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Convocation Address

Stansfield Turner

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From Our November–December 1972 Issue . . .

Convocation Address

Vice Admiral Stansfield Turner, U.S. Navy

WELCOME TO DISTINGUISHED GUESTS AND FAMILIES. Today we extend a warm welcome to the students of the 89th session of the Naval War College. You are now the newest matriculants in the oldest naval war college in the world.

In the Naval Warfare Course you are 188 strong at the commander/captain level. Fifty percent of you are U.S. Navy officers. The rest are Army, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and State Department, CIA, naval, and defense civilians. In the Command and Staff Course you are 232 strong at the lieutenant/lieutenant commander level; two-thirds are Navy. In our two international courses you are 46 strong, representing 35 different navies. Our total student body is 466.

Our 89th session will have a number of unique characteristics:

- This is the first year that we have had an academic convocation.

Vice Admiral Turner, born in 1923, graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1946. He earned master's degrees in philosophy, politics, and economics at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar and also studied at the Harvard Business School. Promoted to rear admiral in 1970, he reported as President of the Naval War College on 1 July 1972. Leaving the College on 9 August 1974, he became Commander, Second Fleet and Nato Striking Fleet Atlantic, and thereafter Commander in Chief, Nato Forces Southern Europe. Retiring from naval service, he was appointed Director of Central Intelligence by President Carter in 1977, serving in that post until 1981. From 1989 until 1990 he taught on the faculty of the U.S. Military Academy as the John M. Olin Distinguished Professor of National Security, in 1991 joining the faculty of the University of Maryland School of Public Affairs as a Visiting Professor. Admiral Turner is also today a columnist, television commentator, and lecturer. He is the author of *Secrecy and Democracy: The CIA in Transition* (1985) and *Terrorism and Democracy* (1991).

Admiral Turner delivered this address to the newly reporting Naval War College class, assembled on Dewey Field, in front of Luce Hall, on 24 August 1972. (Photograph courtesy Naval War College Museum.)

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- This is the first year that we have had U.S. student participation in the two courses designed for international students. This is a direct reflection of the increasing importance of cooperation with allies under the Nixon Doctrine.

- This is the first year of our new Naval Staff Course for younger international officers.

- This is the first year five countries have been represented in our international courses. We welcome Cambodia, Lebanon, Malaysia, Nigeria, and Singapore.

- This is the first time in over 30 years that we have completed a new academic building expressly for the War College. Just behind historic Luce Hall here, our new Spruance Hall is nearing completion.

- This will be the first time in over 20 years that we have built new family housing for War College students [at Fort Adams]. Thanks to the efforts of one of my predecessors, Admiral Richard Colbert, this housing has been specially designed to harmonize with the historic architecture of Newport.

- This is the first year that we will teach an academic program exclusively for the distaff side.

- This is the first year that we have provided a textbook allowance to our students.

- This is potentially the finest student body that we have had in many years. At the express direction of the Chief of Naval Operations, the naval officers in your classes were rigorously screened. Because of this emphasis on quality, we have less than our authorized number of students. You in this new student body are to be congratulated on having been chosen to attend the Naval War College.

- Finally, and most significantly, this will be a year of major changes in the College's academic program.

Why are we changing our curriculum? First, because every academic institution must periodically review whether it is fulfilling its mission. The changes in the issues and problems which the Navy faces today call for changes in what we teach here. The problems we face are increasingly complex. More is demanded of us as officers than ever before. This college, in turn, must demand more of its students.

Beyond that there has been a creeping intellectual devitalization in all of our war colleges since World War II. Rarely does one meet a graduate of any war college who says that he had been intellectually taxed by a war college course of instruction. This is not to say that these men did not find their courses stimulating, time-consuming, and worth their year of effort. What is unfortunately true, however, is that few were challenged to anywhere near the limits of their intellectual capabilities.

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Further evidence of our intellectual weakness is the ineffectiveness of our military establishment in answering the questions, criticisms, and doubts raised against it in recent years. You can be certain that your morning newspaper contains several attacks on the performance or motives of military men. The fact that these questions are growing in volume indicates that we are not providing convincing responses or taking positions that are credible to others not in uniform. Admittedly, some of the criticism is neither genuine nor constructive and cannot be satisfied. However, most of it is legitimate and deserves satisfaction. We must not permit ourselves to think that these voices will be stilled simply by the ending of the conflict in Vietnam.

