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President's Forum—Why Newport?

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PRESIDENT'S FORUM



Why Newport?

IN MARCH 2011, I WAS TOLD that I would be the fifty-third President of the Naval War College. After smiling and making a few phone calls to family to share the humbling news, I began to think about the great responsibilities that come along with the privilege of joining a line of leaders that includes Alfred Thayer Mahan, Raymond Spruance, James B. Stockdale, and Stansfield Turner. Filling their shoes would not be possible, but the potential to do our nation and navy great good was nearly unlimited. And as I am the fourth of six sons of a naval aviator and a Navy nurse who met and married in Newport, this city has a special place in my heart.

Newport has hosted great Sailors since well before America's independence and before the formation of the U.S. Navy. The "rebel" captain John Paul Jones sailed the Continental Navy sloop *Providence* in the waters off Newport in the days leading up to the Revolution. Two and a third centuries later, Newport remains a "Navy town," and the phrase "going to Newport" evokes a sense of anticipation and excitement unique to all the seaports of the world.

Although Newport is now more likely to be the port of call for cruise ships than for warships, it is still an internationally recognized venue for maritime study, research, and thought. Newport and the Naval War College mean different things to different people, and when we ask "Why Newport?" we need to consider the answer from a number of different perspectives.

Why Newport? The Global Perspective. Great nations have great navies, and great navies have world-class institutions of learning. The U.S. Navy is blessed to have three—at Annapolis, Maryland; Monterey, California; and here in Newport. For the past 127 years the Naval War College has served as America's home for the study of sea power and as a catalyst for international maritime security

cooperation. Officers from allied navies have been attending classes in Newport with their American counterparts since 1894, when Royal Swedish Navy officers contributed their insights into the revolution in maritime affairs that gripped the world at the end of the nineteenth century. Ever since, seamen speaking many languages have met as equals in the classrooms and on the game floors of the College and have selflessly shared the lessons of centuries of maritime heritage and experience. The decades have shown that wise judgment and sound tactics have no particular nationality and that the power of a persuasive argument is universal. This tradition continues in the twenty-first century, with over sixty-five nations participating annually in the College's international programs. Today, as in the past, free and open seas remain key to the preservation of peace and the expansion of international commerce. This fact energizes the students and faculty every day; it inspires them to study the lessons of history and to deepen the international friendships that build and maintain order on the ocean commons. The breadth of the global maritime partnerships that have been facilitated by Newport alumni will be evident this fall when the College hosts the Twentieth International Seapower Symposium, which will bring together the leaders of over a hundred of the world's navies for consultation, discussion, and thinking about our shared interests at sea.

Why Newport? The National Perspective. By tradition and by design, the intellectual endeavors in Newport have a decidedly saltwater flavor. The fact that the school is surrounded by the beautiful waters of a broad bay, however, does not obscure the reality that preservation of our nation's security demands not only mastery of seapower but also the learned application of the skills of the soldier, the airman, and the diplomat. Our student body consists (aside from about 150 international students) of a diverse group of leaders from all the military services, as well as from the federal government agencies and departments that must work effectively and seamlessly to "provide for the common defense," as called for in the Constitution. The academic and research programs in Newport address such issues as the size and composition of military forces necessary to meet the nation's worldwide commitments; the impact of the defense budget on the national economy and the industrial base; and the role of the military establishment in a free society. The composition of seminars and study groups ensures that the insights of the Foreign Service officer, the intelligence specialist, and the international student carry equal weight with those of the career U.S. military professionals during the spirited and sometimes heated debates that occur daily. The network of alumni created by each class provides interservice, interagency, and international connections that continue to make the world a better place for decades after graduation.

