

**STATEMENT OF  
MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER OF THE NAVY  
(SUBMARINE WARFARE/SURFACE WARFARE)  
RICK WEST  
BEFORE THE  
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY CONSTRUCTION**

**April 14, 2010**



# Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy

## MCPON (SS/SW) Rick D. West



Master Chief Rick West became the 12<sup>th</sup> Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy on Dec. 12, 2008.

West was born in Rising Fawn, Ga. He graduated from Northwest Georgia High School in 1981 and immediately entered the U.S. Navy.

West received recruit training and Quartermaster training at Orlando, Fla., followed by Enlisted Submarine School at Groton, Conn. His first duty assignment was aboard *USS Ethan Allen* (SSN 608) where he completed Submarine Qualifications. Other assignments include *USS Thomas Edison* (SSN 610), *USS Sea Devil* (SSN 664), Commander Naval Activities United Kingdom (COMNAVACTUK), *USS Tecumseh* (SSBN 628)(Blue), and COMSUBPAC Staff (TRE Team).

West was assigned as Chief of the Boat aboard the San Diego based Fast Attack Submarine, *USS Portsmouth* (SSN 707), completing two Western Pacific deployments and earning two Battle Efficiency “E” awards.

West served as Command Master Chief in Submarine Squadron ELEVEN. Upon completion of his tour at COMSUBRON ELEVEN, he was selected as Force Master Chief (FORCM), attended the Senior Enlisted Academy in Newport, R.I., and served as Force Master Chief, Submarine Force U.S. Pacific Fleet (COMSUBPAC) from Jan. 2001 to Jan. 2004.

West then reported to *USS Preble* (DDG 88) in San Diego, Calif., where he completed a deployment to the Arabian Gulf and qualified as Enlisted Surface Warfare Specialist.

West was then selected to serve as Pacific Fleet, Fleet Master Chief from Feb. 2005 to June 2007.

Prior to being selected to be MCPON, he served as the 14th Fleet Master Chief for Commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command from June 2007 to Dec. 2008.

West's personal awards include the Legion of Merit (two awards), Meritorious Service Medal (three awards), Navy Commendation Medal (four awards), Navy Achievement Medal (two awards), Enlisted Surface Warfare Insignia, Enlisted Submarine Insignia, and SSBN Deterrent Patrol Pin.

### ***Introduction***

Chairman Edwards, Ranking Member Wamp and members of this subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you. It is an honor and privilege to represent the finest force in the history of our great Navy. I offer my heartfelt thanks on behalf of our Sailors around the world and their families for the steadfast support of Congress. I would especially like to thank this subcommittee, who provides the appropriations for our vast array of programs such as child care, privatization of military housing and continuum of care for our Sailors, which are so vital to our quality of life and that of our families.

As the 12th Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy (MCPON), I have the privilege of working for more than 433,000 active and reserve men and women who comprise our all-volunteer Navy. I am constantly amazed and truly awed by the daily sacrifices and outstanding capabilities of our Sailors who serve with distinction on ships, squadrons, submarines and on land.

### ***Sailors in Action***

The men and women I have met, the warriors who wear the cloth of our Nation, are why I am so proud to go to work every day. I have seen them in action, and observed closely the remarkable and selfless things they do out of devout patriotism and commitment to serve others. I have seen them perform magnificently on the decks of aircraft carriers at night in the Persian Gulf as jets scream off the bow, one every 40 seconds, and I have been with them in the engine room of a destroyer where the sweat soaks through your uniform within a minute and where you can barely hear yourself think. They joined the Navy to go to sea and we trained them to

succeed there. We gave them skills to keep a ship afloat, to keep one another alive at sea, and to maintain the gear we use to take the fight to our enemies. They had no idea we might need them to strap on the kevlar, pick up a rifle and head to war in the desert.

The Navy has more than 23,000 active and reserve Sailors on the ground and at sea in the Central Command Area of Responsibility (AOR). As the focus shifts from Iraq to Afghanistan, we expect the current demand on our forces to increase over this year. I have been to the sands of Iraq and the mountains of Afghanistan where our Sailors serve alongside Marines, Soldiers and Airman, and for two consecutive years we have more Sailors serving boots on ground than deployed at sea in that part of the world. That number, more than anything else, points to a shift in traditional Navy missions and an increase in responsibility for our service. With this sustained operational tempo, we are experiencing added stress on the force, but are confident in the steps we are taking to support our Sailors and their families.

