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Richard L. Conolly
U.S. Navy (Ret.)

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EXERCISE OF COMMAND

An address delivered
at the Naval War College

by

Admiral Richard L. Conolly, U.S.N. (Ret.),

upon retirement from the U. S. Navy and
the Presidency of the Naval War College

We are all of us vitally concerned with the subject of command. We are all of us interested in the successful commander and the qualities, attributes, and abilities that contributed to his success. Command is our vocation. Preparation for command starts when an individual joins or apprentices himself to the officer corps of a military service and continues for as long as he can look forward to active employment in it.

I am impelled to give you my views and observations on this important subject due to my good fortune in having experienced command duty in the latter part of my career in a larger measure than is usual. My best qualifications are that in eleven and a half years, beginning in 1939 in the rank of Commander, I was privileged to exercise command of combatant forces for that entire period with the exception of fifteen months. During two short periods of seven and eight months, respectively, I served on the staff of the officers who at those times exercised command of our United States Naval Force in its entirety. As a result of thirty-eight months of it, I am constrained to say that I believe that wartime command, due to the pressure of circumstances and the accelerated tempo of events, is so concentrated as to be much more significant in an officer's career than almost any kind of peacetime employment. Having in mind Frederick the Great's mule, who after seven campaigns was still a mule, you are entirely at liberty to discount or ignore my experience. However, my wartime service did give me the opportunity of observing many eminent commanders — the opportunity of studying their methods

and of appreciating their outstanding qualities. In a number of different theaters, I either worked under them directly or in lower echelons in the chain of their command, or in associated commands. It is possible to learn much from every one of them.

The study of command would be a dry subject if we merely analyzed and defined it without visualizing its embodiment in the persons of known successful commanders. After all, command has to be exercised by human beings and not by mythical supermen possessed with impeccable sets of ideal qualities, all the virtues, and no vices. Thus, looking back through history, we find a host of successful commanders, all of them stamped with an individuality of their own, possessing the recognized qualities of command and leadership, each in different measure. Some were glaringly deficient in those qualities recognized as most important in the ideal commander, but, barring blind luck, each must have been possessed of the combination necessary to prevail and sufficient unto the occasion.

Nowadays, in the exercise of high command, one must prepare one's self for a large range of command functions. In the sphere of the Joint Chiefs of Staff or a theater command, the commander must have a good understanding of the inter-relationship between contemporary political factors and military strategy. Even the theater commander is not usually closely associated with the tactical battle, but he must understand tactical realities, tactical techniques, and weapons employment as they develop during the progress of the war. He must procure, to support his campaigns, the necessary total logistic support and be able to coordinate its distribution to his forces. In the succeeding echelons down the chain of command, strategy and tactics are usually both involved — and it is sometimes difficult to delineate where strategy ends and tactics begin. Still lower in the chain of command the command is purely tactical, but even here an understanding by the tactical commander of the general strategic situation and the main strategic objectives of the campaign are essential.

At every level a commander is responsible for providing, or assuring himself of adequate provision of, the requisite logistic support — the “sinews of war.”

It should be evident that some of the qualities required for successful execution of tactical missions might not be so important in the making of strategic decisions, and that a good strategic commander sometimes might not require the qualities required in a tactical commander. Not necessarily is this always true, for we may find that the successful tactical commander will also succeed in the higher art of strategy and in relating it to the political situation. It is easy to illustrate this last statement by merely mentioning an outstanding example, General of the Army Douglas MacArthur. Anyone familiar with all of his career would bear me out in this, I am sure. Countless other examples could be cited.

In order for a commander to establish personal leadership and control over his forces, he should be associated with them in his command capacity for as long a period as possible in the intensive and collective training and readying of the unit he is to command. His hold on his subordinates will be fully established and confirmed when he has commanded them successfully in active operations against the enemy for the first time.

