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SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT OF
MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER OF THE NAVY
(SUBMARINE SERVICE/SURFACE WARFARE/AVIATION WARFARE)
JAMES L. HERDT, U. S. NAVY
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL
OF THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
ON
PERSPECTIVE OF THE SENIOR ENLISTED
FEBRUARY 13, 2002

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MMCM(SS/SW/AW) Jim Herdt, USN

Ninth Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy



Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Jim Herdt, a native of Casper Wyo., joined the U.S. Navy in 1966. After attending Machinist's Mate "A" School in Great Lakes, Ill., he served sea tours aboard the USS INDEPENDENCE (CV 62) and USS WILL ROGERS (SSBN 659G) and shore tours at Nuclear Power Training Unit, Windsor, Conn., and Radiological Repair Facility in New London, Conn.

After leaving active duty in 1974, Master Chief Herdt enlisted in the Naval Reserve serving in various Selected Naval Reserve units while attending Kansas State University. Returning to active duty in 1976, he served as a Naval Reserve Recruiter in Milwaukee, Wis., and in 1978 rejoined the regular Navy.

Master Chief Herdt served aboard USS TEXAS (CGN 39), USS CINCINNATI (SSN 693), and on the staff of the Nuclear Power School in Orlando, Fla., prior to his tour as Chief of the Boat aboard USS SKIPJACK (SSN 585). He has served as Command Master Chief of Nuclear Field "A" School, Orlando, Fla., of USS THEODORE ROOSEVELT (CVN 71), and of Naval Training Center, Great Lakes, Ill. In 1996, he was selected to serve as the Chief of Naval Education and Training Force Master Chief. He assumed his current position as the ninth Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy on March 27, 1998.

Master Chief Herdt is a graduate of the U.S. Navy Senior Enlisted Academy and U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy. He has earned a master of business administration degree with a concentration in human resources management from Florida Institute of Technology. He is qualified as an Enlisted Aviation and Surface Warfare Specialist, and is qualified to wear the Enlisted Submarine Breast insignia. Master Chief Herdt is certified as a Master Training Specialist. His personal awards include the Meritorious Service Medal with two Gold Stars, the Navy Commendation Medal, the Navy Achievement Medal with Gold Star and numerous campaign and unit awards.

Master Chief Herdt is married to the former Sharon E. Lawrence of Newark, Del., and has one son, James II who lives in Birmingham, Ala.

CARING FOR SAILORS' NEEDS WITH PERSONNEL PRIORITIES

Doing What's Right to Help Sailors Serve Americans

Chairman Cleland and distinguished members of this subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you on behalf of the outstanding enlisted men and women of the United States Navy and their families. I would like to express our appreciation for the steadfast support of this subcommittee and for the vast array of vital programs you have authorized, which improve our lives and the lives of our families. As I complete this my fourth and final year as Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy, I sincerely hope that, in the years ahead, the Senior Enlisted Advisors of the uniformed services will continue to be afforded this invaluable opportunity to offer their views before this subcommittee.

Our dedicated Sailors are continually deployed around the globe in Navy's advanced ships, submarines, aircraft squadrons, and ground units every day, in peacetime and in war. During my tenure, I have traveled extensively throughout the world talking with them and their families, and visiting the places in which they work and live. It has become increasingly evident that, thanks to the staunch support of the Administration and the Congress, and especially through the efforts of the personnel subcommittees, our military has evolved into a better place for our enlisted personnel to serve. Your persistent focus on quality of life enhancements, from significant increases in across the board and targeted pay raises, selective reenlistment bonuses and career sea pay; to reduction in out-of-pocket housing expenses, Montgomery GI Bill improvements, establishment of Tri Care for Life, authorizing Thrift Savings Plan participation and expanding retirement plan options, has greatly contributed to our Quality of Service and has dramatically improved Navy's personnel readiness, through improved recruiting and retention and reduced attrition.

