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Admiral H. Kent Hewitt, U.S. Navy: Part I: Preparing for High Command

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*Although his impressive list of accomplishments ranks Adm. H. Kent Hewitt among the most successful of World War II naval commanders, he also remains one of the least well known. Here, Hewitt's early exploits are recounted—exploits that range from a role in the Great White Fleet's round-the world cruise, the almost Kiplingesque adventures in revolutionary Cuba, to the command of the cruiser Indianapolis—all of which molded him into the man who would successfully command amphibious forces greater than those found at the Normandy landing, deployed over greater distance.**

ADMIRAL H. KENT HEWITT, U.S. NAVY:

PART I—PREPARING FOR HIGH COMMAND

by

Professor John Clagett

H. Kent Hewitt ranks among the most professional of the senior World War II naval commanders. His service during that conflict created a successful series of operations that involved forces of greater magnitude than those which engaged in the Normandy invasion and necessitated deployment over greater distances. His planning and execution were superlative. At the same time, in human terms, Hewitt was a gentleman in every sense of the word who consistently characterized the best traits of the professional naval officer. He was jealous for "the honor of the cloth," as he phrased it, inflexible in his insistence that the Navy be treated with the respect it deserved. Every man who served under Hewitt remembers him with a respectful fondness, yet to the public he is virtually unknown. One wonders why.

The answer lies in the nature of the man, in his modesty, his reluctance to make startling or colorful public statements. He was the complete antithesis to General Patton with whom he was closely associated during the North African, Sicily, and Salerno invasions, yet he and Patton were close personal friends, each with a certain admiration and respect for the other's capabilities.

Adm. Raymond Spruance, a classmate and close friend of Admiral Hewitt's, was much like him, but his central role in the most colorful and dramatic American naval operations of

*An extensive new facility at the Naval War College, to be named Hewitt Hall, is in its final phases of construction and should be dedicated in the spring of 1976. Hewitt Hall is the third and last element of the Spruance-Conolly-Hewitt complex begun in 1971.

the war—the great task forces roaming the Pacific engaging in air and surface battle with a determined enemy—gave him considerably more public recognition.

In order to understand Admiral Hewitt, it is necessary to know his background and see the long and rigorous process of training that made up his naval career. "I never had a job that wasn't interesting," he said again and again—an attitude that was one of the keys to his success.

Henry Kent Hewitt was born in Hackensack, N.J., on 11 February 1887 and passed his childhood in an environment of stable security. He read a great deal. The church, that great molder of character, meant much to him. He was a choirboy and acolyte in the Protestant Episcopal Church, and he remained a firm communicant all his life.

On a spring evening in May 1903, Kent saw an announcement in the newspaper which drew attention to Congressman William Hughes' competitive examination for appointment to the Naval Academy at Annapolis. He showed the announcement to his father, who agreed that he could try for it. During the 4 days before the exam, Kent studied methodically under the direction of the high school principal. He passed this preliminary examination but had yet to pass the regular entrance examination plus the physical. He remained out of school in order to prepare for the entrance examination. Many years later, William Hazlitt Upson, the admiral's firm friend, referred to him as "that high school dropout." That young Kent could successfully compete in the rigorous intellectual competition of the Naval Academy as a high school junior was a high comment on the quality of his mind.

There was nothing unusual in Kent Hewitt's stay at the Naval Academy. He did well in his studies, was well liked and accepted by his classmates, and soundly enjoyed the entire experience. Emphasis on sail and seamanship was strong in those days, and the classes and drills in seamanship were among his favorite. Early in plebe summer he learned knots and splices at jackstay drill in the sail loft of the Seamanship Building and put in hours of drill with signal flags and signal books. He learned the nomenclature of sails and rigging from the waterline model of the *Antietam*. Later, on masts erected in the sail loft, Kent learned to set and furl sail. Later still, he and his classmates were sent aloft for sail drill aboard the full rigged ship *Chesapeake*, alongside the dock. Kent's tendency was to "squeeze the tar out of the rigging," as the sailors put it, but he soon overcame his squeamishness at the height and, before the summer was over, gained the classification of "seagoing" by climbing to the main truck and spiking his white hat on the lightning rod.

The summer cruises were a delight to Kent; twice he had a month aboard Farragut's old flagship *Hartford*, learning the life of the sailing navy in the only way it could be learned. He liked going aloft, and during his second cruise he was rated as captain of the foretop, an indication of his capabilities. This was one of his favorite memories, and in later years he named his Vermont retirement home Foretop.

In the middle of the spring term of second class year, Kent's class was informed that because of the growing shortage of junior officers in the fleet, it would be divided into three sections. The top section would graduate in September 1906, the middle section in February 1907, and the third section in June 1907, the time set for the normal graduation of his class. The criterion for establishing the sections was by academic average, and Kent Hewitt was in the top group.

After a "forced draft" 3 months First Class Year, Kent Hewitt graduated from the Academy on 12 September

1906. His first duty as a passed midshipman was aboard the U.S.S. *Missouri*. He reported aboard just as the ship was about to receive President Roosevelt, who was to observe fleet gunnery practice from her flag bridge. Inasmuch as Hewitt was to be assigned no gunnery station until after the practice, he was free to observe. As a talented mathematician, Hewitt took to gunnery at once and its improvement was to be a major task in his professional years. He watched everything that went on with the keenest interest, benefiting greatly from the captain's decision that for the practice the five new officers should be free of specific duties.

