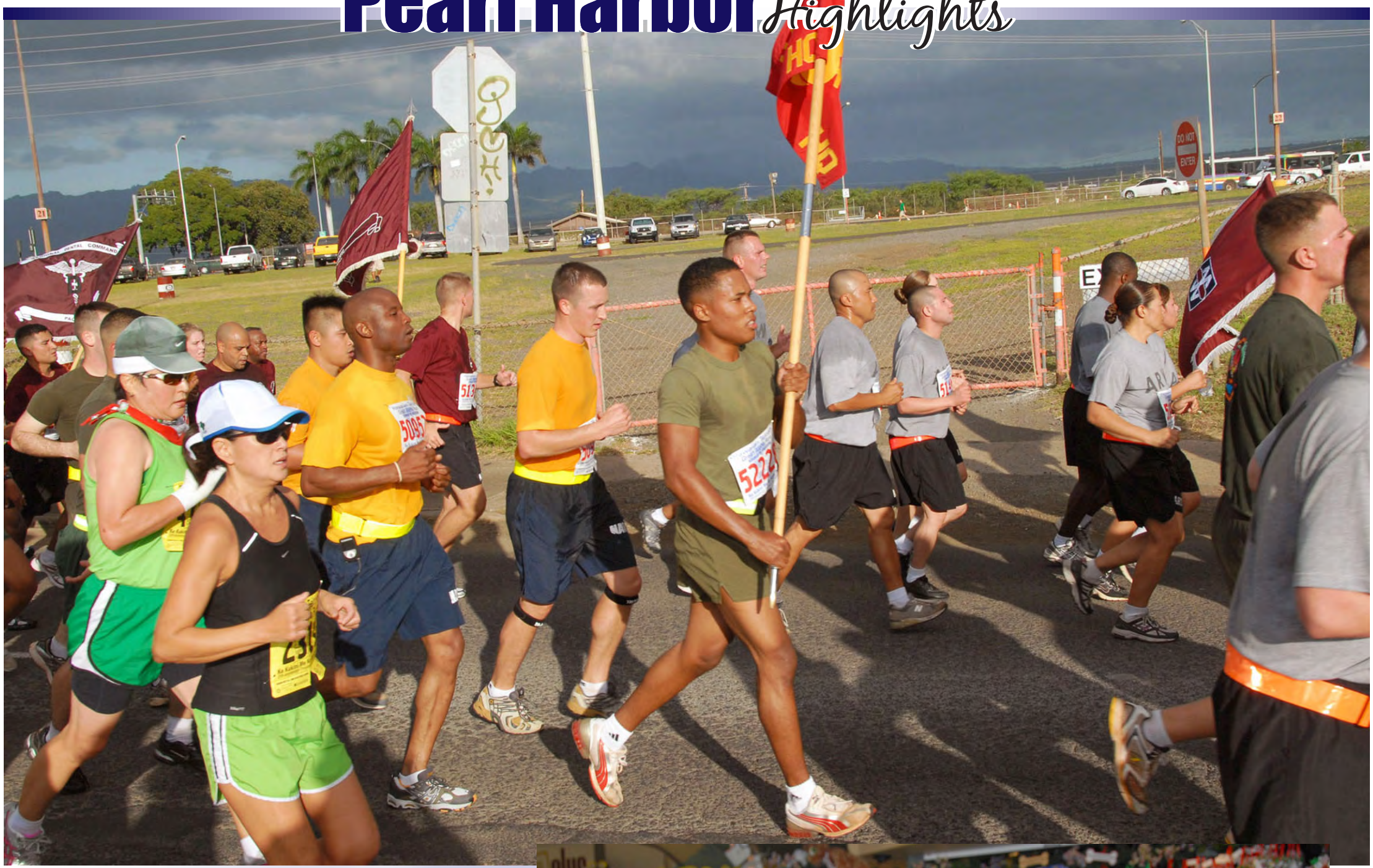
The course is expected to convene two or three times a year to match the influx of officers from commissioning sources to Pearl Harbor-based warships.

