

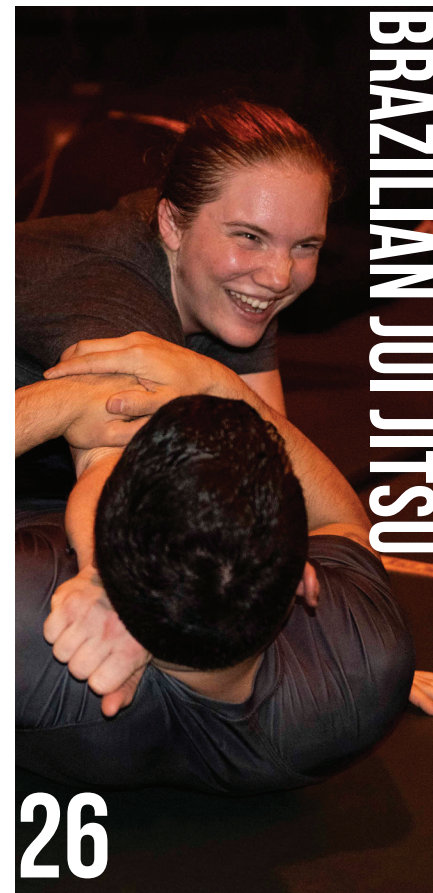
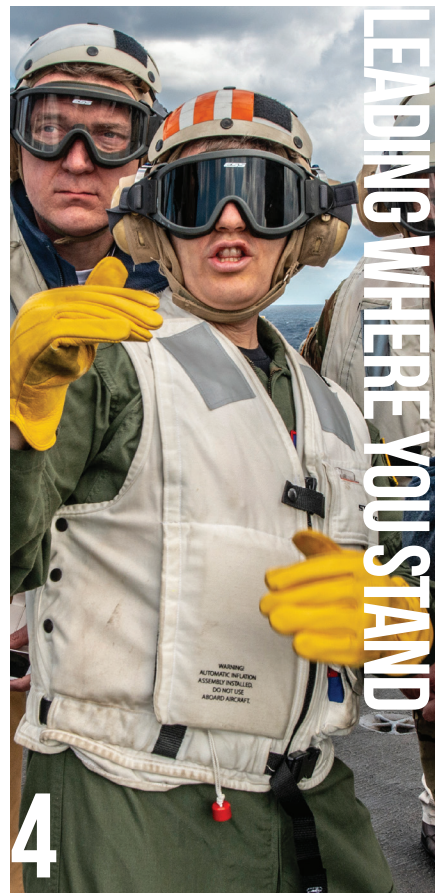
USS RONALD REAGAN

August 2019

SEVENTYSIX



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LEADING WHERE YOU STAND

BY MC3 JASON TARLETON

Mowing lawns all summer and selling \$1,500 in candy blow pops may not have been the easiest way to spend his summer, but it afforded a 13-year-old Dave Pollard the opportunity to attend his Boy Scouts trip from Corpus Christi, Texas, all the way to Maine and unknowingly visit the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. Thirty-two years later, Pollard is the executive officer of the Navy's only forward-deployed aircraft carrier, USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76).

The same work ethic that drove a young boy to save his money for a Boy Scouts trip still drives Pollard today in leading 4,375 Sailors to embrace and embody a concept he calls "servant leadership".

Servant leadership is a concept that was developed by Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970 describing a style of leadership requiring leaders of any entity to be in service to those under his or her leadership.

"To be first, you have to be willing to be last," said Pollard. "You have to be able to put the whole organization if front of you. You have to consider the whole people and not just the parts, planes and ships that make it up. If you think about an organization like a pyramid where the leader is at the top, you would have to flip that pyramid upside down to really know what servant leadership is."

To understand how Pollard cultivated this servant leadership concept, it's helpful to know a little



"When I consider my position here as XO it's an honor," said Pollard.



bit about his background.

Pollard is a 1996 graduate of the Naval Academy with a Bachelor's Degree of Science in Systems Engineering. He flew operationally with Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 34 as a junior officer, VFA 136 as a training officer, VFA 192 as a department head and VFA 195 as an executive officer then commanding officer.

One of the things Pollard attributes to his success in the Navy is consistently educating himself. "We have to be lifetime learners," said Pollard. "If we're not, we culminate, and we'll never reach our full potential. If there's something you want to be good at, you have to read books about it; you have to study it. The only difference between yourself today and yourself

"The only difference between yourself today and yourself five years from now is the company you keep and the books you read."

