

How did your first couple of tours as a SWO on ships prepare you for your command tours, then as an installation commander, and today, commanding this enterprise?

Well, you're never fully prepared! Every day is a day of learning. As long as you are still willing to learn, I think that's a really important characteristic.

The basics that I learned in the beginning still apply today – fundamentals like our core values and the governing instructions that that apply in every job. It's one thing to work with programs, it's another to truly know your team and to bring that team together.

Like I said earlier, we've all got our strengths and weaknesses, and a leader's mission is to figure out how to maximize that advantage by creating a culture of continuous improvement. As you get more senior, your team gets bigger and more diverse. Today my team includes military and civilians of all types of occupational skills and disciplines, stationed around the world. I am incredibly proud of my team and humbled by their service.

Have you had officers that you've mentored, watched grow, and come along to succeed wildly? Did you get that sense of gratification that comes with that?

Absolutely. I've had some amazing mentors along the way, and not necessarily in the sense of a formal mentor-mentee relationship, but people who have just taken the time to sit down and share their story. What was their experience? How did they do it? They planted ideas of what might be the art of the possible for me.

Now I am honored when anyone comes forward and says, "Hey, can we talk?" I can be that sounding board and talk about either something I learned the hard way, or how I navigated something, or saw someone else navigate it. It's always wonderful to see people that you've worked with along the way succeed.

Any last comments you want to make about your staff?

My people are amazing! It's no secret that the shore is resource-constrained, and we often end up being the "bill-payer" for higher priorities. Our team works diligently to be as efficient and as effective with less than, perhaps, they should have. We ask an awful lot of them, and they are dedicated to the mission – many of them, especially our civilians, have been working in this area for years. They are extremely passionate about supporting the Fleet, the Fighter, and the Family, and I could not be prouder of them.

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Jonathan Williams on the red carpet at the Amazon Studios Jack Ryan premiere hosted aboard Battleship IOWA.

Battleship Iowa Looks to the Future as Museum of the Surface Navy

An Interview with Jonathan Williams, President & CEO of Battleship IOWA Museum and the Pacific Battleship Center – Los Angeles, California

BY CAPT EDWARD LUNDQUIST, USN (RET)

What's the plan for the Pacific Battleship Center and Battleship IOWA Museum here at San Pedro?

Earlier this year, we announced plans to become the National Museum of the Surface Navy at Battleship IOWA. We're in the final design process of our Capital Campaign Package to raise the necessary funds. This transition will have a tremendous impact locally and regionally, and ultimately, will raise awareness about the relevancy of the Surface Navy today.

While history at the museum is important, the relevancy of the Surface Navy to the public is probably the most important component. Surface Warriors understand the importance of their own community and their contribution to the Navy and the nation.

A museum's purpose is to educate the public. We see our role expanding by educating the public on the importance of the role of the Surface Navy. In my opinion, there's no better place to do that than right here in the largest port in the United States. Our Navy helps maintain safe and secure sea lanes to ensure the passage of all that wonderful cargo that we enjoy as American consumers, and the exports and humanitarian assistance that we send overseas, and all of those different things that make our country what it is.

I think a large percentage of the general public has no idea of the breadth of the Surface Navy's role and how it affects the average person's life. As we develop the National Museum of the Surface Navy concept, our Capital Campaign Package discusses each one of the components of the Surface Navy and why they're important—not only reflecting on the past in the historical context of “look at this artifact” or “look at this historical story,” but why that component is a relevant aspect of maintaining the future of our country and international relations.

Most people in Iowa probably have no idea how dependent they are on the sea.

They probably know more about our dependency on the sea services in Iowa than California. I hate to say that, but we see fifth, sixth, seventh graders that live in the Los Angeles area, and the first time they've ever seen the ocean is when they walked onboard the ship. They know little to nothing about American history and the wars fought to protect our democracy.

To the general public, all grey ships look the same, and a “battleship” is anything that's painted grey that goes to sea. They don't understand the different types of ships, or why they are important, and why having a strong Navy is important to the future of our country.

I think it would be too much to ask for them to understand what the different types of ships are, instead we should have them understand why we need a Navy, which is pretty important.

Working with and around the Navy daily, we get used to talking about DDGs, LPDs, LCS, or other ships. But when you start talking to different civilian counterparts and city officials about emergency exercises; like the Defense Support of Civilian Authorities (DSCA), it becomes important for the population to understand the difference between something smaller and something larger in regards to a platform that could respond to Katrina, Houston, or Puerto Rico – render medical aid, bring in fresh water, and render the type of aid that the larger platforms do.

