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ADDRESS

T H E A S P E C T S

of

H I G H E R C O M M A N D

Delivered before

U.S. NAVAL WAR COLLEGE

by

ADMIRAL W.V. PRATT, U.S. Navy

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THE ASPECTS OF HIGHER COMMAND

General Discussion.

1. The topic is one which has many different angles. It can be treated in a very general manner or it can be treated from a special view-point such as that of a general staff. Also, it can be treated from the view-point of the individual leader. In this discussion I propose to give you my own particular ideas on the subject. In the main, I shall treat it from the view-point of the Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet, although in the course of the discussion I may express some opinions which have a bearing on the subject of command in general. Personally, I have found it necessary to formulate my ideas on this subject and to have some very definite opinions, otherwise, I would find difficulty in exercising the function of high command according to any well considered plan. Failure to do this, to my mind, has an effect which extends down the entire chain of command; is not conducive of the best results and leaves in the mind of subordinate leaders a somewhat hazy impression as to what the views of the leader may be. I consider that one of the features entering into successful leadership is to have very definite conceptions on this subject, for then not only do you convey to your subordinates clear impressions as to what your ideas and purposes are, but if there be any virtue in these ideas and purpose then you may become the advocate of a school of thought tending to produce other leaders following along in the same path. There is no place in our service where discussions of

this character can be carried on with better effect than our Naval War College.

2. In treating of the subject matter I divide it very broadly into two phases: first, high command during the time of peace; and second, high command during the time of war. The time of peace is the time for preliminary training and while not so spectacular, nevertheless much of the success we may attain in a war campaign will be due to the thorough and intensive work which we do in the somewhat prosaic days of peace. By having concrete ideas on the subject, and translating these ideas into a definite program, we may be able to so conduct our training, arrange our fleet organizations and prepare our plans to such definite and clear ends, that the transition from peace to war becomes one of expansion and does not take place by the road of complete revolution.

SPECIFIC DISCUSSION

The Army versus the Navy point of view.

3. Before treating the matters which pertain more strictly to the Fleet, I would like to go into the subject a little more broadly and touch upon a phase of higher command wherein, to my mind, I see two somewhat different points of view, in regard to exercise of high command. These two different outlooks, as I see them, may be expressed as the Army point of view toward high command, and the Navy point of view toward the same subject. Likewise, these points of view will automatically assert themselves in the conduct of a campaign. I do not expect my listeners to

agree with me entirely, for naturally this is a matter about which there is ground for much discussion, but as I see it, expressed in concrete terms, the Army system proposes the exercise of high command, in actuality through supreme control by a general staff. Though nominally not so, this is what the system practically arrives at. On the other hand, although it may be a fine distinction, I regard the naval point of view as the exercise of higher command through the personality of a leader guided by a staff. The former method seems to me to be more the Army point of view and the latter more the tendency of the Navy. While the distinction is small, nevertheless I feel that it is there. Which is better and why? Which is more suited to a democratic country like ours? Which system, in the course of a war, is likely to produce the better results? Is either of the systems sufficient unto itself or may there not be times when we might lean more to the one and again might with success lean toward the other? To my way of thinking, the Army method is more bureaucratic but if carried to an extreme, might become oligarchic in its tendencies so that even a very able leader in time of war might find it difficult to impress his personality upon the forces under him, possibly through the stifling tendencies of a general staff, though it might be very able technically. The Naval method starts out more liberally, but there's the danger that it may always become too autocratic in case the leader forgets to bear in mind always that he is only one man and that he cannot by his own acts, or by his own personality alone, successfully carry on a campaign, or that the war is not his war or the service his service, but

