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Building the Warrior Ethos in the Surface Warfare Community:
A Culture Change for Distributed Lethality

By

Greta S. Densham
Commander US Navy

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Gravely Naval Warfare Research Group.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Army.

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Abstract

The concept of Distributed Lethality requires a culture change, one that drives the Surface Warfare Community towards a more offensive warrior ethos. The authors of the concept have made a call for the community to “think differently” about how it approaches warfighting and tactical development. In addition to a number of technological advancements that are being made in weapons and command and control systems, changes must be made to training and personnel systems to help develop sailors into commanding officers who are prepared to take their ships into battle. This concept is important to being able to achieve national maritime strategic aims now and in the future. The submarine community in during World War II provides some examples of how and why change occurred that helped them built a more offensive culture. This paper presents a number of current initiatives and provides recommendations primarily in the areas of training and personnel management that can help build a warfighting culture for Surface Warfare Officers. The first tenet of the CNO’s guidance is “Warfighting First.” A more systematic approach to develop a community that values tactical and operational skill—making warfighting a priority—must be taken in order for the concept of Distributed Lethality to meet its full potential.

Introduction

One challenge the Surface Warfare Officer (SWO) community faces is that as an institution, it doesn't endeavor to make anyone great at any one thing. Instead it strives to be a "jack-of-all-trades" force. A few by personal design or chance do become experts in a certain area, but in general this is not the case. This construct has served the Navy well to date, however, the recently introduced concept of Distributed Lethality provides an opportunity to reassess how the Navy is developing those who will lead it's ships into combat. In the author's experience, those SWOs who have been successful in command are those that have had a lot of sea time. They understood the capabilities of their ships and how they handled when operating them because they had done it a number of times before in a multitude of conditions. They had extensive training and in some cases had experience with combat operations on deployment, all the while building a library of situations they could refer back to later in their careers. The SWO community cherishes "sea stories;" many for their humor, but also for the lessons they teach the others around the table.

Distributed Lethality: 2018, A Near-Term Scenario

CDR Jane Paula Jones walked out to the bridge wing of USS LASSEN (DDG 82). It was a quiet morning in the South China Sea as LASSEN sailed not far from a fleet of fishing boats. Looking down at the vertical launch system tubes on the foc'sle, she felt assured in the new offensive power of her ship. The ship had recently been loaded with long range surface to surface missiles, something she had only dreamed of in her earlier years. In the quiet she could

hear all the sounds of the ship, felt it cruise through the water under her feet and felt confident that she and her crew were ready.

There was a quiet hum on the bridge and in combat as the watchteams monitored their common operating picture, this was critical to their mission of escorting commercial tankers. They had to build a picture of all the vessels with only their passive sensors and rely on their local communications network, an anti-surface “Tactical Cloud,”¹ that provided data from a number of aerial, surface and subsurface unmanned vehicles. Other feeds came in from national technical means.

Memories of her time in this region 15 years earlier came back to her. Some of her best memories of her time in the Navy had been on that deployment. As a Lieutenant Junior Grade she was one of the trusted junior officers (JOs) in the wardroom. Not only had she qualified on the bridge, but also as an air warfare commander in combat. She saw a whole world of opportunities ahead of her. Back then, looking at her Department Heads (DHs), she knew she could do their job, well maybe with a little more training, and one day hoped to sit in her own CO’s chair. He was having fun.

Despite the familiarity of the area, things had changed. China had laid claims to contested territory, building islands on otherwise normally submerged reefs. Whereas there was little threat to her Strike Group 15 years ago, Chinese anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities meant the carrier remained several hundred miles away. Her DDG was part of a smaller surface action group (SAG) comprised of another DDG and an LCS.

Her crew was well trained and with several LDOs among her wardroom, she knew she had a wealth of experience to back up her own. The others were highly talented and she was

¹ Sam LaGrone and Megan Eckstein, “Navy Set to Deploy New Lethal Anti-Surface ‘Tactical Cloud’ Later this Year,” *USNI News*, May 17, 2016, accessed May 18, 2016, <https://news.usni.org/2016/05/17/navy-set-to-deploy-new-lethal-anti-surface-tactical-cloud-later-this-year>.

fortunate to have both an IAMD and ASW WTI² onboard. This expertise backed up the experience she had during her DH tours as Operations Officer on a DDG and Destroyer Squadron N3. Even better, her executive officer (XO) was a former Chief Engineer and the Combat Systems Officer on a DDG; they made a great operational and tactical team.

She recalled a conversation with the commanding officer (CO) of the other DDG, CDR Sam Robinson, a friend of hers from the Naval Academy that was a year junior to her. He was nervous; despite his success in the pipeline, he still hadn't gotten his sea legs. As a JO he was bummed to have missed the party in Newport that his friends a year senior to him had affectionately called Baby SWOS.³ Instead he went straight to the LPD he selected on service selection night and into a poorly managed "SWOS-in-a-Box" program. He earned his pin, but wasn't quite sure he understood what he had learned. He then went to be the training officer at an amphibious squadron or PHIBRON. After getting a masters degree in mechanical engineering from NPS, he returned back to the Fleet getting his number one choice to be CHENG on a DDG. It was a great tour for him taking the ship through an extended shipyard period and successfully completing engineering light-off and assessment with some of the best scores on the waterfront. He left the ship just as they completed Basic Phase training to head to be the N4 Materials Officer at the DESRON. Sam then did a tour in Naples, Italy on the 6th Fleet Staff. The tour, the people, the travel and, of course, the food were great - Jane would go in a heartbeat! Then given his experience and a desire to return to New England, he checked two boxes by taking orders to SWOS N74 to be an engineering instructor. It was there he found out

² IAMD is Integrated Air and Missile Defense, ASW is Anti-Submarine Warfare, WTI is Warfare Tactics Instructor.

³³ Baby SWOS was officially called Surface Warfare Officers School Division Officers Course (SWOSDOC). SWOSDOC was disestablished in 2003 and replaced with SWOS-in-a-Box or SWOSDOC in the form of computer based training.

he had been selected for Command at Sea. Having some time before this milestone, he was able to attend the Naval War College before starting the XO/CO pipeline.

He loved this ship and its crew. They worked hard and had successfully left on deployment, but he was worried. Most of his time as XO had been in the yards. This was great then as he was able to mentor his CHENG through the challenges. Change of command had occurred just before deployment and while he did his best to make all of the Warfare Commanders Course there were a few days where competing requirements meant he had to remain onboard the ship. Two months into deployment, he found himself running scenarios through his head. His DHs were still pretty fresh, and while surprisingly still full of energy, there was a lot to learn. Like him, they had served on different platforms as JOs. They had one ASW WTI onboard and felt confident in that mission area, but what he had doubts about what it really meant to operate offensively, the concept of Distributed Lethality had gained traction and just before deploying the ship had also been outfitted with long range surface to surface missiles. Most of his experience was learning and training on how to defend the ship and, honestly, that was really limited. The pinnacle of his tactical knowledge had been halfway through SWO DH School. If the war really got hot, would he be able to lead his ship into battle?

Change the Way the Navy Thinks

In the January 2015 *Proceedings* article introducing the concept of Distributed Lethality, Admiral Thomas Rowden and Rear Admirals Peter Gumataotao and Peter Fanta called upon the Navy “to recognize that we have to change the way we currently operate . . . (to maintain) the United States’ position as the dominant naval power,” in the world.⁴ The authors of the Distributed Lethality concept would like to change the surface force from a risk-averse,

⁴ Thomas Rowden, Peter Gumataotao, and Peter Fanta, “Distributed Lethality,” *Proceedings Magazine*, January 2015, accessed September 21, 2015, <http://www.usni.org/print/48262>.

defensive force to an aggressive, innovative, offensive force by increasing the lethality of surface platforms and providing additional tactical options for joint force commanders. In the past year, they have moved forward, advancing a number of developments in weapons and tactics to actualize what is a major change to how the Surface Navy operates its ships at sea. Critical to the development of the concept are technical enabling aspects that rely on lethal “value-adds” to current platforms and capabilities.⁵ The tactics to employ these additional and advanced offensive weapons are already being tested and much of the published discussion has focused on the technological and tactical aspects of making this concept reality. While technological and tactical innovation is critical, these lines of effort must be complemented by a cultural shift that embraces a warrior ethos—an offensive mindset ready to lead in battle.

Key to this effort is the role of leadership in Distributed Lethality. Improved platform capabilities are part of the solution, however, increased attention must be placed on the manpower, personnel, training and education (MPT&E) system that produces the commanding officers and those in the staff positions who will be responsible for operationalizing the concept. Developing the next generation of offensively-minded, tactically proficient SWOs is critical to achieving the intent of Distributed Lethality as an important element of overall naval strategy.

This idea is well recognized by the key authors of the Distributed Lethality concept. In January 2016, Admiral Rowden asserted that the Navy must “change the way we think” and pay attention to how we develop people.⁶ He addressed the basic issue that this concept relies not only on the capabilities of Navy surface platforms, but also those who command them. There could be strategic consequences of failing to take heed of this declaration if ships’ COs sent to

⁵ Rowden, Gumataotao, and Fanta, “Distributed Lethality.”

⁶ Thomas Rowden, “Tomorrow’s Surface Forces Lethal and Distributed,” (video of lecture, Surface Navy Association National Symposium), posted January 13, 2016, accessed April 11, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EylIBFjuZ-c>.

operationalize this concept are not prepared. In order to enable Distributed Lethality, the Surface Warfare Community must assimilate an offensive warfighting ethos. It is essential that SWOs more deeply develop the skills and knowledge that allow them to take the offensive; ultimately leading their ships and sailors into combat. To facilitate this construct, the culture of the SWO community will need to shift from one focused mainly on defense to one that embraces offensive fighting.

A Roadmap

This paper aims to identify where improvements can be made, mostly in the realm of training to create the shift in SWO culture to evolve into one that embodies an offensive spirit or warrior ethos. “We have to do what we know is right for our Navy and our Sailors. We have to do the best we can for our people as leaders, or our platforms simply won’t matter.”⁷ This shift is critical for the concept of Distributed Lethality to succeed as envisioned. This paper will identify the importance of Distributed Lethality to Naval Strategy. Next it will examine how history and other services can provide examples of the warrior ethos. The paper will identify how the culture is changing through current initiatives and how they can be built upon. Finally new ideas to support this culture change will be discussed.

The Surface Community will continue to make investments in technical capabilities but must do so as well as in the personnel who operate our ships at sea in order to remain the preeminent sea power in the world. The Navy must strive to build a SWO culture that places its best warriors in command in order to meet the Chief of Naval Operations’ tenets: Warfighting First, Operate Forward, Be Ready.

