

CLASS of 1927
(Senior Class)

Thesis

on

COMMAND

Submitted by

Commander R.A. Spruance, U.S. Navy.

Room No C-17

Naval War College
Newport, R. I.
11 September, 1926

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C O M M A N D

The verb "to command" has, among its various definitions in the dictionary, "to order with authority". The principal distinction between an organized military body and a mob is that the former has someone in command, whose orders are recognized and obeyed, while the latter is an assemblage of individuals with no acknowledged leader. When a military body ceases to have or obey a commander, it may rapidly degenerate into a mob, in spite of the fact that the individuals composing it may have been highly trained and disciplined. A mob, on the other hand, may sometimes, through recognition of and obedience to a leader, proceed to effective action - this in spite of the fact that the individuals composing it have had no previous association and training.

The authority to command in a military or naval force is derived directly or indirectly from the source of authority in the country. In the United States the people are the ultimate source of power. They caused to be drawn up and they put into effect the Constitution of the United States. The Constitution states that the President is the Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy. As such, he is empowered to appoint military and naval commanders, and, except as laid down by law, to determine the scope of their authority. A commander may, or may not, be permitted to appoint his immediate subordinates. Usually he has by no means a free hand, but has to take and work with the personnel that is given him. The more remote the commander is from the seat of his government, the more freedom he is apt to have in making and changing assignments to command. Thus, General Pershing was granted a wide latitude in France during the World War. The Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Asiatic Fleet, similarly, has practically complete freedom within the limits of his command, subject to certain rules laid down by the Navy Department. There is also more

freedom permitted in assigning the duties of the lower grades of command, than there is the higher. For example, a commander-in-chief has his flag officers and captains assigned by the Navy Department, as has the captain of a ship his heads of departments, whereas the captain may assign his junior officers to such duties as he sees fit. Theoretically, it would be advisable to permit each commander to appoint his immediate subordinates and then to have him hold these strictly responsible for results. Actually, practical considerations of administration of personnel do not permit such a course.

The authority which any commander is permitted to exercise varies with the importance of his position. Most of the limitations on a commander's authority will be found laid down by law or regulation, as will his duties and responsibilities. There will be found a considerable field, however, where his superiors can increase or limit his authority. The action taken in this respect will depend upon the customs of the service, the general situation, the personality of the superior, and whether or not the latter has confidence in his subordinates. To avoid confusion and misunderstandings when officers are changed, it would be well if a common doctrine existed throughout the service as to the authority and responsibility that belong to each grade.

For a command to be properly organized, there must be unity of command; a proper subdivision among subordinate commanders; and a definite delimitation of the authority and responsibility of each one.

If unity of command is not attained and a subordinate may look to more than one superior, he will receive orders from more than one source, with resultant confusion of plan and of execution. If different forces have independent commanders, there will be a lack of general direction of the whole, and the coordination between the forces will be poor.

The number of subordinates with whom any one commander

can deal successfully is limited. Generally, it should not exceed ten. When this number is exceeded, proper supervision becomes difficult and further subdivision is indicated. This subdivision from the top downward gives rise to commanders increasing in numbers, but decreasing in rank, responsibility, and authority, known as the chain of command. By means of this chain of command, the commander-in-chief can issue an order and be assured that proper supervision of its execution can be carried out throughout the entire command - far beyond what he himself can personally oversee.

For the chain of command to function properly, it is essential that the authority and responsibility of each grade be accurately defined. If this be not done, the result will be conflicting orders issued by commanders of different ranks, or else a failure to issue orders when necessary. To obtain the best results, each man must know what is expected of him, and what he may expect of his superiors and subordinates. A superior can delegate authority to a subordinate, but he continues to be responsible to his own superior for results. Each person in the chain of command holds the next below him responsible for the results obtained by all those under the latter's command. Authority may be delegated, but not the ultimate responsibility.

