

Admiral John Richardson, CNO
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Admiral Richardson: Thank you, Barry, for everything and for having me here, again, to speak to the Surface Navy Association.

I'd like to also welcome Admiral Hogg. Sir, thanks for you coming here this evening down from Newport where you still serve as our intellectual leader up there. It's great to have you here.

And then my friend and Naval Academy classmate Admiral Rowden who really set the high bar for these talks this morning. I don't know how we can compete with that, Tom, but thank you for leading this community for 35 years of naval service, you and Suzie and the boys, and I know you had a chance to check in with your dad during your trip here to the East Coast. He's doing great. We should all hope to be as plugged in as Admiral Rowden, the other Admiral Rowden is at that age. Let's give a tremendous round of applause for Admiral Tom Rowden.
[Applause].

I also want to recognize Admiral Brown, Rich Brown, here, getting ready to take the helm. He's leaning forward. Every time I see him, he's leaning forward, leaning into the harness, and we couldn't ask for a better transition. So the surface force is steady as she goes, confidence at the [com]. So Rich, thanks very much for taking that on.

As I get going, and it always takes a little bit of time to warm up in these speeches and really kind of get in the zone. I just wanted to ask you a quick question. It's an audience participation. It's my favorite way to do a talk.

How many in the audience here have had the chance to do a staff ride or a battlefield walk of a battle? Raise your hand if you've had a chance to do that. If you've served at high levels of command or on a staff, they're great. A great one is Antietam, and the docents up there will lead you around and give you a terrific tour of the battlefield. And there's nothing like walking that terrain to see, holy cow, Pickett's Charge. That really comes alive when you look across that field and you look up and you see where the artillery was emplaced and you think that took a lot of guts to even start that charge. You

get out to Little Roundtop and you see where the 20th Maine did their business. Or you get to see Antietam or any of those battlefields. If you go over to Europe you can see Normandy, and you get a chance, just what it took to execute those campaigns. You get to walk the terrain.

It's even better if you're assigned as a formal staff walk because you can role play, right? You sort of take on the role of one of the leaders in those battles and you get to rethink it through and you lead the team through that talk and you're there on station. It's a very educational experience, and I've always envied the opportunity to do that, and I always envied these land battles, and the Army or the Marine Corps that fought them because in our business we have nothing like that. Right? We can study our battles but we have nothing like that. At the end of our conflict, at the end of our battles, the winners sail away victorious and the losers sink to the bottom, and the sea washes over them and soon after, there's almost no trace of what happened. Maybe, if you want to reach, you can think about walking the Constitution, and you get a chance to see what war at sea in the age of sail might have been like. Maybe you can walk the USS Missouri and you get a chance to see what fighting that battleship in World War II might have been like. In fact Peral Harbor, a naval battle of sorts, and you can see where the terrain might have played a role. But in general, we don't get a chance to do anything close to a staff ride, and it's a stark testament to the unforgiving nature of our environment, and it imposes a level of accountability far greater than any administrative measures that any Navy could ever take.

One might think of the sea as hostile, but of course it's not, right? The sea has no knowledge that we're there. It's just tough on everybody. Just tough operating at sea.

So it makes one think. What's the difference at the end of the battle between those who sail away and those who sink? And as you've no doubt realized and it's a topic of a lot of this SNA Conference, there's a lot of things that go into that. Right? You've heard a lot about those earlier today. Certainly equipment bears a big role, it takes a big role. Warfighting concepts play a big role. And these are crucial, and they can make a difference. But they'll all fall short. In fact any external contributions will fall short without effective command.

As we think about things, this evening I just want to spend some time talking about command. Like many of you in here, I've

spent a fair amount of time thinking about this. We wrote a lot about this in the Leader Development Framework. And as we think about 2018, what will define a successful year in 2018? And indeed, define becoming a more effective and more lethal Navy in combat. I'm convinced that discussions and centering our efforts around leadership in command will be absolutely essential.

As we craft our way forward, we must revolve around a Navy that values and treasures command. Never lose sight of that. The preparation, the support, the execution, indeed, the celebration of command.

So I want to talk about what it will take to fight and win in this competitive maritime environment by looking at command through the lens of unit command and then fleet command, and then I'll wrap up with maybe some words about what I can do as the Chief of Naval Operations to support that. What's my role?

So I'll take a little bit of time just to appreciate that major elements of the leader development framework, which is focused on command. And it's a supporting document for the design for maintaining maritime superiority. And which that design outlines, when it was written in 2016, a return to a competitive environment. A return to great power competition. And it speaks to the imperative, the framework does, to develop leaders, especially commanders, who know how to go out into that great power competition and come back winners. And I'll just highlight the goal as expressed in the framework.

