

1974

## Admiral Richard G. Colbert and Rear Admiral Richard W. Bates: Contributors to the Naval War College

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### Recommended Citation

Eccles, H.E. (1974) "Admiral Richard G. Colbert and Rear Admiral Richard W. Bates: Contributors to the Naval War College," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 27 : No. 3 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol27/iss3/2>

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Admiral Richard G. Colbert  
and  
Rear Admiral Richard W. Bates

Contributors to the Naval War College

This issue of the Review is dedicated to Adm. Richard G. Colbert and Rear Adm. Richard W. Bates. It and the immediate following pages are a posthumous tribute to these officers who through hard work and integrity were able to raise the quality of professional education at the Naval War College. We and future generations of naval officers are deeply indebted to them.



**Admiral Richard G. Colbert**  
U.S. Navy  
1915-1973

"Traditionally and historically, the Naval War College has been the fountainhead of new concepts, doctrines, and ideas within our Navy. In the face of the challenge that confronts us, I would hope that 'on my watch' we will be able to generate new and meaningful thinking . . ." With these words Admiral Richard G. Colbert, in July 1968, assumed the mantle of leadership as President of the Naval War College. More than a simple generalization accompanying a change of the watch, this initial statement formally recognized that the requirements for professional military education had undergone radical change in the years since World War II.

Colbert's perceptive nature, conditioned by years of professional experience, grasped the fact that the military officer was so conditioned to meet the day-to-day demands of putting out fires and meeting deadlines that he had gotten out of the habit of sound research and orderly reflective thought. Thus, it was the stimulation of these very qualities toward which he directed the Naval War College curriculum, stating that "if the kind of research and creative thinking necessary to sound military knowledge is not done at the

War College, there is danger that it will not be done at all."

In implementing these goals as President, Admiral Colbert built upon the foundations of having successfully met a prior challenge at the college. In 1956 he organized and served as the first director of the college's allied officer school—the Naval Command College. Not only have the graduates of the Naval Command College gained recognition on their own merits, but the U.S. Navy and the War College have benefited immeasurably through the establishment of personal and professional ties in the worldwide fraternity of naval leaders.

The Naval Command College was, however, but an obvious manifestation of the particular spirit Admiral Colbert brought to diplomacy. For him, the field of international relations took on a personal meaning. Long aware of the impact that the presence of U.S. naval forces had in affecting national policy, he tempered his grasp of military and political problems with an ability to deal with people. Foreign policy was not simply abstract statements and documents; it was alive in the individuals with which it dealt.

The fruits of this realization took a

more positive form in the fall of 1969 when, under his organization and guidance, the first Naval War College Seapower Symposium took place at Newport. Top naval leaders of 37 friendly countries attended this event, and in his opening remarks Admiral Colbert articulated his faith in the ability of naval officers to contribute to a unique, broad-based understanding of common problems based on their common experience. Success of this occasion has been borne out by the fact that the seapower symposium has become a biennial event and regional symposia have been scheduled by participating navies in off years. This bears out his closing observation of the initial event, highlighting his philosophy on the potential of personal and internavy diplomacy:

Over the years each of us has had the opportunity to observe developments on the world maritime scene. [Our] . . . points of view—the basic beliefs which have arisen from them—and the pure professional naval competence which each of us can bring into the consideration of these matters—all could provide threads of a cloth which might be woven into a durable and serviceable fabric.

Not one to rely on words alone, Colbert continued to weave this “serviceable fabric” at the Naval War College. Discussions with Admiral Zumwalt in July of 1970 led to his founding of the 5-month Naval Staff Course. The college was now able to provide a comprehensive professional education for both junior and senior officers from friendly countries.

At the same time, plans were being developed for new construction at the college, and again Admiral Colbert’s personal diplomacy came into play.

Plans are one thing, but funding is another matter, and through his dedication and personal appeal, Spruance and Conolly Halls were completed on schedule.

In meeting his objective to improve and expand professional education at the Naval War College, he sought to maintain a critical perspective of the entire program. He was particularly sensitive to the imbalance in the curriculum between the “science of naval warfare” on the one hand and “related subjects” on the other. He believed that the related subjects received too much attention in detriment to the military dimensions of the curriculum and, therefore, took steps to strengthen the military educational element. One such step was to inaugurate military chairs. Military chairholders, like their academic chairholding counterparts, assist students with research and writing in their respective subject areas, conduct lectures and seminars, and assist in the development of curriculums.

Another area he sought to strengthen was student research and writing. The best of the papers were briefed in the highest levels of the Navy and Department of Defense. He also sought to keep the student abreast of changing social attitudes in the United States and initiated attitude-affairs seminars with students from nearby universities.

By any standard, Admiral Colbert must be judged as a man of extraordinary vision. He was a master not only of the strictly military facets of his profession but of the complex political, economic, and psychological factors as well. A prophetic diplomat, he could foresee the long-term benefits to be reaped from cooperation among the men of the free world navies. His abilities will be much missed by our Navy and particularly by the Naval War College.



