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A LETTER FROM THE COMMAND CHAPLAIN

HERE FOR YOUR *Support*

Your Religious Ministry Team is here to help and support you. Whether that is seeking to strengthen your spiritual readiness by increasing participation in a community of faith or pursuing meaning and purpose in your life, we are here to support you in that endeavor.

We are also here simply to listen. The weeks ahead will have its challenges and its difficulties. Sometimes it helps just to talk to someone, especially when it feels overwhelming. Chaplains and Religious Program Specialists are unique in that we have 100% confidentiality. We are not required to report anything and no notes are taken or recorded. So what does that mean? It means you always have a safe place to go and someone to listen. No matter how heavy the weight may seem, it can be lightened when shared with someone else. Let us help carry the load.

You can stop by CRMD or the USO to set up a time to meet. Your Religious Ministry Team is here to help and support you.

CMDR. CARL MUEHLER

LT. CMDR. TAKANA JEFFERSON

LT. BRADLEY LAWRENCE

LT. ABBY WILHELM

STAFF

COMMANDING OFFICER
Capt. Matthew Thomas

EXECUTIVE OFFICER
Capt. Ryan Mattson

COMMAND MASTER CHIEF
CMDCM Chaddrake Lavallais

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER
Lt. Cmdr. Devin Arneson

ASSISTANT
PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICERS
Lt. j.g. Kellie Kolnes
Lt. j.g. Jack Scypinski

SENIOR EDITORS
MCCS John Scorza
MC1 Marcus Stanley

EDITORS
MC2 Analice Baker
MC2 Claire Bennett

WINGSPAN CONTRIBUTORS
MC3 Nathan Jordan
MCSN Amber Rivette
MCSN Kenneth Ostas
MCSA Pablo Chavez
MCSA Christa Watson

COMMAND OMBUDSMAN
vinson.ombudsman7@gmail.com





FRCE marks 150th F-35 Induction

Fleet Readiness Center East (FRCE) marked a milestone in its support of the F-35 Lightning II program when the depot recently inducted and completed modifications on its 150th F-35 and returned the aircraft to the Fleet.

FRCE is the lead site for depot-level maintenance on the F-35B Lightning II and has conducted modifications and repair on the Marine Corps' short takeoff-vertical landing variant of the aircraft since 2013. The depot has also worked with the F-35A (conventional takeoff and landing) and F-35C (carrier) variants.

"The F-35 plays such a crucial role in our national defense," said FRCE Commanding Officer Capt. Randy Berti. "It is the next-generation strike aircraft weapon systems for the Navy, Air Force, Marines and our allies. It gives our warfighters unprecedented capabilities. We're extremely proud of the support we provide for this aircraft.

"The F-35 was completely new when the first aircraft was inducted in 2013," continued Berti. "There were a lot of unknowns. Inducting our 150th F-35 highlights how far we've come and how dedicated and innovative our people are. They were constantly breaking new ground and they continue to do that today."

Dustin Schultz, an aircraft planner and estimator with FRCE's F-35 team, was one of those trailblazers.

"Everything was brand new in the beginning," said Schultz. "From engineering support to tooling and logistics, we were starting from scratch. We had one aircraft with six of us working on it. Now we have 130 artisans working on the F-35 alone. That's a lot of growth.

"We have other aircraft programs that are

sundowning," he continued. "The F-35 is filling that gap now as we move forward."

According to Ike Rettenmair, FRCE's F-35 branch head, the depot's F-35 workload has grown exponentially over the years and is expected to expand further.

"I was in the hangar as a Harrier mechanic when the first F-35 rolled in," said Rettenmair. "We've grown from that one stall to what will soon be multiple hangars of F-35s. The F-35 plays such a significant role in the U.S. military with more and more continuing to enter the Fleet. The number of F-35s used by international partners is also growing. Our F-35 workload goes hand in hand with all of this."

As the F-35 program continues to grow at the depot, Rettenmair said FRCE continues to expand and develop key F-35 support elements.

FRCE declared capability on its first F-35 component - meaning FRCE is now a verified source of repair and testing for that item - in 2020. Since then, the depot has declared capability on approximately 76 different components for the Lightning II and continues to stand up capability.

In 2023, FRCE personnel became the first within the Department of Defense to perform the successful assembly of a lift fan clutch for the F-35B Lightning II aircraft outside of the original manufacturer's facility. Additionally, F-35B vertical lift fan testing and processing facilities are scheduled to come online at FRCE in early 2025.

The depot is also capable of bringing F-35 support to the warfighter when and where it's needed. FRCE's F-35 Rapid Response Team, made up of highly skilled, cross-trained aircraft maintenance professionals,

can deploy at a moment's notice to any location, from a Marine Corps Air Station halfway around the globe to a Navy aircraft carrier afloat in the Indo-Pacific region.

FRCE's F-35 support isn't limited to aircraft repair and modification or component capabilities. Don Werner, an aircraft planner and estimator with FRCE's F-35 team, said the lessons learned and the innovation that occurred over the years while expanding FRCE's F-35 program have also found their way to the warfighter.

"There are so many entities within FRC East working on things you would never even think of," said Werner. "They create things and come up with ideas that enable us to get aircraft to the warfighter even faster while saving money in the long run. They create things that make the job easier and these go out to the whole Fleet."

In addition to mechanics, Werner said the team includes quality assurance personnel, parts and logistics experts, planners, engineers and even fabric workers who design and produce heavy-duty protective covers for the aircraft's tires, intakes and other parts.

"You can see people right here at the depot working on all these things," said Werner. "They're designing it, going down to manufacturing and coming up with the tools or equipment our people need because there's nobody out there that's going to get it to us in such a timely manner."

Schultz said the warfighter benefits from the innovative processes and procedures the depot's F-35 team has come up with over the years.

"We've had many modifications that come through here that we were performing for the first time ever," said Schultz. "The manufacturer would say this mod is going to take 10,000 hours and our artisans and engineers would go look at it and end up saving thousands of hours because they came up with a new way to do the job that nobody else had thought of."

According to Rettenmair, the success and expansion of the F-35 program at FRCE, lies with the depot's personnel. He credited their dedication and innovation as instrumental in establishing the reputation of FRCE's F-35 program.

"We've made a name for ourselves as the F-35 facility for depot maintenance," said Rettenmair. "It shows the trust and confidence the enterprise has in FRC East to do this work. That trust is a testament to the people working here who've earned us this reputation."

He said everyone at FRCE, no matter what their job, is committed to supporting the Fleet by providing the highest quality, combat ready aircraft and components.

"Every day when we come to work, we

know why we're here," said Rettenmair. "We deliver product back to the Fleet so the warfighter has what he or she needs to fight and win. The people working here take a lot of pride in that."