The *Missouri* was crowded with junior officers, and Kent, as a very junior one, had to swing a hammock in the passage outside the j.o. mess. He had become accustomed to a hammock on the practice cruises and found it good sleeping, but he sorely missed having a bunk for an occasional highly prized nap and the privacy that went with a stateroom. He worked with his division, supervised maintenance of the after 6" battery, stood one watch in four as J.O.O.D., and kept a navigation workbook and journal. Of course, he also donned dungarees and helped with coaling, a regular all-hands job that came about every 2 weeks or so. Discipline was very taut in the *Missouri* and in the fleet as a whole. On a cold rainy day in Cherbourg, Kent was spotted by a passing flag officer with his hands in his trousers pockets as he supervised a boat's crew; this "dreadful sin" was reported to his captain and Kent received a written—though very mild—admonition.

Among other duties during the cruise, Kent was sent ashore with landing parties at Guantanamo to prepare a camp area for landing force training. A little later, in February 1907, he went ashore with another party in Kingston, Jamaica, to render aid after a devastating earthquake. He and his men pulled down tottering walls, searched ruins for the dead and injured, and collected bodies for immediate cremation—action taken to prevent an epidemic. The Americans also set up a field hospital.

At the request of the warden, the Navy had landed a company of armed bluejackets to restore order in the prison. The Governor General of Jamaica was somewhere inland, and he did not reach Kingston until a day or so after the American arrival. When he did return, he expressed anger that the Americans had landed an armed party, even though it had been requested, and demanded that the field hospital and the landing forces be withdrawn. Admiral Davis obliged and directed his ships return to Guantanamo, including the Navy ships carrying relief food and supplies that the Governor insisted were not needed. The unfortunate incident resulted in a diplomatic apology by Great Britain to the United States and the prompt recall of Governor General Sweetenham. This was Kent's first experience with the extremely delicate matter of international relationships. He had learned that even a helping hand must be extended with care.

The late fall of 1907 saw the beginning of one of the most interesting events of Kent Hewitt's early years, the cruise around the world. When it began he had been aboard for over a year and had become a thoroughly competent junior officer, who had just acquired a stateroom and his own bunk. Furthermore, he had been assigned a new job—that of assistant navigator. He would be on the bridge when important evolutions took place, an excellent vantage point. It was a wonderful job for the cruise that lay ahead. The task of navigating the ship with the basic tools of the navigator of that day, magnetic compasses, alidades, leadlines, sextant, and appropriate publications, gave him a very thorough and practical foundation in the art.

The cruise began with a shift of most of the battleships of the fleet to the west coast and the Pacific, a move made by Roosevelt as a result of existing events in international affairs. Japan was at that time an ally of England, and Germany felt that she could use the ill feeling that existed at that time between the United States and Japan to drive a wedge between England and the United States. The "yellow press" of all nations began speaking of the likelihood of war between the United States and Japan. Roosevelt made quiet and peaceable moves in Japan's direction and at the same time sent the Atlantic Fleet to the Pacific. He had apparently been planning to send the fleet around the world and this offered an opportunity to begin such a cruise. For the moment it was only announced that the fleet would be based on the west coast for a time.

Kent became a shellback on the way to Rio; he and the other officers to be initiated softened the ordeal considerably by a tribute to King Neptune's court, having had the foresight to stock up on a suitable supply of beer before leaving port. The Navy was still "wet" at that time, though ordinarily drinking at sea was very strongly frowned upon. The fleet experienced the seasons as it passed through the southern latitudes and the passage through the Straits of Magellan made a profound impression on Kent Hewitt.

The story of the cruise around the world has been told many times and for this brief sketch only the barest outline is permissible. The Great White Fleet sailed from Hampton Roads on 16 December 1907 and arrived in Hampton Roads again on 22 February 1909. In those 13 months, Kent Hewitt received an intensive and varied experience that would hardly have been equaled in years of normal fleet activities and assignments. The fleet had maintained battle readiness with gunnery practices, torpedo practices, a constant range of general drills, all emergency exercises, and an unending series of fleet maneuvers. It was at sea for much of the time, and its every port of call had been an exercise in diplomacy. Kent Hewitt saw many ports, received warm welcomes everywhere, and was required to carry himself as a diplomatic and naval representative of his country. Through these experiences he learned how to get along with the proud people of other races and languages and the value of practicing restraint and sobriety ashore. He also gained a deep respect for the sea in its every mood, from flat calm to a full typhoon.

Additionally, his good luck continued in his job assignments. He served as assistant navigator from Hampton Roads to the approaches of San Diego. He was assigned for a brief stint to the engine and fire room where his job was mainly counting the buckets of coal consumed. In June 1908, some 8 weeks later, he was given the job of signal officer, which he held for the remainder of the cruise. The jobs of assistant navigator and of signal officer allowed Kent Hewitt to take full advantage of the training experiences offered by the cruise. He was constantly on deck when anything of importance was going on. The experience was excellent training for future command. He finished the cruise as an ensign, a dependable watch and division officer, a competent navigator, and an experienced signal officer.

The call at Monterey, Calif., was of particular importance for Kent Hewitt. He attended a ball given ashore at the Hotel Del Monte where he met Miss Floride Hunt, whom he would see again in San Francisco and who would eventually become his wife. To add to the drama of the occasion, heavy weather blew up during the evening, and boats could not operate. The officers attending the ball had to spend the night in the hotel lobby, still in their full evening dress, wrapped in their boat cloaks.

