

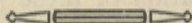
Phelps, W. W.

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Staff

The
U. S. Naval War College Course

Read before the Officers
U. S. Atlantic Fleet.



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By

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THE U. S. NAVAL WAR COLLEGE COURSE.

The subject this morning is a brief outline and explanation of the Naval War College Course.

What follows will contain little or nothing new to officers who have been students at the College. It is intended for those officers of the Fleet who have before them the detail to the College as student officers, and who should seek this detail as soon as they can secure it.

In the preparation of this paper, the addresses of the Presidents and the archives of the College have been consulted.

The Mission.

Every enterprise in life aims to accomplish a mission.

The mission of the Naval War College is found in the addresses and writings of the President, Rear Admiral Sims, and is expressed in the following quotations:—

“ * * * * to study the principles of warfare as enunciated by the great masters of the art, to develop the practical application of these principles to war on the sea under modern conditions, and then to train our minds to a high degree of precision and rapidity of decision in the correct application of these principles.”

And again:—

“ * * * * the development of principles, and training in the application of these principles to practical situations.”

And again:—

“ * * * * It has been the object of the College not only to develop and define the principles of naval warfare but also to indicate the methods by which these principles may be applied with the maximum of success.”

The Organization

The organization of the College for accomplishing this mission and for conducting the course of training, is in four Departments:

The **Command** Department.

The **Strategy** Department.

The **Tactics** Department.

The **Correspondence Course** Department.

Attached to the Staff is an army officer, a graduate of the Naval War College and of the Army General Staff College; and a marine officer, a graduate of the Naval War College, preferably a graduate also of the Army General Staff College.

The cognizance of these Departments in students' work is as follows:—

Command—

Plan making,
Estimate of the situation,
Formulation of orders,
Doctrine,
Dissemination of information,
Art of command,
Organization,
Administration,
Leadership.

Strategy—

Policy,
Service of Information and Security,
Strategy,
Logistics,
Chart maneuvers,
International Law.

Tactics—

Tactical principles,
Tactical maneuvers.

Correspondence Course—

The Correspondence Course.

Each Department concerns itself with the reading course, thesis, and lectures relating to its subjects.

The length of the College course is eleven months. The course begins on the first of July and ends on the thirty-first of May.

It is the desire of the President that each class shall include about fifty officers of the line, one medical officer, one supply officer, one naval constructor, one civil engineer, four marine officers, four army officers and one coast guard officer. Thus the College wishes to be considered as belonging to the whole Navy. As far as its influence can extend it wishes the Service to understand that it desires to help the Marine and Staff Corps in the study of their technical problems incidental to the great campaigns that may lie before us. It desires to help the Marine and Staff Corps towards a greater unity of thought and effort with the line, and toward a greater sympathy for each other's problems and difficulties. The College is most anxious to aid in perfecting the co-ordination that must exist between Army and Navy. These ends, the College feels, are happily reached in considerable measure, by reason of its catholicity as to student membership.

The Outline of the Course.

Briefly outlined the course includes:

Selected reading and lectures to acquire broader knowledge of history, of theory and principles.

Thesis writing as an expository exercise leading to the systematic digest of the subject.

Problem solving to develop the practical application of principles.

Maneuvers to test and to indicate the methods by which these principles may be applied with the maximum of success.

The critique and conference following each maneuver for the co-ordination of thought and ideas looking to the development of principles.

The System of Training.

To paraphrase from Captain Little's writings, success in war is the product of three factors:

1. The right thing,
2. rightly applied,
3. in time.

Where any one is zero, success is zero.

In the College course, the student searches for the **right thing** by reading, from lectures and in thesis writing. Problem solving leads the student to learn the **right thing rightly applied**, trains the mind to a high degree of precision. Exercise in maneuvers increases the student's rapidity of decision, trains him to decide **in time**. Hence the College training assists students to reach the right thing, rightly applied, in time.

