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Master Chief Brady's Guide to

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A Profile of Ronald Reagan's Command Career Counselor

Story and Photos by MCSN Timothy Schumaker

Providing career advice, mentorship and instruction are essential traits for any leader. For most, they are peripheral disciplines that an individual develops in addition to their primary job. For Master Chief Navy Counselor Jake Brady, USS Ronald Reagan's Command Career Counselor, that advice, mentorship and instruction are more than just leadership skills – they're his job too.

A self-proclaimed farm boy from Union City, Pa., Brady's plans as a kid didn't include staying in his home state.

"I just wanted to travel," said Brady. "There were all these other worlds and things, and I was just a kid from a small town in Middle America."

His father, having previously served two tours in Vietnam as a Seabee, played a role in Brady's eventual decision to join the Navy as an undesignated Airman Recruit in September 1991. He started off working on the flight deck of the USS Incheon (LPH 12) and immediately deployed for the first time, hitting 14 ports in eight different countries during a six month deployment.

"I got to see things like Jesus' tomb, and be baptized in the Jordan River," said Brady. "As an Irish-Catholic kid, that's a pretty amazing thing to write home to Mom about."

Two years later, he struck into the Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Handling) (ABH) rate. In 2000, as an ABH2 in Iceland, Brady's Chief gave him the collateral duty of Departmental Career Counselor.

He was initially upset because of the administrative nature of the job, and because he had grown a strong sense of pride as an ABH. That resentment soon passed when he began to notice how gratifying it was to inform his shipmates of their career options, and make a real positive impact on them.





In a program that requires a thorough knowledge of the Navy's personnel and administrative procedures and policies, Master Chief Brady considers the simple act of caring as the true foundation of its success.

In 2001, he officially cross-rated to Navy Counselor (NC) and dedicated himself entirely to helping and counseling Sailors.

"As an NC, we have to understand that it's a lifestyle change," said Brady. "We give our lives up to our Sailors, and it becomes a selfless service. Everything else we've done in our career is set aside. When doing our job it's not just paperwork, it's someone's life...it's someone's husband, wife, or kid."

Before taking orders to the USS Ronald Reagan, he served as an NC for six years with the Seabees. First was Navy Mobile Construction Battalion (NMCB) 1 based out of Gulfport, Miss. With NMCB 1, he served one tour in Okinawa and a tour to Iraq where he ran convoys as an Intelligence Specialist and operated a Combat Operation Center. He later served a tour in Afghanistan as the senior watch officer for a joint combat operations center with the 25th Naval Construction Regiment,

where he monitored and provided intelligence to Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine troops on the ground. This broad palette of experiences has given him a wealth of knowledge to draw from when counseling a Sailor.

"The more you're exposed, the more you experience, and the more you experience the more you can give back," he said. "I've got a lot of experience, and I think that can help people move in the direction they need to go."

Established in 1973, the NC rate's primary goal is to ensure Sailors are provided with quality career information to allow them to make sound career decisions. NCs offer career guidance in programs like Perform-To-Serve, reenlistments, permanent change of station orders, and they also provide counseling on veterans benefits and relocation programs.

"Some of what we do is a lot like human resource management," said Brady. "We look at manning and the ability of the Sailors, and then we try to mold that and put them in the place they need to be."

Brady has combined his breadth of experience as a Sailor and as an NC with a keen ability to give Sailors the "straight talk" on their careers.

"If you want to come down and have somebody chart multiple pathways and viable options to help you progress in life and in your career, then we're the people you want to come see," said Brady. "But if you want somebody to sell you dreams, rainbows and sunshine...that's just not my job."

Navy Counselor 1st Class Chanitra Mitchell, who works for Brady in the Ronald Reagan Career Counselor's Office, has a front-row seat to watch and learn as Brady provides counseling for Reagan Sailors.

"He doesn't sugar coat anything," she said. "He's straight and to the point, but at the end of the day, we're trying to make better Sailors and better individuals."

Brady said that getting potential pitfalls out of the way is the first thing he and his team will do when counseling a Sailor.

"The first thing I start going after are the hurdles they have to clear, because I need to know if they're qualified right off the bat," said Brady. "Nobody should come out of my office saying 'Master Chief said...,' because I will have shown them in black and white. I think it's important to establish that credibility and trust."

When asked who he has modeled his leadership style after, his answer was multi-faceted. While he said that he'd gained a vast amount of knowledge and experience from his greatest leaders, a bad leader can also affect a Sailor in a positive way.

"Sometimes the worst leaders in the Navy are ironically the ones that you learn the most from, because you learn what not to do," said Brady. "When you have a leader that has done some things that you didn't agree with, or it wasn't effective for you, it can sometimes be the best leadership lesson you can get."

In a career field that requires a thorough knowledge of the Navy's personnel and administrative procedures and policies, Brady considers the simple act of caring as the true foundation of the success of the counseling program. He credits everyone who counsels on the ship from Chiefs to divisional counselors, and deflects praise to them whenever possible.

"I have two great NCs, but three people can't run 3,000," he said. "Even more integral is the Chief's Mess and the entire career development team of departmental and divisional counselors. Without them there'd be no way that the three of us would be able to take care of that many people. I'm just the guy in front of the orchestra, the composer."

Brady's leadership style has proven infectious among not only the rated NCs who work for him, but among his team of collateral-duty career counselors as well.

