

Navy Learning Center Head: Sub Training Must Keep Up With Speed Of Technology

By Robert A. Hamilton

Groton – The Navy offers major re-training to its enlisted people about once every five years, timed to coincide with their re-enlistment for the most effective use of the training programs, but it updates technology on its warships about once a year.

“It’s inherently wrong, and we have to break out of that mold or the talent of our enlisted people is going to be obsolete by the time they get to our ships,” Capt. Arnold O. Lotring told the Naval Submarine League in a speech Friday at the U.S. Submarine Veterans headquarters on School Street.

Lotring, who commands the newly established Submarine Learning Center, which will oversee training at the seven major submarine homeports from Guam to Groton, said he was also dismayed to learn that even after installing new virtual reality navigation trainers, some of the bases had maintained the old-style trainers for occasional use.

The redundant systems were costing the Navy an extra \$500,000 a year until he ordered them removed this year, he said. That money was wasted because the system did not move quickly enough to embrace the new technology.

The submarine force has long prided itself on offering some of the best training in the service, Lotring said, but that cannot lead to complacency, because as the technology of naval warfare evolved rapidly, training is going to have to keep pace or it will quickly fall behind.

The Submarine Learning Center represents a major overhaul of the Navy’s training and education system, from the monolithic and centralized structure that existed until last year to a new decentralized structure that allows decisions that are more responsive to fleet needs, Lotring said.

The Submarine Learning Center is responsible for 1,700 instructors and training specialists; \$3 billion in infrastructure, from classrooms to computers; and a \$100 million annual budget. It will offer about 200,000 courses, from single-day to several weeks, every year.

Rather than formal classroom training every few years, Lotring advocates a “learning continuum” that will allow sailors to tap into the Learning Center’s on-line educational resources for the training they need, when and where they need it.

Lotring offered a few examples of the other developments he expects in the next 10 years or so that will affect training:

- Submariners will earn their certifications before they go to a boat on virtual training systems, rather than go through a headlong qualification process once they report. Automation is reducing the number of people on the crew, and making it more important every year that every person is qualified, rather than in training.
- There will be just two enlisted ratings in the forward section of the boat: a service-related rating, which will replace some of the hands-on specialties such as cook, yeoman and storekeeper; and a technical rating, which will combine sonar, radio, fire control and electronics technicians. Systems are becoming so reliable that maintenance and repair jobs will be reduced significantly.
- Every person on a submarine will be trained in information technology, much as every Marine is considered a rifleman. Computers are taking over so many tasks, he said, that a machinist mate can’t order a part or open a repair manual without logging onto the network.