



NAVMEC NAVIGATOR

Keepin' it in the Family

Flight deck crew bonds together to accomplish mission

Comfort Quickies

Notes:

A barrage of mighty explosives crashed down Friday on Baghdad, sending enormous fireballs and clouds of smoke billowing high into the night sky above the Iraqi capital.

The first attack on Baghdad came from 320 Tomahawk cruise missiles fired by ships in the Gulf and the Red Sea, said Rear Admr. Matthew G. Moffit, commander of the aircraft carrier USS Kitty Hawk battle group.

The missiles were intended for targets in and around Baghdad, he said, and they were fired about 20 minutes before the first explosions occurred.

Did you know:

March is women's history month. Women have helped serve the military since the beginning of our nation. During the Mexican War (1846-1848) Elizabeth Newcom enlists in Company D of the Missouri Volunteer Infantry as Bill Newcom. She marches 600 miles from Missouri to winter camp at Pueblo, Colorado, before she is discovered to be a woman and discharged.

Quote of the week:

"Our lives are not determined by what happens to us, but by how we react to what happens; not by what life brings to us, but by the attitude we bring to life. A positive attitude causes a chain reaction of positive thoughts, events, and outcomes. It is a catalyst... a spark that creates extraordinary results." —Anonymous

Don't forget:

You can view the photos featured in the paper as well as many more on the share drive. Click on PAO-pics. Who knows there may be a picture of you.

Story and Photos by
JOSN Erica Mater
Comfort Public Affairs

We are the first people patients see when they come on board and we are the last people they see when they leave."

These are the words spoken by HM3 Alfred Ibin-yopakaka, a member of the *Comfort* flight deck crew. Ibin-yopakaka, or IB for short, is part of a team whose mission is to ensure safe operations on the flight deck.

Flight deck operations include loading and unloading of cargo and patients, fueling of aircraft, maintenance of the flight deck, firefighting, and the overall safety during flight operations.

"If I don't do my job and do it right, people can die," says Airman Stephen Fowler, the youngest member of the crew. Everyone depends on the crew to get the job done. The pilot counts on the crew to get the helicopter down safely. The patients depend on the crew to work quickly so the patients get the help they need.

As many as 21 crewmembers man the deck during flight quarters. They are responsible for landing the aircraft, securing it to the deck, testing the fuel, and safely loading and unloading cargo and patients. Some of the crewmembers are also tasked with fighting fires in the event of a crash.

Being on the flight deck is a danger-



ABH2 Tamela Lee safely guides a helicopter to the flight deck. The enlisted landing signalman is in charge of the safe landing of aircraft.

ous job. There is always a risk factor involved when you are at flight quarters. Risks can range from wrong hand signals, to crashes and fires, to improper unloading of cargo.

ABH3 Gary Miller, who is one of the firefighters of the crew, says what he does is extremely dangerous. "Crashes and fighting fires doesn't happen all the time, but our job as firefighters is one of the most dangerous jobs in the world, and we must always be prepared," says Miller.

With crewmembers on the deck, each with their own job to do, its imperative everyone works together. From the landing signalman enlisted to the tower log chief, communication is the key to success. Talking is not an option for the crew. The noise of the helicopter combined with the almost soundproof headsets, makes talking nearly impossible. The crew communicates silently with hand signals. With-

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CREW

out the ability to hear, their sense of sight is heightened. They must be able to observe everything that is going on around them.

"Communication is very important in our line of work. If someone isn't paying attention or misses a hand signal, it could mean disaster," says Aviation Boatswains Handler Second Class Tamela Lee, one of the landing signalman enlisted (LSE) of the crew.

On Navy ships, the flight deck crews are made up of aviation boatswains (AB), aviation boatswains handlers (ABH), and aviation boatswains fuelers (ABF). *Comfort's* flight deck crew is different. They have ABHs and ABFs, but what separates this crew from the rest of the fleet is the hospital corpsman (HM) working on the flight deck. Now, there is a flight deck corpsman with other flight deck crews, but the corpsman who work on *Comfort's* flight deck work as an ABH or ABF. These select corpsman have been asked to go beyond their corpsman responsibilities and learn a totally new job.

"I love working on the flight deck. Working on the flight deck gives me the opportunity to learn different jobs and I like that," says crewmember HN Johnathan Arango.

However, the corpsman could not learn the jobs of the flight deck without the people who are actually rated ABH and ABF. These are the people who teach the corpsman how to do all the jobs associated with flight operations.

Flight operations are not something that is set in stone. There is no work schedule. It is not an 8-4 job, nor is it always planned. The flight

deck crew is on-call 24-7. Flight operations can happen at any-time day or night, and often without any notice. Sometimes this means the crew is left in a waiting game, waiting for the next flight operation.