FRCE is North Carolina's largest maintenance, repair, overhaul and technical services provider, with more than 4,000 civilian, military and contract workers. Its annual revenue exceeds \$1 billion. The depot provides service to the fleet while functioning as an integral part of the greater U.S. Navy; Naval Air Systems Command; and Commander, Fleet Readiness Centers.

By Joseph Andes

Truman Strike Group Concludes High-North Operations with Strait of Gibraltar Transit

"Two months into deployment, and the Harry S. Truman Carrier Strike Group has experienced an unprecedented amount of operations with our NATO Allies and partners," said Rear Adm. Sean Bailey, commander of the HSTCSG. "It is truly impressive to watch the seamless integration of the armed forces of so many countries and multitude of ships and aircraft all operating as a unified fighting force. It is an absolute testament to the strength and versatility of the NATO Alliance."

HSTCSG arrived in the North Sea on Oct. 15, immediately engaging with Allies and partners, starting with the Portuguese Navy Frigate NRP Francisco De Almeida (F 333) and Royal Norwegian Navy replenishment oiler HNoMS Maud (A-530). Almeida seamlessly integrated into the carrier strike group as an immediate force multiplier, where the ship served as a horizon reference unit for the carrier and conducted Helicopter, Visit, Board, Search, and Seizure (HVBSS) operations.

During that time, Maud provided the needed fuel for the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyers USS Jason Dunham (DDG 109) and USS Stout (DDG 55) to detach as a surface action group to conduct maritime operations in the Barents Sea, where the ships enhanced domain awareness, deterred adversaries, and practiced campaigning in the Arctic. On the way back, both ships pulled into Tromsø, Norway, for fuel, supplies, and rest and relaxation for the crew.

"It is important that U.S. naval forces demonstrate a calibrated presence in the Arctic by conducting routine operations in the region," said Cmdr. Desmond Walker, commanding officer of Stout. "We must take on all opportunities to enhance our capabilities toward potential campaigns around the world."

In a display of transatlantic military

VINSON CHIEF PETTY OFFICERS AND VETERANS HONORED AT POWAY'S VETERANS PARK



Sailors of the USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70) Chief Petty Officers Mess attended the Veterans Day ceremony at Veteran's Park.



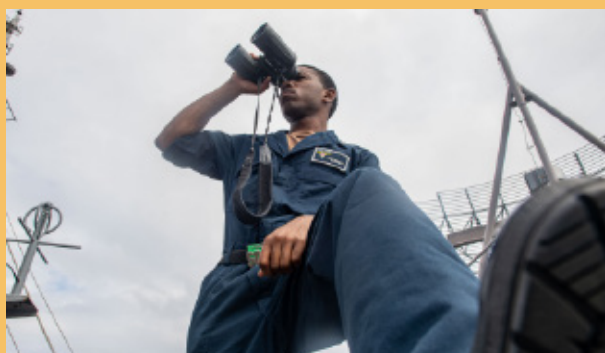
FRCE personnel meet F-35B Lightning II pilots on the flight line.



An MH-60S Sea Hawk helicopter from HSC-11 flies alongside USS Harry S. Truman (CVN75) through the Strait of Gibraltar. (MCSN Michael Gomez)



NAVFAC Washington Commanding Officer
Selected as First Black Civil Engineer Corps
Rear Admiral.



QM3 Samad Snerling, of Birmingham, Ala.,
stands watch aboard Vinson.



AM2 Galitayuh Groves, of Pensacola, Fla.,
primes a brush for a scissor leak aboard
Vinson.

cooperation and power projection, HSTCSG units conducted dual carrier strike group operations with the United Kingdom Royal Navy's aircraft carrier HMS Prince of Wales (R09) for the 7-day NATO-led maritime vigilance activity Neptune Strike (NEST) 24.2, Oct. 24-31. The two carrier strike groups transferred operational authorities to NATO to conduct coordinated surface and air operations, including complex air defense, anti-submarine warfare, and maritime strike operations.

Vigilance activity provides an example of the long-standing strategic partnership between the United States and its NATO Allies over the last 80 years. Today, upholding the international, rules-based order is more important than ever. Harry S. Truman participated in the first Neptune Strike vigilance activity, then called Neptune Shield, in Feb. 2022, shortly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine; marking the first time the United States placed a carrier strike group under NATO's control since the Cold War.

Before and during NEST, Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 1 squadrons flew a multitude of missions with several countries to include Czech and Swedish Air Force JAS-39 Gripen, Danish F-16 Fighting Falcons, Royal Navy and Royal Norwegian Air Force F-35 Joint Strike Fighters, Finnish F/A-18C Hornets. The ability to plan and fly tactical missions with Allies and partners explicitly demonstrates NATO's combat credibility in the air, expanding the striking range of any carrier strike group.

Following NEST, the strike group disaggregated to conduct port visits across the region. Harry S. Truman and Carabiniere navigated the Oslofjord with the Norwegian Fridtjof Nansen-class frigate Thor Heyerdahl (F 314) to visit Oslo, Norway. At the same time, the Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser US Gettysburg went to Helsinki, Finland, and Stout went to Gothenburg, Sweden.

While at anchor in Norway, Harry S. Truman, Vice Adm. Jeffrey Anderson, commander of U.S. 6th Fleet, and Chargé d' Affaires a.i. Eric Meyer of the U.S. Embassy to Norway, hosted a 700-person reception featuring Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre as the distinguished visitor. Gettysburg and Stout also hosted receptions and office calls with host nation civilian and military leaders.

At the conclusion of their port visit, Harry S. Truman and the Norwegian Fridtjof Nansen-class frigate Roald Amundsen (F 311) headed north into the Norwegian Sea to operate above the Arctic Circle, echoing the 2024 Department of Defense Arctic Strategy's "Enhance, Engage, and Exercise" tenants by enhancing our ability to campaign in the Arctic, engaging with Allies, and exercising with calibrated presence.

"Operating in the Arctic requires comprehensive coordination and adaptability," said Capt. Dave Snowden, commanding officer, USS Harry S. Truman.

"Our ship is no stranger to these waters and, while these conditions are a proving ground that tested the ship, crew, and air wing, Team Truman and Tarbox demonstrated that we are capable of operating anywhere and anytime as a combat ready team."

In an increasingly dynamic region, Harry S. Truman's integration and collaboration with Allies and partners is a testament to NATO's combined force interoperability, combat-credible collective defense, and flexibility of threat response in a region seeing increased strategic importance due to climate shifts and global competition.

The carrier strike group consists of the flagship USS Harry S. Truman (CVN 75); Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 1 with nine embarked aviation squadrons; staffs from CSG-8, CVW-1, and Destroyer Squadron (DESRON) 28; the Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Gettysburg (CG 64); and two Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyers, USS Stout (DDG 55) and USS Jason Dunham (DDG 109).

HSTCSG's mission is to conduct prompt and sustained combat operations at sea and remain the cornerstone of the Navy's forward presence through sea control and power projection capabilities.

