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ADMIRAL, U. S. NAVY (RET.)

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Admiral James D. Watkins  
Chief of Naval Operations  
Navy Department  
The Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20350

Dear Jim:

When I became CNO in 1970 I was painfully aware that the then 1100 community suffered from a lack of accepted standards and professionalism. It had become a dumping ground for rejects from naval aviation and submarine service. Some good surface officers came from the 1100 community, primarily through the destroyer force.

The Surface Warfare Officer program which began during my tour as CNO has done much to rectify the situation. There is a recognizable community. There are SWO schools at the enlisted, division officer, and department head levels. There is a rigid qualification program, with tough screening through command. The amphibious, logistic, and destroyer forces have uniform standards, and

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all SWO standards have been significantly upgraded. This improvement in standards, particularly in engineering readiness, owes much to the Propulsion Examining Board and the influence of our nuclear propulsion trained officers.

I am concerned about the future of the Surface Warfare community because I am aware of too many outstanding officers at the Commander/Captain level who have retired or are seriously considering retirement. The feedback I get from them goes something like this:

1. Innovation has been discouraged at the top -- no room for new ideas unless it fits a narrow big carrier battle group concept. The pattern of nearly four decades of training and operations has established a corporate mind set with too narrow a focus.
2. Over-emphasis at high levels on micromanaging leadership, even to the point of saying "don't trust your men, do it yourself."
3. Over-emphasis of technical matters at the expense of strategy, tactics.
4. Reversion to old style leadership where officers could hide behind rank instead of exercising informed and enlightened leadership.
5. Oversized staffs control policy, decide most issues, and have become a substitute for leadership and judgment.

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Some more specific things follow this line:

1. Surface officers that are promoted to two and three star rank tend to be mostly technically oriented officers who cannot change or manage change.
2. When Harry Train retires, there will be no four star surface officer.
3. The number of surfaced submariners in the SWO community flag officers is increasing.
4. The path to the top as an SWO seems extremely limited.

Some of this may be sour grapes, but I have heard it too often not to give it some credence. If even a small part of this is true, we will produce SWOs that are good "mechanics" but chase out the truly brilliant officers who are the key to keeping our Navy on top in a time of great change.

There are some unique qualities of surface warfare officers that should be kept in mind as you mold our Navy, as follows:

1. SWOs are probably the most operationally balanced officer community, not overspecialized, working continuously with air, surface, subsurface and electronic dimensions of naval warfare.
2. The top SWOs tend to be highly educated in a broad variety of disciplines. This results primarily from

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Navy policy that provides them more time for schooling and graduate degrees than the other line divisions.

3. SWOs will have to solve the ship survivability problem, a problem that goes beyond just hull design and involves strategy, tactics, and weaponry.
4. Our new CVs and BBs will need the very best SWOs to man them.
5. Many top SWOs are superior policy thinkers and innovators. This results from being good generalists and the opportunity to spend time thinking and analyzing broad issues while in pursuit of graduate degrees.

I recommend that you take steps to enhance the SWO career picture. Some specific things to think about are:

1. Appoint an SWO four star quickly.
2. Seek out SWO innovators as well as technicians for advancement.
3. Dampen the impression that surfaced submariners and "nukes" are taking over the top echelons of the SWO community.
4. Emphasize innovation in strategy and tactics and bring some thinkers in this area to the top.
5. Emphasize enlightened leadership along with the firm hand of pride and professionalism.

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6. Seek out the truly brilliant SWOs that are well based in technical matters, operations, and strategy/policy and promote them as innovators for our Navy.
7. Continue to support and develop the overall SWO program and its standards of professionalism.

As you know, I have advocated change in naval forces to include offensive capabilities in smaller aircraft carriers and new types of surface combatants. I strongly believe that this is necessary in this decade. On the other hand, in my discussions with members of Congress and in my public appearances, I am supporting the two Nimitz class CVs in the current budget. I am not against large carriers, as I feel that air superiority at sea is essential. My point has been, and remains, that we have large carriers and we need to spend our sometimes scarce dollars in developing ways to diversify and improve our Navy, with emphasis on the offense. I am particularly concerned about the need to extend our combat sensor range to ranges consistent with today's long range missiles, and believe that this should be among your priorities.

Mouza and I wish you and Sheila the very best tour as the CNO and First Lady of our great Navy.

Sincerely,

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