Success in personal leadership in command becomes more and more difficult as the size and complexity of the unit commanded increases. To a few individuals is the personality of the commander of a unit larger than an army division known or felt. Notable exceptions to this are some of the great commanders of the last war who exercised large-scale tactical command most successfully, and whose men and officers knew and felt the influence of their authority and control. Examples that come immediately to mind are General Patton, Admiral Halsey, and Doolittle in our services, and Montgomery, A. B. Cunningham, and Slessor in the British services. All of these were known and idolized by their men and their officers.

I have heard the story, which I well believe, that in proceeding on an inspection across the U. S. front in the last war in France a sampling of this was taken and the soldiers were repeatedly asked by the visitor to what unit they belonged. Only upon entering the Third Army sector were the men universally conscious that they were members of an army. The reply usually took the form of their saying, "We are Georgie's boys." Such a proud spirit incalculated into such a large unit is of inestimable value and can be considered as the ultimate in command genius.

I have no doubt that approximately the same spirit existed in the British Eighth Army. Yet the two commanders, Patton and Montgomery, are as dissimilar in most respects as any two characters that you might encounter anywhere. Halsey exhibited a similar genius in the several types of command that he exercised in the Pacific: first, of a task force; then, of the South Pacific area; and, later, the Third Fleet. There was never any lack of consciousness as to who was in command, and the fiery fighting spirit of this commander was infused into his entire force as soon as he issued his first orders. All of these three — Patton, Montgomery, and Halsey — had decided personal idiosyncracies and yet, they each had one factor in common: a superior in strategic command who understood and appreciated their outstanding qualities and made use of them in the best way possible. Montgomery was under Alexander, himself a fine soldier of broad strategic appreciation, selfless, reserved, and of well-balanced judgment. The same words, with but slight modification, can be used to describe General Eisenhower and Admiral Nimitz.

We may ask what constituted military command. Well, I would say that it consists of the exercise of authority over the forces assigned by inspiring, leading, and controlling these forces in the attainment of military objectives and the execution of the mission as ordered by higher authority. You then may ask what are the qualities of a commander which may be considered as essential that he possess in some degree. Some of the qualities that

I will describe are often identified with leadership, but I believe the qualities of a good military commander must transcend those of mere leadership. Mahatma Gandhi was a great leader, but he lacked many of the qualities that could be considered essential in a military commander.

First of all, a military commander must possess a sense of *responsibility*, a willingness — and even eagerness — to accept responsibility, and he must keenly appreciate of what his responsibilities consist. I believe that there is a spiritual quality in this sense of responsibility, at its best, that springs from a proper pride, a loyalty to ideals, and a supreme self-respect.

A good commander should have a proper ambition to succeed and rise in his profession. This should spring from a desire and a hope that he will have scope for the exercise of the abilities which he is confident he possesses and for the benefit of the national interest — not merely in the furtherance of his own personal welfare, advancement, or glorification.

Another essential quality is *decisiveness*. This requires a bold and enterprising temper. Decisions must not be irresponsible, but time and circumstances often compel decisions involving different degrees of calculation — ranging all the way from the toss of a coin, an intelligent guess, or intuitive surmise to a reasoned and carefully evaluated estimate. All the world beats a path to the door of the man who can make a decision. Admiral C. M. (“Savvy”) Cooke said this to me — I do not know whom he quoted or whom he paraphrased.

There are countless cases in history where lack of decision on the part of the commander resulted in loss of battles, and, sometimes, where it resulted in the loss of campaigns. Often any decision to act would have been better than none with the resulting paralysis and chaos deriving from a total lack of directives. In war if you do nothing, you are sure to be wrong. If you do something, even blindly, you have about an even chance of being right.

Drive — this is a most expressive word to describe an important combination of qualities. It seems to me to involve a combination of determination, stubborn persistence, and a continuing energetic “follow-through” that minimizes resistance and overrides all obstacles to accomplishment. To succeed, a good commander must do things. He must have the drive necessary to get things done, implement his own decisions, and consummate his own plans. To paraphrase a famous Princeton football coach: “A man that won’t be frustrated can’t be frustrated.”