To be a successful commander, one must combine qualities of leadership with a knowledge of his profession. Either without the other is not of much avail. Leadership comprises a number of moral qualities, among which may be mentioned force; initiative; determination; a strong sense of justice; loyalty, both to superiors and to subordinates; good judgement; generosity; self-possession; energy; decision. The qualities of leadership inspire loyalty in one's subordinates; and this loyalty, accompanied by confidence in the commander's professional ability, gives him such enthusiastic support from them that he is, in times of crisis, able to demand and accomplish what

might appear to be the impossible. History abounds with instances where great leaders have inspired such confidence and enthusiasm in their followers that they have been able to perform the impossible, as witness Alexander the Great, Hannibal, Caesar, Frederick the Great, Napoleon, and Nelson. It requires both the moral qualities and the brains and knowledge to make a great leader. Both may be improved by application, study, and reflection.

As each commander is held responsible for the results obtained by his subordinates of all grades, and as no individuals except those in the lower grades are in a position personally to supervise the carrying out of all their orders, it follows that the commander-in-chief and his principal subordinates must take steps to ensure that their orders are understood and executed in the same manner by all hands. An order may be composed of but a few words, but the actions that flow from it, on the part of a large number of subordinates, must be directed toward a common end and each action must harmonize with the others.

To accomplish this, there must be a common system of training and common doctrines. A common system of training permits everyone to perform the same tasks in a similar manner, so that each knows what he has to do and what his fellows will do. The commander knows what is possible and what he can demand from his force. Thus, the German Commander-in-Chief at Jutland was able to execute "ships right about" with his Fleet under fire and not in a straight column, and so extricate himself from a dangerous situation that otherwise might have proved disastrous to him.

A common doctrine flows from a common conception of the means to be adopted to apply the various principles of war. The principles remain the same, but the doctrines developed will depend upon many things, such as the characteristics of the race, the quality and quantity of the different

weapons available, and the possible antagonist. Doctrine results both from actual operations and from study. It may be determined by study that a certain employment of an arm or weapon seems advisable. If this proves practicable in actual practice, it becomes doctrine, and training is taken up to permit its use to the best advantage in future operations. Without a doctrine, the employment of weapons has not been determined, and training cannot be thoroughly carried out. To have doctrine without training, on the other hand, may be to have methods of employment of weapons which are impracticable, either inherently, or on account of lack of the technique necessary to use them. Without doctrine, carefully considered and tried out in practice, it is impossible for the commander-in-chief to plan the best use of his weapons, or for his subordinates to use their weapons in the manner that fits in best with the commander-in-chief's plan.

The work of planning, training, and indoctrination must be done in a greater or less degree by all ranks of command. In the lower grades, the subjects to be dealt with are relatively simple and few in numbers. As the command increases in size and complexity, so do the subjects to be handled by the commander increase in number and variety. The result of this is that, while the lower grades the commander is able to handle his work without assistance, in the upper grades he begins to require help to enable him properly to exercise his authority. This help is supplied by a Staff, which increases in numbers with the size of the command, finally culminating at the seat of government in a large general staff for the entire service, for the aid of the head of the Department.

The function of a Staff, then, is not to usurp the primary duty of the Commander, which is that of making decisions, but it is to assist the commander, first, in coming to his decisions, and, then, in making the plans and writing the

orders necessary for the carrying out of these decisions. Duty on a staff carries with it no authority to command, or to execute the orders which the staff is instrumental in issuing. Such authority is vested in the subordinate chain of command.

The necessity for a staff has increased greatly during the past century with the increase in the size of the forces involved and the introduction of more and more mechanical appliances. The latter has resulted in the changing of types of ships and the introduction of new types, such as submarines and destroyers, and has also carried warfare into another element, the air. The invention of radiotelegraphy has brought with it a world-wide communication service that did not exist before. This enables a commander-in-chief to obtain a much greater range of information than before and to project his command over a much greater area.

In organizing a naval general staff, provision must be made to handle all questions of present and prospective operations and training and to give general direction to the administrative services, so that they may work toward a common end. Such a general staff should plan for and enable the secretary of the Navy to order and direct, but it should be divorced from the administrative or executive functions. The Secretary gives his orders to the materiel and personnel bureaus in the Navy Department, to the commanders of the forces afloat, and to the commandants of naval districts and other activities ashore, for execution. The organization of a naval general staff should correspond as closely as possible to that of the Army, in order to facilitate liaison and joint operations. It should also be applicable to other naval staffs, afloat and ashore. These latter may not include all the functions of the general staff, and those that do exist may have to be combined to give two or more of them to one person, if the staff is small.

but the outline of the organization will still exist.

