



NAVY MED NAVIGATOR

Headlining in world news...

The United States and Britain began reworking a draft resolution yesterday to authorize force against Saddam Hussein. Meantime, Belgium offered a compromise to end disagreement within the NATO alliance over providing military aid to Turkey in advance of a possible war against Iraq. Some are saying the outcome may be a new plan that doesn't explicitly call for war. Before Friday's dramatic Security Council meeting, where weapons inspectors gave a relatively favorable accounting of Iraq's recent cooperation, Washington and London had been preparing a decision that would give them U.N. backing for military action.

Commercial airlines are ordered into military service to transport troops, as the Pentagon continues its Persian Gulf buildup for a possible war in Iraq. The airlines began flying troops last week under an order by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to mobilize the Civil Reserve Air Fleet, a fleet of commercial passenger and cargo planes that can be used to move people and equipment in emergencies. The Defense Department announced it was activating the first stage of the fleet, making it only the second time it has done so in the 51-year history of the program.

In Navy news...

Guided-missile frigate USS Sides (FFG 14) marked the end of a distinguished 21-year naval career yesterday. In a decommissioning ceremony at Naval Station San Diego, dignitaries, shipmates and friends looked on as the last watch was relieved and the ship was ceremonially decommissioned. Sides' past commanding officers, friends and family of the ship's namesake, the late Adm. John H. Sides, assembled to honor the man who served in the ship. Joanne Sides Watson, Adm. Sides' daughter and the ship's sponsor, was in attendance. In 2002, Sides participated in the war on terrorism, conducting maritime operations in support of Operations Noble Eagle and Enduring Freedom during her last deployment. Also in 2002, she led a combined U.S.-Australian task group in defense of strategic interests in the Indian Ocean.

In medical news...

Medical experts are now saying vaccines made from patients' own tumors are safe and seem to work in early human tests. The vaccine is supposed to tell a patient's T-cells, which orchestrate immune system attacks, to target tumors. Developers are claiming future enhancements promise to make this a powerful new treatment for deadly cancers and also causes less side effects than previous standard cancer treatments.

Man overboard!

Comfort crew enjoys fun in sun, surf and sand during command picnic



Photo by JO2 Ellen Maurer

More than a few Comfort crewmembers ended up in the water yesterday, during an all hands picnic on the beach at Diego Garcia. This picture and many others can be found on the Comfort Shared (S) drive under NEW-PAO-SHARE in the "pics" folder.

By JO2 Ellen Maurer

It has been one of Maryland's snowiest winter season in years, but folks deployed aboard *USNS Comfort* who are regularly assigned to the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md. and other duty stations along the east coast aren't feeling even a little bit chilly.

Currently pier side south of the equator in Diego Garcia, the ship's crew en-

joyed the summer weather while it snowed almost a full foot back at their permanent duty stations.

Taking advantage of the island's summer season, Morale, Recreation and Welfare organized an all hands picnic on the beach yesterday, giving the crew of more than 300 active duty Sailors and civilian mariners a break during their working port at Diego Garcia.

The crew has been on loading supplies and training extensively for a possible upcoming repositioning in the Persian Gulf in support of future military contingencies.

"I think it's very important for the crew to take advantage of down time right now," said Command Chaplain, Lt. Cmdr. Mark Koczak. "Because you never know when it's going to get really busy for the ship and its crew."

This is a drill...This is a drill

Unpredictable drills help prepare Navy hospital ship

Story and photos by JO2 Ellen Maurer

"This is a drill. This is a drill."

Those are familiar words for crewmembers aboard Navy hospital ship USNS Comfort (T-AH 20), currently deployed in the Indian Ocean region in support of the military build-up in the Persian Gulf.

A fully functional afloat hospital, Comfort can go anywhere the rest of the fleet goes to provide medical support of soldiers, Sailors, airmen and Marines wounded in combat. Their unique mission, though, means the crew must be able to handle not only shipboard emergencies, but also patient care situations, including mass casualties.

Since departing their homeport in Baltimore, Md. in early January, the medical and support staff have been training daily, practicing everything from fire drills to emergency surgeries. Now, a month into their deployment, Comfort Sailors are functioning as not only a ship's crew, but also a medical team, ready for just about any situation – even ones they'd never expect.

