Dads from a distance

By Chaplain Allen Vaughan

It is likely you have seen the commercial on AFN television, featuring President Obama speaking about fatherhood. In this commercial he says, "To be a great dad is the most important job in a man's life." And then he adds, "The smallest moments can have the biggest impact on a child's life."

I can certainly relate to these statements made by our Commander in Chief. I have two sons of my own, and recently spent one year away from them while on sea duty in the Middle East.

For the most part, it was a positive experience for our boys, but it was not without its challenges. However, I will probably always feel as though I missed out on an important portion of their childhood because I was gone for that year.

In our current state of operational readiness, especially as part of the forward deployed Naval forces in Japan, how do we consistently find those little moments to spend with our children?

I read a story about a father who gave his son a gift on his birthday, which was a box with 365 pieces of paper in it. And on each piece of paper was written, "This coupon is worth one hour of my time. You may use the hour in whatever manner you choose."

Now, some of you who are reading this might be saying, "One hour a day isn't nearly enough time to devote to a child!" On the other hand, some of you might ask, "Where can I find a whole hour each day that isn't already filled with some other commitments?"

Many of us, who are fathers in the Navy, have to learn how to be dads from a distance out of necessity, especially during long deployments.

However, that doesn't mean we should be distant dads, even when we are coming home every evening. It is as important for fathers to be engaged in the lives of their children, as it is for mothers.

Limiting the use of television, computer, and video games is not only a good idea for the kids. I've seen plenty of grown men use these same devices as an escape from the stresses of work, and end up escaping from their families, as well.

I know fathers are very busy. And, if we are not bringing work home, then we might be tempted to flop down in front of the TV or computer and just "chill out" or relax as soon as we come through our front door.

Yes, we have stressful days and we need time to decompress after we get home, but make sure that your time to "chill out" is not at the expense of time spent with your children.

I encourage you to go to the following web site (http://www.childwelfare.gov/), and enter "dads at a distance" into the "search" function at the top of the web page. You will find a number of articles and helpful suggestions about improving your "fatherhood" skills, both at home and during deployments.

May you be the type of father for whom distance is not a problem. Happy Fathers Day!

DESRON 15 recognizes award-winning ships

By MC3 Andrew Ryan Smith, Navy Public Affairs Support Element Japan

The commodore of Destroyer Squadron (DESRON) 15 presented three prestigious awards to forward-deployed ships under his command June 11 in Yokosuka, Japan.

Capt. William Wagner, DESRON 15, commodore, presented the Battle "E" award to *USS Lassen* (DDG 82) and *USS Fitzgerald* (DDG 62)

USS Stethem (DDG 63) was presented the Bloodhound Award for outstanding anti-submarine warfare (ASW) readiness.

The Battle "E" is awarded annually to ships, submarines, aviation squadrons and other units that present the maximum condition of departmental readiness in their group and outstanding capability to perform their wartime tasks. The award recognizes sustained superior performance of the crew in six categories: maritime warfare, engineering and survivability, command and control communications and information warfare, logistics management, safety and efficiency excellence.

Wagner presented Battle "E" plaques to representatives of the award-winning ships.

"I felt it was important for a crew member to accept the award, not the captain, because the crew earned it with their hard work, and I wanted them to receive the plaque," said Wagner. "The Sailors of DESRON 15 are some of the hardest working in the fleet and they earn the admiration of their chain of command on a daily basis."

Accepting the Battle "E" plaque on behalf of Fitzgerald was DESRON 15 Blue Jacket of the Quarter, Quartermaster Seaman Leon Williams, who received the plaque while attending a command function.

"It was an honor to accept this award on behalf of the crew," said Williams. "We all did our part in keeping the ship ready for everything."

Accepting the award on behalf of Lassen was DESRON 15 Sailor of the Year, Operations Specialist 1st Class (SW) Joshua Eddy.

"It's a great honor for us to receive this," said Eddy. "I can't think of another crew on the waterfront that is more deserving of this award."

