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Impact Of Senior Service College Education On Naval Officer Promotion

A lecture delivered at the Naval War College
on 29 April 1969

by

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In the spring of 1968 some 160 naval officers received orders to attend one of the senior service colleges. Commanders were in the majority, but many selectees were already captains. Most were probably surprised, although pleased, with the orders. Surprised because the "war college list" is one of those closely held documents at the Bureau of Naval Personnel, and pleased because natural reaction is that such orders are indicative of high standing among contemporaries.

Individual letters of congratulations and welcome soon arrived from the presidents and commandants of the several colleges. The letters probably cited the great potential of the officers selected and related the mission of the colleges to prepare them for the very

highest positions of military leadership, responsibility, and command. Many officers tried to analyze and rationalize their assignments to particular colleges, and those few that checked with their detailers learned that all the colleges are considered coequal and that assignments were largely random.

Words of congratulations from juniors and contemporaries were welcomed, and the counsel of seniors likely encompassed a broad spectrum of diverse positions on the essentiality of senior service college education, the relative merits of certain colleges, and the impact on future assignments and promotion. Those more inquisitive officers that reviewed official directives found no comprehensive statement of Navy policy on the importance or

operation of the professional post-graduate education programs and the impact which such programs have on individual careers. Recollection of some short articles in the military periodical literature revealed that some increased promotional opportunity is enjoyed by senior service college graduates.

Determined to get the most out of the 1-year sabbatical and to well represent the Navy at the assigned college, most individuals approached fall orientation with the greatest of expectations and no small measure of personal satisfaction. Welcoming remarks by the college presidents or commandants appropriately raised expectations and curricular enthusiasm. Students earned that one out of three, or perhaps one out of four, of them would achieve flag or general rank.

Within a matter of days, these senior naval officer students saw some of their contemporaries in the other services sporting accelerated promotions to colonel. Then the bubble burst! The Navy line captain selection list was promulgated and revealed the astonishing fact that many of their classmates at the senior service colleges were "passed over" for promotion.

If the mystery associated with the paradoxical incident which caps this scenario provided the basic stimulus for this effort, the disclosures of initial research amply provided a continuing motivation. The task is to examine the various nuances of the impact of senior service college education on naval officer promotion, and the goal is to delineate conclusions and advance constructive recommendations which may contribute to development and promulgation of a comprehensive statement of Navy policy on the professional education of senior officers. Such a task necessarily encompasses a brief examination of the war college institutions themselves, a delineation of authoritative consensus on the qualifications of naval leaders, a determination of the

contribution of the war colleges to development of those qualifications, an understanding of the Navy program to utilize the available war college facilities and the products of those facilities, and, finally, an analysis of the abrasive interface between the senior service college and promotional selection systems. With no intent whatever to suggest that the Navy should emulate the program of any other service, comparative data will be presented where they contribute to fuller understanding.

There are five war colleges within the Defense structure. The National War College and the Industrial College of the Armed Forces, both located at Fort Lesley J. McNair in Washington, are under the supervisory control of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Naval War College at Newport, R.I.; the Army War College at Carlisle, Pa.; and the Air War College at Maxwell, Ala., are responsive to the direction of their respective Military Departments. The Marine Corps has no senior service college but utilizes the facilities of all the colleges. Senior naval officers attend all five of these war colleges, and an additional few are assigned as students at the Imperial Defence College, the Joint Services Staff College, the Canadian National Defence College, the Inter-American Defense College, the NATO Defense College, and the Foreign Service Institute.

The mission statements, objectives, educational philosophies, and curricula of the five war colleges are quite similar, notwithstanding some minimal variations in academic concentration. Each college stresses understanding of the broad factors of power potential and emphasizes the preparation of highly selected senior officers for high command, staff, and policy making positions. While the Industrial College of the Armed Forces concentrates on the economic, industrial, and managerial aspects of national security, it can no longer be considered a college for logisticians. All of the war colleges reflect

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the highest standards of graduate-level, professional military education.

Prior to any determination of the contributions which the war colleges make to the development of the essential qualifications of top naval leaders, it is germane to explore those qualifications. Concerned as he was with the matter of flag selection criteria, then President John F. Kennedy addressed a personal letter to Secretary of the Navy designate Paul Nitz, on 7 November 1963, in which he stated:

I believe that military and political factors are so interwoven that they cannot be separated into clear, well-defined categories, and that both must be mastered as a prerequisite to sound military and naval concepts. High ranking officers who hold positions of responsibility in the military departments must be thoroughly aware of the delicate sensitivities involved throughout the broad spectrum of international policy. The education, duty patterns, and promotion processes of the officer corps must be designed to achieve this result.