five years from now is the company you keep and the books you read." According to Pollard, one of the most constructive ways people can learn is through their failures. "I've never been the strongest, fastest, or smartest, but there's one quality that has always given me an edge," said Pollard. "I'm always willing to work really hard and persevere toward the things I want. I'm not afraid to fail. I fail fast, early and often. How do I react to that? I learn from it, and I don't fail the same way. Perseverance is probably one of the best tools in your arsenal in the face of adversity." By his first shore duty tour, Pollard had already found success in his Naval career and he loved his job but he knew he had to plan for a future without the Navy too. "I knew that I needed to work every day like I was going to stay in for the

rest of my life, but plan every day like I was getting out," said Pollard. "If I plan every day like I'm getting out, that means I need to continue to educate myself, save money, and take everything that I have in the Navy and figure out how I apply that to the civilian sector." Pollard went on to pursue a Master's degree in organizational leadership at Regent University. "They had this program that was about change management, executive coaching, the study of leadership and how to enter giant global organizations and affect culture and produce change. I just thought that was amazing. I was going to school with people from the U.S., South Africa, Europe, Singapore, Japan, and a couple of people from South America. It was fascinating." During his studies in leadership, Pollard also learned about the concept of thoughtful journaling. "One of the things they made me do at Regent was journaling. The reason they made me start journaling goes back to our founding fathers. They



journalled everything, so I started journaling too. It was incredibly difficult in the beginning, but in the end, it was life changing. Pollard said journaling allows people to organize and categorize their thoughts. From a leadership position, Sailors can use journaling to help solve any problem they're presented with. "In life, you must be purposeful and intentional with everything you do. In order to be purposeful and act with intent, you have to value time. Don't wait until you need a friend to make one, and don't wait until you have a problem to think about it. That journaling concept; thinking ahead and lining out all these ideas really makes a difference. When you're pressed for time, or someone is hurting, and you need to make that split-second decision, you already have to know what you want to do. That concept might sound strange, weird or difficult, but it's not. You just have to think about it." To live with intent and purpose, Pollard says Sailors must first find

within themselves what it is they stand for. "What's your vision? What do you believe in? What do you stand for? You have to know that, because if you don't, you're just traveling on a winding path ultimately leading you away from your real potential. Once you know what you believe in and stand for, your road begins to straighten out." When Sailors educate themselves, they not only advance in their Naval careers, but make themselves more professionally dynamic in the civilian sector. Pollard found a deeper appreciation for the Navy while getting his education. When Sailors embrace their roles as leaders by serving those they work with, Pollard says it promotes growth in your personal and professional lives, and it grows the organization as a whole.

