

Voiceover: This program is presented in partnership with the Chicago Navy Memorial Foundation.

(Theme music)

Voiceover: The following is a production of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library. Bringing citizens and citizen soldiers together through the exploration of military history, topics, and current affairs, this is *Pritzker Military Presents*.

(Applause)

Schwan: Welcome to *Pritzker Military Presents* featuring a discussion with Rear Admiral Matthew Zirkle, Director Naval Reserve Innovation Branch. I'm your host John Schwan, and this program is coming to you from the Pritzker Military Museum and Library in downtown Chicago. This program and hundreds more are available on demand at [PritzkerMilitary.org](http://PritzkerMilitary.org). Rear Admiral Zirkle is a navy flag officer with thirty-plus years of both military and civilian business leadership experience. Following commissioning, Zirkle was assigned to USS Parche and also made deployments aboard USS Pintado and USS Pogy. In 1989 he affiliated with the navy reserve and commanded nine reserve units. Zirkle's tours of duty include leadership roles in the submarine force, naval coastal warfare, naval forces Korea, office of navy research, Pacific Fleet and Pacific Command. Returning to active duty, Zirkle served on the office of the chief of naval operations, staff as a navy crisis action chief. At the Pentagon he monitored all US navy operations and events worldwide. In 2009 he mobilized as chief of staff Task Force Iraq, maritime in Bahrain, directed a staff of US and Royal Navy personnel responsible for the protection of Iraqis oil terminals and territorial waters as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom. As a flag officer, Zirkle has most recently commanded submarines NATO responsible for operational tasks of all submarines assigned to the alliance. He currently serves as director of Innovation for the Navy Reserve. As a decorated officer, Zirkle's personal awards include the Defense Superior Service Medal and the Legion of Merit. Zirkle is a native of Hinsdale, Illinois and a 1985 graduate of the University of California at San Diego. He also holds a master's of business administration and marketing from Cornell University. Please join me in welcoming to the Pritzker Military Museum and Library Rear Admiral Matthew Zirkle.

(Applause)

Schwan: So we've got somebody local to talk to.

Zirkle: (Chuckles) Yes.

Schwan: How long have you been in the naval reserve?

Zirkle: So I joined the navy reserve after coming off of active duty back in 1989. I always like to think that when I joined the navy reserve, I never gave up my first job the navy, I just went part time.

Schwan: And that was your choice, I assume.

Zirkle: It was. At that point quite frankly it was a choice of pursuing a business career like my father had done or continuing to stay on in the navy with a particular path in the submarine force. At that time we knew we were going to draw down the number of submarines, so it was going to be more and more challenging to be able to do that. And I'd always wanted to go get my MBA and do some business work. So I made the choice at that time to come out and ended up going to Cornell University.

Schwan: And what did you do after that?

Zirkle: So I had a break in service of about seven days.

Schwan: Seven days?

Zirkle: Seven days form active--

Schwan: So you couldn't find a job or what?

Zirkle: No, no, no, from active duty directly into the navy reserve. So I got out to Ithaca to where Cornell is and immediately affiliated with the navy reserve. And thought it was a great opportunity to be able to continue to serve and make some money on the weekends while being able to get my degree.

Schwan: Good.

Zirkle: And from there I opted into a career primarily in marketing and product management. But I stayed in the navy reserve and continued on in that even after leaving Cornell. And obviously here I am almost thirty years later still serving in the navy reserve.

Schwan: So you had a business career--

Zirkle: I did.

Schwan: Simultaneously you were in the reserves. I hesitate to use the word weekend warrior.

Zirkle: Right. And it's not that anymore. You know, I've often said that I've been a part of at least three navy reserves, So when I joined, which was '89, it was right before the first Gulf War. And at that particular point in time the navy reserve was a construct of WWII and the Cold War. We had commands like convoy commands and other things that were built into the navy reserve. And then the first Gulf War--Desert Storm occurred, and that made the reserve change. We found out that we didn't need convoy commands and those likes for the regional conflicts that we had. We needed different efforts, expeditionary type, such as the coastal warfare units, medical corps, Seabees, things like that. And so at that time after that in the 90s we saw significant changes in the navy reserve. So that was sort of the second navy reserve changing and morphing as it went along. And then unfortunately 9/11 happened, so a little over a decade later, and that yet against changed the nature of how we saw war and how the reserve component fit into the overall ability for our country to fight. And so now I think I'm in my third navy reserve, and it continues to evolve, which I think is a great thing. You know, we want to be able to fit our nation's needs, our navy's needs, our military's needs.

