

TABLE TALK WITH
VICE ADMIRAL JOHN HARVEY '69 | By Susannah Clark '84

You could very well say that Vice Admiral John Harvey '69 is head of one of the country's biggest human resources departments. As the recently appointed chief of naval personnel, Harvey oversees the training, education, recruitment and retention of 357,000 sailors in active duty and another 70,000 in the Navy Reserves. "That's the sandbox that I play in each day," he laughs. "Needless to say, I have a lot of high-priced and talented help."

And if that weren't enough, Harvey is also charged with forecasting the direction the modern Navy should be tacking toward for the next decade or two. "I look to the future and say, 'We know the Navy is going to be doing these types of things in this type of world. How do we go about ensuring we have the right kind of sailors and officers to do what needs to get done?'" he explains. "There's very much of a today focus and then a tomorrow, long-range focus."

Given that land-based forces seem to be moving toward fighting small insurrectionist wars in urban settings, one might well wonder where Harvey sees the nuclear submarine in that scenario. The Navy's version of microskirmishes, he counters, involves rivers rather than oceans. "We contribute on the ground by moving from blue to green to brown water as we move in closer to shore," he says.

Of course, Harvey doesn't see the Navy moving completely out of deep water, nor does he see combat as the Navy's only *raison d'être*. "You have to remember that 95 percent of the trade that enters this country comes by sea," he observes. "A global navy ensures the stability of the flow of trade upon which our economy depends, regardless of what's happening in Colombia or Iraq."

Harvey's desire to enter the Navy was with him even before his two years at the Academy, spurred by family friends who were Navy officers; growing up not far from Annapolis, home of the Naval Academy; and the inspiration of his father, John Harvey '41, a physician and professor emeritus at Georgetown University Medical School, and a volunteer

senior research scholar at that university's Center for Clinical Bioethics. "One of the great gifts from my father was the concept of duty," he explains. "This country has given my family and me extraordinary opportunities. When you put the ledger down, this is still a country worth supporting and defending."

Harvey's sense of duty extends, and very fiercely so, to his family: his "lovely bride of 25 years," Mary Ellen, and his children, Sarah and David. "My family is at the center of my life, but the life of a naval officer is one of impermanence. That's always been a point of great angst," he acknowledges with surprising candor. "I was not present when Sarah was born. It's not anything you ever make up for. You rely on the power of love for people to understand this type of duty. Someone needs to do it, and I happen to be someone well suited to do it."

Interestingly, Exeter proved to be an excellent preparation for the rigors of Annapolis. "I felt very at home at the Naval Academy," he says, "because Exeter gave you the ability to produce on demand. At Exeter we had to go to church, there was no cutting class, we had lights out. It was not a shock to my free spirit having to adapt myself to an institution."

Exeter also helped prepare him for the immense job he holds today by instilling "a real sense of bedrock confidence in myself," Harvey says. "I'm always one to ask myself, 'Can I do this? Am I smart enough to be worthy of this?' Yet no matter how I may question myself, there is a small voice inside myself that says, 'You may not be the brightest one out there, but you can figure out how to get it done.' I came out of Exeter with that little voice."

Harvey says he owes that little voice to the fact that the Exeter he attended did not coddle its charges. "'Nobody ever claimed that Exeter is a warm nest,'" he says, repeating part of a favorite quote by former dean of faculty Ernest Gillespie '29, which today sits on Harvey's desk. "It is a place where you are challenged. It's tough, it's meant to be and when you come out of this, you're stronger, better prepared and more mature."



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