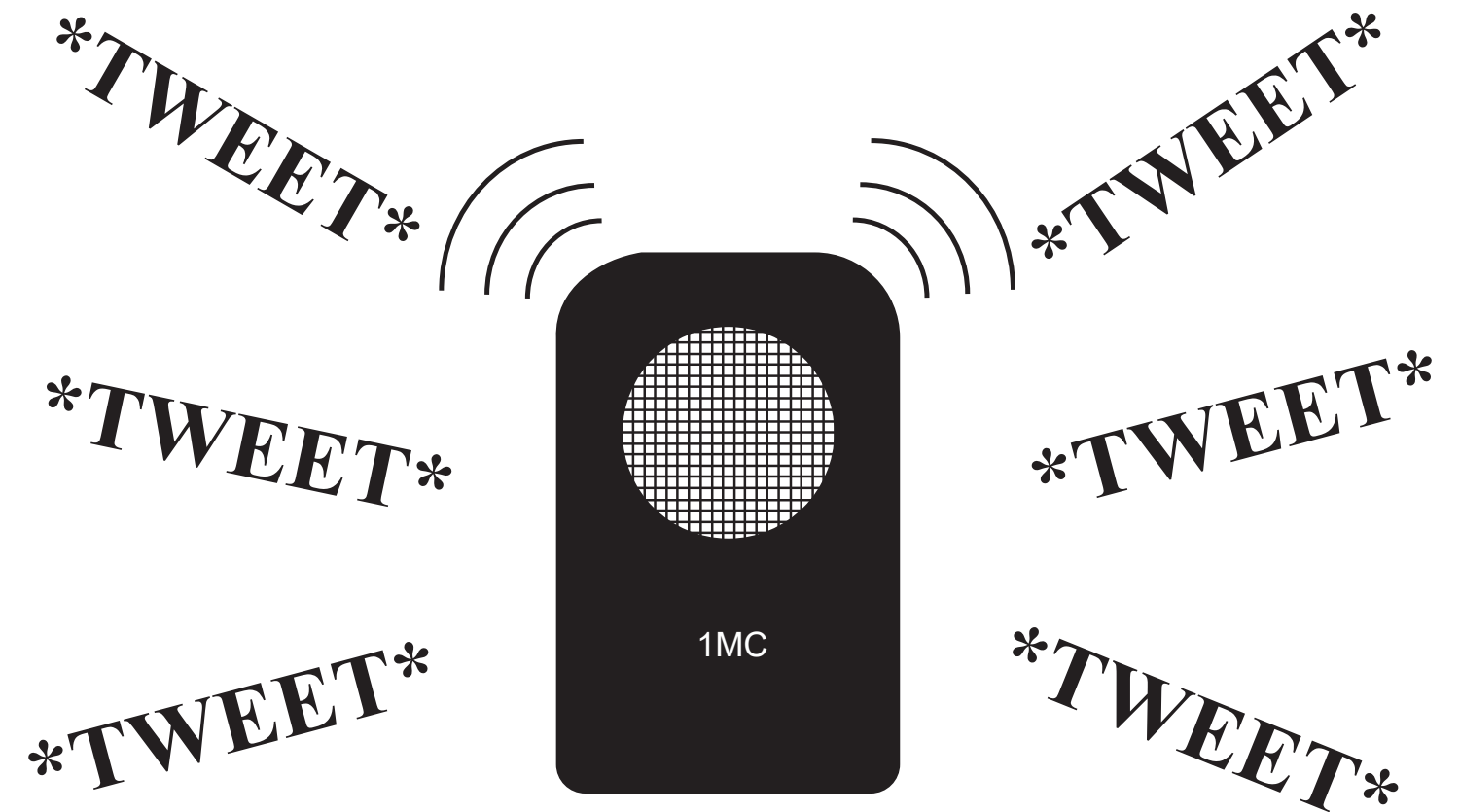
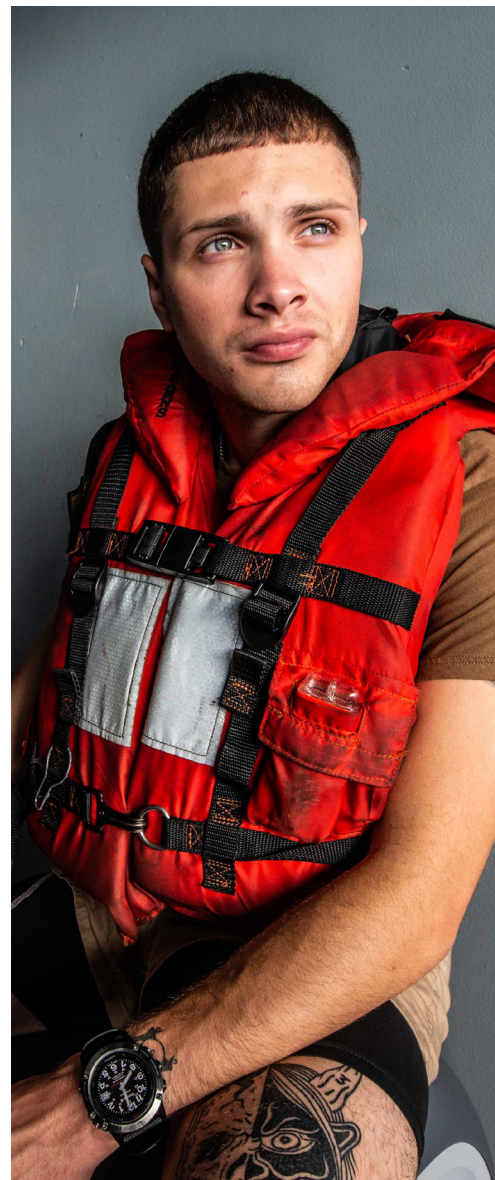
"In life, you must be purposeful and intentional with everything you do."

Whether Sailors plan to lead within the Navy, or as a civilian, Pollard says our mission is a worthy cause to embrace regardless. "We are making a difference and shaping the world for our children and future. Be proud of what we do!" "When I consider my position here as XO it's an honor," said Pollard. "Not only is it an honor, but it's humbling because I'm entrusted to ensure that a culture is developed that allows all of our Sailors aboard Reagan reach their maximum potential. We have a calling, and we're an elite group that represents the best of America. We represent the Constitution of the United States of America; everything that it true and right. We stand for freedom and justice. We have to be proud of that."

SAR SEARCH AND RESCUE

USS Ronald Reagan's SAR Swimmers

By MC2 Tyra M. Campbell



“Man overboard, man overboard! Man Overboard port side! Man the Ready Lifeboat. All hands to muster. Transit routes are starboard side up and forward, port side down and aft!”

Most Sailors hop out of their racks, leave their hot plate of chow on the mess decks, or drop whatever work they are doing in order to promptly make their way to their designated mustering location.

But, for the three Navy surface search and rescue (SAR) swimmers aboard the Navy's forward-deployed aircraft carrier, USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76), it can mean saving a life.

“When I hear those whistles, I'm thinking, ‘it's time to actually go to work,’” said Boatswain's Mate 3rd Class Richard Zayas, from Chicago, one of Reagan's three SAR swimmers. “All the training kicks in at that moment.”

Qualified SAR swimmers must attend one of the Rescue Swimmer School (RSS) in either Jacksonville, Florida or San Diego. RSS is a four-week course that provides rigorous training on lifesaving procedures and how to use necessary lifesaving equipment in case of an emergency. The school significantly contributes

to fleet readiness providing qualified rescue swimmers to the fleet. Each Navy ship is required to have two qualified rescue swimmers aboard before it can pull away from the pier – so the graduates are considered “mission essential.”

Candidates undergo multiple screening processes and prerequisites to ensure they are prepared before being able to attend RSS.