Schwan: How small did the navy get during those periods of times when they weren't sure what--when the missions was changing?

Zirkle: Sure, so when I joined the navy, it was the Reagan era, so we were marching towards 600 ships. We had well over 100 submarines. And then as I mentioned at the end of the 80s we knew things were going to draw down. It was the end of the Cold War, and we were steadily going to decrease to roughly, if I recall correctly, somewhere around sixty to fifty attack submarines. We also have our ballistic missile submarines. The navy reserve, when I joined I want to say it was close to 100,000 personnel. It is now just shy of 60,000 personnel. So you can see there's been an incredible drawdown in that particular force. Yet at the same time the call of our nation is still at the same high level. So we've gone from a lot more units, a lot more personnel, down to much fewer ships, much fewer personnel, but the requirement, the ask, the draw is still about the same. So that's also caused a shift in the way navy reserve has been looked at. The navy reserve ideally is your strategic reserve; it's somebody you can draw about to add to the forces as necessary in a conflict. Makes sense, right? Well as we move from Desert Storm and then post-9/11 with Iraqi Freedom and the other things that we've been through, there's been much more of an operational draw from the navy reserve, and the other services as well--the air national guard, national guards, etcetera. So now we're not just a strategic depth piece--break glass when a conflict occurs--but we're also tasked to help out on an operational standpoint, to be able to surge when we might have a particular event going on. You know, the active duty component tries to be able to maintain as much personnel as they can, but sometimes they might come up a little short. So sometimes we think about the reserve component on this operational capability

as a shock absorber, to be able to compress or expand as necessary to make up for those shortfalls.

Schwan: Which makes the next obvious question to me--

Zirkle: Right.

Schwan: --not necessarily to you. Are you trained--are you and your men trained at the same level as the active navy so that you slip right in, or are you segmented into specialties?

Zirkle: That's an excellent question, and the answer is more of the latter. There are certainly certain aspects of the reserve component that are trained at a different level where they can more quickly integrate into the active component and be able to go do those kinds of things. Again you look at it from a strategic depth standpoint is, I have bodies that are physically qualified, medically qualified, can do most of the basic stuff. I need a couple months to put them up to speed to be able to then put them into that. From the operational capability side, different. We have, for instance, coastal river squadrons now. Actual boats, brown water navy, which you are quite familiar with--

Schwan: Yeah.

Zirkle: --in your background. So those folks are actually training on the hardware on the weekends doing missions on a more regular basis, even deploying, which is the operational side of that and getting into that kind of rotation. Now there are other aspects of the navy reserve that are not quite exclusive but inherent of the navy reserve. So I come from a submarine background, and most of our reserve submarine officers are trained in what is called Theater ASW--theater anti-submarine warfare. And the majority of our capability is actually built into the reserve component. So if we were to stand up and have a significant or a major war, the ASW commands, a large portion of that would be navy reserve component, 'cause most of the active duty submariners are out on the boats themselves.

Schwan: But you are capable of going out on a boat yourself?

Zirkle: Me, no. No, I--

Schwan: Well, no, you're--

Zirkle: (Laughing)

Schwan: You're an admiral, I mean--

Zirkle: No longer. No, so--so that's a really interesting point, too, as well. So certain officers, certain designators, absolutely still maintain that level of aspect. So we have people who train on the newer, what is called the littoral combat ship--the LCS--and they train on those particular platforms. On the submarine standpoint, only the active component is on submarines, and the reserve component does more of the shore-base Theater ASW piece. Enlisted rates absolutely have ability--in fact right now we have an initiative called RC to Seas, so reserve component to be able to go back to sea. When they're manning shortfalls on the active duty side, we have reserve sailors who will opt in and go out and work on the ship for deployment for nine months period at a time, so they get back on a ship, integrate with the crew, and to help out with the--

Schwan: So then you become the force supplier.

Zirkle: Absolutely. That's the whole concept. But there's a tradeoff. The tradeoff is, when you start using your strategic depth for the operational capability piece, you lose part of your strategic depth. So how do you make sure you maintain the two of those?

Schwan: And that I assume is by using more reservists.

Zirkle: So, yes, if you want more out of the reserves, then maybe you need to have more reserves.

Schwan: Exactly.

Zirkle: So we try to keep our force to its manning levels and work through those kinds of issues.

Schwan: And that is done through--do you recruit for reservists?