More than 50,000 Sailors are on station around the world, and 38 percent of our ships are at sea. We are executing special operations with our Navy SEALs, disabling Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) with our Explosive Ordnance Disposal teams, and providing close air support and electronic attack with our aircraft. We are securing key waterways with our Riverine forces, building critical infrastructure with our SeaBee battalions, augmenting ground forces with our Individual Augmentees, and treating wounded warriors.

We have Sailors on the ground excelling in new missions and Sailors above, on and under the world's oceans executing our Maritime Strategy's core capabilities of forward

presence, deterrence, sea control, power projection, maritime security, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief support. Supporting civil authorities with capabilities that can help stabilize and improve the situation in the wake of natural and man-made disasters is a core Navy mission. Some of our youngest Sailors are helping to rebuild nations like Haiti after suffering a devastating earthquake and aftershocks in January. More than 4,000 active and reserve Sailors and Navy civilians deployed to Haiti to help relieve Haiti's human suffering. Our great Navy Sailors and civilians handed out food and water, aided in rescues, cleanup and rebuilding, showed care and compassion, and delivered exceptional medical care to the men, women and children of Haiti who so desperately needed it.

In addition to humanitarian assistance, our ships and aircraft also deter maritime pirate activity in and around the Gulf of Aden, Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean, and the Red Sea, allowing the shipping industry time to implement self-protection measures and enabling the international community to establish a legal framework to hold pirates accountable for their actions much like USS FARRAGUT's (DDG 99) and USS MCFAUL's (DDG 74) recent actions in deterring pirate attacks in the Gulf of Aden

This is what we do. It is who we are. There is no doubt our Navy is the most capable, best trained maritime fighting force in history. Sailors are at the forefront protecting vital national assets. They are keeping open the world's sea lanes by deterring enemies in the maritime domain and assisting people in times of distress, rebuilding nations and partnerships around the world.

At the same time our Sailors are ambassadors and statesmen who not only prove we are a country of strength, but one that relishes the chance to help our fellow man. The United States Navy is the finest in the world and our Sailors are making a difference every day. We are a global force for good.

### ***Recruiting and Retention***

Our Navy recruiters are working hard at finding the very best our nation has to offer for the next generation of American Sailors. Last year marked the second consecutive year that our Navy has achieved its officer and enlisted goals in both the active and reserve components, and we project we will meet them again this year. We continue to exceed Department of Defense (DoD) quality standards in all recruit categories, achieving 97 percent High School Diploma Graduates (HSDG) and 79.4 percent Test Score Category I-III A, to date this year.

Last year, we transitioned from a posture of reducing end strength to one of stabilizing the force. Our stabilization efforts remain focused on maintaining a balanced force in terms of seniority, experience and skills while staying within our congressionally authorized end strength. We expect to meet our FY10 authorized active end strength of 328,800 (this includes 4,400 OCO funded end strength) and reserve end strength of 65,500 by the end of the fiscal year, as well as our active and reserve end strength targets in FY11.

Navy is finding ways to provide flexible service options and levels of participation to maximize each individual Sailor's ability to serve in the Navy over the course of a lifetime. In order to enhance a Continuum of Service for our Sailors, the Navy continues to improve the

awareness and knowledge of reserve programs and opportunities for our active component Sailors. The Continuum of Service concept looks to provide Sailors with flexible career options, to increase opportunity to “Stay Navy,” and promote a lifetime of Service in support of the Navy Total Force.

This year, our Perform-to-Serve program was expanded to include a Selected Reserve option. This gives us the opportunity to retain our fully-qualified Sailors within the reserve component before they separate from active duty. This change removes the recruiter from the Sailor’s transition from active duty to reserve and creates a “Recruit Once, Retain for Life” culture. We also stood up the Career Transition Office (CTO) at Navy Personnel Command to directly assist Sailors transitioning between components; we view a Sailor’s career similar to driving down a highway. Sailors need the ability to make “lane changes” to meet life-work needs, and the CTO is there to make the “lane change” as seamless as possible.