“Surprisingly, there is a lot of paperwork that goes along with the preparation aspect of the course,” said Aviation Boatswain's Mate Airman Giancarlo Marquez, from San Juan, Puerto Rico. Marquez is the newest addition to the ship's SAR trio. “The paperwork and the medical screenings was the most vigorous part of the preparation process to me.”

SAR candidates must also attend training at least twice a week at the base swimming pool with Afloat Training Group (ATG) specialists before being able to attend RSS. They are evaluated on their performance and must successfully pass two physical screening tests (PSTs). PSTs include push-ups, sit-ups, pull-ups, a 1.5 mile run and a 500-yard swim.

“Performing the PST for the first

time is generally a challenge for most SAR candidates,” said Personnel Specialist 2nd Class Nathaniel Phelps, from Stockton, Virginia. Phelps is the third and final member of the Reagan's SAR team. “With the repetition that comes with all that training that end up doing to prepare for the school, the physical tests become considerably easier.”

Not only do candidates attempting to go to RSS have to meet the PST standards, but they must compete against the other Sailors in their command to earn a spot in the class.

“Everything we do is competitive,” said Zayas. “You and your boy might workout together all the time, but at the end of the day, they could be your biggest competition getting selected for school.”

A regular day at RSS starts with an early morning reveille for physical training (PT) at 0500 followed by a 5K run around base that ends at the school house where candidates will get classroom training.

“A lot of candidates arrive prepared physically, but forget how important the classroom portion of the course is,” said Marquez. “It's challenging retaining all of the

information, but the instructors there make it bearable.”

In the classroom candidates learn about emergency patient care and talk out the different scenarios they will be later performing in the pool that day.

Following classroom training is lunch time for the students. Zayas explained the importance of eating a balanced meal in order to adequately prepare for training.

“At chow time, we tend to eat more protein and carbohydrates to keep our energy up, and throughout the day, we have to drink a ton of water to remain hydrated.”

Rescue swimmers must be fully-qualified in CPR and able to evaluate victims and provide first aid treatment. They are trained to perform in multiple different scenarios including rescue or recovering someone entangled in aviation gear out of the water.

“Most of the instruction goes on in the pool,” said Phelps.

Each scenario is graded. The instructors will debrief each student and reinforce what went right and what needs improvement, and then assign a grade of one to four, with one being the highest.

RSS focuses on a Sailor’s ability to swim for extended periods of time and save a survivor. It requires both endurance and sprint swimming. Candidates must accomplish a 550-yard swim, followed immediately with a 440-yard buddy swim in which they drag a simulated dead-weight survivor on their side.

“It requires a lot of physicality. That’s why each day begins with two hours of standard military physical training,” said Phelps.

SAR swimmers are expected to perform according to instruction efficiently. Rough water and low temperatures can sap a swimmer of his or her energy in a real-life situation.

“We build knowledge and skills,” said Zayas. “The final exam is composed of scenarios from our four weeks of training but with a few more distractions thrown in, such as bigger splashes and some fog rolling in over the pool. Everything there is pass or fail. There is no middle ground.”



Sailor in the Spotlight IS2 SARA MULLEN

by MC3 Gabriel Martinez

What's your main reason for joining the Navy?
I wanted to grow professionally and personally while diversifying my life and work experiences.

What are some things that the Navy has taught you?
Patience.

What are your career goals?
I want to learn as much as I can from the Navy and take those skills and continue to support the intelligence community after my enlistment.





Describe your rate?
As an Intelligence Specialist, I process raw information to create reliable intelligence that helps Commanders make operational decisions.

What are you most excited about for when we get back to Yokosuka?
To Reconnect with family and Ramen.



What do you love most about your rate?
Being able to see the start to finish result of military planning.

What place would you most like to visit in Japan?
Universal (Harry Potter World) in Osaka, Kyoto and Mt. Fuji.



What's your favorite thing about the ship?
Waffles and Ice cream on Sundays

Next stop for you after the Reagan?
Shore Command, hopefully somewhere sunny and bright



Happy Snaps



Descent Down Under: Remembering USS Lexington and the Battle of the Coral Sea

Story by MC2 Tyra M. Campbell

On May 7, 1942, black ominous clouds filled the sky, threatening rain as two nations entered the fray.

Deep in the blue Coral Sea brew a battle to be.

USS Lexington (CV-2), one of the Navy's first two aircraft carriers, sailed into action — poised to defend freedom and forever be remembered in history.

Capable, with virtue and swagger, the vessel basked in bright radiance, for She too would blitz in as the battle begins.

The Battle of the Coral Sea was an array of Naval engagements off the northeast coast of Australia fought during WWII by the allied United States and Australian forces against the Imperial Japanese Navy in efforts to stop Japan's continued expansion and control of the Pacific Ocean.

Naval guns set ablaze,
while wooden decks burned in a craze.

The air swallowed within billowing smoke,
but the spirit of men never broke.

