



CAPT Sheila Patterson
First Female Commanding Officer
of NSWCDD, 2007-2010

<p>Introduction</p>	<p><u>MUSIC</u></p> <p>Welcome to the Dahlgren Centennial Celebration – A Century of Innovation. We hope that this and our many other products, events and offerings will showcase what Dahlgren has accomplished during its last 100 years.</p> <p>Throughout our history, we’ve interviewed some of the most prominent minds, leaders and innovators that have been here, and we’re opening up the vault to share them with you this year.</p> <p>Today we are honored to listen to the story of Captain Sheila Patterson, who served as the first female Commander of Naval Surface Warfare Center at Dahlgren from 2007 to 2010. Captain Patterson will discuss her experiences as a woman in the military and the highlights from her tenure at Dahlgren.</p> <p>Let’s listen to Captain Patterson...</p>
<p>CAPT Sheila Patterson</p>	<p>I’d heard about Dahlgren a long time ago when I was working in Washington DC for a systems command back in the nineties. But I didn’t actually work with people from Dahlgren until about the 2000 timeframe when I was working on program for PEO [Program Executive Officer] Theater Surface Combatants, which was part of NAVSEA [Naval Sea Systems Command], and I was in the Navy theater-wide program office. The technical team included engineers from Dahlgren. And we were doing a lot of studies and a lot of requirements work, and some of those key folks were from Dahlgren at that point.</p> <p>My undergraduate was at the Naval Academy. My undergraduate was in Chemistry. I went to the Naval Postgraduate School for master’s twelve years after that was in Astronautical Engineering.</p> <p>I worked in a lot of programs in Washington DC, and I was offered the opportunity to apply to become a commanding officer—commander of the Naval Surface Warfare Center at Dahlgren. So I had to go through a board, and I was selected to be the commander here. That was in May of 2007. Actually the 25th of May 2007.</p> <p>Sheila Patterson: Well really the organization—it’s about being efficient and effective in running the organization but the commander is always responsible for the good things that happen and are always responsible for the bad things</p>





	<p>that happen. While you have a very technical, engineering, and scientific organization run by, for the most part, a civilian organization, the commander is kind of responsible for pretty much the daily operations, which includes the financial and the contracts and the legal, as well as the technical work that goes on in the departments.</p> <p>There's always what work are you doing, you want to be able to understand the work, you always wanted to be able to help, what are the challenges, what is the strategic plan for the organization, you have to understand what you're doing and what you can do today to understand what you should be doing tomorrow. Part of the business is understanding what the technical products are and being able to represent your organization to outside entities.</p> <p>The people are just wonderful here. The energy and excitement about what you're doing and what benefit it brings to the warfighter or whoever the customer is because we have other customers as well. And the innovation and energy and excitement that people bring to what they do every day. That's really what brought me. I really loved that.</p> <p>Well I think you need the people to do the technology, but the bottom line is—and the fact that things happened. We were able to accomplish stuff that was hard. It just took persistence. And some things don't pan out, but there's a lot of really good things that happened while I was here.</p> <p>I've kind of been in a fraternity since 1978. So actually you see a lot more women now, so I saw a lot more women, especially in technical positions, than I have before. I think Dahlgren has somewhere close to 20% women in their technical organization. When I started, even from the operational perspective, I think there was one other woman in the building at my very first command that was in the military, so it's gone from one other woman in the building to some percentage of people that are doing engineering work, and certainly the business leadership, there were women in the business leadership positions too. So I have to say that my baseline is not that many women and growing over a period of thirtyish years.</p> <p>As part of being commander you have to do surveys periodically to assess the command climate. And you kind of know you've come—you talk about a "good ol' boy" network and people roll their eyes, but we actually had comments about a "good ol' girl" network, so you get the "okay, that's still not good," but it's interesting that you have both now. So I don't know if that's good or bad, but it's a point.</p> <p>One of the things that I think more women ask, but men ask it too, is about work-life balance. When you want to do career counseling, I think people feel</p>
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more comfortable asking a woman about a work-life balance. But men ask the question. Maybe more women do, but there's a good percentage of men that will ask that question because they want to spend time with their families, they want to coach a sports team, and they want to know how that gets done. I think that that's probably something that maybe a man wouldn't have asked thirty years ago. It's still, I think, true that women are more likely to take some time off and men will have some time to catch up with their peers because the peers actually continue maybe more fully in the workplace where somebody maybe takes a little more of a detour.