In order to execute his decisions, a commander must have another quality — *persuasiveness*. This will require that he be articulate in the formulation of orders and directives. He must write and speak clear and forceful English (or his native language, whatever it may be). Command cannot be practiced in differential equations. A commander should have the ability, in his contacts with his subordinates, of impressing them by word, by manner, and by his acts of execution with the importance — and even the necessity — of what they are doing. He must be sanguine and confident in manner and bearing. His exhortations must carry conviction that the plan of operations is sound and workable and that he has the capability of executing it with the forces and resources at his disposal.

Again, he must have *integrity*. This is considered to include loyalty. He must be loyal to his country, to the organization of which he is a part, and to his own command. I mention this because, although it should be taken for granted, the lack of it would incapacitate a leader — no matter how able, how brilliant, or how aggressive. But he must be true to himself. His ethical sense must dictate a line of conduct and impel him to follow it, even though it may be against his own individual interest. He must have the strength of character to refrain from backbiting and from practicing the gentle art of undermining his associates for the benefit of his own advancement. He must realize that his own career is insignificant compared to the welfare of his command,

the success of the operations, and the attainment of the objectives of the fighting.

We must include, as an element of integrity, reliability. A commander must be meticulous in the accuracy of reports to his superior; particularly, when he is reporting damage inflicted upon enemy forces. Upon the reliability and correctness of his estimate of damage to his own and enemy forces may depend the action of his superior in a far larger and more important field of activity than his own. In the last war there were many cases of reports from our own commanders which were distorted through wishful and hopeful exaggeration, mostly in good faith and in the enthusiasm of the moment. Sometimes these resulted in action in high places that was based on an incorrect estimate, it, in turn, being based on the inaccurate report. In the camp of our Japanese enemy, willful lack of integrity on the part of many, almost all, enemy commanders — high and low — resulted in misinformation everywhere. It amounted to a congenital weakness in the enemy command that again and again resulted in disaster and defeat to him. Meanwhile, the people of Japan were being fed continuously a diet of false information and propaganda that must have worn thin, even in the sight of the most stupid and fanatical. The people should know the truth and the military commander must know it.

Foresight is an essential in the good commander. Otherwise, he would always be dedicated to the defensive. With no foresight, his action would be limited to reaction. He would be confined to the riposte, the counterattack, and would never attain the initiative nor know what to do with it if he had it. A good commander is somewhat of a planner. Just as he must be close to the supervision of the operations, he must control the development of the plans and be sure they are so developed as to attain the objectives of the tasks assigned to him. He must continually satisfy himself as to the readiness of his command. All of these functions look into the future and require foresight.

Sense of judgment — he must recognize and properly assess the relative importance and relative values of all the various elements of a situation presented to him. He must reject all irrelevant or relatively unimportant matter, concentrate on the essentials, and hew to the line. He must keep his objective always in view.

Good judgment must combine imagination, keen intelligence, and practical good sense. It must be exercised in such manner as not to dampen initiative, but temper and shape it so that it is usable. Of the great leaders that I have known, Admiral A. B. Cunningham of the British Royal Navy comes immediately to my mind as one whose judgment in naval matters and in large-scale operations was almost infallible.

Character (Military Character) — He must have the moral courage to stand by his convictions and enforce his decisions upon his subordinates, have the necessary patience and determination to see his orders carried out, and sufficient personal physical courage to keep himself informed by close contact as to the progress of the battle, and, if and when necessary, to give an example to his subordinates.

A good personal character instills confidence in one's subordinates, associates and superiors. Everyone would like better to work with or for an officer who is also a gentleman, but it is not enough that the commander be merely a "nice man" or a "good fellow." Some undesirable traits can be forgiven if the moral character is sound and the commander is gifted in the art and practice of war. It has been said, for instance, that loss of temper under extreme provocation is condoned by subordinates. The troops expect the "old man" to be emphatic in his righteous rage at times; as long as the lightning does not strike them personally, they seem to enjoy a little of it. There is a famous word picture of the saintly Washington rallying defeated troops by laying about him with the flat of his sword and roundly cursing them for cowardice. His personal example and the very violence of his

anger helped to check the rout and saved the day. Of course, he had other qualities known to them and it was not fear of him but confidence in him that turned them about to face the enemy.