During a recent patient care drill, Comfort crewmembers were surprised when a "pretend patient" arrived, playing the part of an intoxicated person with several serious injuries. This isn't a situation Comfort has ever had to handle, and the situation proved challenging and educational.

"The reason why we chose this scenario is that, frankly, it's more difficult to deal with a patient who doesn't have full mental capacity. It requires a different level of skills and diagnostics," explains Cmdr. Ralph Jones, Director of Surgical Services aboard USNS Comfort and a surgical oncologist at the National Naval Medical Center, where he is assigned when not deployed. "This is perfect training for the nurses and corpsmen because the situation can be translated into several different wartime situations."

Jones explains that a person under the influence of a drug, like alcohol, behaves very much like someone who has been injured in a chemical agent attack. Neither patient can really feel or express injuries to someone who is trying to assess their medical situation.

According to Jones, the same is true in lending medical care to someone who doesn't speak English.

"With Comfort and its humanitarian status, there is always a possibility we could be treating someone from another country who was injured and needs our help," says Jones. "If we don't have the right language interpreters aboard for that situation, we still have to figure out how to treat the person. So, we must practice thorough-



Ensign Rebecca Carmichael and HN Michael Williams help brace the neck of pretend patient, Lt. Cmdr. Steve Gottlieb, MSC.

ness and versatile patient assessment."

Aboard Comfort, unpredictable patient care drills help prepare crewmembers for the uncertainties of their mission and the complexities of medicine practiced in the midst of conflict.

Comfort undergoes computer upgrade

The Information Technology Division is in the process of upgrading all computers on the network to the Microsoft Windows 2000 (WIN2K) Operating System (OS). Most of the computers on the network are currently running the Windows NT 4.0 OS.

Comfort computer experts are saying the new system is more reliable and also offers an easy to use, user-friendly interface that gives crewmembers increased flexibility and keep the ship in compliance with current Information Security (INFOSEC) guidelines.

Comfort's Information Technology Division says they believe this upgrade will be very beneficial to the ship and the entire crew. It will help increase productivity while simultaneously decreasing downtime and user problems, making desktop computing easier for everyone.

The IT division adds that they appreciate everyone's support and patience as we phase in the implementation of Win2K aboard the MEDTREFAC.

Questions or comments can be directed be answered by calling 7370.

Vinson officer receives medical award

*By JO2 (SW) Sarah Bibbs,
USS Carl Vinson Public Affairs*

ABOARD USS CARL VINSON -- During their 45th annual conference in Boston, the American Academy of Medical Administrators (AAMA) Federal Sector honored Lt. Douglas E. Stephens, medical administration officer aboard USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70), for his selection as this year's AAMA Young Federal Health Care Executive of the Year.

The AAMA Federal Sector selects one candidate from each branch of the military to compete for the award. According to the AAMA, the award "recognizes a young leader in the federal health-care system with outstanding contributions and achievements in health-care management."

Lt. Cmdr. J.T. McMahon, Vinson's former senior medical officer, nominated Stephens for the award, citing the 18-year Navy veteran's professionalism and dedication to the medical readiness of Carl Vinson and her battle group.

McMahon, recalling his close working relationship with Stephens, personally attested to Stephens' "resourcefulness, innovative ability, outstanding leadership and uncompromising integrity."

With Stephens' leadership, Vinson's medical readiness program earned first place for Pacific Fleet carriers, achieving a 33.6-percent increase from the previous year.

The department also received the Medical Blue "M" award, distinguishing Vinson as the top carrier in the Pacific Fleet for medical excellence and efficiency.

Navy unveils new "Perform to Serve" program

From Chief of Naval Personnel and Navy Personnel Command Public Affairs

The Navy recently announced the next step in shaping the force to improve combat readiness. The program, called Perform to Serve, encourages Sailors to reenlist for ratings with more advancement opportunity.

Perform to Serve features a centralized reenlistment and extension reservation system giving Sailors other avenues to pursue success. Designed primarily with fleet input to meet fleet readiness needs, Perform to Serve offers first-term Sailors in ratings with stalled advancement opportunity the chance to reenlist and retrain in a rating where advancement is better and the fleet most needs skilled people.

The program will initially apply to first-term Sailors in CREO Group 3 ratings, those that are over manned, but will expand to include those in CREO Groups 1 and 2 later in the spring 2003. The centralized approval authority for reenlistment and extension requests will be Commander, Navy Personnel Command (CNPC) in Millington, Tenn.

