

1996

President's Notes

James R. Stark

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Stark, James R. (1996) "President's Notes," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 49 : No. 4 , Article 2.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol49/iss4/2>

This President's Forum is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.



"I have seen him at his best both at sea and ashore. Admiral Boorda has been eulogized—correctly—as a 'sailor's sailor.' He understood the Navy, its strengths, and how to use them. He was a total professional"

President's Notes

IN MAY, AT A TIME WHEN THE NAVY was under continuing criticism for a variety of issues, we lost our Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Mike Boorda. Any death is a tragedy. The fact that he died by his own hand made it doubly so.

Rear Admiral Stark was commissioned in 1965 at the U.S. Naval Academy, studied at the University of Vienna as a Fulbright Scholar, and earned a doctorate in political science at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University. He has served on the Navy Staff, the National Security Council Staff, and as Executive Director of the Chief of Naval Operations Executive Panel. His sea service has included command of USS *Julius A. Furer* (FFG 6), USS *Leahy* (CG 16), and, from 1994 to 1995, the Nato Standing Naval Force Atlantic, deployed in the Adriatic Sea. He assumed the duties of President of the Naval War College in June 1995.

Since then the Navy has received even closer scrutiny as the press and the public have sought to understand why he died and what the Navy's problems are.

I knew and admired Admiral Boorda for more than twenty-five years. He was my weapons instructor at what was then Destroyer School (now the Department Head course at the Surface Warfare Officers School Command), where he stood out for his ability to get across a difficult subject with humor and some useful lessons from the fleet. I worked with him or for him again many times over the years. He was my detailer, my squadron commander on a Mediterranean deployment when I was in my first command, a familiar face during my Washington tours, and my Nato commander when I reported for duty in the Adriatic in 1994. In my present position, I work directly for the Chief of Naval Operations, and I saw Admiral Boorda often. He always had a unique ability to make everyone feel he was personally committed to solving their individual problems . . . and he was. The first CNO to rise from the ranks, he understood our enlisted personnel and worked tirelessly to improve life for them and their families.


I have seen him at his best both at sea and ashore. Admiral Boorda has been eulogized—correctly—as a “sailor’s sailor.” He understood the Navy, its strengths, and how to use them. He was a total professional—a man who could do it all at sea and loved to practice his craft. Ashore, he was known as both a personnel specialist and a man who knew the ins and outs of the Washington scene. A convincingly articulate speaker, especially effective in dealing with Congress and the media, he was viewed throughout the government as a trusted advisor and an effective service chief. And he was CNO at a time when those abilities were in high demand.

There has been a great deal of speculation about the cause of Admiral Boorda’s death. Certainly, the issue of combat devices for his medals seems so inconsequential that it makes no sense—especially in light of subsequent information highlighting the legitimate confusion surrounding the awards. But then, suicide seldom makes sense to those of us left behind. It is enough to know that Admiral Boorda loved the Navy; and however irrational his death, he was trying to help the Navy and the sailors he cared for so much. His loss is a tragedy for his family, for the Navy, and for our country. We shall miss him.

But even as we mourn the loss of Admiral Boorda, even as critics—both informed and uninformed—speculate about a troubled service and a Navy with leadership problems, our sailors go about their business protecting America’s interests around the world. They deploy on short notice in response to fast-moving events far from home; they leave their families for months at a time; and they sail into harm’s way day in and day out. And they do so in ships, submarines, and aircraft that are the envy of the rest of the world. Our sailors and officers are highly motivated and superbly trained. This is without question the best Navy I have seen in my entire career.

We in the Navy have made a critical strategic and doctrinal shift in the past few years—away from the blue-water operations of the Cold War and into the arena of regional conflict and littoral operations, projecting power and influence from the sea. And we have done so while dramatically cutting our budgets and force structure, eliminating infrastructure, and recapitalizing the fleet. A task of that magnitude was not done without leadership.

When one steps back and looks at the Navy objectively, we are in very good shape. We have a clear mission and the forces to carry it out. Certainly, the Navy has its share of problems that need to be addressed and solved. When we make errors, we must stand up and admit it. And when we are right, we need to stand our ground. But we must never forget that the Navy exists to protect our country in a dangerous world, and it is doing an absolutely superb job of it.


J.R. STARK
Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy
President, Naval War College