Recruiting, developing and retaining the highest quality Sailors continues to be a high priority within the Navy. To that end, we must offer a quality of life and service that is directly tied to combat readiness. Creating an environment conducive to professional growth and supporting an attractive quality of service, adequate pay, health care, and housing will all aid in our retention efforts. The Post-9/11 GI Bill program offers Sailors and their families a new opportunity with greatly enhanced benefits to further improve their lives through education. This program has been very well received in both the active and reserve components. Approximately 18,000 active duty Navy members and 3,400 reserve Navy members have been approved for

transferability of benefits. We have not seen an adverse impact to enlisted retention to date, and we will continue to evaluate the impact of the Post-9/11 GI Bill as economic conditions change.

### ***Reserve Force***

Our Navy Reserve is an integral part of this hard-working, high-spirited and amazingly capable force. I am humbled by the commitment of the men and women of our Navy Reserve. It is very rewarding and fulfilling to stand shoulder to shoulder with them as we meet our nation's requirements.

The Navy Reserve's flexibility, responsiveness and ability to serve across a wide spectrum of operations clearly enhances the Navy's Total Force, acts as a true force multiplier and provides unique skill sets towards fulfilling Navy's requirements in an increasingly uncertain world. Since 9/11, our Navy Reserve Component has met more than 62,000 mobilization requirements. In 2009, more than 7,300 were mobilized to support Operation ENDURING FREEDOM and Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. Currently more than 6,000 Reserve Sailors are on mobilization orders providing global operational support. Sailors of our Navy Reserve are demonstrating they are ready, relevant and capable to meet any challenge, at home or abroad.

### ***Sailor and Family Readiness***

The United States Navy has been tasked with emerging missions that were not foreseeable less than a decade ago, along with more frequent and often longer deployments and deployments that are individual versus unit deployments. Preparing Sailors and their families to

anticipate, understand and cope with the unusual demands associated with the Navy lifestyle and operational tempo is critical to mission success.

Sailors' families are valued members of the Navy team. Through Fleet and Family Support Centers, the Navy offers quality services to prepare Navy families for the absence of their loved ones. We have significantly increased outreach to families, delivering services in alternate, off-base locations and increasingly leveraging technology to reach remotely located, isolated personnel and reserve force families. Webinars, monthly electronic newsletters and deployment preparedness handbooks aid the families of the more than 11,000 Sailors serving as Individual Augmentees — Sailors serving on assignment in Iraq, Afghanistan and other locations in support of Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO). Comprehensive benefits, such as our Morale, Welfare and Recreation facilities, world-class healthcare, child care facilities, housing and a host of programs supporting our families will ensure we retain our best personnel while maintaining the mission readiness our country deserves.

### *Child Care*

Overwhelming feedback from our families points to affordable, high-quality child care, preferably onboard our installations, as a significant quality of life factor. One in every four Navy families depends on Navy Child and Youth Programs (CYP) and 48 percent of CYP total system capacity resides within the Continental United States.

The CYP system of care provides high quality, subsidized developmental child care and youth recreation programs for eligible children ages four weeks to 18 years old. Currently, there

are 132 child development centers, 103 youth centers, 3,000 child development homes, 86 school-age care programs, and 2,500 community outreach spaces. The Navy is meeting 72 percent of DoD Potential Need, and, because of your support, will achieve 80 percent across the force by Fiscal Year 2012 through a 7,000 space increase since 2006 in CYP capacity resulting in an average three-month placement time.

### ***Homeport Ashore, Bachelor and Navy Family Housing***

We appreciate Congress appropriating funds for an enhanced homeowners assistance program that will aid the military homeowner who, by nature of their service, may be forced to sell their homes and take a loss in the current market. This initiative significantly impacts our individual mission readiness and retention. Navy housing continues to be a top priority throughout the Fleet. The quality and standard of living that Sailors and their families are able to enjoy are two key determinants of whether our Sailors make the Navy a career.

Deployed Sailors consistently live in cramped and often undesirable conditions. We remain committed to providing the best living conditions possible when their ships are in port. It is reasonable for Sailors to expect this, and they deserve nothing less. Currently, 6,500 shipboard E-1 to E-4 Sailors, with less than four years of service, reside aboard ship while in homeport. The projected Homeport Ashore (HPA) deficit, with consideration for the FY09 ARRA project you supported for Naval Base Coronado, is approximately 4,300 spaces, with Norfolk, San Diego and Yokosuka, Japan, being the top three Fleet areas with deficits.