"There are some days when we may have only one or maybe no helicopters coming in. Those days are not too exciting, but it gives us a chance to catch up on our studying or working on anything else we have to do," says HM3 Will Patterson, the flight deck corpsman and aviation transportation officer for the crew.

For every down there is an up and the same is true for the crew. There may be days when there is nothing to do but maintenance work, but then



there are those days when the crew must work into the late hours of the night, long after most everyone has called it a day. It is those days the crew lives for.

"I love the adrenaline rush you get from working on the flight deck. I love the fast-paced momentum of vertical replenishments and other flight operations," says ABF3 George Weber, one of the fuelers of the crew.

ABF2 Joshua Cackowski agrees. "I love everything about this job. There is no other job out there that I would want. I mean, where else do you get to work with these people and do the stuff I do. There are only a handful of jobs that give you this kind of adrenaline rush, and I am glad I have one of them."

With the exception of a few new crewmembers, the flight deck crew has been together



since *Comfort's* departure from Baltimore Jan. 6. Over the past few months, the crew has not only come together to work as a team, they have become a family.

The flight deck family does everything together. Not only do they work together, they eat together, go out together, hang out with each other, and they are each others support when it is needed. It's the family-type bond you see when you watch the way they work together and the way they "play" together. You know you have just walked into their house when you step on the flight deck or go into their "garage."

"We are very close, and we won't let anyone come between us," says ABH2 Lee.

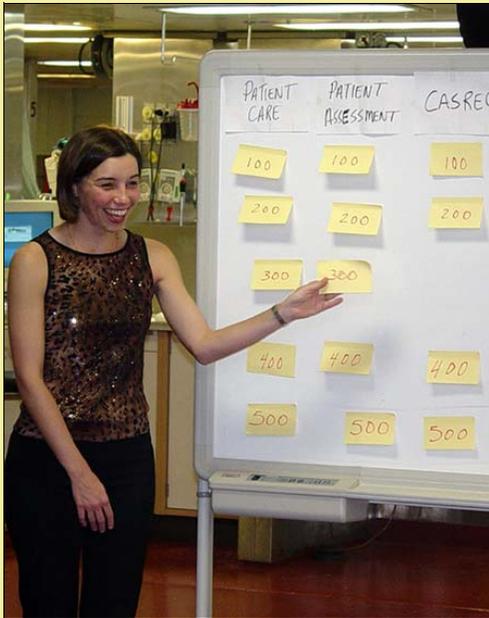
ABH1 Rick Justo says the job is not always easy, but it's the rough times that help bring them closer together.

Most people only see glimpses of the life of a flight deck crewman. Some people walk in on them catching a few snoozes in between flight operations, because they don't always know when the next sleep time will come. Others watch from afar as the crewman secure aircraft to the flight deck, not realizing the danger the job actually possesses. Only when we walk in their shoes and do what they do will we be able to fully understand the life and works of a flight deck crewman.

From left to right: crewmembers await the signal from the LSE to secure the aircraft; Hospital Corpsman Third Class Alfred Ibin-yopakaka takes a sample fuel from the aircraft for testing Aviation Boatswains Fueller Third Class George Weber sets up for refueling



Casualty Receiving takes different approach to training



ENS Julia Reintjes plays the role of Vanna White during a medical jeopardy. The game gave casualty receiving a chance to have fun and learn at the same time.

Story and photo by
JOSN Erica Mater
Comfort Public Affairs

Casualty receiving took a different approach to training Wednesday. Instead of training as usual, they decided to play a game of jeopardy.

HM2 Shawn McDonough is one of the people who help put the game together. He says the game is a great way to break away from traditional on the job training.

"We thought this would be good for morale and at the same time get in some training," says McDonough.

The game was called medical jeopardy, but it was more like a mix of Jeopardy and Wheel of Fortune. There was Vanna White of Wheel of Fortune, who was played by ENS Julia Reintjes, NC, and the host was HMCS William Phillips who played the role of Alex Trebec of Jeopardy.

Unlike normal Jeopardy, there were four teams of two and the topics were hospital and ship related. Some of the categories included ship orientation and chemical, biological, and radiological warfare training.

Applause erupted from the crowd when the team of HN Christina Kula and HN Darris Simmons answered the final Jeopardy question correctly giving them the win.

After the game, the show went to "commercial breaks" while the audience members got a chance to shake hands with the contestants.

Who says you can't have fun while on the job?

USUHS Graduates Deploy in Support of Operation Enduring Freedom

by CDR Craig Bonnema, MC, USN,
USUHS Class of 1993

Fifteen graduates of the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences (USUHS), F. Edward Hébert School of Medicine met for a historic reunion photo aboard the hospital ship, *USNS Comfort (T-AH 20)* on Tuesday 11 March 2003.