By Lt. Cmdr. Courtney Callaghan,
Lt. Brandon Dedmon and Lt. Camila Healey

The selection was announced by NAVFAC Commander Rear Adm. Dean VanderLey, Nov. 13. Tobias, who has commanded NAVFAC Washington since June 2023, will bring his extensive facilities engineering expertise and leadership experience to the flag officer ranks at a crucial time for naval infrastructure.

His selection comes as the Navy implements Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Adm. Lisa Franchetti's Project 33; a strategic initiative launched in September 2024 that identifies seven critical targets to enhance naval readiness by 2027. One of these key targets focuses on restoring the critical infrastructure that sustains and projects the fight from shore.

"Our CNO laid it out for us in our Project 33 targets – to restore the shore, from which we project the fight. So, we have to get after it," said Tobias, emphasizing the urgency of the mission. "The future needs to involve us being able to truly assess our risk. We understand our infrastructure has risk associated with it. So, it's our job to make sure that we understand and communicate those risks and mitigate them where possible."

A graduate of North Carolina Agricultural

and Technical State University, Tobias joined the Navy through the collegiate program before attending Officer Candidate School and Civil Engineer Corps Basic School. Throughout his career, he has emphasized the importance of teamwork and maintaining a positive attitude in leadership.

Under his command, NAVFAC Washington has aligned its efforts with Project 33's ambitious goals while increasing retention rates and strengthening community engagement. "These are big, audacious goals, and I love to achieve big, audacious goals," Tobias said. "With the teammates we have – the officers, the enlisted, the civilians and all the families who support us – we have the best. And with that, we're going to hit those targets and even more – exciting times."

His leadership philosophy centers on the power of teamwork and positive attitude. "Human beings function best when we work together as a team," Tobias explained. "There might be a day where I come in and I'm not at my greatest, but you are, and you help pick me up, and there might be a day when you come in and you're not at your greatest, but I am. And we pick each other up, and that's how we

achieve great things, working together."

To junior officers and engineers starting their careers, Tobias offers words of encouragement: "Thank you for your choice. Thank you for your service. The challenges laid out by our CNO present a great opportunity to meet the challenges and exceed them. It's a fun time to be in the Corps."

Tobias credits his success to strong family support, particularly mentioning his mother's influence as his first leadership model and his wife Toni's ongoing support throughout his naval career. "It is a great joy to serve in the Navy, but it is a sacrifice for our families and for folks who are loving us and supporting us while we go do our thing," he noted.

As he prepares to assume his new role, Tobias remains focused on NAVFAC's critical mission within Project 33's framework to restore and maintain the Navy's infrastructure, ensuring readiness for potential challenges through 2027 and beyond. His selection represents both personal achievement and a significant milestone for the Civil Engineer Corps and the broader Navy community.

By Natasha Waldron Anthony

Hard Lessons: Pitfalls, blunders and shortfalls . . .



Years ago, as a brand new MCSA, I was sent to the pilot house to take a photo for "Sailor of the Day" on my first ship, USS Nimitz (CVN 68). The sun was absolutely blaring into the pilot house that day. Random beams of light streaked the space from starboard to port. The sun was so intense the CO ordered the conning officer to turn the ship around to help fix the lighting for the picture.

During the time it took for the ship to come about, I began taking test shots to get the lighting right. Turning the ship around fixed about 95% of the lighting issue, but as the "Sailor of the Day" sat in the CO's chair and everyone gathered around, one remaining beam of light perfectly streaked across everyone's face.

Now, out of time, I made my best guess and snapped the photo. I knew it was going to be jacked up, but I could tell everyone was frustrated and ready to complete the presentation. For me, it wasn't the worst part. Each day, the "Sailor of the Day" photo was posted on the ship's SharePoint homepage. I'm sure the CO saw it and must have thought, "What the heck? How did he mess this up? I even turned the ship around for him!"

Looking back on it, there are many points of failure. As a new photographer, I was probably not the best person suited for the

job. If the goal was to get me more experience, my LPO should have probably sent someone with me to ensure success.

For my part, I knew as soon as I walked into the room that I was going to have difficulty taking the photo. I should have called down and asked my LPO for help immediately. It is also everyone's personal responsibility to become an expert in their craft. I graduated from photography school two years prior and was assigned to a fighter squadron where I was asked to work on F/A-18Fs. There, I had opportunities to practice my photography skills – I just didn't, and as a result, I wasn't prepared to do my job when the time came.

This is a blunder about a picture, but if we change the scenario to make it about a critical system or maintenance procedure, much worse things can happen.

The right person was not selected for the job. There was no oversight, and the person charged with the task lacked the courage to say he couldn't figure it out – a recipe for disaster in any scenario. If you can eliminate even one of those three things, the chances for success increase dramatically. Until the next time, I'll see you on the deckplates.

By MCCS John Scorza



BURIAL

at

A TIME HONORED TRADITION



STORY BY MC3 NATE JORDAN
PHOTOS BY MC2 CLAIRE BENNETT & MC3 NATE JORDAN

The Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70) held the time-honored tradition of a Burial at Sea for 30 prior service members, Nov. 22.

"It is important to honor those who have gone before us and their service and sacrifice," said Cmdr. Carl Muehler, the ship's Chaplain. "Whether a person served two years or 40 years, that service made a difference, and it is important to honor that service and treat them with dignity and respect."

In earlier history, sea burials were conducted for practical reasons due to the unfeasibility of transporting deceased personnel back to land when out to sea for extended periods of time. Nowadays, they represent the last wishes of service members to be committed to the deep.

The ceremony can be held on any U.S. Naval vessel requested by the prior service member. At the end of the ceremony, before the folded National Ensign is given to the commanding officer, seven riflemen commanded by a petty officer in charge, take aim and fire. Repeated twice more, this ceremony is commonly known as a 21-gun salute. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, gun salutes can be traced back to the European dynastic wars, when firing was halted to remove the dead and wounded from the battlefield.

The firing of three volleys served as a signal for fighting to resume. Centuries ago, gun salutes at funerals were closely tied to superstition and often intended to drive away evil spirits. Shots are traditionally fired in odd numbers, purportedly stemming from an ancient belief that even numbers bring bad luck. Today, gun salutes are customary in military funeral ceremonies.

"There were two service members who were on the Vinson in the past who we committed to the sea today," said Religious Personnel Specialist 1st Class Petty Officer Justin Alvarado. For their families, this ceremony bore a special significance, as their loved ones were given a final sendoff in Vinson's second Burial at Sea ceremony this year.

Sea

“Many service members choose to be buried at sea to be reunited with lost friends. Others wish to return to the sea one last time.”