Military character is an essential in a commander because it will provide him with the moral strength and the self-justification to bear and to surmount the reverses and the loss of life which are concomitant to larger success and ultimate victory. It will mentally prepare him to accept the inevitable losses incident to all military operations.

War cannot be staged without loss of life. Again, the commander may be called upon to bear up under staggering losses of his material means and must find the fortitude to continue the fight with greatly reduced capabilities.

Strength of character should not be confused with calloused indifference, or a cold and brutal nature. No loss of life is negligible; no large loss of material resources can be lightly written off.

Ruggedness — he must have the physical force, the nervous stamina, and the mental energy to continue to execute his functions approximately unabated through long periods of extreme stress. This capacity is usually associated with youth. However, there are many cases of military commanders of very mature and even advanced years who have succeeded spectacularly. Probably experience, knowledge and habitude lessen the strains of command, and the tough fiber of a man is not always measured by years. Julius Caesar, Cromwell, Marlborough, Foch, Hindenburg, MacArthur and King are historical examples of elderly successes that will suffice.

It can be seen that the character, or kind of command, has much to do with the stress to which the commander is subjected. It takes an exceedingly physically rugged and mentally balanced individual to command an army division in the field,

or a task group at sea, or the air defense of an anchorage, or a force in any tactical situation where the commander must be alert and functioning at high tension over protracted periods. Probably the best criterion is the old adage, "Young men for fighting; old men for counsel." The efficiency of Mitscher, McCain, and Lee, who were our tactical vice admirals in the van of our Pacific advance, never flagged — but they all three died comparatively young. It cannot be doubted that this was due to the strain and incessant demands of too-prolonged vigilance and the cumulative fatigue of being on edge and keyed up to making, day and night, of instantaneous decisions affecting the prosecution of the campaign or the security of the vitally important tactical forces entrusted to their command. Somewhat younger men under slightly less stress, it is true, were merely tempered and seasoned by these rigors.

Humanity — a leader must have a degree of firmness exercised with kindness. By his personality he must somehow transmit his spirit, his high purpose, and his confidence to his subordinates. He must have a sympathetic understanding of their difficulties without too soft a treatment of either their frailties or their hardships. There is no place in high command for the bully or the sadist. Nevertheless, the commander must have schooled himself, psychologically, to bear the responsibility of losses of personnel, and his humanitarian impulses must be conditioned by the overriding necessity of prosecuting the war and winning the battle.

The leader is faced with the task of persuading men to overcome their most natural inhibitions and instincts. No man wants to die. Here is where war becomes serious business, indeed. The means by which a military commander convinces his men that it is necessary for them to risk their lives are many and diverse. The methods of leadership used vary with the commander, with the men he commands, with their nationalities, their state of training, their background in previous civil life, and their pride

and spirit. I mention nationality because it seems almost as if a nation had a personality. It is true that this may change, due to time, or progress, or decay; but just as some men will fight and some men won't, so it can be said of nations and so it can be said of armies or military organizations of any size and character. One of the most graphic and dramatic instances of the transformation of a fighting force from demoralization and defeat to savage resistance and aggressive prosecution of a most difficult and unpopular campaign has taken place in recent times. It was accomplished by one man, the late General de Lattre, in the campaign in Indo-China. The methods he used, I believe, were in the field of morale, emotion — perhaps described best by a French word, "esprit." His methods were adapted to the nationality, and the nature and character of the troops he commanded. His appeals probably would not have made the same impression upon American or British troops, but they were most successful in galvanizing to spirited action a very large force of Frenchmen. It is enough that he translated defeat into victory that season. Every true-hearted military leader can join France in mourning the loss of this great soldier.

Intelligence — this should be distinguished from formal education. General Bedford Forrest was an illiterate, uneducated man, but a man of high intelligence. Other qualities combined to make him one of the great leaders of our Civil War. There are cases, it is true, where dogged courage alone has prevailed, but the greatest victories in history were all achieved by highly intelligent commanders. The higher the position attained in the hierarchy of command, the less can stupidity be tolerated, and the more damaging the fatally defective would be the lack of intelligence in the commander.