⁷ James Kelly, “Strengthening our Naval Profession Through a Culture of Leader Development,” *Naval War College Review* (Winter 2014): 7-11, accessed February 5, 2016, <https://www.usnwc.edu/getattachment/da4c554a-2895-4521-83d9-ce9b9c8d19a7/Strengthening-Our-Naval-Profession-through-a-Cultu.aspx>.

Defining the Distributed Lethality Culture Change

First, it is important to describe the concept of Distributed Lethality. As introduced in the *Proceedings* article, “For more power in more places, the Navy should increase the offensive might of the surface force and employ ships in dispersed formations known as ‘hunter-killer surface action groups.’”⁸ The concept aims to provide options for commanders to operate in more sophisticated A2/AD threat environments. “The objective is to cause the adversary to shift his own defenses to counter our thrusts. He will be forced to allocate critical and limited resources across a larger set of defended targets, thereby improving our operational advantage to exploit adversary forces.”⁹ The ability to challenge these A2/AD threats will be vital to any US naval strategy seeking to achieve sea control and project power ashore. Operationally, Distributed Lethality does this by conducting anti-submarine, anti-surface, and anti-air warfare missions in an A2AD environment. Additionally, amphibious capability requires improvement along with enhancing and developing new weapons systems.¹⁰

Distributed Lethality Requires Surface Warriors

Surface warfare officers train to these a multitude of warfare missions including those mentioned above. However, adversaries continue to improve their warfighting abilities through both technology and training.¹¹ Therefore, it is necessary to SWOs with the same. Improved weapons systems and training that continues to challenge individuals as well as combat teams in their knowledge and understanding of how to counter and defeat the threat will help to keep the US Navy’s current advantage. Identifying ways to change the enemy’s calculus are essential. One of the ways this is done is by capitalizing on capabilities already in the Fleet or in a

⁸ Rowden, Gumataotao, and Fanta, “Distributed Lethality.”

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Dale Rielage, “Chinese Navy Trains and Takes Risks,” *Proceedings Magazine*, May 2016, 37.

budgeted acquisition program.¹² These include offensive surface-to-surface missiles, low-cost medium-range strike weapons, long-range ASW weapons, Railgun, persistent organic airborne intelligence/surveillance/ reconnaissance and data relay and more sophisticated command and control systems.¹³ Some of these are already in the Navy inventory and others, like the anti-surface “Tactical Cloud,” will be online later this year.¹⁴ Increasing the offensive capability of ships will demand teams that can and are ready to aggressively use them when required. This combat power combined with well-trained forces result in a greater threat to the adversary.

Distributed lethality calls for units to operate forward, distributed from the carrier strike group and arming all surface combatants with offensive weapons, repurposing some of those already in the inventory like the Tomahawk missile.¹⁵ By increasing the lethality of US Navy ships, their function as conventional deterrents increases. Today’s conventional deterrence is concentrated in ship active defense capabilities and long-range strike ashore. If offensive surface-to-surface missiles or long-range ASW weapons now threatened an adversary’s surface ships, then their planning is more complicated and their forces put at risk. Operational and tactical training to employ these weapons must go hand and hand with their installation.

The SAG concept itself is not new, but the concept looks to exploit the extensive warfighting capabilities of surface ships in new ways. The initial assumption is that these SAGs will be primarily composed of US combatants, but the future vision is that US surface ships will be working with other services and coalition partners. Not only will operators be required to understand their own capabilities and limitations, but also those of the units working with them. The Navy relies heavily on technological superiority. Adversaries look to exploit this and

¹² Rowden, Gumataotao, and Fanta, “Distributed Lethality.”

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Sam LaGrone and Megan Eckstein, “Navy Set to Deploy New Lethal Anti-Surface ‘Tactical Cloud’ Later this Year.”

¹⁵ Rowden, Gumataotao, and Fanta, “Distributed Lethality.”

therefore, operators must understand the limitations of technology and identify ways in which to protect or counter that exploitation. Only by fully understanding the capabilities and limitations of ships' systems and a well-rounded understanding of tactics and how to lead combat teams in battle, will SAG and ships' commanders and their teams be prepared to meet this challenge. Additionally, the staffs that direct their actions and provide command and control must also be fluent. The question to be asked is: Do Task Force Commanders have confidence in their staffs and commanders to execute these missions in a wartime environment? If there is any doubt, now is the time to take steps to make the answer a resounding "YES!"

Challenging the SWO Culture

Distributed Lethality is a concept that calls for ships to operate, often with other units to offensively project power. Ultimately, it is about delivering value in how surface ships are deployed and employed.¹⁶ As Admiral Grace Murray Hopper said, "A ship in port is safe; but that is not what ships are built for. Sail out to sea and do new things."¹⁷ While deployments are very familiar to SWOs, Distributed Lethality is a new way of operating. COs must often make decisions quickly and have the flexibility to innovate when required. The challenge is that the ability for decision makers to innovate is usually based on significant tactical experience that provides a wide base of knowledge from which to draw upon. The current SWO pipeline and training continuum provides this capability more by chance, rather than design.

For the most part, Navy culture dictates that leadership derives from command at sea – which, many will agree, is a unique and challenging experience that demands self-reliance, independence, sound judgment, and confidence. Within the Navy culture, however, there is an expectation that leadership “just happens,” or that effective leadership is achieved through what

¹⁶ Rowden, “Tomorrow’s Surface Forces Lethal and Distributed.”

¹⁷ “United States Military Quotes,” Veteran Owned Business, accessed May 19, 2016, <http://www.veteranownedbusiness.com/military-quotes.php#Navy>.

Admiral James Stavridis, recently retired, has described as “transference” – “just do what I do and you will be a good leader.”¹⁸

It is assumed that by the time an officer reaches command that they have enough tactical experience to lead the ship or that they will learn it in the training cycle.

Fortunately, the Navy has not been combat tested outside of exercises and training. While there is much to be said about how this culture has succeeded to date, it falls short of creating an offensively minded surface force ready to meet the challenges of the future operating environment because of its focus on defensive tactics. An increased understanding and proficiency, dare say mastery, of offensive tactics will be required of future warfighters if the US wishes to retain its dominance in the maritime arena. COs must develop a warrior ethos that is not inherent in today’s Navy.

Return the Focus to Tactics

Surface Warfare leadership is calling on surface warfighters to change the culture and become offensive warriors at sea. The challenge to develop warfighting leaders continues what has always been the goal of Navy leadership: to produce the best naval leaders possible. However, in the 2010 Report *Fleet Review Panel of Surface Force Readiness* or Balisle Report, VADM Phillip Balisle identified a number of issues regarding the culture of the Navy and the impacts to readiness and warfighting. The Revolution in Training that began in 2001 resulted in a generation of Surface Warfare Officers whose qualifications, experience and proficiency was negatively impacted.¹⁹ Since then, this trend is slowly reversed based on the recommendations of the Balisle Report and through initiatives developed by Naval Personnel Command to support junior officer retention, but there is still room for improvement. Specific attention has been

¹⁸ Kelly, 8.

¹⁹ Phillip M. Balisle, Final Report: Fleet Review Panel of Surface Force Readiness, February 6, 2010, 14.

placed on improving the material condition of the ships so they are capable of meeting mission requirements such that training can be accomplished. The Surface Navy has a “culture in which leaders are forged primarily by experience and independent operation at sea,” however, “we tend to leave development of the Sailor to chance or opportunistic events based on career timing or availability.”²⁰

First, it is important to identify any gaps between the current culture and one that is needed to support Distributed Lethality. The most important gap is the level of proficiency that includes a combination of Mission Command, decisiveness, technical skill, and risk taking within the community. While assuredly there are officers who possess this talent today, there is room for improvement in the level of effort taken to develop and hone these skills throughout an officer’s career and within the community as a whole. Distributed Lethality demands that its COs be prepared to take their ships and SAGs into offensive combat conducting scouting, targeting and deception operations in communications denied environments; tactics that are challenging for even the most proficient operators. COs will be required to make decisions quickly, relying on their combat teams to follow pre-planned responses, as well as innovate when standard operating procedures are insufficient. As Arleigh Burke said, “The difference between a good and great officer is about ten seconds.” In combat there may not be time to debate and discuss courses of action. As people become more proficient, they begin to see situations and opportunities rather than being tied to procedures.²¹ There are usually gaps in procedures, for not every inevitability can be accounted for, therefore, “people taught to understand the system

²⁰ Kelly, 8.

²¹ Gary Klein, *Streetlights and Shadows* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 22.

develop richer mental models than people who follow procedures.”²² These mental models allow leaders to thrive in the fog and friction of war.

To close this gap, leadership must continue the current shift towards placing warfighting as the primary function of the Navy, therefore everything that is done supports this function. In the words of ADM Hyman Rickover who is distinguished, among many things, for the culture change he created in the Submarine Community, “Good ideas are not adopted automatically. They must be driven into practice with courageous impatience. Once implemented they can be easily overturned or subverted through apathy or lack of follow-up, so a continuous effort is required.”²³ Still some challenges still remain, “the opportunity to gain ship handling experience and skills is reduced by increased number(s) of junior officers on board and a potential reduction in post deployment sustainment phase underway days due to budget mitigations.”²⁴ Leadership is shifting their focus to improving the tactical readiness of the fleet and addressing these challenges. The same effort that was put into improving the standards of maintenance and material should be placed on tactics. The standard is that every ensign can do a “spot check,” but do they know the warfighting capabilities and limitations of their ship? Is this a priority? These are questions the SWO Community is accountable for.

Similarly, the opportunity to train in challenging warfighting environments is constrained by deployment training cycles and competition for resources. The training commands continue to improve and enhance the scenarios and challenges presented to the fleet, but it is not uncommon for ships to consolidate training in order to meet all requirements for deployment. This can result in missed opportunities for enhanced training or even to build additional proficiency in combat teams. The surface warfare training for recent generations has focused on

²² Ibid, 23.

²³ Hyman G. Rickover, “Doing a Job” (speech delivered at Columbia University, 1982).

²⁴ Balisle, 31.

defensive operations as the Navy has been, until now, unchallenged in the maritime environment since the end of the Cold War. Most would argue that the Navy is good at active defense operations; having undoubtedly the best technology and tremendous capability in its surface warfare force. However, in her naval career, the author has observed a number of ships going through their deployment certification cycles. While some US ships had outstanding combat teams, others just barely passed muster. At least for independent deployers, there was a range of capabilities of the ships and their crews and it was not uncommon for NATO ships to surpass US ships in tactical ability.

One primary reason for this is that the Navy gives lip service to, but has yet to fully embrace, the idea that its SWOs must be warfighters first. Instead, they are leaders in the execution of administrative and material tasks, achieving success through checklist inspections and certifications more than being challenged to lead in combat. One should not underestimate the importance of being successful in these areas; sailors gain little value in training on broken equipment and must, at the beginning, use checklists to guide them in their development and understanding. Instead, the messaging from leadership should be how all of these other requirements are necessary and support warfighting—but are not equivalent with warfighting!