"He knows it's all about the team, because without the team, nothing else is going to work," said Personnel Specialist 2nd Class Kady Smetana. "I think it's something that can only be gained through years of working with people. Honestly, I look at him as someone with a fresh point of view who cares about his people."

Brady said there's not a day that goes by that he doesn't make an effort to learn something. While he admittedly learns a lot from his seniors, the innovation and fresh ideas that junior Sailors bring to him are his most abundant resource of information, and that keeps him loving his job every day.

"How could you not love helping and learning from people every day?" asked Brady. "I'm excited to come to work every morning when I wake up. I don't think everybody on the ship can say that."

Beneath the wealth of knowledge, the straight talk of a salty Master Chief, and the policies and procedures of his rate is the humility of a Pennsylvania farm boy who just wants to give back and help put Sailors on the best path forward for success.

"I don't really look at being the lead person or head career counselor," said Brady. "I'm someone that has received a lot of exposure, has a good bit of experience, and I'm just trying to pay it forward."

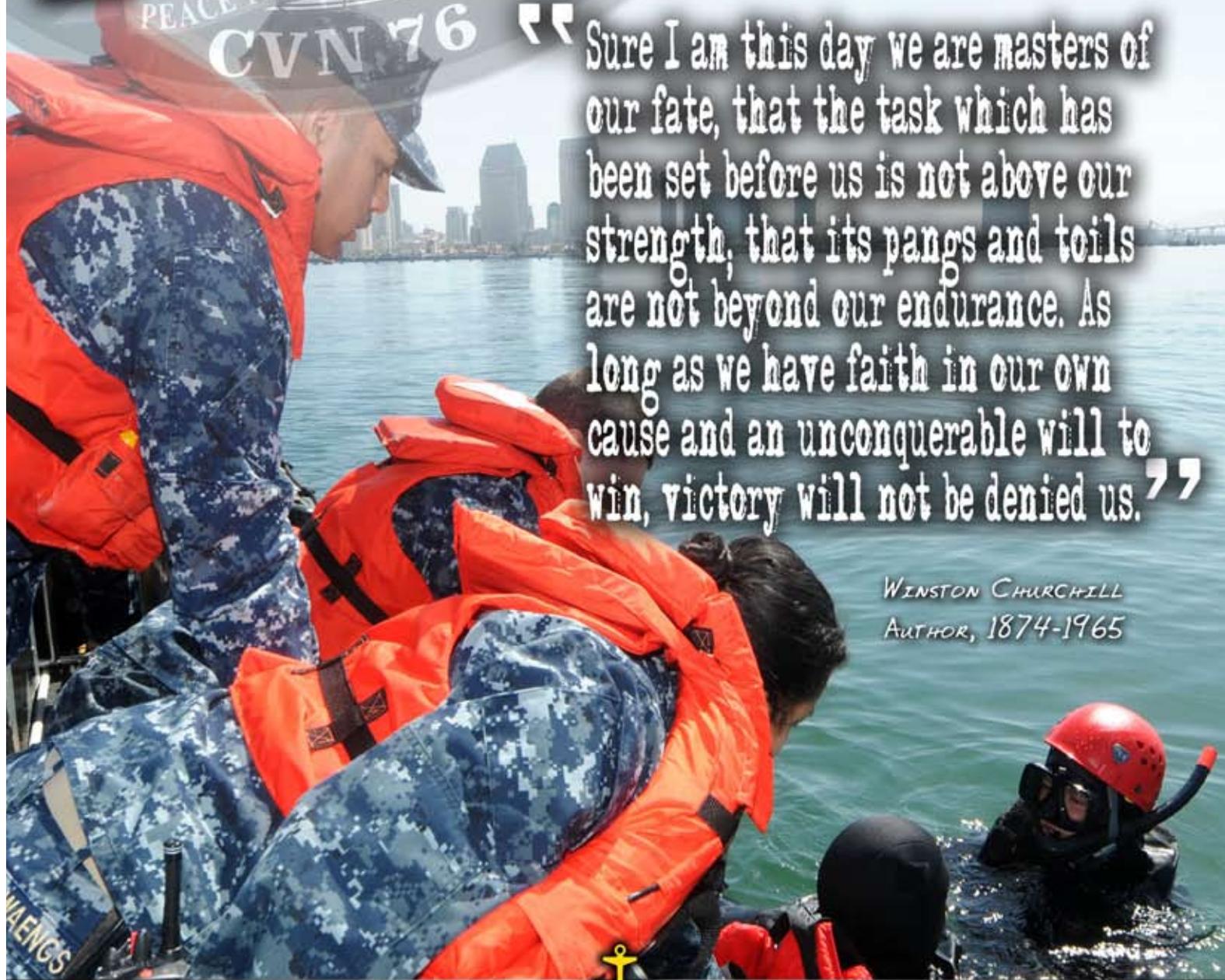
WARRIOR ESTHOS



PEACE THROUGH STRENGTH
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“Sure I am this day we are masters of our fate, that the task which has been set before us is not above our strength, that its pangs and toils are not beyond our endurance. As long as we have faith in our own cause and an unconquerable will to win, victory will not be denied us.”

WINSTON CHURCHILL
AUTHOR, 1874-1965



USS RONALD REAGAN

SAILORS HELPING SAILORS. ONE TEAM. ONE FIGHT.