

Sailor Personally Recounts PP08 Mission

By Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class (SW) Joshua Martin,
Pacific Partnership Public Affairs

ABOARD USNS MERCY -- I am a Mass Communication Specialist (MC) in the U.S. Navy currently deployed in support of Pacific Partnership 2008 aboard USNS Mercy (T-AH 19). Of all the jobs for an MC, photography is dearest to me. I love to take photographs and see the human interaction that goes along with it.

Photography is about being in the moment and capturing it.

The Mercy is currently deployed to the Republic of the Philippines providing humanitarian civic assistance to the people of Mindanao and Samar.

Lately, I have been taking a lot of photographs of post-surgery patients aboard Mercy, enabling me to meet interesting people from the Philippines. Each person has his own unique story and history, and connecting with each offers me the opportunity to learn about unique ideas, beliefs and personalities.

As an MC, I have the privilege of giving the patients the gift of a memory. I had the opportunity to take their photograph and turn it into a Pacific Partnership postcard. When I handed them their postcards, they were very grateful and happy. I wondered what else I could do to make a deeper connection and have more people smile, so I decided to put down the camera and pick up a guitar.

I once read a quote that said "love is only real when shared." While sitting in my office practicing guitar one night, I realized I could be playing guitar for the patients in the wards instead of serenading the walls. Since music is a universal language, I decided to get over my initial anxiety and play for the patients. At first it seemed a bit awkward, and I wondered if I was being entertaining or just annoying. But I soon realized they were enjoying it. Pacific Partnership is about extending compassion and generosity to others, not just as members of the military, non-governmental organizations and partner nations, but as human beings.

I have learned that singing, playing instruments and dancing can be therapeutic. The patients are thankful for the treatment they receive aboard the Mercy, yet I can empathize with their universal concern of going through surgery. By playing music for the patients, I helped to further their sense of comfort aboard the Mercy.

Music is a great medium for expressing ourselves, and everyone can relate with a good song. I have played guitar several nights in a row for the patients. Sometimes I finish with a special dance song that brings joy and laughter to the people in the wards.

The interaction I have with people through music has helped to bridge the gap created by our language barrier. There was an elderly man who had eye surgery aboard the Mercy, with the help of a translator he said, "I haven't played guitar in so many years."

I gave my guitar to him, and he played the most rugged country song I have ever heard. It was an old song he learned from an American soldier during World War II, and one of the translators interpreted the words of the song. He closed his eyes and sang at the top of his lungs, and, by the end, everyone in the room had gathered around and was clapping. I spoke with him for almost an hour with the assistance of a translator, and when we said goodbye I noticed he was crying.

Pacific Partnership has given me the opportunity to experience humble moments like these. I have been to medical, dental and engineering civic action programs and seen that the most important aspect of this mission is the human interaction. I am looking forward to the next four countries we are going to visit -- Vietnam, Papua New Guinea, Timor Leste and the Federated States of Micronesia. I hope to share my love of music and photography with the people I meet.

For more news from Pacific Partnership 2008, visit www.navy.mil/local/PP08/.