Distributed Lethality as Part of Naval Strategy

So why does it matter if SWOs are warfighters or not? The Surface Navy is embracing the Distributed Lethality concept because it provides the means to achieve the ends outlined in two recent important maritime strategy documents. The current US Maritime Strategy is called *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* (CS-21R). Released in 2015, CS-21R requires Naval forces to be “Forward,” “Engaged,” and “Ready.” CS-21R describes in broad terms how these forces are to be designed, organized and employed to meet the challenges of a

complex security environment in support of higher national security strategies. More recently, the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) released *A Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority* in January 2016. “Design” states the mission of the Navy is to “be ready to conduct prompt and sustained combat operations at sea”.²⁵ In support of this strategic guidance, Distributed Lethality would improve the capabilities of surface forces, enabling them to better respond to security challenges in a more challenging and threatening maritime environment, specifically in offensive combat operations, exercising seapower as required to achieve the Navy’s objectives. In the Distributed Lethality concept a more lethal, distributed force “would enable and provide greater options to the maritime component commander to forward deploy ready forces and maintain credible, flexible, and scalable power to establish conventional deterrence, respond to crises, and if necessary to challenge aggression,”²⁶ adding complexity to the adversary’s problem, forcing a change in the adversary’s calculus.²⁷ The concept proposes returning offensive capability to surface combatants, a capability significantly degraded since the end of the Cold War

Specifically, in the case of China, they have many advantages are primarily based on the fact that a conflict would occur in the adversary’s backyard. The US would most likely be struggling for sea control while competitors are only looking to achieve sea denial, a much easier task to accomplish. This proximity to the homeland enables shorter logistics lines of operation as well as increased surveillance and layered defense capabilities. The aggregate of these

²⁵ John M. Richardson, “A Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority,” U.S. Department of the Navy, January 2016, 1, accessed April 12, 2016, http://www.navy.mil/cno/docs/cno_stg.pdf.

²⁶William F. Bundy and Walter Bonilla, “Distributed Lethality Concept Development Workshops I-III Executive Outbrief,” (presentation Gravelly Group, Naval War College, Newport, RI), December 29, 2015, 2.

²⁷ Rowden, “Tomorrow’s Surface Forces Lethal and Distributed.”

fundamental advantages in conjunction with improved training and higher tolerance for risk-taking leads to the possibility of US defeat or stalemate if conflict would occur with China.²⁸

A Call to Think Differently: A Critique of Surface Navy Culture

In this speech to the Surface Naval Association in January 2016, ADM Rowden updated the community on the progress of implementing the Distributed Lethality concept. He called on the surface community to think differently to meet the challenges of the future operating environment.²⁹ Additionally, insights from the Distributed Lethality workshops II and III conducted in July and October 2015, respectively,³⁰ included the idea that C2/C4I constructs in the future will be fundamentally different from how the Navy operates today and that will require technical, philosophical and cultural changes in order to meet challenge.³¹ It is important to address why this call to change is coming now. Combat readiness is a vital skill naval forces must maintain in order to demonstrate seapower in support of US national security. CS-21R calls for seapower in support of national security. According to naval theorist Alfred Thayer Mahan, “Control of the sea, by maritime commerce and naval supremacy, means predominant influence in the world.” Seapower has always been the mandate of surface ships, however, in recent years a shift in mission priorities and weapons investment has ceded this responsibility to pilots and submariners.³²

²⁸ Robert Beckhusen, “The Chinese Navy is Behind America in One Key Area (But Not for Long),” *The Buzz (Blog), The National Interest*, May 16, 2016, accessed May 17, 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/the-chinese-navy-behind-america-one-key-area-not-long-16208>.

²⁹ Rowden, “Tomorrow’s Surface Forces Lethal and Distributed.”

³⁰ Walter Bonilla, “Insight from Distributed Lethality Workshop II,” (presentation from Gravely Group, Naval War College, Newport, RI), October 2015.

³¹ Ibid.

³² James Davenport, “Distributed Lethality: A Cultural Shift,” *Center for International Maritime Security*, July 6, 2015, accessed September 21, 2015, <http://cimsec.org/distributed-lethality-cultural-shift/17350>.

Since World War II (WWII) the Navy has concentrated much of its offensive power on carriers, with aircraft being the main offensive arm. Surface ships provided defensive protection for the carrier. Since the end of the Cold War, new surface ships were built without over-the-horizon anti-ship capability. With no near-peer competitor and the advent of the AEGIS combat system, focus shifted to air defense and maritime security operations.

In 1999, we changed down to a single access threat or no access threat or no threat at all and we started to go to sea in that manner and . . . we forgot how to do EMCON, why because nobody was shooting at us and nobody could shoot at us at range. We have to relearn today the lessons we knew in the eighties.³³

Over the last fifteen years attention was placed on strikes ashore in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya and ballistic missile defense (BMD) against rogue nation states.³⁴ Knowledge within the Surface Warfare community regarding offensive surface warfare has atrophied in favor of defensive tactics.

Historical Precedence

WWII is important to the US Navy for a number of reasons. The development of carrier air power was a revolution in military affairs that changed the landscape of maritime battles. For surface combatants this was the last time they engaged in surface-to-surface combat. US Naval forces in the Pacific were engaged for over a year and a half before surface combatant tactics solidified against the Japanese.³⁵ These sustained combat operations led to many lessons learned regarding surface warfare; this generation of sailors was “learning on the job.”³⁶ The stories of great leaders like Nimitz, Burke and Halsey and their legacy are an important part of Navy tradition. However, it has now been more than 70 years since the end of the war and there is no

³³ Peter Fanta, “Building and Programming the Surface Vision,” (video of lecture, Surface Navy Association National Symposium), posted January 13, 2016, accessed April 14, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I7TnbvjpBUo&nohtml5=False>.

³⁴ LaGrone, “Global Guided Missile Expansion Forcing U.S. Navy to Rethink Surface Fleet Size.”

³⁵ Wayne P. Hughes Jr., *Fleet Tactics*, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press), 130.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 90.

one serving who has wartime surface warfare combat experience. Instead, the Navy must learn vicariously through training and education and then practice the skills necessary to fight offensively; the option to learn on the job may not be available in the next major surface engagement.

The Navy faced a number of tactical challenges that still resonate today. First, the tactical formation of battle groups, specifically, determining what formations would provide the best escort protection for the carriers while allowing them flexibility to maneuver.³⁷ The question was which tactic “should take precedence, passive defense through physical separation with concomitant flexibility for air operations, or better AAW defense through compact defense?”³⁸ Today, the concept of Distributed Lethality chooses the first option pushing surface combatants into the threat area to put the enemy at risk while leaving the carrier protected at distance. The second challenge is offensive versus defensive firepower.³⁹ In WWII this was mainly a question related to carrier operations in that the tactical commander had to decide how to utilize the variety of aircraft available, whether in scouting, defense or attack.⁴⁰ Likewise, decision makers chose how to employ their battleships, whether for anti-air defense or an “offensive follow-up attack.”⁴¹ Again, the concept of Distributed Lethality is relevant here. Increasing the offensive firepower of surface combatants strengthens the joint force thereby, providing more options to the combatant commander to “deceive, target, and destroy”⁴² the enemy.

During this time, the surface force was able to stay in the fight despite significant ship losses. One reason is that ship numbers were considerably higher than they are today due to the

³⁷ Ibid, 95-96.

³⁸ Ibid, 96.

³⁹ Ibid, 97.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Hughes, 97.

⁴² Rowden, “Tomorrow’s Surface Forces Lethal and Distributed.”

fact that the US was on a industrial wartime footing for four years. By December 1941, the later named military-industrial-complex that had produced 233 surface warships and carriers.⁴³ Three years later, that figure stood at 852.⁴⁴ This mass production allowed for the Navy to continue with its mission despite losses and at the same time integrate tactical lessons learned in order to go on the offensive against the Japanese. Today, the navy has 109 surface warships and carriers in service⁴⁵ out of a total deployable battle force of 273.⁴⁶ The Navy's 30-year goal is for a force of 308 ships to be initially reached in FY2021.⁴⁷ Despite the growing numbers, the Navy would be challenged to reconstitute the force at a fraction of WWII levels, therefore, it is critical for the Navy to maximize its capability and capacity to be able to project power while also being smart about bringing their ships into harms way: deceive, target and destroy adversaries that may be able to outnumber US forces. This gives the concept of Distributed Lethality further weight, but balancing this risk will require commanders to be tactical experts that can innovate in challenging situations. Distributed Lethality requires officers who demonstrate aggressiveness, who are less risk adverse.⁴⁸

This culture challenge is not unfamiliar to the Navy. In looking to the past, LCDR Reginald Preston writes in his paper "Distributed Lethality Cultivating a Warrior Ethos" that there are lessons to be learned from history. He discusses a similar culture change the Submarine Community experienced during WWII as they quickly transition to an offensive

⁴³ "US Ship Force Levels," *Naval History and Heritage Command*, accessed January 15, 2016, <http://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/us-ship-force-levels.html#1938>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ "Status of the Navy," *Department of the Navy*, accessed January 26, 2016, http://www.navy.mil/navydata/nav_legacy.asp?id=146.

⁴⁷ O'Rourke, 10.

⁴⁸ Peter Fanta, interview with author, October 14, 2015.

fighting force required to execute unrestricted submarine warfare.⁴⁹ The submarine force faced had to confront low weapons inventories, risk adverse COs, and lack of tactical training⁵⁰. However, through innovation and an environment that supported what is now referred to as mission command, the submarine force ultimately became successful.⁵¹ In the submarine community, WWII commanding officers Dudley “Mush” Morton and Dick O’Kane are legendary for the way in which they changed the culture of their ships and inspired their crews. The aggressive nature with which they approached their tasking to sink Japanese shipping made them some of the most successful commanding officers in the war.⁵²

CDR Mush Morton rapidly changed the culture once he assumed command of USS WAHOO. “When Mush expressed himself on tactics, the only risk he recognized was the risk of not sinking enemy tonnage.”⁵³ This mentality challenged a risk adverse culture bred in the previous decade of fiscal austerity.⁵⁴ Additionally, higher headquarters placed operating restrictions meant to keep boats safe resulted in missed opportunities for attack.⁵⁵ In challenging the construct by adopting a mission command approach with an aggressive warrior spirit, Morton and his crew in WAHOO would hold the record for the most enemy kills on a single patrol during WWII.

Morton’s protégé and Executive Officer (XO), CDR Richard “Dick” O’Kane would go on to command USS TANG. While in submarine school after graduating the Naval Academy, he and his fellow submariners suspected war was inevitable and as a result, studied furiously.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ Reginald N. Preston, “Distributed Lethality: Cultivating a Warrior Ethos” (advanced research project, Naval War College, 2015), 2.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 8.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² James Scott, *The War Below* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 133,135.

