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by

REAR ADMIRAL C.S. WILLIAMS, U.S. NAVY.

President

to the

GRADUATING CLASS of 1923

of the

U.S. NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R. I.
26 May, 1923.

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Gentlemen of the Graduating Class:

Custom requires me, as the official head of this institution, to address the graduating class upon the occasion which marks the completion of its course at the College.

In complying with this now time honored duty I shall endeavor to confine my remarks to a brief review of the aims of the War College, its work during the past year, and the hopes and plans which we have for its future.

The War College was established to afford officers the opportunity to study the higher branches of the naval profession. It is concerned with the study of war and preparation for war.

We are all familiar with what the College tries to accomplish yet, doubtless, each of us would express his conception of the aims of the institution in different language. Such an institution as this may have more than one end in view and individual opinion will vary as to which of these is of the most importance. You know that it is not always easy to select a mission or, having done so, to express it in clear, comprehensive, and concise language.

To my mind the primary mission of the College is concerned with the professional development of officers.

I conceive it to be "to assist in the preparation of naval officers for high command in war". I say "to assist in the preparation" because the course at this institution, important as we believe it to be, can, at best, be only a part of the preparation and training which an officer must undergo in order to be fully equippe

for the higher duties of his profession.

In time of peace, the Navy should be a highly trained team ready for prompt and effective work in supporting the policies of the country. In time of war, the team should function smoothly and irresistibly. This it cannot do unless each of the members has a clear knowledge of where the goal lies and understands the signals. In other words, all officers should have a common understanding of the principles involved in the conduct of warfare, of the language used in conveying orders, and when confronted with any given situation should, in general, meet it in a manner which will best accomplish the designs of higher authority.

To denote the common understanding which I have mentioned above the War College adopted the term "doctrine" and this meaning has come to be accepted for general use in the service.

Indoctrination is the word which, to my mind, best expresses the process by which the War College strives to produce the desired effect upon the minds of its students, and through them upon the minds of the officers of the service at large.

Since its foundation in 1884, the attitude of the War College toward its student body has been undergoing a gradual change.

It was the view of Admiral Luce, the founder of the college, that the members of the staff of the college and the members of the class should form a conference "to meet together to discuss questions pertaining to the higher branches of their profession and to enable each one, according to his own inclinations, to prepare himself for

the highest and most responsible command that can devolve upon a naval officer".

For many years the members of the staff and the members of the class held this relation toward each other. As the College developed, it became necessary for the staff to exercise an increasing direction and control over the studies and exercises pursued. As a natural result of the experience gained, the staff began to approximate gradually to the role of instructors. The methods of the College began to be standardized. There was developed a groundwork of principles and doctrine which received the support of the service and the Navy Department. This fact allows the College to speak with assurance on certain matters pertaining to the conduct of naval warfare. At the same time, the staff of this College does not presume to claim any final knowledge. Its members are earnest seekers after the truth. Very likely each of them learns from the students as much during the course of instruction as he is able to impart himself. The student of one year becomes the staff officer of the next. All work together in the pursuit of knowledge. Each officer endeavors not only to prepare himself to perform his duties in time of war, but to create, improve, and disseminate new ideas and doctrine for the benefit of the service at large. Thus it will be seen that Admiral Luce's idea of a conference remains, although in a somewhat modified form.

The War College of today, in addition to being a school for the professional development of the individual, is an institution devoted to the study of warfare in general and of naval warfare in particular.

By means of chart maneuvers and game board exercises, it carries on what might be called research work to determine the methods of warfare best adapted for use by the Navy of the United States. This work goes hand in hand with the military education of the individual with happy results for the student officers, the staff, the College, and the Navy.

From a conference for the purpose of allowing each man to prepare himself for command, the War College has grown into an educational institution, whose standing and influence is firmly established. It has a background of experience and a record of service which entitle it to speak to its students with considerable authority, but the conference idea, to a great extent, still prevails. When dealing with well-established principles, the staff undertakes to teach; at other times it endeavors only to lead and point the way.

This institution conducts and supervises the instruction of student officers along lines indicated by past experience and, at the same time, is gradually developing principles and formulating tentative doctrine for the use of the service. Of these two functions, the instruction or training of the individual is considered by me the more important. The development of principles and doctrine follows slowly, but inevitably, upon the pursuit of the course of study and exercises laid down. Such a development of a doctrine is, necessarily, complementary to a similar development in the fleet. Any tactical doctrine developed in theoretical games must be thoroughly tested afloat before it receives the stamp of approval.

