

2009

President's Forum

James P. Wisecup

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Rear Admiral James "Phil" Wisecup became the fifty-second President of the U.S. Naval War College on 6 November 2008. He most recently served as Commander, Carrier Strike Group 7 (Ronald Reagan Strike Group), returning from deployment in October 2008.

A 1977 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, Rear Admiral Wisecup earned his master's degree in international relations from the University of Southern California, graduated from the Naval War College in 1998, and also earned a degree from the University of Strasbourg, France, as an Olmsted Scholar, in 1982.

At sea, he served as executive officer of USS Valley Forge (CG 50) during Operation DESERT STORM. As Commanding Officer, USS Callaghan (DDG 994), he was awarded the Vice Admiral James Stockdale Award for Inspirational Leadership. He served as Commander, Destroyer Squadron 21 during Operation ENDURING FREEDOM after 9/11.

Ashore, he was assigned to NATO Headquarters in Brussels, Belgium; served as Force Planner and Ship Scheduler for Commander, U.S. Naval Surface Forces, Pacific; and served as action officer for Navy Headquarters Plans/Policy Staff. He served as a fellow on the Chief of Naval Operations Strategic Studies Group; as Director, White House Situation Room; and as Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Korea.

Rear Admiral Wisecup's awards include the Defense Superior Service Medal, Legion of Merit, Bronze Star, and various unit, service, and campaign awards.

PRESIDENT'S FORUM



This is a professional graduate institution, where “the U.S. Navy connects to the world.”

ADMIRAL STANSFIELD TURNER put a fine point on something very important here at the Naval War College, and that is excellence in scholarship—but not scholarship for its own sake. Scholarship here must serve a purpose—support the Navy and the nation, which it does. This is one of the things that make this institution unique, as we prepare to enter our 125th year of service. After four months in Newport, one thing in particular has become clear to me: many of our people in uniform do not understand what goes on at the Naval War College and have not read much about our own Navy’s history or culture. How do I know this? By using myself as a data point, as a serving flag officer, carrier strike group commander—though I am a 1998 NWC graduate and was a fellow on the 2003 Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Strategic Studies Group (also in Newport), my first six months in this assignment revealed just how much I did not know about the College.

Without going through an extensive “laundry list” of events such as lectures, conferences, and war games, or talking about the curriculum and the distinguished faculty, let me put it to you this way: there is a lot happening here, and it is not mere churning in some vacuum or some “academic ivory tower” pursuit. This is a professionally focused, graduate institution. It is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, which accredits universities in the Northeast. American graduates are awarded a master of arts degree in national security and strategic studies. It has a unique student body, our next generation of leaders, many arriving here directly from the front lines in Afghanistan and Iraq, other overseas postings, Pentagon assignments, or ship, squadron, or battalion command. They are a motivated and purpose-driven group.

Here in residence in Newport in our intermediate- and senior-level programs are normally about six hundred students, about half Navy and half other services and agencies, and somewhere around a hundred international students, from almost fifty countries. Teaching them is a faculty numbering over 150, nearly half of whom are military, of whom in turn nearly thirty are from the other services—so do the math on the rich student/faculty ratio. It's a sophisticated, small seminar approach that hones students' analytical and writing skills.

There are currently about thirty international alumni who are chiefs of their navies or chiefs of defense, and many of them know each other from their year at Newport. In fact, in October the International Seapower Symposium will reunite chiefs of navies and other sea services from all over the world.

Before you roll your eyes and tell me, "Okay, so what?"—before you ask me, "Why do we send naval officers here, who can't afford to take a year off?"—let me tell you, it's *not* a "year off," and more important, we can't afford *not* to send them here. The problems the Navy and the nation are facing are just too complex to be handled by officers who only have an "on the job" education and those problems are not getting easier. The program here is not preparation for officers' next duty assignments, it's preparation for the big events and huge decisions they may have to take or try to influence in the future—an investment, both personal and professional.

This is not a new issue—Admiral William Sims, in his 1912 pamphlet *The Practical Character of the Naval War College*, pointed out that "too many officers assume knowledge will come to us as a result of a faithful discharge of our duties as we advance in years and grade toward positions of command and responsibility. So far is this from the truth that no apology seems necessary for any length of illustration that may be required to show its fallacy, and its extreme danger."¹

For the current students, here is an example of what you are preparing for, and a short story. Our very experienced information and archival staff here in Newport found me a copy of Admiral Harry E. Yarnell's November 1938 report "Situation in the Pacific."² Why does this matter? Well, for starters, it is fascinating and very well written; more important, of course, it was forwarded to CNO about three years before Pearl Harbor. Admiral Yarnell warned his leaders (along with the Naval War College) in a very cogent situation report on the Pacific, providing not only background but advice and an indication that time was running out, all from someone on the scene. It's worth reading (it was declassified in 1972). Yarnell, for those who don't know his story well, saw service in the Spanish-American War, was a Naval War College graduate, worked on Sims's staff during the First World War, and, after working on innovative use of carriers during war games at sea, eventually became Commander in Chief, Asiatic Fleet, during the critical years 1936–1939, where he compiled this report.³

He served this nation well, for fifty-one years and in three wars, from 1893 to 1944.

