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Presidents Notes

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PRESIDENT'S NOTES

About a year ago I wrote in these pages that before coming to the Naval War College I had heard some criticism of the curriculum's emphasis on the lessons of history to the neglect of preparation for the present. I found, I noted then, that a judicious balance has been struck between both needs. I went on to discuss our recurring themes as they illuminate problems that have historically taxed the genius of our statesmen and military men and that need continual resolution in every age. I described the way the study of these themes is integrated into, indeed constitutes almost half of, our 10-month curriculum. These themes are given depth by using case studies beginning with the classical prototype of Athens and Sparta, extending through the Napoleonic Wars, strategic theory, Europe and the balance of power, the roads to World Wars I and II, the lessons of those wars and the actions in Korea and Vietnam and the Cuban Missile Crisis, the events of the cold war, and the strategic and policy context faced by our armed forces today. I concluded with the observation that students here will continue to study the past so that they may serve well in the future.

Two issues ago I amplified this theme, remarking that I was confident that the range of questions and the depth of the analysis provided by our course of study was proper and effective education for military professionals.

Lest those critics noted earlier find confirmation here of their "too much history" claim, I have written, in other issues, of the emphases in our Defense Economics and Decisionmaking course, of the gaming experiences arranged for the students through our Center for War Gaming, of the research into newly emerging problems sponsored by our Center for Advanced Research, and, in the last issue, of the thoroughly professional tactical emphasis in our Naval Operations course. I have also stressed, as the curriculum itself stresses, the deliberately integrative nature of our core courses and electives.

This prologue is intended to remind readers of the professional value of a Naval War College education and to remind me that defensiveness is ill-becoming and unnecessary when I read several recent articles about what war colleges should be but allegedly aren't doing. Still, some comment is needed.

Three of the mentioned articles find fault with Service and DOD policies regarding education and use of personnel and those policy questions are outside the organizational competence of the War College to rebut even were we so disposed. That criticism then is extended to the educational philosophy of the Services. That, too, must pass without comment although I do have some strong personal opinions. But then the criticisms get specific.

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One article says: "... the war colleges [give] little attention to *ideas* about warfare." "We must give our officers a chance to think about warfare . . ." "This means . . . much greater emphasis on military history and theory . . ."¹ A second article states that "at the war colleges . . . management, politics and foreign policy are taught, but no tactics and little strategy . . . [M]ilitary history is treated as if it were a marginal embellishment instead of being recognized as the very core of military education, the record of trial and error on which today's methods can be based." The author continues by calling for "drastic changes in the curricula of the . . . war colleges."²

It is with pride, not smugness, that I can say that the Naval War College does not need to change course to meet such criticisms. We immerse our students in ideas about warfare—I have given much detail in other Notes. We not only give officers the opportunity, we *require* them to think about warfare while they are students, both in historical terms and in contemporary terms. We do it to ensure that our graduates have a framework to guide them as they continue to think about warfare throughout their careers. Indeed, the grounding of our course in military history and theory is so solid that those without firsthand knowledge of the Newport curriculum (and that includes those both in and out of the Navy) have often confused the grounding with the overall course and thought that reason to criticize.

If the educational philosophy they propose promotes increased professional military competence (and I

believe that it does), I invite the authors of these articles to consider our curricula. We do not consider them locked-in ideals for all military education but we are confident that their structure, their content, and the intellectual assumptions on which they are based already are what these two authors call for.

A third recent and widely read article does not so much criticize the War College as it does the Navy's institutional attitude toward the college and towards education (as opposed to training) in general. The author was more specific in detailing Navy-particular practices, attitudes, and results, warning that in his opinion "[o]ur officer corps could well become a group of highly skilled technicians who by default are forfeiting the destiny of the Navy to others who will do their thinking for them."³ Well, maybe, but I am not so pessimistic.

I do not disagree with many of the premises and much of the discussion of any of these authors; I am, however, privileged to be involved with and thus able to observe closely a very significant exception to their generalizations—the Naval War College. I welcome the close scrutiny of our programs by these authors or by any of our interested readers. We don't claim perfection but are convinced that we give our graduates a head start along the proper route.



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NOTES

1. Gary Hart, "The Case for Military Reform," *The Wall Street Journal*, 23 January 1981, p. 20.
2. Edward N. Luttwak, "Towards Rearming America," *Commentary*, September 1980, pp. 27-34 reprinted in *Survival*, January/February 1981, pp. 29-36.
3. Thomas B. Buell, "The Education of a Warrior," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings*, January 1981, pp. 41-43.