The past college year has been a successful one and has been marked by several new developments. The course in International Law has consisted of the solution, by each member of the class, of problems or situations which involved the study of the new agreements formulated at the Conference on the Limitation of Armament which met in Washington on November twelfth, 1921. The resulting solutions, which represent the composite opinion of the fifty members of the class as interpreted and codified by Professor Wilson, must be of much value.

It is doubtful whether many of the officers who come here as students fully realize the importance which is attached by international lawyers and students of international law to the solutions of "situations" which are put out from this College. International law, particularly maritime international law, undergoes changes during every war. The World War was the source of a large crop of perplexing questions. In this war two kinds of new weapons, submarines and aircraft, entered into the naval campaigns. The submarine was extensively used in commercial blockade in open defiance of hitherto accepted rules of warfare. The use of submarines in warfare was made the subject of a special treaty at the Conference on the Limitation of Armament. The terms of this treaty leave much to be desired in the matter of clarity, and it seems certain that the next naval war will give rise to many disputed cases. Aircraft were less extensively used at sea in the late war, but the problems which may arise from their use in naval warfare, particularly against merchant vessels, are manifold.

The report of the Commission of Jurists which recently met at The Hague to consider and report upon the revision of the rules of warfare has not yet been made public. The Commission was debarred from reviewing the rules in regard to submarine warfare, but it is known that the subject of aerial warfare was one of the most important before the Commission. The problem of framing rules to meet the conflicting interests and divergent views of different nations is a very difficult one in any case. This is particularly true when there is lack of historical precedent upon which to base decisions. If the Commission has succeeded in drawing up a set of rules governing the belligerent use of aircraft at sea, which will stand the test of future wars, it has accomplished something little short of the impossible.

With the uncertainty existing as to the interpretations of existing treaties and the wide field which has not yet been covered, the studies and solutions of problems made at this College will be of even greater value in the future than they have been in the past.

One of the important activities of the year was the preparation of a staff solution of a joint Army and Navy Problem with the Army General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth. The problem took the form of an oversea expedition and developed into large proportions. A very comprehensive solution was developed which involved a vast amount of work on the part of the staff. The results of this study were very valuable, but the time involved in its solution was so great as to make it inadvisable to call upon the class to make a

solution. It was therefore decided to submit the staff solution to the class for constructive criticism; a proceeding which doubtless met with the full approval of the class. This was done with the idea to impress the members of the class with the very great difficulties connected with a large joint operation, as well as to benefit by the suggestions of the students. The resulting criticisms have proved to be very valuable and will be useful in the future study and final solution of this important problem. It is proposed to take/^{up} the same problem next year with the Army War College at Washington in an endeavor to perfect its solution and to arrive at a satisfactory understanding concerning a number of debated points involving cooperation between the two services.

Cooperation with the Army is manifestly a subject of great importance and has not in the past received the attention which it merits. While such cooperation is properly a matter which mainly concerns the War and Navy Departments, acting through the agency of the Army and Navy Joint Board, still it is believed that combined exercises between the two service War Colleges should prove to be of great value. This value will only be limited by the time available which unfortunately is short.

In the field of Tactics the exercises have been on a larger scale than heretofore. Endeavor has been made to take account of the actual characteristics of existing ships rather than to use theoretical type ships as has been the practice.

By means of the rules which have been adopted, a reasonably

accurate comparison of the relative fighting strengths of fleets can be made. During a comparison of the British and American fleets the marked superiority of the former in long range gun fire and in fighting strength was developed. The results of the study were reported to the Navy Department and gave rise to discussions and investigation which finally resulted in the recommendation of the Navy Department to increase the elevation of the guns on out battleships.

The tactical and strategical exercises have been rendered much more complex by the use on a large scale of both aircraft and submarines. The playing of a tactical or strategical game which involves the management of large fleets composed of vessels of all classes gets to be a very complicated problem and consumes much time. However, we must play such games if we are to learn the best ways to handle such fleets and to co-ordinate the activities of the various types of vessels: surface, sub-surface and aerial.

This method of investigation, when based upon sound assumptions as to tactical and strategical qualities of the various types of craft engaged, gives the greatest promise of arriving at correct conclusions as to the relative fighting values of those types and of the tactics to be pursued in their employment in warfare. Enthusiasts are apt to be led away by the apparent value of new types and to form rather extravagant opinions as to their effectiveness in actual operations. On the other hand, the well-known conservatism of naval and military men is a distinct danger to the recognition of the value of new types of naval weapons, to their improvement, and

to the development of doctrine for their use in combination with types already existing. Short of the acid test of war, or of peacetime maneuvers on a prohibitively large scale, the chart maneuver and game board exercise furnish the best means of arriving at sound conclusions as to the value of new weapons. We must be sure, however, that our assumption as to the physical qualities and capabilities of the vessels and weapons which we use in our make-believe warfare are correct. For this reason every effort has been made to keep abreast the latest development in all classes of vessels and the weapons used by them. In the case of new types, such as aircraft, airplane carriers and submarines, we endeavor to allow for future development by giving them qualities which as yet they do not possess.