It seems to me that there will always be a demand for this kind of synthesis, cogent writing, and ability to state clearly and concisely what should be done. For the students studying at the Naval War College, whether here in Newport, in fleet seminars, or online, the mandate is clear—in the near future, many of you will need to be able to digest an enormous amount of information, think critically about it under time pressure, and distill it into something your admiral, your commander, or your president can use. The nation needs this type of thinking and needs it from our uniformed military officers—lest we abdicate our responsibility and our profession, to paraphrase Admiral Turner. That means you. For me, the point came home five years after NWC graduation, when I worked in the White House Situation Room.

Let me give you some other examples of the practical scholarship currently in progress here at the Naval War College.

The “final exercise” of the core National Security Decision Making course, which puts nineteen seminars in a weeklong pressure cooker to synthesize concepts of strategy development, policy formulation, and strategic leadership, has been briefed to me by Dr. David Chu and Ambassador Larry Dinger (chargé d'affaires in Burma and former NWC faculty member). Two interesting concepts that surfaced were recommendations for major Defense Department efforts to use alternative energy and encouragement to turn to a Civilian Response Corps (“super provincial reconstruction teams”), an approach that is actually under way now at the State Department. The opinions of international officers on these efforts were very interesting, and they were full players in the seminars.

The voice of the International Law Department (which I have learned is one of the few in military education institutions anywhere in the world) is heard on various United Nations law of the sea issues, such as exclusive economic zones and their impact on operations, as well as the Arctic, using a variety of means, such as lectures, articles, and workshops.

The Current Strategy Forum, to occur in mid-June this year, is the Navy leadership's opportunity to talk in Newport with invited guests about the way ahead for the Navy. For U.S. flag officers, it's also a chance to interact with civilian decision makers who are invited here. As in most major conferences, though great speakers are invited, the conversations “in the margins” can be as important as what goes on at the dais.

The International Seapower Symposium, which will be held 5–9 October, is actually the Secretary of the Navy's conference, one that brings together heads of sea services around the world. It is a signature event at the College—which is where, as CNO says, “the U.S. Navy connects to the world.”

The China Maritime Studies Institute will run a summer workshop and a conference in December.

There are electives on Lincoln, the American Revolutionary War and the colonial military tradition, nuclear proliferation issues, issues in international economics (with case studies), the history of technology, and “small” wars. Our Halsey Scholars, Mahan Scholars, and Stockdale Scholars are working on a variety of warfare analysis, nuclear deterrence, and ethics/leadership issues.

I hope you get the idea. I’m just giving a sample. The idea is to show the remarkable variety and depth of the academic experience—and except for National Security Decision Making, I haven’t even addressed the core-curriculum Strategy and Policy or Joint Military Operations courses.

Someone asked me if coming to the Naval War College was just a “ticket punch” for its students. At the time, I had literally just arrived, so I couldn’t give him any answer except my own as a graduate. The next time I see him, I can honestly say that this professional graduate institution is relevant and ready; the faculty (brainpower accounting for over 80 percent of our budget) is more than capable. It’s up to the Navy to get the right officers here, and then up to individuals to make the effort: do the reading, hone their writing skills, and prepare themselves to be critical thinkers as they take their places as leaders in the Navy. Clearly, the other services are sending top-quality individuals and future leaders to the Naval War College. For example, General Ray Odierno, our commander in Iraq, was recently recognized as a Distinguished Graduate, as have been General Mike Hagee (former Commandant of the Marine Corps), General James Cartwright (currently vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff), and Ambassador Christopher Hill (a well known diplomat), as well as Admirals William Fallon and James Stavridis. Presiding at the U.S. Naval War College is an honor and privilege, and it has been a challenge for almost 125 years—this year is no different. Come see for yourself or visit our website: www.usnwc.edu.

JAMES P. WISECUP

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President, Naval War College*

NOTES

1. Admiral Sims's pamphlet is available on the Naval War College website, at www.usnwc.edu/about/history.aspx.
2. Adm. Harry E. Yarnell, "Situation in the Pacific," report, 26 November 1938, A16-3, Shanghai, China.
3. Admiral Sims is an interesting person in his own right. He led our naval forces in World War I; wrote his memoir, *The Victory at Sea*, for which he earned a 1921 Pulitzer Prize; and became President of the Naval War College for a second time in 1919.