On 10 May 1910, Hewitt was ordered to the *Connecticut,* by request of Captain Rush, who had been transferred from the *Missouri* to command her. The fact that his captain of 2 years in the *Missouri* requested Hewitt's services aboard his new command is clearest evidence of the young officer's capabilities. It was the first of many such occasions, for a large percentage of Hewitt's orders were written at the request of a prospective boss.

In November 1910, two battleship divisions, including the *Connecticut,* sailed for Europe. Hewitt's ship went first to England where he enjoyed 7 days leave in London, including the Lord Mayor's luncheon in the Guild Hall. Another luncheon was being given for the enlisted men on the following day and Hewitt was ordered to relieve a classmate, who was bringing the *Connecticut* detachment to London by train, so that the classmate could go play football at the Crystal Palace. Hewitt wrote:

> The officers' uniform, I was informed, was to be service dress . . . Arriving so attired at the railroad station, 1 discovered to my horror that the officer 1 was relieving and all the others present were dressed in frock coats. Unfortunately my classmate was a much bigger man than I, with very long arms. There was nothing to do but dive into a compartment and change coats . . . I had to parade through the streets of London, leading my platoon, in a coat reaching below my knees, with sleeves almost to my finger tips and a collar two sizes too big, then attend the official luncheon, and after that a reception at the American Embassy . . . My sense of unease was nowise lessened when I found myself at the head table, directly opposite the Lord Mayor himself, and Commander Sims, newly appointed captain of the *Minnesota,* who was representing the commander in chief. 1 spent most of the luncheon pulling up my sleeves so that a little of my cuffs would show, and with one hand trying to gather my coat in the back so that it would not look quite so full in the front. It was in this situation that I listened with awe to Sims' famous "Blood is thicker than water" Guild Hall speech. I thoroughly agreed with all he said, . . .*

After an extended visit in Europe, the two divisions sailed for Guantanamo to join the fleet for exercises. On the way, as a very junior ensign standing a deck watch, Hewitt stopped the fleet in midocean for a man overboard drill when he interpreted a signal from the flag signal bridge as exercise at man overboard. Much to his dismay however, Hewitt started the evolution, only to see that the signal had been replaced by quite a different one. He tried to explain to a red-faced captain and then said yes sir, yes sir, yes sir to the admiral, sure that his naval career had died an early death. It was then revealed that the flag signal bridge had indeed hoisted the signal by mistake, then lowered it before, as the men on watch thought, it had been seen. Hewitt was vindicated.

In June 1911, having completed nearly 4 years in battleships, Hewitt was delighted to be ordered to a destroyer, the *Flusser.* He had a year aboard her, the second half of it being served under a brisk commanding officer named William F. Halsey. In October 1912, now a lieutenant (junior grade), Hewitt was ordered to the *Flordia* when the *Flusser* was placed in reserve. The executive officer of the *Florida* was his old boss on the *Missouri,* Commander

*H.K. Hewitt, "Memoirs," unpublished. Unmarked quotations used herein originated from this source.

Sypher; again Hewitt's services had been requested.

In May and June 1913, while the *Florida* was in New York Navy Yard, Floride Hunt was in Paterson, N.J., visiting an aunt. When Miss Hunt left for San Francisco, she and Kent Hewitt were engaged. On 23 August 1913, Kent Hewitt and Floride Hunt were married in San Francisco. Hewitt always maintained that this was the luckiest day of his life. The marriage was an ideal one, with each half of the partnership complementing and strengthening the other. On 2 October 1913, Hewitt reported to the Naval Academy for duty as an instructor in the Mathematics Department. It was here that he learned of both his excellent potential for teaching and his love for this work; he and Mrs. Hewitt had a very happy tour of duty at the Academy.

During the summer cruise of 1914, Lieutenant Hewitt was aboard the *Idaho* as a navigation instructor and watch officer. That vessel was in Naples when the Archduke was assassinated at Sarajevo, a seemingly rather insignificant incident and one which Hewitt dismissed as one more incident in an armed and waiting Europe. During the summer he realized his mistake as tension grew. At Villefranche he was ordered to the *Maine*, along with all others aboard, when the *Idaho* was turned over to Greece as the *Lemnos* on 30 July. Two days later, Hewitt was officer of the deck of the *Maine*, still in Villefranche harbor. He wrote:

> Suddenly I heard the report of a cannon from the fort at the harbor entrance, and simultaneously I saw a string of signal flags hoisted there. From the shore there was the sound of cheering. Turning to the French bumboat woman who had been a daily visitor selling us souvenirs and what-nots, I asked her if she knew what all that meant. Her reply was to wring her hands and to exclaim "C'est la guerre! C'est la guerre!" And so it was; it was the declaration of the French mobilization.
>
> We remained at Villefranche only a few more days, but they were days of extreme interest. Watching the mobilization, I marveled at the way the reserves rolled in, reported at the caserne, donned their uniforms and equipment with practiced ease, and marched off. But some of the reserves had to go to war dressed in the old blue coats and bright red trousers of bygone days. We noted how promptly the tunnels, bridges, and other strategic points were placed under guard and could not but think what would happen in our country in a similar emergency, with our small regular army and no reserves other than the militia of the several states . . .