The condition of Navy bachelor housing has declined in recent years. Facilities have critical capacity, condition, and configuration backlogs and 70 percent of permanent party barracks and dormitories are rated as Q3 (partial mission capable) or Q4 (non-mission capable). More than 200 bachelor housing facilities are more than 50 years old. The Navy has a projected deficit of more than 15,000 spaces to achieve the CNO and OSD standard of private sleeping rooms across 34 installations.

In the Chief of Naval Operations' (CNO) May 6, 2009, testimony before this Subcommittee, he committed to providing housing ashore for all junior sea duty Sailors by 2016 at the interim assignment policy standard (55 square feet of space per person). The Navy has made considerable progress toward achieving this goal through military construction privatization and intensified use of existing barracks capacity.

With the strong support of this subcommittee, we have successfully used Public/Private Venture (PPV) authorities, expanding our PPV family housing model to address critical bachelor housing needs. Before the authority expired on September 30, 2009, we executed two of the three pilot unaccompanied PPV projects: San Diego which was awarded in December 2006, and Hampton Roads awarded in December 2007. Preliminary success of the two pilot projects in San Diego and Hampton Roads has driven Navy to look at the feasibility of privatizing all barracks to address projected deficits and condition deficiencies.

The Navy has privatized more than 40,000 homes in the continental United States and Hawaii family housing inventory, and achieved the previous Department of Defense goal to

eliminate 100 percent of inadequate housing by 2007. Due to OSD creating a new condition standard for government-owned inventory utilizing Q-ratings which changed the definition of “adequate/inadequate,” the Navy will now have 3,044 inadequate family housing units (Q3/Q4) at the end of Fiscal Year 2011. While the newly-identified units represent 31 percent of the 9,957 government-owned units, they only represent 6 percent of the total Navy inventory, including leased and PPV units.

Affording Sailors and their families the opportunity for suitable, affordable and safe housing provides them the assurance of safety and a quality living environment for their families while deployed around the world.

### *Continuum of Care*

The Navy continues to provide support to Sailors and their families through a variety of programs that increase medical and non-medical assistance to wounded, ill and injured service members utilizing a comprehensive approach designed to optimize their recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration. This “Continuum of Care” provides resources to safeguard the mental and physical well-being of our service members and their families and includes wounded warrior care, operational stress control, suicide prevention, and sexual assault prevention and response. Our Navy medical professionals are among the best in the world and they are rapidly improving their knowledge in assessing and treating the effects of mental health issues associated with war, such as post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI).

The Navy's Safe Harbor Program is the Navy's lead organization for providing the highest quality non-medical care to all seriously wounded, ill and injured Sailors, Coast Guardsmen and their families. Enrollment in Safe Harbor is voluntary and not limited to combat related wounds or injuries. Service members injured during liberty or through shipboard accidents as well as those that have incurred a serious illness, whether physical or psychological, are eligible for support. There are more than 500 Sailors and Coast Guardsmen, and their families, who are being supported under the umbrella of the Navy's Safe Harbor Program.

The Navy's Operational Stress Control (OSC) program provides a comprehensive approach designed to actively promote the psychological health of Sailors and their families throughout a career while reducing the stigma associated with seeking help. As of March of this year, Basic OSC Awareness training has been provided to more than 84,000 Sailors at various locations across the country. We are continuing to deliver formal OSC curriculum modules to key training sites and tailor training materials to address the unique needs of specific communities.

The Warrior Transition Program (WTP) was established in Kuwait and provides a place and time for Sailors to decompress and transition from a war zone to life back home. Through small group discussions facilitated by chaplains and medical personnel, Warrior Transition Workshops prepare Sailors for resumption of family and social obligations, return to civilian employment, and reintegration with the community. In FY09, 3,283 workshops with more than 5,500 participants were conducted in Kuwait and through Mobile Care Teams forward deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Returning Warrior Workshop (RWW) is an important step in the demobilization and reintegration process for the Total Force and their families. The RWW is designed to identify problems, encourage members to talk about their experiences, direct family members to resources, and facilitate the demobilization process. In 2009, more than 1,800 service members and 1,400 family members attended one of 27 RWWs throughout the country. As of January 2010, an additional 15 RWWs, including two for the Marine Corps, have been scheduled under the current contract and 21 more RWWs are planned for the next contract through July 2011.