Navy admiral speaks at alma mater

U.S. Navy photo by Midshipman 3rd Class Janice Vanourney

Rear Adm. Douglas McAneny, Commander, Submarine Force U.S. Pacific Fleet (COMSUBPAC), addresses the University of Nebraska Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps (NROTC) unit on Feb. 4. McAneny was in Nebraska to visit the U.S. Strategic Command in Omaha and stopped to address his alma mater's NROTC unit.

Pearl Harbor *Highlights*



U.S. Navy photo by MC3 Robert Stirrup

Sailors and Marines assigned to commands in the Hawai'i region participate in the Sounds of Freedom division at the start of the 25th Annual Hawaiian Telcom Great Aloha Run in Honolulu. More than 20,000 runners, including more than 2,200 Hawai'i-based service members, participated in the 8.15-mile run, which took place from Aloha Tower to Aloha Stadium. The Sounds of Freedom division is composed of all military branches running together as a group in formation, sounding off to cadence throughout the course.

(Right) A Marine assigned to U.S. Pacific Fleet donates blood during an Armed Services Blood Program (ABSP) blood drive at the Pearl Harbor Navy Exchange on Feb. 10. The ASBP plays a critical function by providing a direct supply of blood to service members and their families. As a joint service operation, they coordinate with Army, Navy and Air Force components to collect, process, store, distribute and transfuse blood worldwide.

U.S. Navy photo by MC3 Robert Stirrup

U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Paul D. Honnick

Kahu Kaleo Patterson performs a traditional Hawaiian blessing during a ground breaking ceremony Feb. 12 for a new Navy Exchange Fleet Store and MWR Information, Tickets and Travel and Outdoor Adventure Center onboard Naval Station Pearl Harbor. Construction of the 24,000 square feet building is set for April of this year and is scheduled to be completed in May 2010.

(Right) The Naval Station Pearl Harbor Honor Guard returns to their stations after a 21-gun salute in honor of Pearl Harbor survivor Boatswain's Mate 2nd Class Alphonse Eckel at the USS Utah Memorial. Eckel was assigned to USS Aylin (DD-355) during the Pearl Harbor attack.

U.S. Navy photo by MC3 (AW) Eric J. Cutright

Hopper shares love of reading with Okinawan students

Ensign Katie Burkhart

USS Hopper (DDG 70)
Public Affairs

OKINAWA, Japan – The Sailors of the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Hopper (DDG 70) distributed donated books and read to students at a local elementary school Feb. 4 while in port at Okinawa, Japan for a scheduled port visit.

The group of 12 Sailors traveled to the Heshikiya Elementary School outside the White Beach Naval Base for a chance to interact with the children. Upon arrival, the Sailors met with students in the gymnasium and presented each class with a set of books. The Sailors and students then split into groups and dispersed to read some of their new books.

Before leaving their homeport of Pearl Harbor, Hawai'i, the Friends of the Hawai'i Libraries donated 100 books to Hopper to be distributed as part of community relations projects in foreign countries.

"The children were very attentive and they repeated whatever is being read to them," said Electrician's Mate 2nd Class Rafael Campano, originally from the Ilocos Norte, Philippines. "It was a great experience because we were able to interact with the kids even though there was a language barrier."

After reading stories, the Sailors attended recess with the group of 120 children, playing various games including "Duck, Duck, Goose."

"The hugs and high fives we got as we departed really made the whole day worth it," said Ensign Kate Hobbs of Pittsburgh, Pa.

Hopper is assigned to Destroyer Squadron 31 and is currently on routine deployment to the U.S. 7th Fleet area of responsibility. Operating in the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean, the U.S. 7th Fleet is the largest of the forward-deployed U.S. fleets, covering 48 million square miles with approximately 60-70 ships, 200-300 aircraft, and 40,000 Sailors and Marines assigned at any time.

