

Navy Lieutenant Reports Cole Is 'Hell on Earth'

A U.S. Navy lieutenant assigned to the USS Dawes, a ship now supporting the USS Cole in Yemen, has written a moving e-mail discussing the situation on the scene. The remarkable description reveals the fears of U.S. sailors aboard the Cole who won't even eat food provisioned from the local Yemenites.

The lieutenant writes:

It wasn't until a few days ago though, that we started doing something that I feel may be the first thing I've seen in my short Naval career that has truly made a difference.

Right now we're supporting the USS COLE and her crew in Aden. When the attack occurred we were a day away. Just by luck we happened to be on our way out of the Gulf and headed towards the Suez and could get here in a relatively short amount of time.

I know what you all have seen on CNN, because we have seen it too. I just want you all to know that what you see doesn't even scratch the surface. I'm not going to get into it for obvious reasons.

But I will tell you that right now there are 250+ sailors just a few miles away living in hell on Earth. I'm sitting in a nice air conditioned state room, they're sleeping out on the decks at night. You can't even imagine the conditions they're living in, and yet they are still fighting 24 hours a day to save their ship, free the bodies of those still trapped and send them home.

As bad as it is, they're doing an incredible job. The very fact that these people are still functioning is beyond my comprehension. Whatever you imagine as the worst, multiply it by ten and you might get there. Today I was tasked to photo rig the ship and surrounding area.

It looked so much worse than I had imagined, unbelievable really, with debris and disarray everywhere, the ship listing, the hole in her side. I wish I had the power to relay to you all what I have seen, but words just won't do it. I do want to tell you the first thing that jumped out at me - the Stars and Stripes flying. I can't tell you how that made me feel ... even in this God forsaken hell hole our flag was more beautiful than words can describe.

Then I started to notice the mass of activity going on below, scores of people working non-stop in 90 plus degree weather to save this ship. They're doing it with almost no electrical power and they're sleeping (when they can sleep) outside on the decks because they can't stand the smell or the heat or the darkness inside.

They only want to eat what we bring them because they're all scared of eating something brought by the local vendors.

Even with all that, the USS COLE and her crew is sending a message guys, and it's that even acts of cowardice and hate can do nothing to the spirit and pride of the United States.

I have never been so proud of what I do, or of the men and women that I serve with as I was today. There are sixteen confirmed dead sailors who put it on the line for all of us, and some of them are still trapped here.

Please take a minute to pray for their families and say a word of thanks for their sacrifice - one made so that we can live the lives that we do.

All of you that serve with me, thank you. All of you that have loved ones that serve, thank you."

Please feel free to pass this on to those you think will appreciate it.

V/R LT Landry