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SUBJ/2026 CNO NAVAL HISTORY ESSAY CONTEST//

RMKS/ 1. The Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) announces the 2026 CNO Naval History Essay Contest, commemorating the enduring legacy of America's Navy and the 250th anniversary of our Nation. As the Navy continues to operate at a strategic inflection point, this contest provides an opportunity to reflect on our history, deepen our understanding of the present, and strengthen the intellectual readiness required for the future fight. Participants are invited to submit their essays no later than 30 May 2026.

2. The Naval History and Heritage Command (NHHC) is the lead for the contest. The United States Naval Institute (USNI) will support contest execution, publication, and awards.

3. CNO invites submissions for the 2026 CNO Naval History Essay Contest that use the power of naval history to illuminate the serious challenges confronting today's Navy. As we enter what may be the most consequential era in American sea power, the demands on our Fleet and our Sailors have never been greater. Great power competition, proliferating threats, rapid technological convergence, and an increasingly contested maritime domain require fresh thinking informed by historical experience. Across 250 years of American naval operations, from the age of sail to the nuclear era, our Navy has repeatedly adapted to strategic disruption, advanced technology, and global instability. Participants are encouraged to examine those historical touchpoints and derive insights that sharpen our understanding of how to generate, deploy, project power ashore and fight a Fleet that is resilient, agile, globally present and combat credible. This contest is an opportunity to harness the intellectual capital of the Fleet and the Nation, leveraging history to strengthen the Foundry, the Fleet, and the way we Fight.

4. Areas of historic interest for the 2026 contest continue to highlight how lessons from the past can inform the Navy's modernization and operational challenges. Submissions may explore:

a. Historic Approaches to Defending the Rules-Based Maritime Order. From early American antipiracy patrols to Cold War freedom-of-navigation operations, the Navy has long served as a guarantor of maritime security. How has the Navy historically countered threats to maritime law, and what can these examples teach us as competitors challenge the global order?

b. Historic Approaches to Technological Disruption and Warfighting Transformation. Examples include the transition from sail to steam, the rise of naval aviation, and the advent of nuclear propulsion. How can these past transformations inform today's integration of artificial intelligence, autonomy, and distributed maritime operations?

c. Historic approaches to maritime dominance. From great power rivalries in the 19th century to the Pacific campaigns of the 20th century, the Navy has consistently adapted to long-term strategic competition. What historical lessons should guide our approach to deterrence and multi-domain rivalry today given expected adversaries across the spectrum of emerging threat?

d. America as a maritime nation. From protecting early American trade to enabling a global forward presence, sea power has been the bedrock of U.S. prosperity and security. How has sea power historically shaped national prosperity, deterrence, and the ability to project power far from home and what will need to change going forward?

e. The Enduring Impact of the American Sailor. For nearly 250 years, the ingenuity, grit, and courage of the American Sailor have provided the Navy's decisive edge. What historic examples, from the leadership of John Paul Jones to the heroism at Leyte Gulf, best illuminate the Sailor as our main weapon system and competitive advantage?

5. CNO Intent. CNO priorities are clear: Foundry, Fleet, and Fight. To deliver the world's most powerful Fleet and be ready for the Fight, we must strengthen our most critical advantage - our people. The intent of this contest is to generate bold, actionable ideas that will sharpen our warfighting edge, applying insights drawn from the past to successfully navigate the challenges of the present. Consistent with the CNO's vision and theory of victory, the contest seeks to stimulate analysis that strengthens our ability to deliver peace through strength, calibrate our course, and transform how we solve the Navy's toughest problems through the lens of the U.S. Navy Fighting Instructions. As the Navy accelerates shipbuilding and repair, modernizes force-generation, and integrates cutting-edge technologies into a Future Fleet Design, understanding how previous generations confronted similar inflection points is essential. The contest invites authors from across the Fleet, the Joint Force, academia, and the maritime community to examine historic approaches to deterrence, warfighting, and sea power-and to connect those lessons directly to the Foundry, the Fleet, and the way we Fight today. The goal is clear: harness history to ensure that America's Navy remains the most lethal, survivable, and globally capable maritime force in the world.