The ocean gleamed in the distance behind six Sailors solemnly flanking a casket draped in a crisp American flag. In the hangar bay, Sailors formed a line next to a table holding 29 urns containing the ashes of other past service members. The commanding officer, executive officer, command master chief, and chaplain took their places on the aircraft elevator, and the Burial at Sea commenced.

“Each one is unique and special. What stands out for me are the Sailors,” said Muehler. “They see it as an honor to be a part of the ceremony and approach their role with humility and respect. They are displaying the core values of honor and commitment to those who have gone before and their families and their service and sacrifice.”

After the pallbearers carried the casket to the edge of the hangar bay elevator, they removed and ceremoniously folded the National Ensign. The casket was then sent to the sea.

Chief Religious Personnel Specialist Benjamin Sheets believes the final salute each person receives prior to being committed to the sea is the most emotional moment. Through all the Burials at Sea he has participated in, he said this is the part of the ceremony that continues to pull at his heart.

Intricately carved cases, finely crafted boxes with names beveled into them, and colorful ceramic urns were taken one at a time after the casket. After the rank, name and branch of the deceased was called, everyone rendered a salute. Sailors from Vinson of similar ranks to each deceased carefully moved the

urns to the ramp at the edge of the hangar bay elevator.

One at a time, each Sailor stepped back from the ramp and honored the deceased with one final salute before two chaplain personnel sent the urns into the ocean.

“Many people choose to be buried at sea to be reunited with lost friends,” stated Sheets. “Others just wish to return to the sea one last time.”

Silence settled in, and waves crashed against the hull of the 200,000-pound aircraft carrier as the petty officer in charge shouted commands. The seven gunners took aim and fired. They reloaded and fired again. Once more, they reloaded and fired. Chambers emptied, and shells cascaded to the deck, the sound drowned out by the ocean.

“I think that more people should attend the ceremony to see what it’s like,” said Alvarado. “There’s not a lot of people that know we do this. It’s a good way to think about what we’re doing in the Navy and how we are able to give back to those who have served.”

After the three volleys, hands held their salutes as taps echoed from a trumpet. Colors were rendered as tiny black specks contrasted the diamond-bright reflections of the sun against the ocean. The service members from the past floated away to the distant horizon — not forgotten, but honored forever with a Burial at Sea.

“To those currently serving, it is a reminder that we are a part of a legacy and tradition, and a part of something bigger than ourselves,” said Muehler. 🇺🇸

Sailors lift an urn during a Burial at Sea on the aircraft elevator.



Sailors in the honor guard stand at parade rest during a Burial at Sea on the aircraft elevator.



JUST KEEP SWIMMING

PHOTO BY MC1 MARCUS STANLEY
STORY BY MCSN AMBER RIVETTE



Chosen by the wands of English Oak and Phoenix Feather as a faithful Ravenclaw, and a Platform 9 3/4 pen she has never removed from her ship uniform, layers of countless victories hid beneath the magic veil of Lt. Spencer McVeigh's innocent sparkle. Growing up in the heart of San Diego, Lt. Spencer McVeigh surprised herself, her friends, family, and community by overcoming tumultuous challenges in the Navy, refusing to sink of failure.

As an adolescent swimming often in the Coronado Bay through the years, she never knew that in her adult life she would glide over the entire 11.5-mile route as an open-water swimmer while finding a sense of healing and connectivity to the island.

As an English major overcoming every science and math struggle to become a surface warfare officer (SWO) for USS Carl Vinson in the nuclear reactor department, McVeigh knew that nothing could stand in the way of her dreams of open-water swimming.

"That was why I started to step up in swimming," said McVeigh. "Passing in power school is a 2.5; I was a 2.5-stay-alive student. 14-hour days for seven straight months just to pass. I was fighting for my life in the Rickover. I felt that if I could finish that, I could try marathon swimming."

The link between swimming and the nuclear navy, however, manifested long before power school. When appearing before a four-star admiral who asked why she wanted to be a SWO in the nuclear navy with, frankly, unimpressive STEM grades and a major in English, McVeigh answered with her passion for sailing and swimming.

"I mentioned that the appeal of surface warfare for me was being in the ocean," said McVeigh. "You see the sunrise and sunset, feel the spray of the sea. I mentioned to him that I'm an open-water swimmer with aspirations to be a channel swimmer one day."

After McVeigh and the admiral marveled over mutual love for the book "Swimming to Antarctica," she knew it was time to add that facet of wonder into her life in a way she never had before.

"Since then, I felt a potential link between pushing through the nuclear community and open-water swimming, because both came up in an environment where I never thought they would," said McVeigh. "The fact that one of my nuclear interview questions ended up being about open-water swimming, I felt I had to pursue this personal goal I will always have."

While open-water swimming connected McVeigh to the surface of her deepest desires and her triumphs, it also served as a deep healing component for loss and a celebration for life.

"My dear friend, Lt. j.g. Andrew James Lorimer, who I knew as Ajay, took his life June 29, 2021," said McVeigh. "For a man so kind, brilliant, and strong, he lost a battle with mental health; I promised to keep his memory alive, and aspire to prevent losses like his in the future."

The Coronado Bay was where McVeigh and her mother walked to mourn and heal in the after-hours of Ajay's passing. Little did they know, the Coronado Bay would be where McVeigh would serve after her first assignment in Japan, and that she would take Ajay in her heart with her to swim around the entire island, carrying their friendship and his story



**"YOU ARE NO LONGER A PASSENGER IN EXISTENCE,
YOU ARE THE DRIVER."**

with her.

"There are these awesome experiences he can now have through me that he never got to have because his life was cut short," McVeigh said. "He's still so much a part of me."

McVeigh wrote the initials of her dearest loved ones on her wrist as a tradition started by her brother during his rugby games. She wrote AJ, JJ, EJ, for her immediate family who came to support her big day, and then another AJ for her dear friend Ajay.



MCVEIGH WITH AJAY

AJ
JJ
EJ

MCVEIGH'S MOM WRITING ON HER ARM



Giving honor to the ship, McVeigh asked permission from Vinson's captain to write its hull number, CVN 70, on her other arm during the swim.

Armed with the salve of presence over her heart for loss, her family, and the shadow of Vinson, McVeigh maintained her warrior toughness throughout the swim by remembering her triumphs in nuclear school, those she loved, and her fight to celebrate life.

"You . . . are . . . alive! I . . . am . . . alive!" McVeigh screamed into the water as she was swimming. "There's nothing else in the world than open-water swimming that makes me feel so deeply alive."

McVeigh's conscious effort to fight through the pain of this swim was a representation of her fight to be a nuclear officer and the fight to see the beauty of pain, loss, suffering, and life itself through endurance and inspiration to others.

"With just you and the ocean, you have to be present, you have to pay attention," said McVeigh. "You are no longer a passenger in existence, you are the driver."

