

Special Feature

VISSER LIVING A NEW WAY OF LIFE - THE NAVY LIFE

BY DYLAN SKRILOFF

New City native Ted Visser finds himself in another part of the world these days – floating on a 567-foot-long, 9,600 ton Navy cruiser in the Gulf of Aden. That's between the mainland of Yemen and Somalia, with the Red Sea to the Northwest and the Arabian Sea to the East.

The 23-year-old Visser is the Communications Officer on the USS Anzio (CG-68) guided missile cruiser. Among other duties, Visser's ship has been running anti-pirate missions due to the surge in pirate attacks in the last year. Visser, who has earned the rank of Ensign, said, "For the first month we kept missing the pirates. Where we'd come, they'd have just left. The Visit, Board, Search and Seizure (VBSS) team is raring to go. They say, 'let's get some pirates.' When we finally trapped a suspected pirate ship it was on a Sunday morning. We are allowed to sleep in on Sunday mornings. We had to be woke up by the P.A. system to get out of bed," he said.

Besides helping keep the world safe from possible pirates, Visser's duties consists of a daily five hour watch on the ship's main deck, as well as helping to care for the ship's communication systems including computer networks and radio. As a communications officer he sometimes has a turn steering the giant ship. "I'm still getting used to my job. It's still kind of a new thing for me. I used to be in charge of the anti-submarine [unit]," Visser said.

Visser described his job as a "Surface Warfare Officer." He said, "that means my primary skill set is to fight and drive ships. Communications Officer is my role onboard Anzio, but when I rotate to a new command I might be in charge of anything, from engineering to weapons to combat systems. However, I will still stand watch as Officer of the Deck, driving the ship from the bridge."



Asked if there were any real threats of submarine attacks, he said off the East Coast of China, US and Chinese ships still harass each other. He noted that where the USS Anzio is stationed is not far from the terrorist attack on the USS Cole several years ago. "There are all sorts of threats out here," he said.

Living on the high seas, away from his family members and his wife is challenging as you might expect. Visser said access to the Internet allows him to keep in better touch with people than people could in the past, but the feeling of being far away from "the world" is always with him. "Despite the fact of the internet, there is still a great degree of separation," he said.

Visser's ship is part of an International Task Force officially called Combined Task Force 151, or CTF 151 that is charged among other duties with keeping the waters safe for trade. As an international task force he's seen an array of nationalities working together including nations usually antagonistic toward each other, like Greece and Turkey. There is a large number of British Offi-



Navy Ensign Ted Visser and fellow officer look over the Gulf of Aden

cers on the ship, he said. Of the over 300 some-odd people on the boat, only four are women and they are all officers.

One benefit of being a Navy man is Visser is seeing the world. Since boarding Anzaio, Visser has seen mainlands and islands such as Bahrain, Israel, France, Cyprus and Crete. He also said he has a bright career future to look forward to thanks to the Navy, though he hasn't made a choice yet. Right now he is working on receiving his "qualification" as a surface warfare officer. Visser's wife Sara "Mac" Visser is a Navy Intelligence Officer whom he met Sophomore year at Georgetown. Due to their military lifestyles they haven't had a chance to spend very much time together since betrothing.

Asked about her job as an intelligence officer, Visser said, "She knows all kinds of secret stuff – more than I do." He noted that while some secrets are exciting "a lot of secret stuff is boring." Visser said he hopes to work his way up to a top-secret security clearance himself.

Visser's mind will often reflect on his youth in Rockland County. "I miss the place. I miss stuff like the New City Diner. I miss little things. I miss hiking up Bear Mountain. I miss sailing the Hudson. I miss New York pizza like you can't believe. When I am doing my rounds with a fellow officer, we can talk three hours just about things we miss from the States," Visser said. He continued, "everyone deals with being separated from loved ones in different ways."

Visser sends his regards to his mom Irene Kelly and dad Ned Visser, who are married and still live in New City. Visser has two younger brothers and a sister as well who are in high school and college. Visser's ship was commissioned in 1992. It travels at a speed of 32.5 knots (60km) an hour. It has approximately 30 officers and 320 enlisted men. Visser said he officially joined the Navy on May 16, 2008 after they had paid for his college at Georgetown University.



Visser on the Deck of the Anzio



Ted and Sarah "Mac" Visser



USS Anzio