⁵³ Scott, 129.

⁵⁴ Preston, 7.

⁵⁵ Preston, 7.

⁵⁶ Scott, 125-126.

As XO on WAHOO, he initially served under LCDR Marvin Kennedy, whose timidity and poor tactics resulted in a multitude of lost opportunities to sink enemy shipping.⁵⁷ These characteristics were ones that would lose wars. Once O’Kane had command, he was determined to lead with assertiveness and determination. His initiative and innovation would result in the most successful single attack in the war.⁵⁸ He would go on to earn “the title of the war’s top skipper,” sinking twenty-six enemy ships in just nine months.⁵⁹ Officers like Morton and O’Kane drove a culture change within the submarine force in WWII. They transitioned their service culture from pre-war caution to wartime aggressiveness. This change lives on in the offensive nature of the submarine force today.

Command at Sea: Mission Command, Experience, and Risk

The submarine force transformed over several years during WWII. The Surface Community has the opportunity to begin a culture change now rather than waiting to recognize the need once a conflict begins. Surface leaders have conveyed the message that in order to meet the challenges of the current and future environment, new technologies and tactics must be backed up with providing future leaders the opportunities to vicariously experience warfighting through training and education. This is important because, the lifetime of experiences a person has is highly influential on their choices in decision making. The Navy’s Surface Community has been witness to remarkable leaders that represent the fighting spirit that the concept of Distributed Lethality demands. Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Dempsey’s white paper *Mission Command* declares the commander is central and must be able to frame and

⁵⁷ Ibid, 126.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 182.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 314.

reframe ill-structured problems.⁶⁰ Furthermore, attributes such as understanding which is the ability to make decisions, manage risk and consider consequences. Finally, they must be able to convey their commander's intent.⁶¹ These traits are all underpinned by trust. Mission Command does not happen overnight, it is a factor of experience through education, training, doctrine, and manpower and personnel processes.⁶² Therefore, it is suggested that to be successful in Mission Command, a leader's experience is critical. In Malcolm Gladwell's book "Outliers," he popularized the idea that it takes ten thousand hours of practice to become great at something. This as a guideline, should inform the SWO community as it determines what experience is required and what combination of education, training and at sea time will support producing tactically proficient officers for command at sea.

Today's security environment is complex, uncertain and ambiguous. As General Dempsey says in the introduction of *Mission Command*, "we will ask more of our leaders in the future. Conduct of mission command requires adaptable leaders at every echelon."⁶³ Fog and friction in war are inevitable. Training and good leadership can mitigate this risk; "in complex and ambiguous situations, there is no substitute for experience."⁶⁴ For instance, leaders must be ready to innovate when the enemy's actions obfuscate standard operating procedures. Innovation is only possible with experience and understanding of the surrounding environment. "Mission command is the conduct of military operations through decentralized execution based upon mission-type orders." Dempsey goes on to say, "Smaller units enabled to conduct decentralized operations at the tactical level with operational/strategic implications will

⁶⁰ Martin E. Dempsey, "Mission Command White Paper" Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Washington, DC, 3 April 2012, 3, accessed September 15, 2016, <http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Publications/missioncommandwhitepaper2012.pdf>.

⁶¹ Ibid, 5.

⁶² Ibid, 6.

⁶³ Ibid, 3.

⁶⁴ Klein, 12.

increasingly be the norm.⁶⁵ Mission command is central to enabling Distributed Lethality. Therefore, the Surface Navy needs to ensure those going to Command at Sea have a sufficient level of tactical training and experience during their career. While many would argue this is obvious, it is not guaranteed today.

Those going to Command at Sea will be required to execute mission command. Additionally, those directing the actions at higher commands must understand this concept as well and, therefore, changing the culture of the entire surface force is necessary as a critical enabler of the Distributed Lethality concept. “Successful mission command demands that subordinate leaders at all echelons exercise disciplined initiative and act aggressively and independently to accomplish the mission.”⁶⁶ Ships need to learn how to fight in an expanded battlespace. Currently the combined arms approach is lacking, that is warfare combining land based air with surface capabilities.⁶⁷ This is not surprising given the level of training that officers and combat teams are exposed to, the majority of which is single ship operations. Furthermore, once certifications are achieved, training is concentrated on single ship self-defense proficiency. Mission command demands that commanders be able to quickly make decisions. “To gain and maintain advantageous tempo, our leaders must be able to see, understand, and rapidly exploit opportunities in both time and space, guided by their understanding of intent, their mission, environment, and the capability of the force.”⁶⁸ This is not an easy skill to achieve. It requires knowledge, practice and an understanding of the environment.

⁶⁵ Dempsey, 3.

⁶⁶ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub 3-0 Joint Operations, August 11, 2011, accessed May 17, 2016, http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp3_0.pdf.

⁶⁷ Tom Halvorsen, interview with author, December 10, 2015.

⁶⁸ Dempsey, 4.

“Mission command challenges commanders to cultivate a bias for action in their subordinates, develop mutual trust and understanding and exercise moral nerve and restraint.”⁶⁹

This is better achieved when there is an understanding of the baseline knowledge and experience that those subordinates have. Currently, the only standard of tactical knowledge that all SWOs are required to attend is DH school which focuses on single ship defensive AEGIS centric tactics. Dependent on timing, commanding officers and key members of their combat teams may miss significant unit and group level training that is accomplished during the training cycle of the ships.

In the book *Ghost Fleet*, by P.W. Singer and August Cole, a probable story of World War III is told. In the story, the US fleet some years in the future is once again attacked at Pearl Harbor, but this time by the Chinese. A significant portion of Pacific Fleet surface ships is decimated. Early on in the story, the protagonist, a Surface Warfare Officer by the name of Jaime Simmons, discusses his future career options with his Commanding Officer. He is told that if he doesn't fleet up to Command, his career is over.⁷⁰ His main reason for not going to command is a desire to spend more time with his family; his wife has “a bad case of what she calls seasickness, as in she's sick of me going to sea.”⁷¹ However, after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Simmons becomes a war hero and in turn is given command, returning to sea to fight in the war. The Navy places faith in Simmons' leadership ability because of his experience in combat at the beginning of the war, and also, he is one of the few that survive. Arguably, in addition to the long hours he spends in bringing USS ZUMWALT back to life, his previous experience at sea plays heavy in his ability to innovate and adapt in conflict. While the book does not elaborate on exactly how much time Simmons spent at sea before the war, the

⁶⁹ Ibid, 5.

⁷⁰ P.W. Singer and August Cole, *Ghost Fleet* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015), 23.

⁷¹ Ibid, 23.

assumption is that his combat experience, sea time, and warrior spirit are critical to success. There is value placed in the talents of the individual warfighter. While much of what the Navy does is based on team work, individual leadership and the ability of the commander is very important.

For SWOs the amount of training received in the fleet is very much dependent on when one meets the ship in the deployment cycle and the billets assigned. It is possible that in some cases the amount of tactical training an officer is exposed to onboard can be next to none. This is the case for many division officers who serve in multiple engineering billets at sea and ashore. Whereas others, such as those who are assigned to Weapons and Combat Systems Officer billets, could have thousands of hours. On the high end, there will be a small number of officers who will easily have more than 10 thousand hours of tactical training.

Another descriptor of Navy culture is risk adverse. In his efforts to return offensive surface weapons to surface combatants to support the Distributed Lethality concept, RADM Fanta said, “You let me bolt it on, I’ll take the risk. I’ll find a [commanding officer] out there that’s willing to point it in a direction and fire it . . . We need to get out of this risk-averse culture.”⁷² Decision makers must balance risk to mission and risk to force, but,

In government, all failures are conspicuous candidates for punishment. Yet not all failures are equal. The cause of some failures, however, is our intellectual inability to invent – on the very first try – a perfect solution to an intractable problem.” In these cases it is necessary to experiment and with trial and error come failure.⁷³

One way this can be accomplished is to make competent and expert sailors and encourage the Mush Mortons and Dick O’Kanes of today. Provide them with the training and time at sea to be

⁷² CDRSalamander, “Fanta’s Elephant,” CDR Salamander (blog), December 2015, accessed January 5, 2016, <https://blog.usni.org/2015/12/02/fantas-elephant>.

⁷³ Robert D. Behn, “Why Failure Has to Be an Option,” *Promising Practices (blog)*, *Government Executive*, December 4, 2015, accessed January 5, 2016, <http://www.govexec.com/excellence/promising-practices/2015/12/why-failure-has-to-be-option/124189/>.

good at their jobs. Make warriors of them by expecting the absolute best and ensure accountability for performance in the tactical realm. They must be more than good managers; they must be warfighters, entrusted with Mission Command.

The Problem of Battle CHENGs

The jack-of-all-trades nature of the Surface Navy Officer corps falls short of meeting the demand for tactically proficient commanding officers. This deficiency is most profoundly highlighted in the career path of the Chief Engineer (CHENG). Material readiness was a primary concern in the Balisle Report and the statistical reports shed some light on the experience of the community. “Officers who have had a chief engineer [CHENGs] tour are far more likely to command select.”⁷⁴

- 65% of Norfolk COs have had a Chief Engineer tour.
- 85% have had engineering division officer tours.
- DFCs on CHENGs are lower than Fleet average for past 5 years.⁷⁵

Having intimate knowledge of how the engineering systems on a ship work is incredibly important to a commanding officer’s ability to fight the ship. Without sufficient knowledge of how the ship will maneuver in combat and then respond once casualties occur limits the decision making capability and the ability to innovate if necessary.

There are two ideas to take away from these statistics that are relevant to building a culture of warfighters. First, it could be argued that given the requirement to pass the Engineering Officer of the Watch (EOOW) certification requirements while at DH school, prepares CHENGs better for their jobs than their counterparts – Operations, Weapons /Combat Systems Officers and First Lieutenants. The EOOW qualification is rigorous and intense,

⁷⁴ Balisle, 70.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

requiring repetitive casualty control drills. These officers are provided the opportunity to drill as the EOOW before stepping foot on the ship. If an officer doesn't meet the requirements, they are not allowed to proceed with their orders. A high standard must be achieved which prepares these officers for their job – they are able to fail in the controlled setting of the schoolhouse.

Therefore, the conclusion drawn is that CHENGs may be more confident and competent regarding some aspects of their next tour in comparison to their fellow DHs. There is no similar standard for the other DH billets. While there is oversight from the waterfront with senior inspectors conducting the EOOW certifications, there is little interest and oversight from the waterfront regarding the topside billet specialty courses. Here the majority of the curriculum is developed by the SWOS instructors whose experience and knowledge varies.

