

# KEEPING THE BEST



By RAdm. John Nathman  
Director, Air Warfare

When I wrote my first "Flightline" article last fall, I made it clear that I viewed the retention of our best and brightest aviators and maintainers as one of our most important challenges. Senior leadership recognized retention as a major challenge in the summer of 1997. Since then, the Aviation Retention Working Group, the Air Board and the Chief of Naval Operations have listened to what you had to say about the challenges facing Naval Aviation. Decisions have been made and initiatives continue to be developed to improve quality of life in the fleet. This article will bring you up to date on some of our recent initiatives with specific emphasis on compensation.

The readiness challenges arising out of retention and program funding levels are in the forefront of policy in the Department of Defense and Congress. Naval Aviation and the Navy Inspector General were the lead agents within the Department of the Navy in identifying officer and enlisted retention dissatisfiers, and addressing readiness and personnel issues up the chain of command. With Congress and DoD on board, we have begun to put some of our long-sought quality of life measures into effect. The Senate Armed Services Committee has approved a package that includes a 4.8 percent across-the-board pay increase; restructuring of the current DoD pay tables increasing mid-level officer and enlisted pay up to 9%; reinstatement of the twenty-year, 50-percent retirement program; introduction of



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the Thrift Savings Plan, which is a 401K-type retirement savings plan; and increased G.I. Bill education benefits. Though the details have yet to be signed into law, we can conservatively expect noticeable improvements in pay and benefits.

A number of other programs, more tailored to Naval Aviation, are also in the works. The law increasing aviation career incentive pay to

\$840 per month from years 14 through 22 has now taken effect. For the first time ever, the aviation continuation pay (ACP) program for FY99 was offered to all pilots and naval flight officers who were at or beyond their minimum service requirement. The FY99 ACP program will transition us to our new bonus program, aviation career continuation pay (ACCP). Still in the



PH3 Christopher Mobley

**Opposite and above: on a daily basis, Naval Aviation professionals use their skills to train and operate around the globe while decision makers fight for increases in funding levels for quality-of-life improvements to retain these professionals.**

approval process, ACCP will base bonus payments on specific seagoing billet requirements rather than on an individual's particular designator or community. It will provide additional incentive for aviators to fill warfighting billets at sea that fully utilize their aviation training, while rewarding performance and progression in an operational career path.

In addition to straight pay improvements, we are working to improve the quality of life for you and your families through a number of diverse initiatives. We are seeking increased funding for housing construction and renovation. We have instituted collateral duty reductions, intended to provide more career satisfaction, less paperwork and more time with your families. The CNO has mandated a 25 percent personnel tempo reduction during the interdeployment training cycle, allowing more family time between deployments. We will continue to respond to the chain of command in crafting future programs, and will work to keep you "in the loop" about plans and progress.

I would also like to pass along my personal BRAVO ZULU to all members of the Naval Aviation team who made Operation Desert Fox such a success. "Hard-edged" aviators and maintainers from the *Enterprise* (CVN 65) and *Carl Vinson* (CVN 70) battle groups demonstrated the unequalled capabilities of the carrier battle group. Their credible combat power, which is the trademark of forward-deployed naval forces, has again proven essential in the execution of our national strategy. Your superb performance makes a powerful statement to our nation's leaders about the importance of retaining high-quality Naval Aviation professionals. Well done!

# NAVAL AVIATION news

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Published by the Naval Historical Center under the  
auspices of the Chief of Naval Operations

Dr. William S. Dudley  
Director, Naval Historical Center

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*Naval Aviation News* (USPS 323-310; ISSN 0028-1417) is published bimonthly for the Chief of Naval Operations by the Naval Air Systems Command and the Naval Historical Center. Editorial offices are located on the Washington Navy Yard, 1231 10th Street SE Suite 1000, Washington DC 20374-5020. Periodicals postage is paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices. The Secretary of the Navy has determined that this publication is necessary in the transaction of business required by law. The use of a name of any specific manufacturer, commercial product, commodity or service in this publication does not imply endorsement by the Navy. Photographs are U.S. Navy unless otherwise credited.

**POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to *Naval Aviation News*, 1231 10th Street SE Suite 1000, Washington DC 20374-5020.