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Grand Joint Exercise No. Four(1932)

Remarks of President, Naval War College
(R.Admiral Harris Laning, USN)

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Lahaina Roads, T.H.,
20 February 1932.

From: Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet.
To : Commanding General 9th Corps Area, San Francisco.
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Commander Battleship Division Three.
Commander Battleship Division One.
President Naval War College.
Commander Aircraft, Battle Force.
Commander Submarine Force.
Commander Minecraft, Battle Force.
Director War Plans Division, War Department,
General Staff.

Subject: Remarks of President Naval War College, Assistant
Chief Umpire (Navy), Grand Joint Exercise No. 4,
forwarding of.

Enclosure: One.

1. Through a grave oversight I did not call upon
Rear Admiral Laning, President of the Naval War College
(Assistant Chief Umpire Navy) to deliver his remarks at the
Critique of Grand Joint Exercise Number 4.

2. In order that officers concerned may without delay
have the benefit of Rear Admiral Laning's observations in
regard to Grand Joint Exercise Number 4, I am forwarding here-
with copies for your information.

FRANK H. SCHOFIELD.

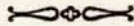
G. W. Dugger
G. W. DUGGER,
Flag Secretary.

Com.Gen. 9th Corps Area (5)
Com.Gen. Dept. Hawaii (10)
Combatfor (3)
Combatships (12)
Comdt 14th N.D. (10)
Combatdiv 3 (4)

Pres. Nav. War Col. (10)
Comairbatfor (4)
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REMARKS BY REAR ADMIRAL HARRIS LANING, U. S. NAVY, ASSISTANT TO THE NAVY CHIEF UMPIRE



Grand Joint Exercise No. 4. showed how difficult it is through maneuvers to test the efficacy of offense and defense.

Our decisions were based on elaborate rules, yet not even in the simplest situations did the umpires feel the damages assessed were correct. Thus the exercise again demonstrated the impracticability of measuring results in maneuvers.

Since we cannot measure results in maneuvers, it is never possible to determine who wins. If we will only remember that fact and realize that maneuvers are not to measure our hitting power but are for training and to teach us invaluable lessons, we will not only get more out of them, but more important, we will not get dangerously wrong conceptions as to the efficacy of our offense and defense.

Although we cannot measure results, things happened in this exercise from which sound conclusions can be drawn. Note what happened to Blue's combatant ships. Carriers were attacked by aircraft and submarines; cruisers and destroyers were attacked by aircraft, submarines and shore batteries; battleships were attacked by submarines and 16" guns; and submarines were attacked by aircraft, by guns on ships and shore, and by mines. It is apparent that in operations against shore defenses all types of ships will suffer severely.

As long as the enemy's fleet exists, the paramount duty of a navy is to destroy or immobilize that fleet and thereby gain control of the sea. Until one controls the sea, risking vital naval units against shore defense is never warranted. Naval men must remember that operations of this nature should never be undertaken until the enemy fleet has been accounted for. Army men should bear in mind that as long as our fleet exists, no enemy is likely to make such an attack as this was.

However unlikely such attacks may be, our navy must be prepared to carry them through and our army prepared to defeat them. This exercise shows the Navy has much to learn as regards making them. Not until the Navy has much improved its material and technique will it be ready to carry out such work successfully or be able in Joint Exercises to show defending forces what they must expect.

As regards material, the Navy is weak. Our armor piercing projectiles are not what we need, either to silence shore batteries or to support a landing. Also, there is the matter of boats. Neither naval nor Army transports have even one boat of a type suitable for transporting troops and troop equipment to beaches. The Navy cannot perfect the technique of landings until it has suitable boats, and not until the Navy can show the defenses what landings will be like when made with good boats, will the defense know what it is up against.

While I might cite other points as to material and technique, the outstanding lesson as regards them pertains to aircraft and their uses. Not before has the Navy tried air operations of this nature, or viewed the advantages and disadvantages of carrier aircraft as against shore aircraft.

There is no denying that since carriers can approach coasts at will, initiative in air operations lies with them. As against that one advantage, shore based aircraft have many. Not only have they more fields than a naval force has flying decks, but also shore fields cannot be permanently damaged, nor can their planes be immobilized except by being destroyed. Since carrier planes cannot destroy air fields or the planes on them except at great cost, it is evidently a bad strategy for carrier planes to attack shore positions as it is for ships to attack them. If carrier planes are essential for other purposes in joint operations, and they certainly are essential in the all-important landing phase, they should not be frittered away beforehand in attacks where only little damage can be done and at great cost.

The primary mission of naval air forces in a joint operation is to further that part of the operation for which the Navy is responsible. Not until the Navy has accomplished the things for which it is responsible should its essential forces be risked for other purposes. If air attacks on shore positions are necessary before landing, there should be an air component in the expeditionary force and that component established in an outlying position from which to operate.

Blue used his air forces as he would use them in purely naval warfare. But suppose instead of using carrier planes to attack shore forces where forces have their maximum air and gun defense, we use them against the sea patrol. Since that patrol is essential, the defense will have to protect it and probably the only protection available will be aircraft. Striking at the sea patrol either with aircraft or ships, the offense not only will draw the defense's air forces to where they can most easily be destroyed, but at the same time will abet the landing through putting out of action the forces that give the first warning of it. In operations of this kind, naval forces should not utilize their initiative to conform to the enemy wishes, but should use it to force the enemy to do what we want him to do — send his planes to where we can destroy them.

I do not offer these ideas in criticism for they are hindsight ideas. But the lessons should not be lost. Blue should realize there are many ways the Navy can improve on what it did. Black should realize that many things Blue did will not be done again. The next time Oahu is attacked, be it in peace maneuvers or in actual war, the operations will be very different. Both the Army and the Navy must realize that fact.