Zirkle: We do. That's a trick, actually. The best way to be able to capture--capture's maybe not a proper term--

Schwan: But it's the correct term. This is a military interview--

Zirkle: To be able to bring somebody into our reserve component piece, the best way is for someone who is actually coming off of active duty. So we make quite an effort to do that. We have a career transition office who helps people with that, inform them of that. Because once someone has come off of active duty, decided not to join the reserve component, and then to be able to go out into civilian life, how do you track that person later on? And I think that's a difficult challenge that we have to think a little bit more about and see how we can be able to go out and find those folks. Because a lot of them several years afterwards, they end up missing service. I know you—I'm sure you feel, after you had to hang up your uniform there's that desire to go back to do that. I'm not looking forward to retiring in a couple years. I love serving my country, and many of these folks still feel that way. So sometimes they'll seek us out, but we have to be able to seek them out as well.

Schwan: Are there reserve positions you can put them into?

Zirkle: In terms of—

Schwan: --what they can do—

Zirkle: --prior service?

Schwan: Yes.

Zirkle: Absolutely. We have--well, the only way to make a reserve submarine officer is from active duty. So we absolutely have specific available for them. Occasionally we will take people who have no prior service and put them into the reserves, but generally we're trying to put them more into administrative type duties and things like that. Some things you just--you learn by actually having gone to sea and gone through the different schools and things like that. And that's a richness that we need to--again I'll say--capture within the navy reserve itself. You think about it, the navy spent a lot of money to train these people. And once they're gone, we're getting no return on investment over something along those lines. So having a strong reserve component and being able to bring those people in and be able to continue to get that investment out of them is a really, really important thing to do. And if you talk to the chief of navy personnel right now, he would tell you that we are facing what we call a sort of a war for talent right now. We're competing with the civilian forces to be able to keep personnel. On the aviation side, there's a high demand on the airlines to find trained pilots. The navy air force are great educators for them in that regard. And so how do we, A, make sure that we get that balance of that. Some people are going to choose to move off, but our naval reserve aviation program is a fantastic place for them to be able still be able to fly for civilian airlines and at that same time keep up their skills in that regard on the navy reserve side. We have aircraft--for instance our C-40 aircraft is a Boeing 737. So if you're a pilot with Southwest Airlines or you're flying 737s, your ability to come over on the weekend and do that or fly another mission and fly a C-40, it's seamless.

Schwan: Now, if you're a regular seaman--an obvious question from an infantryman--how can you integrate them back into the machinery of a ship--

Zirkle: Right.

Schwan: --and make them valuable?

Zirkle: Absolutely. So for the most part, we start off with the basic qualifications that we keep people abreast to. So damage control, fighting fires, patching holes in ships. That's a basic that goes across--preventative maintenance, being able to follow those things. We try as much as possible also for people during their annual training piece to be able

to actually go out to a ship or things along those lines. So they keep current in their particular profession.

Schwan: Now, do you have--again going back to the concept that the public who's gonna listen to this--your part, not mine, they can cut me off. How much active duty does a reservist have to serve to stay a reservist? Weekend warrior or what's that mean--

Zirkle: So, what is our obligation? So we have what's called the basic entitlement, which generally is fourteen days of annual training, active duty training a year, plus the one weekend a month. So that's two days of the weekend times twelve is twenty-four. That's thirty-eight days of entitlement. At a minimum it's thirty-eight days that a person is spending in uniform if they're in the reserve component. Now, remember we go back to operational capability piece and also the fact that there may be certain jobs that have a higher level of qualification or requirement. What we're actually exploring now in one of the programs I'm working on is, could there be tiered levels of service? Could we say thirty-eight is a basic tier that we need to have for strategic depth but recognize that perhaps in other units maybe we need seventy days out of them or ninety days out of them? So a higher tier of participation. And we've actually done enough research and looked at that. Right now currently fifteen percent of the navy reserve is spending more than that thirty-eight days a year in uniform. They're participating, they want to participate. They may have the capacity to. Maybe they're an airline pilot and they can fit that into the schedule. Maybe they have a part-time job. Who knows what their situation is, but they're able to serve more than that. So we've got to be able to figure out those programs more to be able to meet that need from the fleet and also be able to properly take care of those folks.

Schwan: I would think other than--and forgive my fascination--

Zirkle: Sure

Schwan: --a submariner can't be out of the water for--

Zirkle: Right, which is why that is such specialized training being able to operate the nuclear reactor, things along those lines. But there are other areas--so for instance, divers. The divers can--is actually one of the areas we are exploring for having this higher tier of readiness. The navy needs a lot of divers for various different operations, whether it be salvage, rescue operations, things along those lines. And so we actually have--that's sort of the first phase that we're looking at for this greater tiered participation.