To keep in touch with actual developments in material and personnel we have had lectures by representatives of the various bureaus and offices of the Navy Department and, so far as possible, by officers from the Fleet.

The rules governing maneuvers are subject to continuous scrutiny and criticism on the part of student officers and of the members of the staff, and are changed whenever new information or new conditions make it available. The constructive criticism of the members of this graduating class has been particularly helpful.

One of the innovations of the course during the past year has been the study of War Plans. The War College is not a plan-making body, but its graduates should be qualified to make war plans, and it is believed that the subject fully merits the rather brief time which can be spared for its study. The manner of handling this

subject has been in the nature of an experiment. In order to have an historical and factual basis upon which to work, the class was divided into fourteen committees. Each of ten of these committees investigated and reported upon the basic war plans and the military and naval war plans of one of the belligerents in eight different wars. These wars included all the important ones in which this country has been engaged, as well as several modern wars between foreign nations. The remaining committees investigated and reported upon various related subjects. Among them were the following: "The war making powers of certain designated countries"; "The powers of the President as Commander-in-Chief to co-ordinate and direct the national efforts in time of war"; and "An investigation of conventions and treaties in force which would bear upon the conduct of war by this country".

The results of these investigations are interesting and will be very useful for future study. It was clearly shown that at the outbreak of the War of 1812, the Mexican War, the Civil War, the Spanish War, and at the time of our entrance into the World War, the Government of the United States had no plans for war worthy of the name. These studies were followed by a constructive criticism of a basic plan for war against a certain power, which had been prepared by a member of the staff of the College. Owing to lack of time it was found impracticable to carry out the full course laid down in this subject, but it is believed that a good start was made and that next year the course which will be continued can be made of considerable value.

During the presence of the Scouting Fleet at Newport last summer, Fleet-War College sessions were held. Lectures were given to the assembled officers of the Fleet and of the War College during a period of two weeks. Half of these lectures were delivered by officers of the Fleet and the remainder by officers of the War College. This contact and cooperation with our brother officers who are afloat is of great importance to the College, and it is hoped that, in the future, opportunity will be given to continue this work. Now that the bulk of our naval forces is in the Pacific, units of the Fleet do not visit Newport so frequently as in former years; still there are enough vessels in the Atlantic to allow the attendance of a large number of fleet officers at these conferences, provided the ships are sent to Newport.

One of the important activities of the War College, which attracts little attention, is the Correspondence Course. This course is designed to furnish such officers of the service who are unable to attend the War College, an opportunity to obtain a grounding in the more elementary work carried on at the College. It is arranged with great care and with a full knowledge of the truth of the old adage that "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing". It is conducted on the well-known correspondence school system, and the literature and problems sent out are designed to indoctrinate so far as possible the students in the principles of strategy, tactics and command, and in the art of estimating a situation and writing orders. It is intended to give officers, particularly young officers, an insight into the methods used at the War College, and to induce and

encourage them to undertake a serious study of the real work of their profession, which is to fight at sea. While the course is necessarily short and elementary in character, any officer who takes it will, by so doing, ^{increase} materially his value to the service. If every line officer in the service were trained to estimate strategic and tactical situations after the fashion developed at the War College, and to write and interpret orders correctly, the efficiency of the Navy for war would be vastly improved.

I am happy to be able to state that the number enrolled in the course has greatly increased during the past year. At present, nearly seven hundred officers are taking the course. It is true that, owing to various causes, all officers who enroll do not finish the course. However, a large percentage of them do complete it. Even if an officer is not able to complete the course, what he does learn will be of value to him and to the service. I consider this course to be so valuable for young officers that I earnestly recommend to the members of the graduating class to use your influence wherever possible to increase its membership. While the Correspondence Course was originally intended for young officers, among those enrolled are officers in all the grades from ensign to captain, inclusive. This indicates an encouraging interest on the part of the service in the work of the War College, and a desire on the part of a large number of officers to improve themselves in the highest branch of their profession.

You are well familiar with the history of the War College. The story of the endeavors of a few devoted officers to first establish

and then maintain it in the face of the apathy and, at times, open opposition of the officers of the service is well known to all. For many years after its foundation it struggled along in a hand-to-mouth existence and it was nearly thirty years old before it was really firmly established and began to realize in part the hopes of its founder.

