NEWS RELEASE

August 20, 2003

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

Laurie K. Brown, COMT, COE, Administrator
Drs. Fine, Hoffman & Packer, LLC
1550 Oak St., Ste. 5
Eugene, OR 97401
541-687-2110
lkbrown@finemd.com

PHOTOGRAPHS ARE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Eugene, Ore. – Eugene ophthalmologist **I. Howard Fine** recently spent 24 hours onboard the nuclear aircraft carrier USS John C. Stennis, observing everything from night landings to aircraft repair.

As he details in the following narrative, experiencing a 130 mile-per-hour catapult-assisted take-off gave him a renewed sense of appreciation for the commitment and responsibilities of the men and women who defend our country.

Patriotism, Devotion, And Commitment Onboard the USS Stennis

by

I. Howard Fine, MD

Commander David Tanzer, MD, a naval aviator and ophthalmologist on staff at the San Diego Naval Medical Center, recently asked me to participate in a once-a-year program specifically designed for training residents in cataract surgery. I agreed and was offered a Distinguished Visitor tour of the USS John C. Stennis, a Nimitz-class aircraft carrier.

As Commander Tanzer outlined, the tour would involve flying me out to the carrier on a C-2 Greyhound (COD), “trapping aboard” (making a carrier-arrested landing), touring the ship while underway, observing day and night flight operations, and flying off the following day via catapult launch. I found the thought thrilling, albeit somewhat frightening.

Nevertheless, two days before assuming my teaching assignment at the Naval Medical Center, I did indeed go on that tour. The experience left me awestruck at the enormous commitment and awesome responsibility of the men and women who serve in the defense of the United States.

Commissioned in 1995 at a cost of $3.5 billion, the USS John C. Stennis is a fixed-wing, nuclear-powered aircraft carrier with a projected service life of more than 50 years. It is as tall as a 24-story building and has a flight deck equal to 4.5 acres. The 97,000-ton Stennis can contain 85 to 90 aircraft and is capable of more than 20 years of continuous service without refueling. Including the air wing, the Stennis has a crew size of 6,200 - necessitating 18,000 meals a day.

While on board, I was able to observe the training of new pilots in their first nighttime carrier landings. These operations involved multiple aircraft, including Super Hornet and Hornet jet fighters, Prowler tactical electronic-warfare planes, and Hawkeye surveillance and patrol aircraft.

I witnessed some of these operations on the forward deck, very close to the catapult assisted take-offs. I was also able to stand beside the captain on the bridge during the night operations. He answered my questions immediately, all the while concentrating on the control panel above him, which electronically monitored all of the pilots in the air, the number of take-offs and landings they had completed during the current mission, and their fuel levels. The captain was in immediate communication with those approaching and leaving the ship. And, unlike me, he remained calm and composed during several missed and touch-and-go landings.

At the machine shop, I watched two female mechanics repair a large jet engine. I learned about the need for speed in repairing damaged aircraft to make them combat ready, but also the requirement of extreme precision so that there was no threat to the lives of the pilots. Both the combat direction center and the center for avionics and electronics contained multiple highly sophisticated computers, in many cases operated by young people who were extensively trained for their awesome responsibilities, despite the fact that they were only several months out of high school.

In fact, we learned that the crew has an average age of 19, and whether they are in training, on maneuvers, or in combat, they all work 12 hours a day, 7 days a week. In spite of this, there are far more applicants to serve on aircraft carriers than positions available, resulting in the continuous evaluation of all personnel. Anyone who is not fully proficient is rotated off and replaced by others eager to serve onboard. Naval aviation is the most potent and capable of all strike forces within our defense establishment. It was amazing to see the devotion to duty, the commitment, and the patriotism of the enlisted personnel with whom we interacted.

That night I bunked in a stateroom just below deck. And despite the earplugs, I spent much of the night enthralled by the enormous noise of jet aircraft taking off and landing.

At the conclusion of my 24 hours on board the Stennis, I was brought back to the COD Greyhound for a catapult take off, which propels the aircraft from zero to more than 130 miles per hour in less than 2 seconds. The force of the take-off was incredible, both frightening and

exhilarating. It was one of the most awesome thrills I have ever experienced. Shortly after take-off I was landing again at the naval airbase in San Diego.

My experience onboard the USS John C. Stennis left me awestruck, and filled with a new sense of appreciation. We sometimes take for granted the freedoms we enjoy and the options these freedoms allow us. In doing so we unknowingly take for granted the work of people like the crew of this aircraft carrier, most of who are so young, yet work so hard with enormous patriotism, devotion, and commitment.

I am grateful for this once-in-a-lifetime experience and for the renewed sense of appreciation it has given me for the men and women who remain so unselfishly dedicated to the defense of our nation.

###