Schwan: So you are working--an obvious question of a civilian--

Zirkle: Sure.

Schwan: Is the navy ready? What's the flash-to-bang time for most of your reservists?

Zirkle: That's a great question, and that's something that we're actively looking at now. What is that requirement? If you look historically, yes, we've been attacked—Pearl Harbor, an example of that. But it still took time to be able to get up to speed and to be able to do those things. More recently if you look at Iraqi Freedom, things along those lines, we took somewhere around several months in order to be able to get into position to be able to do those things. And so we definitely try to target being able to have people down range I think within ninety days, some people sooner, some people a little bit later depending on that. But that's generally what our goal is that we're looking at.

Schwan: The army has gone with the brigade theory, as you know.

Zirkle: Right.

Schwan: So that there's air mobile or airborne brigade that's attached to a MEC unit and whatnot. Does the navy have that capability, or are you really--

Zirkle: So the other services have a mix of that. So they have a mix of IMA, which is Individual Mobilizers. Not necessarily attached to that. But then there are actual--there's guard units, things along those lines, or contain units. The navy reserve has a little bit of

a mix of that as well. It's primarily augmentation to existing staffs. So for instance you can be reservist who's part of Naval Forces Europe-Africa and Sixth Fleet. You would be going out to Naples or other events as they need you to do that. At the same time we do have contained units, so we have squadrons of aircraft that stand on their own. We have squadrons of coastal refueling patrol craft that stand on their own. So it is a bit of a mix sometimes. Augmentation piece, sometimes it will be a contained commission unit.

Schwan: But the reserve is an active, evolving--

Zirkle: Absolutely.

Schwan: --situation.

Zirkle: Absolutely.

Schwan: Training continuously so at some point you've got to be able to go from sixty to a hundred--

Zirkle: Correct.

Schwan: If that's the number.

Zirkle: In terms of readiness levels. And that's one of the things we definitely take a look at--how are we maintaining that level of readiness.

Schwan: How do you view your service?

Zirkle: Well, as I mentioned, in '89 I went part time. And now I've come back full time since December 2014 after I received my first star. And my story of kind of wanting to be in the navy goes a ways back. Growing up I was a corporate brat, not a military brat. But my dad moved around every couple years, and one of the first cities I lived in was Chesapeake, Virginia. And I remember my dad taking me out on a wood fishing boat that he had bought. And we'd go out, and we'd catch all sorts of fish, and we'd drive up and down behind the navy ships out there. And so I got to see that. And then a few years later we ended up living in San Diego, the other big navy town. So big influence between the two of those. In fact so much so that as a kid--remember Revell models?

Schwan: Of course.

Zirkle: Yes.

Schwan: The USS Missouri. Every old person built one of those.

Zirkle: Right, exactly. I had a whole fleet. I probably had fourteen or fifteen navy models. I already had my own piece. And then my mom bought me Potter's book *Nimitz*, and I read *Nimitz*, which is just a great story of a great man. And then I went to school underneath the flight path for NAS, now marine corps air station Miramar, where they used to have Top Gun, and they flew over my high school. And I moved across the street to UCS San Diego, which was the next school over, so they flew over that. And one day I got the notion that, hey, maybe I should go do this navy thing. In fact, my mom said, "You know, you ought to go to the academy." I said, "Nah, I want to have fun when I go to college." But somewhere two years into college I still got this itching, so I guess there was a calling to actually join the service. And I went down, and I wanted to be a naval flight officer. Sit in the back seat of an F-14, 'cause at that time I wore glasses, couldn't be a pilot. And they somehow or another convinced me to be a submariner instead. And ended up being in the submarine force, did my time in active duty, went through the training pipeline, came out, went to Cornell, and did the business career. But I really wanted to stay in uniform and continue to serve. And I always felt that if I could make other people's lives easier within the navy and be able to serve them, then I would keep on going. I feel I've had that opportunity. I've now been in the navy reserve twenty-nine years and in the navy I guess in total over thirty-three years, and love every day of it.

Schwan: What is your favorite naval battle or encounter? What's the one you read about?

Zirkle: I think Midway, of course.

Schwan: Okay.

Zirkle: Of course. And last week was--and so I was really honored and privileged last week. Last week was the seventy--I'm not gonna do public math--I think it's seventy-fourth--

Schwan: Yeah probably. That's close enough. I don't do math either.

Zirkle: No, no, I got it wrong. It's the seventy-sixth.

Schwan: You gotta do math. You're a submariner.