Why Newport? The Navy's Perspective. The unequalled size and technological complexity of the U.S. Navy requires that its junior officers be singularly focused during the early parts of their careers. Qualification and then proficiency as a naval aviator, a nuclear submariner, or a surface warfare officer (who is also often nuclear trained) provides the foundation upon which a full career is based. But as these officers mature and are promoted to higher levels of responsibility, their vision must expand beyond their tactical mastery. The Naval War College offers the professional development opportunity that enables students to refocus their attention on the operational and strategic aspects of their profession. The proven warfare specialists and associated restricted line and staff corps experts are required to consider the issues that arise from employing the Navy's core capabilities of forward presence, deterrence, sea control, maritime security, and humanitarian assistance and disaster response in an ever-changing world. They then consider how these expanded core capabilities are used in conjunction with the land, air, space, and cyberspace capabilities of all the services to support the national security strategy. The officers who depart from Newport—with joint-service, interagency, and international mind-sets—are truly qualified to lead forces into harm's way in any environment or contingency.

Why Newport? The Officer's Perspective. Military officers spend their careers more concerned about the welfare of others than about their own. They accept a call to service that frequently demands that they leave the safety and security of their homes and families to travel to distant and often dangerous foreign waters and lands.

As I told our students at my change of command ceremony, "This year in Newport is truly a gift from your country to you. The books, the faculty, the time at this point in your life will probably never happen again. You all know people who are struggling in this economy, you all know people who are in harm's way—you are neither. Your orders are to read, study, think, and write. Do that, and I promise, you too will be changed forever. And your country, in giving you this year, will most certainly receive the benefit when you leave here forever changed for the better."

Why Newport? The Family's Perspective. Most of our students are fortunate enough to be able to bring their families to Newport to share in the Newport experience. They find warm and welcoming communities outside the gates, beautiful waters everywhere, and history and adventures beyond compare. The military member is not on duty (in the same way), not deployed, and not at sea or in the field. Students here are busy, since the demands of the academic programs are significant, but the nature of the work in Newport is different, and the

rewards of a year here last a lifetime. It is amazing how many graduates seek me out to express their sincere gratitude for the exceptional education our faculty delivered to them—and to say that is was also the best year of their families' lives.

The folklore here is that getting all the reading done “is only hard if you do it”—to which I love to reply, “Well, I read every word, and it changed me forever.” And the reading continues. The pages that follow represent the ongoing contribution that Newport still makes to the things that matter to our maritime nation and our world.

The year I spent in Newport did change me forever, and I hope the previous paragraphs have answered the question, “Why Newport?”

JOHN N. CHRISTENSON

Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy
President, Naval War College



Rear Admiral Christenson became the fifty-third President of the U.S. Naval War College on 30 March 2011. The fourth of six sons of a Navy Skyraider pilot and a Navy nurse, he graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1981.

At sea, he commanded USS McClusky (FFG 41), Destroyer Squadron 21 in USS John C. Stennis (CVN 74), Carrier Strike Group 12, and the USS Enterprise (CVN 65) Strike Group. He most recently served as President, Board of Inspection and Survey. He also served as the antisubmarine warfare officer and main propulsion assistant aboard USS Cook (FF 1083); as aide to Commander, Cruiser Destroyer Group 1 in USS Long Beach (CGN 9); as weapons officer aboard USS Downes (FF 1070); as Destroyer Squadron 21 combat systems officer, in USS Nimitz (CVN 68); and as executive officer of USS Harry W. Hill (DD 986). He deployed eight times on seven ships, twice in command of McClusky.

Ashore, he commanded the Surface Warfare Officers School in Newport, and as a new flag officer he served as Commander, Naval Mine and Anti-submarine Warfare Command, Corpus Christi, Texas. He also served at the U.S. Naval Academy as a company officer, celestial navigation instructor, assistant varsity soccer coach, and member of the admissions board; at Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, in the Strategic Initiatives Group; and on the Joint Staff, in J5 (Strategic Plans and Policy) and as executive assistant to the assistant chairman.

He graduated with distinction and first in his class from the Naval War College, earning his master's degree in national security and strategic studies. He was also a Navy Federal Executive Fellow at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy.

Rear Admiral Christenson has been awarded the Defense Superior Service Medal, the Legion of Merit (five awards), the Meritorious Service Medal (two awards), the Navy Commendation Medal (five awards), and the Navy Achievement Medal.