Such an organization may be divided under the following heads:

- (1) Operations.
- (2) Personnel.
- (3) Materiel.
- (4) Intelligence.
- (5) War Plans.
- (6) Secretariat.
- (7) Finance.

These divisions would not be of even approximately the same size, and their relative size and importance would change considerably on going from peace into war. Personnel, for instance, would be small in time of peace, but war would greatly increase its size. War Plans, on the other hand, might cease to exist.

Taking up these divisions one at a time, their general duties would be about as follows:

- (1) Operations would include the planning of the current operations of all forces afloat and ashore that are under the jurisdiction of the Navy Department, and of their training. This would include all forces afloat, and in time of war a great many merchant ships; Naval District forces; Naval Reserves; and the Marine Corps. Under training would come such items as tactics, gunnery, engineering, and communications. Communications, in this case, would not be an administrative function, but this division would be responsible for the general methods of operation and training and for getting out code and signal books. The actual operating and administrative functions of the Communication Service would be combined with the materiel branch to form one unit, which would not be a part of the general staff.
- (2) Personnel might be divided into three sections - officers,

enlisted personnel, and regulations. This division would draw up the general plans for all officer and enlisted personnel, active, and reserve, on such questions as methods of obtaining, training and education, assignments to duty, complements of ships and stations, promotions, punishments, awards, etc. It would be charged with the duty of issuing regulations and general orders. The Bureau of Navigation would execute these plans.

(3) Materiel might be divided into four sections. One would deal with ships, their repair and upkeep; the second with the shore establishment, both military and industrial; the third with supply - principally, the maintaining of stocks and, in time of war, priorities in obtaining them; and the fourth would be the Board of Inspection and Survey, which would operate for materiel inspections afloat and ashore.

(4) Intelligence might be divided into four sections: personnel; the collection, collation, and dissemination of information; historical; and censorship.

(5) War Plans are possible future operations. They might come under current operations, but are separated as a matter of convenience so that a different personnel may be provided, who can devote their time without interruption to this important matter. This division might be divided into three sections - operations; personnel; and materiel.

(6) The Secretariat would keep the files for the general staff and would be responsible for the issue of all registered publications.

(7) Finance would make up the budget for the Navy and would keep a running record of the expenditures under the annual appropriations, in order that operations and funds available might be coordinated to the best advantage.

Attached is a chart showing the organization of the naval general staff just given. The subdivision of work in the different sections would be done by each section head, in consul-

tation with the head of his division. Such subdivision would change with changing conditions, but it is believed that a logical place can be found in the organization to handle any matter that may now or hereafter claim the general staff's attention.

In our conception of government, the civil power is always supreme over the military. For this reason, we have a civilian as Secretary of the Navy. The civilian Secretary is not fitted by knowledge or training to make decisions on technical naval matters, but he should be better fitted than most naval officers to conduct the dealings of the Navy Department with the civil branches of the government, especially on such matters as legislation, general policies, and publicity. For this reason, there should be included in the chain of command, next subordinate to the Secretary and between him and the various naval activities, a naval officer, who would be the ranking officer in the Navy. Such an officer - the Chief of Naval Operations - would be distinct from the chief of the general staff, and to him would be referred for decision - subject to the general policies of the Secretary - all questions internal to the Navy. The Assistant Secretaries should not be in the chain of command, but, if not abolished, might more properly function as assistants to the Secretary and act as secretary during his absence. The foregoing would give a centralized competent technical direction to the Navy and Marine Corps as a whole, without interfering with the proper sphere of the civil authority - that of general policy and cooperation with the civil branches of the government.