U.S. Navy photo by Ensign Kate Hobbs

Electrician's Mate 2nd Class Rafael Campano from Austin, Texas and Hull Technician 2nd Class Marc Brandes from Santa Maria, Calif., assigned to the Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer USS Hopper (DDG 70) read to students on Feb. 4 at Heshikiya Elementary School in Okinawa, Japan. Sailors distributed books donated by the Friends of the Hawai'i Libraries to students at the school. Hopper arrived in Okinawa on Feb. 1 for a scheduled port visit. Hopper is homeported at Pearl Harbor, Hawai'i and is currently assigned to Destroyer Squadron 15 for operations in the U.S. 7th Fleet area of responsibility.

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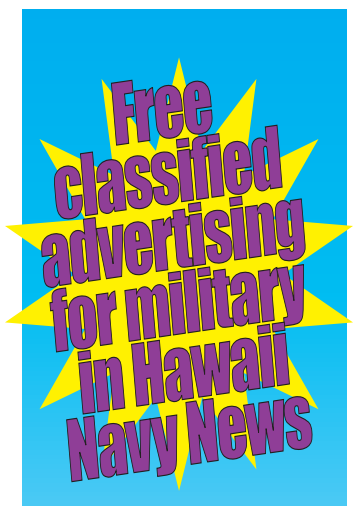

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Religious program specialist rating: Blessing the Navy for 30 years

Story and photo by
MC3 (AW) Eric J. Cutright

Naval Public Affairs Support Element West Det. Hawai'i

In 1979, the Navy established the religious program specialist (RP) rating to provide Navy chaplains with professional support personnel adept in religious programming and administration.

Thirty years later, RPs in Hawai'i continue to provide this service to our chaplains and to our Navy.

"This year we are celebrating our 30th anniversary as RPs," said Chief Religious Program Specialist (SW) Tshombe Harris, assigned to Naval Station Pearl Harbor's Chapel. "Before us, there were specialist (Ws) and before that there were yeomen with NECs [Navy enlisted classification codes]."

Stemming from a concept that a committee of chaplains recommended to the Navy back in 1878, chaplains proposed that the Navy attach a chaplain's assistant anywhere a chaplain was assigned. The Navy's first officially designated chaplain's assistant wasn't until 1942 when the Navy created the specialist (W) rating, with the (W) representing welfare.

Specialist (Ws) had to be able to play the piano and organ for religious services and they were expected to be competent choir directors whereas their modern day incarnations do not have this requirement.

"Today our major role is to provide support to chaplains for both Navy and Marine Corps side, with our major claimant being the Marines," said Harris. "We provide physical security to chaplains in the combat field, as they are non-combatants per the Geneva Convention and cannot carry weapons."

In a non-combat environment, RPs aid the chaplain with religious programs and perform clerical and administrative tasks. They also organize charitable and public service volunteer programs as well as maintain relations with religious communities and public service organizations.

"More than anything, we as RPs are like a gateway to the chaplain," said Religious Program Specialist 2nd Class Justin Robison, also assigned to Naval Station Pearl Harbor's Chapel. "The RP is a more approachable person for many enlisted that might not automatically want to go to a commissioned officer, so the RPs are a very much more visible aspect of the chaplain's office."

Though the RP rating is just at its 30th anniversary, it is "One of the youngest of the old rates." According to Harris, it still garners respect and appreciation for what it exemplifies in today's Navy.

Religious Program Specialist 2nd Class Mohamed Baayd, assigned to Naval Station Pearl Harbor's Chapel, expressed great pride at being an RP. "I never would have imagined that I would be serving in the Navy as an RP. It is truly a miracle. I get to enrich and recharge the spiritual batteries of Sailors and their families and at the end of the day, I truly feel I've accomplished something,".

Religious program specialists (RP) stand outside the Naval Station Pearl Harbor Chapel, beside a plaque that features their rating insignia. The RP rating recently turned 30 years old, having been established by the Navy back in 1979 to provide chaplains with professional support personnel. From left to right: RP2 (FMF) Bryan Bravo, RP2 Justin Robison, RP2 Mohamed Baayd, RPC(SW) Tshombe Harris.