Again, President Kennedy, this time referring to the Cuban missile crisis, commented:

We needed in October—and we had them—and we shall need in the future—and we shall have them—military commanders who are conscious of the enormous stakes in the nuclear age of every decision that they take, who are aware of the fact that there are no purely political decisions, or purely military decisions: that every problem is a mixture of both—men who know the difference between vital interests and peripheral interests . . .

Examining the recommendations made to flag and captain selection boards by the several Secretaries of the Navy since 1954, one finds frequent reference to future potential, qualifications to command at sea, broad appreciation of the politico-military aspects of national security policy formulation, effectiveness in the joint or combined staff environment, early selection, and technical knowledge. In his guidance to the Fiscal Year 1969 Flag Selection Board, Secretary of the Navy Paul Ignatius, acknowledging the importance of proficiency at sea and technical expertise, called for “the accelerated promotion of junior captains,” addressed the importance of assignments “outside the Navy proper,” and related the need for flag officers of “broad national perspective.”

The importance of war college education in the development of the essential qualifications of future naval leaders was well expressed by a past President of the Naval War College, Vice Adm. John T. Hayward. In a 1966 report to the Chief of Naval Personnel, he stated:

As the unrestricted line officer progresses in his career, the nature of his assignments and his responsibilities gradually turns his interests outward—away from concentration upon the details of his specialty and subspecialty toward greater involvement in the direction and management of integrated naval and other military forces. Proficiency in these complex, varied and demanding, more generalized responsibilities calls for a breadth of knowledge well beyond that which can be obtained by experience alone.

War college professional education helps to prepare officers for the complete spectrum of higher responsibilities implicit in the term ‘unrestricted line officer.’ It

benefits the widest range of subsequent assignments and is not directed toward preparation for any restricted number of specific billets.

If the war colleges' mission is to improve an officer's competence for higher responsibility, and if the highest positions of responsibility are held by flag officers, it follows that flag officers should have received a war college education prior to attainment of the rank and responsibilities.

In 1966 the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Manpower) conducted a searching study of officer education. One dimension of the study involved an extensive survey of flag officers and captains. Most respondents recommended that increased numbers of officers be educated at the senior service colleges, and the vast majority observed that graduates performed "considerably better" than non-graduates. Interestingly enough, the more senior the officer questioned, the more importance he placed on senior service college education.

Authoritative opinion from outside the Defense organization indicates that the service college system is a sound one and is meeting its objectives. John W. Masland and Laurence I. Radway conducted an intensive analysis of war college academic contributions. In their book *Soldiers and Scholars*, they observed: "We are very much impressed by the accomplishments of the colleges. They make a direct contribution to the security and welfare of the United States, their resources are of high order and their accomplishments are substantial."

Having established a direct relationship between senior service college education and the essential qualifications of top naval leaders, attention now can be turned to an examination of the

Navy program for utilization of the available war college facilities and the products of those facilities. Such examination necessarily encompasses a review of the senior service college selection system, subsequent school assignment criteria and procedures, and a tentative analysis of the overall Navy program for professional postgraduate education. However, the task is complicated by the apparent absence of any comprehensive statement of Navy policy on the importance or operation of the program and the sharing of responsibility for program conception and implementation between the Bureau of Naval Personnel (BUPERS), the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations (OPNAV), and the Naval War College.

Each May a formal service college selection board is convened at the Bureau of Naval Personnel. The board is headed by a rear admiral, usually from the Washington area, and is organized with unrestricted line, restricted line, and staff panels. The unrestricted line panel may consist of six captains, one each from the Naval War College, the Industrial College of the Armed Forces, the National War College, OPNAV, and two from BUPERS.

The sole selection criterion is "performance," and only fitness report jackets are submitted to the board. Each year group is screened just prior to the 16th and 21st years of commissioned service for attendance at the senior service colleges during the 16-20 or 21-25 year periods. Year group quotas are based on projected captain strength at the 21st year point and equality of year group opportunity to attend. Selection opportunity has been running about 23 percent, or about 44 percent of year group projected captain strength by the end of the period of eligibility. Principal selectees are not arranged in any order of merit; and alternates, in a number up to 50 percent of the year group but not more than two per

principal selectee, are identified. This is admittedly an oversimplification.

