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## Light Without Heat

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## LIGHT WITHOUT HEAT

An article by

*Lieut. Commander R. E. Williams (SC) USN*

The fact that modern warfare is everybody's business was distinctly underscored by the proceedings of the War College Round-Table Discussions held during the first week of May, 1949. These conferences, conceived with a view to obtaining the very best in current strategic thinking, were attended by outstanding men in civilian life and high ranking officers from all branches of the Armed Forces.

To the officers of the Naval War College the discussions summarized everything that had gone before in ten months' work on tactical problems, employment of forces, weapon capabilities, war potential, mobilization and grand strategy. To the civilian guests they represented an opportunity to participate in a stimulating exchange of ideas in an atmosphere of professional competence rather than one of amateur speculation. To everyone they offered the priceless advantage of access to all other participants, whether across the conference table, over a cup of coffee, or simply in the wardroom of the USS Kearsarge, aboard which many of the guests were billeted.

The discussion groups, as finally constituted, included representatives of four principal experience categories:

- (a) Staff and student officers of the Naval War College;
- (b) Representatives of other Service Colleges;
- (c) Outstanding Naval Reserves Officers on temporary active duty;

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Lieut. Commander Williams is a member of the Naval War College Staff. His article is an appraisal of the Round Table Discussions conducted by the War College during the week 4-11 May, 1949.

**RESTRICTED**

- (d) Prominent authors and newspapermen, business and industrial leaders, and noted public servants.

From a body composed of such diverse elements, the Naval War College was justified in expecting a notable amount of worthwhile fact, opinion and conclusions which it did indeed receive in gospel measure. The wholehearted participation of the War College guests was a particularly gratifying feature of these discussions.

Organized into nineteen small discussion groups, each a representative cross section of the guest list, and presided over by a War College student moderator, officers and civilians alike sat down together to examine the factors influencing the national strategy of the United States. In an atmosphere of complete academic freedom, without rivalry or rancour and in a spirit of dispassionate inquiry, they spent six days in friendly, constructive discussion of problems common to all of them as American citizens: What are the fundamental issues involved in the struggle between countries separated by the "Iron Curtain"? What factors exert a major influence in determining the world situation? What are, or should be, our own national objectives? How do we attain them? What are the means—military, political, economic, ideological—at our disposal for attaining those objectives?

Other questions, proceeding out of the answers to these original ones, were carefully scrutinized. Each group appeared to absorb, almost without consciously realizing it, the philosophy stressed in the keynote address: "What we are seeking most earnestly is to demonstrate that it is possible for men of good will to sit down together regardless of the color of, or the lack of, a uniform."

Thus it was that each of the discussion groups proceeded through six days, examining our national objectives and the means, both military and otherwise, of obtaining them, and ending with a concept of the future strategy of the United States. It is perhaps inaccurate to state that any of the groups actually derived its own "concept". The exercise was essentially an individual one, and it is more nearly accurate to say that the participating members arrived at their individual concepts, which generally agreed in principle with the others, but differed in various particulars. This was to be expected, for the purpose of the Naval War College is not to determine national strategy. That is the duty of the planning staffs in Washington. The War College seeks to develop the thinkers who will eventually do that kind of planning.

It is worthwhile noting that if the individual concepts differed in the methods of our strategy they were solidly agreed on its philosophy; that by no possible stretch of the imagination or conscience could we bring ourselves to initiate an aggressive "preventive" war; that the rank and file of a Communist-dominated country, far from being the exponents of their government, are its principal victims; that our Armed Forces, if it is necessary to use them, must be employed as an instrument of liberation rather than annihilation; that our Military Establishment remains—for all its size and power—only a part of the forces at our command and therefore it must be regarded at all times as the tool of state policy, not its master.

Out of the conferences came many valuable lessons and enlightening experiences, but perhaps more gratifying than anything else was the circumstance under which men from all over the country and of many stations and occupations could freely assemble, freely speak and write, could lay aside prejudices and differences and could demonstrate that all of them were first and above all else, American Citizens.