Hewitt spent the next summer at the Academy, and on 27 August his first child, Floride Hunt Hewitt, was born. He and Mrs. Hewitt were occupying quarters in the yard, on Upshur Road, and the year that followed was extremely happy for both of them. On 2 June 1916, Hewitt's tour of shore duty was over, and he was detached from the Academy and ordered to command the U.S.S. *Eagle*, a converted yacht fitted for survey work. Finding that the command of this vessel was vacant, having been refused by a classmate who felt himself too senior for such a small vessel, Hewitt had requested the duty.

His prompt seizing of this opportunity for command was to be an important action for Kent Hewitt. The cruise that followed was an intensely active and interesting one, giving him a broad and exciting experience in independent action very unusual for so young an officer.

On 2 November Kent Hewitt, in the *Eagle*, took departure from the Isle of Shoals buoy, beginning his passage to

Guantanamo Bay which would be his base for a season of surveying. He had taken command of the vessel on 30 June, but his only time underway had been in the passage from New York to Portsmouth Navy Yard, where she had had her annual overhaul. She was an elegant and handsome vessel, graceful and well built, but underpowered and difficult to handle in heavy weather. She ran into a gale on this passage, was delayed several days, and had to make an unscheduled stop at Great Inagua Island for coal. Hewitt arrived at Guantanamo Bay on 14 November and 2 days later he departed on his first surveying assignment.

This work was perfectly fitted to Hewitt's temperament and talents, and he enjoyed it. He also enjoyed the freedom of his position; the *Eagle* was independent of the Atlantic Fleet, operating directly under the Chief of Naval Operations. However, his surveying program was interrupted when revolution broke out in Cuba. On 27 February 1917, Hewitt received orders for his ship to report for duty to the Commander in Chief, Atlantic Fleet, thence was ordered to proceed to the north coast of Cuba to protect American life and property. Hewitt found this new work much to his liking. In Nuevitas, he and his Executive Officer, Jack Lee, went ashore to determine the situation. It was a rather sad state of affairs; Nuevitas had been partially looted and some property burned. The Spanish and Danish consuls joined him in an investigation. At one point, Hewitt found himself and his companions facing a troop of well-armed, wild-looking rebels. He confronted the rebel captain, who showed him his commission, a piece of folded notebook paper upon which was written, in pencil, that Citizen Gonzales was appointed a captain in the Constitutional Army. After negotiations—Hewitt's first experience with very practical diplomatic negotiations in the field—the rebel captain requested permission to enter the town for the purpose of allowing his men to visit their families there. Hewitt doubted the veracity of the leader, but saw no way in which he could forbid Cuban citizens from entering a Cuban town.

When they reentered the town, Hewitt sent Lee back to the ship to bring the landing force ashore, which, on his orders, had been made ready for such an occasion. It was well that he did so. The rebels, rather than seeking families, were "requisitioning" various materials from the local stores. Hewitt entered a store that was ringed by a number of mounted rebel horsemen. The rebel captain was at the counter, arguing with the storekeeper over a large pile of articles. Captain Gonzales looked up, saw Hewitt, and swiftly drew his gun. Hewitt, "with no hope of winning a gun duel" nevertheless reached for his 45 but to his immense relief the rebel officer reversed his revolver and shucked the cartridges out onto the counter. Hewitt later found that he had gained quite a reputation around Nuevitas from this incident.

More negotiations followed. Hewitt informed Gonzales that he could accompany him to any other stores he wanted to visit. Gonzales glared at the American and stalked outside. As Gonzales mounted he gave an order to his men in rapid Spanish. At that moment Hewitt was relieved to see the bayonets of his landing force of 24 sailors coming up the main street. The rebels immediately departed.

Knowing that there were large rebel forces in the area, Lieutenant Hewitt took measures for the defense of the town. He warped the *Eagle* around at anchor so that her two 6 pounders astern—her only armament except for two antiquated machineguns—could bear on the access road to the town. He placed a picket of armed sailors provided with a Very pistol well out on the road to warn the ship of the coming of any armed party.

All this was done without any direct authorization from the Commander, Atlantic Fleet. The *Eagle's* radio could only reach Guantanamo at night and under good conditions. At the first opportunity, Hewitt reported the situation and his action to the Commander in Chief.

All remained quiet with these arrangements, and 2 days later a detachment of regular Cuban troops arrived and took over the defense of the town. Hewitt happily withdrew his forces. He felt some uneasiness as he looked back over his first experience in a combined naval-diplomatic capacity: he had landed armed troops in a friendly country, assumed control over a Cuban town, and issued orders to Cuban citizens. But no shots had been fired and no one injured.

His action was fully approved by Commander in Chief, Atlantic Fleet. He wrote: "The Commander in Chief considers that the Commanding Officer of the U.S.S. *Eagle* acted with commendable promptness and good judgment, and that an appreciation of his initiative, decision, and good judgment should be entered upon his record."

This was by no means the end of Hewitt's role in Cuba. He later obtained an interview with the rebel general commanding in the area he was patrolling, traveling some distance inland by horseback.

> The General politely led me into his headquarters, a one-room shack furnished with a broken down chair and two old iron beds without mattresses. I sat on one of these beds, on the bare springs, and the General sat on the other. In the doorway, with a rifle across his knees, sat what I assumed to be the corporal of the guard, for he wore a corporal's chevrons pinned to his ragged civilian shirt sleeves by huge safety pins. During the discussion, if the Corporal disagreed with the General or had other ideas to advance, he apparently felt free to say what he pleased, and did so.

