Back to school

By Lt. Cmdr. Douglas Vrieland

Summer is rapidly winding down and back to school season is here. Parents are excited and the kids, with perhaps the exception of kindergarteners, are wishing for another month or two of summertime freedom. Soon the heat will break and summer 2011 will be nothing more than a memory.

Back to school season is a great time for each one of us to pause and reflect on what we are doing to further our own personal development, learning, and education.

Too many of us continue to operate with the outdated idea that our learning stops when we get a high school or college diploma. In our rapidly changing society with an unemployment rate stubbornly sitting at around 9%, success often means constantly upgrading and learning new skills.

Those who don't keep learning find themselves increasingly becoming outdated and irrelevant.

I've seen this in my own life. When I attended college and graduate school, we never used the word computer. Computers were large machines that had main-frames that took up a whole room somewhere, and required IBM punch cards to use. Why would someone going into the ministry need such a thing? Obviously times have changed. Not only do we have computers, but we also have i-pads, i-phones, kindles and numerous other electronic gadgets. These and other technological advances have completely changed the way people in my profession do business.

The same can be said for any career. To keep current I've had to keep learning.

But, keeping current is only one reason to continue education. Learning has the additional benefit of helping us grow and develop. Our lives become richer and our perspective becomes broader with learning. Education and learning is a key tool to help us develop our full potential.

So what are your learning plans for this coming year? Have you set any goals for furthering your education over this coming school year? You might decide to set a learning goal related to your job: getting a warfare pin, studying for the next advancement exam, attending a school in your rate. Or you might decide to go to Navy Campus and enroll in a course or two that will help you earn a degree. Or maybe you want to learn something just for fun. Take a course in Japanese, cooking, or photography through MWR. Learn how to play a musical instrument. Take a correspondence course in the Bible.

What plans do you have to advance your own education and learning this coming school year?

Carry each others' burdens

By Capt. John Swanson, Commander Navy Region Japan Chaplain

As I write this meditation, heartbreaking news from Afghanistan is airing on the news networks.

The Navy confirmed that 22 SEALS from the highly secret and celebrated SEAL Team 6 and eight other U.S. service members died when a CH-47 Chinook crashed in the restive Wardak province early Saturday morning.

It was the single largest loss of life for U.S. troops since the Afghan war began in late 2001.

They were part of a "quick reaction" force sent to assist members of the 75th Army Ranger Regiment pinned down by enemy fire in a fierce firefight.

Insurgents are believed to have shot down the helicopter. The Taliban claimed militants downed the helicopter with a rocket-propelled grenade.

The entire Naval Special Warfare (NSW) community is grieving the loss of their Teammates, and families are grieving the loss of their loved ones.

We grieve with them and our thoughts and prayers go out to all those who have been impacted by this terrible loss of life.

Unseen by most Americans, those men in uniform answered the call to defend our freedom.

Their training to become Navy SEALS is arguably the most difficult training pipeline within our armed services.

Their service to defend our nation was in a hostile, rugged, unforgiving country that most Americans can't even find on a map, but they were glad to do it because they loved our country and desired nothing more than preserving freedom for their families and all of us here at home.

While we never know when tragedy will strike, we can support one another during those times. We can carry each other's burdens, as the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christian community at Galatia (modern day Turkey).

On the news is this day is also video of the chaos raging on the streets of England. Unemployment, discontent, social unrest, and a general lack of respect and civility have erupted into a firestorm of looting, killing, burning, and destruction.

Instead of caring for one another, many are selfishly doing whatever is in their own best interest.

We are called to a higher purpose than that. We were created to glorify God. How we glorify God in part consists in caring for one another. Look around you. Is your neighbor in need of someone who cares? Care for your neighbor. Show compassion to those who are suffering.

Life is not about "what's in it for me". Life is about coming together and supporting one another, especially during tough times. Look at SEAL Team 6 and the NSW community.

That's what it means to carry each other's burdens.

The editor asks

***Did you know,* on this day in naval history,** Aug. 26 1775**,** Rhode Island delegated to Continental Congress press for creation of Continental Navy to protect the colonies? A little less than two months later, Oct. 13, congress voted on legislation to fit out two sailing vessels and hence, gave way to the first Continental Navy.

1839 - U.S. Brig Washington seizes Spanish slaver, Amistad near Montauk Point, NY. According to history.navy.mil, U.S. brig Washington was one of a number of vessels employed by the navy to survey and map the coasts and harbors of the United States for the Coast Survey. The brig Washington was transferred to the Coast Survey on 23 April 1840, but was called back to naval service during the Mexican War. The vessel was stationed at New Orleans at the outbreak of the Civil War and was taken over by Louisiana authorities. No more is known of her subsequent service.

1861 - During the Civil War, Union amphibious force lands near Hatteras, NC to help the attack on of Forts Hatteras and Clark. Union forces secured Hatteras Inlet with the capture of Forts Hatteras and Clark on 29 August 1861.

1865 - Civil War ends with a Naval strength over 58,500 men and 600 ships.