



MINDLINES

Edition 18 | Fall 2013

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A Mission for Care

By Cmdr. Jean Fisak

Deploying can be a stressful time, but it's especially hard for Sailors who deploy individually. A Mobile Care Team (MCT) sees Individual Augmentees, Sailors who are pulled together as a unit into a Navy command, Sailors trained to deploy while embedded with the Army, Joint or international leadership and at times, Sailors who are deployed to one command but geographically dislocated with no local leadership available.

MCTs were established by the Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery to present a blend of psychological assessment and prevention services to support IAs. Team members conduct behavior health surveys and focus groups from multiple Navy units while on their mission.

Some of their collected data are analyzed on site to provide command leadership with a quick psychological look at a unit, with a more in-depth analysis available shortly thereafter. Team members also meet individually and in small groups with Navy personnel to provide education in combat and operational stress control.

I was assigned to MCT-7, a first-time reduced personnel team that conducted unparalleled surveillance extending beyond the extraordinary work of previous teams. The team conducted extensive battlefield circulation missions via rotary and fixed-wing flights, convoy movements throughout some of the heaviest and taxing conditions and, on foot, all accessible areas throughout Afghanistan. We frequently traveled in harm's way "outside the wire" in some of the most unstable areas to give Navy warfighters an otherwise unattainable voice.

Consultations were formulated with proposed tangible recommendations for unit leaders into various challenges Sailors faced on a daily basis. The consultations were forwarded and ultimately resulted in direct changes to Navy

policy, guidance, logistics and training for IAs.

MCT-7 has had a unique opportunity to reach out to fellow shipmates. The team has seen firsthand what Navy service members experience, while at the same time assessing mental well-being and gathering information on Sailor concerns. It is a real pleasure to see how well our



Above: *Cmdr. Jean Fisak recently joined NCCOSC as assistant director. She is a member of the Navy Nurse Corps and completed a seven-month tour with the Navy's Mobile Care Team in Afghanistan.*

Navy brethren have integrated into the joint community, demonstrated technical expertise and provided leadership at a level that is unique to the Sailor development model.

Professionally, this tour provided great insight into the psychological stressors of the deployed Sailor. This information is invaluable as it helps to understand their reintegration and possible deployment-related stressors. Personally, this was a rewarding experience as I had the opportunity to provide a voice for the Sailors to their leaders and to Big Navy. 📧



Taking One for the Team

To get a glimpse of how Marines are made, a team of five NCCOSC staff members recently participated in a Boot Camp Challenge held for civilians at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego. Granted, the 5K obstacle course was geared more for the weekend fitness enthusiast, but it did offer a tiny taste of the physical and mental stress that boots go through during the 13 weeks of the real deal, including lots of loud “encouragement” from drill instructors.

How did Team NCCOSC do? Read on for their reactions and observations about resilience.

Tom McFadden, communications specialist: “I still got it, I can do this,” I said to myself before we began. This bit of internal self-encouragement wouldn’t have been necessary 15 years ago, but when

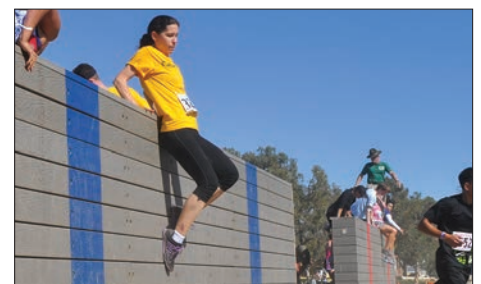


you’re north of 35, physical challenges require more preparation. While I was pretty positive I would finish, I wanted a decent time. I wanted to prove to myself that though I’m no longer as young and carefree as I once was, I’m still physically and mentally resilient.

Singular focus is needed to face a challenge in life. Resilience is built one brick at a time. The obstacle course offered a series of focused challenges – climb over a log, shimmy under another. Hoist yourself over a six-foot wall. Hit the deck and bang out some push-ups. Our team met each challenge and moved swiftly to the next. If we started to lag, our esprit de corps – and the DIs – spurred us on.