"Navy leadership is committed to providing opportunity for Sailors in ratings with stalled advancement opportunities," said Chief of Naval Personnel Vice Adm. Gerry Hoewing. "In some cases, this may mean Sailors converting to ratings that match their skills and interests. One of the critical goals of the program is providing choices for Sailors and ensuring we do not leave any capable, top-performing Sailor behind."

Any first-term Sailor in an over manned rating with a conversion package pending approval still must apply for reenlistment and conversion through Perform to Serve.

First-term Sailors in crowded ratings - those with stalled advancement - who receive transfer orders because of a unit decommissioning, unit disestablishment, or home port change are not exempt from Perform to Serve and are required to submit a Perform to Serve request if they must incur additional obligated service.

There are some exceptions, however. Some first-term Sailors initially will not have to submit a Perform to Serve request to reenlist. Those in CREO Group 1 or 2 ratings are exempt during this initial phase. Sailors who are currently under permanent change of station orders or those in receipt of an approved SRB (selective reenlistment bonus) precertification will not need to submit a Perform to Serve request.

Though commanding officers will no longer be the final approval authority for reenlistment requests, they will continue to be the single most influential person in the process. Command leadership teams will have the central role of submitting reenlistment requests on behalf of their Sailors and counseling affected Sailors on the opportunities and options that come with Perform to Serve.

After a Sailor's command sends the Perform to Serve request to CNPC, it will be compared with requests from Sailors in the same rating. Sailors will be selected for reenlistment based on the following criteria: commanding officer's recommendation for reenlistment, commanding officer's recommendation for advancement, pay grade, selection for advancement, most recent advancement exam results (passed but not advanced), Sailors who hold critical NEC (Navy Enlisted Classification) codes as stated in the most recent CREO/REGA message, and promotion recommendations on the last two regular periodic evaluations.

Enlisted community managers will assign monthly reenlistment quotas based on

fleet needs and rating manning. Those not offered in-rate reenlistment might be offered conversion to one of their rating choices. If conversion is not an option, the Sailor will be separated from the Navy at the end of their service obligation.

"Fleet input played a pivotal role in making this plan," said Hoewing. "Although CNPC will ultimately decide each Perform to Serve request, the decision starts with the commanding officer's recommendation.

"COs are by design the primary control point for Perform to Serve, because they make the quality decision to recommend a Sailor for retention. We're committed to keeping the focus on fleet readiness and opportunity for Sailors."

Command leadership teams can work most effectively with Sailors by monitoring rating status from the CREO/REGA messages. These contain valuable information to share with first-term Sailors on the best options available for reenlistment and continued success.

"We'll always keep mission readiness at the top of the priority list," said Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Terry Scott, "and at the same time we're committed to providing Sailors a good chance to advance. Perform to Serve will help with both of these and that's a win-win for our Navy and our Navy family."

For more information regarding Perform to Serve see NAVADMIN 031/03 available on the Web at <http://www.bupers.navy.mil> or call Navy Personnel Command's Customer Service Center at 1-866-U-ASK-NPC.

For more information on Navy career incentives and programs visit NPC on the Web at www.StayNAVY.navy.mil.



Two Comfort crewmembers frocked

*Story and photos by
JO2 Ellen Maurer*

MS2 (SW) Sanja Walker (Left) and MS2 Candace Thomas (Right) were frocked to second class petty officer Feb. 14 in a small ceremony on the ship's mess decks, where both Sailors are assigned aboard USNS Comfort.

The unusual timing for this frocking is due to the fact that both Sailors received the higher pay grade through the Navy's STAR program. The STAR Program is a

reenlistment incentive program for qualified Mess Management Specialist 3rd Class Sailors to advance to Mess Management Specialist 2nd Class. Upon successful graduation of either the General Mess Operations Course (NEC 3527) or Private Mess Operations Course (NEC 3525) Sailors will be advanced to MS2.

Both Walker and Thomas are regularly stationed to NNNMC. Walker works in the NNNMC galley and Thomas works in the barracks.



Comfort cook beats Diego Garcia's best in island horseshoe tournament



Story and photo by
JO2 Ellen Maurer

"I've come halfway around the world and can now say I am the best on the island, and I have the trophy to prove it!"