that he must lean greatly upon his subordinates and upon an able staff to assist him. Further, the Naval system may have a tendency to degenerate into impotency if the leader is a weak man and if the staff which should guide him likewise is weak. I feel that the Army method presents the safer average in war, especially where the leader may be a general chosen for political reasons. On the other hand, the Navy way gives greater hope for the development of the natural born leader, if we are careful to direct our thoughts and our acts always in the right direction, and I see no reason why the guiding Naval staff of each high command should not be thoroughly competent to accomplish its purpose under our present system of training at the War College, if we keep step with the times. I might say here that I am starting this discussion with the idea in mind that you are all familiar with what the General Staff system of the Army is, and for this reason have avoided entirely any discussion of its organization and functions. Now, in the time of peace, how do these two different outlooks effect results in the matter of product? It seems to me that the Army method tends to produce material preparedness while the Navy method tends to produce an individual or personal preparedness. I feel that the difference in the two outlooks extends even to the training at the two colleges. To my mind, both points of view are necessary. But how much we should stress the one as against the other is a matter of fine distinction. In one way, the difference may be expressed crudely by the words "material preparation vs. operational preparation"; in another way by "combined vs. individual action". In still

another way by "theory vs. theory and practice", and looking at it in still another way by the terms "mass production vs. individual craftsmanship". One of the several reasons why the army may be forced to their point of view is because it is seriously handicapped by lack of troops and therefore by opportunities where officers can serve with troops. On the other hand, the Navy does not suffer in this way, therefore it has the opportunity of translating much of its theory into action in the fleet; of testing out practically its theories and as a result, naturally, stressing the operational factor. Moreover, another reason which is bound to produce the point of view which we hold in the service is the fact that the Navy must be at the very instant war breaks, operationally prepared to the highest degree and materially prepared to cover a certain length of time sufficient to last through what we may call "the first phases of a war campaign". On the other hand, the Army can never be expected to be prepared operationally during the first phases of a campaign but always will be, so far as we in this country are concerned, given time to build up for the later phases of the war. This is true because our country probably will never be seriously in danger of invasion, a situation which you can readily see is quite different from that which obtains on the continents of Europe and Asia, causing military and naval men there to hold points of view which may be radically different from those we should hold. There is, however a grave danger if we hold too closely to the Naval point of view and do not visualize the extent of a campaign, that unless

we lean toward the Army point of view before the war is finished, we may find our reserves gravely depleted in the matter of ships, supplies and men. We must not forget the enormous power vested in reserves. I wish you would bear in mind that this discussion is in no way a criticism. It is, on my part, an attempt to analyze the subject in a most abstract sort of way. Nor do I find any fault with the Army system, for it is practically forced upon them and their present inability to stress the operational factor is undoubtedly deplored by them more than it is by us. I feel that economy does not demand such a reduction in operational strength of the Army. However, I merely sound a warning that the Navy, on account of the different role which it must play through the early stages of a war, must guard itself against a too great worship of the general staff system, while on the other hand, it should be quick to avail itself of all that is valuable in it. Summarizing the effect of the two systems, I visualize the Navy going into a war better prepared at first operationally, but with a danger of running short of its reserves in a long campaign unless it took heed. The Army, on the other hand, will have to develop their leaders during the war unless one emerges from the crowd very early. Even so, in the end he might have to fight against a somewhat bureaucratic tendency on the part of the General Staff. However, if no outstanding leaders emerge I consider that the Army has a very safe average system. In the end, it should take the field with greater material and reserve strength than the Navy, and this is probably the correct relative position of the two forces in an over-seas campaign. Possibly

later the Army would emerge with an outstanding leader trained through the experience and adversity of war. To me there seems to be need of the recognition in both services of the good points in each system. Practically, I feel that the two systems do fit their country's needs fairly well, for, as I have said before, we are in no immediate danger of invasion so long as the Navy's operational ability is not too greatly handicapped at first, for beyond the first stage, an over-seas campaign should not be undertaken too hastily, that is, the second phase of it which is more purely the Army's function than it is the Navy's. Some of these ideas came to me during the World War and shortly after, for in the capacity in which I served then, I came to realize that the Navy, which had been brought up entirely in the operational school of thought, failed in the beginning to realize the character of the war in which we were engaged, and that the Navy's function in this particular war had long passed out of the first phase, i.e., the operational phase of the Navy, and had settled itself firmly in the second phase, which was more properly the operational phase for the Army, and that the Navy's function in this phase was that of ministering to the Army's needs, rather of operating on its own account. The peculiar character of the war at the time we entered rendered this obligatory on our part. Nevertheless, I could not help noting that it took time for the Navy as a whole to realize what the character of the war was.