Rear Admiral Richard W. Bates  
U.S. Navy  
1892-1973

Rear Adm. Richard W. Bates had a unique character and personality; he was completely poised and confident to the point of appearing pompous to those who did not understand his complete integrity and great professional competence. He relished battle, was a splendid commanding officer in wartime, and was at his best when facing the enemy in combat.

I first came to know Rafe Bates in the summer of 1922 in the new battleship *Maryland*. Rafe was the electrical officer at the time, serving under an arrogant and incompetent chief engineer. We in the junior officers' mess used to joke at his pretentious self assurance but, more importantly, we also learned to respect him both as a man and an officer.

By mid-1943 Rafe was on the staff at the Naval War College; I was a student, and there I discovered his complete understanding and total dedication to the principles of exercise of military command. He specialized in tactical analysis and in developing the complex and important process of military decision. These, he insisted, were essential elements in the exercise of command.

I went to Pearl Harbor in late 1943 and found that Bates was making special

tactical analyses for Admiral Nimitz and later successfully commanded the heavy cruiser *Minneapolis*. When I saw him on his infrequent returns to port, I contrasted his delight in the demanding nature of war with the worried concern of officers less suited to its challenge. He simply loved the more challenging aspects of his profession.

From the *Minneapolis* Bates went to serve as Chief of Staff to Vice Admiral Oldendorf, and as such played a major role in the planning and operations of Oldendorf's battleships. In the recapture of Luzon at Lingayen, Oldendorf's ships received the first serious kamikaze attacks. When a heavily damaged cruiser requested to withdraw from the bombardment line to repair damage, Rafe convinced Oldendorf that the withdrawal would only give the enemy an obvious indication that their tactics were successful.

All during this time Bates had the confidence of both Admiral Spruance and Admiral Nimitz, giving them absolutely honest, competent, and unbending professional constructive criticism. It was not in the personal makeup of Rafe Bates to curry favor with any man, senior or junior.

Rafe was supremely confident of his

ability to perform in a superior manner and, although nominated several times, was bitterly disappointed that he was not promoted to rear admiral and given a major command. At the end of the war he served as Commander of the Pacific Torpedo Boats with the rank of commodore.

After the war he returned to the Naval War College and there, from 1946 to 1958, made the most thorough tactical analyses of World War II ever attempted. Specifically, he and his WW II Battle Evaluation Group critically and comprehensively analyzed the Battles of Coral Sea, Midway, and Savo Island, and completed about half of the analysis of the Leyte Campaign. Throughout the analyses, inculcating in his officer and enlisted subordinates the spirit of objective inquiry, he personally researched and doublechecked the bulk of the written records, either by personal interview or by correspondence, and obtained the criticism of the officers whose performance he was analyzing.

Unfortunately, despite the value of the work, problems developed. The Bureau of Naval Personnel seldom lived up to its commitment for selection and length of tour of duty for his officer and enlisted people. It took 3 to 6 months to break in even the best qualified men for work with the competence that Bates demanded. Furthermore, throughout the project Bates had difficulty in convincing the Navy that the work was important enough to continue funding. Always there were those senior officers who opposed his work and sought to stop it. The reason for this opposition is to me obscure, but much of it can be attributed to the partisan interests of the flying, surface, and subsurface navies. My own observation of the project was that Bates was meticulous and totally honest in his approach. Throughout this effort he emphasized the principle of objectivity and cited time and again the instances where the selection of the wrong objec-

tive and the failure to understand and maintain a course of action resulted in a grave mistake.

In 1959 the project was discontinued, but for years he kept trying to reestablish it. The four studies—three complete and one half done—represent the *finest* military analysis ever accomplished by the U.S. Navy.

In respect to Rafe's attempts to reestablish the project, I believe that his total commitment to completing the battle analyses worked against him. I repeatedly advised him to instead re-study his completed work and extract therefrom the most important professional lessons. This he would never do, and finally the time came when he recognized that it was futile to pursue the project.

Nevertheless, in all this time he kept his interest in the Navy, and particularly in the Naval War College. His lectures on major decisions were outstanding, and he loved to reminisce over the battles and leading naval personalities in the WW II Pacific Campaign.

He loved social life. A lifelong bachelor, he lived in a modest apartment. He had a fine knowledge of food and wine. He loved to entertain and frequently enlivened a formal dinner by presenting the hostess with three or four stanzas of sentimental verse.

At a time in life when most men think only of rest and retirement, Rafe turned his indomitable spirit to the establishment of the Naval War College Foundation. The valuable work he performed there, first as Founder Vice-President and later as President, is representative of his dedication and ability.

Rafe Bates had the build and tenacity of a bulldog, high professional competence, a generous nature, and, above all, incorruptible personal and professional integrity. He was truly a professional.

H.E. Eccles  
Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy (Ret.)