



DUKE UNIVERSITY



DUKE NROTC

C.O.R.E. CONFERENCE

The C.O.R.E. Conference explores the evolving role of junior officers in the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps. This year's theme, **"Junior Officers in INDOPACOM: Remembering the Past, Understanding the Present, Navigating the Future,"** marks the 250th birthday of the Sea Services while addressing the challenges and opportunities of leadership in today's Indo-Pacific region.

Conference Highlights:

- **Distinguished Speakers** – insights from both senior and junior leaders with INDOPACOM operational experience
- **Formal 250th Birthday Dinner** – milestone celebration in downtown Durham
- **Professional Networking** – foster relationships with officers at all levels in a collaborative environment

REGISTER NOW!

Deadline: October 1, 2025

**3-4 OCTOBER,
2025**

 [HTTPS://NROTC.DUKE.EDU/ABOUT-CORE](https://nrotc.duke.edu/about-core)

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2025 C.O.R.E. Conference

Friday, 3 October 2025 | Geneen Auditorium

2:00 – 3:00 | Check-in

3:00 – 3:15 | Opening Remarks

3:15 – 4:15 | 250 Years of the Corps: The Enduring Role of the Junior Officer

A look at 250 years of Marine Corps service, highlighting the changing role of junior officers and the enduring demands of leadership in the Indo-Pacific.

4:30 – 5:30 | Navy 250: Tradition and Transformation of the Junior Officer

An exploration of how the Navy's 250-year legacy has shaped the responsibilities of junior officers, with reflections on how life and leadership in INDOPACOM have evolved across generations.

6:30 – 8:30 | 250th Birthday Dinner & Cake-Cutting Ceremony

A formal networking dinner celebrating 250 years of Navy and Marine Corps service, concluding with a ceremonial cake-cutting in honor of the Sea Services' shared legacy.



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Questions? Contact us:

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2025 C.O.R.E. Conference

Saturday, 4 October 2025 | Schiciano Lecture Hall

8:00 – 9:00 | Breakfast

9:00 – 9:30 | NSTC Address

9:45 – 11:00 | Leadership in an Era of Competition: Lessons from the US–China Rivalry

Insights on how the history of U.S.–China competition shapes today's strategic environment and leadership challenges facing junior officers.

11:15 – 12:15 | Shaping INDOPACOM: Strategy and Technology

Exploring how INDOPACOM strategy is shaped by cyber, space, and emerging technologies.

12:15 – 1:15 | Lunch

1:15 – 2:00 Adapt & Overcome: Leading with Grit in Dynamic Environments

Lessons on adaptability, resilience, and small-unit leadership in high-stakes environments from a career Special Operations officer.

2:15 – 3:15 | Junior Officer Panel

Firsthand accounts from junior officers on lessons learned in their first fleet tours and the transition from training to their first fleet tours.

3:30 – 4:15 | Setting the Precedent: Innovation and Leadership in INDOPACOM

How technology, experimentation, and precedent-setting are reshaping junior officer leadership in INDOPACOM.

4:15 – 4:30 | Closing Remarks



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2025 C.O.R.E. Conference Guest Speakers



VADM Jeffrey Hughes

Deputy Chief of Staff, Capability Development, NATO Allied Command Transformation

A Duke alumnus and career naval aviator, Vice Admiral Jeff Hughes serves as Deputy Chief of Staff for Capability Development at NATO's Supreme Allied Command Transformation. He has commanded at every level from squadron to strike group, including Expeditionary Strike Group 2 during disaster relief operations in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Ashore, he has served as Commander, Navy Recruiting Command; Deputy Chief of Naval Personnel; and on the Joint Staff. In his current role, he leads NATO's operational and strategic capability development for 32 allied nations.

LtGen (ret.) H. Stacy Clardy

Former commander, III MEF

Commissioned in 1983 after graduating from the University of South Carolina, LtGen Clardy culminated a 38-year Marine Corps career commanding from platoon through Marine Expeditionary Force. He led units in Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, later serving as Commanding General of III Marine Expeditionary Force in Okinawa from 2019 to 2021. At the strategic level, he served as Military Deputy for Readiness to the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness and as Deputy Director for Force Management (J8) on the Joint Staff.



MG (ret.) Craig Whelden

Bestselling Author, *Leadership: The Art of Inspiring People*

After 30 years in the Army, MG Whelden became the youngest general in the service before later serving nine years as a Senior Executive with the Marine Corps. He spent 12 years in senior leadership roles at INDOPACOM, including Deputy Commander of U.S. Army Pacific and Executive Director of Marine Corps Forces Pacific, where he oversaw major force realignments in Guam, Tinian, Australia, and Hawaii. He is now a Fortune 500 global speaker and international bestselling author of *Leadership: The Art of Inspiring People to Be Their Best*.



2025 C.O.R.E. Conference Guest Speakers



RADM (ret.) Mike Bernacchi

Former Director of Strategy, U.S. Space Command

A career submariner, Rear Adm. Bernacchi commanded USS Alexandria, Submarine Squadron 4, and Submarine Group 10. He later led Naval Service Training Command, earning a rare Navy Unit Commendation, and served as Director of Strategy, Plans, and Policy (J5) at U.S. Space Command. He is a University of Detroit graduate with advanced degrees in nuclear and industrial engineering from the University of Michigan.

COL Eric Jnah

Special Operations Officer and Former Public Policy Fellow

An Infantry and Special Operations officer, Col. Jnah has over 20 years of service and nine overseas deployments. He has led counterterrorism operations across Afghanistan, Iraq, Jordan, Europe, and Africa, and has worked on interagency missions and global strategic competition. He holds degrees in international business and international relations.



Maj Roger Kerstetter

Executive Officer, North Carolina Piedmont Region Consortium NROTC

Maj Roger Kerstetter enlisted in 2003 and deployed in support of combat and humanitarian operations in Iraq, Japan, and the UAE. Commissioned through the Marine Enlisted Commissioning Program, he has served as an Assault Amphibian Officer, Marine Security Guard Executive Officer, and MAGTF Intelligence Officer. His assignments include leading Littoral Reconnaissance Teams and participating in multinational Indo-Pacific exercises.



RDML Matthew Pottenburgh

Commander, Naval Service Training Command

Rear Adm. Matt Pottenburgh graduated from Ohio State University as a Distinguished Naval Graduate. A Naval Flight Officer since 1997, he served in VP-40, VP-47, and commanded VP-5 and Patrol and Reconnaissance Wing ELEVEN. His assignments include multinational deployments, Flag Aide and executive roles on the Joint Staff and OPNAV, and over 3,000 flight hours in P-3C, P-8A, and MQ-4C Triton.