Competence — I have left to nearly the last the quality that is too often omitted from treatment of either leadership or command. It may be acquired by formal education, by private study, or by exercise and experience. It is a combination of the

practical and the imaginative. It includes an ability to organize and to delegate authority, to procure from subordinates the necessary support and participation in shouldering responsibilities.

Regarding the education, the qualification, and the professional competence of a naval officer, John Paul Jones had much to say:

“The art of war deserves the exclusive attention of those who are engaged in it; the military science is only acquired by dint of study and reflection . . . (To the unprepared) - Some occasion will infallibly happen, when pungent regret for having neglected to obtain instruction will be felt in all its force by him who, charged with an important operation, is obliged to confess to himself his own incapacity to execute it. The time has gone by for beginning to attend to such study when he has unfortunately been promoted to command. Birth, patronage, solicitation, intrigue sometimes win employment and rank; but they do not secure success and credit.”

Mahan describes the professionally competent officer in French as “instruit.” This is another way of saying it is necessary that a military commander “know his stuff.” In war, ignorance is bound to be exposed. Initially, at least, Napoleon owed his rise largely to the fact that he was the most accomplished and thoroughly prepared soldier in the Europe of his day. An accumulation of brilliant tactical successes glorified him to his followers. He became, in the eyes of his soldiers, the embodiment of victory. Again, fighting men like to fight for a commander who wins.

Fighting spirit — without this, all the others become academic. It is the urge to aggressive action; a fire buried deep somewhere in a man’s make-up. It must be properly tempered and controlled by a prudent realization of the adequacy, the feasibility, and the consequences of one’s action. However, it must be

there. It must burn brightly and lastingly. It will impel a commander to continue to fight until victory, accepting no partial or incidental successes as a final result. It will transmit itself by contagion to the commander's subordinates, and repeatedly regenerate the whole command. Other qualities may be developed, but to a degree a man is born with this one. You cannot make a wildcat out of a rabbit.

During our Civil War, most of the leaders of the Confederacy seemed to have this quality. Most of the early Union generals seemed to lack it to a notable degree and had to be forced into fighting — either through public clamor or by having battle forced upon them by the enemy. Not until Grant, Sherman, and Sheridan (all obscure, retired, or discredited soldiers) were produced by actual combat operations, did this quality become evident. Even Farragut was almost overlooked. You cannot win in war without fighting, and the leaders must be fighters.

The qualities that I have mentioned are those that I deem either essential or consider to be most important. In some degree, a good commander possesses all of them. Military bearing and a commanding presence are superficial advantages. It has been said, "Good generals come in various shapes." So, I hope, do good admirals. It would seem to me that bearing, figure, and presence are of more importance when a commander is exercising either unified command over personnel of several services, and, still more so, in the case of the exercise of combined command where other nationalities are involved. In such cases, judgment is passed — initially, at least — more upon appearance and bearing than it is upon known and established reputation and the prestige one acquires over the years in one's own service. In the latter instance, an officer's qualities are apt to be well known and he is appreciated for what he has done, together with his own capacity, and not for what he looks like. Napoleon, Nelson, and Wolfe were all men of insignificant physical stature, even for that day. On the other

hand, Allbeny, Haig, Petain, Beatty, Sims, and Pershing — all World War I leaders — were exceedingly handsome military figures.

Here is what a very wise man some years ago had to say about the qualities of a good general:

“The general must know how to get his men their rations and every other kind of stores needed for war. He must have imagination to originate plans, practical sense and energy to carry them through. He must be observant, untiring, shrewd; (and, in turn) kindly and cruel; simple and crafty; a watchman and a robber; lavish and miserly; generous and stingy; and rash and conservative. All these and many other qualities, natural and acquired, he must have. He should also as a matter of course know his tactics; for a disorderly mob is no more an army than a heap of building materials is a house.”

The man was Socrates; the year was about 432 B. C.

