

Chief Learning Officer

Reporting aboard
by Mr. John Kroger

Last week, Secretary of the Navy Richard V. Spencer appointed me to serve as the Department of the Navy's Chief Learning Officer, a brand new position. My job is to lead all education efforts for the Navy and Marine Corps and implement the reforms outlined in the ground breaking Education for Seapower Report. Over the next few months, I will share some thoughts on two of our highest priorities: the creation of the new Naval Community College for enlisted Sailors and Marines as well as the writing of the first Naval Education Strategy to guide our reform efforts. Today, however, I want to introduce myself and convey what motivated me to take on this important assignment.

I have spent my entire life in public service and in higher education. I have been an NCO in the Marine Corps, a Federal mafia prosecutor, and the elected Attorney General for my home state of Oregon. I have also been a professor at Yale, Harvard, and Lewis and Clark College, as well as President of Reed College—one of the Nation's most prestigious liberal arts colleges. As a result of this life trajectory, I come to this job with the instincts and insights of a highly experienced educator, teacher, public servant, and Marine.

Two things motivated me to take on this new assignment. First, I was inspired by the quality of the Education for Seapower Report, which I read long before I applied for the job. If you have not read the report, I recommend it because it is worth your time. The authors, led by former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, ADM Mike Mullen, USN(Ret), and former Commander, International Security Assis-



>Mr. Kroger will start as the Navy Department's Chief Learning Officer on 30 September 2019. The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of the Navy or Department of Defense.

tance Force in Afghanistan, Gen John Allen, USMC(Ret), argue that in our new era of great power competition and massive technological change, we need to out-think our opponents if we want to out-fight them. To be successful both now and in the future, we need to value educational and intellectual prowess as much as physical fitness and operational skill. Based on this analysis, the report calls for a major investment in and reform of education for both officers and enlisted personnel, reorganizing and refocusing our educational efforts—from the Secretary of the Navy's level on down—in order to reach our full potential as a warfighting force. I argue the analysis laid out in the report is compelling and convincing. I am confident, like the distinguished authors of the report, that if we do not make greater efforts to educate our force, we will jeopardize our naval dominance and our national security. My goal in this job is simple: to work with you all to implement the recommendations of the report so that we can make the Navy and Marine Corps the best educated naval force in the world by a wide margin—one famed across the globe for its

analytic rigor, creativity, technological prowess, and strategic sophistication. I cannot imagine a more important, more challenging, or more inspiring mission.

My second motivation is a bit more personal. I enlisted in the Marines in 1983, on my seventeenth birthday, and served my tour in 1st Recon Battalion. At the time I signed up, my life was not on a good trajectory. I was drinking too much, had some trouble with the law, and was getting poor grades in school. Like most people who enlist, then as now, I could not afford college. The Marines put me on a different course. The Corps gave me a great deal of responsibility and taught me how to use it responsibly. I learned that you always need to be crystal-clear about your mission, plan carefully and rigorously, and then execute your plan with 100 percent effort. Those lessons stood me well through my career in government, law and education.

The Marines also taught me to value education. The Corps promoted me early because I made an effort to complete multiple courses through the Marine Corps Institute, the precursor to today's Marine Corps University. My

battalion commander, sergeant major, and company officers encouraged me to apply to college, and when I needed time off from training to take the SAT exam and to attend college interviews, they gave me the time I needed. The Corps' greatest gift came near the end of my enlistment. I was admitted to Yale University, but I could not attend because freshman year was scheduled to begin one month before the end of my enlistment. To fix this problem, the Marine Corps cut orders sending me to Yale for a month as my last duty assignment. Telling that story today, 30 years

later, I still get tears in my eyes. I owe the Marine Corps a great deal, and if I can pay that debt forward by helping today's Marines and Sailors advance their education, it would be an honor.

On Tuesday, 10 September, I was honored by the Under Secretary of the Navy, Thomas B. Modly, to attend the first-ever Naval Education Summit in Annapolis, MD, where I began my journey of listening to and learning from the leaders of our outstanding naval education institutions, as well as the senior leadership in the Pentagon responsible for supporting them. Over the coming

months, I hope to share more information on a regular basis about our efforts to accelerate naval education, so that it will serve in the future as one of our greatest strategic advantages.

In the meantime, please know that it is an honor for me to work on these issues with you all, and that if we are successful, it will be a very important development for our Sailors and Marines, our two great naval forces, and for our country.