Maritime strategy's core competencies: coming full circle

MC1 (AW/SW) Monique K. Hilley

Combined Task Force 151 Public Affairs

USS SAN ANTONIO, At Sea (NNS) -- The Navy and Marine Corps boast a heritage of core competencies outlined in the maritime strategy, namely forward presence, deterrence, power projection, sea control and maritime security – all of which are employed as part of Combined Task Force (CTF) 151's counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden.

Marines from the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit, the crew of the amphibious transport dock ship USS San Antonio (LPD) 17 and several other embarked units, including U.S. Coast Guard Law Enforcement Detachment (LETDET) 405, Fleet Surgical Team 8 and Helicopter Anti-submarine Squadron (HS) 3 have teamed up to tackle a historical menace: piracy.

"We are a lean, agile, adaptable force capable of rapidly leveraging our capabilities from an expeditionary, amphibious platform at a time and place of our choosing in order to disrupt and prevent criminal activities on the high seas which violate international laws and threaten free trade and basic human rights," said Maj. Ken Goedecke, assistant operations officer, 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit. "I would argue that that is as true today as it was 200 years ago."

The Continental Navy was established on Oct. 13, 1775 and the Continental Marines were originally established on Nov. 10, 1775. After the American Revolution ended and the Treaty of Paris resulted in the selling of all ships, both services were disbanded in 1783. On March 27, 1794 the U.S. Navy was re-established, quickly followed by the Marine Corps July 11, 1798, in response to the rising piracy problems off the northern coast of Africa, known as the Barbary Coast.

Throughout the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, the Barbary pirates, based in the African port cities of Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli, preyed on ships in the Mediterranean Sea, forcing European ships to make tribute payments. When the United States became independent after the American Revolution, its ships lost the protection of the British Royal Navy and found themselves suddenly vulnerable to pirate attacks.

At first, Presidents George Washington and John Adams agreed to pay the ransoms and tribute to the Barbary pirates in exchange for peace. By the time Thomas Jefferson took office, the United States was spending approximately 30 percent of its budget on pirate tributes.

Jefferson despised these tributes and in 1801, he decided to send a fleet to the Barbary Coast to put a stop to the pirates, effectively starting the First Barbary Wars. Between 1801 and 1806, Jefferson sent five squadrons of naval vessels to northern Africa to fight the Barbary pirates. Each squadron consisted of at least one super frigate as well as four to 12 smaller frigates, sloops, schooners and gun brigs.

The first naval battle of the Barbary War occurred Aug. 1, 1801 between the 12-gun schooner Enterprise and a Tripolitan corsair, the Tripoli. U.S. Marines initiated the engagement when they opened fire from aloft and from the decks with accurate, deadly musket fire.

"Way back in the 1800s, when the Marine Corps and the Navy first got together, we were fighting piracy way back then and to find out, it being the year 2009, that we're still doing that as a team is really unique," said Gunnery Sgt. Jeffery Benkie, scout sniper platoon sergeant, 26th MEU.

"One of the things that is specific to myself and to what my Marines do in the scout sniper role is that snipers back then were the sharpshooters, and they were placed up on top of the crow's nest and rope ladders during the piracy activity, and they would engage with accuracy fire from those positions," Benkie added.

Nowadays, there are no rope ladders or crow's nests, but the snipers still fulfill the role of overwatch while manning the Mk-11 or 50-caliber rifle, firing from a helicopter during boarding operations or from the ship if necessary.

The Navy and Marines would fight several other battles with various gangs of Barbary pirates, until the wars finally ended after the War of 1812, and tribute payments and harassment of American merchant ships stopped.

"The heritage, or the legacy, of the Marine Corps is not ever built on the people that are doing the job currently," said Benkie.

"It is built on battles of the past, time-honored tradition, and the heroes, the fellow Marines, which have come before them."

Today, Sailors and Marines aboard San Antonio are working together once again to detect and deter piracy to ensure that the sea lanes remain open for free trade and commerce throughout the world.

"We are proud to be among the pioneers of modern counter-piracy operations," stated Goedecke. "There is no manual or doctrinal publication on counter-piracy operations, but the Marines, Sailors, Coast Guardsmen and over one dozen international coalition partners are laying the groundwork for operations that will soon persuade these criminals to seek a different line of work."