So why is this? Why does the Navy put so much time and energy into mandating such a high standard of proficiency and competency among its engineers? The most basic argument is that CHENGs own the most dangerous equipment and spaces. If the standards and procedures are not adhered to, people can get injured or worse, die. The analogy falls a bit flat for the other DHs. The next dangerous are those that would be considered deck or navigational evolutions. And here, the skills to conduct these evolutions are generally learned on the job and often shared with a watchstation, i.e. Officer of the Deck or Tactical Action Officer in addition to the DH, i.e., Operations or Weapons Officer. The collective sharing of responsibility mitigates the risk and it is possible for an officer to be less than proficient in these evolutions than might otherwise be assumed.

Next the Balisle report statistics leads to the question of how much tactical experience do the commanding officers have if their experience is mainly in engineering. Again, this leads to a question of what opportunities those officers were given during their tours. Were they “battle

CHENGs” who spent a considerable amount of time in combat, or did they have to focus their energy on a department that lacked sufficient division officer and senior enlisted leadership? Did they simply stand Tactical Action Officer (TAO) watch or were they allowed to conduct the drills that test the combat systems of the ship? How much time were they provided to drive the ship while doing seamanship evolutions that provide an officer his or her “sea legs”, or the instinctive feelings of how the ship will react in various sea conditions? “It depends” should not be the answer on which the Navy relies. These CHENGs are very talented men and women, who deserve to be set up for success. Many successful commanding officers have been engineers, but the Navy must remain cognizant of the skills and training they have provided their future leaders and ensure that they have provided a satisfactory path for success.

The Navy’s Offensive Communities

The standard of warfighting that we demand of our officers is relatively low compared to other branches, services and coalition partners. This is because the Navy has ceded the offensive fight to other communities within the Navy. Today, the Navy’s offensive force are the aviators and submariners—a fact that is reflected in their training pipelines and the requirement to demonstrate a high level of tactical skill. For example, Submariners heading to command must pass Submarine Commanders Course that includes a three-week underway demonstration and live firing of at least two torpedoes in an offensive scenario.⁷⁶ Whereas the Surface Commander’s Course has conducts a ungraded self-defense scenario in a simulator in addition to a one-week inport “shipride” mostly focused on administration and material readiness issues. In some cases, even this requirement has been waived. As highlighted in the Balisle report, it is

⁷⁶ Kyle Behbehani, interview by author, February 6, 2016.

assumed those going to surface command already have the requisite tactical knowledge or they will get it during fleet training.

In the aviation community, once assigned to a platform, aviators largely remain in that pipeline for their career. Those who go on to TOPGUN to become warfare tactics instructors (WTIs) must first master their assigned platform. Finally, before assuming command, pilots must recertify in the aircraft they will be responsible for; “they don’t return to the squadron until they’ve gone back through the RAG.”⁷⁷ For a SWO, there is no requirement to remain in the same platform, in fact, it is often discouraged. WTIs have recently been introduced to the SWO community, but before many have had any significant experience with the combat systems aboard a ship. Additionally, there is no guarantee that they will return to the platform they came from. While there are inherent differences in between the surface, aviation and submarine communities and there is no one size fits all solution, the surface community must look to its naval partners above and below the water to understand the value they place on training and expertise in regards to tactical ability for those in command of their platforms and squadrons.

Delivering Value: Achieving Culture Change in the Surface Community

The Surface Navy has begun to change the culture towards one that values an offensive warrior ethos. Generally, in order to effect culture change, one must understand the composition of an organization’s culture. Edgar Schein’s organizational culture model identifies three elements of culture that can be targeted to bring about change: artifacts and behaviors, espoused values, and assumptions.⁷⁸ Artifacts are the visible signs of the Navy, like our ships or our

⁷⁷ RAG is Replacement Air Group, now known as Fleet Replacement Squadron (FRS). Dave Oden, interview with author, February 5, 2016.

⁷⁸ Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 3rd ed (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 26.

uniforms. Espoused values are the guidelines from the CNO and Surface Navy leadership. Finally, assumptions are the institutional unconscious behaviors, or cultural ethos.⁷⁹

CNO Admiral Greenert addressed the espoused beliefs of the Navy when he announced his tenets for the Navy: Warfighting First, Operate Forward, Be Ready.⁸⁰ By prioritizing warfighting as central to the mission of the Navy, he began a shift in focus for everything the Navy does and for all who are associated with it. Very visible changes to artifacts have been made in the last year supporting the concept of Distributed Lethality. RADM Fanta's agenda to "bring guns to the gunfight"⁸¹ have materialized with a number of weapon systems like SM6 and Tomahawk now featuring anti-surface capability. Regarding assumptions, changes made in the areas of personnel, training and education most highly reflect what the surface community values, for where investment is made with respect to these areas highlights the value placed in the development of tactical expertise. To that end, there are a number of initiatives that have come online over the past year, with others on the horizon. These will aid in changing the artifacts and values of the Navy, eventually assisting in developing a culture of surface warfighters with an offensive warrior ethos.

NSMWDC: Bringing Tactics to the Fleet

The first major development has been the creation of the Naval Surface and Mine Warfighting Development Command (NSMWDC), which was established in June 2015. With the mission to "increase the warfighting effectiveness of the Surface Fleet by providing advanced tactics and training across the individual, unit and integrated level to enable warships and Warfare Commanders to transform combat potential into maximum combat power." A key

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ "CNO's Sailing Directions," Department of the Navy, accessed April 14, 2016, http://www.navy.mil/cno/cno_sailing_direction_final-lowres.pdf.

⁸¹ Fanta, "Building and Programming the Surface Vision."

function of the command is to train WTIs in the areas of surface, integrated air and missile defense, amphibious and mine warfare. This is directly based on the concept of TOPGUN that has been effective for the aviation community. By establishing a select career path the Navy shows that it values tactical knowledge and ability.

This is an important element of culture change and is highly encouraging and exciting for JOs; they are lining up to take on the challenge. VADM Rowden wrote during CIMSEC's distributed lethality week, "NSMWDC will eventually graduate more than 100 WTIs a year; Distributing the power of human talent more broadly across our fleet makes a lot of sense as we distribute lethality within our ships."⁸² The goal is that there will be one WTI per ship and staff. The goal is that many of these officers will then go on to be XO's and CO's, and Strike Group Commanders. However, with a graduation rate approximately 110 per year, this will take time to implement.⁸³ The WTI program is important in building a warrior ethos within the community. It would be hard to find an officer who became a SWO because they wanted to sit behind a computer and do administration. SWOs signed up to lead sailors, serve their country and travel the world. Many are also motivated by the chance to be mariners and warriors; to fire missiles and guns, hunt submarines and conduct counter piracy operations. The WTI program hits at the motivations of JOs and plays a significant role in building a culture of warfighting in the Navy. With training and experience, junior officers gain confidence and knowledge thus building a cadre of officers within the SWO community which values tactical prowess.

⁸² Thomas Rowden, "Naval Surface and Mine Warfighting Development Center: The Human Element of Distributed Lethality," *Center for International Maritime Security*, July 14, 2015, accessed September 21, 2015, <http://cimsec.org/naval-surface-and-mine-warfighting-development-center-the-human-element-of-distributed-lethality/17467>.

⁸³ Amanda E. Brittingham, "SMWDC Admiral Presents New Warfighter Career Path to New York SWOS," Commander, Naval Surface Force, November 19, 2015, accessed January 16, 2016, <http://www.public.navy.mil/surfor/nsmwdc/Pages/smwdc-admiral-presents-new-warfighter-career-path-to-new-york-swos.aspx#.VpvEWBgrJcw>.

NSMWDC is also bringing new developments in warfighting tactics to the waterfront. With a mission to “develop, validate, standardize, publish, and revise” tactics techniques and procedures (TTPs), they are responsible for leading the fleet effort to ensure warfighters at sea have up to date tactics that work.⁸⁴ NSMWDC is now testing a pilot program called the Surface Warfare Advanced Tactical Training (SWATT) that would provide a crawl, walk, run approach for ships that bridges their training between basic single ship and integrated phases of deployment training.⁸⁵ SWATT provides a foundation in combat training, making crews ready for the next level of training.⁸⁶ Another at sea program is the Advanced Readiness Program (ARP) that aims to increase tactical proficiency for pre-deploying units.⁸⁷ The greater exposure ships’ companies have to warfighting demonstrates the greater the ability to execute concepts like Distributed Lethality in the future.

The Schoolhouse

Another essential organization in training is the schoolhouse, specifically Surface Warfare Officer School (SWOS). By the time an officer reaches the pinnacle tour of Command at Sea, officers would have attended approximately 500 hours of classroom instruction and training at SWOS.⁸⁸ The construct is to build a general foundation in all mission areas with the pinnacle of tactical training being conducted during DH School. For prospective XOs and COs, emphasis is placed on very valuable discussions of scenarios and threats. But while there is a

⁸⁴ “Naval Surface and Mine Warfare Development Center (SMWDC): Tactical Excellence by Design.” Commander Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet, accessed April 15, 2016, <http://www.public.navy.mil/surfor/nsmwdc/Pages/departments.aspx#.VxEgWmN7Iy8>.

⁸⁵ Frank Olmo, interview with author, February 11, 2016.

⁸⁶ Dave Oden, interview with author, February 5, 2016.

⁸⁷ “Naval Surface and Mine Warfare Development Center (SMWDC): Tactical Excellence by Design.”

⁸⁸ Today, a SWO will attend Basic Division Officers Course. The course lasts 8 weeks of which 26 hours of curriculum are dedicated to an introduction to surface warfare. Advanced Division Officers Course is 4 weeks, increasing to 5 weeks in 2017. The purpose of which is to “Develop the principles of Maritime Warfare and current Naval tactics for advanced warfare (Warfare Coordinator) qualification during second Division Officer tour.”⁸⁸ JOs receive 40+ hours of surface warfare training.

review of all warfare areas and operational guidance, there is little tactical rigor. It is assumed that tactical proficiency was mastered as a DH, which may or may not be the case. It is also important to note that at all levels the training is on self and active defense primarily at the single ship level. This relatively low number of hours does not include a wide variety of other training that an officer may see in their career to this point as a result of billet or ship specific training. However, if the gold standard is 10,000 hours to become an expert, there is a lot left to chance regarding billet, ship type and deployment cycle.

That said, SWOS is looking critically at the education and training it provides, espousing the construct of “Warfighting First” and the Distributed Lethality concept. Schoolhouse training is adapting to support Distributed Lethality. One thing that SWOS has for years provided that assists in culture change is that of bringing in flag officers to speak to students. These messages convey the important values of Navy leadership as an element of Navy culture. As those that are highly invested in the Distributed Lethality concept spread their message, the surface community will begin to understand its importance.

