



Keith Wheeler is the Executive Director of ECU's Office of National Security & Industry Initiatives. A native of Manteo, NC, he graduated from the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics in 1986 and was commissioned via the United States Naval Academy in 1990. He retired from the U.S. Navy in December 2017 as a Captain, with nearly 28 years as a surface warfare officer.

His mission at ECU is to create opportunities for faculty and students with national security and industry partners in our region and to continuously improve ECU's DoD research portfolio. He was instrumental in the creation of the Eastern North Carolina NavalX Tech Bridge and is a member of the board of directors for the NC Global TransPark in Kinston, as well as the ENC Food Commercialization Center in Ayden.

His final DoD assignment was to Northern Command, assigned to USCG Atlantic Area as the Senior Advisor and J3 Liaison. He was instrumental in coordinating DoD, DHS, state and local assets in planning and execution of the preparation and response operations for a series of devastating hurricanes in the fall of 2017 that impacted Texas, Louisiana, Florida, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

His prior assignment was Chief of Staff/Senior Advisor at the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), advising the Director and other agency leaders on operational matters relating to technology initiatives. His other joint assignment was in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, working for the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Force Development. There he contributed to the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) and led several DoD efforts focused on Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) challenges.

Keith served as Commanding Officer in USS MCINERNEY (FFG 8), where he conducted the Navy's first autonomous at-sea flights of the Fire Scout VTUAV. He also led the successful night-capture in the eastern Pacific of a drug-laden self-propelled semi-submersible (SPSS) while conducting Counter-Illlicit Trafficking operations in SOUTHCOM. The SPSS, dubbed BIGFOOT II was carrying over six tons of cocaine and was subsequently transported back to the U.S. for extensive study and analysis.

Prior to MCINERNEY, he was assigned to the Surface Warfare Directorate (N86) of the OPNAV staff, establishing the CG(X) Section of the Future Ships Branch. Other sea tours include Executive Officer in USS DONALD COOK (DDG 75), executing several tomahawk missile strikes during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, Operations Officer on the staff of DESTROYER SQUADRON FIFTEEN, Yokosuka, Japan, Operations Officer in USS MITSCHER (DDG 57), commissioning Weapons/Executive Officer in USS FIREBOLT (PC 10), and Main Propulsion Assistant in USS MONONGAHELA (AO 178).

Keith earned a Bachelor's degree in Ocean Engineering from the U.S. Naval Academy and a Master's degree in National Security and Strategic Studies from the U.S. Naval War College. His personal awards include two Defense Superior Service Medals, Defense Meritorious Service Medal, two Meritorious Service Medals, six Navy Commendation Medals and the Navy Achievement Medal.