

Admiral Harvey,

I have come up with the following timeline, as best I can remember, to describe my redeployment process. I have also included recommendations that I feel might have helped improve the process as per your request:

4AUG – Started WTP.

5AUG – Most of us received our initial itineraries to fly out early on the morning of August 8th.

6AUG – Rotator was pushed right 24 hours due to mechanical difficulties.

8AUG – Received travel brief and new itineraries reflecting the change in schedule. As before, everyone going through NMPS Norfolk that I knew of had a roughly 6-hour lay over in Maryland and then a connecting flight to either Philadelphia or New York before they were scheduled to arrive at Norfolk. In my case, my itinerary had me arriving in New York at 2100 and then trying to make a connecting flight departing for Norfolk at 2135 and arriving around 2300. This is where they explained to us the check-in process when we arrived in Norfolk. Most of the emphasis is placed on getting to NMPS. They tell us over and over we all need to go there first, whether we're IA, GSA, or RC. In general at WTP, there seemed to be minimal attention given to the differences between IAs and GSAs: possibly in part because we're all used to being referred to as IAs in theater. So long as different "types" of IA orders exist, I would recommend placing more emphasis on the differences between IAs and GSAs when it comes to redeployment. It might even be worth it to have a separate travel or admin brief just to make the point clear: GSAs report immediately to NMPS like IA sailors, but they are not entitled to the same temporary berthing that IA sailors are. I would also recommend eliminating or revising NMPS out-processing for GSA sailors, given their similar purpose and location: for example, conduct the two blood samples and the provider interview at ECRC or, failing that, at NMPS but after reporting to ECRC for in-processing.

9AUG ~0300L – Departed Kuwait. We spent the previous 6 hours going through customs, driving to the airfield, waiting at the terminal, and then boarding the aircraft. I personally don't feel this was any more painful than it had to be and have no serious complaints about how departing Kuwait was handled.

9AUG ~1330L – Arrived at Baltimore International. The USO was there to meet us as they always have been and it was a nice gesture. A US Navy travel liaison, however, would have been a nicer gesture. At this point I either said goodbye to or simply lost track of the other redeployers from my unit in Iraq: some of them were

IAs, some of them were GSAs, some of them were out of San Diego, and some were out of Norfolk. Some of us going to Norfolk had connecting flights to Philadelphia, others to New York and at various times throughout the afternoon/evening. I re-checked my bags as soon as I arrived in Maryland and at that time changed my itinerary to an earlier flight to allow myself as much room as possible to deal with any potential delays and cancellations either in Maryland or at LaGuardia. If I had executed my itinerary as provided, I would likely have had to stay overnight in New York or Maryland due to the delays and cancellations that I believe all of us encountered that day. My recommendation would be that if there are no direct flights to Norfolk, and especially if the best case scenario for the bulk of sailors is that they get to Norfolk 6 or more hours after landing in Baltimore, a charter bus or two would be much more practical and save us a lot of headaches and uncertainty. It would also eliminate the need for ECRC and NMPS to track dozens of sailors flying in on a dozen separate flights every half hour from early evening until the early morning hours. Then, when we all arrived together in Norfolk, one or two on-duty sailors from NMPS and/or ECRC could meet the entire group either at Wall Manor or NMPS with a couple shuttle vans and help us work out whatever berthing issues might arise. Someone could even feasibly meet us with the buses in Maryland. This would put us back into the hands of the Navy as soon as possible and let NMPS and ECRC put eyes on everyone coming off the rotator before they even have the chance to reschedule their flights, rent a car, or drive down to Norfolk with family. I also think this would reduce the risk of a sailor, frustrated with their itinerary, renting a car after a major time zone change and minimal sleep trying to drive to Norfolk on their own and ending up in a car wreck on the way down due to jet lag and a lack of recent experience with non-tactical vehicles on major roadways. I know several sailors, including myself, were even contemplating making the drive to Norfolk from LaGuardia or Philadelphia due to weather delays and cancellations. All we wanted to do was get things over with.

