

# Navy leadership addresses House Armed Services Committee

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Investments in manpower and current readiness have and will continue to pay big dividends, the leaders of the Navy and Marine Corps team told the House Armed Services Committee during the fiscal year 2003 Defense Authorization Budget Request hearing.

"The Chief of Naval Operations, the commandant and I all agree that we must continue to keep faith with our people by providing them the pay and benefits they so richly deserve and must also ensure that our forces remain trained and ready to carry out missions in the war on terrorism," said Secretary of the Navy Gordon England.

"To this end, we have prioritized spending on critical readiness elements such as adequate flying hours and steaming days, spare parts, preventive maintenance and replenishing our inadequate stockpiles of precision munitions," England said. "We've added more than \$3 billion to our operations and maintenance account and an additional \$1 billion to buy munitions. On the personnel side of the equation, we increased the military personnel account by about \$4 billion."

England told the committee he believes that the Navy and Marine Corps have made the "right choices" on the 2003 budget.

"We can never afford to break faith with our people on adequate pay and benefits and it makes no sense to shortchange current readiness and munitions at a time when the nation is at war," the SECNAV said.

The new budget funds five new ships and two Trident submarine conversions. While many of the committee members offered support for more ships to be funded in the budget, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Vern Clark stressed the need to spend the dollars available this year on current readiness during the war on terrorism.



PHC Dolores L. Parlato photo

Secretary of the Navy, The Honorable Gordon R. England, (center), accompanied by Commandant of the Marine Corps General James L. Jones, (right), and Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Vern Clark, (left), testify before the House Armed Services Committee on the proposed fiscal year 2003 budget. This year's proposed U.S. Navy budget is the largest in two decades.

"Our decision to make current readiness a top priority is paying off at sea and over Afghanistan," the CNO said. "With your support, we have made significant progress in increasing the readiness of the fleet. Increased funding for spare parts and maintenance and training has, in fact, resulted in better readiness and improved performance and absolutely higher morale."

"While continuing the positive trends in priorities one and two - that's manpower and current readiness - our Navy must now sharpen its focus on force structure in the years ahead. This is part of what I call future readiness," Clark said. "This budget supports investment to recapitalize part of our fleet, but there is more that we need to do to ensure tomorrow's Navy remains the finest in world."

The CNO told the committee about the Navy's successful manpower efforts over the

last year.

"I have talked to this committee about our battle for people and this year I am happy to report that we are winning that battle," Clark said. "Not only has our Navy met its recruiting goals for the past three years, but you will be happy to know that retention is reaching record levels, the best I have seen in my 32 years of service to date and attrition is decreasing."

The leaders emphasized the critical role the Navy-Marine Corps team is playing in the war on terrorism. Marine Corps Commandant Gen. James Jones said the strength and reach of the Navy-Marine Corps team has been the solution to the "access challenge" in Afghanistan.

"We draw our strength from our partnership with the United States Navy," Jones said. "Operation Enduring Freedom dramatically highlighted the fact that we're no

longer just an amphibious force in the classic World War II sense, but we're truly an expeditionary force that can project combined arms up to and beyond 600 miles inland in a landlocked country and sustain it."

England stressed that the Navy and Marine Corps were ready on Sept. 11 and remain ready to support the war on terrorism around the world.

"I don't believe in my adult life I have seen a time in which the combat capabilities and mobility of the Navy-Marine Corps team have been more important to our joint warfighting effort," said England. "In my view, not since World War II has the inherent mobility of combat power at sea been so critical to our ability to take the fight to the enemy and sustain that effort over time."

The CNO praised the American people and Congress for their support and applauded Sailors for their service.

"Your Navy's performance in the present war - in the immediate aftermath of the Sept. 11 attacks and in the ongoing campaign - is simply outstanding and it is no accident," Clark said. "It is the result of strong support and sustained investment from the American people and from the Congress. It is the result of great equipment. It is the result of technology. But more than anything else, it is the result of the hard work and the dedication of the highly-trained Sailors of the United States Navy. I'll tell you, I'm mighty proud to be their CNO."

"I do believe that this war is demonstrating very clearly, in a most powerful manner, why we have a Navy: to carry the sovereignty of the United States of America to the far corners of the earth, with credible combat power ... ready to respond, ready to fight, ready to win. I believe that our Navy is an integral part of the joint team, but first and foremost, the Navy-Marine Corps team," the CNO said. "It is truly inspiring to know that our nation is united in fighting freedom's fight. We are going to win this war."



JOI Preston Keres

Spc. Jill Bakken (right) and Vonetta Flowers sprint down the track in USA-2 for the women's two-man Bobsled on their way to a gold medal at Utah Olympic Park, during the 2002 Winter Olympic Games Tuesday.

## World class athlete program member takes Olympic gold with bobsled win

**Army MSgt. Bob Haskell**  
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A soft-spoken National Guard soldier steered her two-seat bobsled to a gold medal Tuesday in the first women's bobsled competition featured in the Olympic Games.

Spc. Jill Bakken, 25, of the Utah Army National Guard and the Army World Class Athlete Program and civilian brakeman-pusher Vonetta Flowers of Alabama drove into the pages of Olympic history.

The unheralded USA-2 duo's two-run total time of 1:37.76 seconds at the Utah Olympic Park beat two German teams that slid to the silver and bronze medals. The better-known USA-1 team of driver Jean Racine and brakeman Gea Johnson finished fifth.

