Surface Warfare

SNA 2026 Issue

Combat Ready Warfighters

This Issue:

Surface Warfare Officers of the Year

Navy's Flight III Destroyer Brings Significant Combatant Capabilities

Ready: Modern Sailor Training for a Modern Global Climate

For 250 Years

Authorization

Surface Warfare Magazine is published monthly as a Digital Feature and printed annually from appropriated funds by authority of the Chief of Naval Operations in accordance with NPPR P-35. The Secretary of the Navy has determined that this publication is necessary in the transaction of business required by law of the Department of the Navy. Use of funds for printing this publication has been approved by the Navy Publications and Printing Policy Committee. Reproductions are encouraged with proper citation. Controlled circulation.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Surface Warfare, SURFPAC Public Affairs Office, 2841 Rendova Road, San Diego, CA 92155.

Surface Warfare (USPS 104-170) (ISSN 0145-1073) is published by the Department of the Navy, Commander, Naval Surface Forces, 2841 Rendova Road, San Diego, CA 92155. Periodicals postage paid at San Diego, CA, and additional mailing offices.

Charter

Surface Warfare Magazine is the professional magazine of the surface warfare community. Its purpose is to educate its readers on surface warfare missions and programs, with a particular focus on U.S. surface ships and commands. This journal will also draw upon the Surface Force's rich historical legacy to instill a sense of pride and professionalism among community members and to enhance reader awareness of the increasing relevance of surface warfare for our nation's defense.

The opinions and assertions herein are the personal views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the U.S. Government, the Department of War or the Department of the Navy.

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Cover: U.S. Sailors assigned to the Wasp-class amphibious assault ship USS Iwo Jima (LHD 7) hoist 17 Ensigns on the port yardarm in remembrance of the 25th anniversary of the deadly terrorist attack on the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Cole (DDG 67) while underway in the Caribbean Sea.
Photo by MC1 Andrew Eggert.

Commander's Corner

Shipmates,

Reading this publication connects you to the enduring heritage of our community. In a world defined by increasing complexity, our technology is vital, but our people have always been the decisive variable. The American Warfighting Sailor remains our true Competitive Edge. As we drive to generate the concepts and capabilities necessary to fight and win, we must take a fix and ensure we are moving with the speed and purpose our Navy and Nation demand.

Our Competitive Edge strategy is driving tangible progress toward maximizing our readiness. As we aggressively execute our Lines of Effort, I am proud of the specific milestones we achieved this past year. We are fortifying the foundation of our future force by developing leaders of character, competence, and energy through the Surface Warfare Command Leadership Assessment (SWCLA). This program provides a rigorous, data-driven process for refining our command talent. Simultaneously, our commitment to excellence by design is producing Advanced Engineering Instructors (AEIs). This program is a critical institutional investment in technical mastery—improving maintenance outcomes, reducing yard period delays, and directly generating more Combat Surge Ready Warships, fit to fight tonight.

This past year we celebrated the tenth anniversary of the Naval Surface and Mine Warfighting Development Center (SMWDC). SMWDC continues to drive warfighting excellence, and the new Surface Advanced Warfighting School (SAWS) centralizes tactical instruction by consolidating all Warfare Tactics Instructor (WTI) courses at the San Diego schoolhouse. We have synchronized these efforts with a robust embrace of the Surface Warfare Combat Training Continuum (SWCTC) to ensure every Sailor is prepared for the high-end fight. The strides we are making by applying enterprise-wide improvement with urgency and clarity extend beyond training; they permeate our efforts to modernize our fleet and strengthen our infrastructure. Every initiative across our Lines of Effort is laser-focused to achieve CNO's call to action: ***building Battle Ready Sailors and a Battle Ready Force***.

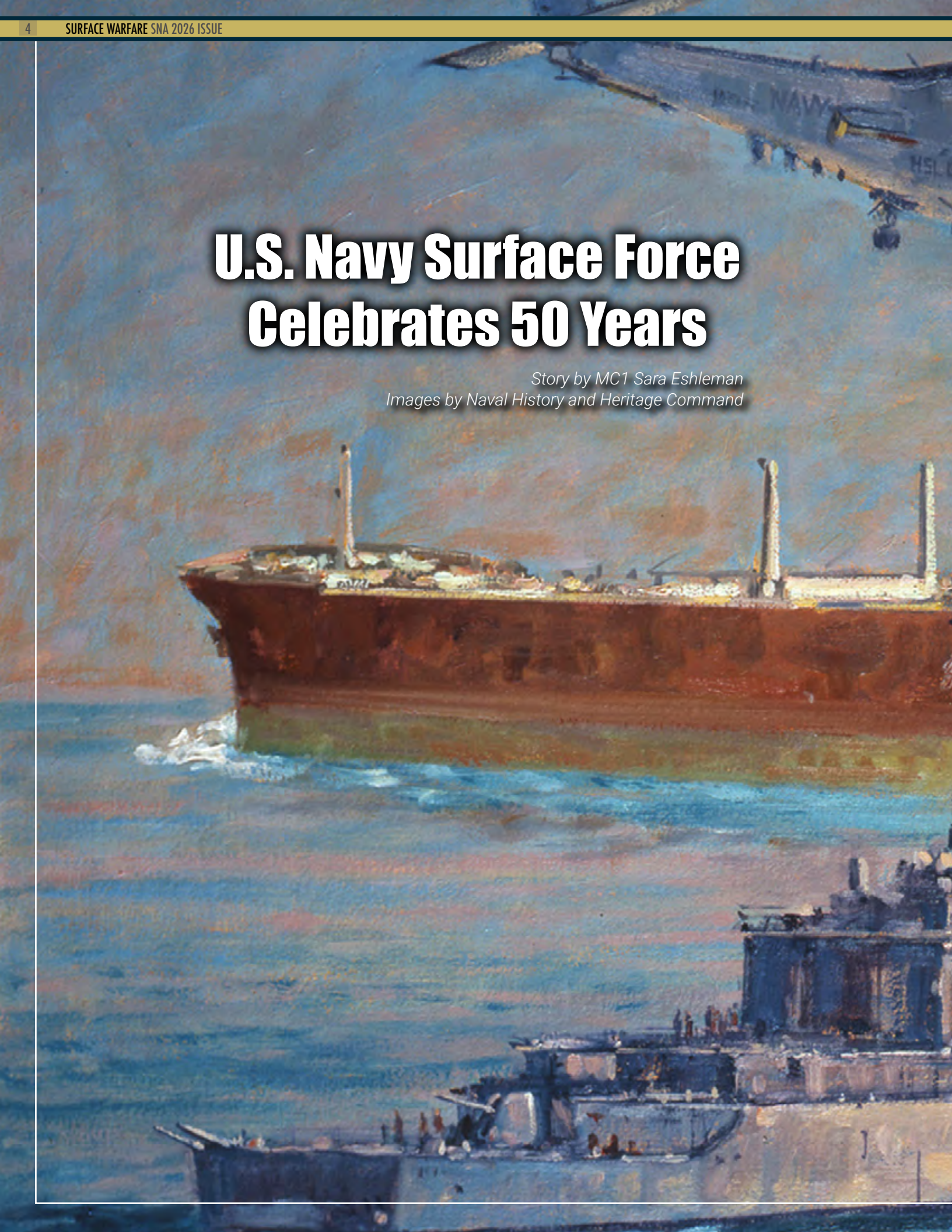
Within this edition, you will discover compelling narratives of Sailors achieving excellence. These features, curated by my Public Affairs Team, highlight the ethos and standards of our Force. The teammates profiled here exemplify the drive required to sharpen our competitive advantage and embody our warfighting prowess.

As we honor the proud legacy of 250 years of our Surface Force, we recognize and reaffirm our commitment to our Nation and our Shipmates. It will take all of us to confront the growing challenges of our ever-changing world. I'm energized by your service and am reassured that our Force will remain the best the world has ever known.

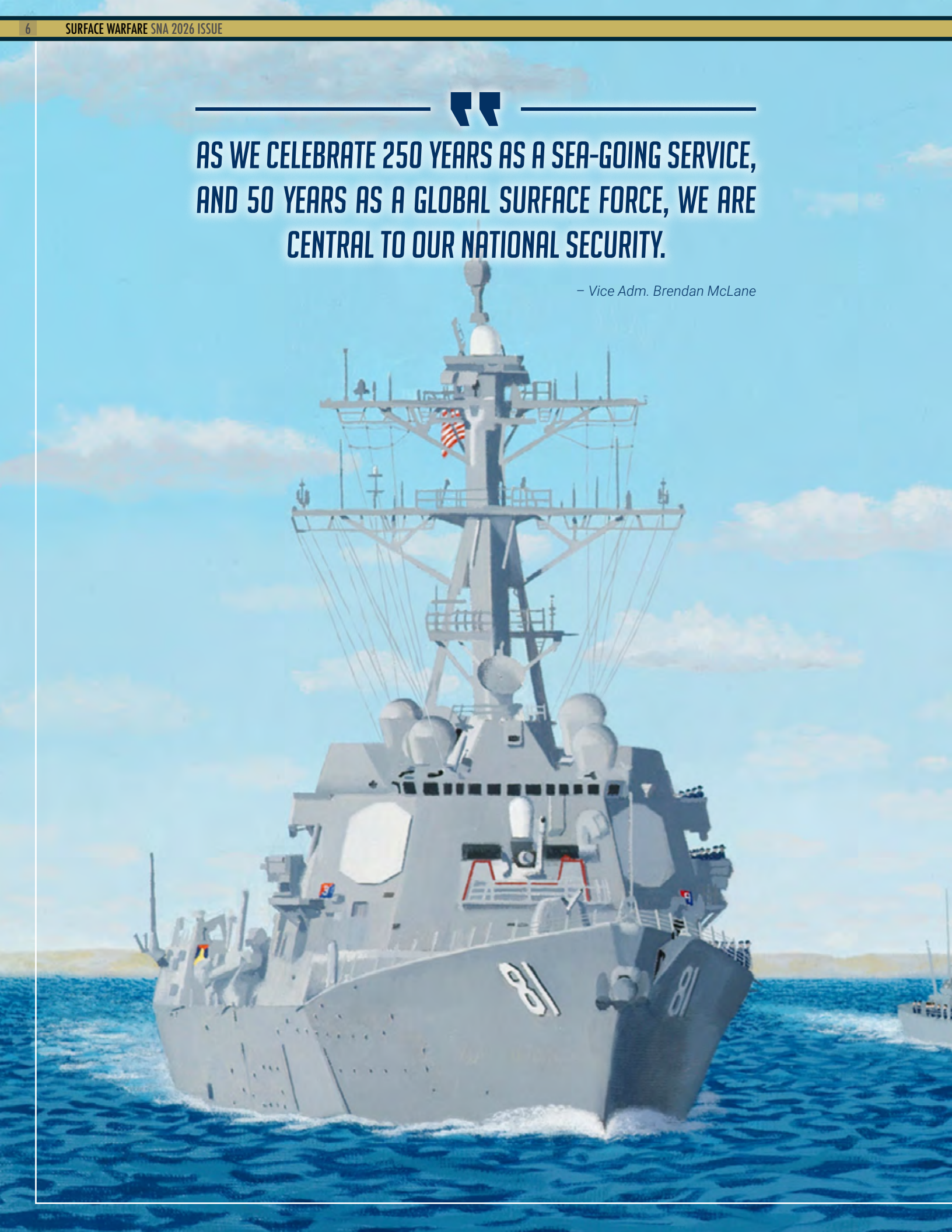
SWOBOSS

U.S. Navy Surface Force Celebrates 50 Years

Story by MC1 Sara Eshleman
Images by Naval History and Heritage Command



Painting by John Charles Roach



"AS WE CELEBRATE 250 YEARS AS A SEA-GOING SERVICE, AND 50 YEARS AS A GLOBAL SURFACE FORCE, WE ARE CENTRAL TO OUR NATIONAL SECURITY.

– Vice Adm. Brendan McLane

Fifty years ago, Operation Frequent Wind had just wrapped, officially signifying the end of the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War. The Cold War was in full swing, and the Navy, with an emphasis on readiness, needed to reorganize its surface force to meet the demand.

Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt was at the end of his historic term as Chief of Naval Operations. In one of his final acts in office, he approved a massive plan that reshaped the Surface Navy and created the Naval Surface Force we know today.

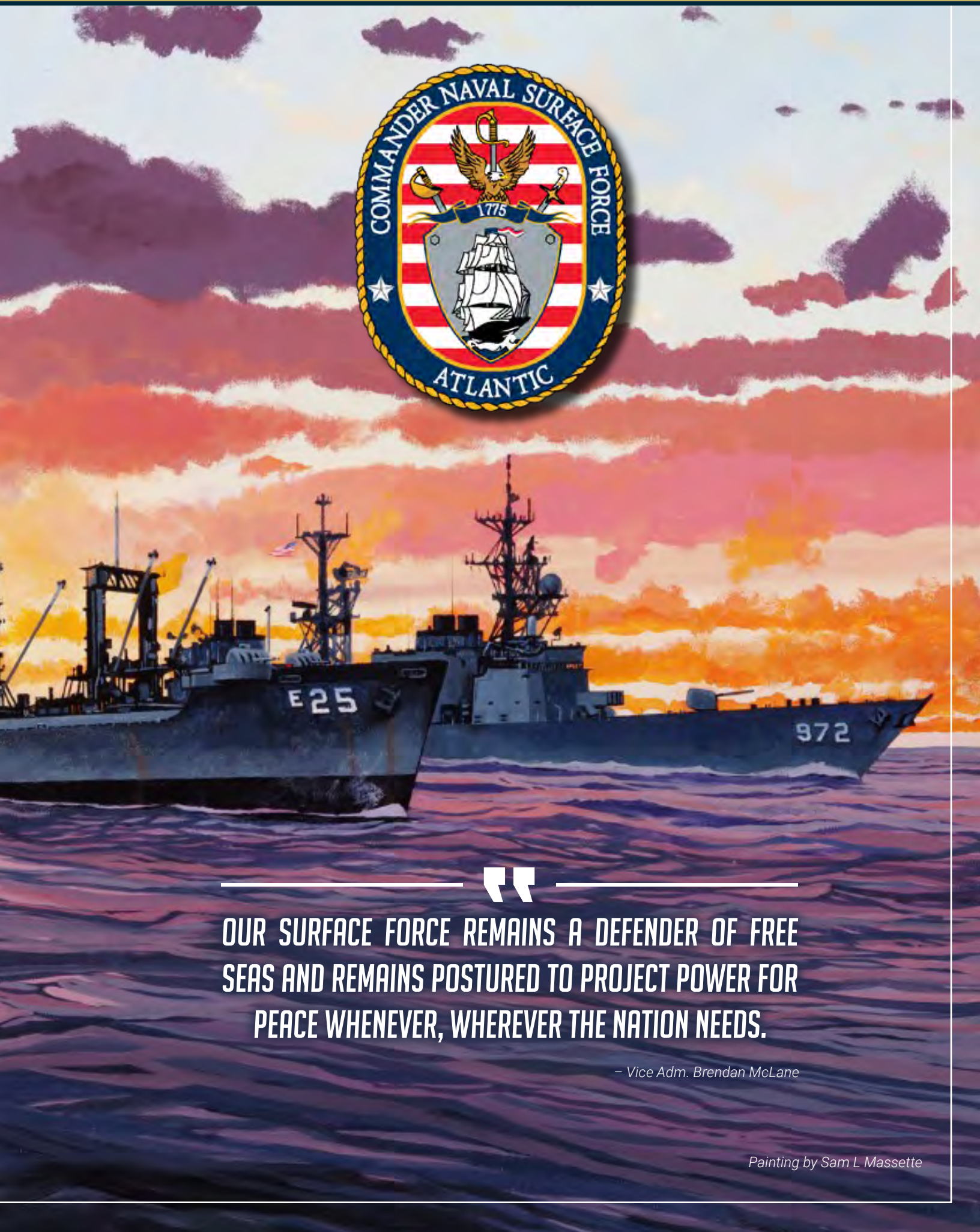
"As we celebrate 250 years as a sea-going service, and 50 years as a global Surface Force, we are central to our national security," said Vice Adm. Brendan McLane, commander, Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet. "Our Surface Force remains a defender of free seas and remains postured to project power for peace whenever, wherever the Nation needs."

Painting by Douglas Rowe

"When I look back at 50 years of surface Navy, I just try to envision what the waterfront looked like," echoed Force Master Chief Larry A. Lynch, assigned to Commander, Naval Surface Forces, U.S. Pacific Fleet. "I remember seeing pictures of five, 10, 15 ships nested alongside the San Diego waterfront, and the quay wall was full of warships. And that's the one thing that captivates me the most: the history and tradition of it. And it just intertwined with 250 years of Navy. And I can only imagine what it looked like if there were wooden ships here, pier side, I think it would give you a very amazing picture and very amazing atmosphere and environment."

The reorganization combined the Cruiser-Destroyer, Amphibious and Service Forces on both the East and West Coasts, respectively, into two mammoth Surface Forces: Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet, headquartered in San Diego, CA, and Naval Surface Force, Atlantic, headquartered in Norfolk, VA. On July 1, 1975, both commands became fully operational, marking July 1, 2025, as a significant milestone in which both entities will celebrate 50 years as an organization.

In "NAVOP" message 89/74, Zumwalt stated that "The rationale for this action is to achieve an organization which will permit more effective management and utilization of existing resources, thereby improving the support to combat ratio, allowing us to eliminate duplication in administrative and support areas, thereby generating savings in common overhead."



"OUR SURFACE FORCE REMAINS A DEFENDER OF FREE SEAS AND REMAINS POSTURED TO PROJECT POWER FOR PEACE WHENEVER, WHEREVER THE NATION NEEDS.

– Vice Adm. Brendan McLane

Painting by Sam L Massette

THE COMMAND WAS CONSIDERED FULLY OPERATIONAL WITH THE ADDITION OF THE SERVICE AND MINE SHIPS ON JULY 1, 1975.

Also in 1975, the Surface Warfare Officer (SWO) insignia was created, mainly in response to the insignia worn by aviators and submariners.

The SWO pin helped the SWO community reestablish its identity and instill a sense of pride and ownership within the wardroom.