Getting back to what I was told about people driving to Norfolk from Maryland either on their own or with family and how it made tracking people difficult: at WTP they never even mentioned those as options. Had they mentioned it as an option I probably would have asked my parents, who live in the DC area, to meet me at the airport and drive me to Norfolk. The reasons I chose not to do that were that 1) I honestly thought ECRC would be keeping track of our arrival and I didn't want them to wonder what had happened to me or why I wasn't on the flight and 2) again, WTP never even mentioned it as an option 3) if I made it to Norfolk before 2000 I wouldn't have the option of taking the first day back as a day off according to what was put out at WTP. In regards to that last point, I would recommend

allowing everyone returning from an IA to have their first full day in the US be a day of liberty if they so choose: I know a lot of sailors from out of the area still wouldn't take the offer because all they really want to do is get through the first morning back at NMPS so they can fly home to their families. My recommendation to help correct this, again, is to simply ask us at WTP what our plans are. Maybe tell us what our options are, that we can have someone pick us up at their airport if we so desire, what implications that might have for our travel claim, and then let us make the informed decision and notify them of what that decision is so that no one at ECRC will be expecting us at the terminal in Norfolk.

9AUG ~2345 – Arrived at the terminal in Norfolk. Both the original flight from LaGuardia to Norfolk on my Navy-booked itinerary and the earlier flight from LaGuardia I had arranged at the terminal in Maryland were cancelled while I was flying to or waiting at LaGuardia. I was able to get on the only remaining US Airways flight to Norfolk that hadn't been cancelled, which even then ended up being delayed 2 hours. The US Airways personnel I talked to were courteous, respectful, and helpful, so it wasn't as painful as it might otherwise have been, but nevertheless I think a bus ride direct to Norfolk would have been significantly less painful.

10AUG ~0000 – I and my two fellow sailors arriving with me picked up our bags and decided to take a cab. We looked around the baggage area and the pick-up area for some clue of where the driver had gone to or when they would be back, but there was none. We asked one of the security guards in the baggage area if they had seen or heard from anyone from the base or NMPS here to pick up redeploying sailors and they said no, but they were kind enough to hail a cab for us. We took the cab to Wall Manor, as directed in our IA orders.

10AUG ~0020 – Arrived at Wall Manor. We said we were returning IA sailors and we thought we had reservations. The woman at the desk asked us if we made our reservations ourselves. We said we hadn't. She said we should have and that there were no reservations from us. She said everything was full because there were ~300 deploying sailors staying there. They all had rooms because "THEY made reservations" (emphasis hers). She then explained that we were not the only people who had come in that night under similar circumstances and that those people had been taken to The Lake Wright Inn on Northampton and we should do the same. She provided us with a photo-copied flyer for the hotel. She said we would have to come back the next day to get a Certificate of Non-Availability as the system was down running and audit of itself. To be completely honest, I'm not sure who started getting testy first. It may have been us. I understand that I wouldn't have

had a reservation anyways, because I was expected to go to Williams Hall on JEB Little Creek, but the Chief and PO1 with me were both IAs and had also been told by WTP that berthing arrangements would be made for them. I did not get the name of the woman at the front desk.

It is entirely possible that the WTP personnel said during one of the briefs that redeployers needed to go to Little Creek for berthing and they did put that in the information sheet attached to our itineraries. It's been brought to my attention that ECRC's phone number was also in my orders, along with NMPS's, but I did not reference my orders for contact information at any time during travel, so my failure to note that was due to oversights on my part. That being said, I did not worry very much about berthing or travel arrangements in Norfolk because more than one of the travel personnel at WTP said both to me individually and to the group that berthing arrangements would be taken care of and we didn't need to do anything, whether we were IA or GSA. Had I not been assured that travel from the airport and berthing would be taken care of by NMPS (though I have since learned it is actually ECRC that meets people at the airport, not NMPS), I would have been more thorough in reviewing appropriate references as I made my own arrangements and probably would have figured out where I was supposed to go either before leaving Iraq or while waiting at WTP. My recommendation is that redeployers either be explicitly advised to handle their own berthing and transportation arrangements or, preferably, WTP, NMPS, and ECRC between them, arrange berthing at an appropriate location and, as part of our travel brief at WTP, give us not just our flight itinerary but tell us where each of us will be staying, down to the building and room number, when we get back to Norfolk. A list with all of our names on it and our reserved room numbers would have been perfect. I understand that some people in the past have just gotten off the rotator in Maryland and either rented a car or met with family then and there and driven down to Norfolk, which has made tracking incoming personnel more difficult. I understand this has also resulted in rooms being reserved for people who did not need them because they had other arrangements made or, in some cases, not enough room being reserved because people have expected their dependents to be able to stay with them on base. My recommendation to solve this dilemma, if berthing arrangements will be made for redeployers by NMPS, ECRC, or WTP, is to simply ask us what our plans are. Tell us what our options are before we even get to WTP, tell us again when we get there, and then ask us what it is we'd like to do. In fact maybe WTP thinks they're doing this already: as I mentioned earlier, they asked me individually when I received my itinerary if I would need berthing. I said yes, I would. They indicated they would make those arrangements so I didn't trouble myself over it any further.

