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NPS Executive Education Helps Senior Flags Prepare for Next Command

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Article By: Kenneth A. Stewart

Prior to assuming command of the U.S. 3rd Fleet this past June, Vice Adm. Kenneth Floyd spent several days at the Naval Postgraduate School for a series of one-on-one sessions with university faculty to assist in his transition.

In fact, since 2010, NPS faculty and staff have been working quietly with senior naval flag officers across the service to prepare them for some of the Navy's most challenging assignments around the world.

"I have to say the Tailored Support Course was definitely additive to my preparation for this job," said Floyd following his official assumption of command at the fleet's headquarters in San Diego, Calif.

"NPS offers a guy like me the chance to really think about what I'm getting into and facilitates that with an incredible number of some of the world's experts in their fields," said Floyd. "Training dollars are tough to find right now and I feel very fortunate to have been able to attend this course. I will continue to avail myself of these resources and recommend others do so as well."

Titled the Tailored Support Course, the program was developed by NPS' Center for Executive Education (CEE) in response to the Chief of Naval Operations' (CNO) desire to assist transitioning naval flag officers.

"The CNO wanted a way to provide additional support to flag officers as they transition to positions of greater responsibility and visibility," said CEE Acting Director Winli McAnally. "We proposed a tailored one-on-one course as an option, and over the last couple of years, we have fine-tuned the process and narrowed our focus to ensure the best use of these admirals' time as they move onto their new positions.

"We help them see the different perspectives of the business they will be doing. By gaining these perspectives, they are able to approach their new commands with tools that will make them more effective," she continued.

McAnally works closely with course participants to create a syllabus fashioned to their specific goals and interests. In doing so, she leverages NPS' diverse intellectual capital to prepare senior leaders for the unique challenges of their next assignments.

"The great thing about this program is that we pull faculty from across NPS," McAnally said. "It really highlights the resources, the faculty and the research that NPS conducts, and has led to research opportunities for our faculty members."

McAnally worked closely with Floyd to mold the program and its content to meet his specific needs.

"I really had no idea what to expect as I flew up [to NPS] ... What I wanted was partially an unknown, but [McAnally] did a fantastic job putting together a syllabus that more than matched where I wanted to go as I worked to wrap my head around the first 90 days in this job," said Floyd.

Floyd also worked closely with retired Air Force Col. Frank "Chip" Wood, a former pilot and a behavioral scientist with 25 years experience coaching industry leaders. He helps participating officers to see past their current positions in an effort to understand the strategic complexities of their future assignments.

"I get them to think about the strategic context of the position they are going into. Who are the internal and external stakeholders? How are they going to assess what's going on in their organizations? What is the strategic context and what are they bringing into that context? What's going to help them or get in their way?" said Wood.

Floyd and Wood worked closely over the course of several days to develop a course plan. NPS-developed transition plans help participants to identify their critical stakeholders, and anticipate what they will need to know and do when they get to their next organization.

"I spent several hours with Chip over the course of two days talking about stakeholders and what this job meant to me as well as to them. We discussed outcomes, how I hoped to accomplish them, and then the details of projected barriers to those outcomes," said Floyd. "[Wood] also helped me to learn how my wiring might be used as a lever as well as to understand when it might need some adjustment."

"Adm. Floyd is an active learner ... The more he learns the more he wants to learn, that's a great situation for a coach to be in," said Wood. "[Floyd's] natural curiosity and good sense of people's needs are likely to serve him well."

Floyd's experience at NPS is indicative of the Tailored Support Course's approach. In preparation for his command of the U.S. Navy's Third Fleet, Floyd met humanitarian and disaster relief, ethics, communications and regional studies experts familiar with his new area of responsibility.

"I had the opportunity to discuss HADR (humanitarian assistance and disaster relief) with Dr. Aruna Apte, talk about an expert in her field," Floyd said. "We talked through the strategy of HADR in relation to defense as well as some potential policies to consider, it was time very well spent."

Often the relationship between faculty and course participant continues long after the course has ended.

"These leaders are going into these organizations wanting to make a difference. I often call and check in on them during the transition and offer them a knowing ear. I know what they were



Vice Adm. Kenneth E. Floyd salutes as his flag is raised during the Commander, U.S. 3rd Fleet change of command and retirement ceremony aboard the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76) in early June. Vice Adm. Gerald R. Beaman was relieved by Floyd and retired following 35 years of honorable service. (U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Jesse L. Gonzalez)

wanting to do and I can ask them how it is going," said Wood. "Sometimes they will run into obstacles or things will not go as planned. If they call me or send me a note, I will do some telephone coaching to offer some strategy."

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