The Lexington's aircraft took part in the sinking and raiding of three Japanese aircraft carriers. Japanese torpedo bombers zeroed in on her and hit her twice. Dive bombers swooped in and added an additional two direct hits upon her structure, jamming her elevators in the raised position. The direct hits caused internal gas leaks that ignited, generating fires that ultimately proved beyond the capabilities of damage control crews to contain after four hours of effort.

Skies raged of igniting thunder
as planes cease and dive asunder.

Many tread helplessly in the water,
while the course of others never falters.

The Mighty, mighty Lexington, in all her glory
at Battle's end, closed her story.

Two explosions triggered massive debris,
Solemn, her descent down under the sea.
Once the decision was made to abandon

Lexington, her crew responded efficiently.

Meanwhile, the fires below continued to eat their way through the ship. As the abandonment of the Lexington was finishing, a large explosion tore through her hangar amidships. New fires were ignited as stationary torpedo warheads detonated after the carrier's Commanding Officer, Captain Frederick C. Sherman, left her. In keeping with the rules of the sea, he was the last man to abandon ship. The carrier burned furiously, shrouded in smoke almost from bow to stern. She was finally scuttled by destroyer torpedoes and sank that evening.

Slowly her crew debarks and grieves,
with sea customs intact, the Captain last to leave.
Slowly, she sank to the bottom of the ocean,
Spirits were low, high was emotion.
Amidst the aching vessel bending,
her decks and passageways began rescinding.
Slowly she drops into the deep,
becoming a landmark of sunken heap.

The Lexington went down with 35 aircraft aboard
and 216 out of 2,770 crew members died in battle.

They all fought, brave and true,
To end the war, through and through.

America's flagship salutes all of you.

Today, men and women filed into ranks, silently,
with heads held high to pay homage to the crew of
the USS Lexington.

They stood on the shoulders of giants, brave and free.
Beneath their keel laid heroes of the sea.

Sailors aboard the Navy's forward-deployed
aircraft carrier, USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76)
held the first ever wreath-laying ceremony in
commemoration of the Battle of the Coral Sea
a year after the wreckage of the USS Lexington
(CV-2) was discovered.

The ceremony was held at coordinates
15°11'59"S 155°26'58"E in recognition of the site



where Lexington sank.

Cmdr. Jennifer Bowden, Ronald Reagan's chaplain, said the Battle of the Coral Sea Commemorative Association invited representatives from Ronald Reagan to meet families connected to the battle during a recent port visit to Brisbane, Australia, for Talisman Sabre 2019. The association presented Ronald Reagan's crew with the wreath used during the ceremony. "It's really to commemorate the efforts of the U.S. to protect Australia because they still find great value in what we did."

This ceremony marks the 77th anniversary of the battle and is the first time in history a wreath was laid at the exact site of Lexington.

The ceremony hit home for a few Sailors of Ronald Reagan's crew, including Lt.

Nicholas Fessler, Ronald Reagan's assistant security officer.

Fessler's great-grandfather, Chief Petty Officer Paul Mueleveld was a survivor from Lexington's crew that was awarded a U.S. Navy Marine Corps Medal with a citation from the President of the United States for saving five of his shipmates' lives during the engagement and carrying each of their bodies from a fire poised to swallow all of them whole.

"Being able to navigate directly over the top of the USS Lexington, taking that moment of silence, puts in to perspective what was below us. Just imagining the potential challenges they were facing that day—it was extremely humbling," said Fessler.

Fessler also expressed his surprise when he realized just how important the Battle of the Coral Sea was for Australians then and now.

"You know about it from a Naval history standpoint but you really don't know what it means to the country of Australia and the significance our role in the Battle of the Coral Sea played in ensuring their freedom and securities as well," said Fessler.

The Ronald Reagan's strike group recently completed Talisman Sabre 2019. The purpose of Talisman Sabre is to strengthen and illustrate Australian-U.S. combat readiness and interoperability, maximize combined training opportunities, and conduct maritime pre-positioning and logistics operations in maritime and littoral training areas of the Pacific.



*The Mighty, mighty **Lexington**,
in all her **glory** at Battle's end,
closed her **story**.*





Three Hundred and Ninety-Two Days

By MC2 Janweb Lagazo

*For a moment, you pause.
Your heart races. Everything
around you is shaky.*

It hit me hard. Leg-sweep hard. It was one of those cliché moments: a near-death encounter I'm only supposed to experience sitting on a couch watching an action movie with surround sound blaring combined with the visceral stimulus hitting my corneas.

It happened October 2016 during a period of seven days. My last ship, guided-missile destroyer USS Mason (DDG 87), was charged with defending guided-missile destroyer USS Nitze (DDG 94), amphibious transport dock USS San Antonio (LPD 17), afloat forward staging base USS Ponce (AFSB 15), and other merchant ships steaming with us from land-based cruise missile attack. I was the helmsman for several of the attacks as we took evasive actions to place Mason between the missiles and the other ships.