Hewitt explained to the General that the United States had nothing but the most friendly feelings for the Cuban people and considered their establishment of a government satisfactory to them entirely their own affair and that his only purpose was to safeguard the lives and legitimate interests of American citizens. The general replied that friendship between the two peoples had been firmly cemented in 1897 by the blood shed by them in a common cause. He promised to respect American property.

Hewitt next took the *Eagle* into Banes Bay to investigate the situation at a large American sugar mill located there. Because of the war in Europe, the United States considered the safeguarding of the sugar supply to be of utmost importance. The town of Banes and the mill lay some distance from the dock, and Hewitt, with his civilian hydrographer Leo Samuels, went there on a railroad automobile—a Ford equipped with railroad wheels to run on the tracks—and conferred with the rebel general whose forces were holding part of the town. All went well and later the two Americans had dinner with the manager of the sugar mill. Hewitt then started back to the ship, only to be stopped by an armed party outside of town. Hewitt returned to Banes, and had Lee turn out the 18-man force he had guarding the mill, poor odds against the several hundred rebel troops in the town. Hewitt, with Samuels, stalked down the street and into the headquarters of the rebel general. Of this encounter, Samuels says,

> The skipper took very prompt action always; he did so this time. He was young, you know, and very concise, and he was very determined in his decisions when he had taken them. As a young man he had an excellent physique,

taller than most and very fine and impressive looking. He brushed right past the sentry at the general's headquarters, strode up to the table where the general sat with his aides, and demanded to know by what authority his men had stopped an American naval officer in the discharge of his duty. The general was surprised, he seemed almost apologetic, but he spoke of the necessities of war. The skipper was still mad. He said, "General, I demand an apology from you now and I demand an assurance that there will be no further interference with me or my officers and men. I am now going to return to my ship, and I will shoot my way through your troops if I have to."

After that there was no more trouble. The skipper thanked the general politely when he offered to send an escort with us, and shook hands with him again. . . . I already admired the skipper very much; after that I also realized that he had the force of character and determination to equal his diplomacy, affability, and extreme competence in his profession. I knew then that he would go far. His decisions were always perfectly suitable to the situation. The situations in Cuba were sometimes quite complex, because we were a very small band. Yet the Cubans had great respect for us, because the skipper was so determined, yet so fair and always polite—except that time when they tried to keep him from going back to his ship.*

Hewitt next proceeded to Manati, where a very large sugar mill was located. He found the situation there threatening, though no actual damage had been done. Large forces of rebels, cut off from the rest of Cuba, were in the area, being forced back on Manati itself. The mill and town were 3 miles from the dock, and the *Eagle* could not help directly. Rebels were burning canefields and threatening to take the town. Hewitt acted with characteristic energy. He discovered that one of his coxswains had served a hitch with the cavalry and that the sugar company had a number of horses. Hewitt loved to ride. He mounted himself, the coxswain-sergeant, and eight sailors who had had some experience on horseback. This was his cavalry. The landing force of thirty sailors was his infantry. The two old machine guns, mounted on model T fords with boiler plate windshields, made up his artillery. He maneuvered this force to great effort, blocking the rebels at every turn. He led the cavalry himself in wild dashes to burning canefields and effectively ended this practice. He had the two six pounders disassembled, taken ashore, and mounted in the tall "mirador", or watch tower, of the sugar mill. From there he engaged in target practice at a target placed at a crucial cross roads half a mile out of town. After a few sessions, the rebel commander sent word requesting that the Americans stop shooting the big guns, because they were making his soldiers nervous. Kent Hewitt was everywhere; in the fields, in the tower, parading his "army", reassuring the American residents, befriending the Cubans, and, as usual, making friends for life. He was also having the time of his life.

Then came 6 April 1917, and the United States entered the war. Hewitt wanted a destroyer; he was a qualified destroyer man and felt that it was in the convoys that he could make his greatest contribution to America's part in the war. He pleaded, demanded, and went through classmates in Washington to finally get the orders he craved. On 1 August 1918, as a temporary lieutenant

*Conversation with Leo M. Samuels, Hydrographer in the *Eagle*.

commander, he reported aboard the *Connor* for a "make-you-learn" cruise; in September he was promoted to commander, temporary, and on 1 October he assumed command of the *D.D. Cummings*. He commanded *Cummings* for the rest of the war, in constant convoy duty, during which he saw one merchant vessel torpedoed. In April 1919, he was transferred to the *Ludlow* which acted as plane guard for the NC-4 flight. In June 1919 he reported to the Naval Academy as an instructor in electrical engineering and physics. He, Mrs. Hewitt, and young Floride spent a wonderful 2 years there at 38 Upshur Road.

In a rather crucial tour of duty, one that went far to make his reputation, Hewitt was ordered as gunnery officer of the *Pennsylvania* on 9 August 1921. The *Pennsylvania* was in bad repute at that time. On being transferred to the Pacific Fleet, she fired a short-range battle practice with poor results and received an unsatisfactory report on Admiral's Inspection. Her captain was relieved, and Kent Hewitt found himself faced with a formidable job; in his words, the ship was "in pretty bad shape." He set to work. On 5 July 1923, the *Pennsylvania* won the battle efficiency pennant; she lost the gunnery trophy by a hair, the loss caused by the mechanical failure of one tiny spring in the director train element.

