DCTT: TEACHING THE PRINCIPLES OF DAMAGE CONTROL

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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH

ABH3 ALEX MARTIN is the Wave Runner

Story and Photography
MC3 Kevin Hastings

LIVE TO SURF

Story by MC3 Kevin Hastings

The life of a Sailor is notorious for being transient. They're never in one place for too long and many times they're just barely getting familiar with a location when it's time to transfer again.

The constant change of military life accompanied by the stressors of work, family and finances can seem overwhelming, and it can take a mental and physical toll on a Sailor. Having an outlet to escape life's pressures, even if only for a short period of time, is incredibly important.

Our individuality and personal passions often serve as that escape and become the balance between what we can control and what we can't. More importantly, personal passions help define who we are, how we behave and how we'll react.

Nowhere is this more important than on the flight deck of an aircraft carrier. Keeping a clear mind and being able to react quickly could mean the difference between a mishap and an easy day.

For Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Handling) 3rd Class Alex Martin, from Fort Lauderdale, Fla., a surfboard and the rhythm of the ocean are the only tools he needs to maintain his focus and his edge.

"The first time I ever picked up a surfboard was 10 or 11 years ago," said Martin. "I stayed with it because it's a way of life for me—I love it."

"Before I joined the Navy, I didn't take advantage of the opportunities I had, and life was tough," said Martin. "But I could always go out into the ocean and ride some waves; it became like a form of meditation."

Photo provided by Alex Martin

Working on the flight deck of an aircraft carrier is a dangerous and hectic experience. It is a place where camaraderie, teamwork and a clear, focused mind can save lives.

"Up there [on the flight deck], we work long hours on a floating runway, moving jets and chalking them down—it's one of the most chaotic places to be in the world," said Martin. "When we get new guys, they get stressed-out in this kind of environment. There are a million different things going on all at the same time, but we're ready to get them trained on how to do the job safely. We look out for each other."

Martin's team is part of a constant cycle in the Navy—train to be part of the best naval fighting force in the world during the day and find a way to relieve the stress once the day is done.

Fortunately, this dry dock period has given his team a unique opportunity to continue strengthening its sense of esprit de corps off the ship as well.

"It's really sweet that we have the time to go to different surf spots out here with my buddies and enjoy each other's company," said Martin. "We barbecue, chill out, and I've even been able to teach some of the guys my passion in life."

Sharing personal experiences and teaching peers new ways to channel stress is a strong and positive way to influence how the team functions on the job.

"Martin is a proactive guy who makes a good mentor for his peers and the people under him," said Machinist's Mate 2nd Class Frank Chavez, from Los Angeles. "He takes a lot of pride in what he does."

Mentorship can take on different forms and can start with something as simple as the proper way to paddle out into the ocean or how to avoid crushing rogue waves. The key, though, is that it also leads to training someone how to safely move a multi-million dollar jet.

"There's a lot of things happening on the flight deck; attention to detail is an important aspect that everyone needs to have up there," said Martin. "When I train someone, I'm not just going to sign off their PQS. They're joining my team, and I need to know that they'll watch my back and each others'."

Every Sailor learns many skills during his or her time in service. One of the most important skill sets we learn, though, is how to form a team and safely lead it to mission accomplishment.

"I surf every chance I get because I know it helps me focus when I'm on duty," said Martin. "If you make one false step or just don't pay attention for a second, it may cost someone's life."

"Sometimes people underestimate Martin without really knowing him," said Chavez. "Martin always has good intentions; when he's at work you can see the drive he has. You can also see it when he's out on the water."