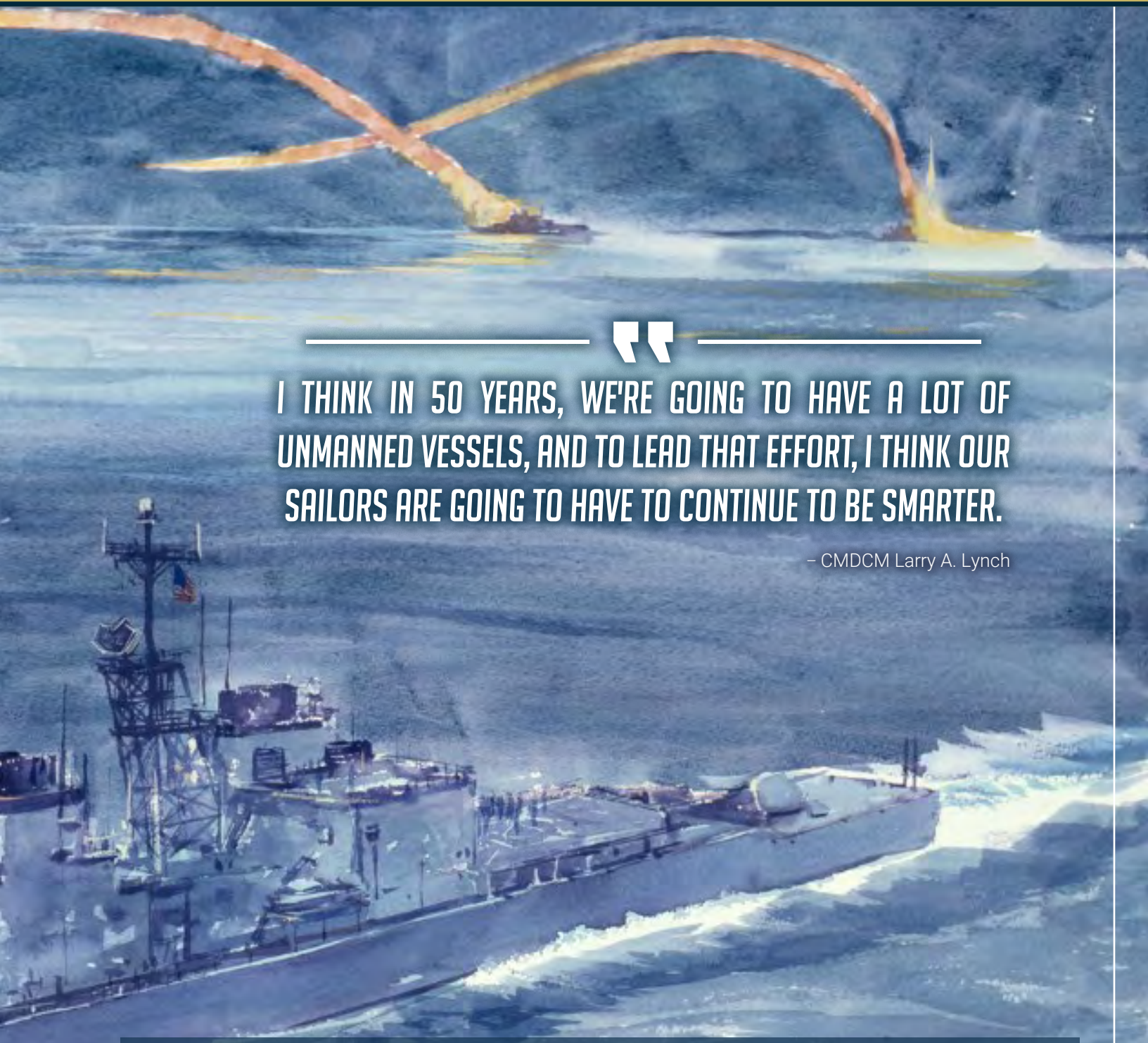
The Enlisted Surface Warfare Specialist designation and pin would come along four years later, in 1979.

The merger was nearly a year in the making. Following the announcement in mid-1974, the commands were established in a development phase, commencing January 1, 1975. This initial move on both coasts combined the cruiser-destroyer and amphibious groups, which were disestablished on April 1.

The command was considered fully operational with the addition of the service and mine ships on July 1, 1975 - the day the Surface Force now celebrates its anniversary.

Painting by Morgan Ian Wilbur

Painting by John Charles Roach



> I THINK IN 50 YEARS, WE'RE GOING TO HAVE A LOT OF UNMANNED VESSELS, AND TO LEAD THAT EFFORT, I THINK OUR SAILORS ARE GOING TO HAVE TO CONTINUE TO BE SMARTER.
>
> – CMDCM Larry A. Lynch

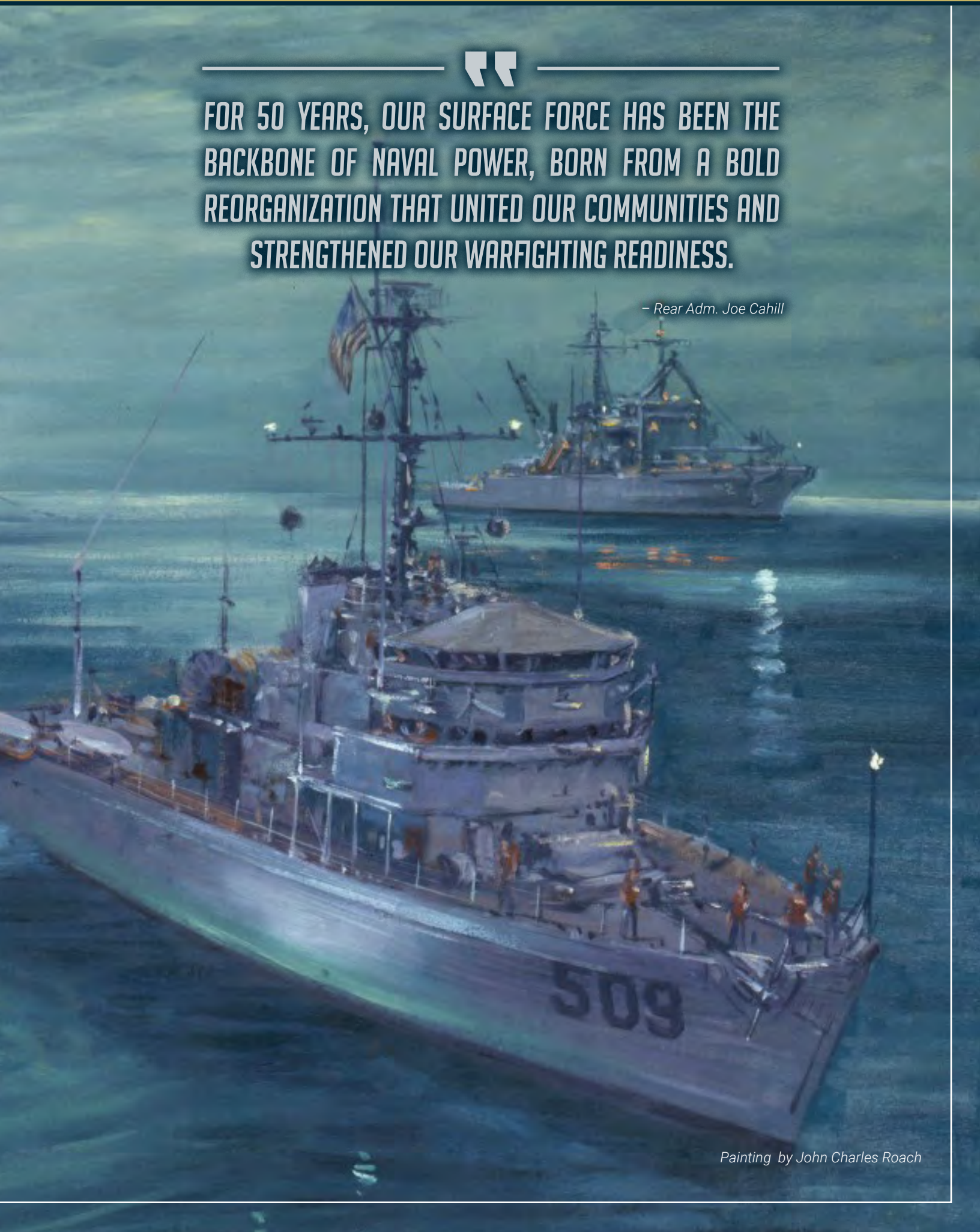
"I think in 50 years, we're going to have a lot of unmanned vessels, and to lead that effort, I think our Sailors are going to have to continue to be smarter," said Lynch, on the next 50 years for the Surface Forces. "And I think we're going to pave the way for them and teach them that technology, and if you look at today's generation, I think they are the concrete for that, the foundation of how smart they are and how they apply technology. I think we're all going to be amazed and very surprised with how technology is going to be utilized for the next 50 years. And I think it's going to make us more lethal, and I think it's going to make us more efficient as a war fighting unit in 50 years."

Of the nearly 400 surface ships active in 1975, only three remain in service: U.S. 7th Fleet flagship USS Blue Ridge (LCC 19), homeported in Yokosuka, Japan, and Blue Ridge-class command and control ship USS Mount Whitney (LCC 20), homeported in Gaeta, Italy. The legendary USS Constitution, the world's oldest commissioned warship still afloat, rounds out the group and is berthed in Boston as a historic ship.

Throughout its 50-year history, the Surface Force has expanded and contracted, as its various entities have grown in capabilities and responsibilities.

For example, Naval Special Warfare Groups One and Two, originally part of the amphibious forces, were no longer included in the Surface Force and migrated to their own type command, the Naval Special Warfare Command, in 1987. In 2006, the Explosive Ordnance Disposal Groups and Mobile Diving and Salvage units were reorganized and are now part of the Naval Expeditionary Combat Command. Multiple bases, including the Naval Amphibious Bases in San Diego and Norfolk, were originally a part of the surface merger, but are now under the responsibility of the Naval Installations Command.

"For 50 years, our Surface Force has been the backbone of naval power, born from a bold reorganization that united our communities and strengthened our warfighting readiness," said Rear Adm. Joe Cahill, commander, Naval Surface Force Atlantic. From Admiral Zumwalt's vision to today's Surface Warriors, we have evolved and excelled, remaining ready on arrival to fight and win across the globe. As we celebrate this milestone, we honor our proud history, the ships and crews who shaped it, and reaffirm our commitment to 250 more years of naval tradition." ⚓



"FOR 50 YEARS, OUR SURFACE FORCE HAS BEEN THE BACKBONE OF NAVAL POWER, BORN FROM A BOLD REORGANIZATION THAT UNITED OUR COMMUNITIES AND STRENGTHENED OUR WARFIGHTING READINESS.

– Rear Adm. Joe Cahill

Painting by John Charles Roach


FLIR
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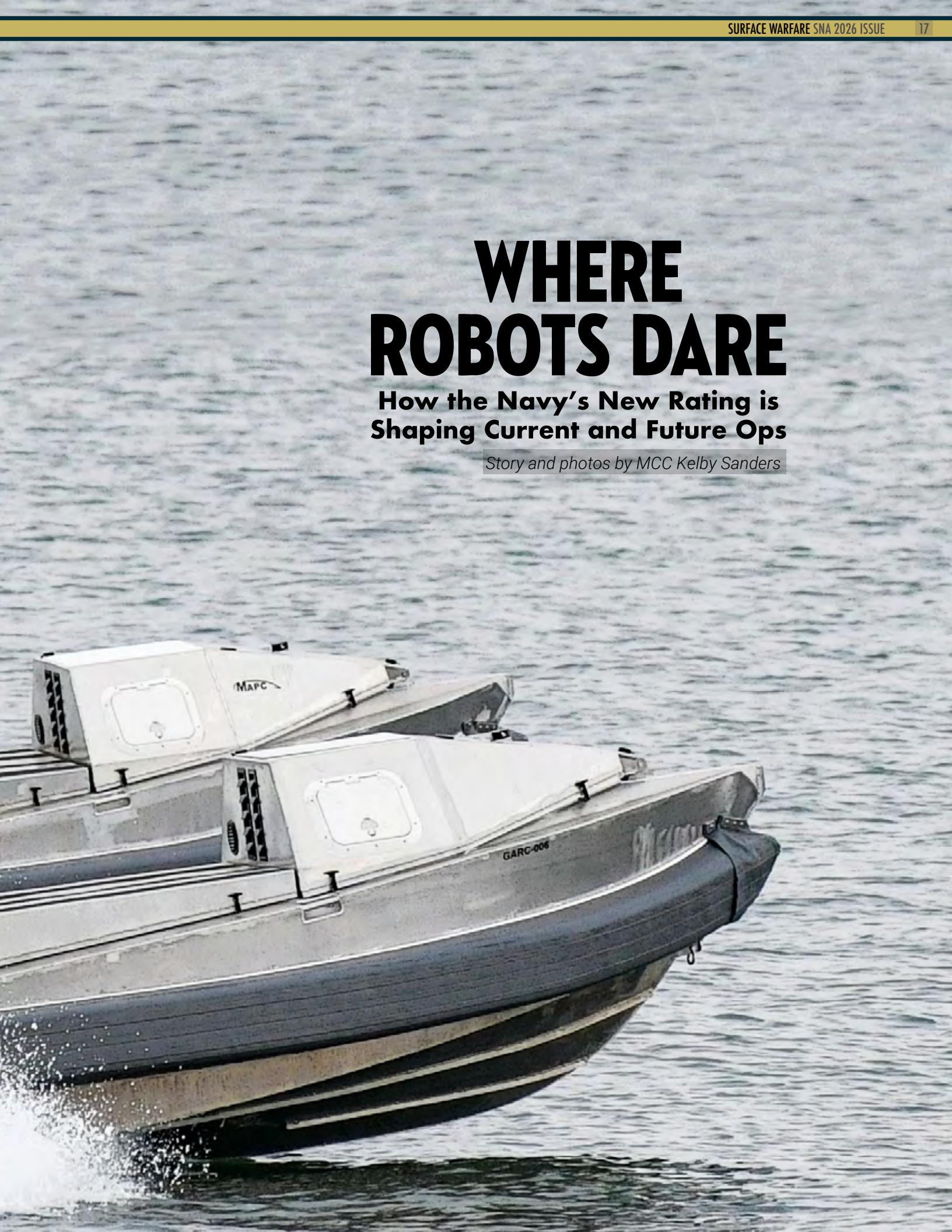
WHERE ROBOTS DARE

How the Navy's New Rating is Shaping Current and Future Ops

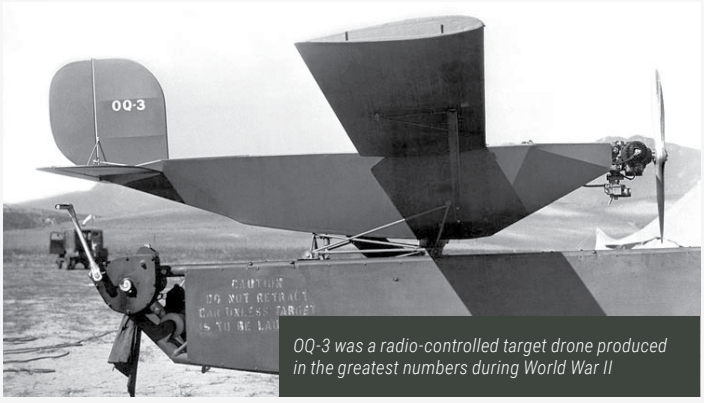
Story and photos by MCC Kelby Sanders



When military history enthusiasts, Hollywood producers and cooky uncles predict a distant future A.I.- driven robot war in the vein of The Terminator, don't shake your head at them.
When defense industry leaders, D.C.-based think tanks and top military brass emphasize to Congress that our success in potential high-end warfare rests on the integrity of our networks and automated systems, don't roll your eyes.
The earliest recorded use of unmanned aerial vehicles in warfare dates back to 1849, and as drone technology and capability continues to develop at a rapid pace, the potential influence unmanned platforms could have on future military operations around the globe is boundless.

Depiction of the first aerial bombardment, directed against Venice by forces of the Austrian empire, came during the 1848–49 First Italian War of Independence.

Archibald Low, a British inventor, designed the first drone in 1916. Called the Ruston Proctor Aerial Target



OQ-3 was a radio-controlled target drone produced in the greatest numbers during World War II

Enter the Robotics Warfare Specialist (RW). Reading the trends, the Navy announced NAVADMIN 036/24 to recruit, train and develop a corps of Sailors to operate and maintain unmanned surface, air, ground and subsurface vessels.

"The RW rating creates expertise that supports current and future advancements in technology," said Master Chief Robotics Warfare Specialist Christopher Rambert, the RW enlisted community manager. "It gives the Navy an opportunity to assess, develop, and retain an agile force of experts capable of mastering skills required to deploy robotic/unmanned systems."

Chief Robotics Warfare Specialist Christian Butler, assigned to Unmanned Surface Vessel Squadron (USVRON) 3, explains the importance of the new rating and the role they may play in future missions.

> **IT GIVES THE NAVY AN OPPORTUNITY TO ASSESS, DEVELOP, AND RETAIN AN AGILE FORCE OF EXPERTS CAPABLE OF MASTERING SKILLS REQUIRED TO DEPLOY ROBOTIC/UNMANNED SYSTEMS.**
>
> *– RWCM Christopher Rambert*

> **WHY SEND A MANNED SHIP SO CLOSE TO DANGER, JUST TO SENSE OR DETECT SOMETHING THAT AN UNMANNED SURFACE, AERIAL OR UNDERWATER VEHICLE CAN DETECT.**
>
> *– RWC Christian Butler*

"In future naval operations, I can see RWs being a part of almost every domain of operations," said Butler.

Thinking broadly, proliferation of unmanned platforms can offer a high degree of operational flexibility. Among many other missions, they can act as sensors dispersed around surface action groups to locate and target enemy contacts or rapidly deliver supplies and equipment to units operating in hostile environments while minimizing risk to human life.

"Why send a manned ship so close to danger, just to sense or detect something that an unmanned surface, aerial or underwater vehicle can detect," wondered Butler. "The other thing they can provide is destruction. I can be hundreds of miles away and cause devastation without putting myself at risk."

Butler, formerly an Electronics Technician (ET) prior to transitioning to RW, had a lot of relevant career experience before making the transition, but as an ET he was a technician and not necessarily an operator.

"It's a little bit different as an RW. You're expected to be technically savvy and also to operate the system you just fixed," said Butler. "If you go somewhere with a small, unmanned surface vessel or unmanned aerial vehicle, you're expected to not only work on it and keep it functioning properly, but also operate that same vehicle."

The RW job description on MyNavyHR.navy.mil reads like something far more complex and science-focused than most other Navy ratings. It contains terms like oceanography, meteorology, bathymetry, aerodynamics, fluid dynamics, radio frequency theory, electrical theory, acoustics, information systems, and networking among several others.

When asked about what kind of Sailor should consider applying to become an RW Rampert said, "a motivated, tech-savvy Sailor with the desire to grow professionally in a community that we continue to define."

Being a new community still in the process of developing its training pipeline affords its early adopters opportunities to influence the rating's development and blaze the trail for future RWs.

"It's an exciting space to be in because we're surrounded by some of the brightest young Sailors in the Navy and the space is evolving and changing rapidly whether its surface, underwater, aerial or ground," said Butler.

> **IT'S AN EXCITING SPACE TO BE IN BECAUSE WE'RE SURROUNDED BY SOME OF THE BRIGHTEST YOUNG SAILORS IN THE NAVY.**
>
> *– RWC Christian Butler*

Information Systems Technician 1st Class Selena Ortwine, and Robotics Warfare Specialist 2nd Class Kaleb Cox, assigned to Unmanned Surface Vessel Squadron 3 (USVRON 3), set up a Global Autonomous Reconnaissance Craft (GARC) control station during a training evolution at Naval Base Point Loma.

We may not know exactly what the future holds or what a future high-end conflict would look like, but unmanned systems will be involved. If you're interested in a job that will put you in position to have a direct impact on the full spectrum of operations going far into the future, check out the Robotics Warfare Specialist Page on MyNavy HR.