Let it be understood that no able military leader achieves popularity by courting it. In war, the commander everyone wants is the one that can lead them to successes. In wartime, if you have the qualities and the aptitude for military command and you have prepared yourself for the exercise of high command, you will succeed inevitably for the following reasons: Every superior for whom you work is looking frantically and desperately for someone who can do a job for him; every subordinate is looking eagerly, hopefully, for someone who can lead him, tell him what to do, make decisions for him. From above, you will find yourself being pulled upward. From below, you will feel yourself propelled in the same direction. In moments when you may doubt yourself, and we all have those moments, look about you and see if you find anyone else who you think could do the job better than you. Usually, this will restore your self-confidence.

Command functions combine into a process that is progressive and continuous. While a commander is exercising military command, he is responsible without respite for the effective and vigorous prosecution of the operations which will achieve his objectives and contribute to the execution of the over-all mission. Obviously, no single man can do this properly unaided. He must sleep sometime. He must direct his attention and allocate his time only to those functions which absolutely require his judgment and decision. This makes mandatory a staff that can function on a continuous basis, performing most of the routine and the contributory and supporting functions for him. They assist him, but they cannot share his responsibility to his superior officer because they are responsible only to him and only in a staff capacity. They can exercise his authority only to the extent and for the purposes he has specifically directed — and then only in his name and with his responsibility. Modern military command of large and complex forces, especially when other services and other nationalities are involved, requires large and complex staffs. These must, however, be well organized, and the efforts of their components must be coordinated and synthesized in order that the commander can be spared any unnecessary effort or any work that others could do for him.

Commanders have certain personal predilections in the manner in which they exercise their command and employ the services of their staffs. It is my observation, however, that those geniuses who do not fully employ their staffs are headed for trouble. Either much is left undone, or they drive themselves to nervous distraction and a physical breakdown. I would say that it is all right to be a perfectionist, but, if carried to its extreme, this characteristic can alienate a staff from the commander and wreck the morale of subordinate commanders. This does not mean that the commander should lessen his drive for results nor lower his standards of performance, but that he should confine his notice and powers to the important factors and events. The chief of staff should be

the nagging villain of the piece that maintains the tone and high-grade technical perfection of the performance of the staff.

In my opinion, the Navy of the pre-war era was backward in its realization of the importance of strategic command and somewhat abashed at the necessity of establishing strategic commands with adequate staffs at a shore headquarters. Every naval officer aspires to tactical command afloat. The opportunities afforded for spectacular achievement, and for the glory and acclaim accorded a victorious naval commander after tactical victory, are difficult to foreswear. The hampering predilection to combine the functions still persists in spite of the many "horrible" examples of ineffective strategic direction, when attempts were made to exercise it afloat and to combine tactical command with it. Contrasted to these failures is the complete and outstandingly successful CinCPac-CinCPoa exercise of full strategic command and over-all administrative control from adequate headquarters at Pearl Harbor, and, later, at Pearl Harbor and Guam. Other instances are ComNorPac, especially Admiral Halsey as ComSoPac, and ConNavNAW and ComSEVENTHFleet — the first two, unified area commands, the latter two purely naval.

Also, I can say that the U. S. Navy was backward in realizing the necessity for properly equipped flagships and provision of adequate staffs and staff facilities for tactical commanders. The complexity, extent, and novelty of naval tactical command in the last war is best illustrated by the control of the execution of amphibious operations. The Navy was totally unprepared by either training, organization, equipment, communications, tactics, or education to undertake this important means of exercising and exploiting sea power. We can thank the Marine Corps and the British Combined Operations for keeping the art alive and developing it initially, and we should hang our heads in shame. Fortunately, the Navy is quick to learn and we were able to pull our chestnuts out of the fire. We were versatile in developing new and successful

equipment and techniques and a vast, but effective, command organization — and the commanders that could use it and prosecute this important type of warfare.

