

BUMED Oral History Project

**Helen Ann Napier Holley, Ph.D., ABPP, CDR, MSC, USN
Psychologist, Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego, California**

Date and Location of Interview: March 2, 2011, Marine Corps
Recruit Depot, San Diego, CA
Interviewer: COL Richard V.N. Ginn, USA, Ret.

SYNOPSIS

Commander Holley attended Ohio State University and after witnessing a classmate's suicide attempt, decided to pursue a career in psychology. She graduated in 1988 with a BS in women's studies and psychology. She went to graduate school at Washington State University in Pullman, Washington, where she earned a Ph.D. in clinical psychology. Enamored with naval traditions, as well as being tempted by the pay of the Navy's internship program, CDR Holley chose the Navy as the environment to practice her chosen profession.

Following a clinical internship at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland she was assigned to the Naval Hospital, Bremerton, Washington as a staff psychologist, and in 1998 as Director of the Alcohol Rehabilitation Department. During this assignment she and CAPT Bill Nash, MC, were sent in 1995 to conduct stress control counseling for the crew of a NOAA ship that had been traumatized by a shark attack of a crewmember off the coast of Easter Island, Chili. In 1996, she was given orders for six months to serve as the first shipboard psychologist onboard the aircraft carrier USS *Kitty Hawk*. Her performance demonstrated the value of a competent mental health professional on the ship, especially in significantly reducing the number of sailors medical evacuated for mental health issues. In 1997 Dr. Holley did another six month aircraft carrier tour aboard the USS *Nimitz*. During this cruise she became the first female to qualify for the Surface Warfare Medical Division Officer pin.

In 1998 she was assigned to the Naval Medical Center of San Diego (NMCS D), with duty as staff psychologist at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot (MCRD), San Diego, from 1998-2000, and the Naval Base San Diego from 2000 to 2002. This was followed by assignment at NMCS D from 2002 to 2007, initially as staff psychologist, later as the senior medical officer of the Adult Outpatient Mental Health Clinic, NMCS D, and in 2007 as the first staff psychologist assigned to the Combat Comprehensive Casualty Care Center (C5). After the birth of her twins, Dr. Holley was

reassigned to MCRD. She is considering retiring from the Navy, depending on her husband's employment situation.

CDR Holley notes that a challenge facing military psychologists today is the instant communication methods available to service members due to the internet and the Challenge Athena system. Service members can be plagued by problems at home in real time yet are helpless to do anything about them, causing tremendous distress while deployed. Another challenge faced by Navy psychologists is identifying those service members who don't have a legitimate mental health disability, but still attempt to collect disability benefits. She believes that the negative stigma of seeking mental health services has been mitigated and feels that leadership is doing a good job of ensuring that those sailors and Marines who are in need of mental health services receive that care.

KEY WORDS

Navy psychology
aircraft carrier psychologist
combat and operational stress control
USS *Kitty Hawk*
USS *Nimitz*
SWMDO-Surface Warfare Medical Division Officer

GLOSSARY

32d Street: The Naval Base San Diego is the largest U.S. Navy base; is commonly known as Naval Station 32d Street due to the positioning of its main entrance.

Boorda, Jeremy Michael, ADM, USN, CNO; Appointed CNO in 1994, died by his own hand 18 May 1996. He was the only CNO who rose from the enlisted ranks.

Challenge Athena: The Challenge Athena program leverages commercial wide-band satellite capabilities to provide deployed Navy carrier battle groups with high data rate communications capabilities, including internet access.

Combat Comprehensive Casualty Care Center (C5): a program of care that manages a severely injured or ill patient from medical evacuation through inpatient care, outpatient rehabilitation, and eventual return to active duty or transition from the military.

Hoge, Charles W. and Carl A. Castro, et al, "Combat Duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, Mental Health Problems and Barriers to Care, *New England Journal of Medicine*, 1 July 2004, Vol 3, No.1, pp. 13-22. Authors included CAPT Robert Koffman, MC, USN.

Moore, Herman, M.D., CAPT, MC; head of the medical department on a Navy vessel

NOAA: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency

North Naval Air Station, San Diego: homeport for two carriers:
USS *Carl Vinson* and USS *Ronald Reagan*

Pollywog (also "Slimy Pollywog" or "Wog"): a sailor who has not yet crossed the equator; those who have are Shellbacks or Sons of Neptune. Sailors advance to Shellback in a crossing of the line ceremony. In biology, a pollywog is the larva of a frog or toad, i.e., an infant.

Return and Reunion: a program sponsored by the Navy's Fleet Family Support Center and Marine Corps Community Services to help service members and their families adjust after a deployment.

Senior Medical Officer (SMO): head of the medical department of a ship; the SMO of an aircraft carrier is aviation medicine trained in addition to his or her primary medical specialty.

Surface Warfare Medical Department Officer: designation awarded upon completion of qualifications as set forth in a Chief of Naval Operations instruction OPNAV 1412.8B. The SWMDO pin is awarded with a distinctive insignia for Medical Corps, Nurse Corps, Dental Corps, and Medical Service Corps officers.

TAD: Temporary Additional Duty