They began in Glorietta Bay and grazed past Vinson through the Coronado channel in a span of 4.8 hours, surviving on glucose packs and water carefully handed to McVeigh in order to heed the no-touch rules.

"According to regulation, during the swim itself, you can never be touched by anyone and you can never hang on something for support," said McVeigh. "You have to train to regulate your body temperature and make sure you can push through those mid to low 60s temperatures."

The most challenging aspect of open-water swimming for many aspiring mermaids, including McVeigh, was the body-temperature adaptability for long-term endeavors.

"The harder swims I found were when I had to train by treading to manage the cold and find something to think about," said McVeigh. "When I'm in the water, I'll sing certain song lyrics over and over, count my strokes, but ultimately, my mind kind of goes blank in the best way, giving me peace and serenity."

McVeigh explained that life lessons, her love of the royal blue hue of the ocean, and especially her favorite magical series contributed to develop her strength in the sea.

"My favorite line in the whole Harry Potter series is when

Professor McGonagall says, 'I've always wanted to use that spell;' the real actress Dame Maggie Smith was going through cancer treatments when she was filming, which is such a testament to continuing to protect and inspire," said McVeigh. "I could probably mumble the Piertotum Locomotor spell to myself a couple of times to keep me going during the swim."

As she steadily closed in on Gator Beach, a crowd of McVeigh's loved ones cheered for joy as she emerged from the water, finally stood, and ran onto the dry sand. Grinning ear to ear, McVeigh turned to face the water, where her coach awaited a signal on a kayak. She threw two fists into the air, then he waved his paddle to signify her triumph.

Once McVeigh was fully at the finish line, she wasted no time in embracing her family, friends, and loved ones with laughter and tears. Her best friends had already thought to bring her a meal upon arrival.

"The amount of food I had after should be illegal. Two Chic-Fil-A sandwiches, bag of chips and a Diet Coke, a Foster's Freeze cheeseburger, fries, and a chocolate shake," said McVeigh. "Just the whole kit and caboodle."

While McVeigh was initially planning to nap after the swim, the electricity of her accomplishment continued to surge within her.

"I actually couldn't sleep," said McVeigh. "I tried to sleep, and I couldn't, I was still pretty fired up."

For both sailing and swimming, McVeigh continues to make a mark of endurance for sailors and civilians around her.

"I quote Dori, 'just keep swimming,' because I'm built to just keep pushing," said McVeigh. "I'm not the fastest, but I have endurance because I love doing it, and it is good for both my body and mind."

No matter the circumstance, McVeigh continues to live an example of kindness and care through her role as a nuclear officer and by living out her dreams of open-water swimming, sharing the depths of her soul to those willing to observe her unfathomable journey. In various dark passages life had to offer, McVeigh has learned and displayed the resilience of a true Sailor through the endurance of her sailing and swimming.

"I genuinely set a goal, I achieved it, and I was just really happy and proud that I did it." 🌊

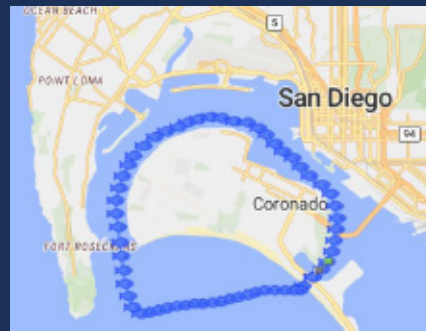
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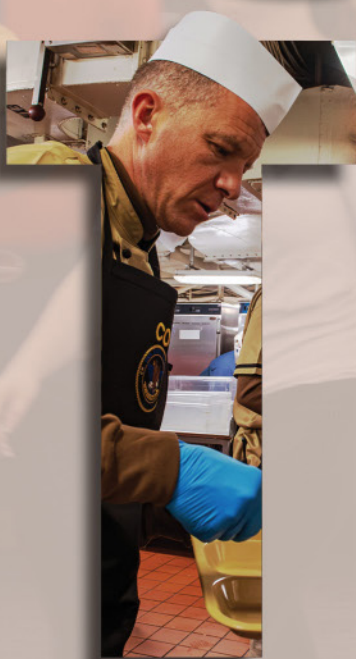
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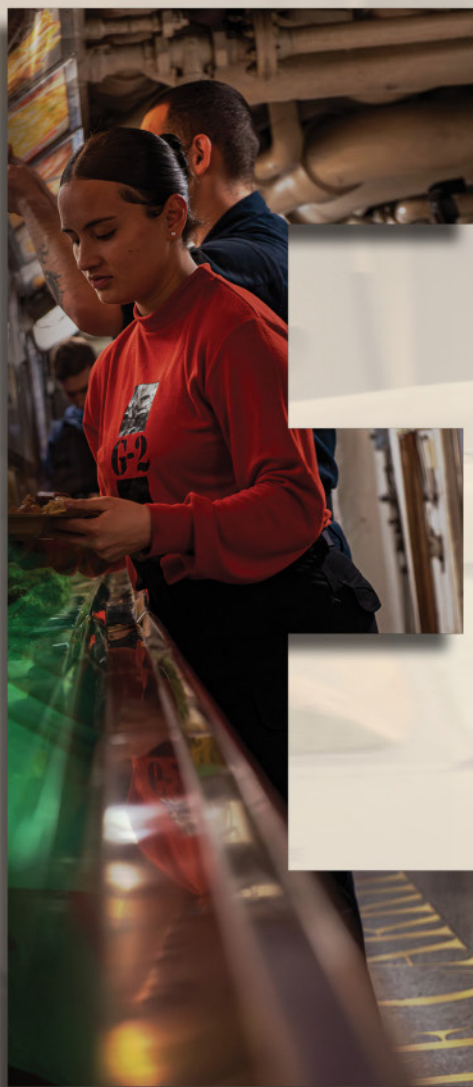


THE COURSE McVEIGH SWAM



PHOTOS BY MC2 ANALICE BAKER & MCSN PABLO CHAVEZ







Naval Tattoos on Vinson

Sailors throughout history are drawn to tattoos. A tradition stretching the length of the service itself, tattooing has become almost synonymous with members of the U.S. Navy. Many Sailors brand themselves with lavish nautical designs like anchors, mermaids and compasses, but where does the heritage begin? How did the Navy's subculture of body art emerge, and what secrets lie behind the designs?

