

Admiral Kinnaird R. McKee, USN (Ret)

Admiral Kinnaird R. McKee was born in Louisville, Kentucky on August 14, 1929 and graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1951. He served in the Pacific fleet destroyer MARSHALL during the Korean War and in eight submarines of the Atlantic fleet since that time. After completion of submarine training in 1953, he served in three diesel-powered submarines: PICUDA, SEA CAT, and MARLIN. In 1956, Admiral McKee was ordered to command of USS X-1, a small experimental submarine. He graduated from nuclear power training in 1958 and joined the commissioning crew of SKIPJACK, the Navy's first high-performance nuclear-powered attack submarine. Assignment as Executive Officer of NAUTILUS followed in 1961, then of the SAM HOUSTON in late 1962. After three deterrent patrols on the SAM HOUSTON, he served in the Naval Reactors Division of the Atomic Energy Commission from 1964 to 1966.

Admiral McKee served as Commanding Officer of the nuclear-powered attack submarine DACE from 1966 through 1969. The ship was twice awarded the Navy Unit Commendation and three times the Battle Efficiency Pennant for operations during that period. Following command of DACE, Admiral McKee served in the office of the Director, Navy Program Planning, where his responsibilities included strategic warfare, research and development, and submarine and anti-submarine warfare systems. In 1970, he was assigned to the immediate staff of the Chief of Naval Operations, where he established the CNO Executive Panel. As Commander, Submarine Group Eight, Admiral McKee served as the NATO and U.S. submarine commander in the Mediterranean from 1973 to 1975. On August 1, 1975, he became the forty-eighth Superintendent of the U.S. Naval Academy. Promoted to three-star rank in March 1978, Admiral McKee served as Commander, Third Fleet with headquarters in Pearl Harbor. From there he was assigned as Director, Naval Warfare, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations concurrent with the expansion of the directorate from its original concentration on anti-submarine warfare to responsibility for all aspects of naval warfare. He developed and implemented the new organization.

On February 1, 1982, he relieved Admiral H. G. Rickover as the Director, Naval Nuclear Propulsion. On March 2, 1982, he was confirmed by the U.S. Senate for promotion to four-star rank.

Admiral McKee retired on October 31, 1988, after 41 years of service to his country.

Admiral McKee's decorations include the Distinguished Service Medal, five awards of the Legion of Merit, and three awards of the Navy Unit Commendation.

Keynote Speaker Introduction

ADM Bruce DeMars, USN (Ret)

My real job here tonight is to introduce Admiral Kin McKee, who graciously agreed to be our dinner speaker tonight. Admiral McKee is a Naval Academy graduate. He served in a Pacific fleet destroyer during the Korean War and then in eight submarines in the remainder of the Cold War. He commanded X-1, a small experimental submarine, and DACE during Cold War Special Operations (I think that's a great term; I expect to hear a lot more of that from now on; remember where you heard it), Submarine Group EIGHT, Allied Submarines Mediterranean, the Third Fleet, the Naval Academy, and Naval Reactors.

I first came to know Kin when he commanded DACE and I was executive officer of the newly commissioned STURGEON. DACE did everything well, and the CO was quite a swashbuckler. He smoked cigars and drove a Jaguar. Cigar sales at the exchange went through the roof as all JOs wanted to be like Commander McKee, including me. STURGEON and DACE were matched up against each other in a submarine ASW exercise in the Gulf of Maine—long time ago (this was in the mid-60's, late 60's, I can't remember). It was a very extensive operation. We worked very hard on STURGEON getting ready, knowing we were up against the top boat in the Atlantic fleet. Forty years later, my memory had the results as pretty close, with Commander McKee saying his old boat had bested the newest of the fleet, and Commander Shellman, our CO, saying our green crew had held their own. In preparation for this reunion, I thought it would be worthwhile and appropriate to get out the old records and refresh my memory so I could embellish on that a little bit. The Development Squadron archives cooperated; we actually had the report. The report was available; however, in close examination, I was advised to change my story as DACE had beat us hands down.

Kin was selected for one of the toughest assignments in the Navy—that the Navy would ever have—in relieving Admiral Rickover. There are probably a dozen retired admirals who take credit for this turnover, and I've heard them—I've been in groups where they've taken full credit for how smoothly this went, and what they did, and on and on. And maybe they had something to do with it, but there's no doubt who carried the load. He kept that organization running at high speed during a very difficult period, and clearly in my view he never received adequate credit for that.

