

President's Notes

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President's Notes

ETHICS IS AN INTEGRAL, ESSENTIAL ASPECT of naval and military service. Our profession demands the highest standards of behavior as well as a competent grasp of the intellectual discipline that supports right action. Toward those ends, for the past seven years the Naval War College has sponsored an annual conference on ethics. Supported in part by the generosity of the Naval War College Foundation, these conferences have brought together senior civilian and uniformed leaders, distinguished academics, and outstanding citizens with appropriate experience in our conference's focus, whether that be "The Ethics of International Intervention" (our 1993 theme) or "Ethics Revisited: The Individual and the Organization" (our most recent topic). All of our students in the College of Naval Warfare and the College of Naval Command and Staff participate in the conference's two days of seminars, lectures, and panel discussions.

Admiral Strasser holds a B.S. from the Naval Academy, two master's degrees from The Fletcher School, Tufts University, and from the same school a Ph.D. in political science. He graduated from the command and staff course at the Naval War College in 1972. He commanded the USS *O'Callahan* (FF 1051), Destroyer Squadron 35, Cruiser-Destroyer Group Three, and Battle Group Foxtrot. His seven years in Washington included two years in the office of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Of course, ethical topics are regularly addressed throughout the Naval War College's various curricula; in addition, several electives allow officers to reflect at length on ethics in theory and in practice. But our annual conference is an opportunity to focus collectively on questions of moral right and wrong, from the routine choices we make each day to the dramatic decisions we face in time of war.

This year we were fortunate to have the Secretary of the Navy, the Honorable John H. Dalton, as our opening speaker, and the Superintendent of the Naval Academy, Admiral Charles R. Larson, for the evening address. We also had several active and retired flag and general officers in attendance and participating, as well as other officers, professors, and leadership experts who helped us to think about our responsibilities as leaders in our services and our nation.

As members of the military, we are entrusted with remarkable responsibility in the performance of our duties, including the prudent stewardship of great human and financial resources, and—when required—the application of lethal force in the protection of our nation's interests. To meet these responsibilities, military leaders are ceded extraordinary privileges of duty, granted considerable latitudes of choice, and blessed with levels of public trust accorded only a chosen few of our citizens.

The military career is a life of service, a commitment to place the needs of the nation before those of self. For that very reason, it requires each of us to perfect our character, to adopt a way of life in which self-discipline, integrity, and courage are part of "the job description." As we know, character is formed and set by decisions, some large, most small. It is cumulatively developed and continually tested; when the prominent decisions of high command must be made, they are the visible heirs of thousands of earlier, perhaps unnoticed, but no less important formative choices.

In this development of our own characters, we are the beneficiaries of those who have worn the uniform before us. They have provided a legacy of heroism, integrity, and achievement that we draw upon for inspiration, mutual trust and respect, and standards of honor. We also live and work in the organizations they built—the armed forces of the United States.

At the same time we acknowledge our heritage, we recognize that we must contribute each day to strengthening that inheritance and preparing our organizations as well as ourselves for new challenges in the future. This means that in their structures, regulations, practices and procedures, our services must be made to conform with our ideals and effectively promote our finest goals. Leadership—particularly by graduates of the Naval War College and comparable service institutions—will determine whether that responsibility is met.


The objective of this year's ethics conference was to assist our officers to reflect on how their personal commitment to serve the nation can and must be

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manifested in leadership at sea, in the air, and ashore. We strove to renew awareness of ethical principles, to remind ourselves of the privilege we have in serving the American people in our profession, and to inspire present and future leaders to make their services even better organizations in which individuals' highest moral aspirations contribute directly to mission accomplishment. I take pride in reporting that the conference met these goals very well; its proceedings were vigorous, wide-ranging, and hard-hitting.

These matters, in fact, are too important to be simply left off "until next year." Therefore I call upon readers of the *Naval War College Review* to sustain the discussion. We welcome and invite letters, comments, and papers (to be circulated, considered for publication in these pages, or used in our courses) that address ethical concerns, issues, and dilemmas. Likewise, we would appreciate recommendations for thematic topics for future Naval War College ethics conferences. Finally, I exhort every reader to join us in pausing from time to time to reflect on moral verities, the importance of character, and one's inescapable personal and professional ethical responsibilities.

Of the many activities I have directed at this command, none has mattered more to me than the College's attention to individual integrity and moral leadership in our naval and military services. We can be technically skilled, operationally superior, and strategically astute; but if we are not ethically guided, we will fail. Our annual ethics conference, the College's several electives in this field, and our continual concern with moral aspects of professional military education are vital aspects of the Naval War College experience. I encourage readers of this *Review* to contribute to our effort and to join us in pursuing right and honorable ends.


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 President, Naval War College