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An Address by The Honorable Edward Hidalgo, Assistant Secretary of the Navy

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AN ADDRESS

By

THE HONORABLE EDWARD HIDALGO

ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE NAVY

(MANPOWER, RESERVE AFFAIRS, AND LOGISTICS)

ON THE OCCASION OF THE

ACADEMIC CONVOCATION, NINETY-FOURTH CLASS

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE

15 August 1977

Every profession deserving of the title advocates continuing education for its membership and, very often, backs its advocacy with incentives of rank, honors, or material reward to foster member participation in professional education and growth programs. Continued education is essential to the vigor of a profession, especially in this era of lightning change and quantum increases in the volume of knowledge confronting the individual.

The profession of arms in this country has been in the forefront in recognition and fulfillment of this professional requisite. Indeed, among the many magnificent features of the U.S. military career is the dedication of the profession to the notion of educational growth as evidenced in precept and in the tangible efforts made and the resources devoted from the very origins of each Service.

It is my hope that you remain mindful of this in the course of your impending academic voyage and also in the years ahead as you exercise your enriched professional abilities.

Today I am going to urge you to be mindful of several other matters as, in the months ahead, you move through your particular curriculum plowing back into history; adjusting and readjusting your looking glass on the operations, management, and technology of your profession; and as you run free with the strategic and politicomilitary notions that cluster and react like charged particles about the central theme of our national interest.

As some of you begin by revisiting Sparta and Athens with Thucydides as your guide, I would ask that you be mindful of: men's passions and the stubborn durability of prejudices and human animosity that are reinforced in bizarre irony by the very values we hold most dear—family ties, religious beliefs, ethnic and cultural roots, and each man's legitimate search for identity.

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Observe closely that, by and large, good intentions pave the avenues of history leading to and from Greece and other centers of civilization that predate or follow. You will find, too, that rare is the capitol city that has not hosted saints, scourges, builders, brigands, oppressors and saviors.

And having analyzed all that separated one great people and two great city-states, one authoritarian, the other democratic—one a landpower, the other oceanic—one a reasoned culture, the other disciplined—I would urge that you then contemplate in comparison not just today's nation-state to nation-state parallels but also that you reduce these parallels to your own experiences—in our profession, our institutions, and indeed, our own streets. If you will do this, then by his own words, Thucydides, "will be found useful."

I would ask that you be discriminating and not lose sight of the fact that the most articulate and gifted recorders of man's affairs, those whose penetrating analysis, perceptive hindsight, and critical evaluation are as necessary an element in our education as any encyclopedic account of facts, remain in the final measure, authors of flawed products. Distressed goods, marked by the prejudice and bias of the author, shaped and contained by events, rubbed and polished by the intellectual currents of the time, and almost invariably fashioned to advance a theme, an ideology, a nostrum, or a self-serving, albeit noble puprose of the author.

Useful?—quite so.

Necessary?—indeed, indispensable.

Valuable?—sometimes beyond calculation!

I would ask that you be mindful, as you continue your historical journey, of the intrinsic value of failure—of disappointment, temporary defeat—and recall that only through failure has it been possible to achieve progress. In terms of the classic quotation: "(to) rise on the stepping stones of their dead selves to higher things."

Those who fear failure and those who have not tasted failure will not be found in your history books. Only those who dare, who measure the risk and make the plunge, who rebound from failure to try once more—only those men who know defeat ever find success and thus have made their mark on mankind. I speak of defeat, of course, in a material or cosmic undertaking, never in the observance of basic principles.

Perhaps I'm wrong but I sense a predilection, perhaps stronger in the bureaucratic environment than in the private sector, that seeks to dedicate excessive talent and resources to ensuring against failure as if the result will, by default, be judged success. This striving to avoid error is not the same as seeking the achievement of a positive goal—avoiding failure is not success. If we allow ourselves to focus solely upon avoiding failure there can be no question about where we are fixed on the curve of progress and the downward direction of its slope.

There is the related syndrome of which one becomes so keenly aware in our Capitol City. The speed and dexterity with which countless numbers of

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kindly or unkindly souls second-guess those who have a responsibility to bear, be it executive, legislative or judicial. No, indeed, says the critic: I would not do it this way or that, the judgment is flawed, the reasoning is unsound, the intentions suspect.

Prejudice, high-minded patriotism, ignorance, commercialism, nobility, idleness, excessive zeal, malice—these and other motivations play their single or cumulative role in the never-ending process of attack, be it on the golf course, in the bars, in the corridors, or in the public marketplace.

How much easier it is to destroy than to build! Watch the demolition of a building it took years to build, and you'll know what I mean.

To end this aspect of our theme, I remind you of the words of Theodore Roosevelt at the turn of the century:

It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer or deeds could have done them better, the credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement; and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.

I would ask that you be mindful of and recognize, as you look for the umpteenth time upon our strongest adversary on the world stage and ponder, as only free men can, that which shows itself as good among the unlighted recesses of the totalitarian landscape, that a discipline imposed cures few of a society's ills. Never mind the attractive packaging, the new brand names, the catchy slogans and promises of instant relief—oh what a relief Euro-communism is—but reality and intellect combine to affirm and reaffirm that allocation of resources in a modern state, management of human endeavors, and the growing demands of technology levy themselves upon all societies with political impartiality and economic equity. The society committed to imposing discipline upon itself must unremittingly give priority to the enforcement of this mandate and only the residue of its time and other resources remains available to deal with the issues of management, human motivation and the demands of a surging technology.