PEACE TRAINING OF THE FLEET.

4. In the exercise of high command the leader should understand the fundamental principles indicated in the above discussion else he is not in a position to guide most efficiently the direction naval training should take during peace. What is more important still, he will not in time of war be in a position to operate along the lines of enemy least resistance with the maximum degree of efficiency.

5. In planning for peace time training, the leader should make a survey of the tactical field in an endeavor to discover its weak and its strong points to guide him in outlining the character of the problem work he proposes to give to the fleet, and also in planning for those tactical exercises designed to train the various types of ships under his command. In surveying the tactical field I note, what to my mind is its greatest weakness. I will express it tersely thus: it consists in the conduct of operations on the order system instead of the plan system. By order now I do not mean the operation order, which follows as the executor of the plan, but I do mean the imperative order flashed out by signal following no particular pre-arranged plan, which plan is itself the result of study and experience extending over years and finally is condensed into concrete form. Unfortunately, this, to my mind, has been the usual method of procedure and to it I am unalterably opposed. Most of our tactical exercises in the past have not been thought out and presented in the nature of problems demanding a plan but have been the children of the moment. This, has resulted in many of

our tactical exercises being perfect in form but lacking much in substance. In other words, I get the impression of a magnificently trained machine so far as precision of movement is concerned but which lacks, frequently, a directive purpose. Under the present system of tactical training this result is inevitable. The War Instructions are excellent in so far as they go; they lay down general principles but these general principles must be elaborated in the form of definite plans, which take shape and are carried to the extent which Fleet experience and training will permit. The signal book then gives an adequate means for putting the plan into execution. Under the present system we jump from the War Instructions to the imperative order conveyed by signal, passing through another general phase of tactical instructions but not using these tactical instructions as principles and assumptions upon which to base our definite plans. I have protested in vain for a number of years against such a system, maintaining that it is impossible to develop the initiative of our subordinate leaders under the present system for to begin with they do not know what the leader is thinking of nor what he proposes to do under certain definite assumptions. With the aid of the Fleet Staff, an attempt has been made to remedy this situation and to start in the right direction. There is hope that in the near future this weakness in the tactical field will be remedied. A number of years ago the conference method was devised to remedy this weakness in our tactical system. It has served a very useful purpose and should be continued, but the method of conference is not always feasible, particularly where

component parts of the fleet operate at considerable distances from each other, a situation which constantly confronts a leader. Therefore, there must be a more definite way for the leader to convey his ideas in some clear-cut plan than the conference method permits of. However, the conference and the plan method taken together ease the way very materially for the concise order, so that this triumvirate form a very strong tactical combination. Another great advantage of this system is that by this method a mutual understanding between leaders is so developed that the mind of the high command is almost constantly at the disposition of his subordinates. In fact, it renders initiative on the part of the subordinate easy to develop and to maintain, thus reducing the need for continuous and manifold orders. It will be noted that there is nothing new about this as, in a simple form, it is the method Nelson used at Trafalgar.

6. The selection of a staff and the proper apportionment of the work constitutes a very important factor in the exercises of high command. In the main it may be said that the General Staff system of the Army, G1, G2, G3 and G4 is accepted as a sound basis for the apportionment of the work, in theory certainly, if not entirely in practice. There is a reason why, during peace, we may not put it in practice in entirety. Space is too cramped on board ship to permit of the full expansion of a staff necessary to perform all of the detailed work involved in an extensive campaign. Naturally in time of war this situation would be remedied at least partially. The result is that in the

forces afloat the G2 or Intelligence Section is the weakest link in the entire chain. In time of war immediate demand would have to be made to strengthen this weak section and naturally the forces afloat must draw largely upon the War College and upon the Office of Intelligence in Washington to augment the present staff strength in order that comprehensive and adequate plans might be made to cope with military situations as they arise. As to the qualities which go into the makeup of a staff, while technical knowledge is of course a first requisite, I place good judgment and human understanding in the same or even higher plane. The key to this entire situation lies in the military character of the Chief of Staff. Fortunately, I have insisted upon and been successful in obtaining the services of a Chief of Staff whom I consider to be one of the outstanding men of the service - broad and liberal in his point of view, a thorough technician and with those qualities which permit of harmonious cooperation throughout the entire staff. I find that such a simple expedient as messing together is conducive to efficiency as in fact it results in an almost continuous conference of the staff in which the leader participates.