"There's a scene in Terminator when they're shooting lasers or bullets at each other, right? And they're falling and it's all scorched earth. It's like a future hell, and these robots are shooting other robots and there are craters and smoke and stuff," explained Butler. "It's right around the corner. It's already happening in certain spaces. We're buckled in and ready to see it through." ⚓

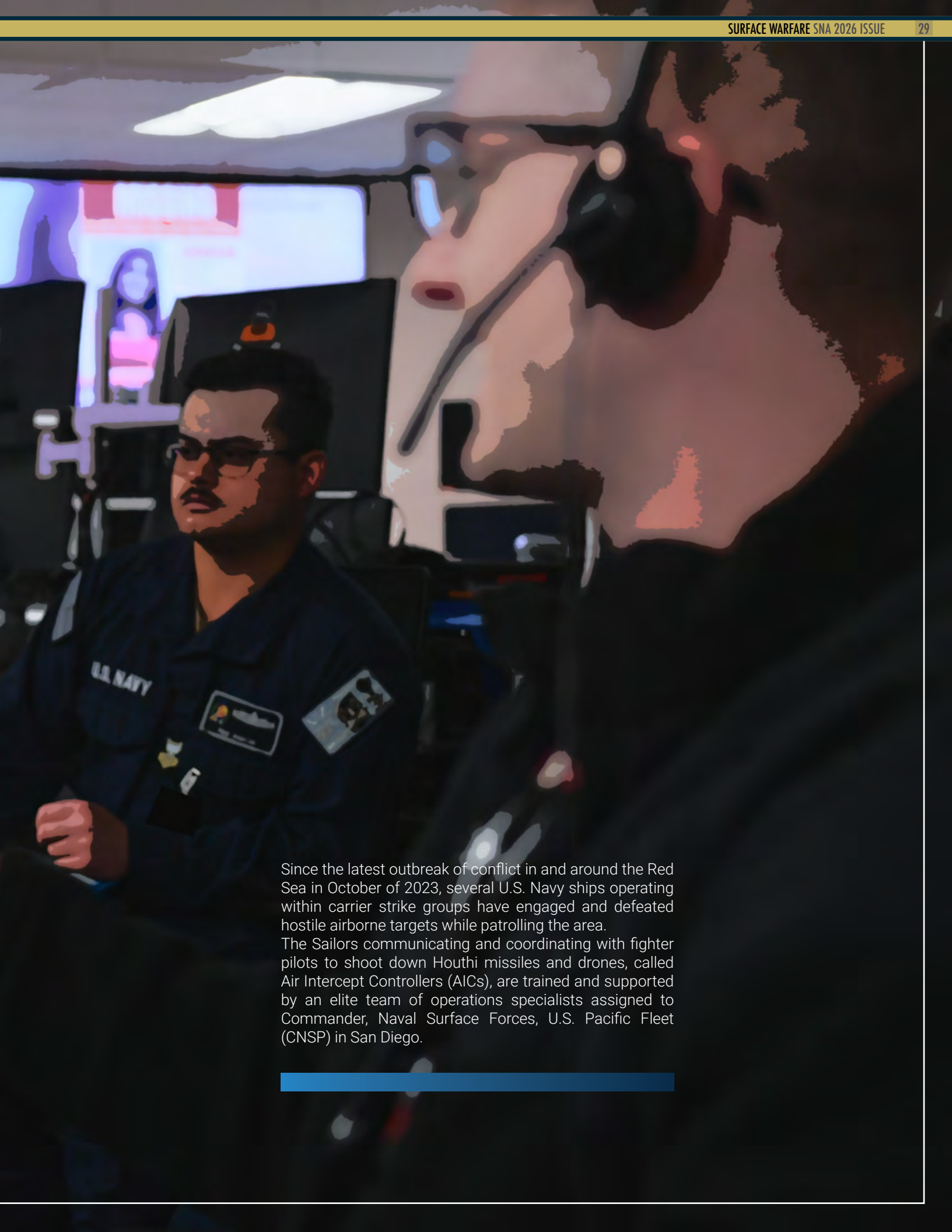

BUTLER
U.S. NAVY
U.S. NAVY
Dave's Trailer Sales

Sailors assigned to Unmanned Surface Vessel Squadron 3 (USVRON 3) pose with Global Autonomous Reconnaissance Crafts (GARC) at Naval Base Point Loma, Nov. 26, 2024. Robotics Warfare Specialists enable Robotic Autonomous System (RAS) operations and maintenance at the tactical edge and are subject matter experts for computer vision, mission autonomy, navigation autonomy, data systems, artificial intelligence, and machine learning on the RAS platforms.

Surface Sailors Level-up, Control the Air

Story and photos by MCC Kelby Sanders

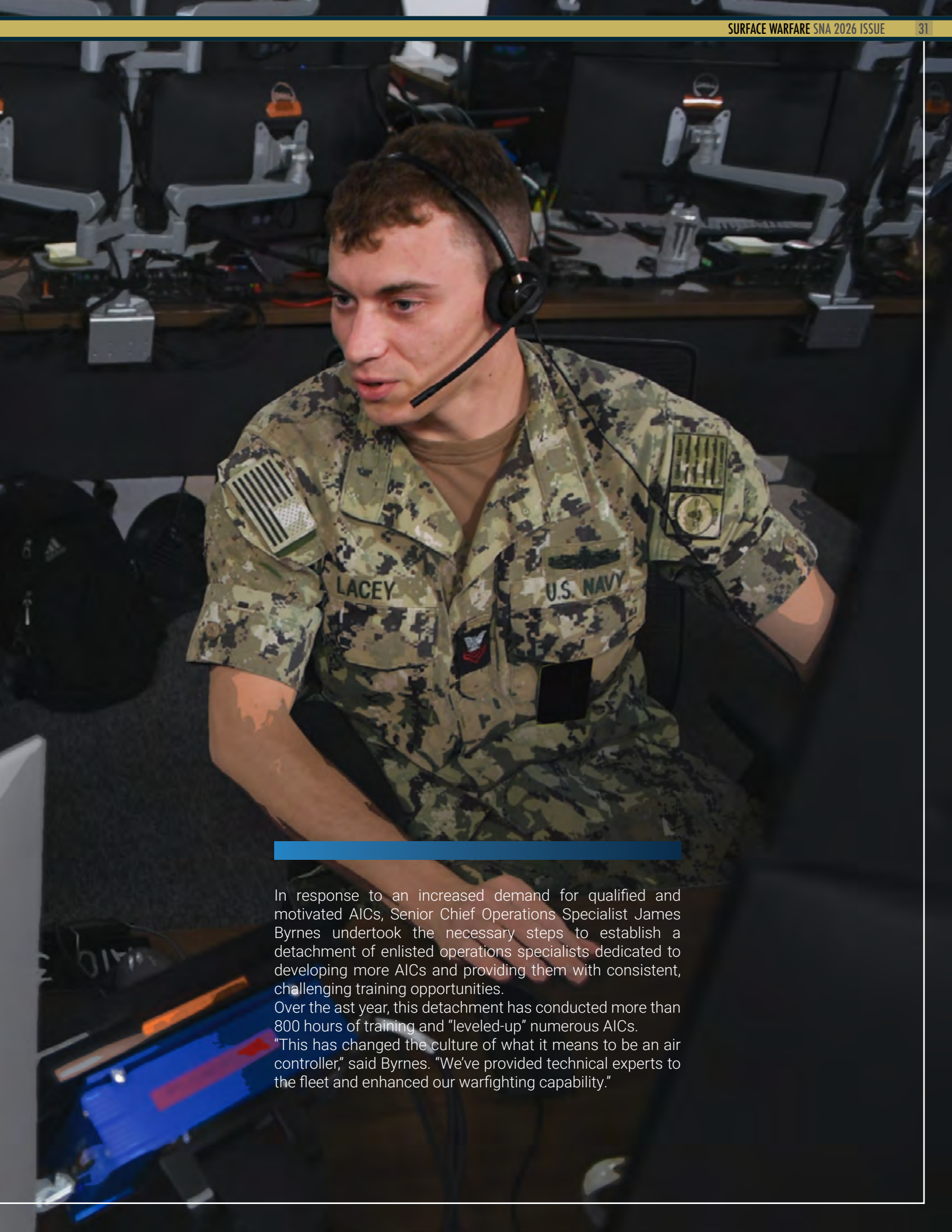
Operations Specialist 2nd Class Natalie Towne, assigned to the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Pinckney (DDG 91), receives constructive feedback during an air intercept controller training simulation in the Tactical Training Group Pacific Battle Lab at Naval Base Point Loma.



Since the latest outbreak of conflict in and around the Red Sea in October of 2023, several U.S. Navy ships operating within carrier strike groups have engaged and defeated hostile airborne targets while patrolling the area.

The Sailors communicating and coordinating with fighter pilots to shoot down Houthi missiles and drones, called Air Intercept Controllers (AICs), are trained and supported by an elite team of operations specialists assigned to Commander, Naval Surface Forces, U.S. Pacific Fleet (CNSP) in San Diego.

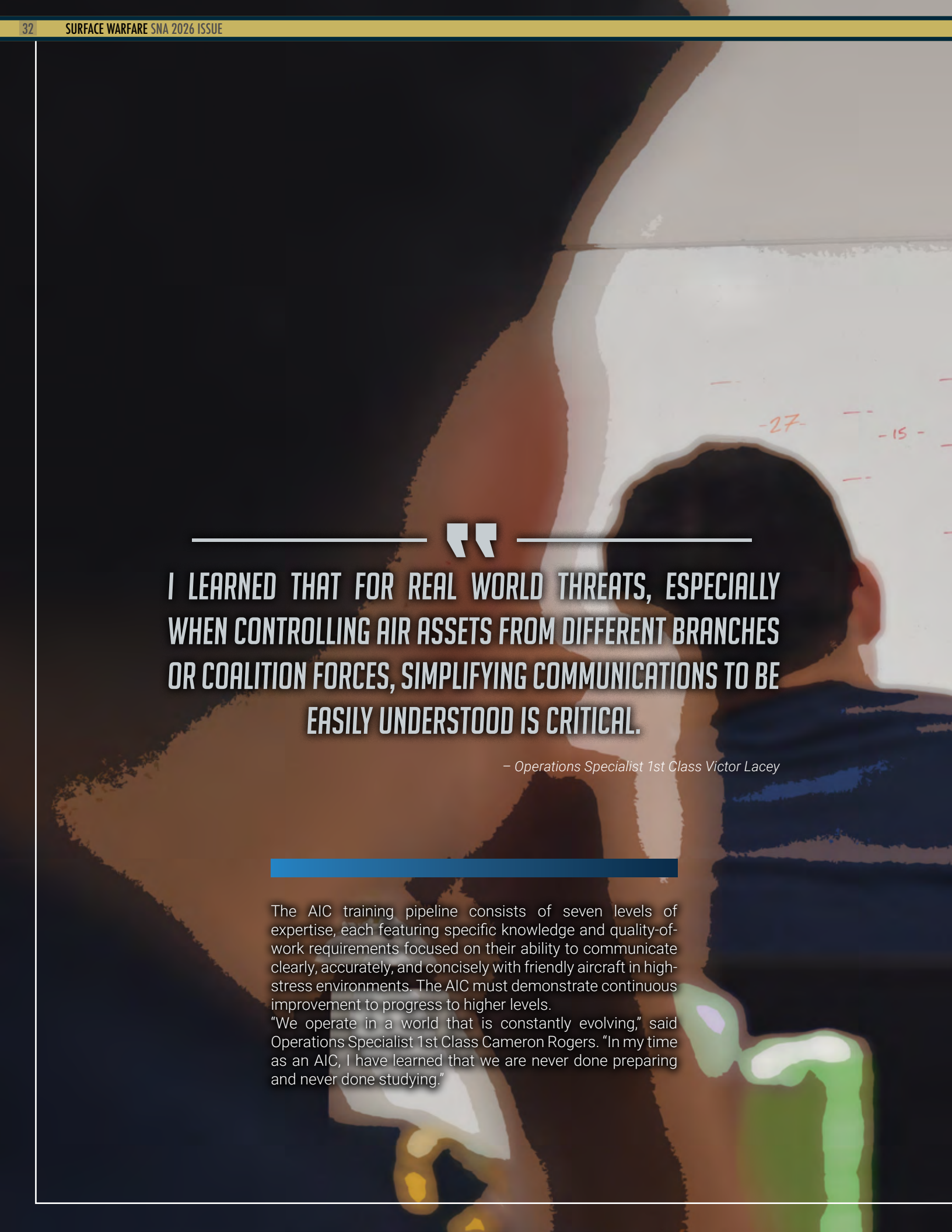
> THIS HAS CHANGED THE CULTURE OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE AN AIR CONTROLLER," SAID BYRNES. "WE'VE PROVIDED TECHNICAL EXPERTS TO THE FLEET AND ENHANCED OUR WARFIGHTING CAPABILITY.
>
> *– Senior Chief Operations Specialist James Byrnes*



In response to an increased demand for qualified and motivated AICs, Senior Chief Operations Specialist James Byrnes undertook the necessary steps to establish a detachment of enlisted operations specialists dedicated to developing more AICs and providing them with consistent, challenging training opportunities.

Over the ast year, this detachment has conducted more than 800 hours of training and "leveled-up" numerous AICs.

"This has changed the culture of what it means to be an air controller," said Byrnes. "We've provided technical experts to the fleet and enhanced our warfighting capability."

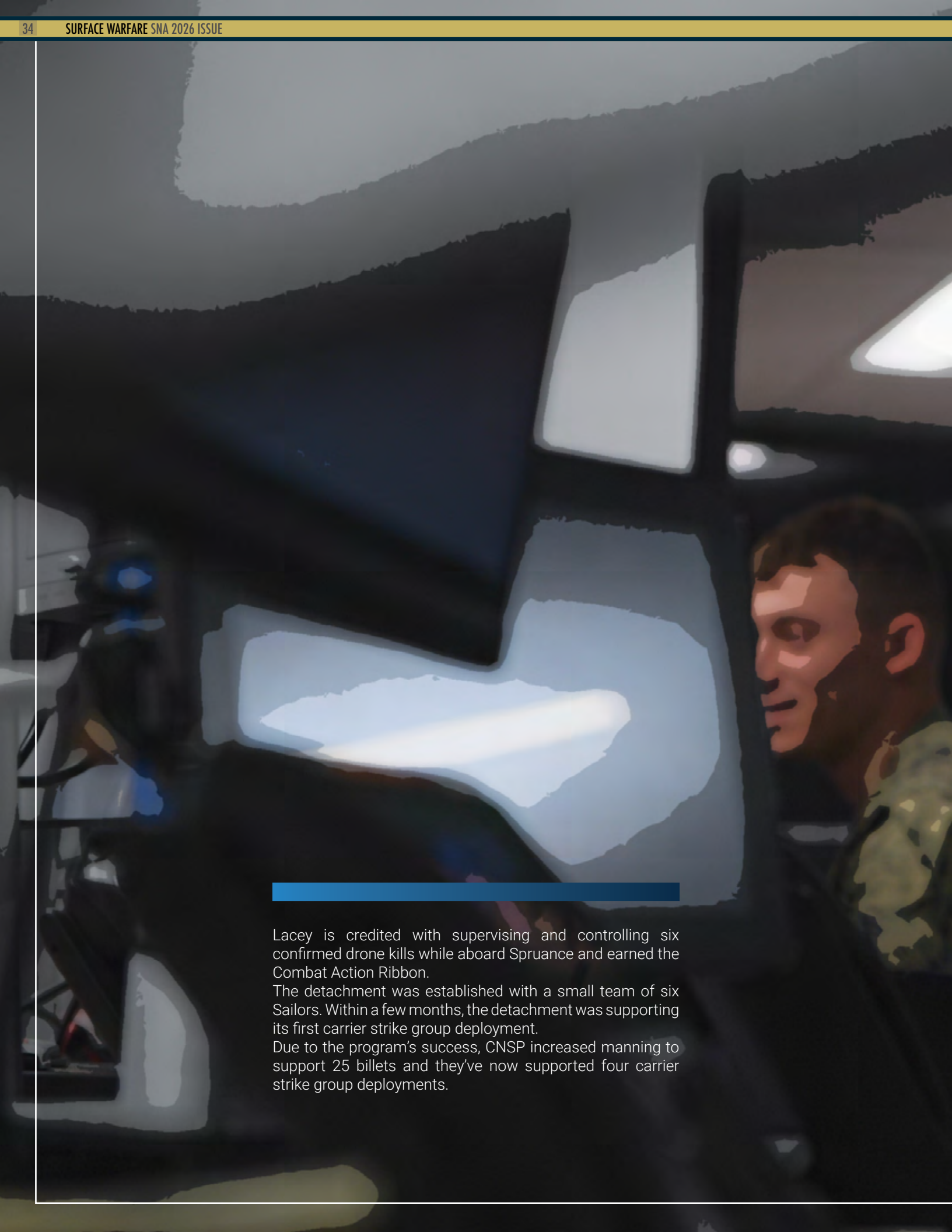


> I LEARNED THAT FOR REAL WORLD THREATS, ESPECIALLY WHEN CONTROLLING AIR ASSETS FROM DIFFERENT BRANCHES OR COALITION FORCES, SIMPLIFYING COMMUNICATIONS TO BE EASILY UNDERSTOOD IS CRITICAL.
>
> *– Operations Specialist 1st Class Victor Lacey*

The AIC training pipeline consists of seven levels of expertise, each featuring specific knowledge and quality-of-work requirements focused on their ability to communicate clearly, accurately, and concisely with friendly aircraft in high-stress environments. The AIC must demonstrate continuous improvement to progress to higher levels.

"We operate in a world that is constantly evolving," said Operations Specialist 1st Class Cameron Rogers. "In my time as an AIC, I have learned that we are never done preparing and never done studying."

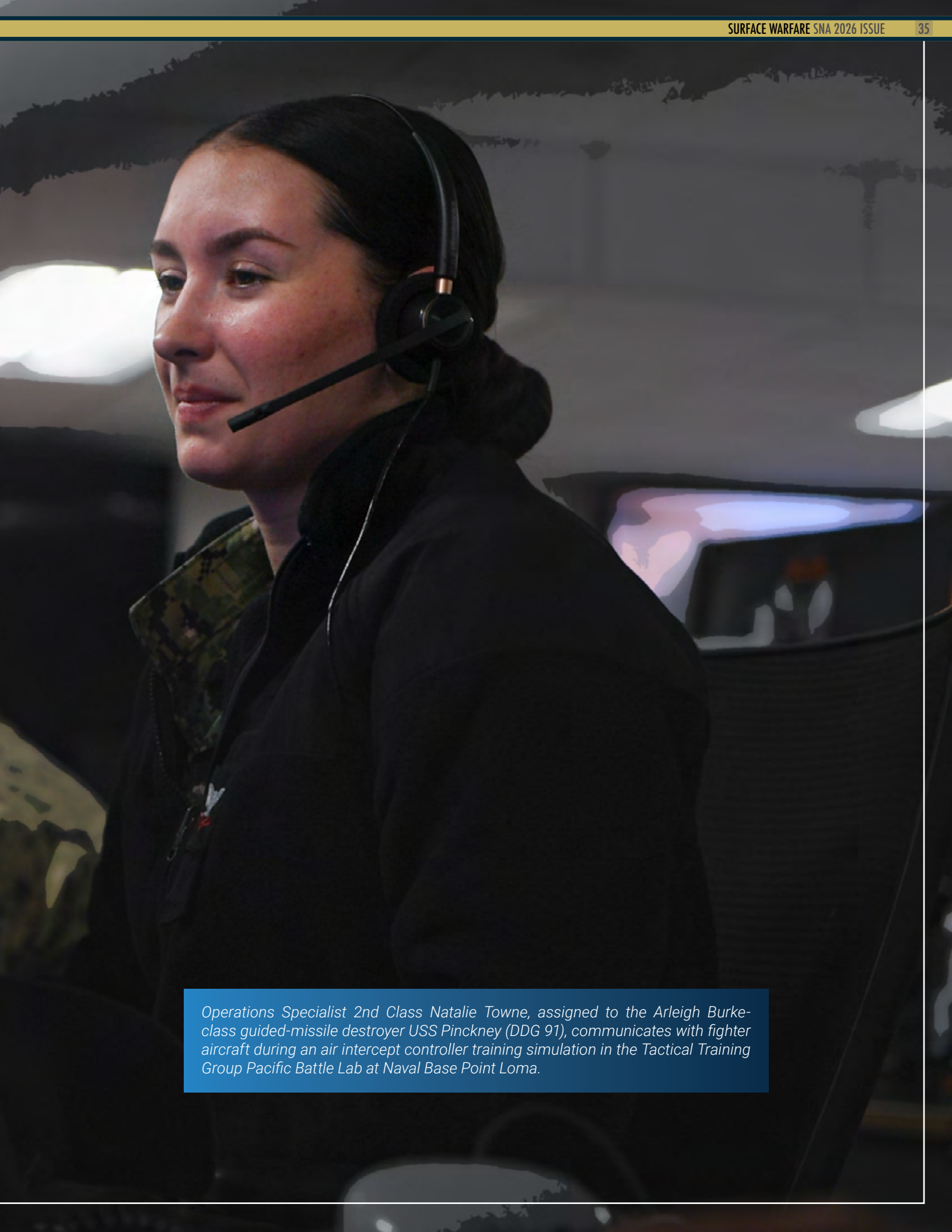
Operations Specialist 1st Class Cameron Rogers leads air intercept controller classroom training at Tactical Training Group Pacific at Naval Base Point Loma. Air intercept controllers deploy aboard various platforms to support carrier strike group operations around the globe and have played a key role in recent operations in the Red Sea.



