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Third Time's the Charm at NPS for Deputy Chief of Naval Research

Thursday, October 05, 2006

Story by Barbara Honegger, Senior Military Affairs Journalist

For George Solhan, Deputy Chief of Naval Research for Expeditionary Maneuver Warfare and Combating Terrorism Science and Technology (S&T), and Director of Marine Corps Science and Technology, the will is the way.

Thirty years after twice applying to the Naval Postgraduate School as a young Marine Corps major, and being turned down twice, he was finally "admitted" to the nation's premiere defense research university – to deliver the Secretary of the Navy guest lecture and to recruit a new generation of young officers for the leading edge S&T enterprise of the Office of Naval Research (ONR). [Watch the SGL.](#)

"I want all of NPS to know – and I'm speaking here for the Chief of Naval Research, as his deputy – that we absolutely value, as a hugely valuable commodity, the Naval and Marine Corps officers this school provides for today's highly technical and scientifically demanding military," Solhan said in an interview after the lecture. "In this time of transformation where we need to rapidly and agilely adapt to asymmetric enemies, the analytical ability and cutting edge expertise NPS graduates bring is vital to being able to prevail against the full spectrum of risks we face, within the budget available."

In his talk, Solhan addressed the audience of officer students as if 'one to one.'

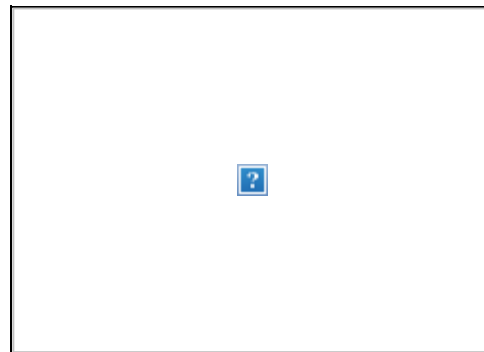
"I'm here to excite you to consider a tour, or career, in ONR's user-inspired naval research enterprise," he said. "It's a natural transition, as both NPS and ONR focus on cutting-edge naval science and technology where the visionary and the practical intersect. We have slots and a great need for the talents, operational experience and academic credentials you bring. Plus, ONR is the most fun you'll ever have in the S&T world, because you're able to redefine the future."

A large part of Solhan's mission is giving U.S. forces the technological edge to prevail against rapidly changing asymmetric threats.

"We're in a whole new world where traditional service roles are rapidly changing," he said. "We now have 50,000 Sailors meeting the enemy face to face, with targets of as close a range as 20 feet, in marine, littoral and ground environments. The ground environments are a huge change, especially for the Navy. My office's mission is to be and stay ahead of that change."

Noting that he's now a civilian in the Senior Executive Service, Solhan vigorously defended the defense civilian bureaucracy.

"I'm part of 'the bureaucracy' and proud of it, because the civilian bureaucracy has a vital role to play," he said. "The market is very efficient and can do a lot, but it has no conscience. Its motive is profit, period. Our function is to look and go beyond that -- to oversee the commons and to invest in areas where the market is risk averse. We're not risk averse. We prospect for cutting-edge science and technology that



specifically supports the naval mission, and we leverage the naval research enterprise, academe, industry and business with relationships all over the world.

“ONR Science and Technology is serious about increasing readiness per unit cost,” Solhan continued, “and we’re invested in a number of exciting areas, including distributed operations and network centric warfare; light, portable alternative fuels, ammunition and water sources; personnel cognitive and sensory enhancement; highly IED-survivable vehicles; building bridges on site with advanced polymers; and even ways to generate power by the act of walking.”

For officers thinking about coming to NPS, Solhan’s message is clear.

“Surmount all obstacles to get here, because your ability to serve the Navy and the Marine Corps goes up exponentially when you do.,”he said.

In the Trident Room after his address, Solhan returned to those two times when NPS said ‘no.’

“Context matters,” he said. “Keep in mind that in 1976 and 1977 when I was turned down, the NPS Marine Corps quota was probably two.”

With 20/20 hindsight, it’s also clear young Marine Corps Maj. George Solhan should have been one of those two.

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