“We will expect lots of individual effort. . . . The first semester, for instance, those of you in the Naval Warfare Course will be assigned about 1,000 pages of carefully selected reading each week.”

Why have we eroded our credibility? One cause is that higher military education has come to substitute prolonged briefings for rigorous intellectual development. This is because almost every aspect of our society today has some impact on national security. Our war colleges have succumbed to the temptation to add piecemeal to their curricula in a fruitless quest to cover everything of relevance.

Another sample of the ineffectiveness of our military educational system is our increasing reliance on civilians and on “think tanks” to do our thinking for us. Do not misunderstand. These people have done outstanding work for us. We will very much need their help and stimulation in the future. We must, however, be able to produce military men who are a match for the best of the civilian strategists, or we will abdicate control of our profession. Moreover, our profession can only retain its vitality so long as we ourselves are pushing the frontiers of knowledge in our field.

There are many other symptoms of our professional decline. The war colleges’ reputations have regressed to the point that many officers believe that assignment to any one of them is primarily a year of release from the pressures of sea or field duties, a year to “recharge batteries,” as the saying goes. It appears that no student in recent years has ever flunked out of this college for academic indifference or incompetence. That is either an amazing record or a false concept of gentlemanly treatment that can only foster intellectual laziness. As of this moment, however, those who do not perform have no guarantee of a full year at the Naval War College.

Any new improvement in the College’s courses of instruction must support the objective of the Naval War College, which is to enhance the capability of naval

officers to make sound decisions in both command and management positions. This means developing your intellect, encouraging you to reason, to innovate, and to expand your capacity to solve complex military problems. To do this the College will emphasize intellectual development and academic excellence.

Now for the specifics. We will start by increasing the academic content of our courses and at the same time placing greater emphasis on what you, the students, do rather than what is done for you. We will expect lots of individual effort in research, in reading, in writing, and in solving case problems. The first semester, for instance, those of you in the Naval Warfare Course will be assigned about 1,000 pages of carefully selected reading each week. We will temper this with seminar discussions led by our recently expanded and strengthened faculty. That faculty's purpose is to expose you to areas of knowledge, to make you aware of what you need to probe into on your own, and to help you do so. It is not here to spoonfeed anyone.

To the best of my knowledge, examinations have never been used here. Apparently this is because our war colleges hold a false concept that a senior officer is above that sort of thing. Not so, in my view. You must prove yourself even more as you move upward. The importance of our knowing all that we can about the men we are going to promote to be colonels or captains or admirals or generals is much more vital than down at the bottom rung. Thus, we will institute exams this year. We will not employ the usual precise military grading system, down to two decimal points; "superior," "pass," and "fail" will suffice. We are not interested in establishing a class standing or writing fitness reports based on exams. Additionally, the type of exams we will employ is not subject to precise grading. We will be attempting to uncover ideas and original thinking, not standard solutions or factual answers. We will do so as much to focus your study efforts as to grade you.

We will de-emphasize lectures, which are a passive learning experience and have a low payoff. We will want you to hear a number of distinguished senior officials, but most of our lecturing will be done with our own faculty. Part of creating a more academic atmosphere on this campus will be to involve our own faculty more deeply.

The Naval Warfare Course will also eliminate the associated master's degree program with George Washington University. This was a good program academically. Ironically, it was probably one of the most intellectually demanding parts of the curricula of all of our war colleges. We must not, however, relinquish control over any part of the academic program here in Newport to associated institutions. Surely we have more than enough to teach you in the time allotted, and we must jealously guard our prerogatives to do it in the way that our professional needs dictate. This change will not affect any of you in your prospects for promotion. Fitness reports signed on Naval Warfare students will

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explain that as a group you were not permitted to participate in the master's degree program.

This year there will be three shifts of emphasis or direction in our curriculum which are at variance with the international relations degree offered by George Washington University.