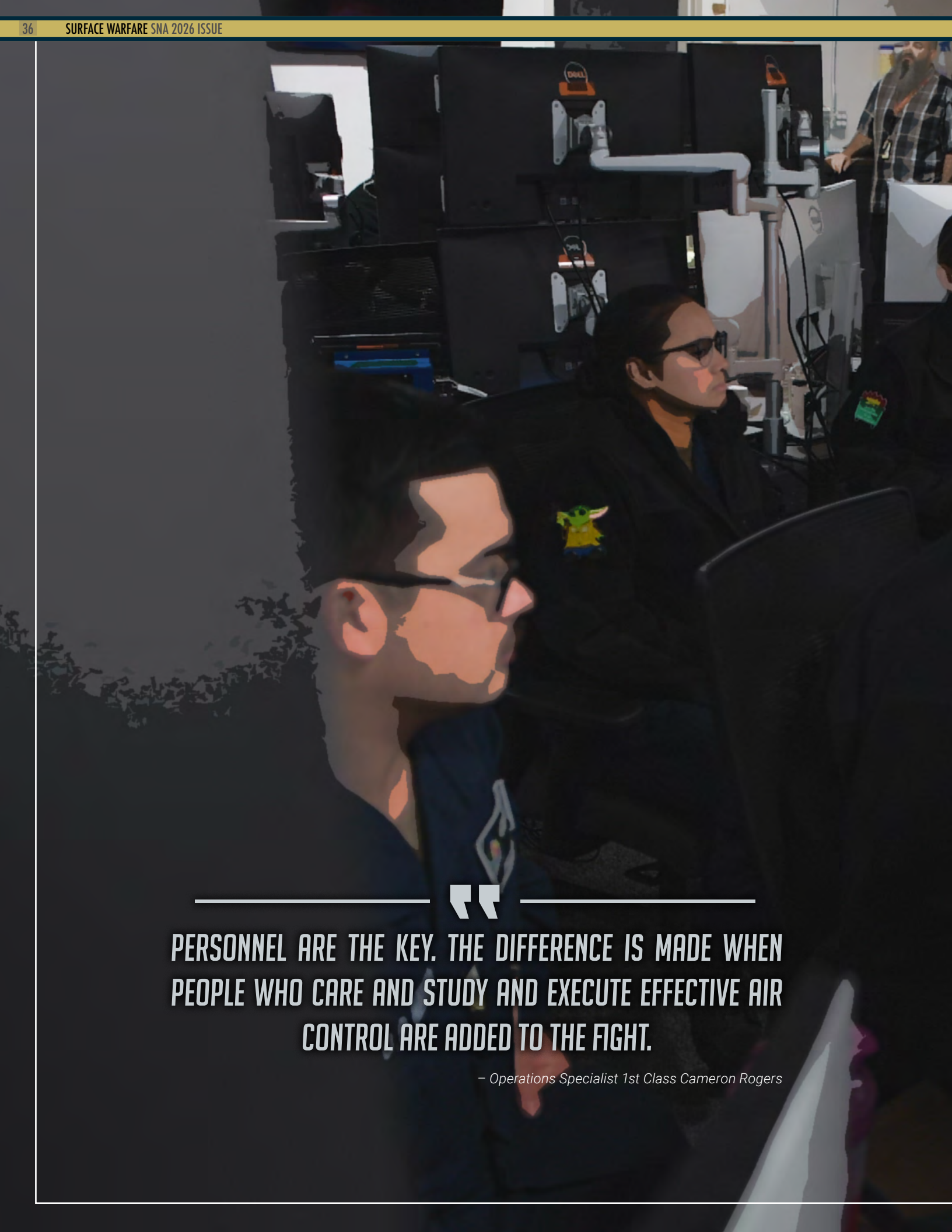
Lacey is credited with supervising and controlling six confirmed drone kills while aboard Spruance and earned the Combat Action Ribbon.

The detachment was established with a small team of six Sailors. Within a few months, the detachment was supporting its first carrier strike group deployment.

Due to the program's success, CNSP increased manning to support 25 billets and they've now supported four carrier strike group deployments.



Operations Specialist 2nd Class Natalie Towne, assigned to the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Pinckney (DDG 91), communicates with fighter aircraft during an air intercept controller training simulation in the Tactical Training Group Pacific Battle Lab at Naval Base Point Loma.



"PERSONNEL ARE THE KEY. THE DIFFERENCE IS MADE WHEN PEOPLE WHO CARE AND STUDY AND EXECUTE EFFECTIVE AIR CONTROL ARE ADDED TO THE FIGHT.

– Operations Specialist 1st Class Cameron Rogers

While manning challenges persist fleetwide, CNSP remains focused on placing highly trained and motivated AICs where they're needed most.

"Personnel are the key," said Rogers. "The difference is made when people who care and study and execute effective air control are added to the fight. A good air intercept controller is a force multiplier." ⚓

Navy's Flight III Destroyer Brings Significant Combatant Capabilities

Story by MC1 Sara Eshleman
Photos by MC1 Sara Eshleman and Mark D. Faram

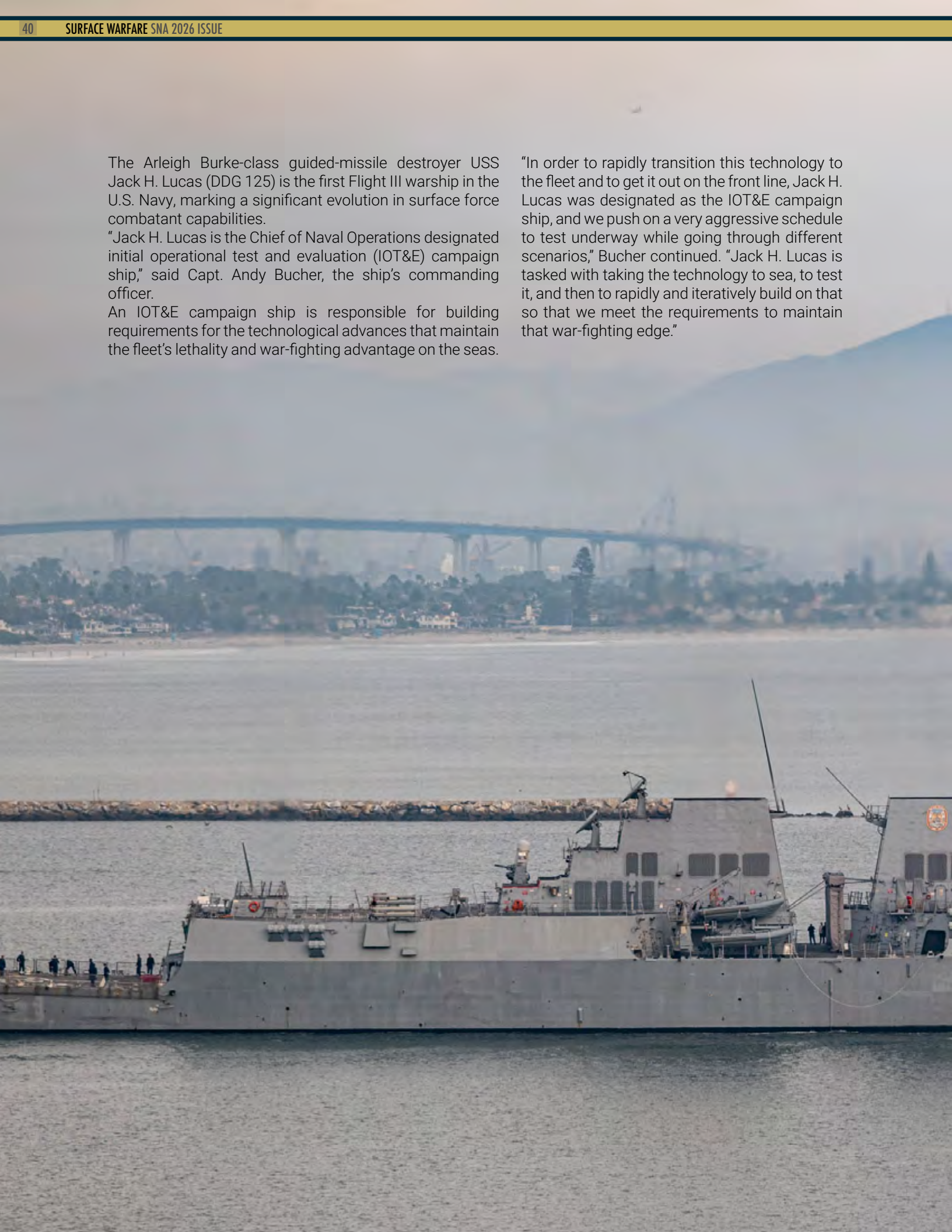

USS JACK H LUCAS
125
INDESTRUCTIBLE
DDG 125
125

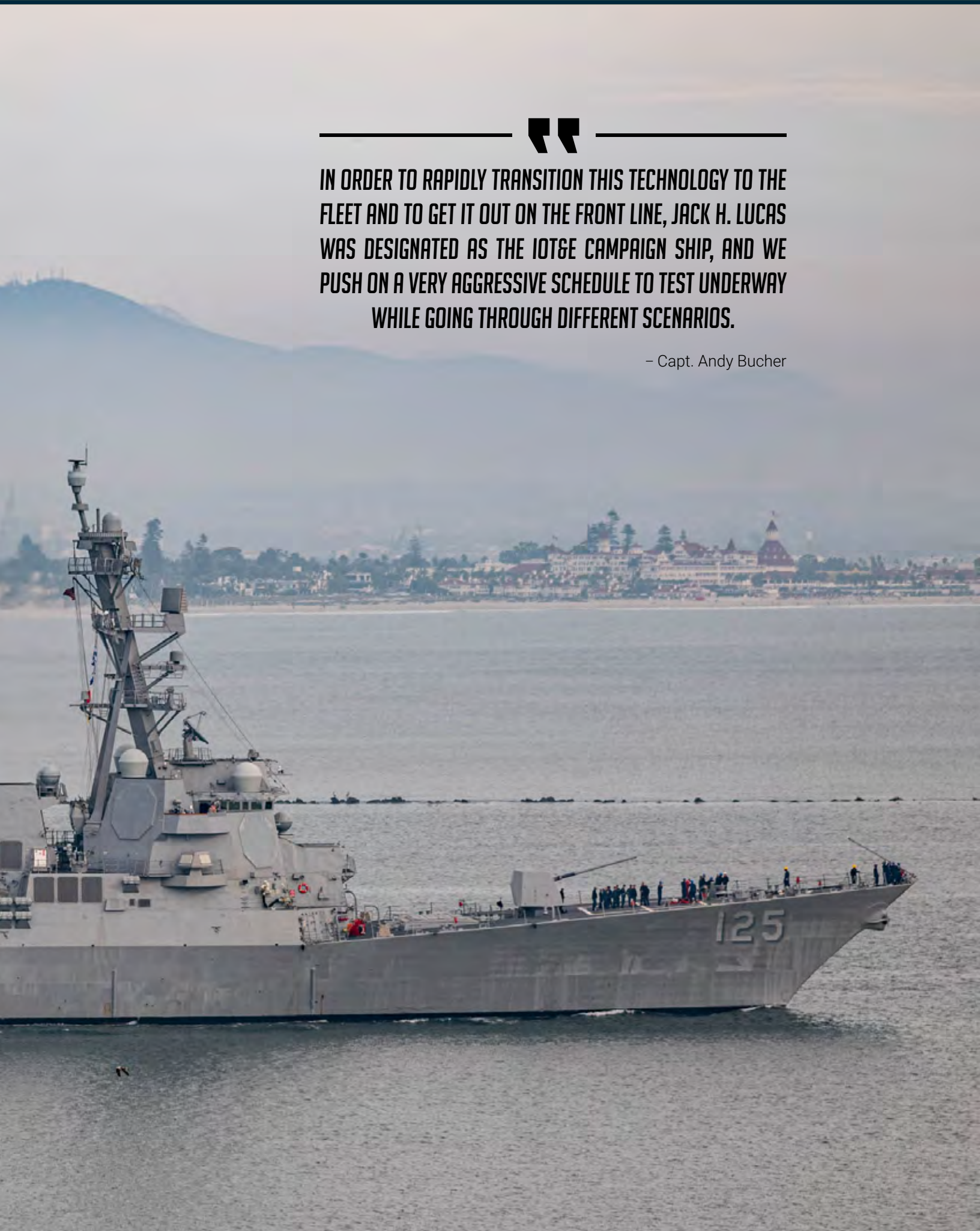
The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Jack H. Lucas (DDG 125) is the first Flight III warship in the U.S. Navy, marking a significant evolution in surface force combatant capabilities.

"Jack H. Lucas is the Chief of Naval Operations designated initial operational test and evaluation (IOT&E) campaign ship," said Capt. Andy Bucher, the ship's commanding officer.

An IOT&E campaign ship is responsible for building requirements for the technological advances that maintain the fleet's lethality and war-fighting advantage on the seas.

"In order to rapidly transition this technology to the fleet and to get it out on the front line, Jack H. Lucas was designated as the IOT&E campaign ship, and we push on a very aggressive schedule to test underway while going through different scenarios," Bucher continued. "Jack H. Lucas is tasked with taking the technology to sea, to test it, and then to rapidly and iteratively build on that so that we meet the requirements to maintain that war-fighting edge."





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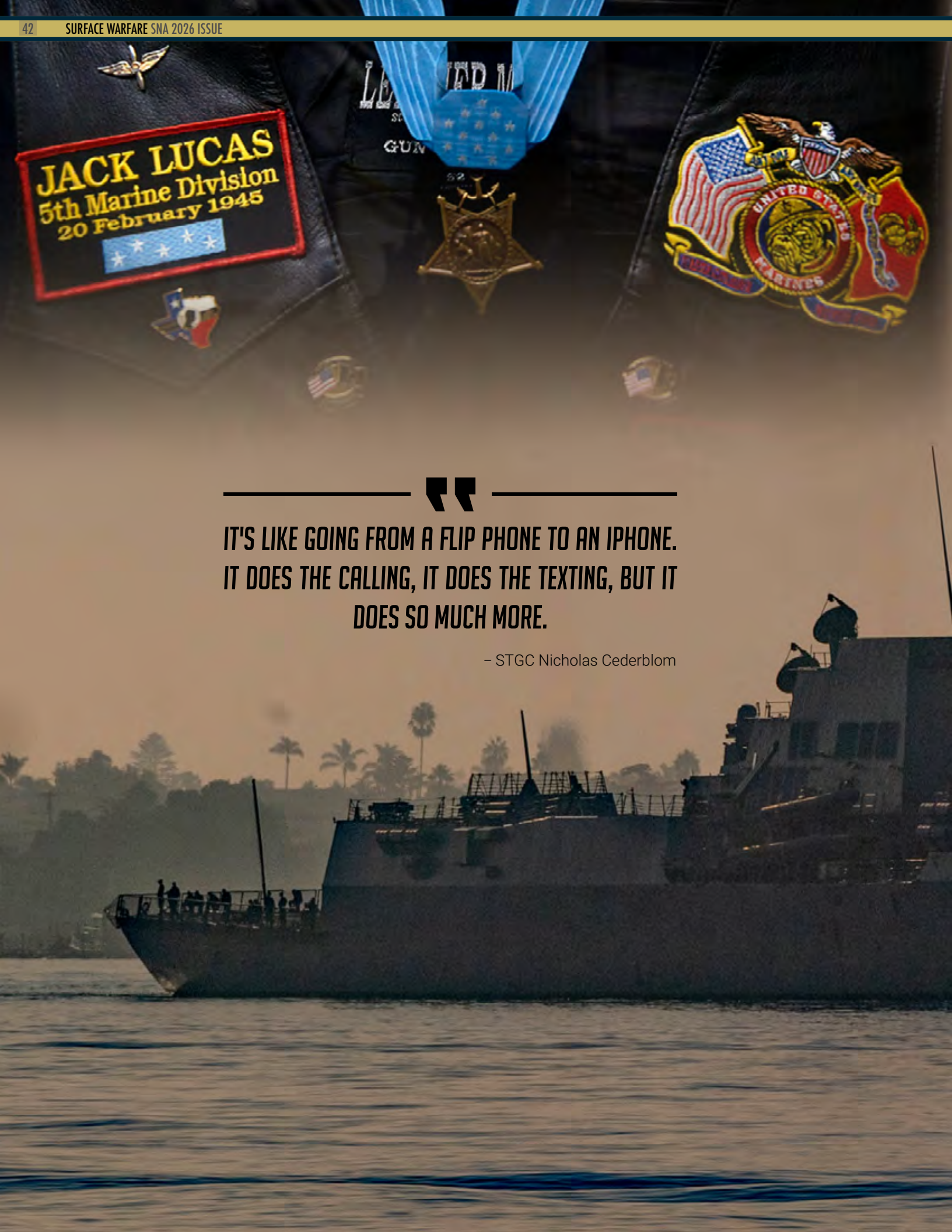


> IT'S LIKE GOING FROM A FLIP PHONE TO AN IPHONE. IT DOES THE CALLING, IT DOES THE TEXTING, BUT IT DOES SO MUCH MORE.
>
> – STGC Nicholas Cederblom

Commissioned in 2023, Jack H. Lucas introduces a suite of advanced technologies centered around the new AN/SPY-6(V)1 Air and Missile Defense Radar (AMDR) — the most powerful radar ever fielded on a U.S. Navy surface warship. Compared to the SPY-1D(V) array on earlier Arleigh Burke variants, the SPY-6 provides dramatically increased sensitivity, allowing the ship to detect, track, and discriminate smaller, faster, and more complex threats across longer ranges.

"It's like going from a flip phone to an iPhone," said Chief Sonar Technician (Surface) Nicholas Cederblom. "It does the calling, it does the texting, but it does so much more. And moving from that system into the advanced capabilities build, what we have right now, definitely is a lot more. No one else has done this."

