Charting a New Course: The Knox-Pye-King Board and Naval Professional Education, 1919–23

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Education occurs in many forms within the context of military organizations, whether during peace or war. Training often reflects the prevailing doctrines, as prescribed within the hierarchical context of rank-oriented organizations. The nexus between education and training remains an uncharted area of historical interest among contemporary military thinkers. As we look beyond the present to the unexplored frontier of the future, the past may offer some perspective on the question of professional military education.

Given these broad assertions, this article focuses on the problem of education within the U.S. Navy of the First World War era. In considering the efforts of Captains Dudley W. Knox and Ernest J. King of a century ago, contemporary practitioners may recognize familiar trends concerning the future of professional military education. Throughout their careers of more than fifty years, Knox and King challenged fellow American naval professionals to open their minds in addressing the strategic problem of education. With Commander William S. Pye contributing, Knox and King studied the problem in detail on their return from Europe after the First World War.

Knox and King presided in compiling their recommendations, while Pye gathered evidence to substantiate their conclusions concerning the problem of education within the Navy. Knox, King, and Pye characterized U.S. naval professionals,
particularly at the higher levels of command, as having been fundamentally unequipped, from an educational perspective, to perform within the context of the First World War. Broadly, USN officers suffered from ignorance after being educated by the Naval Academy “only in preparation for the lowest commissioned grade.” In making this provocative assertion, Knox and King drew inspiration from their personal interactions with a variety of ranking officers. In particular, King and Knox recalled the “salt horse” culture that had prevailed in their First World War dealings with such figures as Royal Navy (RN) admiral Sir David Beatty and USN admirals Henry B. Wilson and Hugh Rodman. Reputations centered on questions of seamanship and years of practical experience; King railed against this in his characterizations of Beatty and with his observation that “Wilson, like Rodman and some other senior officers, distrusted ‘book learning.’” Acting on their assertions, Knox and King collaborated with Pye to stage an educational revolution from within the middle ranks of the Navy after the First World War.

Admirals Henry T. Mayo and William S. Sims provided inspiration and bureaucratic “top cover” for their protégés Knox and King. In keeping with the tribal culture that defined the American naval service at that time, the individuals in question all maintained strong professional connections with each other. Transcending their initial Naval Academy education, they adopted the prevailing Navy-wide culture that viewed the service more as a fraternal society than a lifelong vocation. During the first fifty years of the twentieth century, American naval officers demonstrated such commitment that Henry L. Stimson characterized them as being almost religious about their profession. Having served in a number of presidential administrations (twice as Secretary of War and once as Secretary of State), Stimson grew to respect the “peculiar psychology of the Navy Department, which frequently retired from the realm of logic into a dim religious world in which Neptune was God, Mahan his prophet, and the United States Navy the only true church.”

JUST BELOW THE SURFACE OF NAVAL HISTORY
The problem of education and its underlying strategic importance to the U.S. Navy was reflected in efforts to define the naval profession. The unresolved fight over professional education in the Navy of the nineteenth century also defined the early twentieth-century perspectives of Knox, Pye, and King. To place their perspectives into a historical context: Navies traditionally had required personnel with technical expertise in the sciences, rather than the humanities, for the practical purposes of operating and maintaining ships. Drawing from the ideas of British historians such as Sir John Knox Laughton and Spenser Wilkinson, Rear
Admiral Stephen B. Luce, USN, stirred debate after he established the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1884. His protégé Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan also considered the problem in one of his earliest writings, in 1879. In an article entitled “Naval Education,” Mahan challenged the prevailing attitude of the Navy Department bureaucracy, arguing that the historical functions of the sea services should be considered a national investment. He encouraged Americans to seize a future economic stake in the international context. To this end, Mahan pressed for the development of a strong merchant marine and a credible navy to participate in the global maritime arena.

Historically, navies comprised seagoing practitioners of multiple social backgrounds and cultural identities. In considering the historical and social dimensions of maritime strategy, Mahan warned the U.S. Navy to avoid overemphasizing the “necessarily materialistic character of mechanical science,” which “tends rather to narrowness and low ideals.” He also considered the historical nexus of peace and war to be an uncharted area of consistent strategic interest for future historical discussion. By comparison with other navies in the global maritime arena, the U.S. Navy was among the least remarkable from a technical perspective in 1890, when Mahan gained international fame with the publication of his The Influence of Sea Power upon History. Mahan acknowledged technologies as a variable, but he encouraged fellow naval professionals to seek a deeper understanding of the maritime arena. “Nevertheless,” Mahan lamented, his fellow American naval professionals tended to suffer from a “vague feeling of contempt for the past, supposed to be obsolete, [that] combine[d] with natural indolence to blind men even to those permanent strategic lessons which lie close to the surface of naval history.”