First, we will approach the study of strategy through historical cases rather than through international relations or political science. Our courses of instruction have hitherto concentrated too exclusively on the brief period of military strategy since the close of World War II. The domination of this period by only two world powers will likely prove to have been a temporary aberration. The current trend toward a multipolar world would seem to confirm this. Studying historical examples should enable us to view current issues and trends through the broader perspective of the basic elements of strategy. Approaching today's problems through a study of the past is one way to ensure that we do not become trapped within the limits of our own experience. We will not be concerned with history as chronology, but with its relevance and application to today and tomorrow. We will start with Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*. What could be more related to today than a war in which a democratic nation sent an expedition overseas to fight on foreign soil and then found that there was little support for this at home? Or a war in which a seapower was in opposition to a nation that was basically a landpower? Are there not lessons still to be learned here?

The second shift in emphasis will be away from the broad issues of strategy and international relations into areas of more exclusive concern to the U.S. naval officer. In the last 25 years, we in uniform have been very aware of the importance of understanding our relationship to the economic, diplomatic, and other factors of national strategy. In the process, however, we have lost some of our ability to offer pure military advice. Few of us in uniform will ever be required to deal in the creation of national strategy. All of us here, however, will influence our military and national strategies. We will do so through the recommendations we will offer and the decisions we will make on how to allocate those scarce national resources that will be entrusted to the military establishment in the years ahead. We will formulate the strategy of tomorrow by the way we spend and manage our defense budget today.

Thus, the second part of the curriculum will be entitled Management. The focus of all of the four courses here will shift in this direction. We are in danger of pricing the United States out of a military capability that is sufficient to be a deterrent. Therefore, under management we will study cases of choice: choices of weapons characteristics; choices between weapons; choices between weapons and other necessary elements of military power such as personnel; and choices of how to procure and manage military forces. We will deal in only a few

representative cases, and we will not attempt to cover the full range of military managerial problems. Rather, the cases used will illustrate how to select and weigh the factors relevant to a decision and how to understand the organizational and managerial functions of translating a decision into action. Working on a few representative cases should make you better prepared to handle whatever particular decisions or choices you subsequently encounter.

Thirdly, we will also shift emphasis toward the study of the employment of the forces that we procure and manage. This section of the curriculum will be called Tactics. Again, we will look at specific tactical cases, but perforce we will not attempt to cover all types of naval tactics. The emphasis will be on how to solve problems, using reasoning that can be applied to whatever cases you encounter after leaving the War College.

“Now . . . you . . . may well ask, ‘What is in all of this for me? This is not the relaxing sabbatical I had hoped for!’ The only response necessary is that if you are inclined to shy away from a challenge, you are not the kind of officer we want here.”

Each section of the curriculum—strategy, management, and tactics—has a common thread, that of allocating resources. Strategy is the art of allocating total national resources: economic, diplomatic, psychological, military, and others to serve our national purposes. Management is the art of allocating scarce financial resources to procure and manage a military force that will support our strategy. Tactics is the allocation of available resources or forces when the action starts. We badly need officers who are capable of handling the trade-offs in each of these fields. The skills of doing this are infinitely more demanding than the allocation of assets in the business world of profit and loss. That makes our job here wonderfully demanding.

This year's shift of emphases toward a deeper study of strategy on the one hand and toward more attention to management and tactics on the other is really not something new at the Naval War College. It represents a return to our great traditions—to the strategic and historical contribution of men like Mahan; to the tactical and operational studies of men like William Sims, Raymond Spruance, and Kelly Turner, who were the experts in naval warfare in their day. The idea of hard work is by no means new either. One of our researchers recently dug out the complete course materials for the 1926–27 curriculum. He said that it was a whale of a workload, for students and faculty alike, and that the marginal comments indicated that lots of midnight oil had been consumed back then. It will be that way again in 1972.

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The balance between strategy, management, and tactics will vary between the four courses we teach. Our senior courses, the College of Naval Warfare and the international Naval Command College, will spend more time on strategy. The College of Naval Command and Staff and the international Naval Staff Course will look more toward tactics. They will all four share common ground in management, and there will be more interchange between all four student bodies than there has ever been before. Each can stimulate the others. This is one campus and one basic curriculum, with different shades of emphasis.

Speaking of togetherness, we all know the importance of our wives' interest in and support to our careers. Military wives usually become familiar with their husbands' areas of professional specialty, if only in self-defense against the foreign language they speak, in acronyms such as ASW, TACAIR, FYDP, and other unintelligible mumbo-jumbo. Perhaps it will be even more difficult for wives to feel a part of Thucydides' Peloponnesian wars, case studies of the F-14, or warfare tactics new to her husband. As a pilot project this autumn, we are going to offer an exclusively distaff course on strategy and another on anthropology. If they work well and meet a need, we will look at expansion in the next term.