"Left full rudder," shouted the conning officer. "Starboard engine ahead flank! Port engine back one-third!"

For a moment, you pause. Your heart races. Everything around you is shaky. You realize that it's your legs. No. It's coming from your toes. Wrong again. It's the ship. They tell you the ship is a shield. Every order, no matter how diluted with the curses of Sailors around you, is to be heard and followed with exactness. You falter. Then the order punches you in the face. You fumble the repeat back in your mind. Then your training kicks in. It jars you into action. You shoot the repeat backs out fast and clear. The ship shudders. It veers to the ordered course. Then you realize what you've done. You put yourself and all your friends in the way of hostile fire.

You'll vividly remember the smells and sounds of those moments. There's the suffocating smoke from Aegis launchers smothering Sailors running from the missile decks. The screeching of metal as countermeasures launched and the force jolted the space around you. The black ash-like particles covered the bridge wing creating a bizarre transition to dusk. Explosions — too close for comfort. Every second is a flood of detail. Your needless excitement complicated those moments. It was a rush and the crash was inevitable.

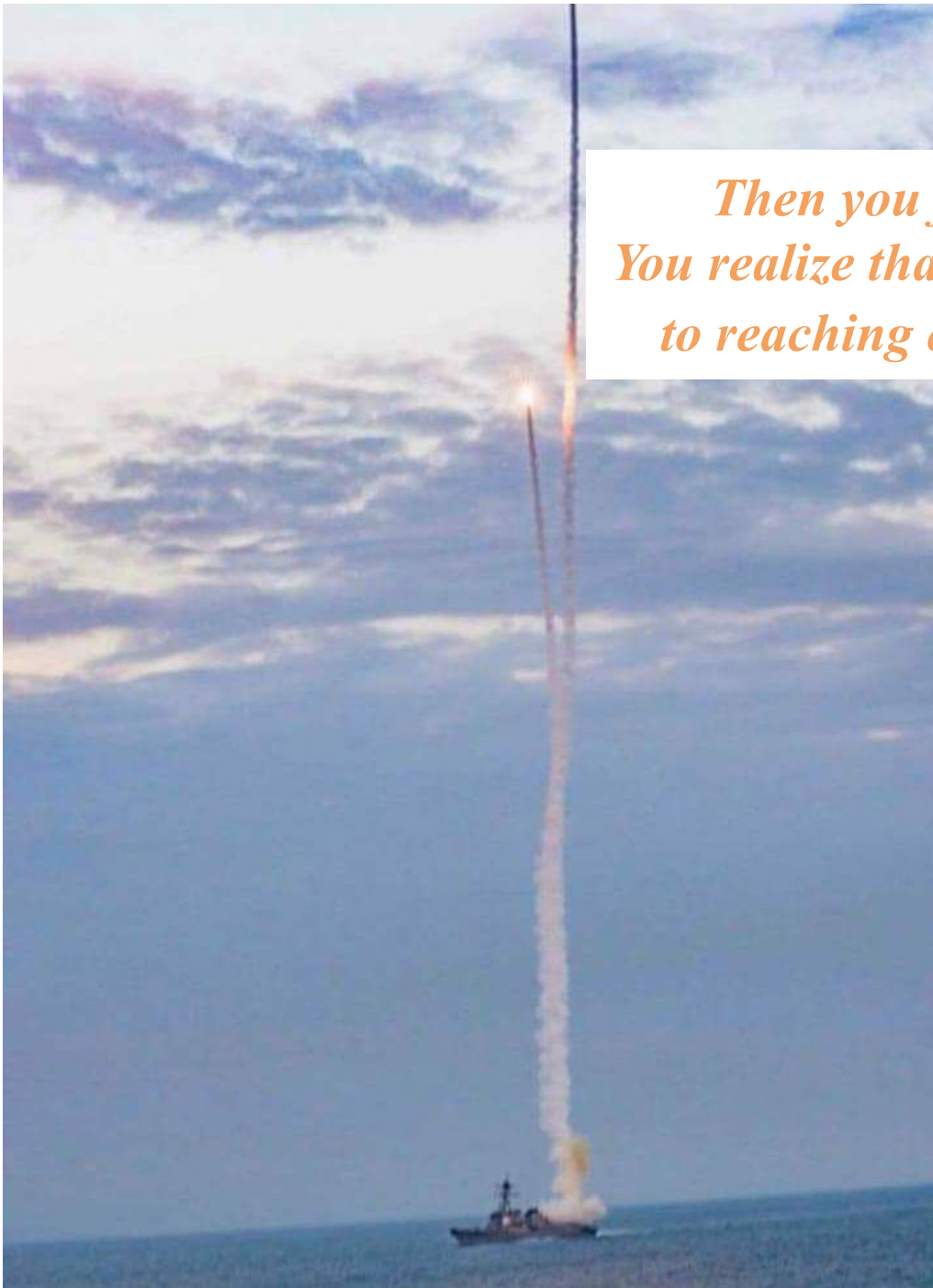
After 210 days on a deployment, now wearing a combat action ribbon, I found myself with my family for 90 days to enjoy the New Year's holiday and catch up on missed time.