The culture of the American naval service reflected the scientifically oriented curriculum of the U.S. Naval Academy. Naval Academy training conditioned midshipmen to follow the rules, adopt a mathematical approach to solving problems through a “concentration on fractions,” and accept rote doctrinal solutions. The Naval Academy engineered the development of practitioners to become tactically minded masters of seamanship. Before the First World War, the formulaic approach of the Naval Academy curriculum fueled a counterproductive culture within the Navy, beginning when the “average midshipman, reluctant to admit his ignorance, would stand at the blackboard chewing chalk rather than ask a question.” On graduation, junior practitioners sought to earn reputations for competence by offering scientifically framed empirical answers in their interactions with the more seasoned, seagoing salt horses among the senior ranks of the Navy. Junior officers refuted their senior-ranking counterparts at their peril, which tended to stratify further the ranks of the Navy.
Thus, the Naval Academy indoctrinated graduates to take a mathematical approach to solving abstract problems, and the hierarchical system of bureaucracy and ranking by lineal seniority governed the culture of the service; however, these tendencies only somewhat overshadowed the underlying nuances and informality that operated among individual personalities. These group dynamics among associated individuals that characterized the underlying culture of the service also influenced the development of professional education in the Navy. William S. Sims served as one nexus for such informal but important associations.

Having spent thirteen years in Canada in his youth, Sims returned to the United States shortly after the Civil War. In his youth he constantly sought adventure, avoided working for grades in school, and assumed the nickname “Bloody Bill.” He considered pursuing a career as an artist. But as the U.S. Navy went through a technological transformation from the era of wooden ships and sail to that of steel and steam, Sims also found inspiration in the progressive vision of the Navy, which provided opportunities to operate on the cutting edge of technology, and he successfully sought an appointment to the Naval Academy. He performed well as a student but poorly as a midshipman, earning a reputation for collecting demerits. Sims proudly remembered running afoul of one instructor: Lieutenant Commander Alfred Thayer Mahan. Standing watch on campus, Mahan sternly punished Sims for being “disorderly on the quarterdeck and disrespectful to the officer of the deck.” Sims nearly failed to meet the requirements for graduation from the academy, but long before he graduated in 1880 he had earned a reputation within the ranks.

Sims directly participated in a period of revolutionary changes in both technology and American strategy. For him, rank held no great significance in the pursuit of a shared vision of a U.S. Navy “second to none.” Combat experiences further solidified the unique connections among individuals that characterized the culture of the American sea services. During the 1900 Boxer Rebellion in Asiatic waters, Sims became a close mentor to Knox and friendly with King. Beyond their shared interests in naval gunnery and battleship design, Sims enjoyed discussing esoteric subjects in naval history with Knox and King. Later, as naval aide to President Theodore Roosevelt, Sims continued nurturing ties with Knox and King. In particular, Sims frequently traveled from Washington to Annapolis, where he called on King while the latter served as an instructor at the Naval Academy.

With Sims acting as a common mentor, Knox and King developed a lifelong friendship that originated in their shared fascination with maritime history. Both served with Lieutenants Harry E. Yarnell and William S. Pye under Rear Admiral Hugo W. Osterhaus in the Second Battleship Division of the Atlantic Fleet after
1909. Knox and King collaborated with Yarnell and Pye in planning gunnery exercises with the Royal Navy during a cruise to European waters in 1910. At that time, Commander Sims reported into the Second Battleship Division in command of the predreadnought USS *Minnesota* (BB 22).

Junior-ranking personnel frequently gained insight into the higher-ranking politics of the Navy when they served on fleet staffs. Assignment under Osterhaus in the Atlantic Fleet provided such a perspective for Knox, King, and Pye. Among other matters, they observed higher-ranking officers discussing the controversial appointment of Sims to command *Minnesota*. In 1910, Sims stood seventieth on a list of 120 officers in the rank of commander; such an assignment usually was reserved for officers of a higher lineal seniority or of lower seniority in the rank of captain. Captain William S. Benson warned Sims to tread carefully as skipper in *Minnesota*, as Sims’s connections to Roosevelt clearly had influenced his assignment. Benson warned Sims that many naval officers thought that the appointment “established a dangerous precedent of giving battleships to Commanders.” On reporting for duty in *Minnesota*, Sims met with Osterhaus and his relief, Rear Admiral Joseph B. Murdock. As the higher commanders set all the details for the forthcoming cruise to European waters, they gossiped; and observing from the corners were Knox, King, and Pye.