This message has resonated and the SWOS training continuum is being adapted to support Distributed Lethality like including discussions on offensive tactics. On the technical side of instructing, SWOS has traditionally relied on instructor lead training to convey information. Future courses will require increased reading, facilitated discussions, and practical exercises.⁸⁹ As Dr. Chris Jernstedt, Professor of Psychological and Brain Sciences at Dartmouth College, was paraphrased, “The most important thing in remembering or learning something new is to use the information actively. Engagement is even more important than overall time

⁸⁹ David A. Welch, “Providing the Training and Education Foundation that Supports Distributed Lethality,” Commander, Naval Surface Force, January 1, 2016, accessed January 17, 2016, <http://www.public.navy.mil/surfor/swmag/Pages/Providing-the-Training-and-Education-Foundation-That-Supports-Distributed-Lethality.aspx#.VpvRTBgrJew>.

spent. Talk about it, write about, do something with it.”⁹⁰ He believes the more authentic the learning task is, the more likely students will engage.⁹¹ This type of learning environment encourages officers to improve their ability to think about challenging problems rather than rely on rote memorization. This type of thinking is required to solve complex problems that are to be expected in combat.⁹² SWOS is looking to improve the curriculum at all levels through more synthetic training, increased discussion and other “non-power point” training opportunities. The combination of new teaching techniques along with new offensive tactics will serve the next generation of officers reporting to sea duty well.

This idea though depends on the foundation that JOs have regarding their profession. In order to provide DHs with more advanced tactical training, they must have a sufficient baseline level of knowledge from which to build on. The initial school, Basic Division Officer Course (BDOC) is 8 weeks long. The purpose of BDOC is “to provide foundational classroom training to prospective surface warfare officers.”⁹³ This includes training in navigation and seamanship, administration, engineering, leadership, and damage control. While the course does consist of 26 hours of instructor-led content introducing the various warfare areas to BDOC students, the words warfighting and tactics do not appear anywhere on the website⁹⁴ nor in the announcement of its launch.⁹⁵ An ensign reporting to BDOC has no expectation to even learn about surface warfare in his or her foundational school. While the areas mentioned above are central to a

⁹⁰ D. Grainger Wedaman, “Chris Jernstedt on Learning,” Theatrical Smoke, July 12, 2012, accessed January 17, 2016, <https://wedaman.wordpress.com/2012/07/12/chris-jernstedt-on-learning/>.

⁹¹ George Christian Jernstedt, “Neuroscience of Learning,” (lecture, Naval War College, Newport, RI, December 4, 2015).

⁹² Klein, 31.

⁹³ “BDOC Overview,” Naval Education and Training Command, accessed April 15, 2016, <http://www.netc.navy.mil/centers/swos/sandiego/CommandInfo.htm#tab1>.

⁹⁴ “BDOC Overview.”

⁹⁵ Steven Gonzalez, “SWOS Launches New Basic Division Officers Course,” Navy.mil, October 3, 2012, accessed April 15, 2016 http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=69949.

division officer's professional understanding, foregoing a real discussion of surface warfare missions does a disservice to the warfighting culture the community is trying to build.

This was not the case in the past. Prior to 2001, surface warfare accessions reported to SWOS for a six month long course. This course included several weeks of warfare instruction. While there were criticisms about the course, many who attended would state that the knowledge gained served them well once they reported to their ships. This was the foundation for earning the SWO qualification. This foundational course was replaced with a self-taught computer-based course that was to be completed by junior officers in conjunction with on the job training on board their ships. As the Balisle Report noted, "Self taught SWOS did not enable officers to arrive on board ships with the correct baseline of knowledge of surface warfare fundamentals." The computer-based training was eventually replaced by a three week SWO taught by Afloat Training Group which was updated in 2012 to the current eight week BDOC.⁹⁶

Personnel Management to support Distributed Lethality

PERS-41, the community manager for SWOs is implementing a number of new initiatives that will help to build the experience levels of the Surface Warfare community. Here are three that are worth noting that impact building a warrior culture. The first is breaking the traditional career path into 4 distinct opportunities (see Figure 1). These paths allow some specialization early on in an officer's career. The goal is to build talent in the Navy and at the same time provide incentives for JOs to follow a path that they are interested in. The accelerated warfighter path is the one that those who want to be WTIs will follow. Having a single long tour on a platform builds experience and confidence in the systems that these young officers will soon

⁹⁶ Jason Bilbo, "SWO Division Officer Training Restored, Training Continuum Established," *Surface Warfare Magazine*, no. 44 (Fall 2014), accessed April 15, 2016, <http://www.public.navy.mil/surfor/swmag/Pages/SWO-Division-Officer-Training-Restored-Training-Continuum-Established.aspx#.VxD4aGN7KJp>.

gain increased tactical training on. The next initiative mandates minimum sea time during JO tours. The new DIVO/DH sequence mandates that at least three of the four tours will be served as part of ship's company.⁹⁷ Only one tour in this sequence may be served on an operational DESRON/PHIBRON staff. This directly contributes to the idea of developing experts through experience and is important to achieving the spirit of the 10 thousand hour rule and places an emphasis on shipboard system knowledge and expertise. The third initiative is adding an additional DH billet in the form of a Plans and Tactics Officer.⁹⁸ This not only reduces the burden on the other DHs, but signals to the wardrooms and greater surface community that operational planning and tactical knowledge are valuable and necessary in order to succeed in the future fight.

⁹⁷ "Fact Sheet: The New Surface Warfare Career Chart," Navy Personnel Command, accessed February 25, 2016, http://www.public.navy.mil/bupers-npc/officer/Detailing/surfacewarfare/Documents/SWO_CAREER_CHART_FACT_SHEET.pdf.

⁹⁸ Ibid.



A new SWO Career Chart... Multiple Tracks

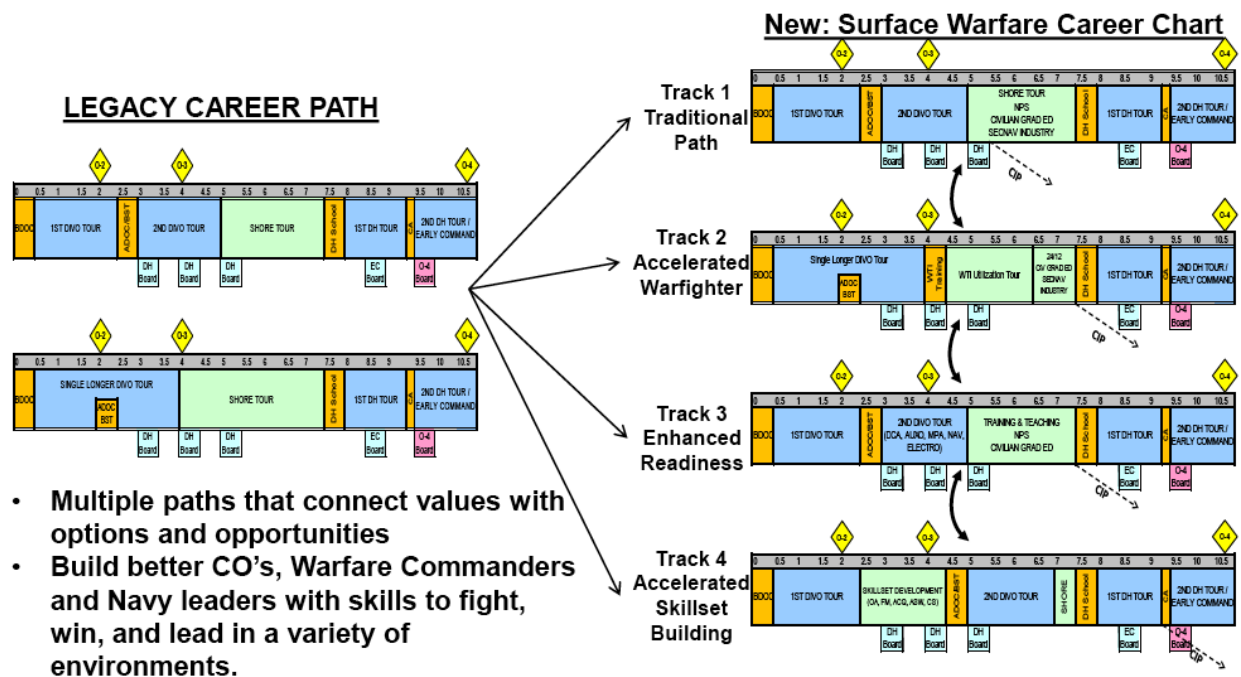


Figure 1. SWO Junior Officer Career Paths⁹⁹

Furthermore, PERS-41 is paying a lot of attention to the skills that JOs are building and look favorably on those who achieve warfare qualifications.¹⁰⁰ JOs should strive to achieve at a minimum their EOOW or a warfare coordinator qualification. Foundational education that addressed professional qualification line items is important for making this happen. There are benefits that extend beyond the individual and their ship. For example, only those who have been able to achieve a warfare coordinator qualification are more favorably looked on to move on to a second tour at an operational DESRON or PHIBRON staff. This is beneficial in a number of ways. Ensuring that these officers achieve a warfare coordinator qualification sets them up to be better qualified to fulfill their duties and responsibilities as a staff watch officer, a

⁹⁹ Navy Personnel Command. "Surface Warfare Office Community Brief," accessed May 26, 2016, http://www.public.navy.mil/bupers-npc/officer/Detailing/surfacewarfare/Documents/SWO_CAREER_CHART.pdf.

¹⁰⁰ Jonathan Schmitz, interview with author, June 2, 2016.

watchstation they will be assigned to on staff. Additionally, this would ensure they have a solid baseline in at least one warfare area before beginning DH School. Furthermore, for those going on to be WTIs have already demonstrated skills and knowledge in a field they are going on to become experts in.

Recommendations

The Navy has no shortage of talented officers who have the potential to lead in offensive combat operations. Distributed Lethality is one of the most important concepts to drive the Navy's Surface Warfare Community into the future and bridge capability gaps. It will require innovative Commanding Officers and therefore, it is imperative that SWO leadership emphasizes the importance of tactical training in the schoolhouse and at sea, ensuring future COs have the chance to learn and grow through experience before they take command. The two officers in the story at the beginning of this paper were both leaders, but their training and experience resulted in different skill sets, one of a warfighter, the other an engineer. It behooves those in charge to look critically at how the Navy prepares officers to lead in combat. As part of the CNO's *Navy Leader Development Strategy*, "rigorous leader development is 'complementary' to and 'necessary' for the demands of technical and tactical competence." This "is central to our warfighting ethos."¹⁰¹ However, this education is undervalued in the surface navy:

We limit the time Sailors are given to attend schoolhouses, or we seek to waive the requirement altogether. We mandate the shortest possible course lengths, while structuring career paths designed to maximize operational experiences. This has created a culture where going to the schoolhouse or attending war college is considered "time off" – rather than an uncompromising investment in our people and in our profession. This must change.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Kelly, 8.