7. A condition which immediately confronts the higher command is the need for an estimate on his part, as to what shall be the character of the major problem work to be undertaken by the Fleet as a whole, at the times of fleet concentration. I have thought over this subject at some length and have definitely come to the conclusion that for the purpose of major fleet tactical training now I would adopt the use of the word "parity".

By this I mean as follows: while I recognize the fact that there is only one other naval service in the world which may in the future be considered as on a parity with ours, and that for these two services to engage in war would be little short of criminal, owing to the fact that the most advanced civilization as the world knows it today would be destroyed, throwing the entire world into chaos out of which nothing but world revolution could come, yet if a fleet wishes to put itself in top-notch fighting condition it must recognize that if it works on the parity basis in its major problem work, it should do more to bring itself into high tactical perfection than work carried on under any other assumption. If fleet problem work in the matter of practical training is carried on to too great an extent under the assumption of superiority it may give rise to a certain laxity in tactical perfection, for the question of waste is not then so important as it becomes when working on the parity basis. Under the parity assumption, the subordinate leader and the high command itself are put on their metal to get the very best out of the types at their disposal. It not only tends to develop perfection in the operation of types but demands on the part of the leaders the exercise of much ingenuity in order that they may take every advantage of each military situation as it presents itself, and be a little keener and quicker in adapting themselves to it. In reality it gives them a percentage of advantage over an enemy which has not operated tactically along these lines.

8. The material situation of the fleet, as it presents itself to me, is not entirely satisfactory, nor will it be in a country situated as we are, wherein the fear of war is not ever present in the minds of our countrymen. However, this is a condition which the leader must recognize and make the best of. Regardless of all the investigations and endeavors which naval men may make to bring out a satisfactory condition of military preparedness during peace, we will never be entirely prepared. Definitely, while we do possess a modicum of all the types of ships which would be engaged in a war, we are lamentably weak in our light forces, particularly, cruisers. We are, therefore, inadequately trained in those operations in which the light forces take a preeminent part. We are limited by money appropriations. The oil situation is not entirely satisfactory for it imposes upon the movements of our light forces a speed which is not consonant with their ability to perform. The repair work of the fleet is not entirely satisfactory; shortage of funds prevents the undertaking of many necessary repairs. This, naturally, demands close scrutiny of the operating schedule in order that the fleet itself may endeavor to undertake those essential repairs which the yards have not funds to undertake. It also cuts down the time which may be spent in developing the use of our offensive weapons and in the tactical operations we may undertake with a view to putting our offensive weapons in such positions that they may be used most efficiently. Naturally, lack of funds prevents us from building up even that modicum of reserves necessary for a successful undertaking of the first phases of naval campaign.

9. The personnel factor is one of which the leader must take cognizance, for after all, in the ultimate, it is likely to be the personnel factor which decides the success or the failure of a campaign. In estimating this situation I place substance before form. Not that form may be neglected entirely, for after all form plays its part in producing substance, but form, being so much more obvious than substance, the tendency is, in the case of leaders who do not care to do much thinking on the subject to give it a preeminence which may cause it to be mistaken for substance. Definitely, substance comes first and form is secondary. One of the most important problems in the exercise of high command is the development of efficient leaders, who know the value of initiative and are willing to accept it with all of the responsibilities attendant thereto. To this end a most important feature is a complete understanding of the leader's views upon war, and upon the campaign actually engaged in and conversance with the plans which the leader proposes to put into effect. Without such complete understanding it is almost impossible for subordinates to exercise initiative. Like sheep, they are constantly waiting to be led and although they may have within them all the latent powers which would permit them to exercise initiative, a system which does not develop the powers of initiative in subordinates will always cramp the operations of the entire force. The force may be willing, but it does not know what to do. I can illustrate by even such a simple proposition as the position of the Commander-in-Chief of the Fleet in battle.