Sims nurtured his reputation and carried himself with a cosmopolitan demeanor to attain celebrity status within the service. Beyond his close association with Roosevelt, Sims had significant political influence through his wife, Anne, and his father-in-law, Ethan Allen Hitchcock, the American ambassador to the tsarist court of the Russian Empire. In addition, Sims boasted close friendships with famous RN personalities, including the First Sea Lord, Sir John A. “Jackie” Fisher; Captains Sir Percy M. Scott and Sir John R. Jellicoe also counted Sims among their closest friends. The American officer anticipated the development of a transatlantic relationship between the British Empire and the United States.

In celebrating the unique connection between the two maritime powers during a celebratory dinner at the Guildhall in London in December 1910, Sims muddled his way into an international controversy. The scope of his remarks went beyond official American policy, extending to a prospective Anglo-American alliance. The *New York Times* characterized the Anglo-American celebrations at the Guildhall as a “Love Feast.” “Had that speech been made by any other officer below the rank of Captain in the Atlantic Fleet, except Sims,” one USN officer suggested to the *New York Times*, “it’s dollars to doughnuts that no attention would have been paid to it, but coming from Sims, who despite his rank and youth is one of the best-known officers in the service, made it different.” For his indiscretion, rivals within the service ensured that Sims was removed from
command of Minnesota, which resulted in his extended exile away from the fast track to higher command—as a student at the Naval War College in 1911.\footnote{21}

Sims recognized the assignment to the College as a punitive setback, which likely carried personal consequences in the fierce competition for higher command among the seagoing ranks of the Navy. But Sims accepted his fate and committed himself to his studies. He soon recognized the broader value of historical studies, informed debates in a classroom setting, and provocative argument in written form.

The issue of professional education within the U.S. Navy remained unresolved by the time Mahan died in 1914 and Luce in 1917. Sims took up their cause, as the future of the Naval War College seemed bleak—particularly under the administration of Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels.

“REMAIN CHEERFUL”

Sims’s dashing reputation, coupled with his unique willingness to buck the system, automatically inspired great respect from many junior officers within the ranks. In particular, Knox considered Sims to be the “model of an American naval officer.”\footnote{22} Personal correspondence between Sims and King also reflected a close friendship, although King disingenuously recalled in his memoirs that he “was never one of the group of Sims’s devoted disciples and followers.”\footnote{23}

As the First World War raged in Europe and Asia, Sims secured orders to command the then-named Atlantic Fleet Destroyer and Torpedo Boat Flotilla in 1914. In this role, Sims employed Naval War College methods to inspire subordinate protégés to carry forward the cause of educating other seagoing practitioners of the Navy.

Pulling every bureaucratic string, Sims circumvented the Navy Department’s detailing processes to arrange orders for a very select team of junior officers to serve under his command in the flotilla. In particular, he pulled Knox from service in the tender USS Dixie (AD 1) and King from his assignment as skipper of USS Terry (DD 25). In this role, King fell under the immediate operational command of Commodore Henry T. Mayo during the conduct of convoy-escort duties in support of operations against the Mexican insurgency off Veracruz. Sims asked King to leave command of Terry, with the enticement of “coming to the flotilla to lend us a hand in the schemes we are trying to develop.”\footnote{24} Sims sweetened the proposal by offering King command of USS Cassin (DD 43). With Sims assuming the Nelsonian role of senior mentor among equals, Knox and King assumed their roles in the flotilla—the “band of brothers.”\footnote{25}

Service in the “Sims flotilla” inspired strategic connections among key personalities as the U.S. Navy carried out the transformation of its fleet from one
dominated by coal-burning battleships to one of oil-powered warships of various
types and specialized capabilities. Among others on Sims's flotilla staff, Com-
manders William V. Pratt, Joel R. P. Pringle, and Harry Yarnell helped foster
close bonds among the individual destroyer skippers, including Lieutenant Com-
manders Harold R. Stark, William F. "Bill" Halsey Jr., and Joseph K. Taussig.26 In
their personal correspondence, veterans of the Sims destroyer flotilla tended to
use the phrase “remain cheerful” as their parting salutation, denoting their mu-
tual membership in a unique fraternity within the ranks of the Navy.27

Sims inspired subordinates to focus on a common vision and work together
as a team. He issued mandatory reading lists for his skippers to enable them to
participate in open wardroom discussions, whether on topics in naval history,
including reconstructions of past battles, or the testing of their current theories
during tabletop wargames. Sims referred to the atmosphere established among
the officers in the flotilla as a “War College afloat.”28 Through such open discus-
sions, Sims and his staff developed totally new tactics for maneuvering destroy-
ers in unison, using a wireless communications system of fewer than thirty-one
words.29 The cost savings resulting from conducting the developmental tests with
destroyers rather than the larger battleships enabled Sims and his men to pioneer
new tactics that could be applied to larger fleet operations.

