

Inaugural Innovation Jam Funds Sailor-Driven Improvements



By Space and Naval Warfare Systems Center Pacific Public Affairs

SAN DIEGO (NNS) -- A broad coalition of Naval commands joined together March 16 on USS Essex to launch the first platform for Sailors to transition technological concepts straight from the deckplates to Navy labs for rapid prototyping and testing in the fleet.

Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet, the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations for Fleet Readiness and Logistics, the Office of Naval Research, and the Space and Naval Warfare Systems Center Pacific collaborated for the project.

The inaugural Innovation Jam, held aboard USS Essex (LHD 2), featured remarks from Adm. Scott Swift, commander of U.S. Pacific Fleet; Vice Adm. Philip Hart Cullom, deputy chief of naval operations for fleet readiness and logistics; and Mike Stevens, master chief petty officer of the Navy, who all stressed the importance of closing the gap between Sailors' innovative ideas and resources.

"What I want to do, what I'm asking you to do, is to expand the box -- that safety zone -- to empower the 140,000 uniformed Sailors and civilians that report for duty every day to be innovative," said Swift. "That's going to be an advantage."

Stevens added, pay grades and titles shouldn't keep anyone from bringing innovative ideas to fruition.

"Our leaders are committed to developing an innovation network where all sailors are encouraged to be bold and bring forth ideas and solutions to fleet challenges," Stevens said.

Six Sailors did just that at the Innovation Jam, pitching their technological solutions to fleet challenges to a panel of eight judges for the chance to win \$100,000 from ONR to develop a prototype with scientists and researchers at SSC Pacific. The contestants were culled from The Athena Project, The Hatch, and Tactical Advancements for the Next Generation, which are all venues for Sailors to collaborate on ideas to increase the technological superiority of the fleet, but don't have the funding component the Innovation Jam offered.

Lt. j.g. Robert McClenning from USS Gridley (DDG 101) claimed the top spot and \$100,000 in prototyping funds for his Unified Gunnery System concept-an augmented reality helmet that would fuse information from the gunnery liaison officer (GLO) and weapon system into an easy-to-interpret visual format for the gunner manning a naval gun system.

McClenning said the way this information-sharing and authorization to fire is currently done is via decades-old radios and sound-powered phones that are hard to hear over the din of machine guns and through the required ear protection.

McClenning will work with SSC Pacific to create an initial version of the system for testing.

In a sign of just how strong the Sailors' concepts were, McClenning wasn't the only one to walk away with prototyping funds. OPNAV liked the idea of second place contestant Lt. Bill Hughes (OPNAV N96) so much that it committed \$100,000 to prototype his Cosmogator, an automated celestial navigation system coupled with an atomic clock that would provide precision navigation and timing in a GPS-denied environment.

The top three contestants were also awarded a cash prize: \$500, \$300 and \$200, respectively.

Prior to pitching their ideas on Essex, the Sailors worked with SSC Pacific subject-matter experts in the technology area of their product to finalize details of their proposals and collaborate on any scientific or engineering challenges. The participants also received presentation advice and had several dry-run opportunities both in the lab and on the ship.

Maura Sullivan, chief of strategy and innovation for the Department of the Navy, and Nathan Myhrvold, founder of Intellectual Ventures and former chief technology officer (CTO) at Microsoft, were also aboard Essex to share insight into what it means to innovate, and how a large organization such as the Department of Navy can become more efficient at innovating.

Sullivan and Myhrvold were part of the judging panel, along with Stephen Russell, CTO of SPAWAR; Scott DiLisio, director of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations for Fleet Readiness and Logistics; Arman Hovakemian, CTO of NSWC Corona; Capt. Brian Quin, commanding officer of USS Essex; Command Master Chief Petty Officer Gary Burghart,

command master chief of SSC Pacific; and Bob Smith, director of ONR's Department of the Navy Small Business Innovation Research/Small Business Technology Transfer office.

The Innovation Jam is expected to become an annual event for fleet Sailors to get their innovative ideas through development and acquisition and into the hands of warfighters as rapidly as possible.

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