This applicatory system of training was established in 1911, when the year course was conceded to the College. There is nothing new in this system. It is a well established manner of training in other than military lines. The study of law by the well known case system followed at many of the university schools of law is entirely analogous to the War College system of training. What it is in brief is that throughout the course the student is caused to train himself by being required to solve a succession of concrete problems. In each problem he must reach a decision as to the best course of action to pursue. He is then required to organize forces and to promulgate his plan of action. Then he actually tests out his plan of operations. Finally, following each maneuver, in the critique and conference over the maneuver, he enlarges his view of the problem by exchange of thought and ideas. Carried along throughout the year with the problem solving, the student is constantly broadening his knowledge of history and principle by reading, by the lectures and by thesis writing.

The theory or philosophy of war may be said to subdivide itself into:

1. Policy in its relation to war.
2. Strategy and logistics.
3. Tactics.
4. Command.

Selected reading is necessary to a student's grasp of the relation of these parts to each other and to the whole. In order that the student shall get this clear grasp of each of these relationships he is required to write a thesis under each title above. The Strategy thesis is to include an analytical study of a campaign. The Tactics thesis is to include an analytical study of one or more naval battles. For the reason that a sound system of organization and administration is so fundamental, the student is required to turn in a thesis under the title Principles of Command. This subject students find it necessary to treat comprehensively, involving as it does organization, administration, psychology, leadership and all the other qualities of military character. Students soon come to realize that there is no other nor better method than thesis writing for fixing in the student officer's mind in orderly arrangement, the origin, development, relationships and possibilities of the subject. Indeed, at the end of the year, the student officer finds that, in his four theses, he has actually written a treatise on the Art of War.

By no means are the information or ideas or thoughts for the theses all to be found in the list of books suggested to the student. By far the outstanding feature of the College equipment is the Library, and here the booklover can browse in contentment. The reading course, while suggested, is entirely elective; because, as to reading (1) a student officer soon learns that he has the best judgment of his own requirements, (2) well read officers can make a better approach to the subject, (3) a free initiative in selecting reading helps the natural incentive that arises to discover new thought under the given titles, and (4) it is these new and fresh treatments of the subjects arising from initiative, that help to invigorate the College.

The Lecture Course is in three series:

1. Topics of timely professional interest.

These keep the staff and students up with interesting developments of a technical nature or in the international field.

2. Political science.

This series is by a university professor of national reputation. It is a most interesting series. It comes early in the course so that the students are greatly helped in preparing themselves for the Policy thesis.

3. International Law.

This series is by an international lawyer of international reputation. While we seek to train ourselves to apply force, inter-

national law deals with the arbitrary limitations upon the exercise of force in war which civilized peoples have mutually accepted. We must know these arbitrary limitations. International law has its modifying effect on every strategical problem. The problem solver will often find that his most promising course of action is inhibited by international law. The development of submarines and air warfare has now introduced a study of the changes in and additions to the Naval War Code that seem desirable to meet the uses and possibilities of these weapons. The lectures deal with unsettled questions such as these, rather than with those situations embodied in the accepted law.

Coming now to problem solving, it may be said, that along with the constant acquirement of knowledge, there are four phases through which the student officer carries himself in the handling of each problem of the year's series:

1. Estimating the situation.
2. Formulating the order.
3. Maneuvering the solution.
4. Criticizing the estimate, the order and the maneuver.

Now, as the business of the College is to study in peace time the art of conducting operations in war time, its system of training has to be founded upon a method of teaching how to approach the solution of war problems. It is therefore, in its beginning, a training in mental processes. This is the first phase, before mentioned.

In Estimating the situation the student officer has to bring to the contemplation of the problem presented all the knowledge he has acquired by experience and reading. Each problem will require special study relating to the situation. His first task is to fix the mission. Now, since the College training aims to co-ordinate officers' strategical and tactical ideas, the end in view is such unity of thought and conception that all can be relied upon to determine substantially the identical mission for any given situation. From this will result unity of action. Unity of strategic and tactical thought, conception and action is doctrine. Therefore the first line of effort taken up at the College is a study of the College publications on the derivation of the mission, and exercises in deriving the mission. Substantial differences in derived missions are freely discussed and cleared up in open conferences. By this free exchange of ideas and points of view, co-ordination and unity of thought begin the develop.