¹⁰² Kelly, 9.

As the requirement for ships to be part of the offensive fight grows, the SWO Community must continue invest in the tactical training of junior officers across the board in order to achieve the leaders who will can exploit their platform’s capabilities to the greatest extent and best achieve Distributed Lethality. Additionally, a focus on what “Mission Command” means for SWOs should be incorporated. “Mission command must be institutionalized and operationalized into all aspects of the joint force – our doctrine, our education, our training, and our manpower and personnel processes . . . Service cultures are important in these efforts . . . Joint and service doctrine, education and training are keys to achieving the habit of mission command.”¹⁰³

The NSMWDC, SWOS and PERS-41 initiatives are a step in the right direction. Now they must continue to move forward together, keeping the press on this new direction the Navy is heading in. The Navy cannot afford risk averse COs in combat; knowledge and experience are key factors in overcoming this challenge. A culture of warfighters will emerge if those commanding Navy ships are warfighters themselves. The following recommendations suggest how this trend might continue. These recommendations apply primarily to training and manpower in order to change the SWO culture and develop surface warriors for Command at Sea.

Warfighting Begins the First Time Across the Brow

The culture of warfighting should begin from day one for all surface officers. As stated by RADM James Kelly, Dean of the College of Operational and Strategic Leadership at the Naval War College, “development of Navy leaders must, of necessity, be a deliberate and progressive process.” In order to meet the strategic challenges of the future, the Fleet must be clear about the skills it wants the Surface Warfare Community to have. If the SWO Community

¹⁰³ Dempsey, 6.

believes in Arleigh Burke's assertion, "This ship is built to fight. You'd better know how," then, at all levels, it must provide future COs with the foundations to drive the training in their ships creating warfighters and building wardrooms of warriors.

First, a greater effort must be made to expose junior officers (JOs) to tactics. While all JOs must meet the same prerequisites for SWO qualification, the actual experience can vary greatly from officer to officer dependent on the division officer billet assigned, the training cycle, deployment location and schedule, and the training culture on the ship. The culture onboard the ships should place a priority on warfighting. From the day a junior officer steps onboard his or her ship, the emphasis should be on how each piece of equipment and administration supports the warfighter.

Filling the SWOS Gaps

To further support this idea, the community should expand the foundational course for newly accessing surface warfare officers. Given a more solid foundation in warfare knowledge, this establishes the importance of warfighting within the community during a JOs initial years in the community. While a DH instructor at SWOS, it was not uncommon to find mid-grade lieutenants having been in the Navy who had no practical warfare experience standing watch in combat. The Balisle Report recommended reintroducing a PCS length course to aid in developing engineering and material readiness skills which had atrophied in recent years as a reduction in basic foundational training. This idea should be extended to address the deficiencies in warfare training as well. While this obviously incurs a cost, the result would be that if JOs have a better understanding of warfare and can be more productive members of the wardroom.

The current culture of the Navy values AEGIS ships as the gold standard for warfighting and indeed they are the most capable platforms. However, this attitude fails to account for the

actual and potential capabilities of non-AEGIS platforms that are and will be part of the fighting force as they are outfitted with self-defense and offensive weapons systems. As these capabilities, to include missile systems and unmanned vehicles, are introduced, the Navy cannot lag behind in understanding how to leverage this technology. SWOS should include greater exposure to non-AEGIS platform capabilities and limitations in combat scenarios. For example, all DHs are required to conduct a scenario as the Tactical Action Officer on an AEGIS Cruiser regardless of the type of ship they will be assigned to. This is because these ships have the greatest combat ability. However, in continuing to focus on AEGIS platforms, the environment is not one that encourages creative thinking about using the multitude of other platform capabilities that exist in the Surface Warfare Community to include amphibious and Littoral Combat ships (LCS) as well as aircraft and submarines.

To further support Distributed Lethality, the curriculum should expand to include offensive surface action group (SAG) tactics and build upon new missile and electronic warfare technologies that are being introduced to the fleet. By providing JOs with more tactical training before arriving at DH School, the opportunity to increase the rigor and expose future DHs to more advanced tactics becomes a reality. More and more ships will be required to operate as a member of the Joint force and as General Dempsey stated, “the reliance and synergy of disparate forces to achieve operational objectives is the genesis for a deeply interdependent Joint Force 2020; this drives the need to create jointness deeper and sooner in the force.”¹⁰⁴

Ownership of Training and Tactics

There are challenges to training, as many commands to include NSMWDC, SWOS, Afloat Training Group, and CSG-4/15 and their tenant commands own some part of the training

¹⁰⁴ Dempsey, 3.

continuum without all falling under the same chain of command. While memorandums of agreement are helpful, this construct has gaps in sharing information and often relies on the personal relationships of individuals within commands to push or pull information from one command to another. With ownership of training spread out, the Surface Community is challenged to provide a single and coherent voice on the direction of warfare training. There must be a more formalized process or new organizational structure to leverage new tactics being developed at NSMWDC, ensuring a push of this information to the waterfront and allow for tactical training at the CO level.

With every organizational design there are pros and cons, however, training commands might look to the model of Army TRADOC. This command provides all the tactics and training for the Army with the weight of a four star general to back it up. This single command links tactics and training from cradle to grave in a way not seen in the Navy. A critical look at where the Army is exceptionally successful in this construct may provide some insight for closing some gaps training.

Integration of WTIs

One other area to pay attention to in order to begin building the culture change is the integration of WTIs into the wardroom. Their integration is critical to capitalizing on the investment both they and the Navy have made in their education to begin to build tactical experts who can share their warfighting skills with the rest of the ship's combat team. Commanding Officers need to prioritize a wide range of training throughout the training cycle. Ships are required to conduct mandatory training exercises either for certification or proficiency at various times from deployment to deployment. Training teams need to understand the concept of distributed lethality and build scenarios that challenge their teams. One option to consider is to

bring the lessons learned from exercise debriefs up for discussion in the wardroom so that all junior officers have access to the challenges posed and how to tackle tactical problems. In conducting routine wardroom tactical training, leadership demonstrates the importance of warfighting knowledge for all junior officers. Since it will be a couple years before each ship has a WTI as part of their crew, all combat training teams should be working with NSMWDC to understand new developments.

Expand the dialogue

The discussions and language that the Surface Navy uses are an important aspect of the culture. The very words a service uses signal what is important. For example, the US Marine Corps is undoubtedly known for its warrior ethos. Their culture is long and storied, but evident in their doctrine. Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1 is simply called *Warfighting*. This signals the very essence of their purpose. In the Surface Navy, much of the language is focused on defense: integrated air and missile defense (IAMD), ballistic missile defense (BMD), and anti-submarine warfare (ASW), for example. In WWII ships words such as scouting and hunting were used to describe the surface combatant missions. These are still relevant today. CAPT Jeff Kline (ret.) of the Naval Postgraduate School calls for three principle objectives in developing tactical doctrine for Distributed Lethality: 1) out think the enemy, 2) out scout the enemy, 3) out shoot the enemy.¹⁰⁵ These proactive words: think, scout, and shoot, instill an assertive and offensive nature to maritime operations and are essential to building a culture that values warfighting. As these words become part of the lexicon of the community just as much as “anti” and “defense” are today, they begin to represent what the community values and where its efforts are focused.

¹⁰⁵ Jeff Kline, “A Tactical Doctrine for Distributed Lethality,” (draft, Naval Postgraduate School), December 8, 2015.

Another recommendation is for more tabletop or tactical discussion training at the Commanding Officer (CO) and TAO levels outside of current Warfare Commanders Courses. This type of training allows participants can test various courses of action, future technologies, or experiment with different types of command and control. For instance, there are challenges to providing all domain access. The US Navy currently relies on a high level on connectivity to relay orders and report current status. This connectivity may not be tactically feasible in a distributed lethality scenario. Tabletop tactical training provides an environment where various ideas can be tested with less cost and time than underway operations. Discussion in this form—ungraded and in some cases, theoretical—allows for open, creative and frank debate that can facilitate the innovative approaches that are needed to counter current and future threats.

Along with these ideas is the concept of Mission Command. “Coupled with shared understanding and intent, trust is the moral sinew that binds the distributed Joint Force 2020 together, enabling the many to act as one in the cross-domain application of the appropriate amount of cumulative combat power at the right place and time . . . The task of imbuing mission command into training and leader development is an immediate challenge.”¹⁰⁶ In order to achieve success, the SWO community must begin to address where and how mission command is integrated into leader development. While integration of mission command must occur in a number of domains, an open and frank discussion of how the concept applies should be one that occurs in each and every wardroom on the waterfront. These discussions will help to build the trust that is elemental to the concept.

¹⁰⁶ Dempsey, 6.

Warfighting Qualifications

In order to show that the Surface Navy really values warfighters is to make those going to command at sea demonstrate their ability to lead a ship in a combat scenario. Similar to the submarine community, prospective COs (PCOs) should be required to prove tactical competency in sustained warfighting scenarios either underway or in simulators prior to assuming command. The future security environment demands that this skill be achieved by COs at least to a pre-determined baseline and should not be something that is learned on the job. While WTIs will be a valuable resource to combat teams, and TAOs will be fresh off intensive tactical training, COs hold absolute responsibility and therefore, it is the responsibility of the community to best prepare these officers to succeed. Providing PCOs the opportunity to demonstrate their tactical knowledge builds confidence in themselves and their crews. The Navy thus proves that it values these skills and therefore a culture of warfighting emerges.

Some may argue that there are already testing requirements for command. The command qualification criteria includes a ship handling assessment, a multiple choice exam on subjects from material to warfare, an interview with post-command officers, and a synthetic maritime warfare scenario. However, this process addresses an officer's potential for command, not necessarily the skills and knowledge needed for command. There is still an essential amount of learning and experience that will take place in the time after an officer's first DH tour and assuming command. A SWO's second DH tour, post DH tours and XO tour will more likely have greater influence and relevance to an officer's ability to command than their initial JO tours. During the PCO pipeline, the Navy should consider introducing a Command Tactical Qualification (CTQ) (see Figure 3.)

There are a number of obstacles that must be overcome to make this happen. First, the SWO pipeline up to this point must adapt to provide greater exposure to warfighting and tactics earlier on in their careers, to include more advanced warfighting training at the DH level. Next, opportunities should be made available for PCOs to conduct live underway drills and weapons firings. With this comes the challenge of having platforms available which comes at a cost to the already constrained deployment cycles. There are a number of precedents here and lessons can be learned from the Submarine Commanders Course as well as the Royal Navy's Principle Warfare Officer Course. Finally, an exceptionally high standard should be set; the course should be a filter rather than a pump. Those who fail to achieve this standard should not go on to Command at Sea. A construct like this would take a generation to implement, but the surface Navy cannot afford to wait. The goal is not to continually test SWOs but to ensure that knowledge and proficiency in tactics and operations is developed and evaluated. The more knowledge COs have, the more they can share with their wardrooms developing an environment that places warfighting first.