Zirkle: Exactly. It's the seventy-sixth anniversary of the Battle of Midway. And as I'm sure you know in Washington D.C. where I am right now we have the US Navy Memorial, and they had an event for the Battle of Midway. And we had four or five veterans still who actually came down, and we honored them for their service for participating in that. And that's an amazing battle. It's--when I think about the Battle of Midway, I think there's a stroke of luck, but sometimes it's what you do with that luck that makes a difference.

Schwan: There's also a stroke of God in my opinion--

Zirkle: Could be.

Schwan: And the definition of what water is and so on, but anyway that's a tremendous, tremendous story--

Zirkle: It is.

Schwan: --of American perseverance. Lucky American sailors. I don't--

Zirkle: We went and did the job.

Schwan: Absolutely. Not even a question. Realizing that you are in, I guess you'd call it innovation, realizing what you can say about innovation is and should be restricted, and if you told me, I would understand a very small level of what you say. Where's the navy gonna be--where are you taking the navy with your job?

Zirkle: So let's talk about innovation. So I know a lot of times when people hear that I'm responsible for innovation, they are of the mindset that I'm talking about technology side of things. And instead my innovation is not just about technology, but it's about doing things better. So one of the things I'm involved with right now is a program Ready To Win. And Ready To Win is a concept we came up with--how can we do things better inside the navy reserve itself, whether it be through technology or simply looking at different processes that we're working through and making them work better? And the interesting thing about this particular program is, it's not a top-down approach. It's a top-down and bottom-up approach. It's from the deck plates. We've enabled, through the use of web technology, we have a site now called the Idea Portal, where actually any sailor, any navy reserve sailor, can come on to this and share their particular ideas. We have people actually monitoring to that. There's a conversation going on, collaboration, and we're getting loads of different ways for how we can actually do business better for our sailors. The bottom line of what I'm trying to do with the Ready To Win program is to try to be able to make the navy reserve--well, let me put it this way. I don't want the sailors, our reserve sailors dreading coming to the weekend, where they have to do all sorts of silly adminis-trivia type stuff. What can we do to make that stuff smaller so they can do what they originally intended to do--serve the nation, do the mission, things along those lines? So actually a lot of my innovation work is in that particular area, as opposed to straight-up finding the next great drone or EEV and things along those lines. And it's important for people to think about that, that innovation is not just about necessarily coming up with new technology. It's about how you take existing technology and other things to be able to innovate and make things better.

Schwan: I saw a picture in a magazine or a newspaper about the new destroyer that you can't even see the guns.

Zirkle: Oh, sure.

Schwan: What is that?

Zirkle: So that's the 1,000, and that's the whole number of it. And you catch me now. I'm going absolutely blank on the name of the ship.

Schwan: No, that's okay, it was just--again, being interviewed by an infantryman.

Zirkle: I'm a submarine. Do you know what all submariners call surface ships, right? Targets.

Schwan: (Laughing) I like that.

Zirkle: But there's a whole nother way of doing this.

Schwan: That's super.

Zirkle: I had a friend of mine who was a--he was a warrant officer, and he was previously a mine man, a master chief mine man. So he wore a surface warfare officer pin. And I used to kid him. I said, "Gary, you know, you guys are targets." And he looked at me and he goes, "You just don't understand, Matt, to a mine, everything is a target." So that totally trumped my piece of submariners calling everything targets.

Schwan: They're continuously working on within the parameters that it's worth discussing laser stuff and those kind of things.

Zirkle: Oh, yeah.

Schwan: Are you involved in that?

Zirkle: I'm not. That's actually part of the office of naval research, which is affiliated with one of the reserve units there. And there are definitely high-energy weapons that they're looking at, so there's the rail gun project we're working on. We've done some work with laser and done some testing actually out in the gulf, in the Gulf of Arabia, in some of those aspects as well. So navy continues to grow and define itself. I think there's a lot of future also in unmanned vehicles, both aerial vehicles, ground transport vehicles, but also from a submariner's standpoint, undersea vehicles as well and how we could best utilize them.

Schwan: How would you evaluate--and I know you're a submariner--

Zirkle: The silent service--

Schwan: --which means you're not afraid of being underwater--how would you evaluate as an example the progress, the Chinese with their quote/unquote aircraft carriers that aren't really aircraft carriers?

Zirkle: So they're continuing to definitely make great strides. They're--they have an all-out effort to grow their fleet to be able to take it from something that's just a regional defense. We see that the Chinese are operating all over the globe quite frankly. While I was in Europe they definitely had a small number of ships that would travel around Europe on a goodwill tour. They've gone to Africa as well. So they are certainly out there, and they are certainly trying to grow their capabilities.