The student officers' next task in estimating the situation is to consider enemy forces and own forces. To compare their strength and the limitations imposed by their radii of action; to consider the disposition of each; and to analyze all the courses of action each may pursue. We first deduce the probable mission of the enemy, and reason from that as to his probable course of action. Then keeping in mind our own mission we finally come, by a process of elimination, to decide upon our own course of action.

The complete elucidation of the rules for estimating a situation is studied in the College publication. Do not mistake. These are not rules for dealing with a situation. They are rules for estimating a situation. And rules must be learned and understood and followed in order that the estimate may be what it is, a formal exposition of a process of logical reasoning.

John Stuart Mill, speaking on the value of education in science, is quoted as having said:—

"If you want to know whether you are thinking rightly, put your thoughts into words. In the very attempt to do this you will find yourself, consciously or unconsciously, using logical forms. Logic compels us to throw our meaning into distinct propositions and our reasonings into distinct steps. It makes us conscious of all the implied assumptions on which we are proceeding, and which, if not true, vitiate the entire process. It makes us aware what extent of doctrine we commit ourselves to by any course of reasoning. It makes our opinions consistent with themselves and with one another, and forces us to think clearly, even when we can not think correctly. It is no small advantage to see clearly the principles and consequences involved in our opinions, and which we must either accept or else abandon those opinions. You will find abundance of people to tell you that logic is no help to thought, and that people can not be taught to think by rules. Undoubtedly rules by themselves, without practice, go but a little way in teaching anything. But if the practice of thinking is not improved by rules, I venture to say it is the only difficult thing done by human beings that is not so."

Here we have the explanation why the College insists upon a following of the rules for the estimate of the situation, and why, in this system of training, the estimate is required to be put in writing, no matter what the cost in labor.

Finally, the decision reached must stand the following tests. It must accomplish the mission. It must embody the simplest plan which at the same time creates the greatest difficulty for the enemy. It must express resolution. Such a sound decision can only depend on the exhaustiveness with which all courses of action are analyzed and compared. The analysis relies on one's common sense and logical reasoning powers. Ability to see all possible courses of action depends on knowledge and not a little on ingenuity. Knowledge is derived from reading and experience. Reading, study, reflection are required in order that the plan maker may approach his problem mentally well equipped. The Service needs that future War College student officers begin now, by reading and study, to achieve the best mental equipment possible.

The second phase of the College system of training, Formulating the order, teaches how to translate the decision into an order. Here also the College insists upon a following of the rules set forth in the College publication, for it is only by a strict following of the rules as to form that its spirit, the essential idea, is grasped.

The order form embraces:

Heading,
Task organization,
Information paragraph,
General plan paragraph,
Task paragraph,
Logistics paragraph,
Communications paragraph,
Signature,
Distribution.

To formulate an order is at once an exercise in organization and administration. The distribution of forces in the task organization is an exercise in organization. The order is an exercise in administration. Here the situation is outlined, and objective is announced, duties and spheres of action are assigned to each subordinate commander, and support and contact are provided for. It is important to grasp this because the conduct of war—the application of the principles of strategy and tactics, rests on the foundation of sound administration. If the system of administration is seriously faulty, the best strategy will fail because it is not well supported. No other form of order meets our requirements so well. In its spirit the order form recognizes first, that the details of an operation cannot be controlled by direct orders from the commander-in-chief; second, that the subordinate commander on the spot is the best judge of the situation; and third, that intelligent co-operation is of infinitely more value than mechanical obedience. These express a sound system of command. The order form points the way to loyalty and unites the command toward the accomplishment of the end in view, for as new and unexpected situations arise, the paragraph 2 is the guiding star for every new effort, the assurance that the subordinate will act as the commander-in-chief would wish him to act. Pervading the order form is the spirit of mutual confidence between commander-in-chief and subordinates and between subordinate and subordinate. Healthy initiative is born of mutual confidence. The order form teaches the other essentials to a sound system of command. It teaches a logical sequence. It teaches brevity, clearness, definiteness and positiveness. It teaches that we are not to trespass on the province of the subordinate and the details of execution must be left to the subordinate. Such an order will transmit to all subordinates the commander-in-chief's spirit of resolution—such as we have before said must be expressed in the decision, and will imbue in all subordinates the same unwavering resolution in its execution.