I have to tell you that no matter who it is, you have to marry the right spouse, and it has to be a team effort, and you have to make decisions that are good for the family and good for--. The bottom line is you don't always have balance every week or every day but overly you look back and could say maybe you had to have more family focus at this point because of x or there was a big project going on and for this three or four months I really had my nose to the grindstone at work. But in the end, what is it over a period of years? You're not going to get work-life balance every day, but you always have to have a great communication with your spouse. You have to figure out what you can and can't do and what you will and won't do. Both the spouses need that work-life balance.

No, I have a great spouse. I really do. Actually, in our military career, we were actually not stationed together four times. And both of us had times where the other spouse had the kids. I think we both understood how it was too. And I would always pick having the kids over not having them.

It is a hard thing. The other thing is I came in the Navy knowing that's an element of the job. Not everybody goes into government service thinking that work-life balance is going to be really hard or they're going to be traveling or they're going to be separated. So I think my mindset was, "Okay, as long as I can still achieve what I think is work-life balance sufficiently, I'd stay in the Navy." So I had more of an expectation that I'd have to work at it maybe than somebody who is not in the military. It is a mindset. And you can't do everything. You have to decide where's the line and try to stay on the right side of that line.

I have to tell you, I love to travel. I was mostly on the technical side or the programmatic side. I just loved the work. And my spouse loved the work. So the fact that we both loved our jobs, and we love being home—I can't explain it. We didn't really have it. You have to do a lot of planning. You have to make sure that the kids are safe, and the kids are happy, and that environment is good. You have to work at that.

I really started traveling back when I was a lieutenant. I didn't travel a lot when I





first was in the Navy. I basically had a staff job, but then I started working with the reserves, who only work on weekends, so I was always traveling on weekends, which worked with the spouse who was mostly home on weekends, most of the time, not always. And then I worked with the Air Force building launch vehicles, and we traveled all over to the major suppliers and traveled all over the launch sites. It was just a really great experience, great teamwork, I learned a lot, felt I was part of the team. It was fun.

The highlights... It was kind of celebrating with the engineers or the staff organizations when they had really good successes. I'll start with CX. They did really well in their command inspection. Basically the organization that inspects them, which is NAVSEA, basically said they're better than we are. That was really good. We had a great bunch of folks doing a lot of... the lawyers and the—I can't remember what the organization is called. When there's issues with people, and they're working those issues, just a really great team of folks. We had some challenges with security while I was here. As I was leaving I think we got a really solid leader there, and it's a woman. So she got an opportunity to be promoted, and she brought something to an organization that needed some leadership, and I think that whole thing worked really well.

Z Department, [I] can't talk a lot about what they do, but they had some amazing mission-related successes and were able to incorporate wounded warriors doing real work and making a contribution again to the warfighter.

W Department getting all sorts of combat systems out to the fleet. The satellite shoot-down was amazing. Led out of W Department. LCS [Littoral Combat Ship] was K and G, and getting the mission modules done and working, and it's one of the really working well—I think it's probably working the best out of all the mission modules that have been done for LCS, and the fact that when they did—the prototype was never supposed to be deployed. And when the Chief of Naval Operations decided to deploy LCS early, they had to use the prototype, and so when they picked it up to put in LCS-1 for a fit check, it fit the first time.

Those kind of things, and I can go on and on and on about Q Department and about the other departments, but they're pretty amazing. They're just an amazing bunch of people.

I had a great time. Plus the team I worked with every day were just really good people. I learned a lot from the deputy technical director and the technical director. I just thought we formed a really good team. Now, I don't know what they would think about that, but I really think we made a good team. So, working with the people and being part of their successes, watching their successes, was just really fun.

Let me think about the departments. So G is a gun department, so the fact that we're still over the years doing a lot of the gun work for the Navy is really





	<p>important. We're checking the production lots of ammo. The fact that we have the gun lines there able to still do analysis if there's a failure. Q Department, I know that some of the stuff they're doing in radars and electronic warfare, which will help fill gaps that the Navy has today in warfighting. I could go on and on. It's just a great organization. Stuff that this organization was doing for counter-IEDs, they were doing a great job there. The fact that this really is about death, destruction, and disruption really, it's kind of our job. I know I keep using the word "our." I know I'm not here anymore, but it's still kind of part of me.</p>
Conclusion	<p>Thank you for listening to this week's Dahlgren Centennial Podcast, and hopefully you have learned another interesting aspect of what our people accomplish for the Navy and for our nation.</p> <p>We will continue sharing how Dahlgren is a one-of-a-kind location where innovation is heralded as the hallmark of each individual.</p> <p><u>PAUSE</u></p> <p>Tune in next week to hear from Genevieve Parker, a former WAVES officer at Dahlgren in 1944 and 1945.</p> <p>Thank you for celebrating this century of innovation with us at Dahlgren.</p> <p><u>MUSIC</u></p>