Sailors are exceptionally pleased with last year's targeted pay increases, representing the largest across-the-board pay raise in nearly twenty years, and recent steps to reform the pay tables are beginning to influence Sailors' decisions to stay for a career. The Fiscal Year 2002 National Defense Authorization Act provision permitting us to increase by one-half percent the number of E-8's serving on active duty, while seemingly insignificant, greatly enhances our ability to establish the more senior, experienced and technically proficient force needed for today's high-tech platforms, while also continuing to increase enlisted advancement opportunities. As the Navy continues to evolve, it is a virtual certainty that the ongoing transformation will increase the requirement for experienced and technical Sailors. Our efforts to increase the experience level of the force and improve advancement, which directly enhances retention, would be facilitated by easing or removing the current percentage limits on E8 and E9 personnel.

In the past three years, our Navy is well into turning the corner in our efforts to acquire and retain quality people. We met overall recruiting goals in Fiscal Years 1999, 2000, and 2001 and this year we are well ahead of last year's record setting pace. The most recent reenlistment data indicates that we are reenlisting 63 percent of eligible Sailors who reach the end of their first enlistment, 75 percent of Sailors with 6-10 years of service and 85 percent of Sailors with 10-14 years of service. Additionally, our annual attrition rate for first-term Sailors has fallen from over 14 percent in 1998, to 10 percent today resulting in thousands of young men and women remaining in the Navy who would have been otherwise lost from our ranks. These successes have all contributed to recent battle groups deploying better manned than ever before. While these are indeed welcome developments, we must continue to sustain this momentum.

We have made great strides toward improving our Navy's quality of work and quality of life, which together comprise "quality of service." We've come a long way, but there is always room for improvement. For example, we need to continue working towards our goal of providing every Sailor with adequate housing and allowing all Sailors the opportunity to reside ashore when in homeport. We are continuing to review our Individual Personnel Tempo requirements with an eye toward identifying the best means of adequately compensating Sailors for the demands placed upon them and their families by the tempo of operations, while considering the unique nature of the Navy as a deploying force.

Navy has mobilized nearly 10,000 Reservists, primarily on an individual basis, rather than by unit, as was the case during the Iraqi War. We are continuing to evaluate future requirements to determine the right active/reserve mix to meet anti-terrorism/force protection manpower requirements in the new security environment. Today, our Navy consists of 381,099 active duty personnel and 166,411 ready reservists. Five Carrier Battle Groups and Amphibious Readiness Groups deployed (some early) in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in the highest states of personnel readiness. They operated at wartime tempo – twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week -- without requiring additional personnel. It is no source of contention for Sailors to deploy from their loved ones for six months at a time. Deployments are what we do, but we should never underestimate or take for granted the incredible sacrifices that a six-month deployment imposes on our Sailors and their families. While deployed, Sailors consistently live in cramped and often undesirable conditions. We certainly owe them our commitment to provide the best living conditions possible when their ships are in port. It is reasonable for them to expect this, and they deserve it.

HOUSING ISSUES

Adequate housing continues to be a top priority throughout the fleet, and Sailors tell us that housing is one of their most important quality of life concerns. The quality of our lives and the standard of living that Sailors are able to enjoy are two very key determinants of whether our Sailors make the Navy a career or leave for employment that will deliver a better standard of living for them and their families. The authorization to fully fund our Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) is a major step in the right direction and we have started making significant progress in this area. The result of fully funded BAH enhances our long-term ability to provide quality housing for all service members. While we are making important strides in this area, we must sustain our three-pronged approach to improve housing for Sailors and their families: continued funding increases for BAH to zero out-of-pocket expenses(OOP); continued traditional military construction housing projects; and continued support of public private venture (PPV).

This year service members' out of pocket (OOP) expenses is 11 percent of national median housing cost by pay grade and dependency status, an improvement compared to last year's 15 percent. We need the continued commitment to drive the funding of BAH to 100 percent for Sailors, as authorized by the 2001 National Defense Authorization Act. The Department of Defense is working to buy down the remaining OOP expenses by 2005. Even with the lower percentage of OOP expenses this year, families living in high cost areas may not feel the full benefit. For example, last year's housing costs in Fallon, Nevada, increased an average of 36 percent. Sailors don't ask for excessive amounts . . . they just ask for enough money to have an average household in their community comparable to their peers.