We will quote here the advice of an authority that all of us should follow every day of our lives in little matters of administration and routine, so that we shall have correct mental habits in the days when we may be at war. This authority says:

“It is never a good thing to criticize the orders of a superior, not even in one's own mind, because one can not place himself in his superior's position. All orders from superior authority should be considered as decrees of fate, and no other thought should be given to them than how to execute them best, and how to understand the intention of the superior in the most complete manner. Criticism is apt to spoil one's pleasure and keenness in one's work, and besides is useless, because in the subordinate position it can not be well founded.”

Cultivation of this frame of mind is the cultivation of loyalty.

We come now to the third phase of the system of training—Maneuvering the solution. This translates the mental processes into action, actually applies and tests out, in the chart maneuver, the strategical plan decided upon; and in the tactical maneuver, the tactical plan decided upon.

In the maneuver the student officer experiences all the intellectual processes of war. To be sure the mental strain caused by the loss of men and ships is absent, but even so, the student of lively imagination feels it keenly when he suffers such losses. Also there is lacking the strain of the burden of responsibility, which in war is the most difficult burden for the commander-in-chief to carry. Yet each student as he is called upon to test his solution of a problem by a maneuver, not only begins to feel what the responsibilities of the higher command mean, but also he is training himself some day to carry those responsibilities. And our College system not only thus trains and improves an officer, but it also reveals him. As he is in the maneuver, so will he be in the reality. We see in a student's conduct of a maneuver, whether strategic or tactical, by the degree of resolution or irresolution with which he pursues his plan, whether he has confidence in himself, whether he practices the art of limiting his own area of activity, the art of trusting to his subordinates' initiative. These depend largely upon the perfection of his **Operation Order**, whether it is capable of clear interpretation by the task commanders. This in turn depends upon his grasp of the spirit of the order form and upon the perfection of his estimate of the situation, whether the latter is a logical analysis of the situation. This in turn depends upon the student's powers of analysis and upon the knowledge and mental equipment he brings to bear upon the solution. So we see that the student's conduct of a maneuver will reveal the degree to which he has responded to each of the elements of the College course. The conduct of the maneuver, then, becomes the basis of the student's

introspection, by which he brings home to himself imperfections requiring his attention.

An equally valuable result of playing a maneuver is training and exercise in co-operation. The maneuver commander has to exercise leadership and loyalty down. The subordinate commanders have to exercise loyalty up, loyalty to each other, initiative, intelligent obedience. As these are the elements of discipline, the maneuver provides exercise and training in that quality. As a result of repeated maneuvers new methods of applying principles come to light, and doctrine evolves itself. Not the least valuable feature of the maneuver, whether strategic or tactical, is the succession of its phases as a continuous development toward an end in view, with minds and wills in opposition striving against each other. Herein the maneuver is pre-eminently a war game, and herein is its greatest value in training officers for staff duties and for duty as plan makers. Nowhere in our service life, outside the War College, is it possible to develop a plan maker; for nowhere else is a plan attacked by an active enemy. It is the alert, opposing intelligence and will, attempting to destroy the plan at every turn, that forces development in the art of making sound plans.

This brings us to the last phase of the system—Criticising the estimate, the order and the maneuver.

Following the conclusion of strategic and tactical maneuvers, the director conducts a critique—an open conference. Similarities and variations among the solutions are pointed out. The maneuver is unfolded on a screen move by move. This permits critical situations to be discussed, and gives opportunity for the presentation of suggested alternative movements and for discussion as to the effect of such alternative movements. The entire solution and maneuver is freely debated by the student officers. The object of this discussion is elucidation and enlightenment. This freedom for debate and argumentation is one of the finest features of the College course. It may be said that it supplies the intelligent and constructive criticism that has its due share in the healthy growth of the College.

This healthy growth is in no small measure also one of the splendid results of the camaraderie existing at the College among staff and student officers. This close association, the concentration of attention, the mental intercourse and exchange of thought proceeding daily everywhere, produce intensive effort. Intelligence, industry and capacity impelled by full freedom of speech and action, here stand revealed. Prestige is acquired only by able work.

