PRESIDENT'S FORUM

Professional Competence—What They Admire Most

MEDAL OF HONOR award recipient Vice Admiral James Bond Stockdale was the fortieth President of the Naval War College. I recently had the great honor of delivering the sixteenth annual Stockdale Lecture at the University of San Diego, with Mrs. Sybil Stockdale in the audience. I learned afterward in feedback about the lecture that during the "Q&A" I had provided a most unexpected answer to a midshipman's question concerning leadership.

Over the course of my seven commands I have always loved the opportunity to meet with the men and women under my command. One of my favorite questions has always been, "Who is the sailor ["sailor" being defined as everyone from recruit to admiral] you served with at sea that you admired the most, and what were the qualities that made you select that person?" The question to me that evening in San Diego was, "What trait should be focused on to ensure future success?" Upon hearing the question my mind immediately accessed the thousands of actual answers I had heard to my own question, and the answer was obvious and overwhelming. Despite the fact that the theme of the lecture would presumably point me to answer "ethical leadership," I replied with the truth as I see it—which is *professional competence,* meaning, usually and specifically, "they knew how to fight the ship."

Upon reflection, however, I would argue that a sailor who fails to demonstrate ethical leadership is immediately passed over in any consideration of a list of "best leaders." Ethical leadership is necessary even to enter the arena of leadership worth remembering. Also, it is important that the definition of "sailor" include everyone from recruit to admiral. In fact, the first couple of hundred times I asked the question I actually said, ". . . the *officer* you served with at sea that you admired most . . . ," until a sharp Army student at Newport's Senior Enlisted

Academy asked me why my question was limited to officers. *Touché!* I changed the question, and from then on the answers always included admiration across all ranks of service.

Similarly, it would be a mistake to presume that professional competence is limited to knowing how to "fight the ship." This naval war college was founded by Admiral Stephen B. Luce in no small part because what is meant by professional competence for naval officers continues to change over their years of service. Knowing how to fight a ship, a fleet, a navy, a nation, a coalition—these things sailors must know if they are to serve their nation well until their last days in uniform. Our Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Jonathan W. Greenert, knows it, and his tenets "Warfighting First," "Operate Forward," and "Be Ready" reflect this spirit and make clear the order of priority.

This past August, the Naval War College hosted a remarkable event. In conjunction with the Navy's Fleet Synchronization Conference (which is hosted by Fleet Forces Command and normally takes place in Washington), the CNO requested that the Naval War College conduct a "Required Operational Capability" session, or "ROC drill." ROC drills are commonly used by the Army as a kind of mini-rehearsal of a prospective operation, using markers on a map to represent units. These markers are moved around in accordance with the plan so that commanders and their staffs can more easily visualize the physical and temporal relationships among the units as the operation progresses, helping them to spot potential conflicts and problems beforehand. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, an Army officer, has taken to using this technique on a grand scale to achieve coordinated thinking among the services and the combatant commanders. Admiral Greenert had participated in these joint ROC drills in the past and decided the technique would be useful within the Navy, so he tasked the College, with leadership by Fleet Forces Command, to set one up.

The War Gaming Department turned to and produced an amazing map of the world on a canvas twenty-four feet by forty-four feet, with 670 scaled ship models and markers representing all current forces and those expected to be available several years hence. The war gamers did extensive research into projected readiness levels and positioning of all the Navy's forces and produced a lay-down on the map that the admirals (virtually all three- and four-star officers) could use to visualize operations and discuss how they would conduct them and support each other in both steady-state situations and contingencies. The event was very well received by the CNO and fleet commanders, and we expect that ROC drills will become a routine occurrence.

Quite apart from their immediate practical utility, these events represent the rebuilding of an institutional relationship that served the Navy so well in the years between the two world wars. In that era, games and studies at the College

were reported to the Navy Staff and the General Board, and in a number of different ways these results were incorporated into fleet experimentation. Feedback from the fleet would influence the direction of subsequent studies at the College. This triad—College, Navy Staff, fleet—was highly effective in preparing the Navy for the war to come. After the war, in part due to the emergence of highly technical and semiautonomous warfare communities, the triad gradually broke apart. The introduction of the ROC drill may serve to revive this mutually reinforcing relationship, a prospect that promises to enhance Navy effectiveness and efficiency as well as facilitate the process of innovation.

In many ways the Naval War College is experiencing a renaissance in terms of its influence on Navy thought. The founding of the College of Operational and Strategic Leadership, the creation of a true command and staff course, the Maritime Advanced Warfighting School, the revival of the Global War Game, and a host of other initiatives—now including the ROC drills—signal a bright future for the College and its contribution to the Navy and the nation.

JOHN N. CHRISTENSON
Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy
President, Naval War College