If he has a force thoroughly inculcated with his views and adequately trained, he may even be absent from the actual scene of battle and yet have the outcome successful and he can, certainly with greater confidence, accept the entire responsibility for the acts of his subordinates. Under the proper system, the Commander-in-Chief of the Fleet may place himself wherever he sees fit, and not necessarily in the battle line. Even though he be in a type which requires his presence in the battle line he may with confidence turn over the tactical command of that line to the next in command, the Commander-in-Chief of the Battle Fleet, reserving the right to direct the course of battle in general and the further right to assume command of the battle line whenever he chooses to do so if the situation demands it, but he is not forced inevitably to assume that command at first, if working under the right system, as he is forced to do working under the wrong system, since in any battle the movements of the auxiliary combatant forces depend upon movements of the battle line and nobody but he knows what he has in mind. In the handling of personnel, to get the best result out of it, much human understanding is required. Much latitude in the granting of privileges, even to the stretching of regulations, may be beneficial but rigid exaction in the performance of duty is required even to the extent of removal from positions of trust, for failure in performance, those men who hold such positions or who do not possess the military virtues which inspire confidence in their followers. In handling personnel the value of the factors example, tradition and ideal are most important. The possession

of these virtues combined with technical skill on the part of leaders will secure an almost unswerving obedience on the part of subordinates and will secure results entirely incommensurate with the quantity and quality of the material at hand. In this connection it might not be entirely inappropriate to touch upon the effect of selection upon the commissioned personnel. It is my experience in the fleet that the best men and the outstanding leaders survive it and these men are the men to whom should go the high commands and to no others. I do believe, however, in selection in the grade of flag officers and further, I think the present system could be modified beneficially and that the good and faithful service rendered by men through long years of devotion to duty should be recognized in some other way than by arbitrarily putting them out of the service with the rank which they hold when not selected. I believe further that the pay of the commissioned personnel should be materially increased. It is an axiom in the business world that you get just about what you pay for, and if the pay of federal servants is poor, the results in the end will be cheap service for the country. But regardless of all the disadvantages under which the naval personnel may operate, it is incumbent upon them to hold to tradition, to have high ideals and give full obedience to the laws of the country they serve. The discipline of the fleet is an important matter. No matter how perfect the machine be otherwise, there is a flaw in it if the discipline is lax. I do not advocate for the high command to attempt to correct infractions by starting at the bottom, but at the top. Too many orders and regulations directed

at petty infractions will get nowhere, but if a ship is a repeated offender, and warning has no effect, then I incline to holding the Captain responsible and of putting the ship in quarantine for varying periods on the ground that she is unsanitary from a disciplinary point of view. This has been in effect in the Battle Fleet and has been successful; only much common sense and discretion must be used. The ship must be made to realize that under the rules established she penalizes herself when she becomes a repeated offender. This matter is now being taken up in the Scouting Fleet. Grave laxity in discipline might even call for the removal of responsible heads, the breaking up of a ship's organization or even more drastic action in war. Fortunately, I consider that the discipline of the service is on a high plane, but I choose to sound a warning now as the spirit of lawlessness is rife in our country and may penetrate even the naval service.

10. Another point which the high command must consider is the value of inspection and personal contact, versus regulations, order, and distant control. No orders or regulations however sweeping have the beneficial effect of the personal touch. It is my opinion that the presence of the high command is frequently demanded at the weakest spot in the chain of command. Personal contact will do more to effect results than a multiplicity of orders written at a distance. Say "yes" when it is possible to say it, but know how to say "no" and do not hesitate to say "no" when the occasion demands.

11. In effecting the tactical training of the fleet, it is incumbent upon the high command to be guided by some fundamental principle which determines the method of operating the various types. After watching the work of the fleet for a number of years, I have come to the conclusion that so far as it is practicable, the component parts of the fleet should, during the training periods, operate upon a weekly and not upon a daily basis. Taken in conjunction with the home base idea, it affords the most practicable and efficient method of operation. It is economical in fuel expenditure; it saves time, enabling schedules to be completed which otherwise would be thought to be congested, and if properly carried out, is conducive to contentment. I have adopted this principle: the first part of the week out devoted to intensive training, and the week end in devoted to leave, home-coming and to recreation.