The results of the College system of training, the relationships and uses of the phases of which it has been the aim to explain, are many. It develops qualities of military character. It trains the student officer in judgment, in decision, in command, in leadership. It leads to similarity and thoroughness of treatment of any war prob-

lem. This feature of its method, combined with a good knowledge of principles gleaned from a reading of naval and military history leads under repeated exercises, to the correct application of those principles and to an approximate agreement in judgment or decision. If it does not accomplish this end entirely, at least it tends toward the elimination of that which is unsound. All this ensures to a superior the guarantee of trained judgments in his subordinates; and inspires that confidence that not only keeps the superior within his area of discretion—keeps the superior from unduly meddling with the subordinate's job, but also stimulates the exercise of initiative on the subordinate's part. This system develops doctrine—the uniform or common conception of the application of the principles of warfare leading to co-ordination of effort and unity of command. Indeed it can be said with assurance, that Tactical Principles and Their Application—the College publication, has evolved itself here as tactical doctrine through years of problem solving, game board maneuvering and criticism. The same can assuredly be said of the authoritative doctrine promulgated by the Chief of Naval Operations to the Service. These stand as monumental proofs of the potentialities residing in the College system of training.

As training in the applicatory system begins at once in the College course, not all student officers—as will be readily admitted by some of us graduates—approach the course sufficiently well grounded in the essential foundations of the course and in knowledge derived from reading. It ought to benefit the Service if we graduates can impose on the younger officers, from our own experiences, the meaning of that which we lacked on taking up the College course. We should urge our juniors who expect to attend this College to begin now to read the addresses of the President and the series of elementary College publications that reveal the spirit of the College aims and methods of training. If we can induce officers to begin early thus to prepare themselves mentally and culturally for the College by systematic reading, not only would the College and the Service better profit by the attendance of such well prepared officers, but also they themselves would find problem solving and thesis writing less irksome in point of the mental effort involved, less costly in point of time consumed. Actually they would take a keener enjoyment in their investigations. Consequently we should urge every officer who has not yet attended the Naval War College, to apply to the College for a reading course suggested with this end in view. The reading matter suggested would be College publications supplied, and books all of which would be found in the libraries already on board ship. Undoubtedly from every standpoint there is greater profit, better mental exercise, in selected reading preparatory to entering this College—in equipping one's self for future training in the College, than there is in playing cards on board ship. And assurance can be given that this reading of naval and military history and biography will more and more create a thirst for professional knowledge,

apart from satisfying the craving for the romantic and the thrilling. And furthermore, what is of most concern to the future of the Service, this thirst for professional advancement, we feel sure, will urge the officer who fully realizes his obligations, to enroll with the Correspondence Course, preparatory to his detail to the College.

Finally, let us emphasize the two sacred obligations that rest on every officer, no matter what his rank:

The first: To make himself an efficient leader of his command, no matter what the size of his unit.

The second: To make himself an efficient subordinate to higher authority.

In the first, he has to perfect his command and maintain its personnel and material in a high state of efficiency so as to make it a reliable instrument for warlike uses, and he has to train himself in its use.

In the second, he has to absorb the principles and doctrine laid down by higher authority; he has to train himself to apply them correctly, and he has to seek to achieve the maximum co-operation with his colleagues in subordinate command.

We have a vision that in the next war we will see our Commander-in-Chief, before his assembled staff, after a contemplation and study of the theatre of operations on which are laid down our own and the enemy's forces and dispositions, state to his staff simply his resolution, his decision, leaving to his trained and indoctrinated staff to formulate his operation order around his resolution, the order to be executed by equally well trained and indoctrinated subordinate commanders.

The Naval War College course is a training toward this end.

Distribution:

- Naval War College (200).
- Atlantic Fleet (400).
- Pacific Fleet (500).
- Asiatic Fleet (100).
- Special Service Squadron (25).
- Naval Forces in European Waters (50).
- Opnav. (12).
- All Bureaus (6 each).