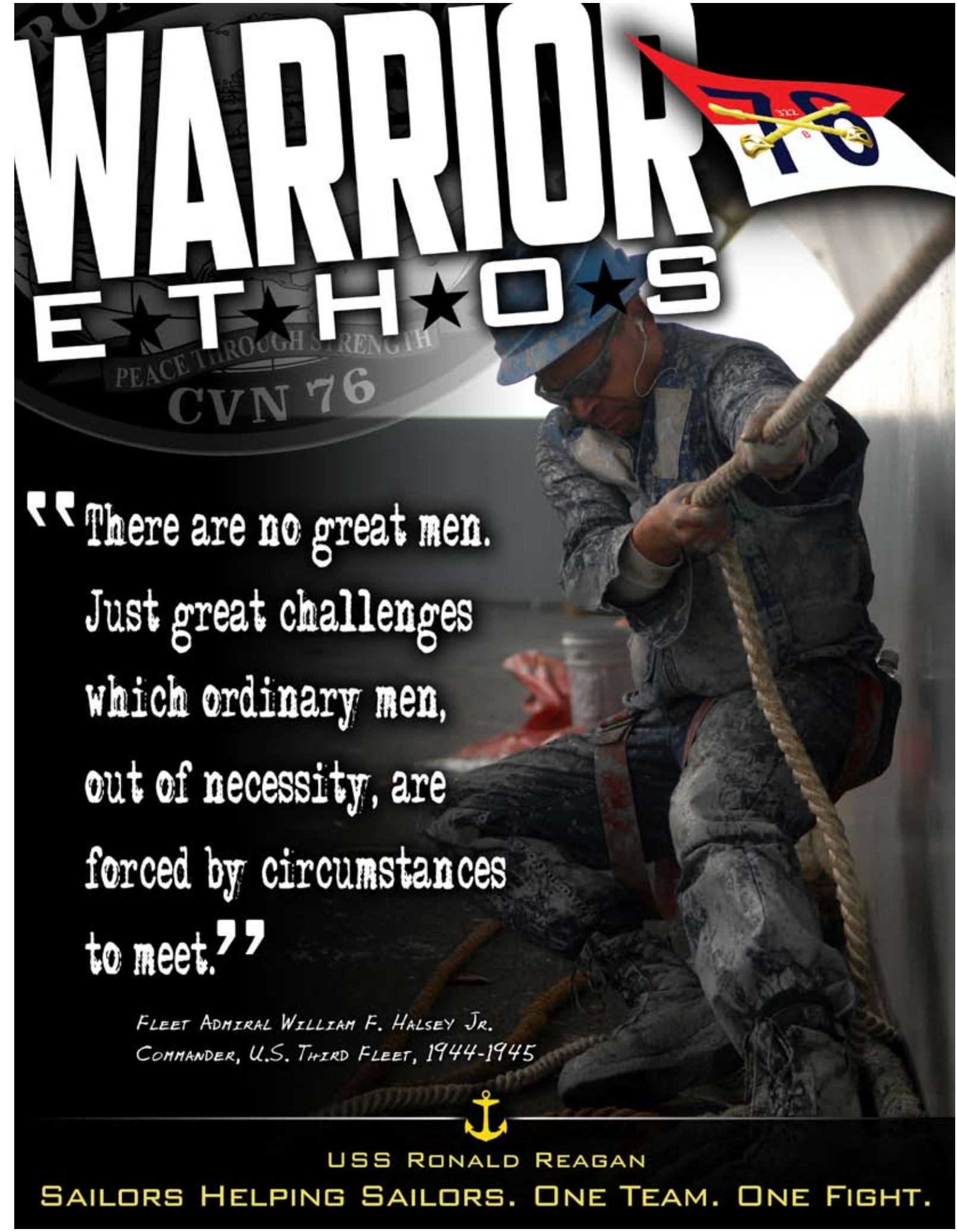
The Navy holds its Sailors to a high level of physical fitness, but we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that mental fitness is just as important a component to combat readiness. Maintaining focus and level headedness is essential to our warfighting ethos and finding positive outlets to decompress allows us to achieve the requisite mental clarity we need to fight on. Surfing gives Martin that clarity and the ability to channel the chaos into serenity . . . all the while knowing the exhilaration of dropping into a wave.

"I always try to surf a wave every day," said Martin, "even if it's just in my head."

> "I can always go out into the ocean and ride some waves; it became like a form of meditation."

Photos provided by Alex Martin

WARRIOR ETHOS



"There are no great men. Just great challenges which ordinary men, out of necessity, are forced by circumstances to meet."

Fleet Admiral William F. Halsey Jr.
Commander, U.S. Third Fleet, 1944-1945

USS Ronald Reagan

Sailors Helping Sailors. One Team. One Fight.