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## Questions and Answers with Clay Moltz

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## Questions and Answers with Clay Moltz

### The RSEP Experience

#### Q&A with NPS Professor Clay Moltz



We had the opportunity to sit down with NPS Professor Clay Moltz, expert on Northeast Asian security, and learn about his recent RSEP mission. He's been participating in RSEP missions since 2003, and in January 2009 participated on his fourth mission at sea, in addition to two onshore RSEP briefings for strike groups.

**RSEP:** When did you first hear of RSEP missions? How did you get involved?

**Professor Moltz:** I went on my first RSEP trip in March 2003, when I was still working at the Monterey Institute of International Studies. I have been on four trips at sea: March 2003, July/August 2004, October 2004, and January 2009. I have also done two on-shore RSEP briefings for strike groups still in work up.

**RSEP:** Where did you deploy for your RSEP missions?

**Moltz:** All of my trips have been in the Pacific, since I brief on Northeast Asian security issues. I have been on the USS Carl Vinson (March 2003), USS John Stennis (July-August 2004 and January 2009), and USS Abraham Lincoln (October 2004) operating in the Pacific Ocean, the Sea of Japan, and the East China Sea. On each of these trips, we have also flown via helicopter to brief on smaller ships in the battle group, either cruisers or destroyers or frigates.

**RSEP:** Tell us about the journey from NPS out to the fleet.

**Moltz:** We always took commercial jets to get to the initial base location. Then, for two missions, we walked onto the carrier, and for two we flew onboard. On one trip our team left by small boat from the carrier (to Pusan), and the other three times we flew off by COD (C-2 aircraft).

**RSEP:** What sorts of activities did you participate in on your RSEP missions?

**Moltz:** On each trip I've been on, we had a four-person team whose members each prepared briefings on four to five topics covering the countries of Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia, as well as specific topics of relevance to the battle group's mission or particular interests – such as East Asian cultural awareness, Islam, terrorism, graduate educational opportunities, etc.

Other RSEP teams, of course, go out with different missions to different parts of the world. Most of them in recent years have been involved in prepping strike groups en route to the Persian Gulf.

**RSEP:** What are some of the highlights of the RSEP missions for you?

**Moltz:** Meeting the skilled young men and women of the Navy and getting to experience their work environment at sea. I am always impressed by the work ethic and professionalism. And I'm especially grateful to the fixed-wing and helo pilots who get us there and back safely, no matter what the seas or the weather!

You gain a real appreciation for the service these young men and women provide to their country – especially when they have to be away from their families for six months at a time. Sometimes, they do get to have fun, though. On my last trip, Sunday morning brunch in Wardroom 3 had a "South Sea island" theme, with fake palm trees and tiki lights. One ship I was on had a "full metal beach" party one Sunday up on the carrier's flight deck to celebrate the mid-point in their deployment. Frisbees, softball, a cookout, and even a cigar bar! Hot and sunny too, in July, out in the South Pacific!

It is also an amazing environment if you have been out at sea before and surrounded on all sides by nothing but water, air, and horizon. There's nothing like it! It's really quite awe-inspiring. My best memory: riding in a helicopter in the summer of 2004 with the doors wide open about fifty feet above the ocean as we transited to one of the smaller ships. Great view, and pretty exhilarating – despite the noise.

**RSEP:** Can you describe a typical day on an RSEP mission?

**Moltz:** Reveille sounds at 6 AM on most ships, and taps is at 10 PM. Normally, you give at least three hour-long briefings per day, sometimes more, occasionally less. You are usually doing preparations – such as background reading – or are honing your presentations when you're not briefing. The pace is typically quite hectic to start with, until you have your briefs well oiled and any glitches worked out.

On the days when you visit the small ships, the day starts at 5 AM and you normally visit and brief on two ships before dark, usually giving at least four hour-long talks. Sometimes, there are night briefings as well on the carrier. But there is usually a spare hour to get in a quick workout in one of the gyms or ersatz exercise areas stuck all over the ship.

**RSEP:** Can you tell us about the accommodations and meals?

As for accommodations, the rooms are normally shared, officer-level staterooms. Small for land-lubbers, but fine: two desks, two bunks.

But, on the carrier, it's always right under the flight deck and extremely noisy, due to F-18s and other aircraft taking off and landing on the deck just above your head – the "sound of freedom," as they say! Somehow, you get used to it, and the rocking of the ship and the all of the work you've done help put you to sleep.

The food has improved steadily in the five years I have been going out on RSEPs. I would rank it highly, at this point, for "institutional" food. And it's amazing that they can get all of those provisions while on deployment at sea.

At-sea “replenishment” operations are truly something to behold – two 1,000 foot ships running for hours, side-by-side, without colliding, as crew members transport literally tons of food and material, and many tons of fuel.

**RSEP:** What are some of the challenges encountered on an RSEP mission?

**Moltz:** Noise, computer glitches, and trying to remain standing when briefing in heavy seas on the small ships (while not losing your lunch!).

**RSEP:** Would you recommend participating on an RSEP mission to fellow colleagues.

**Moltz:** Yes. I think everyone who teaches at NPS should try to go out at least once. For faculty, RSEPs help us keep us in touch with the concerns of the Navy, its operational environment, and the challenges our student-officers face in their “real world” jobs. And I think we do provide a useful service to them.

RSEP trips benefit the fleet by sharing information about the politics, economics, culture, and security relations of regions where U.S. Navy ships are deploying and working. For some officers, we are their only source of such background information, which definitely can make a difference to the success of their at-sea deployment – especially if they are making port calls in the region or will be engaged in joint exercises with foreign navies.

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