Bakken's the first World Class Athlete Program member ever to win Olympic gold, according to Army officials.

Flowers became the first African American ever to win Winter Olympic gold — and during African American History Month. The two are the first Americans to medal in Olympic bobsledding since 1956, when the U.S. men claimed the bronze.

"It's an amazing feeling. We had a lot of fun today," Bakken said afterward. "There was a lot of tough competition, so we definitely had our work cut out for us. The Germans are tough teams to beat. I just knew that I had to put in two solid, clean runs."

The duo had to battle back from injuries to make it to Salt Lake. Bakken underwent back surgery and two knee operations in the past four years to earn her shot at gold. Flowers, 28, was a track and field star at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

She originally set her sights on representing the United States at the Summer Olympics, but injuries ended that dream. She switched sports and hooked up with Bakken in December.

"I knew we had to have a good start, and I knew we were going to do really well on that," Bakken said. "I was thinking about how I needed to get down the track clean."

It was also a golden moment for two other Army Guard soldiers, Spc. Bill Tavares of New York and Sgt. Tuffield "Tuffy" Latour of Vermont. They are women's bobsled team coaches and members of the World Class Athlete Program.

Tavares, head coach, is a three-

time Olympian who rode the luge in the 1992 Winter Games. Latour is the driving coach. His grandfather was a bobsled driver for the United States in the 1948 Games.

Bakken joined the Utah Guard's 115th Engineer Group headquarters in Draper in March 2000. She became an Army world-class athlete after basic and advanced individual training in mid-2000.

"She went from boot camp back to bobsledding," beamed her mother, Peggy Smith. "I knew she had it in her. I'm so happy for her. She's gone through a lot of injuries and come back to do this."

Bakken competed Feb. 19 in her hometown of Park City, Utah. About 40 members of her family witnessed the gold medal efforts that included a track-record time of 48.81 seconds during the first run.

"I had a ton of relatives there. It was awesome," Bakken said Tuesday night, admitting that she thought she was dreaming. "They've supported me through the whole thing - not just this race - but ever since I started sliding."

"I never really wanted to quit. There were tough times injury-wise, but I never wanted to quit. I wanted to go the Olympics, and now I'm here," she said.

## 7th Fleet Sailors continue to build relationships throughout Pacific region

**7th Fleet Public Affairs**

For more than a century, the U.S. Navy has maintained a presence in the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean to promote peace, and encourage commerce and regional security cooperation.

Today, in the wake of the vicious and criminal attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the vital work of the men and women of the U.S. 7th Fleet — training, conducting naval operations, and engaging and building relationships with regional partners — is all the more important, due to multi-national efforts at combating terrorism. Inasmuch as things change, they remain the same.

"We're continuing to do what the Navy has done in this part of the world for more than 150 years," said Capt. William R. Mason, chief of staff for the 7th Fleet staff, embarked aboard USS Blue Ridge (LCC 19).

"Maintaining our readiness to carry out naval operations and building regional relationships are Vice Adm. [James W.] Metzger's priorities and what we really focus on throughout the fleet. The two are interrelated and we can ap-

proach both in any number of different ways.

Metzger is the U.S. 7th Fleet commander. Conducting more than 100 exercises each year with navies and other military forces throughout the 52-million-square-mile 7th Fleet area of responsibility (AOR) — from roughly the international date line in the Pacific to the east coast of Africa — is one way of maximizing training and engagement opportunities, Mason said.

Units of the 7th Fleet train and interact with navies from countries such as Japan, the Republic of Korea, Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and others.

"These operations keep our professional skills, and those of our friends and allies, sharp, but at the same time give us the opportunity to develop personal relationships," explained Capt. Mark Welch, the 7th Fleet exercises and engagement officer visits.

Port visits throughout the region are one of the principal means of engagement with friends and allies, Welch agreed. "For many Sailors, the 7th Fleet is a favorite

for liberty ports." And while these routine visits give Sailors an opportunity for rest and relaxation following long periods of at-sea operations, according to Welch, the visits also serve as a critical way of conducting outreach and diplomacy.

"During each and every port visit, our Sailors are serving as American ambassadors. To many of the people they meet, our Sailors are all they'll ever know of America. It's quite a responsibility for our young people, but one they handle incredibly well," Welch added.

Blue Ridge and the 7th Fleet staff are in the midst of an underway period away from their forward-deployed port of Yokosuka, Japan. Across the 7th Fleet AOR, more than 50 ships, hundreds of aircraft and approximately 20,000 Sailors and Marines are

Mason said those Sailors and Marines are adapting to the necessary changes in operating procedures brought on by acts of terrorism over recent years, and cemented by the criminal acts of Sept. 11. They also know that the war on terrorism is a worldwide team effort, and that engaging



PH3 Kurt Eischen photo

A Sailor rides aboard a small boat deployed from the ship while conducting a man overboard drill. The sailor is a search and rescue swimmer (SAR), and regularly participates in open water training drills designed to improve personnel reaction times and individual rescue skills under all types of conditions.

with people throughout the region is the foundation of making such an effort effective.

"The value of what the men and women of 7th Fleet have been doing out here with other countries,

I believe, is more clear to them than ever before. In today's environment, if we were to disengage from our partners, we would be yielding the battle to the enemy," Mason said.