We finished the 5k course in a respectable 30 minutes, earning us 10th place out of 50 five-person teams, and we were ready for more. One of my colleagues and I joked that we wished there had been more push-ups. We even decided to take the Marine Corps pull-up test afterward and we both passed. So, good news Marine Corps – if you find you’re running low on recruits, I know a handful of resilience-building weekend warriors who can tackle an obstacle course and perform the requisite number of pull-ups required to join.

Eileen Delaney, psychologist: I thought I had all of the essentials for a stress-free 5K obstacle-course race since I’m training for a half marathon and have been doing CrossFit on a weekly basis.



Still, as soon as we started running my mind quickly demanded answers. *Why do my legs feel tight and heavy? How come I’m not sprinting to the first obstacle?* This is my typical pattern in races – my mind always manages to jump out in front. Things eventually come together but I wish my mind would give me a break from the start.

The negative thoughts, of course, are a waste of energy that could have been put to better use. Imagine how far we all could go if we tell ourselves to “just hang in there.” These four words are not judging our performance or telling ourselves we can’t do something; instead, they are simple words of encouragement, prompting us to stick

with it and see what happens.

Sure, it might not be the most inspirational motto, but perhaps that is the best part. It seems doable, not overwhelming. It just might turn out to be an ordinary phrase that gets us through extraordinary times.

Erin Miggantz, clinical research coordinator: I'm a new runner, and I admit I was nervous for this, my first race. Not to mention my palms were raw from taking a spill off my skateboard the night before.



My nerves were quelled by the first mile of the race, which was a relaxing jog at a comfortable pace. Jumping over barrels of hay wasn't so bad either. I could even handle a few push-ups in the mud under the direction of our friendly DIs. Hoisting myself over multiple shoulder-high logs is something I won't miss, but I did it.

I now understand why people love running so much. It's an excellent exercise in distress tolerance, not to mention a wonderful way to clear your mind, take time to think, to process situations that may be troubling you while your feet pound the pavement. Your breath naturally regulates itself with your running pace, and you learn to breathe through the physical or emotional pain that arises as you continue to put one foot in front of the other.

Obstacles aside, I enjoyed the race and am proud that we finished as a team. I'll be back next year.

Right: Members of Team NCCOSC just before starting the 2013 Marine Corps Boot Camp Challenge. From left, Capt. Scott Johnston, director, Naval Center for Combat and Operational Stress Control; Eileen Delaney, psychologist; Tom McFadden, communications specialist; Steven Gerard, research coordinator; Erin Miggantz, clinical research coordinator. **Inset:** 2013 t-shirt graphics. Photos by Joe Griffin.

Steven Gerard, research coordinator:

The race for me was a snapshot of the group accountability, enthusiasm and physical fitness required of Marines.

In order to see your team "through to



the finish line," you must be loyal to each other, never leaving a buddy behind. This accountability facilitates cohesion and helps make decisions to accomplish the unit's mission. Motivation becomes inherent in the team that values its success over individual success.

Physical fitness is, of course, essential to the Corps. One benefit of regular exercise is increased levels of the neurotransmitter serotonin. That generally equates to being happier, having less anxiety and aggression, and better sleep.

Exercise also improves cognitive functioning. It helps activate the higher cortical regions in our brains, leading to clearer and more focused thinking and improved reasoning, planning and strategizing – optimal for achieving success of the mission and looking out for your teammates.

What we experienced at the MCRD challenge was just a bit of the physical and emotional demands of basic training but,



nonetheless, the event upheld the integrity of the Marines' esprit de corps.

Capt. Scott Johnston, NCCOSC director: In the military, we begin building resilience during boot camp. We face, and conquer, physical challenges we didn't imagine we were capable of. These accom-



plishments set the tone for our careers, but also for a lifelong effort to build and maintain resilience.

We know that resilience can indeed be taught, and we also know that it's a continuing education. We need to keep ourselves both physically and mentally resilient throughout our lifetimes to ensure that we have the strength and conviction to meet the challenges and obstacles life presents us.