Representatives of Stethem's weapons department accepted the Bloodhound Award for excellence in ASW.

"This award is the culmination of a whole year of ASW performance and readiness," said Lt. j.g. Jonathan Breed, the ship's ASW officer. "Even though it was presented to the weapons department, the whole ship did their part to maintain readiness."

Support to Navy spouses topic of latest Family Gram

By Commander, Navy Installations Command Public Affairs

Educational and information resources, as well as support information for spouses are the subject of the latest "Family Gram," NAVADMIN 195/10 released June 2.

Navy spouses, often called the Navy's unsung heroes, endure frequent moves to unknown towns, long deployments and wartime fears.

The Navy provides an array of programs and resources to prepare spouses and family members to meet the unique challenges of military life.

Spouses who are new to the Navy, far from home or starting a new chapter in their life, may be unsure about what support is available or how to take advantage of it.

"Just call your nearest Fleet and Family Support Center," Kathy Turner, a program analyst at Commander, Navy Installations Command (CNIC), said. "Even if you're too far from a base to come in, just call. The staff will be happy to answer your questions. In fact, when you're sure that there's no help available, that's a good time to call us. We'll get you headed in the right direction."

The Navy's goal is for spouses to be resilient, well-informed and adaptable to the Navy environment.

CNIC helps spouses reach this goal with its Child and Youth Program, Ombudsman Program and Fleet and Family Support Centers (FFSCs).

FFSCs assist military spouses in obtaining employment and maintaining a career.

They teach personal financial management, with topics ranging from car and home buying to the financial impact of deployments.

They provide guidance on making permanent change of station moves, helping a family learn about their new duty station, the cost of living, availability of housing, even the cultural changes they will encounter.

FFSCs also offer clinical counseling and classes on a variety of topics, including anger management, stress management and couples communication.

"A spouse may have effectively dealt with anger, sadness or stress when they lived in a familiar town with family and friends they have known their whole life," Turner said. "But, leaving this personal support system may be stressful and require adjustment. Fleet and Family Support Centers offer life skills classes and services that show how to adjust and even thrive in these situations."

Short-term clinical counseling helps Sailors and families obtain the tools necessary to cope with the challenges of daily living.

The courses and the counseling are free. People are welcome to come in anytime, without an appointment or a referral from the command.

For children and youth ages four weeks to 18 years, the Navy's Child and Youth Programs provide high quality educational and recreational programs.

Teams of caring, knowledgeable professionals provide developmentally appropriate programs that respond to the unique needs, abilities, and interests of children.

"Military children face more than the usual challenges of growing up, such as moving every few years and establishing new friendships, while worrying about family members who have been deployed," Chuck Clymer, of the Navy's Child and Youth Programs, said. "We provide children and families with trusted programs and services that assist in coping with these challenges, making the difference between stress and success."

Child development homes offer quality care in a loving, learning home environment for children ages 4 weeks to 12 years.

The flexible hours, 24/7 care, low child-to-adult ratios and convenient locations make this a viable option for families whose "normal" workday is anything but normal.

School-age care programs provide quality before and after-school programs and camps for children ages six to 12 years in 86 centers worldwide.

Youth and teen programs offer developmental and recreational programs that provide a safe place to learn and grow.

The Navy's Family Ombudsmen are Navy spouses who volunteer to serve as a vital two-way communication link between the command and Navy families.

They offer support and guidance to families in their role as the official liaison between the command and its families.

When families respond to the challenges of deployments, natural disasters or family emergencies, ombudsmen are there to provide guidance and to help them regain a sense of normalcy.

Ombudsmen help families find the answers to their questions, promoting their resiliency and self reliance.

Ombudsmen serve families of Active duty and Reservists, whether they deploy as a unit or as an individual augmentee; whether they live right on a base or hundreds of miles from any base.

"They serve with a genuine desire to help," Kathy Rock, manager of the Navy Family Ombudsman Program, said. "These are extraordinary times for spouses. Whether it is for surge or individual augmentee deployments, or even natural disasters, ombudsmen keep the information moving."