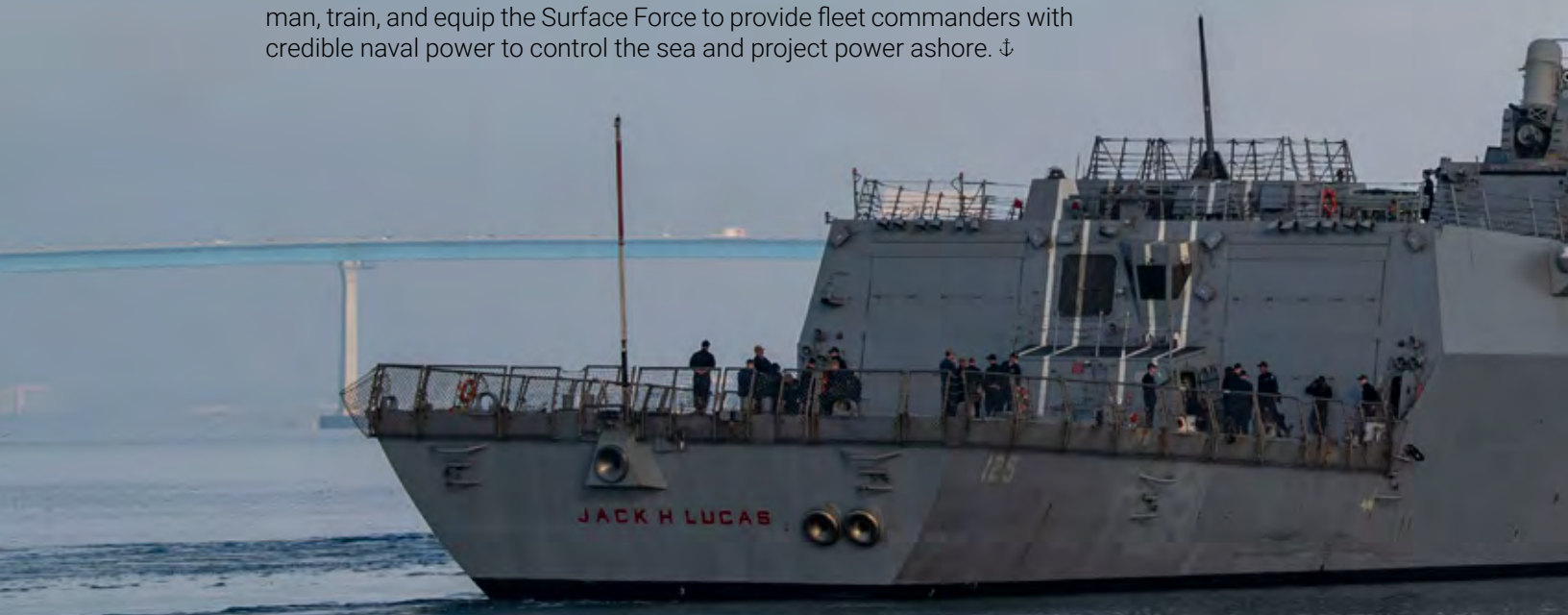
The Flight III configuration required substantial redesign of the destroyer's power and cooling systems. Jack H. Lucas incorporates an upgraded electrical plant, improved chilled-water capacity, and strengthened structural elements to accommodate the AMDR's power demands and higher displacement.

USS Jack H. Lucas looks like every other destroyer," continued Cederblom. "We have the same weapon systems outside, but it's the internal component, and it's the people itself that make it different. We are training the next generation to go forward with our new SPY-6, with our Baseline 10, with our engineering plants having to supply everybody on board the ship to get where we need to go."

Operationally, Jack H. Lucas retains the proven Aegis Combat System, here integrated as Baseline 10, enabling enhanced ballistic missile defense (BMD), integrated air and missile defense (IAMD), and improved reaction time against emerging hypersonic threats.

"To come here and see what this ship can do is truly impressive," said Bucher. "And it makes me proud as an American. And I hope that it makes the taxpayer proud that their capital investment is well spent. And then it is crewed by 300 citizens that are absolutely giving what they've got to make this platform, and this campaign and this class succeed. It is an engineering marvel. The things that this ship can do are truly impressive. I've been here about 18 months now and watching the technology evolve and watching it meet requirements - it's amazing. I would say that the capacity in the war-fighting capability that it brings are remarkable."

Jack H. Lucas commissioned on Oct. 7, 2023. The ship is named after Capt. Jacklyn Harold "Jack" Lucas, a U.S. Marine who became the youngest recipient of the Medal of Honor at age 17 during World War II. The mission of Commander, Naval Surface Force, Pacific Fleet is to man, train, and equip the Surface Force to provide fleet commanders with credible naval power to control the sea and project power ashore. ⚓



> TO COME HERE AND SEE WHAT THIS SHIP CAN DO IS TRULY IMPRESSIVE," SAID BUCHER. "AND IT MAKES ME PROUD AS AN AMERICAN.
>
> – Capt. Andy Bucher

Ready: Modern Sailor Training for a Modern Global Climate

Story by MC1 Claire M. Alfaro
Photos by Kelsey Danner


U.S. NAVY
COMBAT SYSTEMS TRAINING COMMAND GREAT LAKES
SEMPER PARATUS

It's 3:00 a.m. in the Red Sea. An Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer navigates steadily through the dark water. Inside the combat information center in the ship's heart, a team of enlisted and commissioned Sailors man their stations with calm, careful attention. An Operations Specialist Seaman sits at his console watching for radar contacts, ready to act if danger arises. Except, this isn't a destroyer, and this operations specialist is not in Fifth Fleet.

He is sitting in a Virtual Operator Trainer (VOT) at Surface Combat Systems Training Command (SCSTC) Great Lakes, home of operations specialist (OS) "A" school. The VOT is a simulated combat information center (CIC), and it's playing out a real-world-style scenario, allowing him to experience the sights, sounds, and timing of events as they could happen in the fleet. This is as close as it gets to being in a real CIC, and his actions could make or break the outcome of the scenario.

> I LEARNED A LOT ABOUT WHAT I WAS GOING TO BE DOING IN THE FLEET, IT WAS VERY HELPFUL ON WHAT TO EXPECT THROUGHOUT A DEPLOYMENT AND HOW TO USE THE EQUIPMENT.
>
> – OS2 Chance Clark

Welcome to the future of U.S. Navy training.

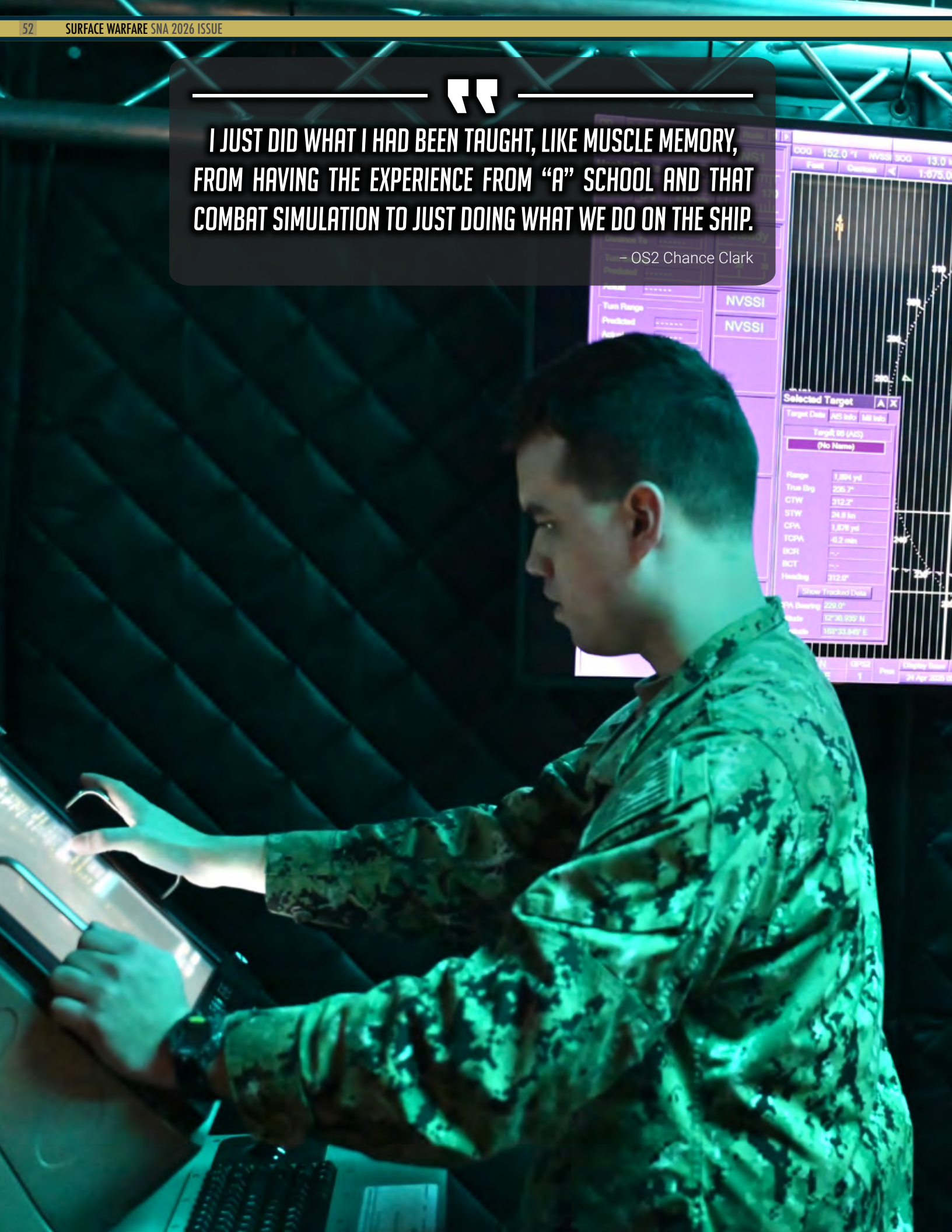
OS "A" school is one of the first schools to be officially modernized with a VOT and other updated curriculum and technology. With its modernization completed in 2022, the school has been sending trained, capable warfighters out into the fleet ready for a seamless transition into real operations thanks to Ready Relevant Learning (RRL).

RRL is a fleet-wide effort to modernize accession-level in-rating trainings, such as "A" and "C" schools, for many ratings across the spectrum. This means newer technology in classrooms, virtual reality training experiences with high-fidelity graphics, and immersive real-world scenarios to get new Sailors accustomed to their roles and responsibilities.

"I learned a lot about what I was going to be doing in the fleet," said Operations Specialist 2nd Class Chance Clark, a native of Westminster, Co., about "A" school. "It was very helpful on what to expect throughout a deployment and how to use the equipment."

Clark graduated "A" school in November 2022, just as the modernization effort received its finishing touches. After that, he reported as an Operations Specialist Seaman to the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Spruance (DDG 111), advancing to Operations Specialist 2nd Class by the time the ship deployed in 2024.

By September that year, Clark found himself standing Identification Supervisor (IDS) watch as the ship navigated the Red Sea. IDS monitors air contacts, including the seven drones and six missiles Spruance intercepted during its time in the region. One of those engagements was during Clark's watch.



> I JUST DID WHAT I HAD BEEN TAUGHT, LIKE MUSCLE MEMORY, FROM HAVING THE EXPERIENCE FROM "A" SCHOOL AND THAT COMBAT SIMULATION TO JUST DOING WHAT WE DO ON THE SHIP.
>
> – OS2 Chance Clark

"I just did what I had been taught, like muscle memory," said Clark. "From having the experience from "A" school and that combat simulation to just doing what we do on the ship, which is train, train, train, it was pretty cool just to know that even in a high-stress scenario, I knew exactly what to do, what buttons to push to execute [the mission] at a high level."

The vision for RRL is to take full advantage of existing and emerging technology for knowledge transfer and skill development, driving evolution in Sailor development and learning. This is meant to improve Sailor performance and enhance mission readiness by providing Sailors with the necessary knowledge and skills to compete and win across the spectrum of conflict.

According to Clark, that mission is working. He said that while the real-world experience can be frightening, his experience in the simulator gave him the confidence to know he was capable of doing what he had been taught.

The RRL program has been operational for several years as one of the three pillars of the Sailor 2025 initiative. It will continue until all impacted trainings have been successfully modernized.

Sailor 2025, which began in 2016, is the Navy's program to improve and modernize personnel management and training systems to more effectively recruit, develop, manage, reward, and retain the force of tomorrow. Its focus is on empowering Sailors, updating policies, procedures, and operating systems, and providing the right training at the right time in the right way to ensure Sailors are ready for the fleet.

Commander, Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet (CNSP), as the type commander, is responsible for the modernization of training for combat systems ratings such as OS "A" school. Other ratings in the CNSP purview include Fire Controlman, Aegis Fire Controlman, Gunner's Mate, and Interior Communications Electrician.

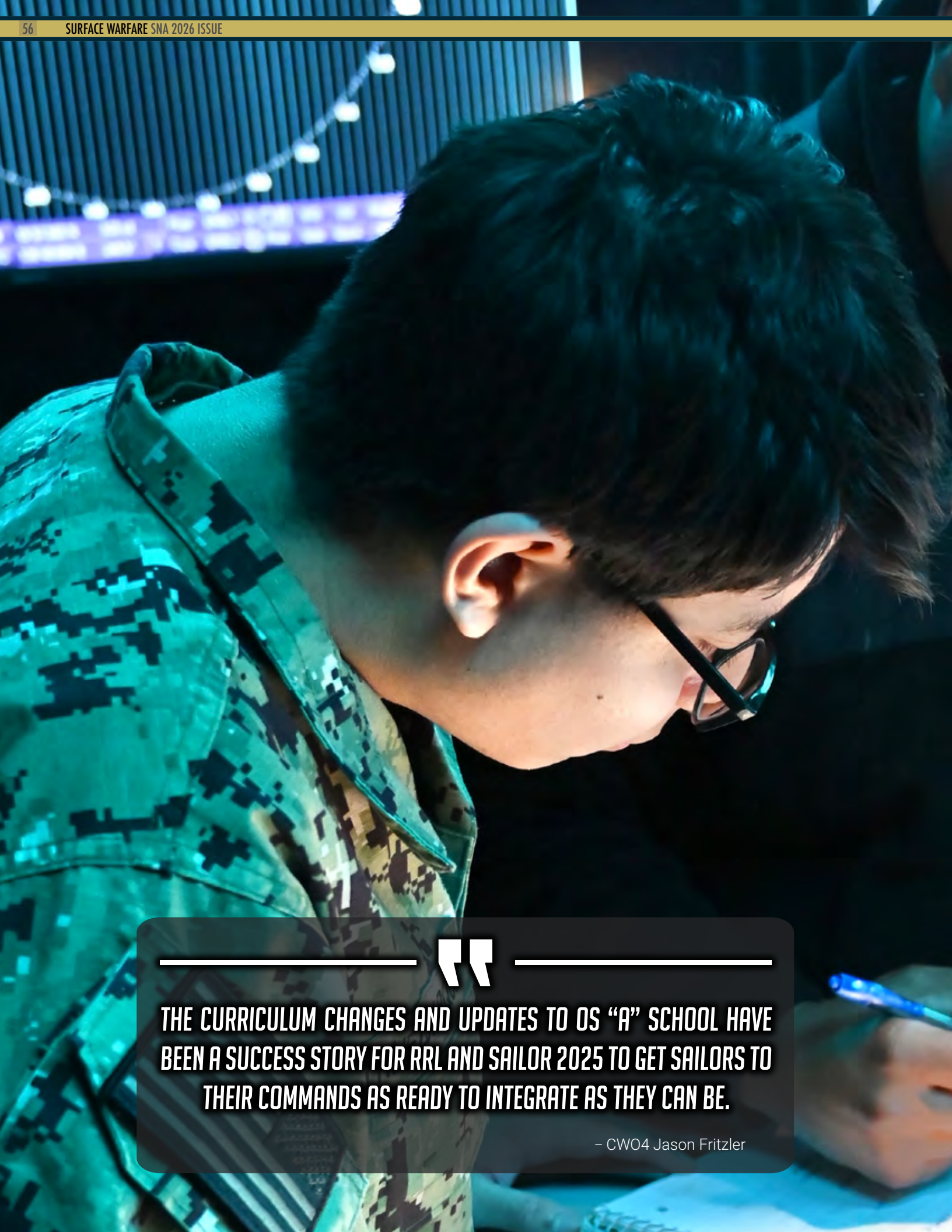
Chief Fire Controlman Rob Churilla is the Ready Relevant Learning Lead assigned to Commander, Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet. He believes faster and better maintenance in the fleet will be an indicator of RRL's success.

"These ratings are all very maintenance-oriented," said Churilla. "If you look at the learning objectives, it's all about maintenance. So generally, maintenance improvement would indicate improved training. Over the long term, I hope to see an increase in system availability."

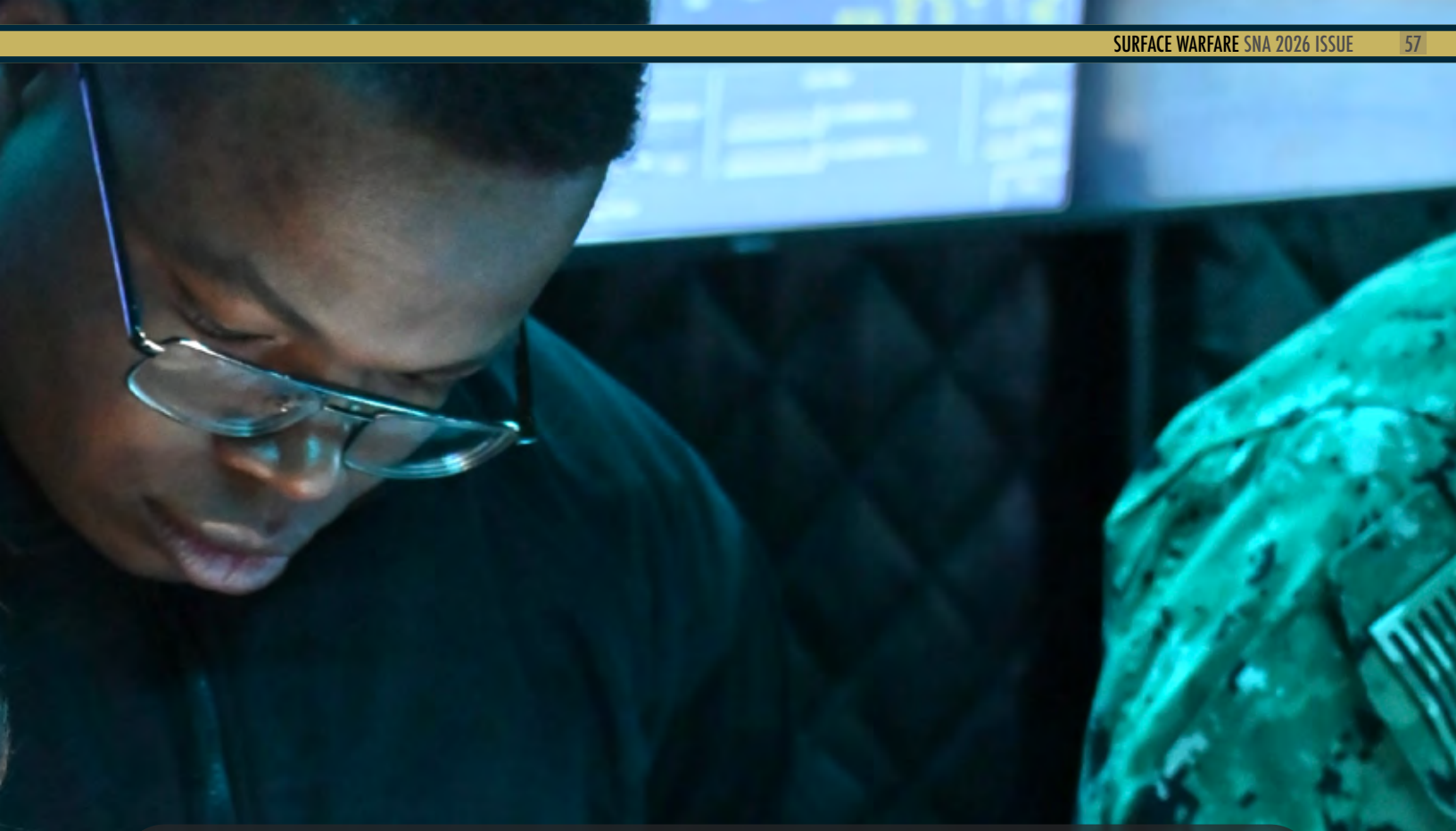
As RRL continues to spread through accession-level trainings, bringing modernized equipment and education methods, OS "A" school continues to be a shining example of what is to come.

