

## USS Preble CO Wins SECNAV Innovation Leadership Award.



### By Navy Public Affairs Support Element Detachment Hawaii

PEARL HARBOR, Hawaii -- Cmdr. Jeffery Heames, commanding officer of the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Preble (DDG 88), home ported in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, was recognized as calendar year 2015's winner for Secretary of the Navy's Innovation Awards Program's Innovation Leadership category, Feb. 8.

The Secretary of the Navy (SECNAV) Innovation Awards Program recognizes top talented Sailors, Marines and civilians who are continually creating innovative solutions for complex problems in the fleet.

"I've always loved ideas. Since I was brand new to the Navy as an enlisted Sailor in 1991, I've been an appreciator of good ideas throughout," said Heames.

"When I found out, I felt I won on behalf of the crew. It was their effort. They're the ones that had the courage to bring their ideas out. In my mind, it's 100 percent a shared award with every Sailor of the ship."

Heames, commissioned through the Officer Candidate School program in 1996, said he believes Sailors have a responsibility to apply critical thinking in solving problems and that it's not all top down solutions. He believes that many great ideas come from the bottom up and has implemented an innovation instruction on board the Preble.

"We need to have an environment that can receive those ideas and do something with them," said Heames.

"Sailors can present ideas to me through their chain of command, commanding officer suggestion box or even walk right up to my stateroom and talk to me about an idea," said Heames. "I believe most of the crew knows they can do that and that I'll listen to them. We can evaluate it and see if we can grow the idea into something that's useful or more useful if it needs refinement. Some of our best ideas came from my most junior Sailors."

Fire Controlman 3rd Class Andrew Bugaj, Operations Specialist 2nd Class Dylan Cook and Cryptologic Technician Collection 2nd Class Mallory Mcpherson said they feel the command promotes a culture of change and they feel comfortable presenting ideas to their chain of command.

Heames says he views innovation as an attitude that he tries to inspire throughout the ship at every level. He said he wants an environment where everyone can contribute their ideas and one where someone can try and prove an idea and that it's that attitude he feels one can take to a very challenging situation like combat and get good ideas from.

"While we focused primarily on warfighting and produced an extraordinary number of different tactics and concepts of operation that apply to how we use our ship and how we employ our weapon systems, there's a natural spin off that occurs when you have an innovation campaign and it opened the door wide open," said Heames. "While tactics was our main focus of effort, we thought wouldn't it be great if we could improve the way we did administration, manage risks, do things safer or improve our command climate."

Since taking command in December 2014, Heames and his crew developed more than 54 innovative concepts directly resulting in his winning of the SECNAV Innovation Leadership award.

One idea developed and implemented on board was a lunch event called the "Mess Decks Mash Up" which was designed to improve crew morale.

"When you're on a long deployment people tend to do the same thing every day and hang around the same people every day. Sailors naturally gravitate towards shipmates within the same division, department or like-minded people," said Heames.

"What we wanted to do was shuffle the deck a little bit mid-deployment, so we could change people's patterns and give them a different exposure to different parts of the crew. Officers, chiefs, and enlisted all grabbed a ticket from the mess decks that told them where they would be eating that day. They were split up between the wardroom, chief's mess and mess decks.

“It brought together people who otherwise would not interact with each other. When we were midway through deployment and Sailors were getting conditioned to the same old things this helped bring our team together more easily,” said Heames. “It’s not some grand innovation that will change the Navy but it does change the attitude on the ship.”

There are many contributors and influences Heames accredits to his success and leadership style, but he said he believes in order to be successful in innovation efforts you have to have a good ship. You can’t take on an innovation effort without having sound fundamentals and a desire for improvement.