



# Lessons From the Desert

By Admiral Vern Clark, Chief of Naval Operations

you need them — take eight,” because that’s how many were ready — because we invested in readiness — and it wasn’t just carriers... I remember talking with the ACMC [Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps] about potentials and if our amphibious structure was ready. They weren’t on the list, but in the third week in December we offered up Amphibious Task Force East and West, the U.S. Marine Corps-Navy team, and on the 6th of January they were rolling out the gate — and they weren’t on alert.

One of the things that we’re talking about is to make sure that as institutions we establish...attitudes that reinforce that we are going to live the lifestyle of readiness. We are going to exist in a culture of readiness.

Lesson number two: joint warfare is decisive. I’m tremendously impressed with the joint team and I press this point to everybody who wears a uniform. If you’re thinking about lessons learned and you’re not thinking joint — recalibrate. The future is about the Navy-Marine Corps team and the rest of the joint structure and — how we’re going to respond to give the president options.

... One of the tasks I have is talking to groups about why we need a Navy. I have a 30-, 20-, 15- and 10-minute speech — and sometimes I don’t even have that long. Sometimes I just have 30 seconds and the 30-second version is: credible combat power, far corners of the earth, sovereignty of the United States of America, anywhere, anytime, options for the president without a permission slip... My new favorite word is persistence. So now it’s not credible combat power, far corners of the earth, etc., it’s — credible, *persistent* combat power, far corners of the earth...

Lesson number three: access over flight and basing are not guaranteed. It fits in with the without a permission slip thing. Maneuver is a key part of Army discussions, but I don’t think we talk about maneuvers enough in the Navy, and we happen to have a pretty good-sized maneuver space. Lesson number three is about exploiting that maneuver space to the fullest. It’s about the freedom to maneuver.

We need to understand that maneuver

space allows us the opportunity to distribute our force in ways that we never thought about before, for example: a three-axis attack from the Red Sea, the Mediterranean and the Arabian Gulf. I’m convinced that to truly understand and get at the lessons in warfare — we must understand *LIMFACS*, the limiting factors that we confront in crisis. Access is going to be an issue everywhere we go.

For the U.S. Navy what it means to me at the strategic level is that this is what Sea Basing is all about. Sea Basing is about the ability to exploit the freedom to maneuver. So when the 4th Infantry Division couldn’t go in the East Med — we took it south and someplace else. When it was necessary to alter course for a long-range strike with TLAMs [Tomahawk Land Attack Missile] we just moved to where we could get the job done. These are examples, but the lesson for us is that in everything that we think about for the future we must understand the value of freedom to maneuver in the international domain. Very soon, you will see a report from the Defense Science Board that talks about the third leg of the triad in our Sea Power 21 strategy called Sea Basing. We need to think about Sea Basing in a very joint construct and what it does for the entire military structure...

The next lesson is inherent in operating from the sea base and it’s about reach. Reach equates to persistence... I’m going to be very careful about investing in anything that doesn’t have greater reach than we currently have. In Afghanistan, when we had a dozen Special Forces troops on the ground, it became imperative to have somebody close by in case they got in trouble. For the first time in our history we conducted routine operations, 7, 8 — 900 miles from the carrier. If you were an aviator in those experiences, it was an awesome experience in more ways than one. It’s like launching from 100 miles south of New Orleans, flying to Chicago, orbiting over the Great Lakes and waiting for the call on station. Now we couldn’t have done this without the U.S. Air Force and their tanker fleet. Those guys are going to the tanker four or five times then... landing on a “postage stamp” at 2 a.m.

We had the first operation with F-18 E/Fs. E/Fs are important for a whole lot of reasons, but I was excited that they could go all the

It is absolutely necessary for the Navy and the Department of Defense to dissect, study, analyze and determine the effects and causative factors of what we are accomplishing in Afghanistan and Iraq.

...We need to challenge every assumption — everything that we think about the way we conduct our business. It’s healthy for us to challenge those assumptions and see where the future takes us. In the course of these discussions it is absolutely appropriate that you examine tactical, operational and strategic perspectives. It would be inappropriate for me to talk about the tactical level perspectives and I’m not going to...but I will share this piece... First and foremost is that we are ready.

Strategic lesson number one is that readiness counts... It’s necessary to say that because we have not always had the discipline to finance a ready force. I think that as an institution it’s wrong to identify the requirement and then fund 85 percent of it. In my confirmation hearing, I said to Congress that it was my view that we had fundamentally understated the requirements and then we fundamentally underfunded the understated requirements — and we’ve done it for a long time.

So we invested in readiness... in the tools to see to it that the men and women who wear the cloth of this nation would be ready... We were in the tank in the third week of December [2002] and the plan was fundamentally set, but the force selection was not. I will never forget the Chairman asking me, “Vern, how many carriers can I have? Can we have four?” There have been times in the past that mustering four fully ready, in the green, all the way across and ready would not be possible. We have been famous in the past for crossdecking things. It was such a thrill to be able to say, “Yes General, you can. In fact, if

way to Baghdad without going to the tanker. We found the value of the E/F and it's ability to reach... We flew airplanes forward while Nimitz was en route and we flew them forward to the fight and brought them on board with the rest of the E/Fs from the Lincoln. The 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit was able to fly more than a 1,000 miles into northern and western Iraq from Suda Bay. Reach translates to persistence. *I don't want to buy any more stuff that doesn't go at least as far as what we own today. That's not a hidden message.*

Speed is a force multiplier. We have talked a lot about FORCEnet. FORCEnet is the key to the realization of Sea Power 21. We cannot have Sea Power 21 without reinvigorating our focus on interoperability and command and control structures that allow us to have and share knowledge. I'm disappointed that we are still building systems that stovepipe. Part of this is structure, part of this is cultural — the stovepipe Service system. Talk to Vice Adm. John Nathman, Deputy CNO (Warfare Requirements and Programs) (N6/N7), about things he is doing with the Air Force, Army and Marine Corps about this problem.