As a result of this dramatic improvement in the battleship's gunnery, Hewitt was ordered to the Fleet Training, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations in July 1923. Mary Kent Hewitt was born on 5 July, and he had to proceed to Washington alone. He spent 3 years in Washington as Head of the Gunnery Section of Fleet Training. In 1926 he was ordered to the staff of Vice Adm. Louis de Steiguer, Commander Battleship Divisions, as Aide and Battle Divisions Gunnery Officer. After reporting, he found himself also to be Staff Tactical Officer; in that capacity he practically ran the tactical handling of the division of which the admiral was in immediate command, and the battleships as a whole during maneuvers. Admiral de Steiguer was not an easy officer to work for. Years later, Hewitt encountered a younger officer who had been serving in the *West Virginia* at that time, one who had vivid memories of a scene between Hewitt and the admiral during maneuvers. Hewitt wrote that this officer had said:

> You were arguing with him on the bridge over what signal to make for some maneuvers, and Admiral de Steiguer said, "Damn it, Hewitt, you are wrong." And you came right back at him with "Damn it, Admiral, I am *right*!" The young officer might have added, as I well remembered, that the Admiral finished off with "All right! Go ahead and make a damned fool of yourself."

In spite of such encounters, when Admiral de Steiguer was promoted to four stars and given command of the Pacific Fleet, he took Hewitt with him to the flagship *California* as Fleet Gunnery Officer.

In June 1928, Hewitt was ordered to the Naval War College, another key experience in his career. Of this opportunity he wrote:

> I enjoyed my year greatly, a year with no command responsibilities, during which I had ample opportunity for study and reflection, for learning the art of estimating situations, making decisions, and writing orders to put them into effect; and I practiced what I had learned by the solution of tactical and strategical problems and playing them out on the game board. The student commander of a major force, or one of its subdivisions, was faced with making the same sort of decisions as might fall to his lot in actual war.

> When it came time for graduation, I was just beginning to scratch the surface of things I wanted to know. So I was delighted by being asked to remain at the College as a member of the staff.

Hewitt found the year on the Naval War College staff one of his most valuable experiences, giving him a good foundation for the problems of major command. Twice while a member of the staff, he visited the Marine Corps schools at Quantico, once to lecture on naval gunfire in support of a landing and the other time to discuss a strategic problem on the seizures of overseas bases.

In the spring of 1931, the Bureau of Naval Personnel did just what Hewitt wished it to do: it turned down his request to be executive officer of a battleship because of a lack of vacancies and gave him command of Destroyer Division 12, the type of duty he most wanted. He loved ship handling and soon trained his division into a precision team. In the spring of 1932, during joint Army-Navy exercises, Hewitt's division was assigned as plane guards for Carrier Division 1, the *Saratoga* and *Lexington*. Concerning an exercise designed to test the Hawaiian defense plans, Hewitt wrote:

> From a position well to the northward of Oahu at nightfall, this force made a fast run-in during the night, executed a predawn Sunday morning launch of planes in rough weather, and recovered them successfully after a simulated surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, Army air fields and defense installations. Little did we realize that we were rehearsing what was actually to happen less than ten years later with such disastrous results.

On 30 June 1932, Hewitt was commissioned captain, and was at once ordered to the Staff of the Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet, as Operations Officer. Once again the assignment proved a valuable aid to his future career. He had everything to do with the operations of the fleet: preparation of the plans, fleet schedules, actual tactical handling of the fleet at sea, and working out war plans. One year later, after Admiral McNamee's relief, Hewitt was ordered for his third tour of duty at the Naval Academy as Head of the Department of Mathematics. Of this tour of duty, which resulted in some extremely helpful changes in the teaching of math at the Academy, he wrote: "I was delighted, for under Admiral Hart and later under Admiral David W. Seller, I was able to spend almost three years in work which, next to handling ships, was to me the most interesting and enjoyable." Typically, he issued orders that sections not be brought to attention when he entered a section room, so that he could slip in quietly and take a seat in the rear of the room and watch what was going on. He wrote:

> I was able to see the midshipmen struggling with something at the board, and I was able to go up and question him a little bit, talk to him, and try to get him to think the thing out. The tendency of the midshipmen to solve mathematical problems just by memorizing always annoyed me, when I was an officer instructor, and also when I was head of the department.

The genuine concern of the natural teacher is clearly evident in his comments, but as one who strove almost in vain at those section room blackboards, the writer can well imagine the sensation of the struggling midshipman when those four big gold stripes loomed over his shoulder and the Head of Department tried to get him to "think things out."

In February 1936, Hewitt was detached from the Naval Academy and given command of the *Indianapolis*. On

18 November, President Franklin D. Roosevelt came aboard at Charleston, S.C. The *Indianapolis* had been selected to carry him to the Pan American Conference to be opened in Buenos Aires on 1 December. President Roosevelt had just been reelected for his second term. Obviously, this assignment was a wonderful opportunity for a rising naval officer. It also was a difficult and potentially dangerous one. Everything had to go well, a rigid schedule carefully adhered to, military and diplomatic protocol perfectly carried out. Any unfortunate incident occurring on the cruise would be greatly magnified in its effect on Hewitt's career. The Navy, the country, and perhaps the President, would never forgive him if he ran the ship aground, suffered a collision, or even had a mechanical breakdown.