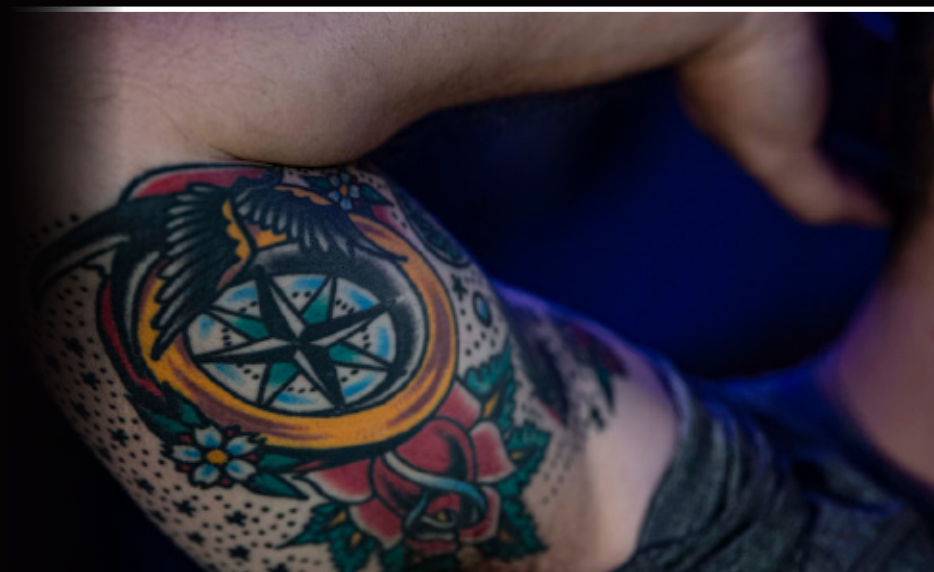
The practice of tattoo artistry among American and European navies began around the 16th century and evolved over time. By the early 1900s, it was not uncommon for Sailors to carry along boxes of needles and ink to tattoo each other while out at sea. The practice dissipated as times changed, but for some Sailors, these celebrations of tradition still hold true.

The evolution of naval tattoos brought the development of an intricate code and hidden meanings for these pieces of art in the 17th century, beginning as good luck charms. For instance, a tattoo of a swallow was known to act as a distance marker over a crew member's voyage at sea. This special bird is known to have incredible migration habits, traveling long distances to find its way back home. Each swallow tattooed on a Sailor's body marks another 5,000 miles traveled.

In the early 18th century, it was common for Sailors to have a flock of swallows filling in gaps and framing the designs of other meaningful tattoos. They were often embellishments to other pieces like masted ships, dragons and sea creatures. These larger, detailed tattoos would usually represent rare accomplishments.

Many of these tattoos indicated traveling to certain parts of the world. A fully rigged ship typically suggests a trip through Cape Horn at the southern tip of South Africa. Cape Horn is known to have devastatingly rough seas, and crossing it can be a remarkable feat for many Sailors.

A golden dragon has been known to represent the crossing of the international date line. Traveled east to west, the date line is the point at which the clock is set forward a full 24 hours. A Sailor will generally acquire this tattoo after traveling to 7th fleet, much like USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70) during its current voyage. The date line is at the 180-degree meridian, with an approximate longitude somewhere between New Zealand



and Hawaii. The date line is not a straight border – individual governments along the date line operate independently when choosing times.

Some smaller and more common tattoos include good luck charms such as a compass or a nautical star, which are said to help Sailors find their way home. “HOLD FAST” might be written across a Sailor’s knuckles to encourage crew members, particularly Boatswain’s Mates, to hold tightly onto lines when rigging. Roosters and pigs might be found tattooed on a Sailor’s feet – in the unfortunate event of

a shipwreck, livestock was often all that remained, floating on the surface above the sinking wreckage in their wooden crates.

Regardless of the number of tattoos a Sailor chooses to adorn themselves with, the tradition is long-held and likely to continue, especially as the U.S. Navy relaxes regulations, allowing the Sailors of today to embrace their expressive history. Perhaps the success of our crew is owed in part to the artful good luck charms worn by so many, enabling Vinson to remain the seaworthy workhorse of the Pacific. 🌊

“I grew up in and out of
Tattoo
parlors so it was a big
part of my *Culture*
and upbringing.”
- STG1 Jose Gutierrez



CALL SIGNS

CHUCKY

LT. SUZELLE THOMAS

Hometown: Birmingham, Alabama

Commissioned out of the United States Naval Academy in 2018.

Lt. Thomas had an early TSTA watch one day and didn't have time to eat before flying, so she grabbed a bagel and knife on her way to the Ready Room and stuffed them in her flight suit pocket.

As she hastily ascended the ladderwell, both bagel and knife fell out of the pocket, plummeting two decks below. A shout rang

out as the knife struck another officer in the head two decks down, causing him to bleed profusely from his wound.

Thus, Lt. Thomas adopted the psycho knife-wielding killer doll call sign of CHUCKY.



A REAL CLEAR VISION

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MCSA PABLO CHAVEZ

Experts commonly agree that sight is the most important of our five senses. Although an essential part of mission success, we often take it for granted. Everyone needs eye care, but aviators are among the few who require specialized attention to execute their job safely.

USS Carl Vinson recently embarked an aerospace optometrist, Lt. Sherry Sandri from Naval Air Station North Island, on a temporary assignment.

She is working with Vinson's medical team to provide care to Sailors aboard.





WHICH SLIDE IS BETTER

Sandri uses a phoropter to demonstrate obtaining a glasses perscription for a “patient.”

“She’s a good leader,” said Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class Daniela Parra. “Very caring of people who come and seek help.” She loves her profession and is always looking to help on any occasion. “The best part of the job is getting to see the direct impact,” said Sandri. “Helping people see better and having them notice the difference makes me happy.”

An aircraft carrier is an industrial environment, and moving about the ship on a day-to-day basis without proper eye protection can lead to injuries. “Corneal scratches from metal or debris are common especially on the flight line,” Sandri said. “Many of the injuries I’ve seen could have been easily prevented if the sailor wore regular eye-pro.”

Highlighting these hazards and the proper protection against them can limit the potential for accidents. “Just like ear-pro, you want eye-pro all the time,” Sandri said. “I’ve seen a lot of injuries, and I’ve had a lot of patients that were innocent bystanders. I don’t recommend wearing contacts on the ship. There is always a risk of eye

infection and you can potentially go blind.”

While optometrists routinely conduct eye exams and prescribe glasses, Sandri’s profession has far more to offer in terms of patient care. Her skillset also involves the diagnosis and treatment of eye conditions, the most common being scratches, infection and inflammation.


When she is not busy seeing patients, Sandri has been eagerly adapting to ship life – a difficult adjustment to some, but one she has taken in stride: “Experiencing life on the ship has been great,” she said. “I still haven’t explored most of the ship.”

Excited to make the most of her experience underway, Sandri approaches her job in a similar manner. When asked why she does it, her answer was simple: “I’ve always wanted to be in healthcare and have a direct impact on people.” As Carl Vinson’s embarked aviation optometrist, Sandri is doing just that. 🌐





A HERO'S SALUTE



THE HARROWING STORY OF A VIETNAM PRISONER OF WAR

"I'm going to make this a quick and dirty war story," said retired Navy Capt. Rodney Knutson peering down at the thousands of eyes staring up at him as he stood on the podium in the center hangar bay aboard the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70).

