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THE THREE PHASES OF A NAVAL CAREER

SOME REFLECTIONS OF AN OLDER OFFICER

By

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THE THREE PHASES OF A NAVAL CAREER
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1. Introduction

I have long been formulating in my own mind, and have lately committed to paper, my conception of a Naval Career, which it seems to me divides itself into three phases: first, the preparatory phase; second, the executive, and third, the command phase.

2. The Preparatory Phase

This phase concerns itself with the early intensive training of a naval officer. In the line, it is embraced in the course given at the Naval Academy and during the practice cruises; in the Staff Corps, civilian institutions and special courses after entering the Staff Corps take the place of, or in some cases, supplement, the Naval Academy course.

This phase I need not elaborate at this time. You have all been through it and have benefited from it. Its main purpose was, of course, to fit you for a Naval career. If it did this successfully it enabled you not only to learn the elements of your profession, but also to realize that you have certain special inclinations and leanings, which, if you have been wise, you have developed

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to the best of your ability. You have come to realize that the various component parts of the naval service outside of the Line all play important parts in the modern science of war, much more important than in the old days of sail; each corps or organization plays its allotted role, contributing definitely to the success of the whole. Old line-staff feuds and jealousies have no place in the modern idea of team-work, and when they do crop out, only prove harmful to the entire service.

You have also come to appreciate the value of a broad education. No man is thoroughly educated. The naval career demands much technical knowledge and constant reading along technical lines, but this is not enough to develop the type of officer you must be today if you are to be successful. Education limited entirely to technical aspects sometimes fails to produce in man that state of mind which enables him to coordinate the fact with the cause and the principles underlying it.

If your academic ground-work was well laid, and you had ingrained in you the atmosphere, the tradition and the foundations upon which many of the world's civilizations have rested, you were fortunate. You could then develop side by side the technical knowledge and the broad general

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knowledge of world affairs which are now demanded of the leaders of your profession. The lack of an early academic training, or perhaps an over-emphasis in the technical side, can be compensated for by continued study, but no matter how your education has been attained, you should never allow it to stagnate. The world moves too fast to permit of mental stagnation in its leaders.

In your Preparatory Phase, you were trained intensively. You became disciplined, seasoned men, capable of taking orders and of giving them, realizing the value of time, and the necessity of implicit obedience, capable of subordinating your wishes to those of your superiors and able in turn to exact obedience from others, alive to a realization of the part which law and order play in any stable community and in any relation between world states.

Above all you formed your character along sound and enduring lines. You came to regard loyalty to service as superior to loyalty to self. You became, especially those of you trained on sailing ships, keen observers, self-reliant, able to make quick decisions, willing to assume responsibility - all qualifications essential to the later phases of your career.

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3. The Executive Phase.

The next phase, the Executive, applies more particularly to the members of the Junior Class. Most of you have had duty on various classes of ships, and such variety of experience is, in my opinion, most desirable in producing a well-rounded officer. To stick to the fleet in spite of the temptations of easier berths, to gain broad experience, to master the details which later you must direct and supervise, to develop purpose and to understand principles, these are the stepping stones to higher commands.

It has come to be realized that, in the higher grades of the profession, no officer, regardless of how capable he may be, how good an executive he is, or how thoroughly sound are his judgments, is a fully rounded naval man unless, at some time, he has had the advantage of the War College course. He may be able without it to be an excellent gunnery officer, engineer officer, airman, radio officer, or the captain of an individual unit. His judgments may be thoroughly sound and good so far as they go, but they are bound to be limited in scope. Usually he will not have the broad perspective which is necessary to qualify him for the higher command. An

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officer of this type usually sees the culmination of his life work as captain of a dreadnought. Even here if he cannot look forward to something which absorbs his time and his intellectual capacity, he has the tendency to look backward and to usurp the duties of the executive officer. Now not only should he command a major individual fleet unit but he should prepare himself for the duty of co-ordinating the many parts comprising our fleet, with confidence in himself to use those parts in a way to give the maximum efficiency to the whole. This viewpoint and ability he cannot attain without study and War College training which enable him to evaluate properly his practical experiences and act as stimuli to his mental capabilities.

You are going to be very busy now in the technique of your profession and probably the tendency will be to say you have little time left to devote to reading. If, however, you can possibly find the time, I would recommend, that, in addition to your work, you devote yourself to a certain amount of selected reading. I know of nothing which will help you more to fit yourself for a proper understanding of what you may be called upon to do as you climb the ladder of your profession, than the

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mental development and knowledge which you will acquire through a course of selected reading, carefully attended to and not done in a perfunctory manner. Its effect is unconscious, but it is lasting, and little by little you will find that you have progressed to a plane which is considerably higher than the one attained by those who have not conscientiously and thoughtfully devoted themselves to mental training along these lines. I know of nothing at this particular time of your life, which will do you more good, than to study history and to obtain a knowledge of the character and acts of men who have been leaders in the world's evolution.

In this phase of your naval career, there is no time for a lazy man, nor probably will you enhance your future prospects by being the personal follower of any one leader. You may do it through this method. It is quite possible, but you should remember that your allegiance is due first to the Service and not to a person. The wise leader never will expect your allegiance to be given to him, but to be given to the Service, and knows that it is given to him only as he stands for something in the Service which you recognize to be right and great. This is a school of thought now growing within the Service.