I came to know him quite well during this period, while I was serving for five years in OP-02. We worked pretty closely to keep good things happening and prevent bad things from happening. While he was always open to input, it was clear he was the master of the grand strategy. I came to once again admire him as I did when he was the premier CO on the waterfront. He had intelligence, integrity, and industry in a measure that you rarely see. He had the ability to voice the unpopular truth, to say in a gathering what others wished they had the nerve to utter. He was respected and admired with affection at Naval Reactors (after a while). He had the intellect to get into the technical details, but he never got bogged down at the expense of clarity or execution. He was held in great regard by the Congress; he was a consummate politician in the finest sense of that term. At least three different southern congressmen claimed he was born in their state.

For me it is a great personal pleasure to be able to introduce a person who was fundamental in guiding the Navy during very perilous times and in influencing what I became as a naval officer.

Keynote Speech

ADM Kinnaird R. McKee, USN (Ret)



It's great to be back in New London for this occasion and to celebrate 50 years of remarkable progress in the art of submarine warfare. At the same time, it's sort of a bittersweet thing for me. We lived here for 11 years. I served on SKIPJACK, SAM HOUSTON, NAUTILUS, and DACE—all in this place. I had orders to SEADRAGON in Hawaii, but I got sent to NR instead. Our children grew up here. We helped put St. David's together, as I'm sure many of you all did. There are many memories here—Betty Ann launching LOUISVILLE. This young man: (CAPT Dave Gove) ran her very well for Betty Ann. At the luncheon afterward, so many came from so far—we had 750 guests at the luncheon. We invited all those folks; but we didn't think everybody would come.

The tour in DACE was great for me; it's something you look forward to all your life. But I don't think I ever saw both ends of the boat at the same time in New London. We were always in the fog. The first day underway we started down the river in the fog—the bridge jammed, the whole line backed up, and the word came up “Fire in the engine room!” So we pulled out of the line and snuck under the bridge (you could do that with a 594 if the tide was right) and got out of there.

The Development Group has come a long way since its initial CNO task in 1949 to “solve the problem of using submarines to detect and destroy enemy submarines.” The Royal Navy came aboard soon after that and has been with us all the way. We were fortunate in SKIPJACK to have the commissioning crew for DREADNOUGHT on board—that was a lively group as I recall, particularly those enlisted guys you brought—Rotten Reggie and the rest of them. And of course there was Robin Heath, he's another good friend; we made a special op together. Later in the Med, Terry Lewin gave me the Black Pig to work with for a while. She did good work—that's HMS VALIANT for those who don't remember the nickname. I had forgotten it,

frankly; we had to research a little bit who was the Black Pig because they gave me a cartoon that they did to describe their operations in the Med in TF 69 (the cartoon did not identify her real name). I always considered it complimentary, but I was never quite sure.

There could have been no better choice to be the first DEVGROUP commander than Roy Benson, and those who followed were cut from the same cloth. The performance of this organization clearly reflects that. Betty Ann and I got to know Roy and Vida Benson when we were at the Naval Academy. Betty Ann had trouble reconciling his gentle demeanor and courtly manner with his World War II exploits in TRIGGER. She said, “He is so kind and such a gentleman; and he did all that stuff in the war?” I told him about that; he said he considered it a great compliment.

Among all those who started this place up, Frank Andrews has a special place. He was a tremendous influence in those early years. The Group began to settle down and find its focus when Frank was here. I am particularly pleased to see him and so many of his successors who are here tonight. Each has been a tough act to follow in his own right, but for my time in DACE, there were no better guys to work for than Mike Moore and Bill Pugh. Each has already gone to his reward, but their collective spirit remains alive and well in this place.

Then there was Sam Francis—a special guy in so many ways. He introduced me (and a lot of others) to the sonar equation and all that followed. He taught all of us a lot of other good things as well. Mike Moore, Bill Pugh, and Sam Francis routinely did difficult things very well. Each of their exercises was a highly effective simulation of what we might expect in the real world. In one Gulf of Maine exercise (with Sam Francis on board to keep me honest), DACE fired over thirty MK-37 hits against four opposing diesel boats, in high sea states, where recovery was unlikely at best. Mike Moore considered the risk of losing those torpedoes as an acceptable price for the realism he sought.

But more important than individual exercises was the way in which this organization has become an environment in which integrity, independence, innovative thought, and decisive action are still encouraged in the best submarine tradition. The DEVGROUP’s reputation for innovation and integrity has paid dividends in many ways.