At NCCOSC, we preach resilience on a daily basis and it was only fitting that some of us practice what we preach by participating in the Boot Camp Challenge. We tested ourselves physically and mentally and built camaraderie competing as a team. Importantly, we're all a little more resilient today as a result of our efforts. 🇺🇸

Awards Salute Leadership and Caregiving

Since 2010, NCCOSC has been the venue for bestowing two awards to the Navy fleet and medical communities. One acknowledges the importance of line leadership in the care of shipmates, and the other spotlights the compassion and concern of caregivers in helping patients. NCCOSC is proud to continue the tradition this year with the presentation of the **2013 Epictetus Leadership Award** and the **2013 NCCOSC Peabody Caregiver Award**.

A bit of background on Epictetus. He was a Greek philosopher who often used nautical metaphors. “Anyone can hold the rudder when the sea is calm,” he said, inferring that it takes a strong leader to keep the ship afloat and the crew safe when seas are turbulent.

The award acknowledges leadership characteristics in an individual who models behavior for other aspiring leaders to emulate, who maintains mission focus at all times, and who demonstrates concern and a caring attitude for shipmates. As the new recipient of the Epictetus Award, **Cmdr. Gadala Kratzer**, commanding officer of the *USS Gridley*, was cited for his caring and inspirational leadership qualities during a highly challenging year for the guided missile destroyer.

Despite the challenges, he ensured the best E-4 to E-6 promotion rate in Destroyer Squadron One, and he won the Golden Anchor Award for retention. He also established a shipboard program to

reward responsible decision making and deglamorize alcohol consumption.

“Leadership is setting a culture about what is right and what’s wrong,” says Kratzer. “It’s about always going back to the principles of honor, courage and commitment and about constant engagement with Sailors,” says Kratzer.

The Peabody Award is presented to a healthcare provider who has demonstrated competent mental health skills, values, attitudes and behaviors that exemplify compassionate concern and caring for patients. It is named for Francis Peabody, a noted Harvard Medical School professor who ended his lectures with what he called the essential healing component in all treatment. “For the secret of the care of the patient is in caring for the patient.”

This year’s Peabody goes to one of NCCOSC’s own, **Dr. John Clapp**, a clinical psychologist who was one of the first staff members to join the center.

Clapp has been a tireless advocate for warriors and their families throughout his long and distinguished career, much of it spent at Naval Medical Center San Diego. His significant footprint can be felt throughout Navy Medicine – from championing the program that put psychologists aboard all aircraft carriers to the world-class OASIS program, a residential treatment option for PTSD patients.

“I grew up in awe of the military and I’ve always had the most profound respect for our service members and their

families,” Clapp says. “I’ve always been intrigued by how they cope and adapt.”

Clapp wanted to join the Navy but family obligations and age restrictions prevented it. He instead focused on mental health issues affecting Sailors and Marines and his impact has been profound – treating thousands of patients and supervising training for scores of interns.

At NCCOSC, Clapp made significant contributions in all of the center’s training and consultation programs, including writing the curriculum for operational mental health training for general medical officers. He retired in September. Fair winds and following seas, Dr. John! 🚢



Left: Commodore, Destroyer Squadron One, Capt. Michael Elliott (left), congratulates *USS Gridley* commanding officer, Cmdr. Gadala Kratzer after being presented the 2013 Navy Epictetus Leadership Award. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Rosalie Garcia. **Right:** Dr. John Clapp (left) is honored with the 2013 NCCOSC Peabody Caregiver Award by Capt. Scott Johnston, director, Naval Center for Combat and Operational Stress Control. Photo by Joe Griffin.



On the Cover: Aviation Structural Mechanic 3rd Class Oliver Charles prepares an E-2C Hawkeye for launch aboard the aircraft carrier *USS Nimitz* (CVN 68). U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Jessica Bidwell.

NCCOSC MINDLINES
EDITION 18 • FALL 2013



Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery
Naval Center for Combat & Operational Stress Control
(NCCOSC) (M95)

Views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Department of Defense.

Mindlines is written and produced by the NCCOSC Strategic Communications Department.

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