

1969

Challenge

Richard G. Colbert

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Colbert, Richard G. (1969) "Challenge," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 22 : No. 8 , Article 1.
Available at: <http://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol22/iss8/1>

This President's Forum is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact daniel.desilets@usnwc.edu.

CHALLENGE!



The requirements for military education have undergone radical change in the years since World War II. The continuing revolution in military technology, the disintegration of the colonial empires, and the worldwide challenge of Russian expansionism have all created problems that have enlarged the area of military affairs far beyond the traditional concerns.

As a result, civilians have entered those areas of military affairs and strategy once thought to be the exclusive concern of the military, and military officers have found themselves increasingly concerned with economic, political, and social considerations which were once outside their province. The mission of the Naval War College is "to provide . . . advanced education in the science of naval warfare and related subjects in order to improve their professional competence for higher responsibilities." Now this combination of naval science and "related subjects" is assuming a more and more complex nature. The distinctions between matters of essentially military concern and essentially civilian concern are no longer as clear as they once were. At the same time that the complexities of new military technology are demanding increased expertise on the part of the military officer, the changing nature and increased destructive potential of war require that he become more knowledgeable in nonmilitary fields. This is a large order, and the demands it places upon military education must be weighed carefully.

While we must recognize the necessity for military officers to be well educated in those nonmilitary subjects which have an ever-increasing impact on military affairs, nevertheless it seems to me that it would be a serious mistake to emphasize these facets of education to the detriment of specialized military knowledge. The Naval War College has been a leader among senior service educational institutions in the establishment of civilian academic chairs, and these play an integral and vital part in the curriculum. But with many attractive topics competing for attention, it is not necessary for the military officer to feel that he must compete with civilian experts in all aspects of international relations and national security policy. There are specifically *military* areas of expertise, and these must be explored and developed in concert with an understanding of the impact of nonmilitary factors.

In the February issue of the *Review*, Rear Admiral Eccles, U.S. Navy (Ret.), noted:

We have been preoccupied by exploding technology itself and thus distracted from the central and more fundamental elements of the military profession. We have failed to adjust the long established military concepts to

2 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

the implications of the technological potential.

To the extent that this is true, I think that we have to reexamine the tasks of military education. There may have been a time when military educational institutions could properly perform their function by teaching only knowledge that had been learned at sea or in the field. If there ever was such a time, it is now past. Military technology is changing too swiftly, and the consequences of failure are too great, to permit us to rely on the lessons of experience.

Every new weapon is a challenge to accepted doctrine, yet weapons are changing faster than doctrine can be tested in war, and some kinds—long-range ballistic missiles and thermonuclear weapons—are unlikely to be employed in any situation short of a world catastrophe. Therefore, trial and error in developing doctrine is no longer so feasible as it once was, but must be replaced wherever possible by techniques such as war games, system analysis, and the full range of analytical tools of modern science. To quote Henry Eccles again:

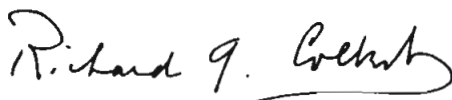
Since the cost of idea research is infinitesimal in relation to the operational cost of military hardware, and since the ideas, be they sound or faulty, govern the choice, the support, and the employment of hardware, this cost must be paid. Idea research and high-level military education are inseparable.

Throughout the military establishment—in fact throughout all the government—the day-to-day demands of putting out fires and meeting deadlines necessarily take precedence over research or reflective thought. This puts a particular responsibility on military educational institutions, for if the kind

of research and creative thinking necessary to sound military knowledge is not done there, there is danger that it will not be done at all.

These circumstances have for some time been under careful scrutiny at the highest echelons of Government. Not long ago, the Secretary of Defense took action which deals directly with the question of military research and which has immediate implications for the Naval War College. In a memorandum to the Service Secretaries and General Wheeler dated 27 June, Secretary Laird expressed his apprehension concerning the middle level and senior service schools that, “the full potential of their activities is not, in my judgment, being realized.” He went on to observe that each year some of the most incisive minds in the military are engaged at the service schools in careful analysis and original treatment of pressing problems of national and strategic relevance. He therefore called upon the addressees for “your proposals on how we can better use the resources and output of our school system.” It is my belief that this development offers all of us a unique opportunity. For the students, it provides a direct line of communication to the makers of broadest policy. For the War College in general, it is a requirement for the keenest judgment as to the nature and quality of professional service education.

There is a serious danger that the new complexities of the study of war have outdistanced the state of our knowledge. It is the challenge of military education to catch up.



R. G. COLBERT
Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy
President, Naval War College