

2019

President's Forum

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PRESIDENT'S FORUM



Enhanced Historical Focus at the Naval War College

HISTORY IS MORE than just a recitation of facts; it is a tool that can and should be used to inform the process of effective decision-making. In recent months we have taken significant steps to enhance the role of historical research and scholarship at the College. In August 2018, I announced the establishment of the John B. Hattendorf Center for Maritime Historical Research. This center is charged with studying history for the purpose of educating and informing contemporary practitioners and sea-service professionals about the fundamental historical functions of navies. The center supersedes the former Maritime History Center that had been active since the establishment of the College's Historical Section in 1919.

The John B. Hattendorf Center for Maritime Historical Research is a unique asset that will provide unity of effort among various historically focused functions and related activities on the Naval War College campus and throughout the world. More specifically, the Hattendorf Center is responsible for coordinating the Naval Historical Collection, composed of rare books and archival documentary collections at the College, and will coordinate our historical missions with those of the Naval History and Heritage Command in Washington, DC. As a core mission of the College, the study of maritime history supports the institution's defined lines of effort to operationalize, navalize, futurize, and internationalize the school.

The center is named in honor of Professor Emeritus John B. Hattendorf, who served the school for nearly fifty years, both in uniform and as a civilian scholar. Following his combat service in Vietnam, Hattendorf reported to the Naval War College in 1972 as flag speechwriter, research assistant, and instructor under then-President Vice Admiral Stansfield Turner. He later earned the doctor of

philosophy (DPhil) degree in history at Pembroke College of Oxford University in 1977. Through his publications and original documentary research, Hattendorf earned international acclaim for his scholarship in the field of maritime history. In recognition of these scholarly contributions, in 2016 the faculty of Oxford University endorsed Hattendorf's academic promotion from the DPhil to the higher degree of doctor of letters (DLitt). We are indeed fortunate that John remains affiliated with the College and continues to contribute to the important work we do.

Since its inception, the Hattendorf Center has conducted a number of interesting events, ranging from helping to execute a unique war game in the United Kingdom to holding a major history conference on our Newport campus. The game conducted in November 2018 at the Queen's House at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, U.K., was based on the much-studied World War I Battle of Jutland. The reenactment employed the same methods and technology used a century ago to understand the maritime strategy of what was the largest naval surface engagement of World War I, a battle fought between Great Britain and Germany off the coast of Denmark in May–June 1916, which resulted in the loss of nearly ten thousand lives.

The most recent accomplishment of the center's faculty and staff was a large-scale gathering of world-class historians who convened in the College's Mahan Reading Room in mid-March to examine the naval lessons of the Great War and discuss how these lessons might inform today's Navy. The conference's title—"The Victory at Sea: Naval Lessons of the Great War and the U.S. Navy of the 21st Century"—is a nod to past Naval War College President William Sowden Sims's Pulitzer Prize-winning 1920 book, *The Victory at Sea*, which chronicled the U.S. Navy's vital role in winning World War I. Speakers at the conference discussed Sims's legacy, the revolution in professional naval education after World War I, and the Naval War College's historical influence as an international forum for scholarship on naval strategy. Of particular note was the participation of Admiral Sims's grandson, Nathaniel Sims, and Nicholas Jellicoe, grandson of Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, who commanded Britain's Grand Fleet during the Battle of Jutland.

Another new initiative of note is the Hattendorf Center's graduate certificate in maritime history (GCMH). The GCMH provides students with a deeper understanding of maritime and naval history and introduces them to the study of history at the graduate level. In a specialized version of the College's popular electives program, GCMH students gain priority enrollment in relevant courses and complete a graduate research project based on historical scholarship under the guidance of a faculty mentor. They earn two additional graduate credits and recognition on their permanent academic record as certificate recipients. This

program is voluntary and goes beyond the master's degree. Selection is limited to a small number of highly motivated students and is determined on a case-by-case basis. GCMH students will be encouraged to submit to the Chief of Naval Operations essay contest, sponsored by the U.S. Naval Institute, and to various official journals for publication.

The Hattendorf Center builds on the foundations of maritime historical scholarship, which long have been a hallmark of the groundbreaking work done at our remarkable institution. Today a distinguished team of seven scholars is assigned to the center, including Dr. Craig Symonds, the recipient of the Roosevelt Prize, the Lincoln Prize, the Morison Prize, and the Dudley W. Knox Lifetime Achievement Award; and Geoffrey Till, the author of over two hundred articles, books, and book chapters, including the revised fourth edition of *Seapower: A Guide for the 21st Century*, which was published in 2018.

More than a century ago the College's founder, Rear Admiral Stephen B. Luce, argued that "shutting our eyes to the lessons of history . . . is to be unscientific in one's own profession, which, in these days, is to be culpably ignorant, if not criminal." This remains true today. Collectively, we must seek to understand history and how it contributes to the future.

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