Even the ceremony of welcoming the President aboard had to be just right. Hewitt wrote:

> As the President worked his way up the special narrow brow with a high rail on which he could support himself, there was no sound except the trill of the boatswain's pipe, gradually rising in note as he came up. Instead of sounding off when he came over the side, in accordance with the usual procedure, I waited, as I had been advised to do, until he reached the top, giving time for his son James to take his arm as he removed his silk hat. Then the marine guard presented arms and the band broke into the four ruffles and flourishes, followed by "The Star Spangled Banner." That finished; I stepped forward to greet him. Since we were alongside the dock in the city we fired no salute, but the *Chester*, in the stream, did so as we broke the President's flag at the main. As I shook his hand, I said, "Mr. President, the *Indianapolis* is most happy and honored to have you on board." He grasped my hand, looked at me with a smile, and said, "Well, Skipper, I am mighty glad to be here." That immediately put me at my ease. Throughout the ensuing cruise he never called me anything but "Skipper." It was indeed something to have the head of the nation on board one's ship, and to feel the responsibility for his safety.

The *Indianapolis* was to get underway at 1300. Just as the lines were let go and she began to move ahead, two bells were struck. Later the President commented to Hewitt, "Skipper, I noticed that you were right on the bell." He knew nautical terminology, and liked to be treated as a flag officer would. Throughout the cruise, he had charts with courses plotted, parallel rulers and dividers in his Admiral's Cabin, and he was always furnished with the 8 a.m., noon, and 8 p.m. positions, which he plotted.

Every arrival and departure on this entire, complex cruise was made "right on the bell." The immensely careful and experienced planning that such a record entailed can perhaps only be appreciated by commanders of naval vessels. Foresight, careful planning, rigid discipline, and the application of "velvet" made it possible. Velvet was one of Admiral Hewitt's favorite words: a little extra speed for extra time for emergencies, a little extra margin of safety in case luck turns bad. Luck also was necessary for this kind of extended punctuality, and Admiral Hewitt was always a lucky man. Everything went well on the cruise, including stops at Trinidad, Rio, Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Trinidad again, and Aves Island, where the President went fishing with excellent good fortune. On 15 December, the President debarked at Charleston, giving the *Indianapolis* special permission to return to her home port of San Pedro at a speed sufficiently high to

get her there by Christmas. Hewitt wrote:

> We dropped anchor in the harbor of San Pedro before eight in the morning of December 24th. As the anchor went down, up went our Christmas trees to the mastheads, following the motions of the others already in port. So ended a memorable cruise, in which two ships had covered about 18,000 miles in 36 days, an average of 500 miles per day, including stops. We had had just two nights in port during that time.

Later the President wrote Hewitt and his ship:

> Now that my recent visit to South America in the *Indianapolis* is at an end, I retain nothing but the utmost esteem for the fine performance of that vessel so ably commanded by yourself. During the cruise, the ship met every detail of the itinerary with precision and to my complete satisfaction. Furthermore it was evident that every officer and man in the ship was determined to leave nothing undone that could add to the pleasure and comfort of myself and those who accompanied me. . . . In sending this letter through the Secretary of the Navy, I am requesting that it be made a part of the official records of yourself, your executive officer, your heads of department, and of your communications officer. You have a smart ship . . . Well done!

After the Christmas-New Year holiday period, the *Indianapolis* put to sea as flagship of the Commander, Scouting Force. As always, Hewitt thoroughly enjoyed the period at sea in the joint exercises, most especially as captain of so fine a cruiser. He was saddened by the fact that his tour of duty in this capacity was already nearing its close, for at that time the command of major vessels was limited to 18 months. He would have been relieved in mid-September, but Vice Adm. J.K. Taussig, the prospective Commander Cruisers, Scouting Force, requested his services as Chief of Staff when he assumed his new command in June. This would curtail Hewitt's *Indianapolis* cruise by 3 months, but since the new duty would be interesting and valuable, as well as give him another year of sea duty, Hewitt accepted gladly. But his gladness was tempered with genuine regret. He wrote:

> It was with real feeling that I put my ship alongside the tanker in San Pedro Harbor for the last time, and handed my binoculars over to the Chief Quartermaster. Not only was I leaving a wonderful ship and ship's company, but I realized I would never be handling a ship again. Before another tour of sea duty, I should be either a passed over captain slated for retirement or a flag officer.
>
> The sadness I felt in turning my ship over to another, even a good friend and fine officer, as was Captain Thomas P. Kincaid, was nothing like my grief eight years later when I learned of her sinking by Japanese submarine torpedoes with the loss of many of her officers and crew. I felt then exactly as if I had lost a dear relative or close friend. One of my treasures is a water color of the ship by the marine artist Arthur Beaumont, given to me by my ship's company on the occasion of my detachment.

The tour of duty with Admiral Taussig, one of the most popular and respected flag officers of the fleet, was successful and pleasant in every respect. When the admiral was handling his total command, Cruisers, Scouting Force, he turned over the handling of his own division of cruisers to Hewitt, giving him

full tactical control; Hewitt particularly enjoyed this, since he hoped that someday he might have a similar division of his own.