Most of those present were attached to the *Comfort*, but some were from embarked medical units awaiting further deployment. Two days later, five more USUHS graduates, including one from the Graduate School of Nursing, Nurse Anesthesia Program, joined their classmates aboard the *Comfort*.

The Class of 1993 was the most heavily represented USUHS class with seven of the twenty members. CAPT Dave Beardsley, Class of 1984, Anesthesiology, Naval Medical Center Portsmouth was the senior graduate present and LCDR (Sel) Pat Sipe, Class of 1997, Anesthesiology, National Naval Medical Center was the most recent graduate.

CDR Terry Stambaugh, Class of 1992, noted that five of his twelve



physicians in the *Comfort's* Anesthesiology Department were USUHS graduates. "This is Homecoming Week out here," he said. "My classmates bring a wealth of experience, military and medical, that will serve us well during this conflict."

LCDR John Capacchione, Class of 1993, was impressed with the level of preparation aboard the *Comfort*. He remarked, "If our medical readi-

ness is any indication of our military readiness, this will be a quick and decisive war."

Once the war in Iraq begins, this group of graduates, along with their classmates in other forward deployed units, will be putting into practice the valuable lessons learned several years ago in the classrooms of USUHS.

-Photo Provided by HM2 Michael Duff

Chaplain's Corner: Time And Place

By LCDR Mark Koczak
Comfort Command Chaplain

Shipmates, take a moment or two today and every day for as long as we are here to consider why you are on *Comfort*. For us older folks, those of us who have spent much of our adult lives serving our country in the military, this should be a very simple task. Almost all of us are part of staff corps in the Navy. We support and more importantly on *Comfort* we care for the injured.

On this day of all days it is much too easy to get wrapped up in the event. We are at war but... *Comfort's* mission remains the same. Each of us has a part to play here.

From the food service attendants on the deck of the galley countless hours each day, to the nurses and corpsmen on the wards, the CASREC, the ICUs and the Operating Rooms, to the doctors and specialists, to the MSC crew often working incredible hours to maintain this ship and to those of us who support them and the patients we will be caring for.

I encourage all of you to look after each other. Many have told you this for most of if not all of your time in the Navy. This is the time we have prepared for. All of the training, all of the duty time, all of the countless days of boredom when we had nothing to do, this is our time and *Comfort* is our place. With all of that the most important piece of *Comfort* is you, the entire crew. Take advantage of those brief times to spend with shipmates. Visit the ship's chapel, although it can be hard to find some quiet personal time there with now 46 events going on during our 'normal' week. Take care of yourselves physically and get some sleep. We all need to be at 150%.

I have waited almost 18 years for just this chance. As have many of you who have always been back home during a conflict. Talk to us about how we feel about this. You might be surprised.

Remember all of our brothers and sisters serving everywhere around us. We are definitely not alone. And remember all of our loved ones, families and friends, who care about us and may not understand what we are doing here. Tell them about it. They need to know. Our priority now is the mission of this ship and her crew.

Comfort's NMCRS Fund Drive a hit

The 2003 *USNS Comfort (T-AH 20)* Navy and Marine Corps Relief Society (NMCRS) Fund Drive started with a bang as enthusiastic and determined Key Persons from divisions within each department gathered contributions from their shipmates to the tune of over **\$13,400** in our first week of this year's campaign. The amount is not as remarkable as the number of contributors, 185 or about 18% of the ship's military complement. Here is some information that may interest you:

- The lowest single contribution was \$1.00
- The highest single contribution was \$600

The top five contributing Department/Divisions:

- H1 (ICU): Over \$3,300
- S2 (Supply): Over \$2,900
- H2 (Surgery): Over \$1,700
- H2 (Medical): Over \$1,400
- H4 (Laboratory): Over \$1,201

Not that any of you are in this for anything other than your desire to support Sailors, Marines, and their families, but you may be interested in knowing that none of these departments/divisions are secure in their current position. Food for thought.

The Fund Drive isn't scheduled to end until 10 April so you have a little time to seek out your division key person.

Congratulations to you all on your outstanding effort.

Information provided by LCDR Wilson Knight, *Comfort's* NMCRS chairperson.

Vertrep equals group effort



Photo by JOSN Erica Mater

Comfort supply and flight deck crews took part in a vertical replenishment with *USNS Sirius* Thursday afternoon. The crews worked together to help unload 120 pallets of food, medical supplies, and office supplies. The replenishment took almost four hours to complete and allowed *Comfort* to get rid of several boxes of trash.