He asked for a show of hands from those in the crowd ages 27 and older, and then from those under the age of 27. As hands went up, he saw a glimmer of his past and the brightness of the country's future.

"I want you all to know that I just got a show of hands from the next leaders of the United States of America," said Knutson. "I'm proud of the people who have served in the U.S. Navy. It's not always easy."

STORY BY
MC₂ CLAIRE BENNETT

PHOTOS BY
MCSN KENNETH OSTAS

**“My mother and dad
did not know whether
I was alive for
five and a half years.”**



For Knutson, the father-in-law of Vinson's current commanding officer, Capt. Matthew Thomas, the age 27 holds great significance. During the Vietnam War, Knutson was a 27-year-old Marine seated in the back of an F-4 Phantom II, flying 300 feet above the ground at 550 knots when he began taking on a barrage of bullets. The aircraft exploded to the ground, landing him in seven years of captivity as a prisoner of war.

“I estimate I spent somewhere between 10 and 15 seconds in the parachute before I hit the ground, and my parachute already had bullet holes in it,” said Knutson. “When I landed on the ground, they were shooting at me, and I ran and hid in the bushes, trying to get away from them. I was alone.”

Although unable to recall every detail, Knutson can remember being in an intense shootout with a militiaman and someone else he never saw. He knows that at some point, he ended up unconscious.

“When I woke up, I was laying on my back,” said Knutson. “They were using my own survival knife to cut off my parachute harness and my G-suit.”

As the North Vietnamese soldiers began tying rope around Knutson's neck and wrists, chaos birthed confusion. The language barrier made it difficult to understand what was being asked of him, but he finally realized that they wanted him to march. They led him to a small village, where he was put in a cell. Eventually, he was thrown into the back of a truck, tied face down and taken to the notorious Hanoi Hilton prison.

Knutson would spend the next 88 months in captivity, with most of the first 24 months spent in solitary confinement.

“I was 27 years old, and I wondered, ‘Will Mom and Dad even know what happened to me?’” said Knutson. “While I was in that prison, I was tortured within an inch of my life. There were times when they wanted me to say something against my country or when they wanted me to speak out against my fellow airmen.”

Knutson gave the North Vietnamese soldiers the basic information required and nothing more, much to their frustration and much to his pain.

“The U.S. code of conduct says you will give your name, rank, serial number and date of birth, and that's what I would give. And when I did, they would slam me in the back of the head with a rifle's stock,” said Knutson. “I was chained, I was manacled, I was put in leg irons and I was beaten. I had that happen to me many, many, many times while I was a prisoner there, and each time it happened I had to make a decision. Could I stick with name, rank, serial number and date of birth? That's what my government has asked me to do. What happens if I can't?”

Knutson thought of a way to appease his captors. If they asked him where he was from, he would say the United States. If they asked him where in the United States, he would say District One. If they asked what high school he went to, he would say District One High School.

“That was the only defense that I had, but I was bound and determined to try to abide by what my government expected of me,” said Knutson.

That was how life went for Knutson as a POW for 2,673

days. However, in his final months in captivity, he was able to write letters to his family.

"My mother and dad did not know whether I was alive for five and a half years," said Knutson.

On Jan. 27, 1973, the signing of the Paris Peace Accords ended the war in Vietnam, and on Feb. 12, 1973, Knutson was released with the other prisoners. They were loaded onto buses and then onto C-141 Starlifter jets, with Knutson on the first plane out of Vietnam.

"I sat down beside another prisoner who I knew very well," said Knutson. "We didn't speak. We just stared straight ahead. I looked down at his hands. His knuckles were curved over the armrest on the seat, and they were white. I looked at my own, and they were the same way."

As the airplane finally lifted off the ground, the men cheered for the first time.

"Every guy on that airplane unstrapped and jumped out of his seat," said Knutson. "We weren't any more than 50 feet off of the ground, but we were free. We were headed home. We were going to see our families. We were going to go back to the place that we loved."

The North Vietnamese had been feeding the prisoners propaganda about riots and demonstrations in the U.S., so they didn't know what to expect when they landed at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines. They arrived to a group of people standing and watching, but Knutson wasn't looking at those people.

"What I saw was right in the front of the crowd," said Knutson. "There were a bunch of little kids who had American flags. I had not seen a child for seven and a half years. I had tears in my eyes."

Knutson weighed only 103 pounds and wanted nothing more than a shower. Afterward, he called his parents. He tried to speak but could not find the words to talk to them.

Three days later he was back in the U.S. Knutson stayed in the military for another 32 years. He became a Navy pilot and retired with 38 years of service.

"I'm proud of it," said Knutson. "I wasn't treated as some sort of a rotten animal when I came home from Vietnam. I was treated as a hero. I don't feel like a hero. I was doing my job."

Staring out at the crowd of Vinson Sailors in front of him, his son-in-law in tow, Knutson told the sailors he could see the same grit in them that he had as a POW.

"I think the Navy does a very good job at trying to expose us to hardships and decision making, and therefore, building up our reliance on our own and depending on ourselves," said Knutson.

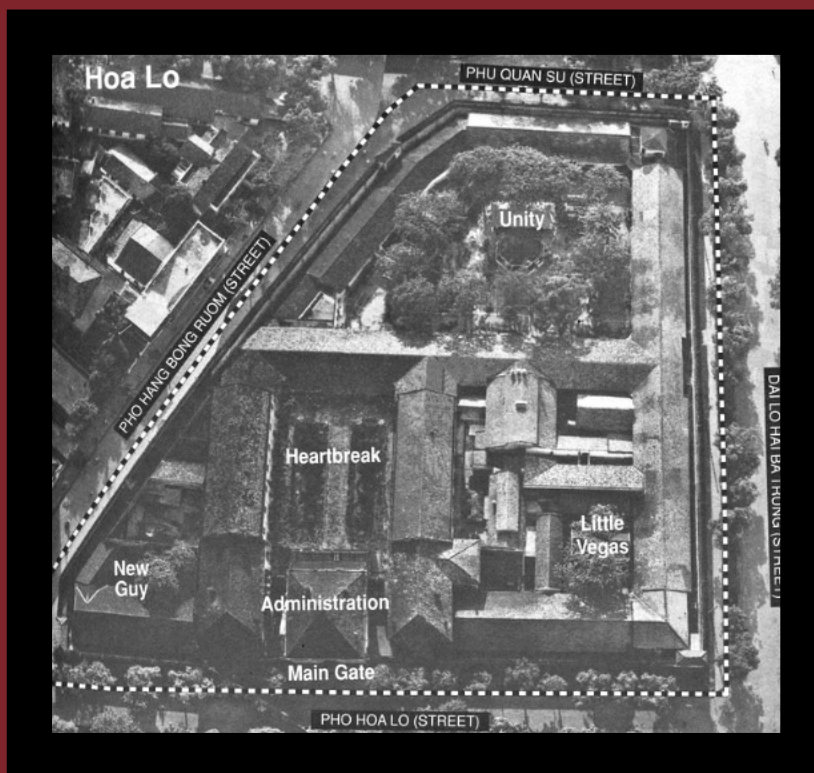
"Enjoy it for what it is. Work hard and it makes the time go faster, and you'll have a good time."