12. Another feature which demands consideration is the organization of the fleet. At present we are organized on the basis of two task forces, the Battle Fleet and the Scouting Fleet. Political exigency has, in a measure, demanded this. I, myself, incline to a fleet organization on the type basis, but I think I see the way clear whereby the principles involved in type organization may be carried through successfully even under the present system. Of course the Scouting Fleet labors under a disadvantage when compared to the Battle Fleet which has its home operating base the San Pedro-San Diego Area. It is difficult and always will be to make conditions in the two fleets similar, an

end which should be striven for if possible in order that similarity in training methods be carried out, and unity of purpose achieved in the Fleet. As I said before, it is difficult to effect this but I think with proper foresight conditions may be ameliorated.

13. In addition to the major U.S. Fleet problem work, each component part of that fleet has its own training work to undertake. The work of gunnery training is very well organized, better organized in fact than the work of tactical training. I believe, however, that the work of tactical training during the period of tactical exercises can be more efficiently carried out if the higher commands visualize their work in the nature of problem work. This requires considerable thought on the part of these leaders to determine what are the essential features to be developed in each fleet; to lay out their tactical exercises in the form of problems; and to carry out their operations under the plan system. By this method much interest is added to the work and instead of perfunctory maneuvers, which certainly the subordinates take little interest in, each man has a working knowledge of the intent of the problem while the leaders succeed not only in developing the strong points of their forces but in finding out the weak points. In addition, while carrying out these maneuvers precision of movement is automatically developed. This is the system which has been put into effect in the Battle Fleet and is now in effect in the Scouting Fleet. In other words, the plan and problem system embraces tactical precision of movement as one of its component parts but is not the sole and only

part of the problem. In laying out the problem work I believe in always keeping to the fore the value of the offensive attitude of mind rather than the defensive attitude of mind. It is my experience that often when the broad military situation demands the strategic defensive an astute leader can sometimes turn the scale by appropriate local tactical offensive.

14. Naturally, much of the training work is devoted to the development of the tactics of types. Each type - the battleship, the destroyer, the cruiser, the submarine and the air force - has its own particular problems to consider and work along these lines must be most thorough and comprehensive. Unfortunately, owing to lack of cruisers, we are extremely weak in the development of the tactics of this type. The battleships and destroyers are pretty well established and work along these lines means merely an increase^e in perfection of detail. The submarine is still an uncertain problem. Many able men are of the opinion that the submarine can be considered as an essential component part of the fleet in battle. I do not incline entirely to this idea, for I believe that the submarine in battle is still a weapon of chance except for those vessels which are able to maintain fleet speed. The air force, (and in this connection I include the carrier as a part of this force) is the most interesting and unknown problem of all. It presents a great future if properly developed and with more intensive work I believe that the future will find the air force taking a more prominent part as one of the striking arms of the fleet than it has in the past. So thoroughly convinced am I of this that I propose to spend a

great part of the coming year in immediate personal contact with the air force.

15. The strategic situation which confronts the fleet must always be of concern to the high command. However, in peace it plays a less prominent role than the tactical situation. In fact, it plays a secondary role then. In peace it is better in hand than is the tactical situation. An element of time enters here which permits of a review and an adjustment of the strategic situation in peace which might not be possible in war, and being given the time it becomes the concern of the War Plans Section of the Department to a greater extent than would be the case in war.

16. The political and international situation must always be one of indirect concern, in peace, to the high command, but being out of his control it naturally plays a subordinate part in his concern. However, the high command must always keep, in the background of his mind, a working knowledge of the political situation so that in the event of sudden hostilities he may take over the reins of such part as may be entrusted to him and carry on efficiently. Naturally, in time of war, the political and international situation forges immediately to the front place. In a broad sense it becomes the primary role second to which is the strategic situation and third, the tactical situation which, though subordinate to the others, is, in the public mind, the most dramatic of all.

