

OUTLINE OF THE COURSE IN TACTICS FOR THE  
U.S. NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
CLASS OF 1924  
AS GIVEN TO THE CLASS IN AN ADDRESS BY  
CAPTAIN HARRIS LANING, U.S.N.,  
HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT  
ON 11 JULY 1923.

OUTLINE OF COURSE IN TACTICS

The object of the course in Tactics at the War College is to develop sound tactical conceptions in the minds of the students and to prepare them to apply those conceptions practically in their work afloat. For the senior class the tactical conceptions and their practical application are confined largely to major tactics and for the junior class to minor tactics, but the work of the two classes so parallels that while the senior class deals with the major aspect the junior class covers the minor.

The first step in the course is to start each student out with a clear mental picture of the modern naval battle between two complete battle fleets that he may have some idea of a battle plan and of the general tactical principles the fleet, in its whole and in its parts, should follow in carrying the plan out. Having such a conception of battle, student officers will be in a position to read, study, and analyze actual battles to see where and how successes and failures occurred, and can maneuver battles of their own in miniature to practice themselves in battle.

Generally the battles fought out by student officers at the College will be between complete battle fleets in spite of the fact that in most wars there is rarely more than one fleet engagement while there are many engagements between minor forces. Since the minor type of engagement is so much more frequent than the major type it might appear at first glance that the College should devote a proportional amount of time to minor engagements rather than give most of its time to the general engagement, but the College believes otherwise. It takes much time to conduct any battle on the maneuver board and at best there is time in the course for only a few maneuvers. Furthermore it is believed at the College that he who prepares himself to carry out

the most complicated type of battle successfully will find no difficulty in carrying out successfully any minor and more simple type. Again since a minor type battle may take anyone of many forms all of which are covered in the big general engagement, it seems probable that the only way to cover the whole ground is to confine the big efforts to the biggest battles that can be fought. Through them you can get practice in handling all types under all conditions and by merely applying to minor actions the principles gained from major actions success in minor actions can be attained.

Having become versed in the more fundamental tactical principles by reading, study, and practice, and having become more or less proficient in applying those principles in battle maneuvers, the students, at the end of the year, are required to submit a thesis on tactics which thesis is the means by which a student crystallizes and records for his own future use the results of his years work in the Tactics Department. Of all the things that you do at the College the thing you will like the least will be the writing of your theses, yet if your work on your Tactics Thesis is thoroughly done you will carry from the College in that thesis the meat of your years work in tactics. The thesis is therefore the summing up of your work in the tactics course.

While the above gives you a general idea of the course in Tactics I will now outline the course in more detail. The present week lays the foundation for your future work. Today I will read to you "The Naval Battle" to give you the War College up to date conception of such a battle. Since you may want to refer to the material contained in "The Naval Battle" it has been issued as a pamphlet and will be found in your "Tactics Jacket". Tomorrow we want you to refresh your memories on the Battle of Jutland by studying the War College monograph on that battle and reading any of the many other accounts of it available in the Library. The Monograph, and plates to accompany it, have

been issued to the class. With the sequence of events in the battle fresh in your minds from tomorrows reading, I will on Friday read a critique of the battle, which critique has been mimeographed and issued to you in your Tactics Jacket. Then on Saturday and Monday I will give a history and critique of the Battle of Emerald Bank which when completed will give you all something to mull over and digest for a few weeks and a fairly good point of departure for the next tactical period some four weeks distant.

That next tactical period starts August 6th. During the first six days of it you will study the War Instructions as issued or approved by the Department for the fleet and for the various types in the fleet. The study should be as thorough as possible in the time available since the College endeavors to follow those instructions in handling its fleets. The following week is to be devoted to the study of the maneuver rules, a complete knowledge of which is essential not only to the playing of games but also to bring before you the limitations and capabilities of the various types of ships and weapons under the conditions found at sea. The maneuver rules may seem complicated and you may feel that some of them do not conform to your ideas. However they are the result of years of work to perfect them and, being constantly revised on information received from the fleet are believed to be as nearly accurate as the knowledge of today warrants. With a complete knowledge of the rules and with an understanding of the naval battle and the principles that must be followed in it, you will then be ready to take up the solution and maneuvering of tactical games. Such maneuvers will continue to the end of the year and, except for the thesis, will complete the work in Tactics.

As for the thesis you will be allowed approximately three months, ending with April, to complete it. The material for it comes from the above described work and from reading for which a reading course has been laid out and will be given you later on.

(HL/WD 18 Sept. 1923)  
(Tactics Department)