We have worked extremely hard to change our visitor audience over the past seven years from the natural affinity audience of veterans and history buffs, to more of a multi-generational and multi-ethnic public engaging audience.

How'd you do it?

We started focusing on the basics.

We realized that only ship lovers like us really care to go inside to see the nuts and bolts of a ship. The majority of the general public is more interested in the human connection point versus technical facts, which drives a broader level of storytelling.

The IOWA crew tends to want to go down the road, “Oh, it's 58 thousand tons and 887 feet 11 inches...” but the public has no clue what they are looking at. They just walked on the ship.

We're dealing with a long time since this ship was built.

World War II to our young people today is what the Civil War was to the World War II generation. When you start to look at that time differential, many don't realize how much of a time distance that is for a 15, 18, or 20-year-old. We have recruits going into the Navy today that weren't alive when September 11th occurred. It's a different world, and we have to understand that to engage with them.

If you don't understand the differences between generations, you can't reach them.

That's the dynamic challenge that we have and that we're addressing here at the ship. It's why something like Fleet Week, as well as becoming a more diverse community platform, comes into play.

The **National Museum of the Surface Navy** will be more than just a museum. We want to become the place where we can have conversations about international trade, safe and secure commerce at sea, disaster response, and important facets of the Surface Navy's impact to society. We have our wardroom, our CPO mess, and our fantail available for meetings, presentations and seminars. The ship itself can serve to stimulate these discussions.

Having them on the ship is both a draw and an advertisement.

Yes. We're also using the ship's event spaces for veteran's reintegration programs, education programs, and public outreach opportunities.



LOS ANGELES (Aug. 28, 2019) Sailors aboard the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Spruance (DDG 111) render honors to the Battleship USS Iowa Museum while transiting through the Port of Los Angeles during the fourth annual Los Angeles Fleet Week (LAFW). LAFW is an opportunity for the American public to meet their Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard teams and experience America's sea services. During fleet week, service members participate in various community service events, showcase capabilities and equipment to the community and enjoy the hospitality of Los Angeles and its surrounding areas. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Hector Carrera/Released)



LOS ANGELES (Aug. 30, 2019) Interior Communications Specialist 1st Class Budd Brown, left, from Anchorage, Alaska, and Gunner's Mate 1st Class Eldy Fields, from Los Angeles, both assigned to Center for Surface Combat Systems (CSCS) West and selected for the rank of chief petty officer, clean the barrel of a 5 inch gun mount on the battleship USS Iowa during the fourth annual Los Angeles Fleet Week (LAFW). (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Gavin Shields/Released)



LOS ANGELES (Aug. 28, 2018) Mineman 2nd Class Justin Ormsby, left, and Mineman 3rd Class William Brush render honors to the Battleship USS Iowa while the Avenger-class mine countermeasures ship USS Scout (MCM 8) pulls into the Port of Los Angeles to begin Los Angeles Fleet Week. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Eric Zeak)

What does that mean?

One of the things we didn't realize is the organic nature of the ship. How being part of the crew here today has helped vets and civilians alike, bridge that gap and provide a comfortable environment to be part of something greater than themselves.

Veterans have always found in service to one's country something that's greater than themselves; feeling like they're part of something bigger. And today the ship and this organization continues that experience by organically helping vets transition into the civilian world—we're integrating both civilians and vets aboard a ship platform versus walking into a building or a workforce development center.

We're hosting a lot of seminars and programs to build on this unique environment.

Who are your partners in that effort?

REBOOT out of San Diego is one of them and LA County Department of Mental Health is another.

We're starting to work with Wounded Warrior Project, as well. We've received some early funding from Philadelphia Gear and the Johnny Carson Foundation.

Do you have any relationships with local active or reserve military organizations?

We have them here often, and we'd like to see more. We have CPO selectees come here from Port Hueneme and San Diego each year. We do a lot of enlistments, retirements and promotion ceremonies. We also have Army, Marines, Air Force and Coast Guard coming here. It's not just Navy.

I understand you have a STEM program with the schools nearby.

We have two STEM programs. One is called "Day of Discovery" with LAUSD – the second largest school district in the country. The other is called "STEAM at Sea" for any other school district in Los Angeles or Orange county.

We have trained volunteer tour guides that help us deliver the program. We currently focus on 4th through 6th grades.

Students learn about math through calculating trajectories; lifting

objects with block and tackle; they make aluminum foil boats and see how many pennies they can get inside and keep floating; how to measure the depth of the water; and they do leadership training.

Some of the kids have never been on a ship, or even seen one before. Here at the Port of Los Angeles, the kids will see all kinds of ships, including very large ones, very close up. Their eyes get big, and they say, "Wow! Look at that!"