Operations Specialist (OS) "A" school students man simulated Combat Information Center (CIC) watch stations in their capstone event. The students spend their final three days of OS "A" school in the Virtual Operating Trainer (VOT) that simulates the watch stations and scenarios the Sailors will encounter when they report to their first ship. Each student must pass the final scenario to graduate from "A" school.


U.S. NAVY



> THE CURRICULUM CHANGES AND UPDATES TO OS "A" SCHOOL HAVE BEEN A SUCCESS STORY FOR RRL AND SAILOR 2025 TO GET SAILORS TO THEIR COMMANDS AS READY TO INTEGRATE AS THEY CAN BE.
>
> – CWO4 Jason Fritzler



"The OS "A" School has fully leveraged Ready Relevant Learning in the curriculum and laboratory environments," said Chief Warrant Officer 4 Jason Fritzler, director of OS "A" school. "Our accession-level graduates learn the basics of the Combat Information Center (CIC) administration, rules of the road, and contact management in an electronic classroom setting; certify as a Voyage Management System Operator; and as a capstone event, they engage in a realistic CIC laboratory setting in our VOT. We have incorporated real-world open-source Red Sea CIC operations into the VOT and progress to General Quarters to ensure our students know what to expect when they get to their ships out in the Fleet."

RRL directly contributes to the surface force Competitive Edge 2.0 number one line of effort, which is to develop the leader, warrior, mariner, and manager. Investing in Sailor development at the beginning of their career and giving warfighters the tools to succeed in the fleet is exactly the development of warriors and mariners that the surface force requires. Not only that, but these Sailors will be set up for success in the fleet so they can go on to become well-developed leaders. "Overall," said Fritzler, "the curriculum changes and updates to OS "A" school have been a success story for RRL and Sailor 2025 to get Sailors to their commands as ready to integrate as they can be."

Back in the Red Sea, this time for real, it's September 2024 and Spruance is on the move. Clark is manning his IDS station. It is his first real deployment, but he knows the system like the back of his hand. Clark will go on to execute his duties exactly as he was trained, and Spruance will return to San Diego with a combat action ribbon and a proud crew. Clark's experience, along with many others, are testament that a modernized surface force is a capable surface force. RRL is in full swing updating schools across the fleet, helping to produce trained, capable warfighters who are ready to fight and win at sea. ⚓

Surface Force Delivers Leadership Coaching Program

Story by MC1 Claire M. Alfaro

What it is

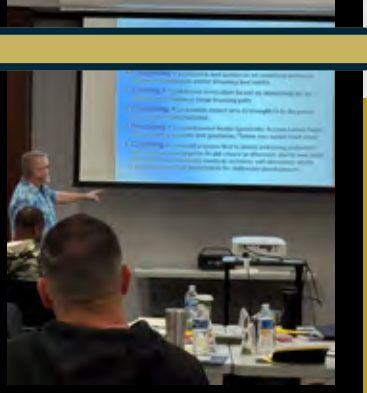
Everyone has a different theory about what it means to be a good leader. Some leaders will say it is a natural ability, others believe it can be learned. Still others might say leadership is all about setting a good example. Whatever your perspective, one thing seems undeniably true: Good leaders build more leaders. Leadership means helping others become good leaders after you, wanting to set them up to succeed because you know that you must at some point pass on the mantle.

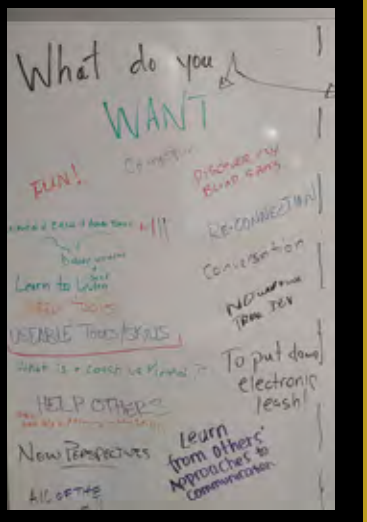
Today, this idea is being applied to surface warfare in a first-of-its-kind Surface Force Leadership Coaching Program.

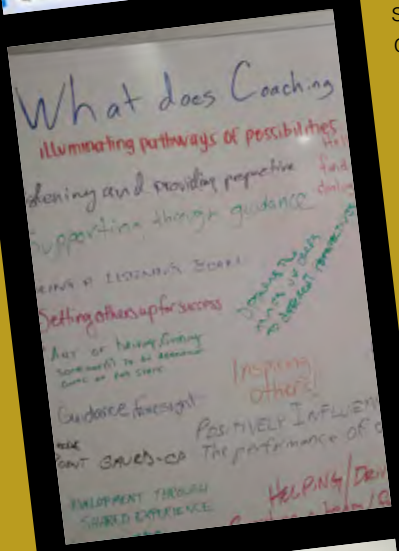
Officially established in December 2024, the program exists to train senior leaders, comprised of post-command surface warfare officers (SWOs) and command master chiefs (CMCs), in coaching techniques to then provide coaching services to afloat command triads. These coaching services are provided on an individual and collective basis to the command's top leaders – commanding officer, executive officer, and command master chief.

"COACHING IS NOT ABOUT SOLVING TRIAD MEMBERS' PROBLEMS FOR THEM OR GIVING THEM ADVICE, IT IS A TOOL TO HELP THEM TALK THROUGH THEIR ISSUES AND AID THEM IN CREATING A SOLUTION TO THEIR PROBLEM.

– CMDCM Jorrel "Jay" Reich







How it started

Capt. Jason Motes, deputy director, force improvement office at Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet (CNSP), built the program from scratch so that experienced surface warfare leaders can learn and apply coaching principles in an official capacity by coaching fleet triads.

As a Navy Reservist, Motes came to CNSP in 2024 with this mission in mind. He immediately began brainstorming how to deliver coaching to surface warfare.

"We really had three options," said Motes. "We can hire coaches – there's a plethora of qualified coaches to come in and coach. We could tap into MyNavy coaching [a non-accredited program through MyNavy HR], which is more of an organizational resource from the Navy's perspective. Or we could grow our own right here at naval surface forces."

Motes explained that the most attractive option was developing new coaches from a pool of experienced-at-sea commanding officers and CMCs because they understand what current triads are experiencing.

"At that point, all we really had to do was train them on how to coach," said Motes.

The first cohort of 36 Sailors began their training in March and are now implementing their training through coaching sessions with San Diego-based triads in basic, maintenance, and sustainment phases of readiness.

Command Master Chief (CMDCM) Elias Robles III, senior enlisted leader at Afloat Training Group Pacific, was part of the first cohort to go through the training. He said he was curious but skeptical about the program until it began.

"I quickly became a believer who wholeheartedly advocates for the program," said Robles. "I use it all the time now and I have noticed a difference in my daily interactions."

CMDCM Tarius Williams Avery, senior enlisted leader aboard the San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ship USS Green Bay (LPD 20), also participated in the first cohort.

"I think the program is absolutely awesome, inspiring, and motivating," said Williams Avery. "It has given me new perspectives and tools that keep me focused on my own goals. I truly feel encouraged and supported to grow both personally and as part of the team."

Future coaches go through three separate weeks of training. These weeks focus on fundamentals of coaching, advanced topics in coaching, and team-based coaching. After the training, they practice what they have learned by pairing with a triad and providing periodic coaching sessions.

CMDCM Jorrel "Jay" Reich, senior enlisted leader aboard the Wasp-class amphibious assault ship USS Makin Island (LHD 8), another coach from the first cohort, explained the goal of coaching.

"Coaching is not about solving triad members' problems for them or giving them advice, it is a tool to help them talk through their issues and aid them in creating a solution to their problem," said Reich. "Essentially, we as coaches coach them in finding their own "win" to a situation."

The program uses an accredited curriculum taught by U.S. Air Force Air University professors and credentialed Surface Force staff members. The course includes 90 hours of accredited coaching training, providing participants with accreditation on completion and qualifying them to sit for board certification and earn the Board Certified Coach credential.

How it works

There are four phases to the leadership coaching program: selection, training, execution, and assessment. This format is designed to familiarize participants with coaching principles and equip them with the skills to be leaders who coach other leaders.

In phase one, future coaches are selected for the program based on volunteers. Post-command SWOs and post-first-tour CMCs are eligible to volunteer, and SWOs and junior CMCs are considered on a case-by-case basis.

Capt. Keith Fernandez, readiness operations center director at CNSP, said Motes asked him personally to join the first cohort and become a coach. He agreed immediately and was amazed by the training.

"It's pretty awesome," said Fernandez. "We're giving back to the Surface Warfare community. We're giving back to these triads that are just day in and day out getting inundated with all the stressors of being in command. That's my motivation, just to make sure that these folks are doing the best they can for their Sailors."

In phase two, coaches complete three weeks of training both in-person and virtually and they practice coaching skillsets in small groups.

"After learning how to coach someone, I realized how beneficial it could be," said Reich. "To me, it is a new form of leadership development that can be used long-term and assist our leaders in becoming a better version of themselves for their people and their commands."

Fernandez also said he learned the benefits of coaching during the training phase.

"It's another tool in the toolbox for leaders to utilize to get to where they want to be," Fernandez said. "It's not mentoring, it's not counseling, it's not therapy, it's really maximizing your potential. You already have a whole lot of potential, but if I could do some things and have conversations and guide you down a path or two to get you to maximize opportunities, that's an amazing thing."

In phase three, coaches are matched with a triad and give three to six hours of one-on-one coaching to each triad member along with group coaching to the triad collectively.

"The team-based coaching is exceptionally dynamic," said Motes. "It's the first time the triad can come together and say, 'Oh, wow, I didn't realize that something like that was on your mind.'"

Motes explained that the coach gets to facilitate that process for all three triad members and they get to learn from each other.

"The best way to describe it is the coach sets the structure, the client sets the agenda," Motes explained. "It's their problem, it's their challenge, it's their set of goals, and it's their support. It's their set of answers. We as coaches believe that the client already has the answers. We just help them get there."

> **"IT'S ANOTHER TOOL IN THE TOOLBOX FOR LEADERS TO UTILIZE TO GET TO WHERE THEY WANT TO BE. IT'S NOT MENTORING, IT'S NOT COUNSELING, IT'S NOT THERAPY, IT'S REALLY MAXIMIZING YOUR POTENTIAL.**
>
> – Capt. Keith Fernandez

Fernandez saw his individual coaching sessions as something new and different than past experiences.

"If I'm going to mentor you, I'm probably talking more than half the time," Fernandez explained. "Coaching is just a lot of actively listening, picking up on things, picking up on insights they might have when they are talking … when you present the framework that, 'hey, I'm here to bring out the best of you. I'm here to maximize your potential,' it's a different conversation."

Robles also reflected on the coaching he has done in phase three.

"In my opinion it is better than mentorship," said Robles. "Coaches are outside immediate chain of command, possess competency and experience in your field, and are equipped to challenge perceived barriers to goals."

There are five core pillars the coaches focus on in their sessions with triad members: warfighter readiness, safety, unit performance, command culture, and personal leadership.

According to Motes, triad members can bring almost any topic to a coaching session and receive support working through it under one of these five pillars.

"I think command climate is one of the most important ones," said Fernandez. "If you have the right climate, you can do anything."

Finally, in phase four, assessments are done to evaluate the coaching relationship and the growth of the triad on both a qualitative and quantitative basis. This phase takes lessons learned back to the program leaders to improve future iterations and training continuums.

Motes described the outcomes he would like to see from the program in a few different areas.

"From a triad perspective, more open communication and collaboration and more vulnerability drives trust," said Motes. "From a pillar perspective, we expect to see if we focus on safety in the coaching sessions – again, we don't force them to choose safety – but we should see growth in safety initiatives. We should see growth in warfighter readiness metrics. We should see growth in unit readiness metrics."

He also emphasized that what he expects to see anecdotally is a growth in confidence and a growth in trust.

Joining the program

Coaches who complete the training are expected to go on to serve as a leadership coach to an assigned afloat triad for at least three months. During this time, they will conduct at least six one-on-one coaching sessions with each member of the triad and at least three group sessions with the triad.

Motes spoke about this vision and mission for leadership coaching with passion.

"We want all of our triads to have access to a coach, internal to this [type command] that has no conflict of interest, that's not going to violate confidentiality," he said.

All coaching sessions can be done either in-person or virtually. During and after the coaching period, coaches will also complete qualitative and quantitative surveys to assess the experience and its outcomes. Coaches from the first cohort have given glowing reviews.

"As a CMC, I want leaders who are critical thinkers, self-sufficient, intent based, and remove barriers to success - coaching facilitates this," said Robles. "Coaching helps draw from talent people currently have. With learned coaching techniques, our triads can help facilitate greater success throughout their crew."

"The word is spreading that we have these certified coaches now and I've been contacted by senior leaders in certain fleet staffs asking if I could engage with some of their senior leaders and coach them." Said Motes. "It's like we have our own mini pool of coach leaders that can really cater to the needs of the [type command]. Again, no one else is doing this. We're way ahead of our time."

As a first-of-its-kind program, the leadership coaching program will continue selecting and training new coaches for the foreseeable future. The next cohort will be convened on the East coast in October, and another will occur on the West coast in the spring. Those who are interested in volunteering for future training sessions are invited to reach out to Capt. Motes directly.

"I want any SWO out there that has an interest in giving back and learning the tenets of coaching to participate in our program," said Motes.

Robles added, "we have very intelligent and resourceful Sailors in our fleet. I want to see more of our leaders pave a path for Sailors to fully realize and maximize their potential."

Triad members looking for opportunities to be coached are also invited to contact Capt. Motes.

"Hey, triads, if you want to take your game to the next level, if you want to be the very best triad and win for all the right reasons, try coaching," he said.

Fernandez also emphasized the importance of coaching as a new and different tool for triad members.

"We're used to being mentored and advised and counseled. We're not used to being coached. So just be open to it," Fernandez said.

"It works," said Robles. "Buy in early, trust the process, and watch the program pay dividends!" ⚓

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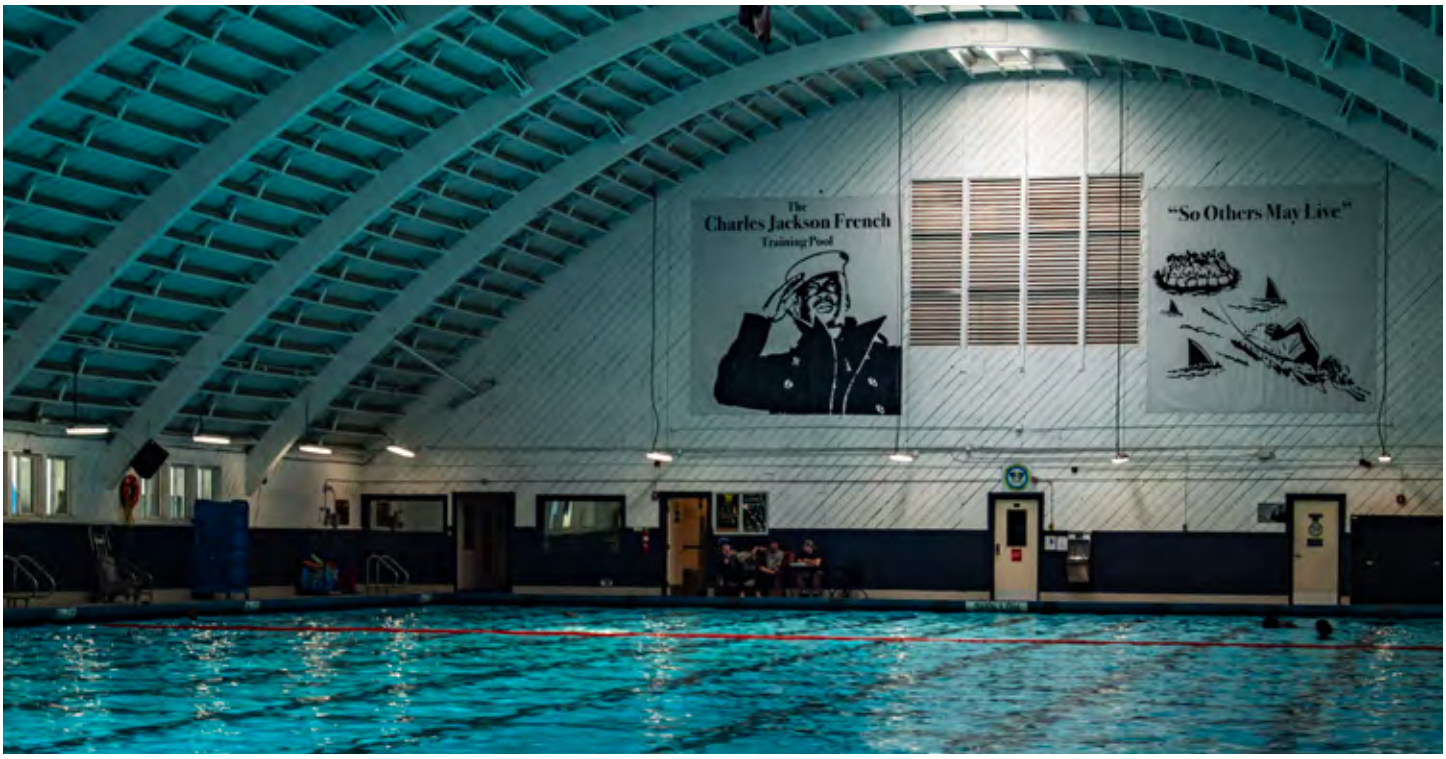
>
> – CMDCM Elias Robles III

ATLANTIC OCEAN (Oct. 5, 2025) – Three Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyers fire standard missile 2 (SM2) during the Titans of the Sea Presidential Review. The Titans of the Sea Presidential Review is one of many events taking place throughout the country to showcase maritime capabilities as part of the U.S Navy's 250th birthday. America is a maritime nation. For 250 years, America's Warfighting Navy has sailed the globe in defense of freedom. (U.S. Navy photo by MCSN Kaitlyn Bailey)

Dive into the Reserves

Story and photos by Lt. Julian Jacobs

Surface Search and Rescue Swimmers assigned to the Command Naval Surface Forces Reserve component to Sea practice critical search and rescue skills at the Charles Jackson French pool on Naval Base San Diego. By perfecting skills in the pool, swimmers can have the confidence and skill to execute life-saving maneuvers at sea.