In the process, Sims himself transformed
from being a seagoing salt horse into a zealot
for the Naval War College brand of profes-
sional education. Such commitment to this
cause put him out of step with the political
agenda of Navy Secretary Daniels; Sims's
relationship and dealings with Admiral
William S. Benson as the first Chief of Naval
Operations also remained tenuous. Given
the costs involved with maintaining a sepa-
rate Naval War College, Daniels and Benson
judged the institution's curriculum to be suf-
ficiently analogous to that of the Army War
College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Given the
pressures of balancing budgets and political
horse trading within Congress, Daniels and
Benson endorsed the idea of a unified Army
and Navy war college, which could be estab-
lished closer to the capital.30

Josephus Daniels, Secretary of the Navy (left), and Admiral William S. Benson,
Chief of Naval Operations (right).
Naval History and Heritage Command
For Sims the idea of closing the Naval War College seemed outrageous, as the U.S. Navy stood on the brink of potential involvement in the global conflict already raging among the empires of Europe and Asia. He considered the fundamental differences between armies and navies so profound that the “Naval War College should be made one of the principal assets of the Naval Service.”\(^3\) Against the overarching emphasis that Daniels and Benson placed on the maintenance of seagoing forces, Sims argued for the potential necessity of placing warships “out of commission in order to avoid decreasing the efficiency of the education of our officers.”\(^4\) Sims challenged fellow naval professionals to recognize the strategic advantages to be derived from supporting the educational mission of the Naval War College. With a clear purpose in mind, Sims articulated his points in an article published in the Naval Institute Proceedings in mid-1916 under the provocative title “Cheer Up!! There Is No Naval War College.”

In the article, Sims cited complaints from some within the seagoing ranks that many of their colleagues needed a “dictionary to tell them the meaning of the commonest terms.” Sims chastised critics of the Naval War College, suggesting that they suffered from “wholly unpardonable ignorance,” then broadened his charge: “When I went to the college . . . the service was very generally ignorant of its purposes and the practical value of its teachings.” He deplored the failure of many officers to understand “its vital importance to the efficient conduct of our fleet.”\(^5\)

Sims stated that he wished to “make plain that he [was] a thorough and enthusiastic advocate of the college.” The article characterized the Naval War College as an educational forum wherein practitioners enjoyed freedom of discussion. Sims offered the seemingly counterintuitive argument that there was no War College, as the term “college” is usually understood. There is no president or corps of professors who remain during life and good behavior and whose duty it is to impose their conclusions upon the pupils. . . . [The] assemblage of officers is practically a board convened each year for the purpose of determining the best manner of conducting naval warfare with vessels and weapons of ever-changing characteristics. The staff of the college, generally fresh from the fleet and a course at the college, presents the accepted principles of war, and the accepted manner of writing orders, issues the rules of the war games to be played, and helps the pupils play them.\(^6\)

After their interactions with officers of higher rank, Knox and King frequently compared notes about their discussions of organizational and naval leadership. Reflecting on his personal experiences, King noted that “Captain Sims himself was an officer of extraordinary energy, but given to speaking with exaggeration”; he observed that, for Sims, “all matters were clear white or dead black.” Although King claimed to be less committed, Knox remained cheerfully associated with Sims throughout the First World War and beyond. As head of the Planning

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Section in USN Headquarters in Europe, Knox frequently collaborated with King and Pye, both of whom served on the seagoing staff of Admiral Henry T. Mayo, the wartime commander in chief of the Atlantic Fleet. Characterizing his mentors, King thought that “Sims was flighty, Osterhaus steady, and Mayo was the man for me.”

Debates surrounding the practical functions of the Naval War College and the role of higher education raged in the seagoing wardrooms and officers clubs ashore, even as the U.S. Navy sailed over the horizon to participate in the first war requiring American forces to operate within a strategic context of multinational operations in foreign waters. Having assumed the presidency of the Naval War College in the rank of captain in February 1917, Sims within weeks became commander of USN forces in Europe—largely by accident. By June, he was serving in the temporary wartime rank of vice admiral (three stars). Yet Sims lacked a clear prerogative to assert control over the warships now participating in ongoing operations; instead they fell under the immediate command of his lineal senior in rank, Mayo of the Atlantic Fleet.