Quite natural questions concern the reasons for two screenings and the matter of changes in performance subsequent to selection. The "second look" is to insure that officers showing improving performance and those unavailable for early assignment are given additional consideration. In addition, the rank detailer can "board" officers of declining performance for "selection out" and "late bloomers" for reconsideration at any time. "Deep selectees" are automatically "boarded" as are "late picknps." Officers "passed over" for commander are not considered.

Selected officers are "hanked" or placed on the "war college list." Individuals cannot determine if they are on the list until they receive orders, and even then cannot know if they were principals or alternates. This secrecy is ostensibly intended to reduce the demotivating impact on officers that are not selected; but it acts, quite obviously, to enhance "detailing flexibility." The entire system is designed to insure equality of opportunity and to minimize the impact of availability on selection. With the possible exception of the powers granted the detailers to "board" individuals in special cases, the selection system appears to be entirely equitable and quite well conceived.

The matter of assignment of an officer from the "war college list" to a particular college is by no means as clear cut. The first problem is one of availability. Top performers are always in demand, and detailers are frequently faced with a choice between the immediate needs of the Navy and the needs of the individual. This is difficult to rationalize in light of the fact that the greater and longer range needs of the Navy are identical with the needs of the individual selectees. In any case, there is some evidence to indicate that it is possible for a principal selectee never to receive orders to a senior service

college.

With little more than the guidance that all senior service colleges are to be considered coequal and with a "war college list" reflecting no order of merit, the detailers are tasked to assign some 160 officers to the five principal colleges. The quota plan delineates the billets for unrestricted line, restricted line and staff officers at the various colleges. For example, in a particular year one restricted line or staff officer may be ordered to the National War College, 11 to the Industrial College, and 14 to the Naval War College. The remainder would be unrestricted line officers. Only the Industrial College has attempted to influence assignment criteria by requesting officers that have not earned a master's degree in business administration during the preceding 5 years. This is to provide compatibility with an established cooperative degree program.

Any analysis of the matter of assignment leads to the compelling conclusion that the detailers are all-powerful and that the relative impact of their decisions on an individual's career may even challenge those of the senior service college selection boards. They determine availability, decide which college one is to attend, decide when he is to attend, and may even decide if he is to attend any college. Granting the absolute impartiality of the detailers and acknowledging their professional wisdom, there is apparent latitude, within this career-making smörgasbord, for the exercise of subconscious bias concerning the relative merits of individuals and service colleges.

The number of Navy students assigned to the various war colleges is delineated in table 1. The demands of the war in Vietnam have acted to reduce attendance; however, a reversal of this trend occurred in Fiscal Year 1969. Historically, about 50 percent of naval officer participants have attended other than the parent senior service college.

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TABLE 1—SENIOR SERVICE COLLEGE INPUT OF NAVY STUDENTS, FISCAL YEARS 1965 to 1969, INCLUSIVE

College	FY-65	FY-66	FY-67	FY-68	FY-69
NWC (National)	26	26	27	27	26
ICAF (Industrial)	40	36	39	39	37
NAWC (Naval)	100	85	86	39	72
AWC (Army)	10	10	8	7	8
AIRWC (Air Force)	10	10	10	10	10
Other	8	4	10	8	10
Total	194	171	180	130	163

A Program Change Request is currently being developed by the Navy that would increase the number of naval officers attending the Naval War College to 160 by Fiscal Year 1980. Acknowledging the ultimate goal that all unrestricted line officers attend both a junior and a senior service college, the present trend is toward the compromise position that all unrestricted line captains should have attended either a senior or a junior course. Justification for future expansion is complicated by Navy reluctance to identify specific billets as requiring a senior service college graduate and thus developing numerical requirements for officers so educated. It is felt that placement officers do identify some billets for their own purposes but that such practice is essentially a quality control device. There appears to be no stated policy with respect to the future assignment of war college graduates.

Attention now can be turned to examination of the impact of senior service college education on promotion. The relationship between such education and promotional opportunity provides an acid test of the coherence of the Navy professional postgraduate education program and promotional policies. In an attempt to minimize resort to empirical estimates and statements of opinion, a statistical approach will be taken. After some general

observations on promotional opportunity, the flag and captain communities will be explored in more detail.

The current philosophy on promotion is to provide a viable career structure and pattern that will optimize incentive and equalize individual opportunity for succeeding year groups. Flag selection opportunity is planned to continue at about 13 percent through year group 1945, with the probability of an increase to 15 percent thereafter. Flag selection zones are set at 29 years of commissioned service, with most selections made from below the zone. Eligibility has been based on 3 years in the rank of captain; however, all time-in-grade restrictions may soon be suspended by executive order. The opportunity for selection to captain will likely be maintained at 60 percent, with selection zones including officers completing 20 or 21 years service.