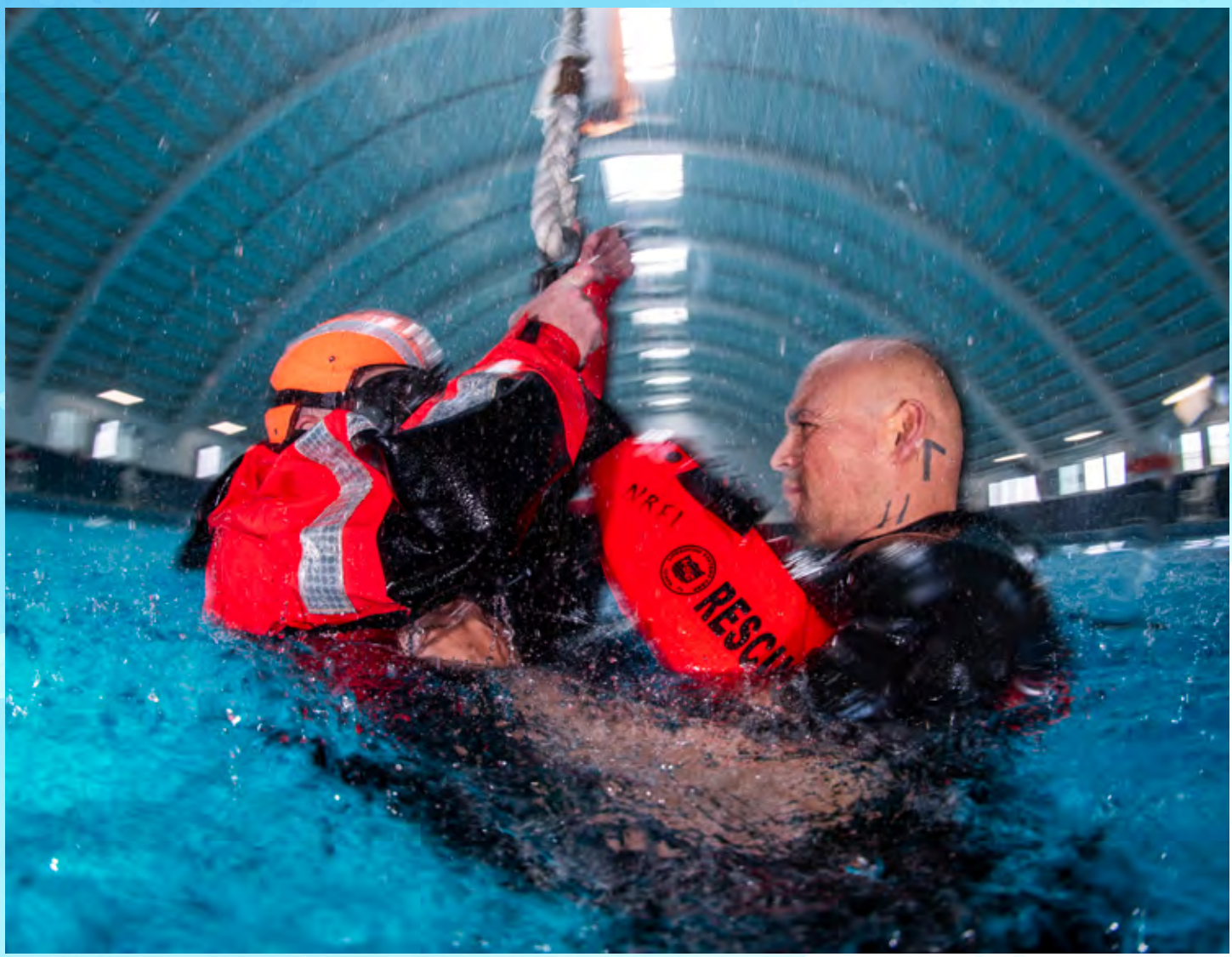
Diving into the Reserves: Reserve to Sea Surface Search and Rescue (SSAR) Swimmers prepare to help ships reach 80% surge ready goals.

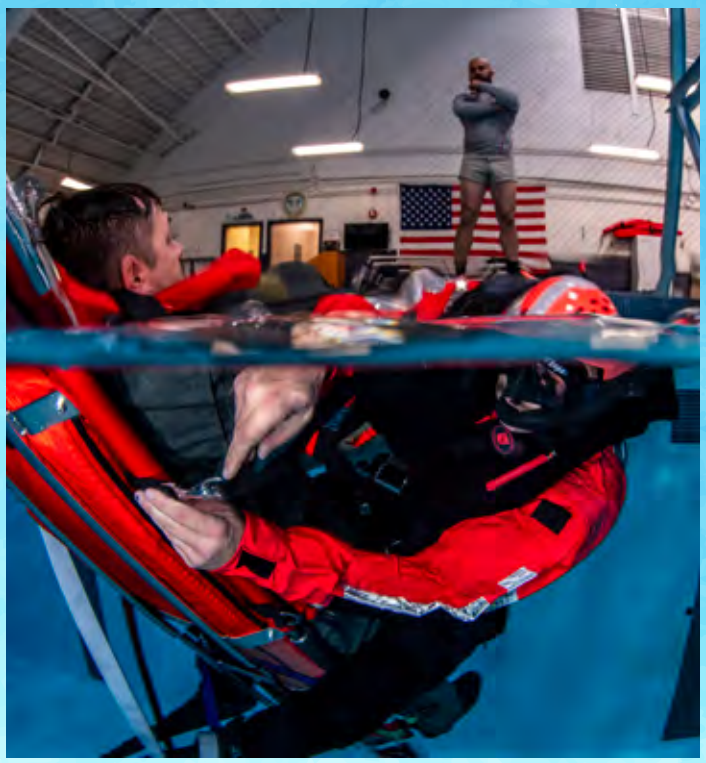
Fins slice through cold water. Above the surface, an orange drysuit moves toward a swimmer in distress. Below, expert hands prepare to save a life. A week ago, this Surface Search and Rescue (SSAR) Swimmer was living his civilian life.

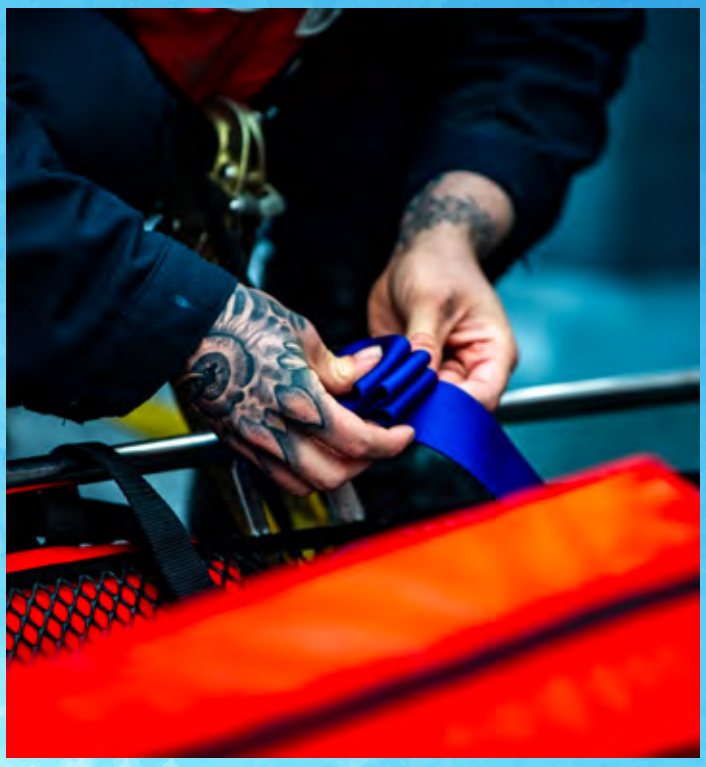
SSAR Swimmers are essential to surface operations. As the last line of defense, they help rescue, recover, and resuscitate Sailors who have fallen outside of a ship's lifelines. A SSAR swimmer's critical role makes them a prerequisite "redline," a requirement for every surface vessel to get underway and stay underway. To meet redline standards, each ship always needs two SSAR swimmers onboard.

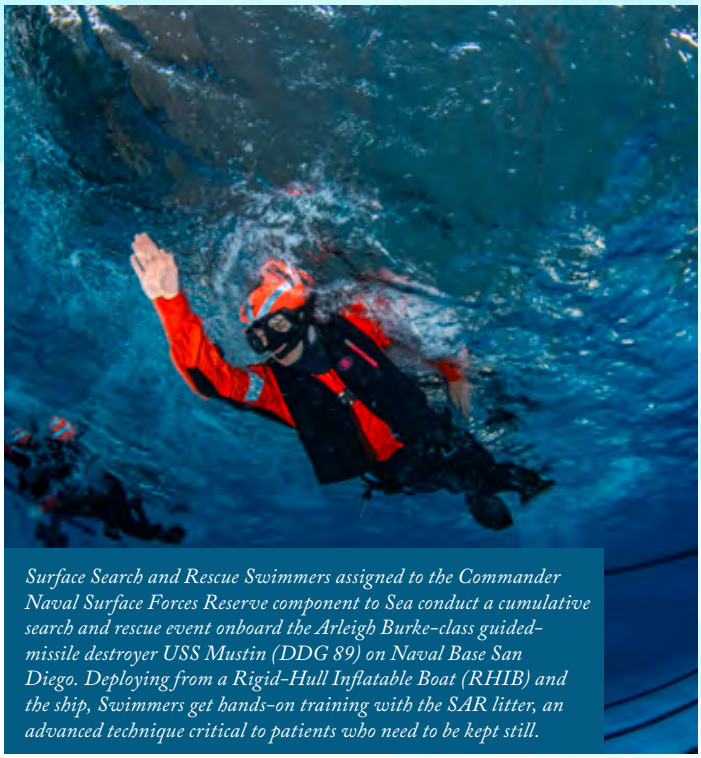
As the Surface Force looks to expand to 80% combat surge ready by 2027, the force will need more SSAR swimmers, ready to take on more time at sea, to provide flexibility to the fleet. How does the fleet supply this demand? Through Reserve Component to Sea (RCS) SSAR swimmers.

The RCS program sends Navy Reserve Sailors to sea, filling critical manning gaps. As qualified SSAR swimmers end their time on active duty, this program allows them to maintain critical qualifications, a civilian lifestyle, and execute SSAR missions when called upon.



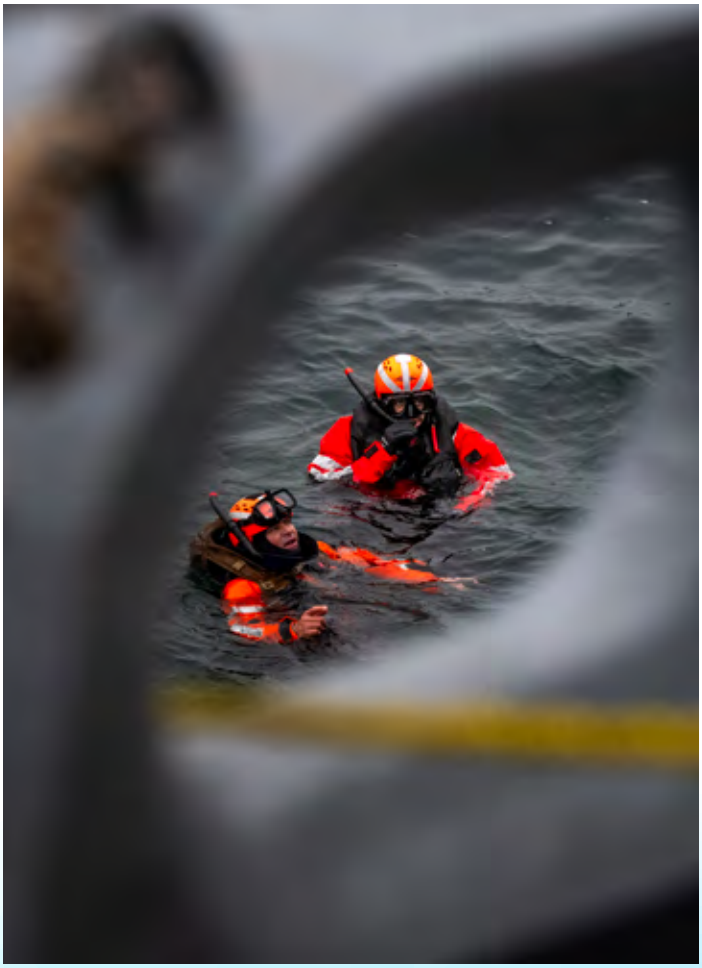


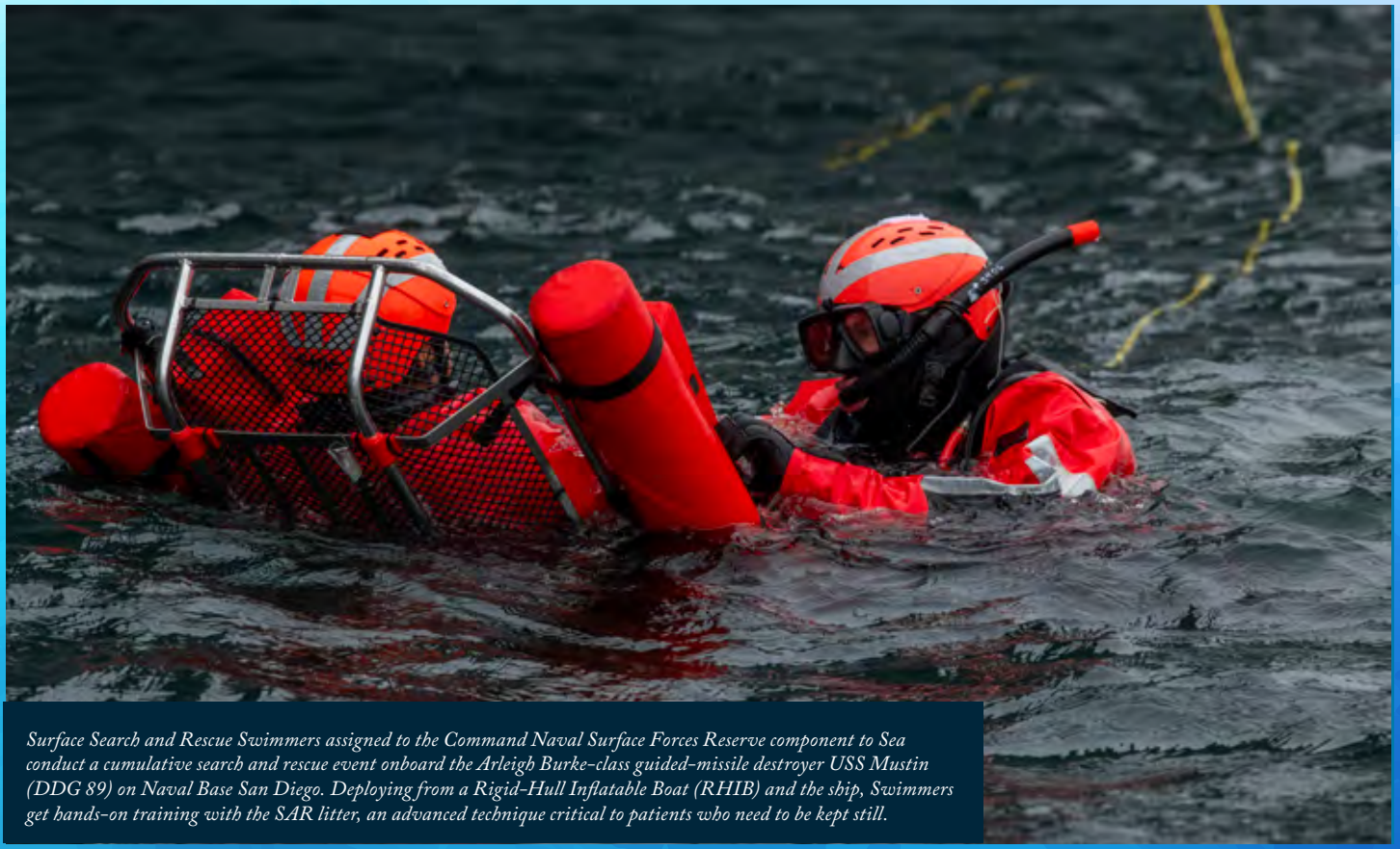




Surface Search and Rescue Swimmers assigned to the Commander Naval Surface Forces Reserve component to Sea conduct a cumulative search and rescue event onboard the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Mustin (DDG 89) on Naval Base San Diego. Deploying from a Rigid-Hull Inflatable Boat (RHIB) and the ship, Swimmers get hands-on training with the SAR litter, an advanced technique critical to patients who need to be kept still.

Swimmers like Gunner's Mate Second Class Robert Case enjoy that flexibility. Case was hesitant coming into the reserves, but he credits his tenure as "the most fun" he's had in the Navy. As a full-time student at the University of Auburn, studying Wildlife Enterprise Management, Case believes that "the reserves are what you make of it," with extended service setting Sailors up professionally and financially. Case notes that the things he did on active duty gave him a resume "leagues above" the other students in his class, and before entering the civilian workforce, he viewed his service as a SSAR swimmer as a unique advantage when showing potential employers his work ethic and dedication. When not on active support orders, reserve swimmers come together quarterly to participate in a "SAR-a-Palooza," affectionately named by Boatswain's Mate Senior Chief Gregori Bianchini, the head of the program. During the week, RCS swimmers practice critical skills, maintain certifications, participate in group physical training, and bond as a unit. This event is intensive and cumulative. The beginning of the week starts in the pool, where the swimmers warm up with long-distance swims, buddy drags, and mask skills, then moves into advanced maneuvers like litter setup (a technique designed to keep the spine still during transport) and strop recovery (a horseshoe like floatation device). These skills, practiced in the pool are put to the test pier-side in the week's final event.



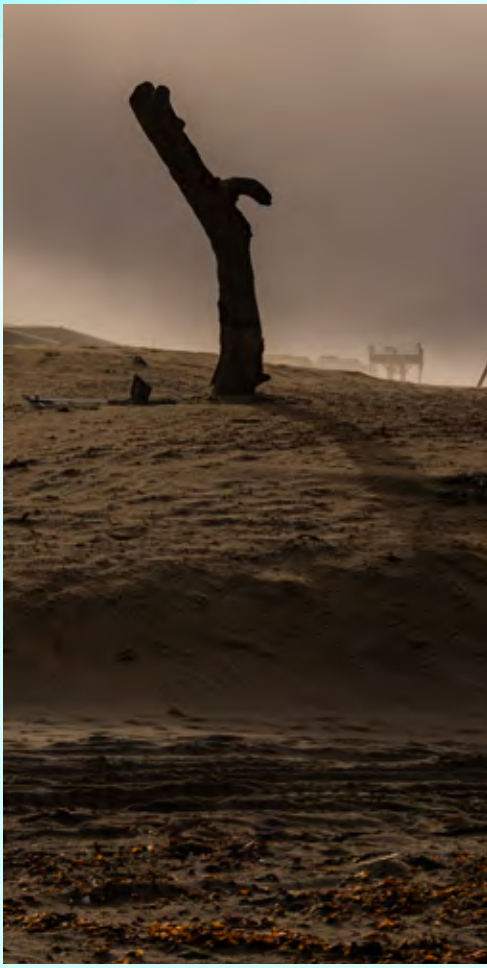


Surface Search and Rescue Swimmers assigned to the Command Naval Surface Forces Reserve component to Sea conduct a cumulative search and rescue event onboard the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Mustin (DDG 89) on Naval Base San Diego. Deploying from a Rigid-Hull Inflatable Boat (RHIB) and the ship, Swimmers get hands-on training with the SAR litter, an advanced technique critical to patients who need to be kept still.

Surface Search and Rescue Swimmers assigned to the Command Naval Surface Forces Reserve component to Sea, conduct a cumulative search and rescue event onboard the Arleigh Burke class guided-missile destroyer USS Mustin (DDG 89), on Naval Base San Diego. Training in adverse conditions allows the swimmers to experience the rigors of rescues at sea with the safeguards of being pierside.

On the event's penultimate day, swimmers get the chance to practice techniques they perfected throughout the week aboard an active surface vessel, this year, the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Mustin (DDG 89). This real-life application of skills in an open water environment gives swimmers the confidence to execute real-time missions. Missions like Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Quinn Anderson went on, when underway with the Independence class Littoral Combat Ship USS Cincinnati (LCS 20), for 3 months as part of RCS. This opportunity allowed Anderson to support the operational tasking of the Cincinnati and gave him the opportunity to train with the Chief Hospital Corpsman onboard for in-rate advancement and professional knowledge as a nursing student in his civilian life.

Surface Search and Rescue Swimmers assigned to the Command Naval Surface Forces Reserve component to Sea, conduct a group physical training event on Naval Amphibious Base Coronado. After a week of intensive training, this group run is designed to unite the team and celebrate the week's wins.