Shortly after we moved to Squadron Ten, COMSUBLANT was told to have DACE do an unusual one-on-one exercise for DDR&E (Johnny Foster at that time). The outcome was to have a lot to do with initial production rates for the 688s. Bill Pugh had the Development Group by then, and though we were no longer in his squadron, he was told to write the exercise order and ride with the DOD observers. There was to be only a single encounter. DACE was allowed no part in structuring the exercise. We were given only a description of area boundaries and safety rules. As I recall we were not even told the name of the opposing submarine. After the exercise, everyone agreed that it had come out all right, but it was Bill Pugh’s reputation for rigor and integrity that ensured SECDEF acceptance of that conclusion. Previously appropriated funds that had been on hold for the new class were released the next day.

Over the years, the DEVGROUP also brought increasing rigor and integrity to the art of tactical analysis. When I arrived in the DEVGROUP, I had just been exposed to a variation of that discipline called “systems analysis” (as it was practiced in DOD at the time). Rigor and integrity are not words I would have used to describe that activity in that place at that time. This was entirely different, and we came to understand and believe in the discipline as it is practiced here. More important, we also learned that tactical analysis was not just for exercises. It became an important part of every tactical encounter and a particularly important aspect of Cold War operations.

Today there are substantially different ships and weapons here, and the definition of submarine warfare has expanded tremendously, but this squadron's basic philosophy has remained the same. Using products of the work done in this place, our submarine crews continue to demonstrate great tactical skill in a variety of difficult, demanding, and dangerous operations. I have been pretty much out of the loop for a good while, but know that is still true.

But even as our submarines continue to do good things in these difficult times, I have begun to worry more and more about the increasing intrusion of things political into many aspects of our business. The submarine community has had to deal with that sort of thing off and on ever since World War II, but the problem seems much more pervasive today. Having said that, let me make one thing very clear: I am not worried about the commitment or skill of our current crop of submarine officers and men. They still have to be damned good, even in this new world; and they are. My concern is primarily for the long-term availability and adequacy of the tools of our trade, and for some of the adverse consequences of recent changes in the military command structure. Viewed on a fifty-year scale, most, but not all, of these are relatively new concerns. Many began with the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union.

The period following these events has been intensely stressful for our military services, and closer to home, for submarines, for the nuclear navy as a whole, and for the Naval Reactors program. Relatively new attack submarines and nuclear powered surface warships have been prematurely decommissioned. Attempts were made to decommission ENTERPRISE and to limit the authority of Naval Reactors. Shipyards and prototypes were shut down. The industrial base was reduced to single suppliers of some components. There was no supplier of nuclear fuel for a period of six years. Finally, there was a serious concern that the submarine industrial base would simply collapse because of an inadequate building rate. In fact, SECDEF wanted to stop building any more submarines after SEAWOLF. All that sounds very much like what happened at the end of World War II. Roy Benson spoke of going to less than 100 submarines at that time. We are certainly doing that again today.

All of these challenges were met, and while the solutions were sometimes far from optimum, they were at least acceptable. With a lot of hard work, Bruce DeMars and other risk-takers managed to get the building program back up to three ships. Today, the third SEAWOLF is under construction, but production of the class will stop well before the flat of the learning curve is reached. We will never know what the follow ships might have cost in series production. More important, this decision was made even before the full range of SEAWOLF's tactical capabilities have been adequately explored.

Nevertheless, various "experts," unhampered by any understanding of or experience in submarine warfare, have declared these ships too expensive. In fact, when one considers what they can do, they are a bargain. But when it became evident that there was little chance of any further SEAWOLF production, the decision was made to turn up the gain on a new class. The new design would obviously have to be a departure from SEAWOLF. That meant starting over again, with major resources committed to new research and development—and a new learning curve—to produce a less capable submarine that, at a building rate of one per year, may not even prove to be less expensive.

This whole exercise sort of reminds me of an earlier time when "Fat Albert" was proposed as a less expensive (and less capable) replacement for the 688s. I know some of you must remember that drill. There finally was a happy ending. A young captain named Bruce DeMars had a lot to do with that result.

Now don't get me wrong; the new attack submarine is no "Fat Albert." On the other hand, it is no SEAWOLF either, but it should be a good submarine.

All things considered, the outcome of all this is an accomplishment of some significance. Arleigh Burke and the “Revolt of the Admirals” saved our aircraft carriers (and Navy tactical air) in similar circumstances shortly after World War II. This accomplishment has been no less important. The same challenges will rise again—and again. Our current and future crop of senior submarine officers must be prepared to accept whatever professional risk may be in store when their turn comes to stand up and be counted.

