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*From Our November–December 1982 Issue . . .*

## "This Is Your Ticket to Compete"

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Admiral James D. Watkins, U.S. Navy

**T**HIRTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, right after World War II, the Naval War College went through one of those soul-searching examinations—the kind [that] people and institutions go through after cataclysmic events.

Before World War II the War College's purpose was to teach naval warfare to senior naval officers. Evidently it succeeded in its task. When considering graduates, names like Nimitz, Halsey, King, Spruance, and Fletcher come to mind. One of its greatest contributions to naval warfare was the wargaming strategy taught to the students in 1922. Chester Nimitz was in that class and later found it necessary to send to the College for those early lessons, applying them precisely to the war in the Pacific. We all know the outcome.

But times change. So following the war, the time was right to have a fresh look at what the College stood for, and to set the tone for the days ahead.

Admiral Raymond Spruance had just returned from the Pacific and was looking for a shore tour that would allow him and his wife Margaret to share their lives more closely together again. He approached his friend and former boss—then Chief of Naval Operations—Chester Nimitz, and asked to be assigned as head of the Naval War College. Since he had served three tours there previously, he knew it to be a quiet and comfortable life. But for the College

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Admiral Watkins, a Naval Academy graduate who spent his career in submarines, served as Chief of Naval Operations from 1982 to 1986. He was appointed Secretary of Energy by President George Bush, serving from 1989 to 1993. He is today the president of the Consortium for Oceanographic Research and Education, and also of Joint Oceanographic Institutions, Inc. He is a member of the Advisory Council of the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict.

This article was an address given on 14 August 1982 at a Naval War College evolution combining a convocation to open the academic year, a change of command (of Rear Admiral Edward F. Welch by Captain David L. Self, as Acting President), and a retirement ceremony (of Admiral Welch).

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staff, his tenure as President was anything but quiet and comfortable. And it would never again be the same for the students.

Spruance decreed that the primary mission of the Naval War College was to broaden intellect, enhance professional judgment, and stimulate sound reasoning of professional naval officers in order to prepare them for higher command. He recognized the human mind to be an officer's most valuable asset. And he reasoned that, just like a muscle, the mind could best be developed by strenuous exercise.

So his staff set about to develop a new curriculum. At the center of study he placed *naval warfare*, emphasizing anticipated future developments of our profession. He placed particular emphasis on planning problems and war games. Additionally, Spruance believed a well-rounded naval officer should be familiar with world affairs, foreign policy problems, international relations, and his own national government. The staff was given four months to put the new curriculum into effect before the new class arrived in July. When July came, they were ready.

The course set by Admiral Spruance was a good one. And the tradition has continued over the last four decades. From time to time we have strayed from the path but we keep coming back. I am pleased with the thrust of the College today. In fact, we've even improved on Spruance's concept. Witness the contribution of the Defense Economics Department—well known for its high standards. That also goes for the Strategic Studies Group which, leaning on the impressive resources here at the Naval War College, has begun to contribute significantly to new and exciting concepts about warfighting within the exploding technological environment in which we live.

We must always remember as naval officers that, by law, *warfighting is our profession*. The growth in Soviet naval capabilities and the dangers of the present world mean that the U.S. Navy must pay great attention to readiness and to warfighting skills. Hence, we look to the War College to play a leading role in inculcating into our professional officer corps a larger grasp of strategy and integrated tactics.

For most of our line careers, we function primarily in only one of many parochial branches of the Navy. At some point each of us must break out of our narrow experiences and come to grips with broader concepts of joint or combined maritime operations. It is here that you will do that. It is *here* that you will reflect on events affecting national security and begin to consider a proper and integrated maritime strategy in all its dimensions.

Current, fast-paced events of global significance suggest that the remainder of this decade will require naval officers with a broader reach if we are to continue to be successful in our historic crusade to help bring stability to a volatile world. As examples: events in the Middle East demonstrate the potential

for expansion of local conflicts; attempts by the Soviet Union and surrogates to encourage internal strife and revolution, in order to further Soviet hegemony, remain inimical to the healthy recovery of deprived and vulnerable areas of the world; and political unrest in the Caribbean and the instability of governments in that area pose problems of both national policy and military strategy. Yet, in over 80 percent of all similar periods of international tension since World War II, it has been the U.S. Navy with which the national leadership has felt most comfortable as their on-scene symbol of national resolve to bring stability and peace to the region.

These events stress the importance of broad professional development by our senior officer corps—and the strengthening of interservice and international relationships as the elementary basis for competence in maritime strategy. Our priority is to seek such an advantage in strategy that the possible use of technical advances and weapons against us is minimized. Secretary [of Defense Caspar] Weinberger recently said, “The true aim of our national military strategy is not to seek a battle[;] it is to seek a strategic situation so advantageous that, if it does not by itself produce the decision, its continuation by battle is sure to achieve it.”

That’s where you come in. Right now we have a strategy and force mismatch. Not that we aren’t building the right kind of Navy; we are. It is a balanced force, the best navy in the world—only there is just not enough of it.

That says we are going to have to be smarter in the way we do business. From here on out we are going to have to learn how to fight and win with the resources at hand. To do that we must continue to build a stronger deterrence and exploit the weaknesses of our adversary. We must force the enemy to do battle on our terms and at a time and location of our choosing. We will have to use our intellect instead of sheer numbers. We must learn to make tradeoffs. In short, we must learn to fight smarter.

And helping us to fight smarter, here at the Naval War College are the particularly strong faculties of the Strategy and Decision Making departments. They, together with the Center for Wargaming, elevate ideas to the level of doctrine. They have my admiration and thanks, and they will witness my personal involvement and support during the four years ahead.

In past years, our allies were often critical of what they viewed as an affluent strategy, because we seemed content to plod along with our weight, our numbers, and our technology as the means to prevail. Let me tell you that those days—if they ever really existed—are behind us. In the days ahead strategy and tactics, combined with a lean but balanced force structure, will make the difference. I’m not just talking to U.S. Navy students, I’m talking to everyone here, military and civilian alike. It is good that there are so many here from the other services, because you will be working together much more in the years

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ahead. I see an even greater emphasis on joint and combined operations in days ahead with the Army, Air Force, and allies. For example, the Chief of Staff, United States Air Force, and I are working together to increase Air Force participation in tactical air support of maritime operations.

The lessons you will learn here over the next year are not taught at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School; you won't find them at a civilian university, nor in any of our specialized pipeline training programs. You will be asked to reach out for new ideas, and you will learn—as did the followers of Socrates—that questioning is good; it leads inevitably to truth.

You will have opportunities to study with the best and brightest in your profession. You will find that people you study with now will be the ones you will work with in later years as you move on in the service of your country. We are looking for new ways to give many more of our finest unrestricted line officers a chance to experience the Naval War College before selection to flag rank—one of my key objectives.

Today, College graduates are distributed throughout the world. They wear many uniforms and speak many tongues. There is a brotherhood that binds them—a bond which elevates our vision and keeps us free. They form the board of directors of our world's free navies. This is your ticket to compete for a seat.

Our Secretary of the Navy, John Lehman, once observed that "political purpose must always dominate strategy, just as strategy will in turn dominate tactics. But policy must clearly be influenced by strategy, and strategy by tactics." The Secretary is right. Without tactics our strategy remains only a dream. And yet, even with books full of good tactics, it remains for us in the fleet to read them, understand them, and apply them. That requires a depth of experience which only time and practice confer.

So I admonish you to do your part. Make Admiral Spruance proud of you. Give it all you've got!

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