In the spring of 1938, fleet maneuvers were held in the Hawaiian area. The task force commanded by Admiral Taussig won a rousing victory by taking prompt and decisive action at the very beginning of a problem, an action which later analysis showed was the only practical way of accomplishing the assigned mission. Hewitt wrote:

> The details had been worked out by me, with the assistance of the Operations Officer, Dan Callahan. But it was Admiral Taussig of course who approved the solution and gave the order to carry it out. However, as I learned some years later, when Admiral King congratulated Admiral Taussig on the result, the latter took no credit for himself, but assigned it to me. It was like him. I have thought since that this may have had some bearing on the confidence Admiral King as CinCUS, . . . later showed to me, with effects on my subsequent career. It was one of the many debts I owe to my old Chief, who had made such a wonderful reputation in World War One, and who would have liked so much to have been young enough to serve afloat in World War Two.

On the occasion of Hewitt's 51st birthday, 11 February 1938, his subordinates on the staff presented him with a poem concerning his services with that organization. It reads:

"Oh, the Chief of Staff,
  he ain't really half,
As tough as he claims to be,
Though he cracks the whip,
  and our poor darned ship,
Has to hustle and get to sea.

"For all of us know,
He and Uncle Joe,
So long as you play the game,
Be you right, be you wrong,
  will help you along,
And are freer with praise than blame.

"Let us therefore quaff,
  to the Chief of Staff
A toast of affection and praise.
May each following year bring
  good luck and good cheer,
And success, to the end of his days."

R.C. Parker*

Hewitt was detached in July and ordered as Inspector of Ordnance in Charge of the Naval Ammunition Depot, Puget Sound. It was an idyllic and pleasant tour of duty with his family in one of the most beautiful settings in the country before the immense stresses and strains of the years to come.

Hewitt found many things wrong at the depot, not in its operating personnel, but in the material state of the command. Materiel was sharply lacking, especially in the locomotive stock, consisting of one battery driven engine that could work only 12 hours followed by 12 hours of recharging. Yet that locomotive was the major motive power for half of the ammunition of the Pacific Fleet. The depot was also very vulnerable to sabotage and enemy attack. Hewitt set off smoke pots in various places in the depot at any time of the day or night, for fire drills, once he set fire to an abandoned shack. The response was "gratifying." He staged saboteur raids, demonstrating the defenseless nature of his command. He visited Fort Lewis, met a Lt. Col. Mark Clark—whom he would meet later under much different circumstances—and found that defense plans for the entire northwest area were virtually nonexistent. He witnessed the Third Division in its training exercises. He would

*Mimeographed document, Hewitt's personal papers.

land that division four times in the Mediterranean operations.

Hewitt's oldest daughter, Floride, was married that summer in the beautiful garden of his quarters. The gardens were cared for by a professional gardener, and the lawns stretched down to the water of Puget Sound. The day, 30 July 1938, was a beautiful one. As Admiral Hewitt said so many times, he was always a lucky man.

In December 1939, Hewitt was selected for promotion to rear admiral. Two other officers similarly chosen were then in Bremerton, in command of battleships. Hewitt invited them to the depot for a celebration, a mild wetting down the stripe, or stars. One was Capt. I.C. Kidd, who would die in the *Arizona* at Pearl Harbor in 2 more years; the other was Raymond Spruance, Hewitt's close friend, who would win fame in the Pacific War.

Hewitt had expected to wait until 1941 before actually being promoted, since no vacancy would occur before that time. However, in June 1940, shortly after having loaded several million rounds of rifle and machine gun ammunition on an emergency basis, after Dunkirk, he received orders to report to the Canal Zone on about 1 August to relieve the admiral commanding the Special Services Squadron, and, upon assuming command, to hoist his flag as a temporary rear admiral.

Hewitt had 30 days leave, plus travel time to Panama; he and Floride visited her family in San Francisco and his in Hackensack, a final period of relaxation and a renewal of family ties before the exhausting years of World War Two. Then in New York they boarded a United Fruit Company liner bound for Panama. As captain of the *Eagle* in Cuba, Hewitt had made friends with several of the resident employees of the company. They had advanced in their company as Hewitt had in the Navy, and he found that his first-class stateroom, which was all the Government would pay for, had been changed to an upper deck suite, with "parlor, bedroom, and bath." He wrote, "So we had a pleasant and luxurious voyage to Cristobal, the first sea trip I ever had with my wife, and the first one in which I did not have in some manner to work my way."

The 3rd of August 1940 was a very great day for H. Kent Hewitt. He went aboard the *Erie*, read his orders to the ship's company, saluted Rear Admiral Wilcox, and said, "I relieve you, sir." Admiral Wilcox's flag came slowly down; as it did so, Kent's flag rose to the masthead, fluttering in the warm wind, while the first gun of the 13-gun salute echoed its way around the bay. Still young at 53, tough, resilient, ready, Hewitt was at the height of his powers, a flag officer with the greatest naval war in history just ahead. Not for long would he have the almost-yachting command of the Special Service Squadron with its diplomatic duty. It would vanish with the impending war.

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY

Professor John H. Clagett graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy and in World War II served in the U.S.S. *Lexington* and various motor torpedo boat squadrons; as a result of enemy action at Guadalcanal, he was physically retired in 1946. He subsequently served as a Foreign Service officer with the U.S. Embassy in Oslo, Norway (1946-49) and in 1950 entered Yale Graduate School where he received his doctorate in 1955. Professor Clagett is the author of numerous books—many on naval matters—and a number of articles and short stories and is currently serving as professor of English at Middlebury College, Vermont.