Nonetheless, Mayo and Sims collaborated in developing American naval strategy by pioneering organizational means to harness the advantages of wireless
communications and to enable naval headquarters ashore to orchestrate the interactions of operations and intelligence. To their great credit, Mayo and Sims unified their collective strategic efforts, empowering their immediate subordinates to act with their authority in planning multinational strategy, making recommendations governing USN tactical forces in European waters, and executing operational decisions. Relying on their previous associations with those who were now their subordinates, Mayo and Sims empowered them to overcome problems of command organization. From within the “London Flagship” headquarters, Sims authorized Knox to work with King and Pye in mobilizing the forces of Mayo and the Atlantic Fleet. However, while Mayo and Sims established a great rapport, subordinate Atlantic Fleet commanders such as Wilson and Rodman frequently challenged Sims’s authority, which just as frequently required Mayo to promulgate directives to enforce those of Sims.  

In dealings with foreign allies, the U.S. Navy suffered from intramural fighting among its various disjointed commands. The parochialism and patriarchalism within USN culture ultimately convinced Mayo to sign a memorandum concerning the Atlantic Fleet staff that had been drafted by Captains King and Donald C. Bingham, with assistance from Commander Pye, under the title “Education and Training of Officers for Staff Duty.” On February 20, 1919, in one of his last acts as Atlantic Fleet commander, Mayo submitted the recommendations to the Bureau of Navigation in Washington.

“Officers assigned to ‘staff duty’ should,” Mayo argued, have the “same viewpoint and perspective as that to which flag officers . . . have attained by reason of their study, training, and long experience throughout their careers in the service.” Mayo criticized the prevailing system of educating officers to master tactical doctrines and technical functions governing shipboard routines rather than subjects focused on higher strategic levels. He observed that the Navy suffered from the “present lack of arrangements for the education and training of officers for ‘staff duty.’” Mayo endorsed the Naval War College approach, arguing that the
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The special bond among American naval practitioners influenced the development of professional identity within the Navy. Within the structured culture of the naval service, sailors all stood essentially equal in the unique context of shipboard life at sea. Skippers traditionally took responsibility for nurturing their subordinates so that eventually they would earn commands of their own. Seagoing experience prevailed in establishing reputations for higher command within the ranks of the Navy. Mayo and Sims stood out as advocates for professional education among the salt-horse culture that persisted after the First World War among the members of the elder generation of practitioners. By contrast, their contemporaries in rank—particularly Benson, Rodman, and Wilson—resisted challenges to the status quo. “The opinion has been generally held in the Navy,” King noted, that the “only way to learn things is to do them,” whereas “[b]ook learning [and] abstract knowledge is like fertilizer,” he observed; it “does not of itself produce anything, but it stimulates growth and advance when the live seed [of] practical experience is instilled into the soil.”


Mayo returned from the First World War determined to address the fundamental problem of education within the U.S. Navy. In 1919, he accepted reduction from four- to two-star rank and a sunset advisory assignment to the General Board of the Navy. He also arranged orders for his protégé King to assume command of the Naval Postgraduate School at the Naval Academy in Annapolis. After reporting for duty on May 1, King immediately lobbied the Navy Department for an expanded budget and additional personnel for the school.

curriculum represented a prerequisite for practitioners to succeed at higher levels of command. He noted that the College’s curriculum was “generally reserved for the instruction of higher ranking officers”; as a result, the Naval War College lacked “facilities of sufficient general scope for the education and training of officers for ‘staff duty.’”

EDUCATION BEFORE THE MAST

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Wartime experiences inspired King to enter the fray in efforts to establish higher professional education standards in the U.S. Navy. He first broadened the Naval Postgraduate School curriculum, focusing on the mission of preparing student practitioners for assignment to receive graduate education at civilian universities. He fostered partnerships between the school and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Harvard, Columbia, Northwestern, the University of Chicago, and the state universities of Iowa, Wisconsin, and Michigan. King developed the curriculum to focus on transcendent concepts of permanent value rather than empirically framed staff school solutions. King assumed the function of teacher, rather than examiner, at the school. His approach contrasted with the traditional culture of military discipline that prevailed on “the Yard” at the Naval Academy. In the spring of 1919, King solicited assistance from his mentors Mayo and Sims.

While peace negotiations dragged on at Versailles, outside Paris, after the armistice, USN forces demobilized from wartime operations and returned to American waters. But in wartime propaganda Sims had attained heroic status as the personality most associated with victory in the First World War and international fame as the widely mythologized personification of the spirit of future Anglo-American collaboration. With Sims having been promoted from captain in 1917 to four-star admiral by 1919, it appeared politically inevitable that he would remain in four-star rank as Chief of Naval Operations.