The top leaders or commanders inspire their teams to perform at or near their theoretical limits, and by making their team stronger, they relentlessly chase best-ever performance. They study every text, they try every method, seize every moment, and expend every effort to out-fox their competition. They ceaseless communicate, train, test and challenge their teams. They are toughest on themselves. They routinely seek out feedback and are ready to be shown their errors in the interest of learning and getting better. When they win, they are grateful, they are humble, and generally spent from their efforts. And by doing all these things great leaders bring their teams to a deeply shared commitment to each other in the pursuit of victory.

So we'll break down that statement just a little bit.

First, there's clearly an intense focus on winning. We are not in this except to win. Win in the competition that we face. And this focus for winning leaders, winning commanders, nears obsession. If you think about the leaders and commanders who have been persistent, consistent winners, they are newly obsessed. They are obsessed with victory.

Today's CO's must be prepared for winning in a great power competition war at sea. They must be preparing their teams on the bridge, in combat, in engineering, at their guns, to win in combat. And more than any readiness test, more than any outside team's exam, more than any [dirge] report, more than any inspection results, they must be ready, the commander must be ready and competent to take their teams into combat against a competent and advanced enemy and win. To sail away with their crew and leave the enemy out of action, slipping beneath the waves.

This is a stark test. Right? If you're a commander and you don't feel that in your gut, if you don't feel a little bit nervous about that, you're not thinking hard enough. It's a stark test, but anything else, anything less is negligence.

I'll tell you, if you've got some experience in this business you can tell within five minutes of walking aboard whether that team is focused on that level of competition, winning in that fight. Right? Those sailors are fit. You can see the good order and discipline right away, from the moment of crossing the bow. Formality and mastery seems routine on board. These sailors on that crew look you in the eye, and you can see in their eye that they are confident, they are proud, they are tough, and they're ready to show it if needed. In short, they are well led.

A second element of that goal statement talks about a deep sense of humility. I'm not talking about spiritual humility here. But a sense of the truth that somebody else besides the commander may have the best idea, and in combat, the best idea is the only thing that matters. And in that regard, they are their own worst critics. They are asking people to challenge their thinking, their ideas. Because they know it's much better to find a weakness, much better to find a flaw in the discussion in the ward room or with the Chief's quarters, or on the crew's mess and adjust before finding that flaw in combat. And combat will find that flaw.

Third, these commanders have a deep devotion to their team. Complete. They bring their teams into their obsession with winning, constantly communicating, constantly building them up, challenging them. Constantly.

Let me ask you another audience question. How many people in this room were members of some form of championship team? Whether it's a sports team, a chess club, a glee club, whatever. At the end of the season, you were the champion. Raise your hand up high. You've got to be proud of that. Look around. That's a lot of hands. That's a fair number of hands.

I'll tell you what, let me ask all those folks who had their hands up, did you work hard that season? Yeah, you're damn right you did. Right? And did you feel bad about that? No. Not a single one. Right? Of course you worked hard. Winning teams want to work hard, they want to be challenged, they want to be well led because those teams know what it takes to win at the highest level.

Think of those best commanders, those leaders. They are always testing their team. Your best COs were constantly asking you professional development questions, weren't they? They were constantly testing you as officer of the deck, as junior officer of the deck, as the conning officer. In fact, you didn't even want to pass them in the passageway, right? Because if you weren't ready for the question, you knew it was coming, there was just hell to pay. Right? You stand by for the lookups.

These leaders are always stretching their teams. Stretching them to achieve their theoretical limits. And then the team that starts, it becomes a critical mass, right? They start to push themselves and one another, and they build toughness into themselves. Toughness focused on defeating an enemy, not toughness as focused on tearing each other down. They do so, they build that toughness, they build that mastery in a sustainable way, right? So they can go in and win today's fight, and they can come back and win tomorrow's fight and the next fight after that, because we are not a one-fight Navy.

Finally, through these efforts, these commanders achieve a combination or a shared vision of winning it all, and a shared commitment to that goal. Again, nearing complete obsession. And there emerges from that effort this effort to build in a sustainable way a deep commitment to one another. A bond that can really only be described as an affection that can't be duplicated anywhere else. These teams are not interested in

discussing or hovering around the pass/fail line. They are not interested in the rules-based approach to business. They are shooting ever-higher towards a standard of excellence. And those of you that have been parts of those types of teams know exactly what I'm talking about. Right? You championship winners who raised your hand, about 50 percent of the people in here easily, you know what it's like to be part of a team and an effort like that. It's like magic.

