A Farewell Editorial from RADM Fred Lewis, USN (Ret.), President of NTSA

A few of you might recall the circumstances surrounding I/ITSEC 1995 which was conducted in Albuquerque, New Mexico. It was, to say the least, a turbulent time for our Training and Simulation Industry. In an unprecedented move our political leadership allowed the U.S. Government to shut down for the first time in our Nation’s history. As a consequence, our government constituents were either unable to travel to Albuquerque or were recalled to their home stations and not authorized to participate in the I/ITSEC event. In spite of this calamity, we carried on with I/ITSEC 1995 and made it yet another successful event.

I/ITSEC 1995 had particular significance for me because it was my first in depth exposure to our industry at large in my new capacity as President, NTSA. In spite of the government shutdown, I was deeply impressed by the wide array of companies involved in the enterprise, by the state-of-the-art of the technologies on display, and by the commitment to excellence by all participants.

Life is dynamic, and, thus, so it is with our industry, with I/ITSEC, and the constituents we serve. Many of the companies who participated in 1995 have consolidated with others or have morphed into something else altogether. Small companies in 1995 have grown into medium sized or even larger entities. Academic Institutions have seen significant growth in their student bodies and have expanded their M&S curricula to offer more opportunity to those seeking education in engineering and science and are increasing efforts to help populate our M&S workforce.

We have built on the technology development that I observed in 1995 and have made significant strides in enhancing the “believability” of our simulations. This is key to the success we have enjoyed as we have responded to the changing requirements from our customer base. Those requirements have changed dramatically since 1995 as a result of changing threats, changing operational environments, and changing capabilities most strongly influenced by “Moore’s Law” and the processing power of our computers and computer networks. In our industry we have been blessed by tremendous agility and creativity in our responsiveness to be able to meet warfighter requirements and the needs of those courageous young men and women at the pointy end of the spear. But it is not only those in the Armed Forces whom we serve as it was almost exclusively in 1995. Today, our constituent base includes other domains within our economic and social strata. These new domains now embrace M&S as a way to train, analyze, forecast, explore, and develop. Manufacturing, financial analysis, meteorology, oil and gas exploration, transportation, education, architectural design, communication, and aerospace industrial design are some of the domains wherein M&S has become a critical component of progress and success. In the healthcare field use of M&S Training technology has experienced an
explosion of growth and acceptance. Surgeons, anesthesiologists, nurses, specialists of every kind, ER personnel, and EMT’s all now use these M&S technologies to train for their critical life saving and life giving tasks, and their numbers will continue to grow. In fact it is clear to many that since 1995 M&S has become absolutely pervasive within the economic fabric of our Nation. Today, it is recognized that nothing that is invented, developed, built, delivered, utilized and disposed of that has not been, at some point in its life cycle, touched by M&S and the practitioners thereof. M&S is now critically important to our way of life and to the quality of life that we enjoy today. The House of Representatives recognized this when in 2007 they approved HR 487 declaring M&S to be a “National Critical Technology”.

As we have moved forward from 1995 and as we have matured as an industry and community of practice, our Association has increased its membership, and the products and services provided to our constituents have been improved through our never ending quest to meet their expectations of first class events and outstanding service. In the domain of work force development, which I believe to be the single greatest challenge to our industry, we began in 2001 to offer a credentialing service with our “Certified M&S Professional” program and have since revised it to keep pace with constituent needs. Further, we have had a very active program in the STEM domain and have leveraged the wonderful technology on the show floor at I/ITSEC to educate young people on the positive and exciting aspects of careers in M&S. Programs which we instituted over the past 16 years such as the Future Leaders Pavilion, America’ s Teachers at I/ITSEC, Serious Games Showcase, and the Student Tours program, have all proven to be highly successful in helping us to achieve our objectives of education and inspiration. We have only just begun to exploit the significant potential that M&S has for use throughout our educational system. That challenge remains to be addressed, but once overcome I believe that we will go a long way to enhancing all levels of our educational system.

I am confident that we will make the right decisions as to workforce development, and I am equally confident that by leveraging new developments and by using new organizations such as the National Modeling and Simulation Coalition we will be able to make the next great technological leap forward. In my view, that leap will take us to an environment where the use of virtual worlds will be commonplace in our society. They will be “commonplace” because they will be accessible to all, and the immersion of participants into the simulation will be complete. There will be total suspension of disbelief, and the virtual worlds will exist according to the participant’s desires. Farfetched? Perhaps, but if we can build virtual worlds today with limited capability, then it is not too much of a stretch to envision this kind of advancement 20-30 years hence.

The past 16 years have been an exciting and rewarding time for me as President of NTSA. Our growth and achievement have been significant, but our success could not have been accomplished without the support of a highly professional staff to assist me in the execution of
our mission. People on the full time staff such as Barbara McDaniel, Debbie Dyson, Patrick Rowe, and Samantha Riemer are all outstanding professionals who know how to get things done, and the support from consultants such as Nelson Jackson, John Williams, Steve Husak, and Linda Brent has been invaluable. I would be remiss if I did not mention the outstanding support we have received from hundreds of volunteers who assist us in putting all of our programs together. These volunteers are the ones who bring life to our efforts and are the ones who have created our own M&S culture. Lastly, let me acknowledge the superb support provided to us at NTSA by LtGen Larry Farrell, NDIA President, and the entire NDIA staff. Our success over time can be directly attributed to the positive working environment and structure provided by NDIA.

I most strongly believe that the future is bright for our community of practice. As our Nation’s wars overseas recede into history and our troops return home, the reliance on the capabilities that M&S technologies can provide will significantly increase on the part of the Department of Defense. New training policies within DoD dictate that training will increasingly be conducted at home station where the lack of adequate training facilities will require that key training activities be simulated. There will be greater demand for higher fidelity simulations as units seek to maintain the high readiness levels required in an unstable and uncertain world. There will be an open-ended requirement that our industry provide training systems to meet that demand. I am supremely confident that we in the M&S and Training community of practice can provide. After all, we have done precisely that since 1995.