However, after the American declaration of war Sims had performed his wartime service in a temporary status, so technically he remained in his permanent assignment as President of the Naval War College. And over drinks with his friend Knox in Paris in January 1919 Sims learned about the Navy Department’s plans to proceed with the disestablishment of the separate Army and Navy War Colleges; Captain William V. Pratt had written to Knox earlier about the plans of Navy Secretary Daniels and Secretary of War Newton D. Baker to establish a consolidated war college in Washington, DC. With this most recent news, Sims requested immediate orders to return to the Naval War College. In the course of his reassignment, he accepted demotion from his temporary wartime rank of four stars to a permanent peacetime rank of two stars.43

Sims recruited his protégé Knox and his former intelligence officer in London, Lieutenant Tracy Barrett Kittredge, to join the faculty of the College. Sharing similar concerns about the future of professional education within the Navy, Sims and Knox developed a strategy to save the Naval War College. Sims also worked through the good offices of King at the Postgraduate School and Mayo on the General Board in Washington. Together, they drew from the model that Sir Julian Corbett had designed at the Admiralty in London, wherein historically trained analysts associated with the Historical Section of the Naval Intelligence Division.
examined issues of contemporary importance to the RN staff. In June, Sims empowered Knox and Kittredge to organize at the Naval War College an analogous subdivision known as the Historical Section. The section’s immediate charter was to synthesize analytical requirements supporting the higher educational mission to align with those of the Operations Navy (OpNav) planning staff in Washington.

Rather than proffering overt challenges to the authority of Daniels or the Navy Department, Mayo and Sims worked outside the General Board and the Naval War College—through their protégés. Mayo and Sims empowered these more junior officers to incite a bureaucratic revolution from below. Mayo acted through King at the Postgraduate School in Annapolis to initiate actions, which provided the pretext for Sims in his turn to initiate a study of the problem of education. Knox, the Naval War College chief of staff, recommended the establishment of a board to study the critical issues and offer recommendations for future action. King subsequently shared Knox’s recommendations with the superintendent of the Naval Academy, Rear Admiral Archibald H. Scales. In turn, Scales endorsed the idea of organizing a board to examine the issues, offer findings, and provide a strategy for professional education.

This methodology granted Mayo and Sims bureaucratic immunity, as it was Knox and King who influenced Scales to endorse a recommendation to the Bureau of Navigation to establish a board consisting of Naval War College and Naval Postgraduate School personnel to study the strategic problem of professional education. Knox worked the ropes with other members of the Naval War College faculty while King and Pye gathered evidence to substantiate their arguments.

In particular, King drew inspiration from the works of Professor Edgar James Swift of Washington University in Saint Louis, Missouri. King would use Swift and his 1918 book, *Psychology and the Day’s Work: A Study in the Application of Psychology to Daily Life*, as tools in the longer battle for educational reform in the Navy. King invited Swift to lecture at the Postgraduate School and influenced Sims to sponsor Swift on a regular basis as a visiting lecturer at the Naval War College. Swift offered a critical argument that not “until facts have been accumulated and ordered are suggestions that are worth while likely to appear.” He maintained that “[k]nowledge gives the raw material for solving problems, but in
addition to knowledge there must be a sensitive, open mind anxious to see things as they are, instead of as we should wish them to be.”

Meanwhile, the bureaucratic wheels of the Navy Department churned blindly among the various bureaus. Since the establishment of the Navy Department in 1794, whenever the seagoing forces navigated the uncharted waters in the nexus between peace and war, the department had followed a sustained administrative course fueled by politics and mediocrity. Having muddled through the First World War, the Navy Department bureaucracy under Secretary Daniels settled back into its traditional peacetime routines.

Before the First World War, Daniels had used naval education as a means to amalgamate immigrants and the lower economic classes, encouraging them to embrace their identity as American citizens. As part of shaping the future in general, he considered the U.S. Navy an ideal platform to advance the broader military policy of the United States. “It is my ambition to make the Navy a great university,” Daniels reported, “with college extensions afloat and ashore.” He suggested that every warship “should be a school and [and] every enlisted man and petty and warrant officer should receive the opportunity to improve his mind, better his position, and fit himself for promotion.”

Although Daniels somewhat shared Sims’s vision about the role of education, their opinions on civil-military relations proved radically different. Daniels worried that Navy professionals might use education as a means to undermine traditional American civil-military ideals. He wanted the Navy to support education to create American citizens, rather than merely to satisfy the applied purposes of military or naval practitioners. Given these concerns, Daniels endorsed the recommendation by the chief of the Bureau of Navigation, Rear Admiral Thomas Washington, to organize a board comprising Knox, King, and Pye to examine the question.

Traveling between Newport and Annapolis during the summer of 1919, Knox, King, and Pye gathered their evidence. Knox later recalled the moment when their report came together at King’s hand, explaining that while Knox “was theoretically the senior member . . . and many ideas were contributed by Pye,”

the principal man was King. After much deliberation, King suggested that we write the report. King sat down at a desk and wrote that report in the course of perhaps a day. Scarcely any change [was] made from [the] preliminary draft. He wrote it and followed the details through in his logical way. The report came out of King’s head primarily. There was a great deal of ground work by Pye, but the stringing together and the argument that you make in such cases was all King’s. No one without outstanding ability could have done what he did there.