... We talk frequently about the enemy's asymmetric advantages. I am absolutely convinced that future enemies aren't going to go toe to toe with us... I'm concerned that asymmetries are something that we have to understand and live with every day in a comfortable way. We have to expect it. It has to be part of what we're about. We often think that they're the only ones who have asymmetric advantages. We have at least two. The first greatest advantage that we have is the ability to introduce and exploit technology to the advantage of the young men and women who are committing themselves to taking it to the enemy. Number two is the genius of these young men and women.

Sea Shield is about ensuring that we cannot just take the fight to the enemy, but that we can climb into the ring with the enemy. I just think you've got to be able to do that. I don't believe that you can win them all from over the horizon. There were some important things that happened in this conflict and one of them was the way ahead for theater ballistic missile defense. I can't give you exact numbers because it's classified, but the connection between the Army Patriot battery and its system, and our prototype system that was on the USS Higgins (DDG-76), produced a very satisfying result.

... In an article for the October 2003 issue of *Proceedings* magazine, "Rethinking the Principles of War," by Rear Adm. John G. Morgan, there is a phrase that I really like — "persistent precision." I'm absolutely convinced that persistent precision is going to change the way we fight... What I see happening in the future is that ground forces will fight differently... As we figure out how to exploit the technological advantages that come from the maneuver systems, persistent ISR will change the conduct of warriors on the ground... The future is about persistent precision fighting coupled with persistent ISR that allows one of our Soldiers or Marines to be able to bring precision to bear in ways that we do not understand today.

I want to say that predictability can be a liability. The Navy has been too predictable. If you want to know what we are planning to do next, go to the Navy Exchange, ask the cashiers, and they will give you our schedule... I commanded three ships and I learned that our current model, where we deploy ships, come home and put them in the shipyard has some disadvantages to it. In fact, I never deployed one that wasn't in better shape the day I brought it home than it was the day I took it out the gate.

Our model said, we can take this ship that's in better shape than it was the day we sailed into the shipyard and see if they can tear it up? Do you know what? They can. This is not denigrating to them [the shipyard], I'm poking fun at the model that we have used for 30 years, and it's time for us to rethink this. We need to think in terms of our ability to respond and to surge... We are going to rethink our maintenance concepts... We're going to rethink what it means to be ready. Instead of thinking about a ship or an aircraft squadron (or you name it) being ready to go, we want to recognize that the world of tomorrow is a more uncertain world than the world we live in today — and we are going to be ready to respond.

The military operates in support of diplomacy. When that methodology fails it flips around and then diplomacy operates in support of the military... I fundamentally do not see the value in six-month heel-to-toe deployments just for the sake of deployments. I would much rather have a Navy that is able to respond and give the president options. So if a country is acting up — it's far better to think in terms of surge ready. How many do you want Mr. President? A strong message to follow and four or five [ships] show up that are capable of doing real work. That's what the future is about ladies and gentlemen — and that's where we're going.

... You cannot do these things without a ready force. The first week of this journey we established the number one priority in our Navy and that is we were going to win the battle for people. I just want to share with you that it's very fulfilling and rewarding to be able to tell you that we are winning it. At the top of my list of challenges is that our retention is too high and we have too many people. Congress gives us a window for how many people we can have. Up until 9-11 they gave us a small cushion. On 9-11 they changed all the rules and said, Navy, Army, Air Force, Marine Corps, you can have a two percent surge and if you get special permission you can have three. Oh, by the way, we didn't give you money for that... We were counting noses in September [2003] getting to where we needed to be.

When I took command of the Atlantic Fleet in September 1999 our first term retention in the Atlantic was 19 percent. All my life it ran in the 20s and once in a while it would creep into the 30s. Last year I said we are going to reduce attrition by 25 percent. We didn't make it. We only made 23. In FY03, through September 1, first term retention in the U.S. Navy was 64.2 percent. If any of you have any questions about the patriotism and the determination of the young men and women who wear the cloth of the nation, I want to tell you to not worry about it. These young men and women are absolutely fantastic... We are winning the battle on people.

So the lessons are these: If you can win the battle for people and we are; and if you can establish a culture of readiness and an operational construct that allows you to be surgeable and deployable as opposed to extraordinarily predictable — we will have the strategic level tools coupled with the injection of all of the technology that we're talking about creating for the future. That is what we are investing in — to be the right kind of team player in the joint force of tomorrow. And that's the number one lesson from the desert.

*Editor's Note: Admiral Clark's article has been edited from his remarks to the U.S. Naval Institute Eighth Annual Warfare Exposition and Symposium, October 8, 2003. The full text of his remarks is available at [www.chinfo.navy.mil/navpalib/cno/speeches/clark031008.txt](http://www.chinfo.navy.mil/navpalib/cno/speeches/clark031008.txt).*