Selection opportunities in the other services are quite similar, but, except for the Marine Corps, there is a far greater tendency to accelerate the promotion of a large number of more outstanding officers. While the junior flag selectee is from year group 1944, the Army and Air Force are selecting some generals from year groups 1948 and 1947 respectively. Most Navy captain selectees from year group 1948 are still waiting to "make their number." Navy flag selectees are 2 to 5 years older than general

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officer selectees. Many officers may still remember Secretary of Defense McNamara's criticism of the Navy for "failure to promote on merit and continued emphasis on service-in-grade as a basis for promotion."

The unrestricted line flag community was examined by using the 1968 Register and including all subsequent selectees. Some 88.5 percent of the 278 officers are Academy graduates, a figure far exceeding that of any other service. Service dates range from 1927 to 1944, with the median 1937. The oldest officer is 61, the youngest 43, and the median age is 53. There is no apparent pattern with respect to decorations, and 20 have none at all. Only 14 have multiple qualification designators, 17 have special technical qualifications, 31 percent hold advanced degrees, and ordnance engineering and international relations are the two areas accounting for the bulk of graduate study. The senior service college education of the 278 flag officers and flag selectees is reflected in table 2. Surprising as it may seem, 18 percent of the officers have no senior service college education. About 8 percent have attended only junior service college. A far greater percentage of general officers are senior service college graduates, and practically all Army generals are graduates of both junior and senior service colleges.

TABLE 2—PROFESSIONAL POST-GRADUATE EDUCATION OF UNRESTRICTED LINE FLAG OFFICERS AND SELECTEES

College	Number	Percentage
NWC	90	32.4
ICAF	27	9.7
NAWC	105	37.7
AWC	1	.4
AIRWC	1	.4
Other	4	1.4
None	50	18.0
Total	278	100.0

Table 3 depicts the flag and general officer selection opportunity of senior service college graduates. College classes 1951 through 1960 were selected for analysis, as most graduates of these classes have reached the stage of "practical consideration" for star rank. While the number of graduates for each service is almost exactly proportional to the number of star hillets authorized under Senate limitations, the Navy graduates had the lowest opportunity for selection. The preferential position of graduates of the National War College is apparent. No service regarded the graduates of its own war college as badly as did the Navy. Navy graduates of the Army War College had the lowest opportunity, 5 percent; however, one in three of its Marine Corps graduates made general.

The Fiscal Year 1969 unrestricted line flag selection list was examined in an effort to determine recent changes in trend. Of 24 selectees, eight had no senior service college education, four each were graduates of the National War College and the Industrial College, and eight were products of the Naval War College. This would indicate some moderation of the higher flag selection opportunity of National War College graduates, but a continuing trend away from service college graduates as a group.

Examination of the captain community indicates that year group 1943 is the junior group that has entered the "practical zone" of consideration for flag rank. On that basis, about one-half of all active captains have had a good chance at flag selection. Of those not selected, 672, or about 50 percent, are senior service college graduates. Thus, while 18 percent of all unrestricted line flag officers are not senior service college graduates, some 25 percent of all unrestricted line captains are non-selected senior war college graduates.

The unrestricted line section of the 1968 Register contains the names of 115 senior service college graduates who

TABLE 3—FLAG AND GENERAL SELECTION OPPORTUNITY OF SENIOR SERVICE COLLEGE GRADUATES, CLASSES 1951 to 1960, INCLUSIVE

College	USN	USA	USAF	USMC
NWC	109/263-41 ^a	225/336-67	148/321-46	27/66-41
ICAF	40/335-12	92/417-22	57/392-15	8/63-13
NAWC	81/981-8	6/118-5	9/68-13	7/114-6
AWC	1/22-5	390/1,665-23	7/45-16	11/34-32
AIRWC	27/54-50	15/113-13	202/1,261-16	6/53-11
Total	258/1,655-16	728/2,649-27	423/2,087-20	59/330-18

^aNumber selected/Number of graduates—percentage

have been "passed over" for captain. None were National War College graduates, and only two attended the Industrial College. The Fiscal Year 1969 captain selection opportunity for unrestricted line "in zoners" ran about 48 percent. The opportunity for senior war college graduates was 68 percent, a considerable edge. The incredible thing is that any were "passed over" for captain, as the promotional opportunity far exceeds the senior service college selection opportunity. Even assuming that performance subsequent to graduation can account for nonselection, it is difficult to explain why 20 percent of the Fiscal Year 1969 resident students failed of selection. For comparison purposes, virtually all Army officers that attend senior war college make colonel. Examination of the unrestricted line "deep" selection for captain indicates that only three of 23 selected in Fiscal Year 1968 had senior service college education. In Fiscal Year 1969, none of the 13 "deep selectees" had attended. From these statistics it is apparent that senior service college education enhances selection opportunity, but by no means insures selection to the rank of captain.