King attempted to frame the board’s findings in objective, empirical terms within a thirty-one-page treatise that bore the awkward title “Report and
Recommendations of a Board Appointed by the Bureau of Navigation Regarding the Instruction and Training of Line Officers.” The authors formally submitted their findings to the Bureau of Navigation on October 16, 1919.

The original, typewritten report circulated among the various bureaus of the Navy Department. While Admiral Washington acknowledged receipt of the report with thanks to Knox, King, and Pye, he considered their recommendations impractical because they would have required the Navy Department to sustain a forty-year strategy for educating individual naval practitioners throughout their careers. He declared that inadequate bureaucratic and budgetary resources to maintain educational programs ashore, amplified by the shortage of officer personnel for service afloat, prevented the Bureau of Navigation from acting on the board’s recommendations. Washington effectively suppressed the report; the original vanished into the black hole of the Navy Department bureaucracy after its last reported sighting in April 1920.51

Undeterred by the report’s purported loss, Knox and King conspired to force the Navy Department to address the strategic problem of education within the service. Acting with the confidence of their convictions, Knox and King launched a bureaucratic revolution from below, within the ranks of the service. Six years
earlier, on the advice of Sims and Knox, King had accepted the voluntary position of secretary-treasurer of the Naval Institute. In this role, he edited and reviewed articles in the institute's professional journal *Proceedings*. Thus, King's position
was one of significant influence. Following the disappearance of the board’s original report to the Bureau of Navigation, King used a duplicate copy to arrange the report’s publication in the *Proceedings* issue of August 1920. King later admitted to “arranging” the publication of the report. In the published version, King added the caveat “Published by permission of the Navy Department for the information of the service. The Report of the Board has been approved, but the shortage of officers will not permit the recommendations to be carried into effect at present.”

With some editorial adjustments, the published version in *Proceedings* reflected the original narrative of the typewritten original. Even though he was the report’s primary author, King claimed no immediate responsibility for its publication; the article appeared in *Proceedings* without any attribution to authors. Even so, the report would become widely known within the Navy as that of the Knox-Pye-King Board, or K-P-K Board.

In the article, the supplemental recommendations to the Navy Department to take action on the question of education appeared in starkly framed prose. Between the lines of the article’s narrative, the K-P-K Board railed against the problems of bureaucracy, the dogmatic deference to doctrine among service practitioners, and the coercive intent and power of orthodoxy in the education of USN professionals. By its construction in two sections, the article makes the assertions in the original report resonate more sharply. Unlike the published *Proceedings* variation, the signed original reads like an indictment against the bureaucratic culture of the Navy.

Given the timing of the article and Sims’s close association with the authors of the K-P-K Board report, Secretary Daniels associated such criticisms with Sims. In effect, Sims was daring Daniels to ignore the findings and recommendations of the K-P-K Board—and the oily politician Daniels disliked the watery practitioner Sims for challenging the policies of the Navy Department. The ensuing bureaucratic duels between Daniels and Sims became infamous, inspiring formal congressional inquiries and embarrassing the Navy Department—but remained a persistent influence on the development of the U.S. Navy.

The rivalry between Daniels and Sims must be considered when placing the K-P-K Board report into the broader context of historical discussions concerning the still unresolved historical question of professional education and the U.S. Navy. Notwithstanding that, the findings of the K-P-K Board defined a progressive vision of professional education. Publication of the report achieved the K-P-K Board’s design: it sparked heated debate within the tribal culture of the Navy about that progressive vision. Lines of division became clear as the debate on naval education stratified relations between policy makers such as Secretary Daniels and practitioners such as Admirals Mayo and Sims.
Ultimately, the K-P-K Board offered a coldly honest portrayal of fellow naval professionals as being insufficiently prepared for the broad spectrum of challenges facing the naval profession. For those serving at the lowest levels to the highest levels of command, the K-P-K Board provided a lasting warning against allowing the U.S. Navy to sail under the command of officers who were “educated’ only to the lowest commissioned grade.” The solution to this fundamental problem actually preceded the original setting out of the question, as Mayo and Sims worked through Knox and King in a roundabout strategy to first acknowledge the problem of ignorance before addressing the transcendent question of professional education within the Navy.

One emphasis in the report was a requirement for officers to attend the Naval War College twice in their careers. The authors of the report led that charge; for example, King completed the College's correspondence course in 1924, then graduated from the residence course in 1933. Among others, the K-P-K Board directly influenced the Naval War College studies of future admirals Thomas Hart, Harold Stark, Harry Yarnell, Edward C. Kalbfus, and Chester W. Nimitz.