Those days were the hardest of my life.

It was all because of me.

Think about that for a second.

The day after coming home, your two-year-old daughter



*Then you find light.
You realize that there's value
to reaching out for help.*

problems stops you from expressing what you felt. You fill your daily life with menial tasks; convincing yourself they were neglected while you were

away. The adjustment was just not happening. You are in self-inflicted exile — your body

was home but your heart and mind were elsewhere.

“That hyper-vigilance after being in the moment when someone is trying to kill you and then coming home is very surreal,” said Lt. Jason Owen, a chaplain aboard Ronald Reagan and an Afghanistan combat veteran. “It’s like two different environments. You go from the ship, or mountain, or desert to home and all the sudden you’re surrounded by carpet, tiles, walls, paint, and kids. You don’t really hear children’s voices out at sea, in Afghanistan, or wherever people go.

“That vigilance over there is healthy because it keeps you alive and keeps your head on the swivel. It tells you there’s danger and you have to be courageous and focused to do your job.

“Coming home it’s hard to switch that off. While you’re happy to be home with your kids and family, there’s a part of you that’s longing to still be out there.”

After a brief 30 days, I was back to work and duty. The monotony and routine of work was bearable. I went to a training school in Maryland 60 days later. I spent another 90 days separated from my family before transferring to the Navy’s forward-deployed aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76). I had to learn new skills. Planning a military move while I was away from home brought its own anxieties. It complicated things. Made it difficult to focus on school, on training, and on keeping stable. It wasn’t my first military move but the stress was there.

Japan offered a more predictable schedule but my timing was off. The schedule forced me to leave my family again. Fifteen days after

arriving to Japan, I left for my first scheduled patrol in 2017. Three hundred and ninety-two days in the last two years and counting, I’ve been gone from my family.

I managed to create family in the Navy, when I’m underway, and, especially, during stressful times. It’s close but not the same.

Picture for an instant, that you have these delinquent thoughts: thoughts about losing yourself, thoughts about losing your family, and thoughts about losing everything you’ve worked hard for because of something you might do. You’d think these thoughts would eventually resolve themselves.

You become scared of what others might think of them. You talk to people — the right people. You bear your bare self. If left alone, you start drowning. You wallow in doubt. You stagger in the dark. You clutch for any measure of safety.

Then you find light.

You realize that there’s value to reaching out for help.

Returning home, transitioning back, I didn’t do very well the first time away or even the second time. I’m hoping the third time will be better.

I’m seeking the help I know I need.

“A lot of people come to me because they’re having problems and hard times adjusting to home, to being 18, to being overseas and having all these restrictions but you have to reach out for help,” said Xhosa Burford, a deployed resiliency counselor from Fleet and Family Services.

Burford told me service members should help themselves first, then they become better able to affect the environment and people around them. She said to treat it as if I’m a passenger on a crashing airplane. Should I put my oxygen mask on first or should I help my wife next to me? My instincts say my wife but I should fix myself first.

“Service members make mistakes all the time that they think they can never recover from,” said Burford, “but resiliency isn’t just about

strength. It’s about vulnerability and really embracing that to make yourself better.”

Sometimes, our weaknesses highlight our strengths. My vulnerabilities showed me where to focus my efforts — where I was broken and what I need to mend.

Resiliency is taking shape again. Picture I’m a plastic bottle.

Someone pours out all the liquid from me and crushes me.

I can never be the same again.

However, what if air was pumped into me and I was filled with liquid again — better stuff. I’m still a bottle. I may have dents but I still fulfill my purpose.

The process of reshaping that bottle and filling it again with a more nourishing beverage is resiliency. It’s not about avoiding the process but making it work for me.

It’s not easy letting someone into the deepest recesses of my mind but I had to for my sanity and my family.

*Three hundred and ninety-two
days and counting has never
been easy.*

“One important thing to remember when you’re coming back from deployment is expectation management,” said Lt. James Larsen, a Navy psychologist. “A lot of people come back from a deployment imagining that their life is going to be exactly like what it was before they left or with a specific picture of what they think life is going to be like when they get home. It’s really hard to have an accurate picture of what that’s going to be like. Your family changes, your friends change and your situation changes with each deployment.”

Larsen said most people come home from deployment to something different. Communication was the key for me. The chaplain, deployed resiliency counselor, and psychologist were all on the same page.

“It’s very important to talk openly with your family members, your

friends, or whoever your support network may be,” said Larsen. “It helps set mutual expectations so everyone is on the same page.”

I talked. I talked a lot. I talked to my wife. I talked to my kids. I talked a lot to people who knew what they were talking about — professionals. Communication unlocked the cage of emotion brewing inside me. It led to outlets and resources to express myself. I grew from that experience.