At an earlier period, older men frequently exacted personal loyalty to themselves but the best thought in the naval service today demands loyalty to the Service and not to any person..

4. The Command Phase.

Gradually you will advance until you reach what I call the Command Stage. In the earlier aspects of this phase you will still, to some extent, be absorbed with the details of your profession. The commands you get will be proportionate to your rank in the service. The handling of a single unit, its up-keep, its maintenance, the welfare of the personnel under you, will be matters of supreme moment to you. But if you have done your work well in the executive stage, you will be in a better position to know whether your subordinates are capable of handling their work efficiently, and you will be apt less to interfere with their work, except to give it the benefit of your guiding direction, than if you had performed your own earlier duties in a slipshod way. There is nothing which gives a man more supreme confidence, making him apt less to interfere with the duties of others, than the knowledge that he is the master of his own profession. When you have

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attained this confidence, through hard and conscientious work, you will exact the same performance of duty from others, but you will be less likely to be suspicious, to nag, or to interfere with their work because you will be a better judge of whether it is well done, from having done it well yourself. Therefore, the power which you will hold over your subordinates is not one which displays itself in nagging or in doing the work yourself, but in a close inspection of the work of others, and the ability to guide the efforts of your subordinates along the proper lines. Many an excellent officer fails here. He may have been a splendid executive officer but as captain of a ship he may forget that he is not the executive, but the director of the executive and of all other subordinates. If he interferes too much with the details which should be the province of others to execute, he causes chaos and dissatisfaction within his command.

During this time, probably opportunity will be given you to take advantage of the Senior Course at the War College and for those who have shown special aptitude there may be given the opportunity to take advanced work there. You should endeavor to make the opportunity if it is not offered you. This work as we outline it, consists in the handling of fleets, the various units of the

fleet and the conduct of major campaigns. You will then be given a chance to understand how wars are waged, of the stupendous forces always at work influencing the various operations involved in the conduct of war. Your work and your studies will lead you into having some knowledge of the political and economic forces with which the leader has to deal, in order to be the wise director of a major campaign. You will then see for yourselves to what an extent operations are influenced by many other factors than those which pertain to the strictly tactical handling of a fleet.

In the higher stages of command you will be given charge of major individual units and later on when you reach flag rank, of the direction of the various component parts of the fleet, and finally, possibly the command of an entire fleet or the direction of naval operations as a whole. In this stage of your career, command assumes a different aspect from what it did when you commanded an individual unit. Naturally, if you have worked your way up, doing faithfully the job at hand but always looking forward, you will reach the position when you become the great commander. In this stage of your career, naturally you should give more thought to the broad

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aspects of command than you do to its more immediate details. By this time you should be sufficiently versed in the technique of your profession, to be able to handle tactical and strategical situations with wisdom and with decision, but you are less concerned with the execution of the tactical details yourself, than you are in seeing that your subordinates handle their units in an efficient manner. You are then the supreme inspector more than you are the good executive. In addition, you will have become what we call in the medical profession a diagnostician. Men pay large sums of money to the good surgeon who performs his operations successfully, but they pay more for the services of the man who is the accurate diagnostician.

Through careful reading, training, experience and thought, you should have arrived at a position where your services become invaluable to the government on account of the good and sound advice which you are able to give. Not alone this, but your experience in dealing with men should have led you to have such an insight into human nature that you should be able to perform good work for your country in almost any capacity involving naval statesmanship. Your training, extending over nearly a

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lifetime of work, the contacts which you have made abroad and at home, the knowledge which you have gleaned, should be such, that you ought to be able to handle any work which the Government may assign you and to do it well. I could cite numerous cases where naval men who have faithfully and conscientiously followed a naval career, have been able to perform work beyond that imposed by their more strictly technical duties, in a manner satisfactory to their Government. It is to the everlasting credit of the military and naval professions that men so brought up have been able to undertake this work in a manner which has reflected great credit to the Government which appointed them to the task.

In the exercise of supreme command, it is not the arbitrary man who makes the best commander. He may impress you with the outward show of force, but this outward show has less effect in determining his status as a leader, than do many other traits of character. Knowledge is absolutely necessary to the great leader, but above knowledge he must have character. Without character and knowledge, true power cannot reside within a leader. Character and knowledge display themselves in breadth of vision, determination, undeviating purpose

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when once a decision has been thoughtfully arrived at, unselfishness, simplicity, knowledge of men and of fundamental principles, based upon a background of sound practical experience. The leader who possesses these qualities will receive always the undeviating support of his subordinates. He will receive it even when he does not exact it and he will be followed when a more arbitrary man will fail. These qualities in a leader will do even more to ensure success than astuteness, brilliancy and skill, though naturally he should possess these qualities as well as those I have mentioned above. The leader who possesses these qualities need never fear of securing unswerving loyalty to his purpose, for he himself has set the example first by placing loyalty to Service above loyalty to self.

The true naval leader accepts extra work and responsibility without expecting adequate material reward. He has made his choice when he enters upon his career. To those who follow other callings, may come wealth, political preferment, and an established home. To the naval man the guiding star in life is service, service to a country and for a people who in time of peace may care not for him, but who in time

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of danger and stress turn to him, because they know that his life training has made him a man in whom they can safely depend. This is his great reward, that he is trusted when danger comes.