Now those of you in the entering classes may well ask, "What is in all of this for me? This is not the relaxing sabbatical I had hoped for!" The only response necessary is that if you are inclined to shy away from a challenge, you are not the kind of officer we want here. All of you here are too capable to afford a year away from the intensity of professional development or from the heat of competition.

Now let us look also at the rewards that you can achieve under the new curriculum. They are considerable. Those who have the capability to contribute to our profession's intellectual growth will be identified, and efforts will be made to assure assignment to appropriate responsibilities after leaving this college. If we are to redress the balance of unfavorable public opinion, we must be able to place the intellectual square pegs in the square holes and those otherwise qualified into holes shaped for them; and many of those are equally important and challenging. We don't all want to be squares (forgive me).

Second, and far more important, you can have the reward of becoming a more capable and productive officer, but not because you learned a lot of new facts here. If you attempt to make this a prep school for your next duty assignment, you will have missed the purpose of being here. If we trained you for a particular assignment or type of duty, the value of this college would be short-lived. We want to educate you to be capable of doing well in a multitude of future duties. The common ingredient in them will be the ability to make good decisions. Now the essence of decision making is not finding facts—a plebeian chore. Rather, it is considering all of the key factors which bear on a decision—and weighting them in a manner that will assist in making the final

judgment. Your objective here should be to improve your reasoning, logic, and analysis, not to memorize data that will soon be outmoded. Don't look for answers on how to conduct antisubmarine warfare or whatever. Search instead for methods of approaching antisubmarine warfare problems. Learn to discern which facts are trivia and which drive the results.

The new curriculum should leave you with abundant free time without the distractions of musters, coffee breaks, committee meetings, and lectures. You can run the risk of abusing your freedom, or you can use it for self-development. You are on your own to get your higher education in military decision making during these next 10 months. The basic premise underlying this new approach is that if we point you in a reasonable direction and just turn you loose, you will conquer every height ahead of you on your own. Always keep in mind that the product which the country desperately needs is military men with the capability of solving complex problems and of executing their decisions. Scholarship for scholarship's sake is of no importance to us. You must keep your sights on decision making or problem solving as your objective. Problems are not solved by standard or pat solutions, especially not in times of such rapid change as we are now experiencing.

Here in an academic atmosphere, free of real-world responsibilities, you have a particularly valuable opportunity to express thoughts freely and let your imagination roam. We want this year to be built around an uninhibited exchange of ideas, and rank has no monopoly on those. Note that student and faculty name badges emphasize first names and purposely omit rank. From today on, also, everyone will be wearing civilian clothes, to blur rank distinctions.

Take advantage of this opportunity. If you find yourself taxed hard, overtaxed in cases, do not let that discourage you. If we tailored a course to the average student, we would fail to tax those who are most ready to proceed. Remember the related point that course content is secondary. It is the development of habits of thinking that counts. If you cannot cover everything that is assigned, do what you do accomplish well, so that you think creatively. Ploughing through a wealth of material just to absorb it is not what we want or what you need. A modicum of excellence and understanding will far outbalance a plethora of mediocrity and superficiality.

There is, of course, also a danger that we may not challenge some of you to capacity in the standard programs here. If so, it will be up to you to seek out academic opportunity equal to your talents. You can undertake additional independent research projects under the guidance of one of about 30 well qualified tutors we have on campus. Or you may audit the academic program of one of the other courses, no matter which course you are in. Or if you believe that you have exceptional talent and conceive of a particularly demanding project, you can apply to be a Research Associate under our new Research

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Department and do independent work at the doctoral level. I hope that many of you will take some of these directions.

We in the military establishment have the intellect and the capability to provide the answers demanded of us today. We can tap those capabilities only through hard intellectual endeavor such as you are about to undertake. We are a profession, not a trade. You are going to help us continue to be professionals. You have a unique opportunity for these next 10 months. It will be only as productive as you make it for yourselves. Cherish this one golden opportunity and give it all you have.

Your first meeting on Thucydides commences at 1:30. Between now and then all of our facilities are open for you and your families and our guests to visit.

Again, welcome—and good studying.



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