So says MS1 (SW) Charlie Bubb, having now out-pitched 16 other competitors at Diego Garcia's Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) double-elimination horseshoe tourney Feb. 8.

Bubb, along with two other Comfort shipmates, MS1 Kelly Drager and HN Nathan Charboneau, participated in the tournament

while enjoying liberty off their ship as it floats pier side on the south-of-the-equator island.

Comfort has been in Diego Garcia since Feb. 3, taking on supplies, training medical troops and awaiting possible repositioning orders in support of military contingency efforts in the Persian Gulf.

When the ship first deployed from Baltimore, Md, in early January, the crewmembers, like Bubb who has been in the Navy for 20 years, were unaware of where they were headed. Enduring one of the snowiest winter seasons of that area in several years, many of the Sailors were not prepared with proper summer clothing for the tropical climate. Having been told that MWR offers free T-shirts to all who participate and finished Diego Garcia events, Bubb says they had good reason to join in the fun.

"Somebody just brought a flyer about the tournament to the ship. So, we decided to sign up and get a free T-shirt...I never thought I'd

win, or anything," admits Bubb.

Actually, this is Bubb's first time ever competing in a horseshoe tourney. He says he never really plays or practices, but he did grow up around the pits.

"When I was a kid, growing up in Pennsylvania, my dad and uncle used to throw horseshoes all the time. So, I grew up watching them and I guess I'm now following in their footsteps," says Bubb, proudly. "They were pretty good at throwing shoes. I guess it's in my blood."

With his newfound competitive spirit, Bubb says he hopes to try out some other Diego Garcia MWR events, as the ship's schedule permits. He says he's thinking about entering an upcoming darts tourney or maybe a billiard competition.

Bubb also says that he plans to continue with his horseshoe pitching, and will even consider giving lessons.

"Yep, I'm offering my expert advice on horseshoes to anyone who wants it...Just sign up with me on the mess decks!"

USNS Comfort Chaplain's Corner

By Comfort Chaplain
(Lt. Cmdr.) Mark Koczak

During the last major conflict in this part of the world, a song became very popular and the refrain was very interesting. I wrote about this song in the later part of 1990, as I watched the recruits and students, for which I was their chaplain, go off on ships in the Gulf and Kuwait.

This was the Desert Shield/Desert Storm conflict. We watched this one on the TV every hour of every day.

On the ship, we watch each other all the time. That is why the Military Sealift Command folks on

the bridge are called the watch. This is why the quarterdeck has the watch.

What are all these people looking for? This is an important question for each one of us on Comfort -- right here and now.

During any time of the day or night, the watch is always on duty. This is not for fun or a drill. They watch for fires, which is one of the worse things that can happen on a ship. They look after ship's safety and ours.

In this sense all of us are on watch all the time. We look after each other and should be aware of what is going on and around the ship. This is not the time to

live in a daze. Being at sea is not a daydream or a time to loose focus.

Oh -- about the song. Bette Midler sang those words, "God is watching us," during the Desert Shield/Desert Storm conflict. The last line was, "from a distance."

However, God does not watch us from a distance. He is right here with us right now. I, too, watch after each one of you. This is one of my jobs -- to watch and to listen to you.

By the way, I loved the song and still can sing it now 12 years later. I just don't agree with the theology.

Remember to watch...



Diego Garcia's Upcoming Events

Feb. 16 – 5k Full Moon Platoon Run at 8 p.m. at the base gym

Feb. 17 – ½ marathon and 5k walk at 7 a.m. at Camp Justice, Tent City

Feb. 19 – DGYC Sailing Regatta at 4:30 p.m. at the Marina

Feb. 20 – Dart tourney at 6 p.m. at the Sports Bar in the Turner Club

Feb. 20 – Powerboat class at 4:30 p.m. at the Marina

Feb. 21 – Powerboat class at 4:30 p.m. at the Marina

Feb. 22 – Racquetball tourney at 5 p.m. at the base gym

Feb. 22 – 3 on 3 Woman's basketball at 6 p.m. at the base gym

Feb. 25—5K fun run/3k walk at 5:30 p.m. at the base gym

Feb. 27—Donkey gate and back bike ride at 4:30 p.m. at the beach house

For the tournaments, you need to sign up at the gym. For everything else, you can just show up and participate. After all the runs and tournaments, you get a T-shirt just for finishing.



Don't forget to wear sunscreen!