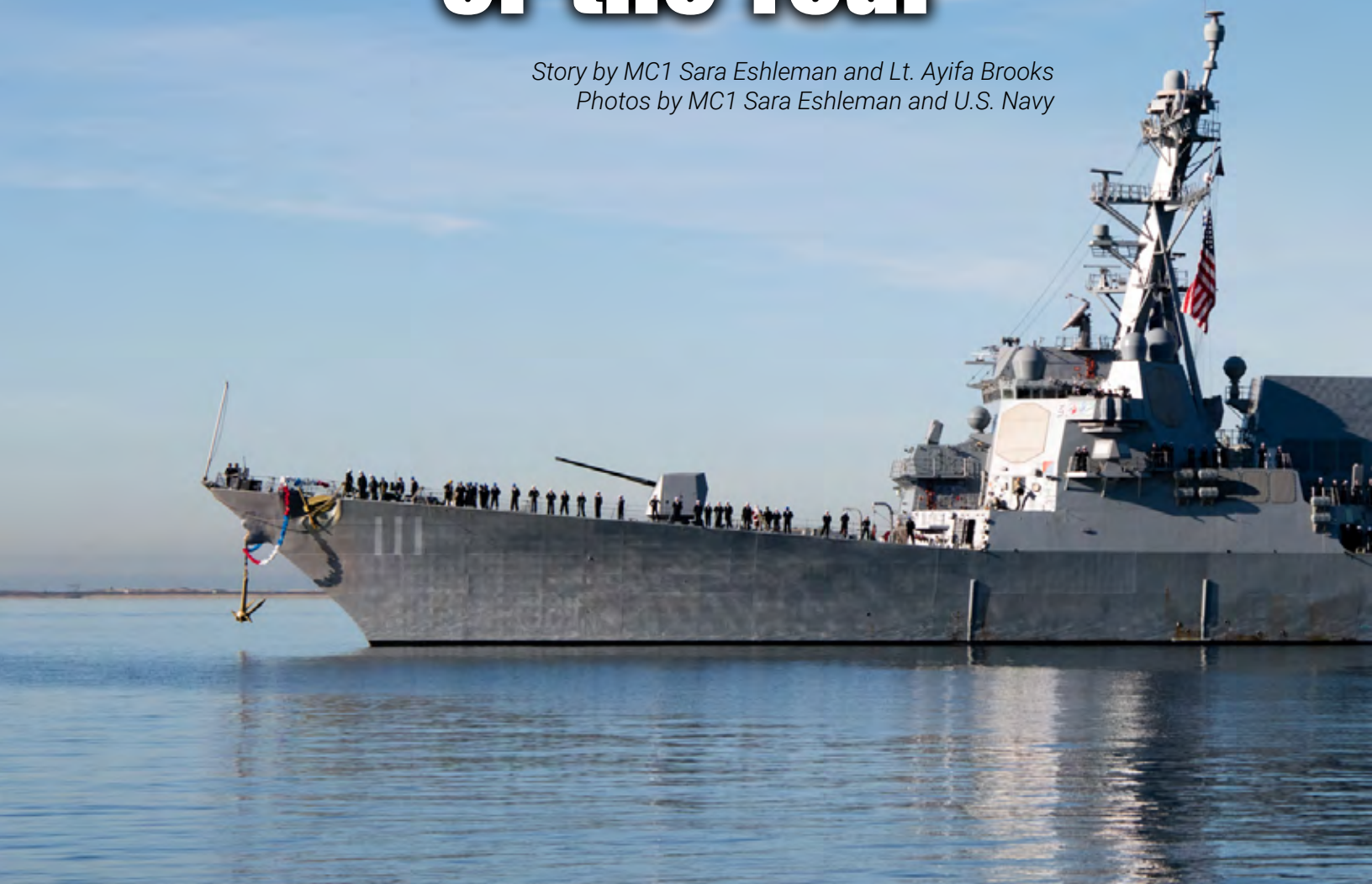
To meet the expanding demands of the Surface Fleet, the RCS program plays a pivotal role in meeting the increasing demand for SSAR swimmers as the Navy strives for 80% surge readiness. The program strengthens the fleet's operational capabilities by offering Navy Reserve Sailors like Case and Anderson the flexibility to balance civilian life and active-duty training. It enhances the professional development of those involved through rigorous training events like "SAR-a-Palooza" and real-world applications aboard ships, these dedicated swimmers are equipped to save lives while furthering their careers. The RCS program exemplifies the Navy's commitment to maintaining readiness and providing Sailors with unique opportunities for growth, both in uniform and in their civilian endeavor.

The mission of CNSP is to man, train, and equip the Surface Force to provide fleet commanders with credible naval power to control the sea and project power ashore. ⚓

Gunner's Mate 1st Class Matthew Tremblay, a Surface Search and Rescue Swimmer assigned to the Command Naval Surface Forces Reserve Component to Sea, poses for a portrait at Naval Amphibious Base Coronado. To Tremblay, the Reserve Component to Sea program allows him to extend his service while allowing him to be flexible in his civilian life.

Surface Warfare Officers of the Year

Story by MC1 Sara Eshleman and Lt. Ayifa Brooks
Photos by MC1 Sara Eshleman and U.S. Navy



It is no exaggeration to assert that Surface Warfare Officers (SWO) are among the most vital personnel within the U.S. Navy's surface fleet. SWOs play an integral role in nearly every aspect of shipboard operations. From navigating the vessel and overseeing flight operations to ensuring the safety and coordination of the crew, their influence is both broad and critical. They lead Sailors across divisions responsible for the full range of a ship's operations—from mast to keel, and bow to stern.

In their roles as Division Officers (DIVO), SWOs provide leadership and management across multiple departments, including operations, engineering, and combat systems. They are actively engaged in all facets of maritime warfare—anti-air, anti-surface, and anti-submarine—and are responsible for the full spectrum of a ship's mission execution. To fulfill these duties effectively, SWOs must develop a comprehensive understanding of all systems aboard the ship, enabling them to operate it as a cohesive and capable weapons platform.

Becoming a SWO is a rigorous process, demanding dedication and perseverance. Officers enter the SWO community either through Officer Candidate School (OCS) after earning a bachelor's degree, or via commissioning from the U.S. Naval Academy. From there, candidates undergo intensive academic instruction and simulator-based training at Surface Warfare Officer School (SWOS) before reporting to their first ship assignment—typically a destroyer, cruiser, amphibious assault ship or littoral combat ship.

Once aboard, officers have 18 months to complete one of the most significant milestones of their early careers: earning the gold Surface Warfare Officer warfare qualification. This qualification marks formal entry into the SWO community and is a prerequisite for future leadership positions, including the opportunity to one day command a Navy vessel.

Each year, the Surface Force recognizes outstanding performance through the Surface Warfare Officer of the Year award, selecting one SWO from each coast. This prestigious distinction honors those who embody the core values and ethos of the SWO community—demonstrating exceptional leadership, professionalism, and warfighting proficiency. Unlike many other awards, the selection process goes beyond endorsements from senior leadership. Finalists must complete a series of written and practical evaluations that test both their technical knowledge and tactical skill.

Lt. Cmdr. Carolyn Bystrom: Pacific Fleet's Surface Warfare Officer of the Year

> SHE'S OBVIOUSLY A REMARKABLE TACTICIAN. SHE REALLY DOES EMBODY GET REAL GET, BETTER.
>
> *– Cmdr. Leigh Tate*

Lt. Cmdr. Carolyn Bystrom was named SWO of the Year for Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet while assigned to the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Spruance (DDG 111) as the ship's Plans and Tactics Officer (PTO).

"You have to be a good advocate," said Bystrom, reflecting on the qualities required for a SWO of the Year. "You have to be able to advocate for yourself, and you have to be able to advocate for your Sailors. You have to be able to advocate for the ship. I think you have to have a high level of knowledge and competency because your Sailors are trusting you as the person who's sitting at the front table to make the right decision."

"She's obviously a remarkable tactician," echoed Cmdr. Leigh Tate, Spruance's commanding officer. "She really does embody Get Real, Get Better. We have a mantra on our ship. We call it ruthless self-assessment. And we really mean the word ruthless. We really believe that the key to being the best we can possibly be is self-assessment, which is really what Get Real, Get Better is getting at."

Following her commissioning through OCS and completion of training at SWOS, Bystrom began her career aboard the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS John S. McCain (DDG 56). She then transitioned to a tour aboard the Ticonderoga-class guided missile-cruiser USS Shiloh (CG 67). Departing from the traditional SWO career path, Bystrom next served as a naval gunfire instructor and range safety officer at San Clemente Island while assigned to Expeditionary Warfare Training Group, Pacific (EWTGPAC).

"Working with the Marines was really valuable," said Bystrom, "The Marines that I worked for, all of them had done multiple combat deployments to Iraq, Afghanistan, and so just hearing their stories and gleaning from their leadership experience had a huge impact on me. And it was actually one of the major drivers as to why I signed department head. They were very tough and professional, but they were the ultimate hype squad."

After completing her service at EWTGPAC, Bystrom reported to Destroyer Squadron 21 in San Diego before joining the team aboard Spruance as Operations Officer (OPS).

"She's actually an interesting case," said Tate, regarding Bystrom's assignment aboard Spruance. "She was the OPS and was actually set to leave the ship. And then, the officer that was PTO at the time got pulled early for an assignment. And as she was sort of out the door, she asked myself and the Captain at the time, 'is there any way that I can stay on as PTO, I'd love to stay and be PTO?' I think that speaks to her character that not only she volunteered and wanted to stay knowing she's going on a deployment, but also to her talents that we wanted her to stay."

Spruance deployed in July 2024 for a U.S. 7th Fleet deployment with the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72), the flagship of Carrier Strike Group Three. In August, Spruance was redirected to the 5th Fleet area of responsibility, and operated in and around the Gulf of Oman.

My detailers were telling me, 'Hey, you've got to fly out to execute your schools,'" said Bystrom. "I was like, 'I'm not going to leave my team while we're in the WEZ [weapons engagement zone].' So, we worked out a deal with the detailers where I could stay here as PTO. And then I was really happy to execute the rest of that deployment with my team."

During a transit of the Bab al-Mandab Strait, Spruance, in the company of the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Stockdale (DDG 106), and Freedom-Variant Littoral Combat Ship USS Indianapolis (LCS 17), came under attack by missiles and drones launched by Houthi rebels. The ship successfully engaged and defeated the threats during an engagement that lasted for more than 30 hours.

"When we were in the Red Sea, I think that was the epitome of what an elite group of Sailors can accomplish," said Bystrom, reflecting on the experience. "Every person was completely

> WHEN WE WERE IN THE RED SEA, I THINK THAT WAS THE EPITOME OF WHAT AN ELITE GROUP OF SAILORS CAN ACCOMPLISH.
>
> *Lt. Cmdr. Carolyn Bystrom*

bought in. I think a culture was built where junior Sailors felt like they had autonomy to just have complete ownership of their equipment and their warfare area. Watching people succeed is something that brings me joy. So that's something I'm proud of; building a culture where people feel like they can succeed, and I think that translated really well into legitimate combat engagements."

"She really engenders trust with her teammates," added Tate. "And I think that's key. I think that she doesn't judge. I think people want to talk to her. She's going to be honest - again, self-assessment; how do we get better? And I think she gives honest feedback. She takes feedback well. And so I think those two common denominators make her very easy to talk to whether it's the crew, the Chiefs Mess or the Wardroom. She just engenders trust, and that's why people respond to her very well."

According to Tate, Bystrom's commitment extends beyond her immediate role and command.

"She is always looking at how to make the community better," said Tate. "So, her head isn't just on Spruance. It's also how do we make the surface warfare community a better community? And, with that type of thinking, it's no wonder that she is SWO of the year. And certainly, her future is wide open."

Bystrom remains grounded in her accomplishments and quick to recognize those around her.

"I'm the one person who got the award, but I wouldn't have gotten it without my team," said Bystrom. "You take care of your Sailors, they'll take care of you. I'm happy to represent this ship and receive this award, but it's definitely not just me."

Lt. Cmdr. Brian Van Metre: Atlantic Fleet's Surface Warfare Officer of the Year

Lt. Cmdr. Brian Van Metre's dedicated service aboard the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Mason (DDG 87) began in 2021 as the Chief Engineer. He fleeted up to Plans and Tactics Officer and ultimately, Combat Systems Officer, culminating in a prestigious honor: Atlantic Fleet's Surface Warfare Officer (SWO) of the Year.

For Van Metre, the award is a testament to the ship and its crew:

"I am humbled and honored to be recognized as SWO of the Year," said Van Metre. "To me, this award represents the tireless and extraordinary efforts of the Officers, Chiefs, and Sailors onboard Mason throughout my time onboard. Their expertise, integrity, and hard work throughout maintenance, training, and combat operations were awe-inspiring. I'm proud to have served with them and to have been a part of their success."

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>
> *– Lt. Cmdr. Brian Van Metre*

Van Metre is quick to credit those around him as the catalyst for team success. He emphasizes the pivotal role of his Command Master Chief, Executive Officers, and Commanding Officers on Mason, recognizing their guidance in shaping him into a better officer and leader.

"They set high standards for us to meet because they knew that those high standards would lead to superior performance when it mattered most in combat," said Van Metre. "At the same time, their doors were always open to any officer or Sailor who needed help to meet those standards."

He also celebrates the expertise and resilience of his Mason shipmates:

"Any time that I had a question on how a system was supposed to operate or what's needed to succeed, no matter the time of day or night, I was lucky enough to have some of the best junior officers, mustangs, Chiefs and junior Sailors in the Navy to ask," said Van Metre. "Their ability to problem-solve and innovate was instrumental to Mason's success during combat operations."

Capt. Chavius Lewis, commanding officer of Mason, underscores Van Metre's potential.

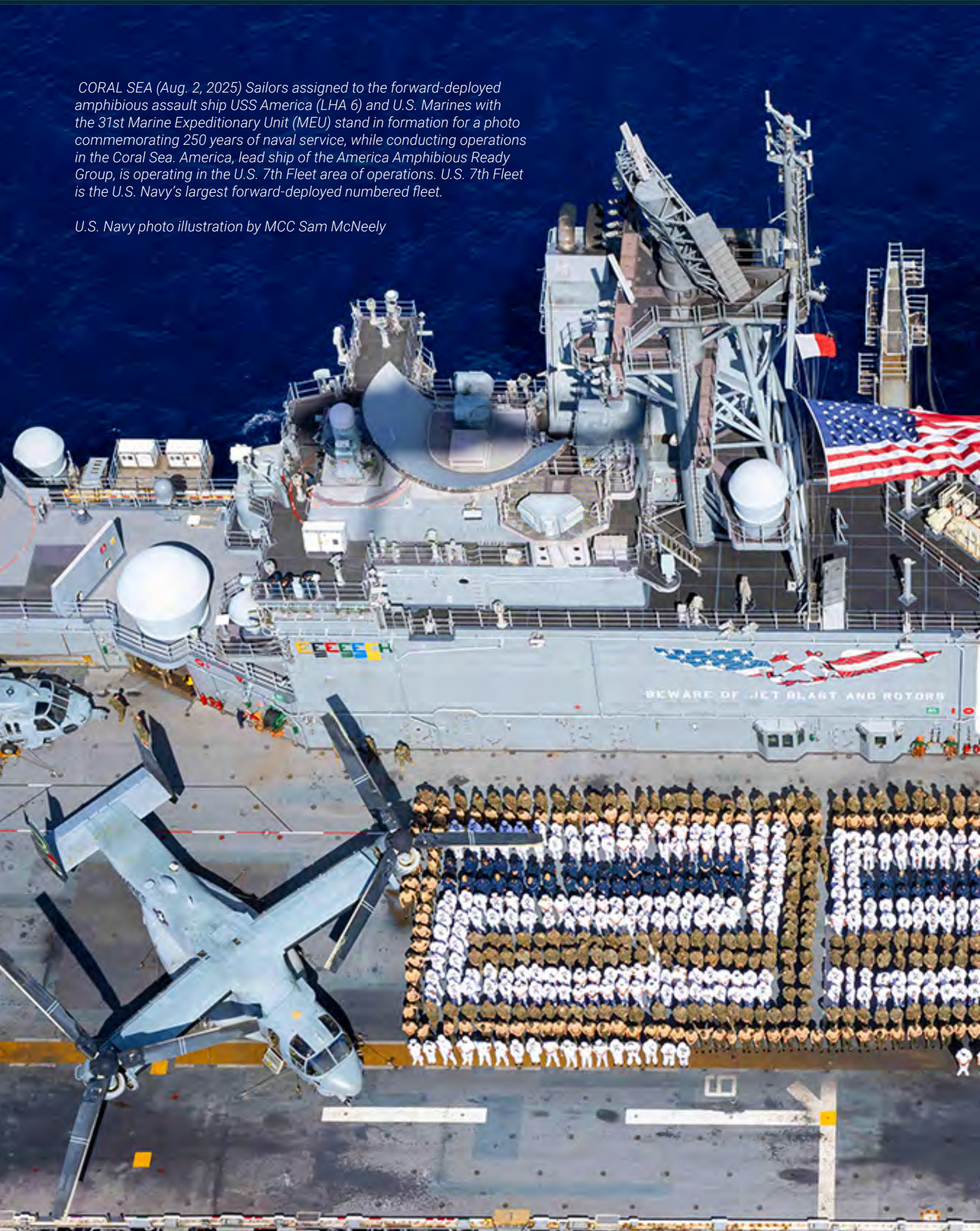
"Brian is the future commanding officer we want leading our ships in the high-end fight and great power competition," said Capt. Lewis. "A brilliant tactician who ensured Mason delivered when it mattered most."

> **BRIAN IS THE FUTURE COMMANDING OFFICER WE WANT LEADING OUR SHIPS IN THE HIGH-END FIGHT AND GREAT POWER COMPETITION.**
>
> *Capt. Chavius Lewis*

Beyond tactical acumen, Van Metre distinguished himself as a mentor. As the Senior Watch Officer, he prioritized training and preparing junior officers for success. His guiding principles, particularly his belief that officers must be "the calm in the storm" during critical moments, have been central to his leadership. This ability to maintain composure and confidence, even under pressure, has set a high standard for those following in his footsteps.

The true test of Van Metre's leadership came during Mason's 2023-2024 deployment with the Dwight D. Eisenhower Carrier Strike Group. Deployed to the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden following the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks in southern Israel, Mason operated for months in a high-threat environment. The ship's Sailors engaged and shot down multiple unmanned aerial vehicles and anti-ship ballistic missiles targeting Mason, other U.S. and Allied warships, and merchant shipping. Van Metre once again credits the crew aboard Mason for their adaptability and resolve.

"They adapted to the threat and evolved with it. From the Sailors in combat information center to the ones manning repair lockers and engine rooms, they found new ways to win, and they did it with a smile," said Van Metre. "The deployment on Mason and other ships was a culture-defining moment for the U.S. Navy, shaped by the resolve and skill of the Sailors operating those ships." ⚓



CORAL SEA (Aug. 2, 2025) Sailors assigned to the forward-deployed amphibious assault ship USS America (LHA 6) and U.S. Marines with the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) stand in formation for a photo commemorating 250 years of naval service, while conducting operations in the Coral Sea. America, lead ship of the America Amphibious Ready Group, is operating in the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operations. U.S. 7th Fleet is the U.S. Navy's largest forward-deployed numbered fleet.

U.S. Navy photo illustration by MCC Sam McNeely

SURFACE FORCE

VISION: A Surface Force second to none that controls the seas and provides the Nation with combat naval power when and where needed.

MISSION: Man, Train, and equip the Surface Force to provide Fleet Commanders with credible naval power to control the sea and project power ashore.

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