

# Local Navy officer continues family legacy

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steady income during the recession of the early 1990s. Spencer remained in the military to help pay for his daughter's multiple surgeries, including the removal of a brain tumor and several eye surgeries.

Spencer's daughter Jessica is 12 and his son Spencer is 11. Both children live with their mother and have high ambitions for the future. Jessica is a promising young journalist, having already published a small magazine about her Pokemon league, according to Mrs. Wheeler. Spencer said he wants to go into police work, claiming he won't pursue military service like his father and grandfather.

Jessica and Spencer have grown up with an understanding of the unpredictable nature and demands of military service, as their father has served in various locations for differing lengths of time throughout their lives.

After being stationed on the west coast upon entry into the navy, Wheeler was deployed on the USS Cleveland in 1994 just before the start of the first Gulf War. Returning from Iraq, Spencer served as a recruitment officer in Richmond, Va., for two and a half years to be closer to his children, according to Mr. Wheeler.

Spencer then rejoined the fleet



Photos Submitted

Petty Officer Second Class Spencer Wheeler poses with his children Spencer and Jessica Wheeler.

on the USS Bataan. His most recent assignment was in Afghanistan. Spencer returned home from Afghanistan in May 2002 for a relaxing holiday with his family, the Wheelers said.

Spencer was redeployed in late December, when he returned to Iraq on the USS Bataan. According to the Wheelers, Spencer was fortunate, as most who were deployed received very little notice.

Currently, Spencer works in many capacities aboard the USS Bataan, refueling and loading and unloading ammunition and other supplies for the marines who travel aboard his ship. Spencer is a member of the "Vessel Boarding

Search and Seizure Team" and works in ship security. The search and seizure team searches small passing vessels for contraband.

The Wheeler family hears often of Spencer's daily tasks, accomplishments and routine, as they exchange letters, e-mails and telephone calls when possible, according to Mrs. Wheeler.

In addition to all of Spencer's responsibilities, Jessica commented that her father often writes home about being tired from a hard day's work or bored on the ship at sea.

Mrs. Wheeler reminded Jessica that her father often wrote home that he loves her and misses her.

Jessica's brother, Spencer,



Wheeler demonstrates proper technique in a search and seizure. Wheeler's team watches for possible contraband.

added that his dad tells him he's looking forward to coming home, hopefully this summer.

Usually, fleets spend about six months aboard a ship before returning home, Mr. Wheeler said.

"There have been rumors that they may release his battle group," a group of ships sailing together in one fleet, Mrs. Wheeler said.

The USS Abraham Lincoln and its battle group recently have been released and the USS Bataan could follow in the next few months, according to Mr. Wheeler.

Everyone in the Wheeler family hopes for Spencer's return home, but the family understands Spencer's commitment to the United States armed forces and the importance of serving when called.

As Wheeler is in Iraq, he joins a great line of military figures including his father, who fought in the Vietnam War. Spencer's great uncle was killed in Guam as a Navy Corpsman assigned to the

Marine Corps and Spencer's great-great uncle was a naval war hero in World War II. As captain of the USS England during WWII, Spencer's great-great uncle received the Navy Cross after commanding his ship to sink six Japanese marine submarines in 10 days, which, according to Mr. Wheeler, changed the course of the war in the Pacific.

"I guess it's necessary," Mrs. Wheeler said, regarding the deployment of U.S. servicemen and women to Iraq.

Spencer, however, sees little necessary about the loss of time he has to spend with his dad.

"I don't want him over there; he doesn't get to spend enough time with me," Spencer said, echoing the calls of children across America who wait for their parents to return home from war.

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The USS Bataan sails outside of Iraq. The battle group may return home within a few months.