Dollars and rubles are only symbols and the manipulators of each are really saying yes and nyet to allocation of the same scarce resources.

The better life may be a relative concept but people everywhere want it just the same. Your problems and my problems are shared by countless others in the world—transcending the political or economic philosophy that envelops each sphere of existence.

The line mechanic in a Mig squadron curses the supply system and instinctively must long for changes in his life, as his counterpart in the U.S.

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Navy does in his very different level of existence. The officers of *Moskva* contend with problems of leading and discipline, maintenance and operations, self-fulfillment, personal ambition, as, in a fundamentally different sense, do their opposite numbers in *Enterprise*, and so it goes.

The problems of technology, of leadership, of resource allocation and management can be neither wished away nor mindlessly disciplined away. Neither side holds a monopoly or a clear majority of unique problems over the other.

I would ask that in your review and study of the technology of the profession, the management of resources, capital equipment, manpower, and money and the operational techniques for their employment, you be mindful of your own experience with the men, with the ships, with the aircraft, and weapons system of the fleet, do not undervalue your experience and the insights that it formulates. All too often men fall victims to the seductions of the systems, the institutions and the processes that were intended to be tools and that with time, become entities, arts, specialties—creatures of their own, with little or no relation to their original purpose.

How many of you recognize the saltwater seasoned officer who goes ashore and becomes fixated with ship or weapons design as an end in itself and forgetting how unforgiving is the sea, helps to produce a system that can't be operated and maintained to the unrealistic standards and demands prescribed?

Or, the aviator who becomes similarly enamored with the magic and mysteries of flight and forgets that the deck remains for his successors just as hard, just as short, and in constant motion, as it was when he was looking for the meatball.

And those who become administrators and managers, par excellence, of money and people—how often have we seen their systems become the dominant consideration, masters and not servants of the clients they were once supposed to serve?

To those who this year come upon the notion for the first time of staffing, planning, and military problem solving in a formal sense, I urge you from personal experience to remain mindful that plans are carried out by men, that formats are to assist, that communications must convey understanding, and that warfare rarely conforms precisely to the course of events projected by either contending party. Learn well these procedures but never lose sight of their purpose.

Be mindful then of your own experience—your own instincts and recognize the desperate need we have in the Navy today to relate our people and our experience to our technology. For herein lies the key to our continued success as a leading maritime power or the seeds of our eventual eclipse as an oceanic influence.

I also ask that you be mindful of a nation's treasure, our own, our friends', our enemies' and the treasures of enemies and friends throughout history. For

there are lessons of enduring application in how and under what circumstances the treasures are divided—who shares and when—what rationales have prevailed over the passage of time.

Logisticians like to belabor us with the axiom that wars are lost for the want of a nail but a better case can be made that wars, nations, civilizations are won or lost in the tenacious vigor, optimism and wisdom of man, as well as the material resources at his disposal.

Those who do not want to lose wars are well-advised to learn to identify those human and material resources, marshal the facts, pose the arguments, and earn the right to share the treasure. If there is any question in your mind as to the principal business conducted daily in the Pentagon, let it be laid to rest now.

This task becomes more important and concurrently more difficult in the technological age and the ensuing intense pressures exerted upon senior decisionmakers enhance the potential for critical error at a frightening rate.

And here it is that we return to our fundamental purpose today, to convoke the NWC classes of 1978 and charge them with their duties. For it is with you that our future as a seapower rests. It will be your strategies, your technological achievements, your knowledge, and your influence upon the decisions of the hour that will shape our destiny. The year ahead will have great impact upon your professional discharge of these responsibilities and I entertain great confidence in your ability and the influence of this institution in preparing you for this duty.

After formulating the laws of Athens, the mighty Solon left for a period of years and then returned. A procession was given in his honor.

The first procession was that of older men with bowed backs and feeble step. The banner above their heads said: "We have protected the state."

"Yes," said Solon, "those were glorious days for Athens but they are gone."

A second procession of men in middle life carried the banner: "We protect the state."

"Yes," said Solon, "but what will become of Athens when you are no longer her defenders?"

Then came the vigorous step of young manhood with a banner bearing the inscription: "We will protect the state."

"Praised be the gods," shouted Solon, "the state is safe."

In closing I would ask you to remain mindful of one other matter—an important one—yourself. Find time this year to do something you've wanted to do but which has been cast aside by the press of professional duties, look

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to your own state of personal tranquillity, your self-esteem, your physical well-being, and the state of the union with family, friends, companions new and old. At this closing point, a quotation from the gigantic mind of Oliver Wendell Holmes is irresistible:

. . . the joy of life is living, is to put out all one's powers as far as they will go; that the measure of power is obstacles overcome; to ride boldly at what is in front of you, be it fence or enemy . . . ; to keep the soldier's faith against the doubts of civil life . . . ; to love glory more than the temptations of wallowing ease, but to know that one's final judge and only rival is oneself.

And so, reemerge next summer ready to return to your profession—re-freshed—whole—eager to take on the task and responsibilities held in reserve for you. Know that your return is awaited eagerly, that your help is needed and that our Navy and the navies of the free world represented here will be strengthened and sustained by the Naval War College classes of 1978.