Schwan: And obviously we monitor them. The place I'm taking this is, they aren't competitive with us from a technology standpoint or any other standpoint, are they?

Zirkle: That's an--

Schwan: That's a concern.

Zirkle: That's an interesting comment. So as much as we can talk about-- their capabilities are in different domains if you will. So we have subsurface/surface aviation, but we also have another domain as well, and that's the cyber domain. And I would say that in places like the cyber domain, they certainly are much more of a near-peer competitor. And so that's a concern to our nation, and we have to be able to counteract that and defend against that.

Schwan: And that's one of the things you're working on. Within the parameters you can discuss. I--we get that.

Zirkle: I personally am not involved with that, but I know a lot of people who it greatly concerns. Look, from a navy reserve standpoint, here's the way that we look at it or how we view it. Our country just recently released its national defense strategy. And in the

national defense strategy we move from what we called the four-plus-one to the two-plus-three. And it's not a math problem.

Schwan: Thank you.

Zirkle: No problem.

Schwan: So now you can explain it.

Zirkle: Sure, so the four-plus-one and the two-plus-three are the same, but you have Russia and China. That's the two now. Additionally there was Iran and North Korea, so that made the four, but they're part of the plus-three. And then violent extremist organizations is the other piece as well. And so that's the focus of our new national defense strategy on those. And there's a recognition especially with China and Russia, and once again we are tending towards great power competition. And I use the word competition. I don't use the word enemy or anything along those lines. It is a competition. We're not moving back, I think, towards a cold war. I think it's a bit different in how we're approaching these things. There are certainly things to learn from history and how other nations approach things. A legal annexation of Crimea. We saw a lot of annexations before WWII in various different parts of the world. It's always been sort of that territorial fight. We now--the conflicts in the South China Sea and how we view along those kinds of things how that's going there. And so we have to be able to have a strong military to fight our nation's wars. And so where my responsibility is on the navy reserve side is, how do I make sure we have a navy reserve force that can provide that lethality to be able to help fight those wars. That's where my charge is.

Schwan: Now conceivably a more difficult question. Are your sailors better than they ever were before, male and female?

Zirkle: Absolutely. So that's to say that as we look at our force going forward, the education level and what they bring to the fight now is amazing. You think about from a cyber perspective. You and I grew up before personal computers and things along those lines. I look at my daughter, and she things everything is a touch screen. Everything is a touch screen. And so--I have a nine-year-old son who's already learning how to program things. So just the amazing capability of our youth and their ability to be able to bring that capability into this, it's fantastic.

Schwan: Good.

Zirkle: It's great.

Schwan: So you think they're as good as ever.

Zirkle: Absolutely, so--and people talk—they're different. Every generation is a bit different. They grew up based on their environment and what they came from. I grew up in the Cold War era. It was all about fallout shelters and different drills that we had to do--drop drills and stuff like that in class. It was the Soviet Union; it was a different time. Where they grow up now, we have the different various terrorist activities that are going on in the world--cyber and online and the internet--it shapes them differently. But the same still premise is there. They're all great Americans who love their country and love what we stand for.

Schwan: Which is what's important.

Zirkle: Right, and that's the common theme. Okay. So we may be shaped by the different technologies and social things that are going on at the time. But underlying, that doesn't change.

Schwan: Do these incidents like the Pueblo and destroying--terrorists destroying our ships, are we moving forward and doing a better job of protecting our sailors?

Zirkle: Oh, yeah, I would absolutely agree with that. There's a lot of focus and effort to ensure that we are looking out there for that next threat. And the navy very much believes in the safety of our sailors. That is of high, high importance. I know that. I have personally been involved also lately in taking a look at how we affect our culture in the

navy broad--not just the reserve but navy broadly—in the wake of the tragedies that happened in the previous years with the Fitzgerald and the McCain and other incidences. So I've been working with a team that I've collected to actually go and look at best practices across industry and to see what we can learned from that just to make sure that we continue to grow a safety culture and make sure that we maintain safety operations.

Schwan: Are you comfortable with the level of talent enlisting?

Zirkle: Oh, absolutely. There's no doubt in my mind. I continue to meet new sailors, both men and women. They continue to impress me with their perseverance, their toughness, and what they bring to the fight. It's a fantastic navy.

Schwan: How are we doing numbers-wise in recruits?