It's interesting the number of people that will go into the Navy just because of their early exposure to an historic ship. I think some of the kids that come through here as a Scout or Sea Cadet will enter the Marine Corps, Navy, or one of the other services because of having that positive experience here. We want to track and articulate it. I don't think that's ever been articulated at the level it should.

How would you measure that?

I'd like to create a video of each person that says, "I went into the Navy because I was exposed to it here on Battleship IOWA," and create a 10-minute video of one person after another saying that.

How big of an impact does Fleet Week here in Los Angeles have on the community?

LA Fleet Week holds the high-water mark for public engagement of all Fleet Weeks across the country. We have data proving this, including a Navy commissioned Gallup poll, stating that 93% of attendees would recommend the Navy to a child or grandchild and 92% of attendees would support greater funding for the Navy.

Annually, we survey to find out what the awareness is from the public, and how many would encourage a son or daughter to join the sea services. We know what Fleet Week does. I'm not sure we quite know what an historic ship does to create awareness, because we haven't measured that. That data will be helpful.

Sometimes it's a lot more impactful when you hear it directly from someone who did it versus the data sitting in a spreadsheet.



SAN PEDRO, California. (Aug. 30, 2016) A Sailor aboard USS America (LHA 6) renders a salute as the Battleship Iowa Museum fires its 16-inch/50-caliber guns in salute as the ship arrives for Los Angeles Fleet Week 2016. The inaugural Los Angeles Fleet Week offers the public an opportunity to tour ships, meet Sailors, Marines, and members of the Coast Guard and gain a better understanding of how the sea services support the national defense of the United States and freedom of the seas. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Robert R. Sanchez)

Basically, what you're trying to do, I think, is show that this matters. Not about what the ship did in the past; but what it represents, and what the Navy means for the future of the nation. That's what makes the business case to sustain this ship.

That's why the whole national museum concept must be about the future.

When we first talked about the National Museum of the Surface Navy, people said it belongs in Norfolk or San Diego. But this museum is not being built for the Surface Navy community. It's being built to educate the general public on the importance of the Surface Navy.

It's the general public that's our audience, and that's ninety-five percent of our visitation. And here in Los Angeles we may get more exposure for the Surface Navy than you would in Norfolk or San Diego.

To your point, Norfolk and San Diego know about the Navy. Here we have a huge metropolitan area that doesn't know about the Navy. It's a ripe opportunity.

We have 2,100 racks on board here. The public doesn't need to see all of them. They would like to see a representative berthing compartment—40, 50 or 100 racks—that's more than enough for anybody visiting a ship to see. But we can convert that space into productive space. We have to do it strategically, because we don't want to rip out things that are unique in their own right.

We have space forward on the third deck where we can put a big movie theater. We're also looking at having different tours through the ship. When you tour the National Museum, and you want to learn more about navigation, or communications, or a specific area relating to something you just learned, we can have spurs that go off to experience those areas, to not just stare at them but have an immersive experience where visitors have to work through a scenario.

It's fun, stresses teamwork, and builds leadership. It creates an appreciation for what Navy men and women have to do every day.

Now the objective is to raise money and awareness.

We're almost done with our Capital Campaign Package. We've refined the budget. We've created the donor levels. We're starting to partner with a few entities to build that out.

There's already a large donor list of about thirty-six thousand people who have supported the IOWA. And we've started to shop that a little bit with people.

You just can't keep sticking your hand out asking them to donate.

You might think that, but I tend to find that you will actually turn-off a donor if you don't ask them to support your programs or maintain the ship condition. Donors like to make an impact and involving them in your organization allows them to become a part of something greater than themselves.

What do you need from SNA?

We need the community's support. We need to build the Surface Navy support through SNA to help spread the word and make people aware, across the country, and build a human foundation as we press forward and become the National Museum of the Surface Navy.



PACIFIC OCEAN (June 1, 2012) The guided-missile destroyer USS Decatur (DDG 73) passes the former battleship USS Iowa (BB 61) while departing Naval Weapons Station Seal Beach. Sailors assigned to Decatur spent the week conducting ordnance operations at the weapons station. The former USS Iowa is being prepared for berthing in San Pedro, Calif., as a museum ship. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communications Specialist 1st Class Eli J. Medellin)



Jonathan Williams with members from Cheap Trick during 2019 LA Fleet Week.



USS Iowa veteran and current CIO David Canfield, volunteer crew member Gary Blackney, volunteer crew member and SNA member CAPT Rich Abele, and Jonathan Williams at ceremony honoring volunteer service.