Military housing is the second piece of our approach to housing the fleet. This includes traditional barracks and family housing, as well as Public Private Venture (PPV) projects. Traditional and PPV barracks projects are particularly important to the Navy as we move closer to providing all Sailors the choice to live ashore when their ships are in port. I cannot emphasize enough how important the authorization for E-4 and below to live ashore is to junior Sailors. Single shipboard Sailors in pay grades E-4 and below routinely live in the most minimal accommodations even when not deployed. While close-quarters living conditions at sea are a necessity for now, we're working to improve the QOL in port. We currently estimate that we will need approximately 25,000 additional bed spaces to move Sailors ashore in homeports in the contiguous United States. We have noticed an early increase in retention rates in the areas where we have ongoing projects of moving junior single Sailors into barracks while in homeport.

There is still a strong need for continued support for government owned and leased military family housing. The BAH is based on median housing costs and does not provide sufficient compensation for every Navy family to obtain housing in the private sector. Owned and leased family housing is needed to provide suitable and affordable housing for many Navy families. To support this goal, we have and will continue to invest in family housing construction projects. The Fiscal Year 2002 budget invests over \$204 million to replace, construct, or improve over 3500 Navy homes, the majority of which are for junior enlisted families. We are on track to eliminate approximately 28,000 inadequate homes that were on our roles at the beginning of last fiscal year. Navy intends to eliminate all inadequate homes by Fiscal Year 2007, consistent with DoD budget priorities. Military family housing is, and will continue to be essential for acceptable quality of life for Sailors.

Our Public Private Venture (PPV) program for Military Family Housing projects continues to develop and create more opportunities for military families to reside in quality, affordable housing. We continue to increase the number of homes we can construct for the same money using leverage savings of PPV. Continuing to pursue these PPV projects, where advantageous, is essential to keeping up with the growing need for family housing. Today, an overwhelming majority of our career enlisted Sailors (approximately 80 percent of E-5 to E-9) are married. The fact that most Navy activities are located in typically high-cost areas adds an even greater dimension to our need.

EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS

Today's Sailors are immersed in a culture of learning and they are grateful for their educational benefits, especially the recently increased Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) stipend. I fully support continued efforts to ensure that the MGIB remains an effective tool for attracting young men and women to enter the military services and, more importantly, that it adequately recognizes them for their selfless commitment to service to our Nation and helps them transition when they eventually leave our ranks and bring their wealth of experience, training, education and professionalism back into the civilian workforce.

INDIVIDUAL PERSONNEL TEMPO (PERSTEMPO)

Sailors appreciate the intent of PERSTEMPO legislation with regards to reducing/eliminating excessive individual personnel tempo. However, we have noted some unintended consequences that occur due to the nature of naval service. For the past 20 years, the Navy has been committed to managing deployment tempo at the unit level. After 16 months of

tracking and reporting deployments on an individual basis, we are gaining insight how the frequency or duration of deployments adversely affects certain specialties or communities.

I fully support the intent of Congress with respect to managing PERSTEMPO to avoid undue burden on our Sailors and their families caused by high individual personnel tempo. We are committed to identifying the best means for balancing PERSTEMPO with mission requirements, while adequately compensating Sailors and their families for the arduous nature of the duties that service in the Navy imposes upon them and the sacrifices they must make as a result.

CONCLUSION

The events of the past several years, which saw the bombing of American embassies abroad, the attack on the American warship, USS COLE, and the attacks upon the World Trade Center buildings and the Pentagon, have united us in our resolve to preserve, protect and defend the greatest democracy on the face of the Earth. Every day our shipmates are deployed around the world to safeguard our freedom and our way of life and they go in harm's way without giving it a moment's thought. During fleet visits, I am inspired by the honor, courage and commitment of our Sailors. We owe it to these guardians of democracy and world peace, to sustain our efforts to improve the quality of service. For it is their service and their sacrifice, and that of their comrades in arms in the other armed services, which make all else possible in our great country. They deserve the continued unwavering support from the nation they serve. It is my honor to represent them here today.

Once again, Mr. Chairman, on behalf of our Sailors standing the watch around the globe, I thank the committee for its strong and unflagging support. Your efforts are making a difference and we are eternally grateful.