In an effort to address the mental health concerns of mobilized reservists, the Psychological Health Outreach program was implemented in July 2008, specifically for reserve component Sailors. Because these Sailors returning from deployment face unique challenges that can cause increased stress in their lives and exacerbate deployment-related injuries, psychological health outreach serves as a “safety net” for reserve component Sailors and their families. This program improves the overall psychological health and resiliency of Sailors returning from deployments and identifies long-term strategies to improve support services for them and their families.

We must be mindful that our force is consistently changing and so are the needs of our families. As the dynamics of American society shift, and as Navy families continue to be representatives of our nation’s communities, it is absolutely critical that our support programs evolve along with the needs of our loved ones.

We continue our efforts on suicide prevention through a multi-faceted system of communication, training and command support designed to foster resilience and promote psychological health among Sailors. Suicide prevention is an all-hands effort involving the individual Sailor, family members, peers, and leadership. The Navy's calendar year 2009 suicide rate of 13.8 per 100,000 Sailors represents an increase from the 2008 suicide rate of 11.6 per 100,000 Sailors. Although this is significantly below the national rate for the same age and gender demographic of 19.0 per 100,000<sup>1</sup> individuals, we remain committed to creating an environment in which stress and other suicide-related factors can be more openly recognized, discussed and addressed. This includes maintaining a solid foundation of trained and supported suicide prevention coordinators across commands, refreshing mental health provider skills in assessing and managing suicide risk, raising family awareness of suicide risk, warning signs and support resources, and encouraging Sailors to seek help.

Additionally, our Navy continues to develop and enhance programs designed to mitigate suicide risk factors and improve the resilience of the force. These programs focus on substance abuse prevention, financial management, positive family relationships, physical readiness, and family support with the goal of reducing individual stress. We continue to work toward a greater understanding of the issues surrounding suicide to ensure that our policies, training programs, interventions, and communication efforts are meeting their intended objectives.

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<sup>1</sup> National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (2004). Standardized U.S. suicide rates are adjusted for DON demographics.

Sexual assault is incompatible with our core values, high standards of professionalism, and personal discipline. CNO recent message to the force emphasized the importance of all Sailors living the attitude of “Not in my Navy” to the prevention of sexual assault.

Under the leadership of the newly designated Director of the Department of the Navy Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, the Navy has adopted a multi-faceted approach to raise awareness of effective prevention methods, victim response and offender accountability. We are working with leaders across the force to enhance training and victim advocacy programs, standardize reporting and case management procedures, and improve investigation and treatment processes. During the past year, program reviews have been conducted by the Government Accountability Office, the Defense Task Force on Sexual Assault in the Military Services, and the Naval Inspector General to identify program gaps and provide recommendations for improvement. We welcome these recommendations as we refine the Navy SAPR program and promote a culture that is intolerant of sexual assault.

### ***Conclusion***

It is often said that the greatest advantage we have is our technology. Technology has changed during the last 70 years and it has touched every part of our Navy from the way we fight, to the way we communicate, to the way we maintain and sustain our ships, planes and submarines. However, one constant has remained and that is the United States Sailor.

Whether on or below the oceans, in the air or boots on the ground, our Sailors are getting the job done and sustaining a high operational tempo. If we are to maintain that superiority, we

must remain dedicated and continue to invest in the quality of life of our Sailors and our Navy families. This is all the more critical during this time when we ask so much of our Total Force in the defense of our nation.

Navy senior leadership has long understood that family readiness is tied to operational readiness. More than that, we have learned that as our commitments continue to expand, stress on the family also increases. It is absolutely critical that our support programs evolve along with the needs of our Sailors and their loved ones. As the environment in which our Sailors and their families live changes, along with global requirements and world events, we must be continuously search for new and better ways to support our Navy families.

It is no source of contention for Sailors to deploy from their loved ones. Deployments are what we do; but, we should never underestimate or take for granted the incredible sacrifices our Sailors and their families make for the good of our nation as they meet the unusual demands associated with the Navy lifestyle.

On behalf of all the men and women in uniform who sacrifice daily and their families who faithfully support them, I want to extend my sincere appreciation for your unwavering support for our United States Navy. Thank you.