17. I find in considering the aspects of high command that the question of personal contact with influential men and foreign

officials plays a prominent part. While on the surface the Navy, during peace, may not be apparently a popular arm of the public service, yet underlying the surface there is a high regard for the naval service among the thinking and responsible men of our country. No persons are better qualified to express the Navy's needs, its aims, and its objectives than are those who exercise high command. I think that these men should feel that they have a duty incumbent upon them to define, without being aggressive, the naval position whenever the right occasion presents itself. Moreover, much more good is done by a few intimate personal contacts than can be done by reams of letter-writing or newspaper agitation.

18. A point which should not be neglected in the exercise of high command is the matter of joint Army and Navy problems. I will not go into this matter at length for this is a problem in itself. Nevertheless, opportunities to get together and to carry on maneuvers for the benefit of each service should not be lost sight of. It tends to mutual understanding and reliance on each other and of a certainty would bring about better cooperation whenever the exigencies of war force us to work together. I would like here to mention briefly a few of the points brought out in the execution of Problem IX last winter. In the first place, the naval point of view is so generally fixed upon the value of the battleship force as the striking arm that it was not entirely ready to accept the idea that the real striking force may, if the situation demands it, consist almost entirely

of an air force properly supported. The result was that when the Fifth Division of the Battle Fleet, supported by the CALIFORNIA, was thrown well to the front it was practically accepted as the striking force and attracted, as it was intended to do, a concentration on the part of the enemy while the real striking force, the supported air force, swept around the flank to accomplish its mission. On the part of the Army I think it led to the view that the defense should be more open than it had been.

19. Summarizing. During peace, which is the training period, I consider the most important field of work for the fleet afloat to be the tactical field and in this I include not only movement but the use of all offensive weapons and methods of defense. Second to this, the strategic field of endeavor is placed, and last of all I place the political and international field as the concern of the higher command.

FLEET WAR OPERATION

20. In this discussion I shall not attempt to outline any of my conceptions of the exercise of high command as pertains to that highest command of all, the Office of Naval Operations. This is beyond my province, except the very general comment which pertains to the exercise of all high command, that details, so far as it is practicable and efficacious, should be delegated to subordinates. It is my purpose here to speak more of the exercise of high command in the Fleet.

21. It is during the period of war that the value of a plan of campaign asserts itself. No serious campaign can be undertaken that is not based upon sound strategic premises. Then is

the time when the high command, having so trained his fleet to perfection in the tactical field in peace, can, with reasonable assurance, leave the execution of tactical details to his subordinates and devote himself to the study of the strategic situation. For unless the strategic plan of campaign is sound, no brilliancy of tactical execution can entirely overcome a fundamental strategic weakness. If then the Fleet is on a sound war basis, the Department can, with a certain degree of assurance, leave much of the execution of the plan of campaign to the man in the field, which is the correct thing to do. He is the man on the spot, the one who should handle most of the details himself and not be harrassed by orders and counter orders from home. But unless the service as a whole works on sound principles, this is apt to be the case the moment we are hurried into a war.

22. It is now that the importance of the political and international situation jumps to the front. But this can never be the first concern of the man in the field, while it must always be the first concern of the Department at home. The man in the field, however, must be so alive to the political and international situation that he can accept general instructions from the Department and in turn translate them into correct strategic estimate on the spot. So then, to the man afloat, in war, his first concern is the strategic field of endeavor and hardly second to that is the tactical field of operation, while covering all as a mantle must be the general instructions received from home, guiding and directing him constantly as to the political and international situation, which, during the course

of a war, may change and present as many varying phases as does the strategic situation at the front itself.

23. In the conduct of war afloat, the high command must constantly survey the strategic situation in order to know where to throw his force most effectively. In placing this force to the best advantage, he must constantly bear in mind the nine fundamental principles of war and in addition he must bear in mind the four factors within his own fleet with which he has to deal, namely; 1) Fighting, which means the efficient use of all of our weapons; 2) Propulsion, which takes us to the scene of battle or of operation; 3) Flotation, which keeps our hulls under us, and; 4) Tactical Movement, which disposes our weapons to the best advantage.