6. Eligibility. Essays are accepted in the following categories:

a. Professional Historian Category Eligibility:

(1) U.S. and international professional historians, including history museum curators, archivists, history teachers/professors, and individuals with history-related doctoral degrees.

(2) Authors of books on naval history (not including self-published works); or

(3) Civilians and active-duty members of the military who have published historical articles in an established historical or naval journal or magazine.

b. Rising Historian Category:

(1) Those that do not fall in the Professional Category and are either active duty, reserve, veteran, and federal civilian personnel of the Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and Merchant Marine.

(2) Members of foreign militaries serving in official billets within the above services.

c. Midshipmen and Cadets Category:

(1) Students at the U.S. Naval Academy, U.S. Coast Guard Academy, U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, and the State Maritime Academies.

(2) Students enrolled in an official Navy Reserve Officer Training Corps program.

7. Submission Requirements:

- a. Deadline: 2359 Eastern Time on 30 May 2026.
- b. Citations: Essays must include numbered footnotes or endnotes.
- c. Word Count: 3,500 words (Professional Category) or 3,000 words (Rising and Midshipmen/Cadet Categories).
- d. Co-Authoring: Permitted in the Rising Category only.
- e. Original Work: Submissions must be original, unpublished, and not under review elsewhere. The use of large language models (e.g. ChatGPT) is not authorized for generating substantive content for review.
- f. Multiple Submissions: Allowed; only one winning essay per author.
- g. Entry Submission:

(1) Professional Historian Category:

<https://www.usni.org/essay-contests/2026/2026-cno-naval-history-essay-contest-professional-historian>

(2) Rising Historian Category:

<https://www.usni.org/essay-contests/2026/2026-cno-naval-history-essay-contest-rising-historian>

(3) Midshipmen and Cadet Category:

<https://www.usni.org/essay-contests/2026/2026-cno-naval-history-essay-contest-midshipmen-and-cadets>

- h. Eligibility Confirmation: Provide a short biography affirming eligibility.
- i. Word Count: Include on title page.
- j. Anonymity: Do not include any identifying information in the essay itself.

8. Essays will be evaluated based on:

- a. Relevance to the specified areas of interest (para 4).
- b. Insightfulness and originality.
- c. Depth and quality of research.
- d. Clarity and readability.

9. Judging:

- a. A six-member panel will select winners in the Rising Historian Category.
- b. Separate six-member panels will evaluate Professional and Midshipmen/Cadet submissions.

10. Awards:

- a. Invitational travel orders to the 2026 CNO Naval History Essay Awards Reception (details to be announced).
- b. Cash Prizes (provided by USNI):
  - (1) First Place - \$5,000 (Professional and Rising)
  - (2) First Place - \$4,000 (Midshipmen/Cadet)
  - (3) Second Place - \$2,500 (Professional and Rising)
  - (4) Second Place - \$2,000 (Midshipmen/Cadet)
  - (5) Third Place - \$1,500 (Rising)
  - (6) Third Place - \$1,000 (Midshipmen/Cadet)
- c. Publication in USNI Proceedings and Naval History (for select essays).
- d. Copper sheathing from USS CONSTITUTION (NHHC).
- e. Recognition on the NHHC website.
- f. One-year USNI membership and Naval History Magazine subscription.

11. Additional information:

- a. <https://www.history.navy.mil/get-involved/essay-contest.html>
- b. Questions for NHHHC: [stephen.a.hill6.civ@us.navy.mil](mailto:stephen.a.hill6.civ@us.navy.mil)
- c. Writing guidance: [essayquestions@usni.org](mailto:essayquestions@usni.org)

12. Released by VADM Michael E. Boyle, Director, Navy Staff//

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