“Post-traumatic growth is the idea that when people go through a really difficult or traumatic situation, there may be some way for them to grow or learn from that experience,” said Larsen. “When we go through these really difficult stages in our life, like a deployment, as hard as it is to be away from family, as long as the hours are, as hard as the work is, or as burnt out as you may feel in the end, there are things you can learn about yourself in the end — your limits, your capabilities, and your ability to push yourself. That will benefit you for the rest of your life.”

I gravitated to that concept. It’s something I already believed in or knew. I just failed to apply it to my own life.

Sailors are resilient.

I recovered and learned from my experiences. I learned my family and friends should have been my first line of defense. They know me better than anyone else. I also know that the Navy has given me resources. Chaplains, deployed resiliency counselors, and the ship’s psychologist are within reach with offices on board. The Fleet and Family Support Center regularly hosts classes and trainings to help reintegrate with partners and children. They also teach about stress and time management and how to be a new parent.

All you need to do is ask.

Three hundred and ninety-two days and counting has never been easy. It never will be. This holiday will be different because I’m different — better at transitioning but by no means an expert. Three hundred and ninety-two days’ worth of growth will be made to good use.

approaches you banging her toy pots and pans — Christmas gifts. She innocently says “hi, Daddy” with that grin of hers.

Your adrenaline rushes to your head.

The bashing metal indents itself into your brain.

Emotion, unbridled and unwarranted, surfaces. You don’t know from where. It’s terrifying to control. You stop sleeping well that night. You stop sleeping well. Period.

Your newborn son cries — the lungs on that kid.

He was born on day 186 of the deployment.

You feel guilty. I suspect you will always feel guilty for that.

You try to comfort him. Take some of the burden from your wife. It never works. Abrupt anger and fast frustration became the norm. So you distance yourself.

During those days, my wife was the greatest support for me. We talked a lot about family and the future. We talked about the kids. We talked about what to eat. We talked about an impending transfer. We talked about things. It helped ease the inner brawls that played out in my mind.

The stigma of talking about your



BRAZILIAN JIU-JITSU

BY MC3 ERICA BECHARD

It's not uncommon to see Sailors in a chokehold in Hangar Bay 2. In fact, Aviation Ordnanceman 1st Class David Smith ensures it happens most nights of the week. He leads a Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu class four times per week.

Brazilian Jui-Jitsu, or BJJ, is a martial art that focuses mainly on ground fighting and grappling through submission techniques. Practitioners earn belts as they progress through the system, from white belt all the way up to black belt.

For Smith, BJJ is a lifestyle – one

he has practiced for the last 11 years and taught the last three. His passion for BJJ comes from the sport's structure and the philosophy. He applies these principles both on and off the mat.

"Jiu-jitsu is all about feel – how the other person moves, what their reaction is," Smith said. "It's multi-dimensional, nothing is linear. You go from one position to another, and you have time and space to get through in each of those positions."

Smith said jiu-jitsu is different from

other martial arts because of the grind.

"You put in the time and effort to earn a little three-inch piece of cloth that you tie around your waist, but you've committed several hours to it and it becomes addicting."

For BJJ newcomers, Smith recommends practicing with a "white belt" mentality.

"For my class, any time we step on the mat, rank doesn't mean anything," Smith said. "Newcomers — whatever military rank — should always be open to learning something new from others."

While some may think BJJ is only for men or that one needs to be big and strong to do it, the sport can be practiced by just about anyone.

"Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu was designed for the smaller, weaker opponent to survive in a life-threatening situation," Smith said. "Someone five-foot-two and 96 pounds could walk in the room and the second you get on the mat with them, they could be a shark and rip you apart."

For Aviation Electronics Technician 2nd Class William Heck, one of Smith's students, BJJ is more than just a fitness class. It's a lesson in learning patience and how to think outside the box.

"When I'm on the mat, a lot of the time I can't do the thing I want until the other person makes a mistake," Heck said. "I have to either wait them out or figure out a way to make them do what I want."

Heck has translated lessons learned in jiu-jitsu to his work center.

"I deal with all different kinds of personalities in my shop," Heck said. "I have to play it to my strength to get things done. Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu has helped me realize that if I wait for certain cues, I can get less resistance when tasking others."

Smith said practicing jiu-jitsu requires a lot of humility. Being humble and not afraid to ask questions and learn is key, just the same as in the work center – one walks in to learn something new or make the team better.

"Any time you step on the mat or in your work center, there are teachable moments to be had. The second you think you know everything is when you're going to get tapped out."

"You're going to be under pressure on the mat, where you have to think, react and move to get out of those

tight situations," Smith said. "A lot of jiu-jitsui translates directly into life - if you grind more and do something that sucks every day, life will get easier. If something falls apart, you're not going to fall apart. Jui-jitsui is life."

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Aviation Electrician's Mate 2nd Class Richard W. Roper, from Middleburg, Florida, troubleshoots communication capabilities on an F/A-18E Super Hornet assigned to Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 195 aboard the Navy's forward-deployed aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76). (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Tyra M. Campbell)



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