Our Navy from its very birth has required from its commanders strict accountability for their actions and their performance of duty. We are indeed fortunate that the United States Navy inherited from the Royal Navy a great measure of the traditions and ethics of command, and the spirit and code of fighting conduct at sea. Great Britain was then the supreme naval power, as she had been for a long time before and was to be for a long time thereafter. We were fortunate, too, because our parent nation had a long seafaring experience, and it was in that ancient school that our own seamen of that day were reared and instructed. These were priceless heritages, and they were fostered and propagated by our own leader, John Paul Jones. It was not only by the pre-eminent example of his genius for leadership, but greatly due to the fact that he was singularly articulate for a seaman of that day — or, perhaps I should say for a seaman of any day. He expressed himself in lucid, forcible English, and this thinking was deep, profound, and eminently practical. The philosophy and logic of his writings, the training, administration and schooling of John Barry, and the old "Articles for the Government of the Navy" provided the spirit, the standards, and the rules of conduct for our officer corps over the years of development of our new Navy.

It has seemed to many that the strict accountability enforced by our naval service, and the high standards of performance of duty relentlessly demanded from those in command, are cruel, unreasonable, and autocratic. Nevertheless, results over many years under the stress of intensive training for war, and of the actual fighting at sea, have proven them justified. Commenting upon a recent naval disaster, I would like to quote some extracts from an article in the *Wall Street Journal* of May 14, 1952, entitled, "Hobson's Choice." This validates better than any words of mine the Navy's unremitting requirement:

“Now comes the cruel business of accountability. Those who were there, those who were left from those who were there, must answer how it happened and whose was the error that made it happen. . . .”

“And it seems more cruel still, because all around us in other places we see the plea accepted that what is done beyond discussion, and that for good men in their human errors there should be afterward no accountability.

“.. . . But we are told men should no longer be held accountable for what they do as well as for what they intend. To err is not only human, it absolves responsibility.

“Everywhere, that is, except on the sea. On the sea there is a tradition older even than the traditions of the country itself and wiser in its age than this new custom. It is the tradition that with responsibility goes authority and with them both goes accountability. . . .”

“It is cruel, this accountability of good and well-intentioned men. But the choice is that or an end to responsibility and, finally, as the cruel sea has taught, an end to the confidence and trust in the men who lead, for men will not long trust leaders who feel themselves beyond accountability for what they do.”

I do not know who wrote this, but I believe that he was neither a naval officer nor a seaman. However, he has grasped completely the philosophy of the United States Navy in holding its leaders entirely accountable for the results they obtain. May our great Service never accede to the importunities of softer counsel!

The question of professional competence is almost of as much importance, but it will not be as evident to the individual who fails as it will be to the superior who has trusted him and delegated him the authority and the accountability for the performance of important tasks. Unless involved in a disaster of unmistakable proportions, few in high command realize or are ready to accept the extent and magnitude of their failures or shortcomings. Usually, they can rationalize their conduct of affairs and justify themselves to themselves by ascribing their errors to bad luck, to that overworked phrase, "calculated risk" (which usually involves more risk than calculation), or even claim that they actually have succeeded — that the defeat or stalemate was in reality a victory.

It is not enough that an officer who aspires to flag rank has become proficient in all that is necessary to command a single ship successfully. These qualities, and the professional knowledge and abilities that qualify him for this important assignment, are only part of what he will need to exercise higher command. Over the years of his career — by formal education in our higher schools, by participation in and observation of fleet exercises, and by personal application and study — he should have acquired a knowledge of and proficiency in the practice of the higher arts of his profession: tactics (not of a single ship or unit, but of dispositions and formations — large and small); the objective uses and effects of weapons; the logistical and administrative needs of a large and diverse force; the strategy of campaigns and the relation of strategic matters to the whole contemporary political picture. He should realize that he is about to graduate into a new and greatly enlarged sphere of activity with infinitely larger responsibilities. Some do not comprehend the demands that will be made upon them until they find themselves faced with immediate and urgent requirements for leadership in a field of activity with which they are unfamiliar and ill-prepared.

So, if you have any aspirations or expectancy of some day attaining flag rank, expend over the years intervening between now and then a little effort each day in schooling yourself psychologically and in developing yourself professionally to shoulder the burden that may be yours. It is not sufficient that you merely wear the uniform of the rank that goes with the leadership, nor that you merely take over and hoist your flag, but you must be prepared truly to exercise the leadership and actually to command.