Knutson's story was not a quick war story, but rather the long story of a warrior who persevered through unspeakable acts and continues to leave his legacy with the Sailors of today. His response to incredible hardship was outstanding perseverance, which is the biggest takeaway for Capt. Thomas when listening to his father-in-law's story.

"Each time he [Knutson] resisted, each time he kept his honor," said Thomas, "he returned to his cell and thought, 'I did it! They didn't win today; they didn't break me.' Each of us can build up our own strength by winning the little battles each of us face each day. We can go to bed each night and say to ourselves, 'I did it!'"

Thomas and Knutson urged Sailors to celebrate every win, no matter how small it may seem in the moment.

You all feel like you're just doing your job, but you are heroes too. I'm proud of every one of you," said Knutson. "I also know and trust you with my life because I know you will protect me and my country." 🇺🇸



SURVIVING "THE HILTON" BY MASTER SGT. TIMOTHY LAWN

A 1970 aerial surveillance photo of the Hanoi Hilton, where Knutson stayed for seven years.



Carl's Jr's

MEET AMERICA'S FAVORITES



**LT. J.G.
ANNIE
WALLACE**



AGE | 26
HOMETOWN | Ellicott City, Maryland
FAVORITE FOOD | Olives
FAVORITE HOBBY | Music
FAVORITE PART ABOUT BEING ABOARD |
Meeting New People #ONETeam



**YNSN
JAMIE SUAREZ**



AGE | 20
HOMETOWN | Kissimmee, Florida
FAVORITE FOOD | Mofongo
FAVORITE HOBBY | Reading
FAVORITE PART ABOUT BEING ABOARD | The View/
Meeting New People



**ET2
HANNAH CELI**



AGE | 21
HOMETOWN | Dublin, California
FAVORITE FOOD | Carne Fries
FAVORITE HOBBY | Drawing
FAVORITE PART ABOUT BEING ABOARD | Hanging
Out With Shipmates



**LT. J.G.
JACK
SCYPINSKI**



AGE | 25
HOMETOWN | Sherwood, Oregon
FAVORITE FOOD | Hummus
FAVORITE HOBBY | Collecting Music
FAVORITE PART ABOUT BEING ABOARD |
Media Department & Meeting New people



**ASAN
TYLER BOWERS**



AGE | 24
HOMETOWN | Salt Lake City, Utah
FAVORITE FOOD | Soul Food
FAVORITE HOBBY | Skateboarding/Hiking
FAVORITE PART ABOUT BEING ABOARD | Traveling &
Meeting New People

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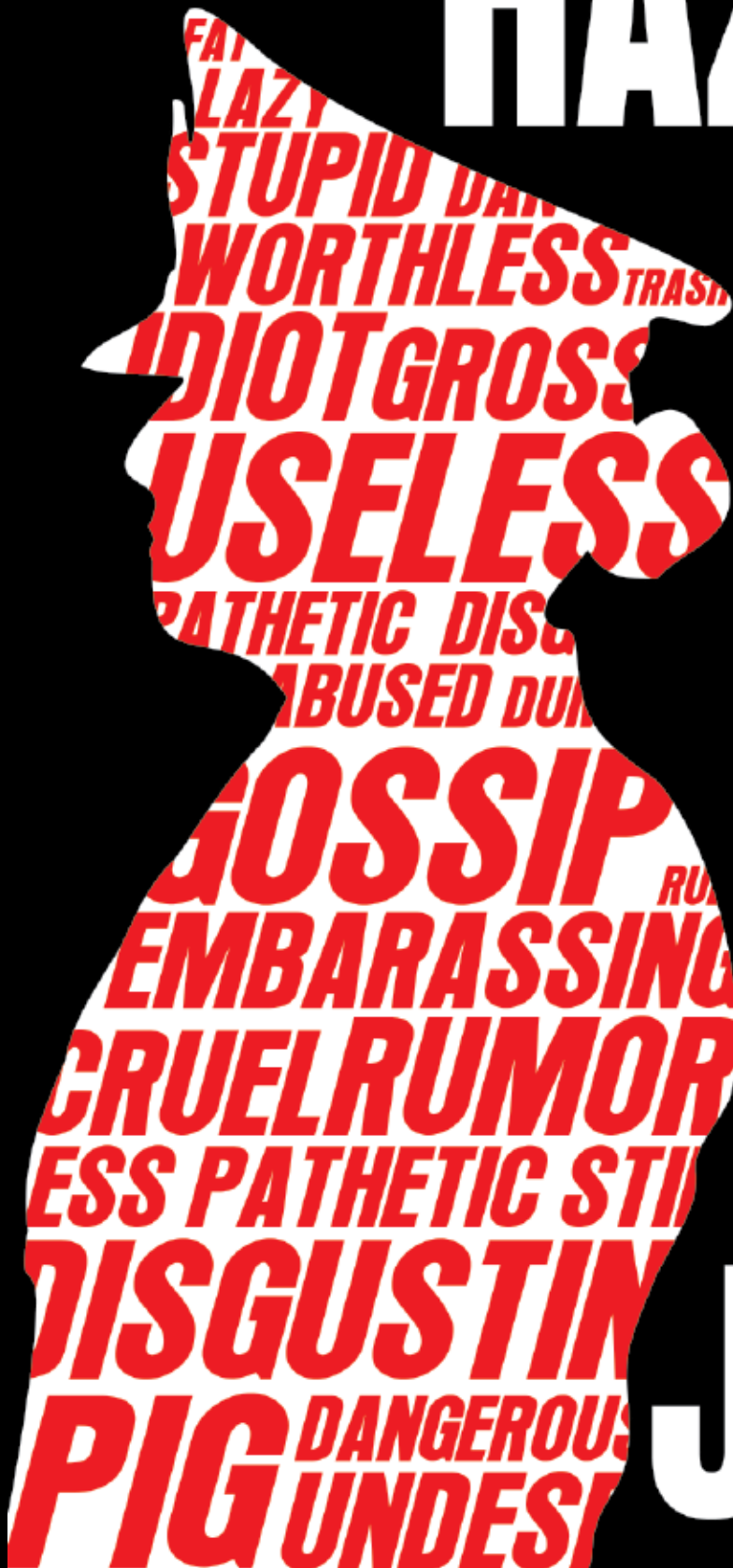




PHOTO | MCSA CHRISTA WATSON