Zirkle: Yeah, so we are actually--we're on a hiring spurt right now. We need more talent into the service. As I mentioned before we have the War for Talent. The economy is continuing to improve, and with that, that makes it tighter on the job market to be able to find the best possible people. So we're continuing to grow that piece. And right up the road here is Great Lakes, which is our navy's boot camp. And we are growing that particular program in order to meet that demand. There is a thought right now that we are trying to grow the number of ships in our navy. The target that they talk about a lot of times is 355 ships. We're somewhere right around the 300 mark. And as we continue to expand that and grow the navy, we're gonna need more and more talented personnel to be able to man those ships.

Schwan: I went to—I periodically go to a graduation--

Zirkle: Sure.

Schwan: --up at Great Lakes.

Zirkle: And so what's your impression?

Schwan: They're bigger.

Zirkle: Okay.

Schwan: Or the rest of us are littler. I'm not sure what the equation is.

Zirkle: In terms of stature.

Schwan: In terms of, they were discipline. They've obviously closed the base, which they should have. They seemed to have the pride or esprit that we have had. At the Pritzker we bring them in here periodically for training, just to have them go through and what not. And I'm familiar with the captains who run the operations, and I think they're outstanding. I really do.

Zirkle: Gives you a sense of pride.

Schwan: Total sense of pride.

Zirkle: Absolutely.

Schwan: Almost everybody--I don't think it can be allowed or whatever--almost everybody should get an opportunity to go to one of those graduations, because they just--they make you feel better.

Zirkle: So I ran into--yesterday when I was flying in here, I got on the shuttle bus for the car rental, and I was in uniform, and there's a family in the back, and they said, "Hey, our daughter is actually up. She's graduating in August. She's enjoying every minute of it. She's having a hard time, though, with the uniform and getting that just right, but she's doing great in the class." But you can just tell. I mean, the dad was wearing the Navy Dad sweatshirt and everything else. They were just absolutely prideful of that. And to me, family plays a significant role in this, in continuing to build our navy. When we look at the decision-making process of a teenager, they are going to turn to parents, their grandparents, other family members, instructors, things along those lines to do that. So we have to make sure that we make the right promises to them as well to take care of

their kids and to provide them a great career opportunity. And you go back to the safety piece too as well, that we're on top of those kinds of things.

Schwan: I have a view that one of the things that makes our military across the board the strongest in the world is that a private can become a lieutenant if he has to.

Zirkle: Sure.

Schwan: Because we're smarter.

Zirkle: Sure.

Schwan: Do you share that view, and do you think that the training you are participating in perpetuates that?

Zirkle: Oh, undoubtedly. That sort of goes back to the whole concept of America, being able to succeed. You're not by your class that you're limited to only being an enlisted person or because you've done this thing you should be an officer. Anything along those lines. I see plenty of enlisted personnel who have master's degrees, maybe even Ph.Ds. just as much so. And I think that's fantastic. And the opportunities to be able to move that along are very much there, whether it's through a direct commission program, the LDO--limited duty officer--where we take an enlisted person and give them a commission, and they are focused in a very specific area. All those kinds of things are open and available to anyone.

Schwan: What are your future plans?

Zirkle: Great question. Thanks for that. I am right now in the midst of preparing to go over to Naples and be chief of staff for Naval Forces Europe-Africa and Sixth Fleet.

Schwan: Does that include the Middle East?

Zirkle: So, no, the Middle East is part of CENTCOM, the Central Command and Naval Central Forces. Our dividing line is--so we have all of Europe, and it goes out and includes Israel, believe it or not. Includes all of Africa except for Egypt, which that belongs to them and then all the coastal waters around it. And I'm particularly pleased actually to go back and be able to do this. As you mentioned in my biography, I most recently was commander of the NATO Submarine Force up until actually August of last year. So getting a one-year break here in America and then going back over to Europe. And as much as things are going on down in the South China Seas and what you talked about there, there is an awful lot going on in Europe and Africa, and especially in the Eastern Mediterranean. Russians have made quite a big deal there within Syria and some of the different operations that they're doing over there. And that as much as South China Sea I think as a contentious area as well is the Eastern Mediterranean. And so the ability to be able to go over there and to work with the fine men and women of the European-African Naval Forces, Sixth Fleet, etcetera--I am honored to be able to do that, because it is a growing operation. We are shifting to be more and more operational because of the rising level of activity from the Russians.

Schwan: With the various things that go on with NATO with the funding and who functions with you, how do we function with NATO?