24. But after all, while the above factors are those upon which the high command must constantly keep his eye, there is one more imponderable factor which must be his concern constantly. After all, it is men, not things, which fight. Weapons speak, but they only speak effectively through the guiding genius of the man who exercises control over all. Therefore, to my mind, one of the key points upon which the high command must always keep his eyes is the military character of the man who, as an enemy, exercises the high command. Upon the estimate of the strong and the weak points in the military character of the enemy high command so must our high command arrange his strategic plans and dispose of his tactical weapons to meet most efficiently each situation as it presents itself. With an enemy of certain known military virtues, one of the fundamental principles of war might

be demanded, while with an enemy in high command of certain other military virtues the same fundamental principles, though apparently obvious, might indicate a course of conduct it would be exactly the thing to avoid and another course of action would be the course to produce the best results. Therefore, however well we may arrange our own plans and however thorough may be our own preparations to meet certain situations, if we do not give the gravest consideration to the military characters of the men who exercise enemy high command we would not be playing to best advantage necessarily. Therefore, in considering the problems which face the high command, one of the most important is to correctly estimate the military character of the men opposing you.

25. It may be noted that up to this point in the discussion I have dealt almost entirely with the positive side of the aspect of higher command, that is broadly with those view-points and those acts which enter into the picture from the constructive side. There are, however, certain restrictions upon the exercise of higher command, and certain acts which should not be committed, which make it incumbent to sketch briefly the negative side of the picture. I will limit myself to two very general presentations.

26. While I was President of this College I got out a paper entitled "Administration and Command", "an analysis of their derivation and discussion of their exercise." There was outlined the origin of each and the channels along which each should flow. It will be noted that in peace, Administration has a tendency to

assume Command and to exercise authority which it would be dangerous for it to exercise in war. This is the logical result of our Bureau system, a perfectly natural and sane system in itself but with faults inherent to it, which must be guarded against. In the first place, through its clerical system, it represents the only continuous body of thought always holding the same positions always doing the same things, which we have in our ever-changing, purely naval personnel. The result is almost inevitable that though in theory, the Fleet comes first, and the Bureaus exist to maintain the Fleet in being, actually the power resides in the Bureaus with the tendency more and more for administration to creep into the realm of command and to assume the reins. We go along this way with more details, constantly being taken from the Fleet and exercised by men in the Department, until one morning we suddenly awake, the calm of peace shattered and the horrid din of war on. Then there is a fluttering behind the front line of the fleet, the reins of assumed authority are laid down: the small piping tunes of peace are stilled, and there goes up a cry from the entire country, swelling constantly in volume, for the high command to exercise authority and to produce results, a call to the very men whose hands have been tied partially in peace. And the high command must meet this call.

27. A second thought which flows naturally from this I name Loyalty. When does loyalty demand that I disobey an order? Certainly rarely in peace, for the all important element time will come forward to ease the situation, but in war it may be different. Our country was founded on the idea that "The Law",

the expression of what is true and right should prevail over the orders of any one man. The first should be as enduring as the granite, backbone of our land: the latter may be as variable as the winds that blow. So when the test comes, the great leader must go into silent communion with himself: he must search his soul and come out prepared to give his loyalty to what he deems his duty to be, in the great things, even though by so doing he may go contrary to express directions in smaller matters. If absolutely sure he is right, he must stick to the right even though he sacrifice life and glory. Honor he can never sacrifice so long as he be right.

FINALLY

I wish to thank the college for this opportunity to present my views on high command to it. I do not ask you to accept anything I have stated to be of particular value except as ground for discussion, beyond those facts which evidently are true. Further, I wish to state that I owe a debt of gratitude not only to the Naval War College but to the Army War College for the opportunities they have given me to formulate my ideas upon this subject. Without the aid of these two service schools I could never have had any concrete ideas at all. So thoroughly am I impressed by the training given by these two institutions that in the future I would hesitate to recommend to the highest command any man who had not been able to avail himself of the opportunities given here. A man may have a world of experience at sea, but experience only, may cover a form without useful purpose and

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direction unless purpose be furnished by years of thoughtful study directed by the guiding hand of our great service schools.

W.V. PRATT.

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