With King orchestrating Anglo-American combined strategy and simultaneously supervising U.S. naval operations on an unprecedented global scale after 1941, Knox attained one-star rank as a commodore while organizing the Office of Naval History. In 1943, Knox and King again joined forces with the President of the Naval War College, Pye, to revisit the question of professional education in the U.S. Navy. Twenty-five years after the original K-P-K Report, Knox and King contributed to the recommendations found in the “Pye Board” Report of 1944, which influenced combined and joint professional education into the Cold War era.\(^5\)
By attacking the problem of education openly and without deference to higher-ranking personalities or bureaucratic protocols, the K-P-K Board helped place the U.S. Navy on the course that would educate the personnel who would secure the strategic victories of the Second World War. Pursuant to the vision of ensuring an American “navy second to none,” the K-P-K Board report remains a critical foundation to establishing the fundamental role that higher professional education has played in framing the future strategy of the U.S. Navy into the twenty-first century and beyond.

NOTES


11. King, Fleet Admiral King, p. 106.


13. William S. Sims Jr. to Anne Sims, notes of “Recollections” circa 1934, December 18, 1934, pp. 3–4, Nathaniel Sims Collection, Correspondence of William S. Sims, Naval Historical Collection, Naval War College, Newport, RI [hereafter NWC].


18. Walter Muir Whitehill, “Staff Duty,” notes of interview with King on March 9, 1948, Manuscript Register Series 22, King Papers, box 5, folder 5, NWC.
19. Morison, Admiral Sims, pp. 3–14, 280, 389–92. In May 2016, Dr. Nathaniel “Nat” Sims, grandson of the admiral, donated to the Naval War College the original papers that Morison used in writing this biography. The collection included the original manuscript drafts, a comprehensive record of duplications and original correspondence by Sims, and all the original photographs, sketchbooks, and other related ephemera that Morison used. Coincident with the book’s publication in 1942, during the Second World War, Morison served as a U.S. naval reservist within the Historical Section of the Office of Naval Intelligence under Capt. Dudley W. Knox and Prof. Robert G. Albion. Although Morison remained in close contact with his relative Samuel Eliot Morison, the various USN histories written by the two should not be perceived as being directly connected or officially coordinated.
21. Invitation from the Commander and Officers of the Third Division, U.S. Atlantic Fleet to “Mrs. E. A. Hitchcock and the whole St. Louis Family Push,” Sims Papers, box 101, LC.
22. Knox to Anne Hitchcock Sims, October 7, 1936, Manuscript Register Series 31, William S. Sims Papers, folder 16, NWC.
23. King, Fleet Admiral King, p. 91.
24. Sims to King, February 20, 1914, Sims Papers, box 68, LC.
26. These names and their rotation of assignments may be found in the Naval Registers for 1914, 1915, and 1916. Individual personal papers also provide critical insight to their service with Sims in the Atlantic Fleet destroyer flotilla.
27. From a survey of personal papers among the key personalities, the phrase “Remain cheerful” appears to be associated completely with Sims and members of the Atlantic Fleet destroyer flotilla, which dates from the First World War era and continued through the Second World War and into the Cold War era.
28. Hattendorf, Simpson, and Wadleigh, Sailors and Scholars, p. 89.
29. King, Fleet Admiral King, p. 91.
32. Ibid., p. 98.
34. Ibid., p. 858.
35. "Staff Duty," July 31, 1949, King Papers, box 13, folder 7, NWC.
38. Ibid.
39. King, Fleet Admiral King, p. 149.
42. K-P-K Board report, supp., p. 2, King Papers, box 2, LC.
43. Sims returned from Europe to Newport on April 11, 1919, wearing four stars; the following day he began his second tour as President of the Naval War College in the uniform of a two-star admiral.
44. King to Sims, August 9, 1919, Correspondence, King Papers, box 68, LC.
45. Sims to King, August 30, 1919, Correspondence, King Papers, box 68, LC.
46. King, *Fleet Admiral King*, p. 149.
50. Walter Muir Whitehill, notes on “Memorandum of Conversation with Commodore D. W. Knox,” May 31, 1946, King Papers, box 5, folder 5, NWC.
51. Ibid.
53. Ibid., p. 1265.
56. K-P-K Board report, pp. 9, 22, King Papers, box 2, LC.
57. Willam S. Pye [VAdm., USN], comp., “Report of Board to Study the Methods of Educating Naval Officers,” Presidential Papers, Subject Files, box 3, folder 1, record group 28, NWC.