USS Curtis Wilbur returns from deployment

By Ensign John Scott Shaffer, *USS Curtis Wilbur* Public Affairs

Red roses, crisp uniforms, eager families, and a gorgeous September morning all painted a spectacular return for the crew of the *USS Curtis Wilbur* (DDG 54) upon their return from summer deployment.

The ship left June 10, 2011 to begin their extensive operations stretching over 22,000 miles and participated in exercises with two allied naval forces.

***USS Curtis Wilbur* (DDG 54) Sailors man the rails prior to entering port Sept. 6. *Curtis Wilbur* and its crew returned to Yokosuka after completing a summer deployment. U.S. Navy photo by MC3 Andrew Smith**

Of special interest to the crew, their travels took the ship south of the equator for the first time since July 2007 allowing them to participate in a traditional crossing of the line ceremony.

After joining the *George Washington* Strike Group, *Curtis Wilbur*'s first major endeavor led them off the coast of Australia to conduct joint operations with the Royal Australian Navy in Talisman Sabre.

The allied exercise allowed both navies to exchange training methods in multiple areas including Visit, Board, Search, and Seizures (VBSS), underway replenishments, and flight operations.

Upon completion of Talisman Sabre, *Curtis Wilbur* completed escorted duties with *USS George Washington* (CVN 73) and pulled into Manilla, RP.

Next, the ship met up with the Republic of Singapore navy for Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT).

CARAT, a bilateral exercise, helped to strengthen cooperation and force readiness between the two nations.

"Although the deployment may have been shorter in duration than others, it is incredible to see how much the crew accomplished during our underway," said Cmdr. Christopher Monroe, *USS Curtis Wilbur* commanding officer. "In addition to the great multinational experience, the crew took leveraged underway to enhance their own professional development which can be illustrated by the 46 Enlisted Surface Warfare pins earned by members of the crew."

With the return home, *Curtis Wilbur* Sailors look forward to spending time with their family members and friends.

"It always feels like a long time when you're separated from your family, but seeing them when I come back always feels great!" said Fire Controlmen 1st Class Christopher Downing.

Pentagon first responder says America stands strong

By Emily Greene, health.mil

"I looked up and saw firefighters and soldiers on the roof of the Pentagon, amid smoke and fire, unfurling our flag. It was then that I knew our nation was still there; I knew we would be strong and move forward as one." – Army Maj. Gen. Patricia D. Horoho

On September 11, 2001, Army Maj. Gen. Patricia D. Horoho, U.S. Army deputy surgeon general and 23rd chief of the U.S. Army Nurse Corps, was working at the Pentagon when she heard a loud booming noise.

"I said, we've been hit. This is it," Horoho recounted in an interview published in the memoir "*Soldiers to the Rescue*: *The Medical Response to the Pentagon Attack*."

Moments before, she had watched the second plane strike the World Trade Center in New York City on television and immediately prepared herself for the worst.

Throughout the rest of that day, as she led efforts to provide medical relief to those injured in the attack on the Pentagon, Horoho said she was reminded of the inherent strength and character of her countrymen. Ten years later, she still holds vivid memories of that day.

"My belief in our country was re-enforced, as people pulled together in the midst of tragedy to do what needed to be done and to support one another," Horoho said. "I knew our world would probably never be the same; the attackers had tried to take away our freedom and everything it means to be an American. But, this is something others may not understand about Americans; despite all our differences we Americans will always unite in times like this."

While the fires raged and smoke filled the Pentagon, Horoho said she was proud to be part of a team of people helping to care for the injured.

"It was wonderful how quickly people pitched in and just started working. The response of medical people was tremendous. We had physicians from Walter Reed, Bethesda, all civilian hospitals in the area, as well as students from the Industrial College of the Armed Forces," she said.

Looking back, Horoho's intuition about the impact of that day has proven correct. The world has changed.

Within the military medical community there have been dramatic changes and developments in health care before, during and after combat.

"I would say, in almost every facet of health care we have learned lessons on and off the battlefield," Horoho said.

Horoho said huge strides have been made throughout the system, from readiness training and prevention to trauma and rehabilitation. Just as important, a diverse medical team including active duty, reserve and National Guard service members as well as civilians has worked in concert to constantly improve the quality of care provided to service members and their families worldwide, she said.

"When we say we will never leave a fallen comrade we really mean it," Horoho affirmed. "We learn something every day and we will always look for ways to improve."

Currently serving in Afghanistan, Horoho said she is surrounded by poignant reminders of the events of 9/11.

"Growing up in my military career I never thought I'd be in Afghanistan," she said. "Being here brings home memories of that day. To me this is an amazing opportunity to face so much evil and to turn it into tremendous good with all that is being accomplished in this country."

As she, alongside the rest of the nation, commemorates the 10th anniversary of the attacks on 9/11, Horoho said she remembers the day as one which brought out the very best of America.

She said she is exceedingly proud to be working alongside today's service members.

"Seeing so many young men and women fighting the hard fight to make a difference in the world is, for me, a very humbling opportunity," she said. "We could not be more proud of our medical team - reserves, guardsmen and civilians - who have shown such dedication to supporting our warfighters and their families. My hope is that this 9/11 we celebrate being Americans and our strength as a nation."

MCPON: Recruits keep the Navy moving

From Chief of Naval Personnel Public Affairs

WASHINGTON – In response to Sailors' questions Sept. 8, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy (SS/SW) Rick D. West emphasized the importance of maintaining a consistent flow of new recruits, even during a time of unprecedented retention.

"Our most junior Sailors provide the fleet with some of the most important and demanding work. Without their efforts, our Navy would find it difficult to start the engines, navigate our ships, or launch and recover aircraft," said West. "High retention has resulted in fewer advancements and an imbalanced force, but stopping the flow of new recruits is not the answer, and would very likely create a talent gap that could cause problems for decades."

High retention altered the shape of the force, which led to some rates becoming critically overmanned, while leaving others undermanned. With many Sailors deciding to stay in uniform, normal career progression within these rates is slowed and in a few cases halted.

"Navy promotes to vacancy. To give Sailors in these overmanned ratings the opportunity to advance and grow professionally, leadership has been resolute in providing a focused and transparent method to relieve this pressure in a controlled manner that properly balances seniority and experience," said West. "The ERB (Enlisted Retention Board) was determined to be the best way to accomplish this."

Some concerned Sailors may have been pointing to the ERB as a reason to slow or stop recruiting. Although this proposed solution could get Navy within its congressionally mandated end-strength numbers, it would not alleviate the current overmanning in the mid and senior enlisted grades, and could further slow career progression by not providing trained Sailors to relieve them.

"Without new recruits, there will be no one to replace you when you get advanced," said West. "It's vital that we keep the 'seedcorn' of new recruits coming into the Navy or we won't have the force we need to meet future challenges."

Navy needs more than 34,000 highly qualified active enlisted applicants each year. These Sailors fill important roles throughout the fleet, while allowing our current Sailors to progress into positions of greater authority and responsibility. A reduction in new accessions would create hardships for the fleet, shifting their workload to more senior petty officers, and adding additional pressure to career progression in future years.

Since job opportunities are based on the needs of the Navy, the career fields that are the most challenging to fill include medical, nuclear power, and special warfare. For more information about joining America's Navy, visit Navy.com. From this website, you can refer potential Sailors to a local Navy recruiter by clicking on "Find a Recruiter."

To read more from the MCPON, visit www.navy.mil/mcpon or his Facebook page at www.facebook.com/mcpon.