New Career Paths: Operators, Business Professionals, and Maintainers

In selecting those for Command at Sea, among equally qualified officers, tactical experience and demonstrated proficiency should be given considerable weight. In addition, the SWO community should decide who will command its ships: tactical operators or jack-of-all-trades. In the current construct, the priority is not placed on those who have extensive tactical and operational experience to lead our ships. Instead, anyone who has proven leadership abilities and the potential can be selected for Command. The challenge to this construct lies in the fact that in order to promote beyond the rank of Commander, Command at Sea is what is valued in Navy culture. The Navy prioritizes this experience over other skill sets that are necessary for the

functioning of the Navy at the highest levels. Instead, a construct which places value on prized skill sets in a number of areas and promotes these at relatively equal levels will result in one that will meet the challenges of the future. One possibility is that post-DH officers begin to focus on a path of the warfighter or operator, the business professional, or the engineer or maintainer. The warfighters are those that will command our ships, the others will go on to leadership positions at the Fleet and Pentagon. Another option would be to ensure that there is always a warfighter in either the XO or CO position. While a priority should be on warfighters to lead at the highest levels as it is today, the Navy may be able to find a more equitable spread of talent at the mid-grade level if other skill sets are valued.

The current midgrade officer pipeline is shown in Figure 2. Whereas PERS-41 has broken down the JO pipeline to build talent in a number of areas, the second half of an officer’s career remains focused on Command at Sea. There already is a construct for designating additional skill sets that officers have. Additional Qualification Codes or (AQDs) are assigned when an officer achieves a qualification or attends a school or course which provides them with specialized training or skills. The challenge is that many billets do not designate the AQDs that would best serve that position. While PERS-41 work closely with commands to assign officers who have specific skill sets and in practice the system is not fully utilized.

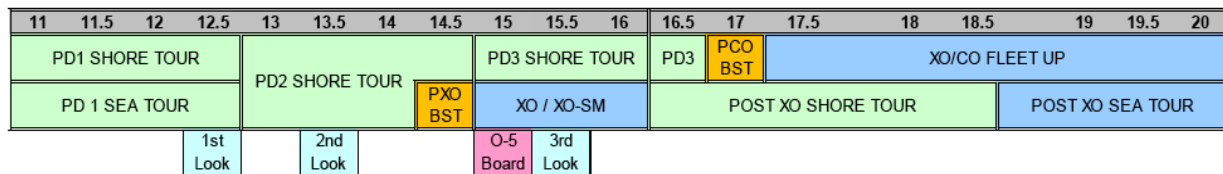


Figure 2. SWO Midgrade Officer Career Paths¹⁰⁷

Instead, PERS-41 should look to continue the effort that they’ve begun with junior officers, whereby they continue to develop their skill set. This would be a construct in which

¹⁰⁷ Navy Personnel Command, “Surface Warfare Office Community Brief.”

officers followed an operator, business professional or maintainer track (see Figure 3). Operators would be those that followed a traditional career path or the accelerated warfighter path and business professionals would be those who took the accelerated skill set path, and finally, maintainers would come from those who took the enhanced readiness track. While all would follow a traditional career path construct, the billets should be designated in one of the three lanes and further defined by AQDs such that they would continue to return to areas where they had expertise. In this model, the operator lane is the largest as they provide the core of the SWO community. However, both business professionals and maintainers would have the opportunity to take a ramp back to the operator lane for Command at Sea should they desire and as may be necessary for their career progression. While they may have specialized training in a non-tactical or operational area, that does not mean they cannot be warfighters and therefore, if they can demonstrate their abilities and pass the CTQ, then they should have the opportunity for Command at Sea.

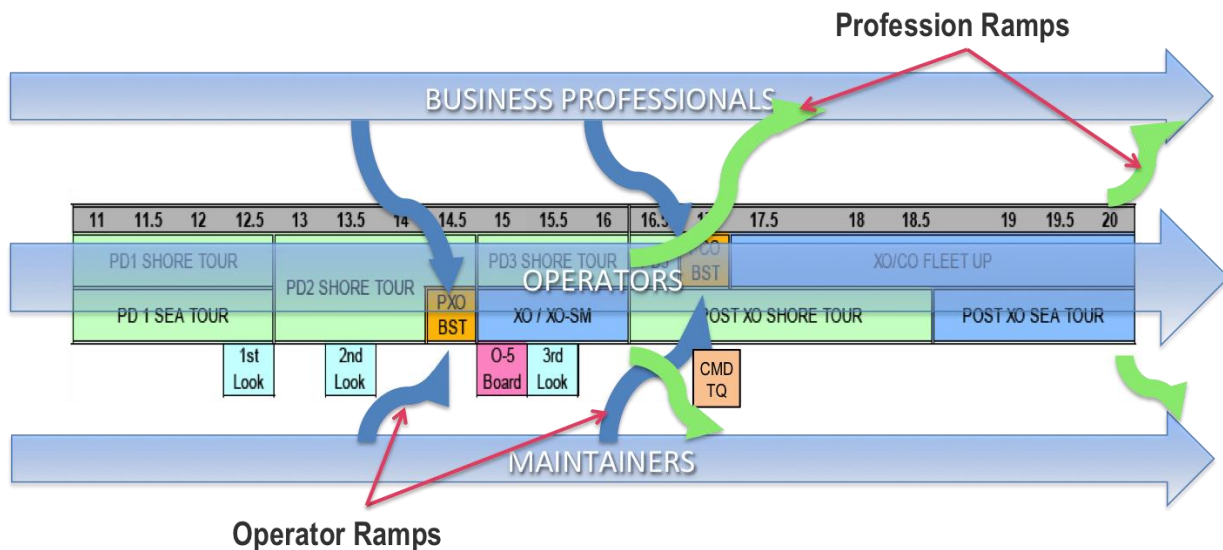


Figure 3. Proposed Mid-Career Path for Warfighting

This concept is not revolutionary. The Surface Community, and Navy in general, does this to an extent already¹⁰⁸. However, by describing a new construct that brings continuity to a career expectations are set for officers to have an idea of what opportunities exist within the community and emphasize that there is value in having different skills. The challenge is that personal success in the Navy is defined by Command at Sea. The SWO culture values leaders who can successfully command a ship and its crew through the crucible of maintenance, training and deployment. For those who do not achieve command at sea, their career will most likely be capped at Commander rank, but arguably, there should be some allowance for those who may have other necessary skills that support warfighting. What is interesting is that those selected for flag rank are not done so necessarily because of their tactical prowess, but more so because of the other executive skills they bring to the table. These skills are needed to build the force that operators take to sea. In breaking down these new tracks, the culture shift that embraces warriors also needs to embrace and appreciate the business professionals and maintainers such that there will be promotion opportunities for the most successful regardless of whether or not they have command at sea. This holistic approach is one that supports best supports warfighting and maintains US Navy dominance at sea.

Conclusion

Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz said, "Naval forces are able, without resorting to diplomatic channels, to establish offshore anywhere in the world, . . . and furthermore, they are mobile offensive bases, that can be employed with the unique attributes of secrecy and surprise — which attributes contribute equally to their defensive as well as offensive effectiveness."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Jonathan Schmitz, interview with author, June 2, 2016.

¹⁰⁹ "United States Military Quotes."

Distributed Lethality and the warrior culture that will enable it reflect a Navy rich in history of innovation and fighting spirit. In just over a year, a number of initiatives have begun changing the focus of the Surface Navy and therefore building a culture that values tactical skill and ability. In order to maintain the capability and capacity that seapower requires, the focus must remain consistent and continue to improve all aspects of the force. As the fleet is outfitted with new and improved weapons systems and technologies, the training and personnel management organizations that support SWOs must look to systematically develop, from the ground up, officers that are better prepared to take the fight to the enemy. The Navy cannot afford for only aviators and submariners to have sole ownership of an offensive warrior culture. SWOs are part of the fighting force and their training and pipelines must support that. No longer can the SWO community rely on the system that fails to nurture the warfighting capabilities of its members. The tide is changing and now is the time to build a community of warfighters, where all SWOs who set sail have a warrior ethos and COs are prepared to take their ships into battle. As Admiral George Anderson said, "The Navy has both a tradition and a future—and we look with pride and confidence in both directions."¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ "United States Military Quotes."

Recommendations for Further Research

All of the recommendations listed above would require additional analysis to determine exactly what is needed in order to implement proposed changes. Listed below are some additional recommendations that have either not yet been mentioned or only briefly.

Organizational

1. Continued effort to reduce the administrative burden and make progress in streamlining inspections and certifications as has been done under recent updates to the Fleet Response Plan, thereby allowing more time for tactical training.

Training

2. Implement fleet tactical tabletops for combat teams on the waterfront to provide opportunities outside of required training cycle events.
3. Leadership development to better prepare officers for leading in combat. The Warfighting Command Course¹¹¹ has begun to address this challenge. The training community should look to identify if there are other opportunities earlier on in an officer's career.

Manpower

4. Assessment of FITREPS system. Provide real feedback to officers to help them determine where they might be able to improve, especially if they are weak in tactical and operational experience and knowledge. The system may be fine as it stands, but mid-term counseling not effectively used.
5. Better defined shore tours that link operational/tactical specializations – detailers have honest discussions about opportunities and what specializations would be available – reduce jack-of-all-trades mentality and increase buy in from community to support the development of specific skills and talents. This would include an assessment of AQD assignment for billets.

¹¹¹ John Meyer. "Warfighting Command Course Outline," Naval War College, College of Operational and Strategic Leadership, August 14, 2015.

About the Author

CDR Greta Densham is a Surface Warfare Officer. She graduated from the US Naval Academy in 2000. Her initial sea tour was on USS LASSEN (DDG 82) where she served as the Administrative, Electrical and Combat Information Center division officers. Her department head tours were as the Operations Officer on USS DOYLE (FFG 39) and as N3 Operations at Destroyer Squadron 24. Her shore tours were as an exchange officer at the United Kingdom's Joint Tactical Exercise Planning Staff and as the Department Head Operations, Readiness, Training and Engineering Cell Lead in SWOS N73 Surface Warfighting. Her education includes a Master of Science in Operations Research from the Naval Postgraduate School (2007) and in June 2016, will receive a Master of Arts in National Security and Strategic Studies from the US Naval War College.

CDR Densham was selected first look for Commander Command. Later she requested to shift to Special Mission Command. She will report to Naval Beach Unit 7 in Sasebo Japan as the Fleet Up Executive Officer in January 2017.

She is married to Martin Densham, LtCdr RN (ret.). They have two curly haired toddlers, Rose and Eva.

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