Zirkle: Quite well. NATO is the world's greatest alliances it's ever known and continues to be. It's grown now to twenty-nine nations--are now part of NATO. And we all kind of share a common bond of democratically controlled nations. It was really quite a privilege to be able to go over there and serve with those many nations. So I was commander of the Submarine Forces NATO, and thirteen different nations contribute submarines to the alliance in addition to the United States. They have the UK, France, Spain, Portugal, Germany, the Netherlands, the Norwegians, the Canadians, Italians, Turks, and the Greeks. So all of them do that. And I had the opportunity to have a staff of all those different nationalities on there. And one of the things I found is that there's a tremendous amount of commonality amongst us, especially again we go back to the safety piece. One of the things that we had that we were involved with as a part of NATO is a thing

called the International Submarine Escape and Rescue Liaison Office, or ISMERLO. ISMERLO is a lot easier to say than that big mouthful. And it's an organization that even the Russians and the Chinese can be a part of. But if there's a tragedy that goes on in the world, a submarine goes down, then everyone comes together to try to be able to save that submarine. So for instance with the sad story of the ARA San Juan, which was the submarine, the Argentinian submarine. That, all sorts of nations came together including through ISMERLO and other aspects to be able to go do those kinds of things. So the tie between the--

Schwan: But they couldn't save it.

Zirkle: Unfortunately it was in a--and actually the reality is, in the business of submarining, the percentage of the oceans that's rescue-able is like single-digit percentage, because most of it is way deeper than is possible. So they were very close to the shelf there, but it appears the area that they went down in was too deep and crushed the hull.

Schwan: No question. So what are your plans after you go to Naples?

Zirkle: That's an interesting question as well. I think my time is coming to potentially a close here. I have one of two options that will happen at the end of that tour. I will either retire or--because in the navy reserve we have one three-star position. That's the chief of navy reserve; that's my boss. And if I'm so lucky to be chosen for that, I'll be honored to stay on for an additional four years. But there are a lot of great other two-star reserve admirals out there--

Schwan: Of course you already have thirty.

Zirkle: What's that? I'm fine for that. I've had a great ride, and I have loved every minute of it. To me, being a flag officer is kind of the bonus round. I got to go beyond the typical thirty years, and so every day is a privilege to be in uniform.

Schwan: What naval book would you recommend or book would you recommend?

Zirkle: So I can tell you the book that I'm reading right now, which is *The Conquering Tide*, which is the second in a series--a trilogy from Ian Toll. It's about the Pacific battles from 1932 to 1934. It's the follow-up to his first book, which is *Pacific Crucible*. The nice thing about this book--so if you're worried about reading a dry history book, he writes it in such a narrative that it becomes more of a story. So it's historically accurate, but it's written in such a way that there's great entertaining value that his authorship gets to that. So I've just started that one, and very much looking forward to reading that. The other thing, too, if you're interested in reading about admirals, a great book is called *The Admirals*, which talks about the four different five-star admirals that we had in WWII, and kind of the compares and contrasts them.

Schwan: Who are they?

Zirkle: So that's Halsey.

Schwan: Okay, Bull Halsey. Okay, I got that one.

Zirkle: Nimitz, King, and Leahy. So all very different personalities. All important leaders to help us through this particular conflict. All in different areas with Halsey and Nimitz out in the Pacific, King being back in the Pentagon in the war department, and then Leahy acting as an aid to the president. But all of them played an incredible piece in that. And it takes you through sort of the history of how they came from either—from the academy and how the academy started in the late 1800s, early 1900s, and moved along. It's just a fascinating read.

Schwan: I remain a fan of John Paul Jones--so then I move forward.

Zirkle: Right

Schwan: Has the navy still got the John Paul Jones spirit of, we can do it, and we can function alone if we have to?

Zirkle: Absolutely. I mean, that's sort of the spirit of navy command is, it's mission command. You're out--you can be out there--if you're a submariner, and you're on patrol, you're given your orders, and you go and do it, and you check in from time to time, but that is absolutely the nature of command in the navy.

Schwan: Again, we want to thank you for your service. We want to thank you for your time. We would love to have an interview with you to do your bio when you're back here. It saves it for posterity. It saves it for your family. And yours is most assuredly worth doing. And you impart a lot of knowledge, and we thank you for that.

(Applause)

Schwan: Thank you, Admiral Zirkle, for visiting the Pritzker Military Museum and Library. To learn more about the US Navy, visit [Navy.mil](http://Navy.mil). To learn more about the Museum and Library, visit in person or online at [PritzkerMilitary.org](http://PritzkerMilitary.org). Thank you, and please join us next time on *Pritzker Military Presents*.

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(Theme music)

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(Theme music)

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