It's the one goal, the Leader Development Framework talks about two lanes on a road to achieve that goal. Those two lanes -- competence and character. I'll tell you, competence in the job is the prerequisite for any credible leader. An incompetent leader is a recipe for disaster. The best they can hope to achieve is to stand by and look sincere, right? And they won't know disaster when it comes up and smacks them in the head. We've got to be competent. That credibility is established by being a master of our craft, but it's also earned by enforcing standards of accountability and conduct among the team, right? Because as commanders, we're not responsible solely for ourselves.

Competent leaders insist on rigid adherence to basic principles like watch-standing principles and those things. They enforce those. They have mechanisms to ensure that their watch standards live up to that standard. They demand these standards of others and they demand them even more of themselves. And they're never satisfied with the status quo, are they? They show up each and every day, trying to achieve perfection and on the way finding excellence.

Committed to life-long learning, a hallmark of any high-performing organization. They embrace any mechanism for learning. The plan, practice, execute and review cycle for each of their teams. And we've got that going on right now, right? John Wade, I saw you coming in. Where are you? There you are. Your team's doing that, right? [SMITIC] has been a driving force in inculcating that cycle into each of the teams, and your weapons tactics instructors have really made a huge difference at sea in terms of just raising that standard of knowledge, showing people what that standard of excellence looks like, right? And maintained a constant feedback loop. Right? You have eyes on target in theater, bringing that back and learning and then sending the new lesson forward. Right?

These tactical experts like the [WITIS] and [SMITIC] encourage critical self-assessments and help build up teams of

professionals. Teams who are as introspective and self-critical as John Wade's team is. All right? Because as he said, that's how we're going to get better.

There's an equally important trait of effective commanders, and that's the other lane in this road is character. Commanders of character embody those attributes of accountability, toughness, initiative and integrity. Commanders of character are mentors, but they go beyond mentors, right? They go beyond mentorship to becoming true advocates for their people. Actively seeking opportunities to reach out, find ways to propel their teams forward. Their individuals on those teams forward. They do so with confidence because they understand this is what establishes trust with the team mates. Creates buy-in, and powers others to peer in and contribute and to illuminate the darkness of our blind spots. Helps push that team to its theoretical limits.

And this character also serves as the proud stewards of our Navy legacy, right? In 2018 we'll mark two highly-related milestones. We'll commission the USS Thomas Hudner, named for the Medal of Honor recipient who just passed away last year. And in that same year, even as we commission that ship, we'll probably mark the birth of her last commanding officer. It's just kind of the way it works out with lifetimes of ships.

And then in terms of moving down that path, that two-lane road, those two lanes of competence and character, the Navy has been solid in providing three methods, I would say, to propel ourselves forward towards that goal. First, we have a robust constellation of training and schools. These must be rigorous and they must be challenging, right? They've got to be prototypic of the difficulty that we face. So we're working very hard to ensure that they are. And they must end with some kind of a rigorous certification or graduation event, an exam. So that's one way.

The second way is on-the-job training and qualification. Again, this must have rigor. The walk-throughs and exams must be done by competent people who understand that the difference between winning and losing in combat is the thousands of small things like qualifications and PQFs. That's the difference between a well-trained crew that is both tough and resilient, and one that is fragile. A brittle crew that will crumble under the first test.

A third way, we each control it ourselves. It's self-learning. And those top commanders, if you read back through history, read

the biographies of those persistent combat winners. They don't wait around for the formal school to get started. They are insatiable readers, insatiable self-learners. They've got this unquenchable thirst for knowledge. Their obsession won't allow them to wait, will it? They're just after everything they can get their hands on to figure out how to outwit the enemy. They're going to study their opponent deeply. They're going to study their history. They're going to do everything to confound and defeat the enemy they teach themselves.

So excellence, achieved through competence and character is the glue that binds us together, that gives us confidence in one another, and that really permits us to delegate. If we have competence and character, that leads to confidence. And trusting COs, that allows us to trust commanding officers, to take their teams and lead them over the horizon and come back with that team stronger than when they left.

This idea of delegation gets me to a quick discussion of command, not just at the unit level, but also at the fleet level. These characteristics of effective command and leadership, they don't reside just at the unit level. They translate up. But there are some differences. They are now fleet commanders. The commander of commanders. That's different. They have to exercise command at a distance. How do you do that? Well, you've got to spend a lot of time crafting commander's intent, commander's guidance. And you've got to ensure you've got enough visibility to allow that subordinate commander to exercise all of the initiatives that you want to give them but still ensure that you've got sufficient visibility to make sure that standards are being met, that the teams are ready for the missions to which you are assigning them.