10AUG ~0045 – Checked-in at The Lake Wright Inn. The Chief that I shared the cab with got the room number of someone from his IA unit that had checked in earlier and called to ask if and when a shuttle from NMPS would be coming to pick us up. It was at this time we learned that there in fact had been a shuttle making trips to the airport and we had simply missed it. We also learned it would be back at 0600 to take people to NMPS. We never talked about calling the number on our orders or on our redeployer information sheets. None of us had phones in any event.

10AUG ~0130 – Posted online rant, because it was what I needed to do to vent before I could get some sleep.

10AUG ~0200 – Called the phone number listed on NMPS's website, which I have since found was the same number on my redeployer information sheet and IA orders, to see if I could clarify things or if I was supposed to have gone somewhere else, but all I got was the voice mail. I didn't feel the need to leave a message. Although it didn't occur to me to call NMPS until after I got to the hotel and it never occurred to me to call ECRC, it might help others in the future if the number to ECRC were provided on the redeployer information sheet: only the number to NMPS is provided on that document. Though ECRC's number was provided on my IA orders, I made the mistake of only traveling with the ORDMOD to my IA orders, rather than my full and complete IA orders: ECRC's number was on the orders, but only NMPS's number was on both my orders and my 6-page ORDMOD.

10AUG ~0600 – The two sailors I came in with and I took the shuttle provided to NMPS. We knew we didn't have to come in the first day back since our flight arrived in Norfolk after 2000. The only reason I decided to come in was for the CNA and because I wanted to find out right away what had happened and if I was even supposed to be staying out in town. The two IA sailors came in because they really wanted to get home.

10AUG ~0715 – Arrived at NMPS. The staff seemed very eager to help, but two separate sailors from the Admin department, including the LCPO, said that we might have to wait to go through medical because “deployers are the priority.” That and the thought of the delays it might lead to was a major let down to the IAs who were hoping to get flights home that afternoon. To be clear, they weren't rude when they said it and both sailors were very helpful to us. I obviously don't know if they're just repeating what they've been told or they've simply misread their

OIC's priorities, but I would strongly recommend that at the very least if redeployers aren't "the priority" that you not tell us that. I think I can echo some of the other comments on sailorbob.com, having had a chance to read the replies, when I say that it seems the deployment process as far as Kuwait goes a lot smoother than the redeployment process. I think that sends the wrong message to IAs, leading some of us to infer the Navy is more interested getting us forward than getting us back, and I would recommend doing everything possible to eliminate that disparity between deployers and redeployers: again, at the very least, I would recommend not telling us we're not the priority. If NMPS and ECRC really know we are coming, even if we get delayed 24 hours, at the very least they could tell us not to report to NMPS until they're ready for us. As it happened, we only waited about an hour before starting medical, but it was just the wrong message to send as we were coming home from overseas. However, once we actually got to NMPS if we weren't the priority, it was not at all apparent from how they handled us: I would never have guessed they considered deployers a higher priority for medical screening than us if they hadn't said so explicitly.

This concludes my summary of events; I will be checking this e-mail address regularly to respond to any follow-up questions or orders you may have.