But politics aside, our most immediate challenge has always been one of how to make best use of what we have, taking full advantage of the unique capabilities of our modern attack submarines and the technical competence, tactical skill, and gumption of their officers and men. Like their World War II predecessors, they have grown up in tradition, well understood by the Royal Navy and our guests from the German Navy, that submarines must be able to operate alone and unsupported, doing grievous harm for extended periods, in areas controlled by the enemy.

Everyone understands that while other warships may go in harm’s way, submarines must be able to live there. The ability to live (and fight) in that environment dictates the need for stealth, mobility, and firepower. That has not changed since World War II. Those characteristics are still prerequisites for successful submarine operations, even those involving coordination with other, more vulnerable forces.

Royal Navy operations during the Falklands campaign and TF69 operations during the Yom Kippur War proved once again what can be done by first line attack submarines, commanded by tough minded, innovative, and independent commanding officers. Sixth Fleet SSN COs (Fountain, Green, Kelso, Carter, and others) invented the current concept of direct support, and they did so on station, in real time, and against real opposition. Since then, coordinated operations have become increasingly fashionable, and our submarines have become very good in that role. But we need to be careful. The accompanying onslaught of buzzwords and arguments of convenience may have already created a perception in the minds of some folks that the requirement for submarines to operate independently is no longer as important as it once was.

But the fact of the matter is this: we can’t do anything well without a strong foundation in basic submarine combat operations, and that includes independent operations in the forward areas. Coordination for its own sake can easily do more harm than good. In the final analysis, my great fear is that we may some day find ourselves in danger of losing our immortal submarine soul in response to pressures to become more like “one of the boys.” That would be a Faustian bargain at best.

Speaking of being “one of the boys,” let me digress for a moment and say more on the subject of “jointness.” I have a particular problem with the currently fashionable idea that “jointness” is some sort of easy way to enhance military effectiveness. It is not. (In fact, it is not even a word in the English language.) I would never argue with the idea that diverse military forces should be able to operate together, when it makes tactical sense to do so. But the notion of “jointness” has come to involve much more than that.

My principal concern lies in second order effects of the Title IV legislation that has defined much of what is now referred to as “jointness.” These second order effects run all the way up and down the chain of command. At lower and intermediate levels, some officers have already begun to consider command at sea less important than a tour in a joint billet. You might be surprised to know that even before I left active duty, some of our younger officers (and some of the prospective NROTC and USNA graduates I used to interview) had already come to that

conclusion. At the upper end of the spectrum, Title IV allows (or perhaps even encourages) the Commander-In-Chief to avoid direct contact with his service chiefs in matters involving tactical and strategic issues—or anything else for that matter. Since enactment of that law, it has become increasingly clear that only the Chairman and the Secretary of Defense consistently enjoy direct access to the President. This situation can make it very difficult for other than consensus opinions to be brought forward, and that is exactly what it does.

In his oral history, Roy Benson described Post World War II efforts to “unify” the services. I was struck by the eerie resemblance between that notion (which was finally discredited) and the senior command arrangements I have just described. Some members of Congress, particularly those who are unencumbered by any military experience, seem to think this interpretation of Title IV is as it should be. Over the years, frequent complaints have been heard from that quarter when intelligence agencies or the military services offer competing ideas or conclusions. The press usually likes to describe any such disagreement as just another example of inter-service rivalry. It is not. My point is this: it is axiomatic that seniors at any level in the chain of command cannot afford to isolate themselves from well reasoned but competing argument. Instead, they should encourage it.

Our Submarine Forces have always had men of personal courage and integrity at all levels of the organization. We still do. Our young officers and men still do the right things and do them well. Unfortunately, under the current rules of the game they must expect to encounter increasing pressure on some of our basic principles. Many submarine officers and men will be put to the test in that regard in the months and years to come.

My mother used to caution me against what she would describe as “borrowing trouble.” I reckon some of what I’ve said tonight would fall in that category. But make no mistake; trouble is out there now, and more is probably on the way. Future submariners must expect to encounter intense pressure to justify some of the political decisions that have found their way into our world in the past few years. That will not happen all at once, but it will happen. Nevertheless, I have every confidence that our traditions of commitment, tactical skill, and ruthless integrity will still be alive and well when they are put to the test.

Thank you.