Fleet commanders must do that by allowing the unit commanders the time to train, the room to learn, and the space to operate. Provide them clear boundaries and the latitude to maneuver inside those boundaries. These concepts aren't new. They're inherent in the combined warfare concept principles of delegated authority and command by negation. These principles which make any military operation, but particularly naval operations, so effective. In these days of the ever-increasing speed of operations, particularly the speed and proliferation of information, it demands that we keep an eye on these principles so that we maintain that focus on commanders' initiative. So we don't create a cadre of commanders whose first instinct is to grab the telephone and call up for permission. That goes all the way down.

The fleet is the level where a unit in training becomes a unit deploying. Ready to take the fight to the enemy. Something I saw first-hand as I traveled around during the holidays to the 7th and 5th Fleets. I'm proud to see our fleets achieving exactly that. Through their command and their execution of concepts like the Third Fleet Forward, Distributed Maritime Operations, Electromagnetic Spectrum Management, networking. All of these force multipliers, making these concepts more relevant, more real, more important and more effective today than they have ever been.

So I told you I'd finish, perhaps, with a few thoughts on what I see as my role. What is my contribution?

Let me tell you first and foremost, does our Navy have things to fix? Certainly, and we will get after that. Can we get stronger? Yes, and we will. But let me be absolutely clear. I'd rather be a sailor fighting on a DDG in the United States Navy than in any other Navy, in any other surface force in the world. Okay? So let me make that clear right up front.

That's my applause line. Come on. [Applause]. If I can't get applause here out of that line. Okay. I know you clapped louder for Rowden. [Laughter].

So it's my job to set the conditions to empower our commanders and our leaders to achieve their full potential, and I'm laser focused on knocking down obstacles that stand in your way. To set the optimal conditions for our sailors and our commanders to fight and win.

This means reducing distractions, giving time back to commanders to train their team. This means creating clear, effective and simple C2 structures so commanders know exactly who they're working for and what their mission is. It means managing the supply and demand for how naval forces are sourced to meet combatant commander needs, and it means communicating our progress thoroughly by informing the fleet.

Now the playing field looks fundamentally different, right? Fleet operations, fundamentally different. Combat at sea, very different than when Tom Rowden and I took our oath nearly 40 years ago now, Tom. Right? But winning in any competitive environment, winning at sea, combat at sea demands action. And that starts with the leaders in this room and those listening around the fleet. With the commanders.

Everyone has a role to play, and you never know when your number's going to be called, and we have seen that played out in just recent years. And luckily, toughness is nothing new for our force. It's engrained in our warfighting ethos.

It was engrained last March when I visited the USS Ross and they got underway after I left the ship and went at a head flank to their launch basket to launch cruise missiles into Syria. It was engrained in USS Mason as they transited through the Bab el Mandeb. It was engrained in our six carrier strike groups deployed last year in support of defeating ISIS and safeguarding maritime security. And as I talk to you tonight, it is engrained in today's Navy with 93 ships deployed around the world right now manned by 61,000 sailors; three carrier strike groups with their embarked air wing; and one ready to surge on notice. Two ESG's are ARGs and another one ready to surge. Six DDGs on BMD station. Thirteen SSNs. I've got to mention them, even here. [Laughter]. Five SSBNS, who have been on alert patrol 100 percent of the time since 1960. They are ready and they are getting more ready every day. And they have their versions of task battle cries like "Damn the torpedoes," "Don't give up the ship," and "I have not yet begun to fight," that rise up from their captains and their crews.

So here's what I ask of you and what I promise as my part of this. Show me things that distract you from warfighting and I'll work together, we'll knock them down.

Lead your team to pursue excellence every day, and I'll work alongside you.

Put your uniform, and especially your command pin on every day, committed to making your team the best they can be. Theoretical limits. Because our nation is counting on you.

And if we accomplish this, acting with command as our north star, we will gather next year for the SNA Symposium knowing that we have earned our place as the safest Navy in the world for our sailors, the strongest partner in the world for our friends and allies, and the most lethal Navy in the world for our enemies.

Ladies and gentlemen, fellow sailors, fellow commanders. This is how we celebrate command. The stakes are high, but we wouldn't want to be sitting at any other table, would we? So

let's get to it and earn our future. Thank you very much.
[Applause].