



# NAVY NEWS



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## CNO praises people, warns of shortfalls

By Chief Journalist(SW) Mike Perron, CNO public affairs

WASHINGTON (NNS) — Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Adm. Vern Clark recently told legislators that though the tip of the Navy's spear remains the sharpest on earth, the service's non-deployed forces are paying the price to keep it that way.

Clark voiced his concerns during testimony Sept. 27 before the U.S. Senate and House Armed Services Committees.

"Our forward deployed forces today are ready to respond to all tasking," Clark said in prepared remarks. "However, there is increasing concern that this high level of readiness is coming at the cost of our non-deployed forces. It is the readiness of these forces that continues to be of concern as we attempt to maintain the balance between current and future readiness."

Clark described some of the areas where the Navy is facing shortfalls.

"The limited availability of support material for our non-deployed units continues to be a significant readiness challenge," he said.

Clark described to the senators and congressmen a situation where aging ships, aircraft and support facilities were increasing routine maintenance costs, placing further strain on already limited funds.

"These shortfalls in maintenance, spare parts and



**Adm. Vern Clark, Chief of Naval Operations, tells members of the Senate Armed Services Committee that the "tip of the spear" remains sharp. Testifying on military readiness, the CNO explained that forward-deployed naval forces are ready to respond to all tasking, but also stressed the need for additional funding to help meet the readiness challenges faced by non-deployed forces.**

Photo by PHC Dolores L. Parlato

support equipment are impacting our training readiness among non-deployed forces, particularly in our aviation community," Clark said. "Until we have achieved a modernized force, we will continue to face the challenge of the increasing costs to maintain the existing, aging force," he added. "We are in a Catch-22."

Clark said the way out of the problem would be through increased funding.

"My view is that we have got to have increased funding to work at and deal with the backlog of maintenance that has occurred over numbers of years," Clark said.

He also noted that at current funding rates, the Navy was not building enough ships and aircraft to maintain the force called for in 1996.

"With regard to our current shipbuilding account, and with regard to our aircraft

procurement, we need to buy 160 to 180 aircraft a year in order to sustain the QDR (Quadrennial Defense Review) force. We're looking at 128 right now in the current program," Clark explained. "And with regard to shipbuilding, I need nine a year. Navy plans currently call for 6.7 to 7.5 per year."

Senator Robert Smith, R-

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N.H., pointed to personnel and maintenance concerns raised by Vice Adm. John Nathman during the recent Naval Air Forces Pacific change of command, and questioned the CNO's commitment to those who raised readiness warning flags.

"All of the things that he said ... I want to sign up for those," said Clark. "Shortly before his change of command, I had a meeting with all the three-stars, where he was present, and we went over each of those issues. And for the future, within a matter of a few weeks, I am going to personally designate him as the head of all naval aviation."

Clark noted that some areas of greatest concern had seen a turn-around in recent years.

"The fiscal year 2000 budget provided for an increase to base pay, restoration of the 50 percent retirement option, pay table reform, and special pays and bonuses, all of which are having a positive impact," he said.

He also praised congressional concern for Navy recruiting efforts. "In fiscal year '98, with the assistance of this committee, we began growing the recruiter force, expanded the number of recruiting stations, and increased enlisted bonuses and our advertising budget," Clark said.

Those actions were beginning to pay dividends, Clark said. "Our recruiting goals have been met for the past two years, but with a great deal of effort. Retention is better, but remains below goal. Our attrition level is too high, and Navy leadership is taking action to reduce it."

The CNO said keeping



**Adm. Vern Clark, left, Chief of Naval Operations, and Gen. Henry H. Shelton, right, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, testify on the state of military readiness before the Senate Armed Services Committee.**

**Photo by PHC Dolores L. Parlato**

good Sailors in the Navy was a top readiness priority.

"Retention is at the heart of our efforts to achieve and sustain optimum personnel readiness," Clark noted. "Some attrition is inevitable; however, the current level is too high. We are stressing to Navy leadership the importance of fostering a work environment that is more conducive to personal and professional growth." The CNO added that "we are emphasizing that we must make, and we must have, a collective commitment to Navy people, our most vital resource."

Even with recent retention and recruiting successes, the Navy remains well short of the people it needs, said Clark.

"If you look at our trends, you find that I'm 14,000 people short — almost 8,000 at sea, and 6,000 ashore. That has to be redressed," he said. Clark called on the committees to fully

support funding for an increase in the Navy's manpower end strength.

Clark summed up his testimony by telling Armed Services Committee members that the U.S. Navy remains the best in the world.

"I'm proud of what the Navy is doing in our forward areas of deployment. Their performance is superb. Our people are performing brilliantly. They are proud. They are ready," he said.

But, said Clark, there are problems that cannot be ignored.

"I cannot say the same about our non-deployed forces. They too are proud, and they are

committed, but they are significantly challenged to meet the readiness standard."

Clark told committee members that it would take a commitment from Congress and the American people to keep the Navy the premier force that it is today.

"The question is ... what kind of Navy does the nation need, and what kind of Navy does it want in the future? In my view, we must invest in the future."

The full transcript of Clark's prepared remarks, as well as photographs of the hearing, can be accessed by visiting the "What's New" link at <http://www.navy.mil/>.

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