In most of the War College literature which bears upon the matter of lack of student officers and lack of material support during these years has been blamed upon the Navy Department. To my mind this is hardly fair. Had the officers of the service really been interested in preparing themselves to exercise command in time of war and had they understood the value of the training which can be gained at such an institution, there would have been a different story to tell. The pressure of service opinion would have soon persuaded the Department that the War College was a necessary institution.

Just as there can be no adequate preparation for war until the people of the country are convinced of the necessity for such preparation, so will there be no adequate development of the War College until the officers of the service realize the necessity of their being trained for command in war.

An encouraging event in connection with the future of the War College and of the naval service was the issue by the Navy Department in March last of a general order on the subject of training for high command. One of the provisions of this order is the establishment at the War College of a Junior Class. This class is designed

to fill a gap in the training of our officers which has existed heretofore. The need for some course of training which would bridge over the wide gap between the Naval Academy and the War College has long been apparent.

The course of training for the Junior Class will be designed to fit its members for duty on the staffs of flag officers afloat or for the command of small units in time of war. It is intended that it shall be more elementary than the course for the Senior Class, but will follow the same general lines. Much attention will be paid to the signal books, tactical manuals and communication instructions. The members of the class will take part in the strategic and tactical exercises of the Senior Class, in the capacity of staff officers, or as commanders of small units, but will not be required to submit solutions of the problems. They will, however, be required to estimate and solve situations involving smaller forces.

It is proposed to make the course for the Junior Class a fitting preparation for subsequent entry into the Senior Class at a later period of an officer's career.

The Correspondence Course will continue to be a useful means of preparation for entry into either the Senior or Junior Classes. It will, of course, be impracticable for some years to require an officer to take the Junior Course, or even the Correspondence Course, as a condition for qualifying for the Senior Course. However, it is hoped that in the not too distant future it will be found advisable to consider the Correspondence Course, the Junior

Course, and the Senior Course as successive steps in the preparation of our officers for High command. Nearly all officers should be able by making the necessary effort to complete the Correspondence Course and thus take the first step.

It is manifestly impracticable for all line officers to attend the War College. As it is of great importance that officers of command and flag rank should have the benefit of the Senior Course, this course is restricted to officers of and above the grade of Commander. Here again it is impracticable for all officers who are eligible to take the Course to do so. Probably the best which can be hoped for is that at some time in the reasonably near future all flag officers and captains and a fair percentage of commanders shall be graduates of the War College. Enough officers should complete the Junior Course to furnish a supply of young officers for duty afloat on the staffs of flag officers, with a surplus available for the command of smaller vessels in case of rapid expansion of the service as the result of war. The number in the Junior Class should be considerably greater than that in the Senior Class to allow for natural waste.

For the indoctrination of the remaining officers of the service in War College principles and methods we will have to depend upon the Correspondence Course, the voluntary schools at shore stations, the fleet schools, and the efforts and influence of the graduates of the War College. Every officer who takes the course at this institution and who believes in what the College stands for should do all that he can to further its influence and apply its teachings. That

the College is not a finished product none of its friends will deny. It is in a state of evolution, but I earnestly hope and firmly believe that it grows better each year. It will not accomplish miracles. It will not transform an ordinary man into a Nelson or a John Paul Jones. It is, however, doing most valuable work to ensure that the admiral who commands our Fleet in its next war will have under him what very few, if any, naval commanders have ever had i.e. a body of officers well grounded in the established principles of naval warfare and thoroughly imbued with a common strategic and tactical doctrine.

The suggestions which the members of the Class have made in regard to alterations in the course will be given careful consideration. Changes will be made when considered desirable and practicable. In the name of the War College, I thank you for the interest which you have shown and for the valuable work which you have done. We hope that you will carry on this work by continuing to prepare yourself for the duties which may devolve upon you in the future.

This, as you all know, is a critical time for the Navy. After every war there is a natural revulsion of feeling. People wish to forget about matters naval and military, and take up the pursuits of peace. This is the opportunity of the no doubt sincere, but misguided advocates of peace at any price, whom we commonly call "pacifists". Their arguments fall upon the ears of people who are weary of war, and, if counter influences are not set up by those who believe in peace with justice and honor, the effect may well be disastrous to the interests of the country.

Since the tremendous conflict of the World War the influence in this country of the opponents of an adequate Navy has become very strong. Determined and largely successful opposition has been offered to the maintenance of a Navy second to none. The Navy has ahead of it a hard struggle for recognition and support. The burden of this struggle will fall mainly upon the Navy Department. While each officer should use every legitimate means in his power to convince the people of the needs of the Navy, still it is his principal duty to help make the Navy efficient and ready for war.

The graduates of this institution can fulfil this duty in no better way than by carrying to the service the methods, principles and spirit of the War College.