Based on this examination it now is possible to conclude that:

(1) One of the essential qualifications of future naval leaders is a thorough understanding and appreciation of the

broad factors of power potential as they relate to national security policy.

(2) The attainment of such qualifications involves the acquisition of a special knowledge and conceptual framework which cannot be obtained by experience alone.

(3) All of the senior war colleges well provide the opportunity, the facilities, and the curriculum to impart exactly that knowledge.

(4) There exists no comprehensive statement of Navy policy on the importance and operation of the professional postgraduate education program.

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Captain Edward R. Day, Jr., U.S. Navy, did his undergraduate work at Ohio State University, holds a masters degree in international relations from American University, and is a graduate of both the Naval

War College, School of Naval Command and Staff, and the Army War College. He has had a wide and varied career in aviation—his most recent assignments being Commanding Officer of Antisubmarine Squadron 27 followed by Operations Officer of the U.S.S. *Essex* (CVS-9). Captain Day is currently serving as Assistant Head, Policy Coordination Branch in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations.

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(5) There is a marked lack of coherence in the Navy program to both educate and promote those officers best fitted for future leadership.

(6) The Navy places less emphasis on its professional postgraduate education program than does any other service and, to a degree, has squandered its senior service college resources.

The development of a revitalized, understood, and coherent program for the professional education and promotion of those best fitted to act across a new and broader spectrum of professionalism will insure the Navy of the future the same high quality of leadership that it has enjoyed throughout its history. While such a task is well beyond the scope of this effort, certain rather obvious courses of action are advanced with respect to the professional postgraduate education program.

(1) As the requirements of administration are a constantly changing quantity and the mission of organization is never complete, consideration should be given to centralization of the broad spectrum responsibility for management of the service college programs. The Bureau of Naval Personnel probably is best equipped for the task. In addition, a Special Assistant for Senior Officer Career Management might well extend the capabilities of the Chief of Naval Personnel to monitor matters of service college selection, college assignment, detailing and further qualifying of graduates, and promotional patterns.

(2) Early promulgation of a comprehensive statement of Navy policy on the importance and operation of the professional postgraduate education program would enhance understanding and motivation in the officer corps.

(3) Since revolutionary change would inflict injustice on many fine officers, an evolutionary approach should be taken toward achievement of a viable and disciplined senior officer career pattern encompassing the orderly progression of the best fitted officers

through junior service college, commander selection, basic command assignment, senior service college, captain selection, qualifying command, major command, and flag selection. Similar programs could be developed for restricted line and staff officers. At each succeeding stage of progress, selection opportunity would be reduced to insure quality control. Only in very rare cases would selection boards identify "late bloomers" for inclusion in the pattern. Academic postgraduate education could be easily accommodated.

(4) Some expansion of the war college facilities is essential to implementation of any such program; however, justification should be based on the necessity to progressively educate the best fitted officers, rather than on bringing the vast majority up to some minimal standard. In order to insure proper utilization of graduates in career sensitive billets and to provide a basis for justifying war college facilities, the identification of billets requiring war college graduates is essential.

(5) As an interim measure, action should be taken to insure that:

(a) The policy of selecting the best fitted for service college education is continued and that selectees are ordered regardless of other short-range requirements or considerations of expediency.

(b) Assignment officers and selection boards are reinstructed on the coequal status and prestige of the senior service colleges and that an order of merit listing of selectees be required in order to insure equal distribution of quality.

(c) Captain and flag selection boards are specifically instructed on the importance of service college education.

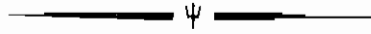
(d) Qualifying and major command selection boards are instructed to give maximum consideration to senior service college graduates.

In summary, senior service college,

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education does not now have a proper relationship to naval officer promotion. If the Navy is to meet the challenges of

tomorrow, it must select, educate, and then promote those best fitted for leadership today.



For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor yet from the south. And why? God is the judge; he putteth down one, and setteth up another.

Psalm 75, 7-8