However they were chosen, I would say that our nation has great reason to be proud of its leadership in World War II — particularly in its high-command leadership, the so-called “brass.” Our own naval leaders were able to hold their own in the higher councils and exercised high command of both fleets and forces and of unified commands ably — even brilliantly in many instances. We never before in the history of the Republic had such uniformly competent and inspired naval commanders in our top command positions.

While you will not amass riches in our profession, I know of none that provides a more fascinating career. It has been said that “In war the true commander yearns not for a bigger tent, but for more command.” Your best rewards will be: the approval of your superior; the assignment of new and more important tasks; higher responsibility; the command of larger forces and of more important operations. If you are worthy and fortunate enough to attain high command in the Naval or Military Service, you will have achieved a notable success in life. If you should exercise such command in active combat operations against an enemy of the United States, you can take much comfort and justified pride in having inflicted damage on enemy forces or in having wrested from him important strategic positions — and thus in having made a material contribution to the final victory.

In closing, I would like to assure you that there is nothing in life that will give you more satisfaction than to look back

upon a career consisting of a large measure of the exercise of successful military command. It is exciting to contemplate, exhilarating to experience, and satisfying in retrospect. Ours is, indeed, an old and a most honorable profession. Be proud that you belong to it!

BIOGRAPHIC SKETCH

Admiral Richard L. Conolly, U.S.N. (Ret.)

Admiral Conolly was born in Waukegan, Illinois, on 26 April 1892. He attended Lake Forest Academy and was graduated from the U. S. Naval Academy in June, 1914.

From graduation until 1929, he served normal rotation at sea in battleships and destroyers; attended the Postgraduate School in Engineering at the Naval Academy and Columbia University, where he received an M. Sc. degree; was an instructor at the Naval Academy. In 1929, he assumed command of the U. S. S. CASE. Following this, he was a student in the Junior Course at the Naval War College and a member of the staff; served on the staff of Commander, Cruisers, Scouting Force, and in the U. S. S. TENNESSEE; was an instructor at the Naval Academy.

In May, 1939, Admiral Conolly was transferred to the Pacific area and assumed command of DesDiv 7. He became Commander, DesRon 6, in January of 1941. Following this, he returned to the United States in April, 1942, to serve, first, in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations and then on the staff of Commander-in-Chief, U. S. Fleet. Early in 1943, he joined the Amphibious Force, Atlantic Fleet, as Commander, Landing Craft and Bases, Northwest African Waters. In October of the same year, he was transferred to Amphibious Forces, Pacific Fleet, and was designated Commander, Group 3 in July, 1944. For a short period following the Japanese capitulation, Admiral Conolly commanded occupation troops and then was ordered back to the United States to serve, first, as DCNO (Operations) and then DCNO (Administration) until September, 1946. During this period, he had additional duty as United States Naval Advisor to the Council of Foreign Ministers at the Peace Conference in Paris and as United States Naval Advisor to the European Advisory Commission in London.

In September, 1946, he assumed duty as Commander of the U. S. Naval Forces, Europe, and of the Twelfth Fleet — with the rank of Admiral. In 1947, his title was changed to Commander-in-Chief, U. S. Naval Forces, Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean. On 1 December 1950, Admiral Conolly became President of the Naval War College, serving in that capacity until his retirement on 2 November 1953. The following day, he assumed his present position as President of Long Island University.

Admiral Conolly has been the recipient of many foreign decorations. Other awards include: Navy Cross; Distinguished Service Medal with two Gold Stars; Legion of Merit and Gold Star with Combat "V"; Commendation Ribbon with Combat "V"; Mexican Service Medal; Victory Medal Destroyer Clasp; American Defense Service Medal, Fleet Clasp; Asiatic-Pacific Area Campaign Medal with silver star for five campaigns; Philippine Liberation Medal with two bronze stars; European-African-Middle East Area Campaign Medal with bronze stars for three campaigns; American Area Campaign Medal; World War II Victory Medal.