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U.S. Department of the Navy

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Former Navy Cryptologic Warfare Officer, NPS Military Professor Selected for Prestigious Fulbright Scholar Program

By Petty Officer 2nd Class Huy Tonthat, Naval Postgraduate School - April 5, 2021

U.S. Navy Cmdr. Thor Martinsen, an applied mathematics professor, has become the first Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) Permanent Military Professor (PMP) to receive a Fulbright U.S. Scholar award that will allow him to visit the University of Bergen (UiB) in Norway and collaborate on research during the 2021-2022 academic year.

With the Fulbright Scholarship, which provides opportunities for U.S. academics to teach, research or do projects abroad, Martinsen will collaborate with UiB faculty and carry out research on the properties of Boolean functions used in cryptographic algorithms. Martinsen said that understanding Boolean function properties and behaviors will help to build secure cryptographic systems.

Martinsen credits his years as a Naval officer for helping him stand out in the Fulbright U.S. Scholar selection process.

"[The University of Bergen] has a secure communications research center, focused on research similar to the type of work I do at NPS," said Martinsen. Prior to becoming a PMP, I was a Navy Cryptologic Warfare Officer who did information warfare, cryptography, and things of that nature. I bring to the table not only the theoretical stuff, but practical experience.

"I will use this experience along with my doctoral education and research expertise to team with our Norwegian allies and help conduct important cyber security research," he continued. "I think part of the reasons my application was so successful, was that I bring some of that operational knowledge to the forefront."

In addition to research, the Fulbright Scholarship is an opportunity for Martinsen to extend diplomacy to Norway through the sharing of knowledge.

"The Fulbright is a cultural exchange program," said Martinsen. "On the cyber security side, it's important that we help our allies out and it's a team fight. [NPS] is an international campus of sorts, and we have lots of allies here, so this [Fulbright] goes further to extend that relationship with Norway. Even though I go as a Fulbright, I'm also working on an opportunity through the Navy Engineers and Scientists Exchange Program where a Norwegian scientist can potentially visit NPS for an extended period of time and collaborate with us on research."

Martinsen noted that he is not just going to Norway as a researcher representing NPS, but he is going as an ambassador for the United States.

"Extending the reach and being an ambassador to show some of the things we do is what's really important," said Martinsen. "That's why I'm very pleased to get this opportunity to showcase NPS. Not many folks get this opportunity through Fulbright. Whenever we can showcase NPS and demonstrate the quality of our faculty, it helps NPS. I'm very fortunate to have that opportunity."

Martinsen's Fulbright U.S. Scholar award recognizes not only his accomplishments, but also NPS' ability to provide quality graduate level education.

"This represents so many things that are critical to NPS," said Dr. Scott Gartner, NPS Provost and Academic Dean. "One is our commitment to excellence that is recognized globally. Fulbright Scholarships are an outstanding achievement. His permanent military factor reflects a second item aspect that I think is really critical for us, which is that we have military and civilian faculty working together to reach our primary military and civilian students. I think it's a win-win in terms of both of NPS' excellence and in demonstrating that military faculty can achieve national recognition for their contribution to knowledge."



U.S. Navy Cmdr. Thor Martinsen is the first NPS Permanent Military Professor to be selected for the Fulbright Scholarship Award, where he will conduct cryptography research at the University of Bergen in Norway during the 2021-2022 academic.

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