Diagram of general naval organization

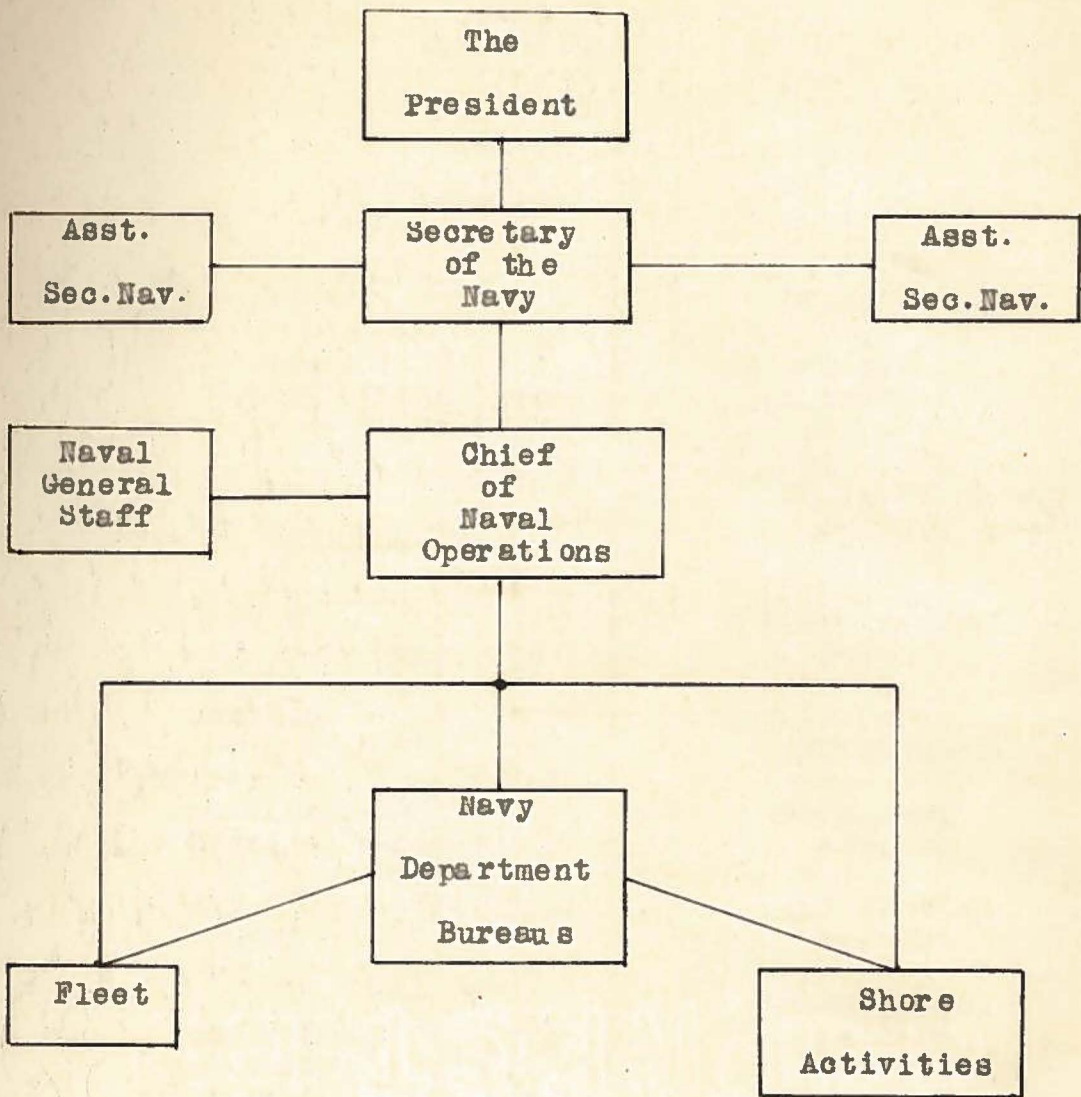
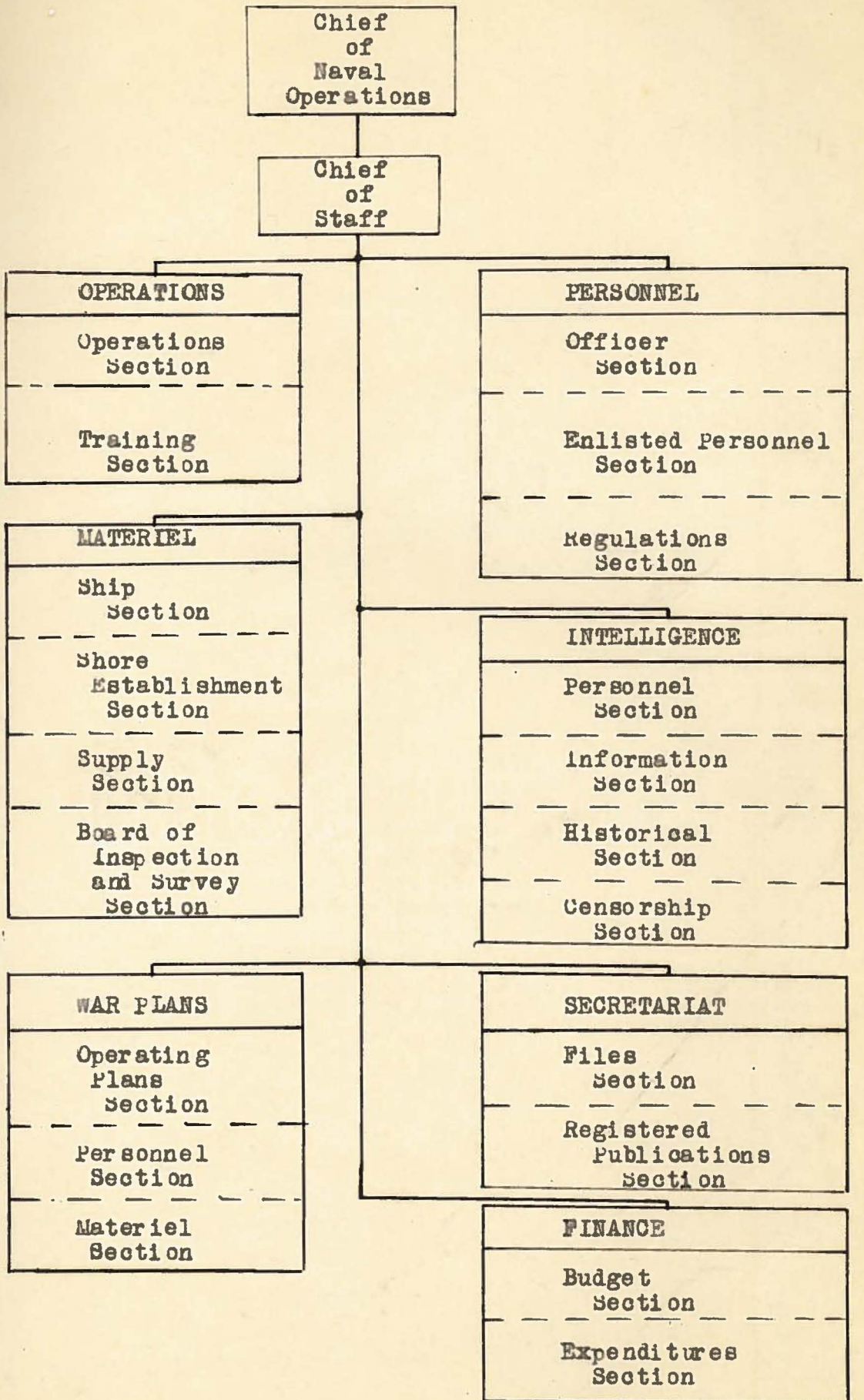


Diagram of organization of naval general staff.



U. S. NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
MEMORANDUM OF COMMENT
COMMAND DEPARTMENT

Name Commander R. A. Spruance, U.S.N.

Subject Thesis on COMMAND.

ROUTE SLIP
ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT

30 Sept, 1926

To: CHIEF OF STAFF

Subject: Thesis on

COMMAND
POLICY

Written by Comd. Spruance

Read by

Date

<u>Weyburn</u>	<u>Sept 30, 1926</u>
<u>J. V. Sawyer</u>	<u>Nov 1, 1926</u>
<u>R. J. Johnson</u>	<u>11/10/26</u>
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