

PRESIDENT'S FORUM



Gaming in Newport and What Lies Ahead

ONE OF THE THINGS I FIND as I travel around and talk about the Naval War College is that many people aren't aware of the fact that Newport is the home of war gaming in the United States. In fact, our war-gaming facility is named after William McCarty Little, who in 1903 as a young naval officer—a lieutenant—was instrumental in establishing gaming as a fundamental part of the curriculum and research. In 1995 McCarty Little Hall was designed from the ground up to support this. If you've never seen it, I highly recommend, especially to naval professionals, that you visit it at some point.

I had said in a previous edition of the "President's Forum" that I would talk some about gaming. Even as a student at the Naval War College in 1998 I had little idea of the variety and relevance of some of the gaming going on. Our Dean of Naval Warfare Studies, Robert Rubel, wrote an article that appeared in these pages in the spring of 2006 entitled "The Epistemology of War Gaming." He goes into some of the history of gaming and also some of the misconceptions surrounding it. Most important, he tells us that gaming is not prescriptive but descriptive.¹ What this means is that games will not foretell the future. In fact, no individual game may produce the "*Aha!*" moment, but the cumulative effect of persistent gaming over time *if you are looking at the right things* can produce insights over time. This also means that as naval leaders we must also be knowledgeable about the nature of gaming, so that we can be "good consumers" of its results. Sometimes these games can turn out like Rorschach tests, where all draw their own conclusions, or there may be inconclusive results; sometimes, however, there are very interesting results—or you might see things you have looked at for years in a very different way, for the first time. McCarty Little's most famous quote resonates with me even today: he said in 1887, "Now the great secret

of its power lies in the existence of the enemy, a live, vigorous enemy in the next room waiting feverishly to take advantage of any of our mistakes, ever ready to puncture any visionary scheme, to haul us down to earth.”²

In Newport, our history makes pretty fascinating reading, and it is chronicled in some interesting and readable books:

- Edward S. Miller’s *War Plan Orange: The U.S. Strategy to Defeat Japan, 1897–1945* (reissued in 2007)
- John T. Kuehn’s *Agents of Innovation: The General Board and the Design of the Fleet That Defeated the Japanese Navy* (2008)
- Michael Vlahos’s *The Blue Sword: The Naval War College and the American Mission, 1919–1941* (1980)
- John B. Hattendorf, B. Mitchell Simpson III, and John R. Wadleigh’s *Sailors and Scholars: The Centennial History of the U.S. Naval War College* (1984)
- Hal M. Friedman’s *Digesting History: The U.S. Naval War College, the Lessons of World War Two, and Future Naval Warfare, 1945–1947* (2010)
- Albert A. Nofi’s forthcoming *To Train the Fleet for War: The U.S. Navy Fleet Problems, 1923–1940*.

These works describe in detail how the Navy used the Naval War College and also its gaming to educate a generation of officers over twenty years about how a campaign in the Pacific (and elsewhere, for that matter) might be waged. Admiral Chester Nimitz, speaking in the early 1960s about his time at the College (he was a 1923 graduate) said two things that I find very interesting. First, he said, by the time the war arrived all the officers who attended the Naval War College had done the necessary logistical planning during their courses; he didn’t even have to look at a chart to find some of the islands in the Pacific, as he had learned the geography during his time in Newport. Second, he talked about new technology, in this case, aviation: “We all knew that aviation would play a central role in the next war; we just didn’t know *how*.”³ The “how” was eventually provided by the fleet—and people like John Towers, and former Naval War College faculty member Joseph Reeves—during the annual fleet problems, over a period of years.

The conclusion I draw from reading these books and talking with our historians here is this: a persistent effort over a long period of time in gaming and study imparted to almost the entire flag community a common understanding of the major issues of campaign plans against potential adversaries. On 7 December 1941 all flag officers in the U.S. Navy but one were Naval War College graduates. In fact, by the time this issue goes to press we will have dedicated a “wall of honor” in Spruance Hall that will include many of their names.

At the same time, there was always a belief even at the highest levels of the Navy that “failure to attend the Naval War College never hurt anyone’s career.”⁴ Admiral Rickover famously said that “all the tactics and strategy taught by the Naval War College were of little use if a ship could not operate properly.”⁵ It’s not my intention to debate this issue here—I think the facts speak for themselves. That said, much has changed here in Newport during my thirty-two years of naval service. Most recently, the size of the student body has grown from three hundred during the 1970s to almost six hundred. International officers now make up 20 percent of the student body. There are officers from all services and several government agencies (the State Department, the Intelligence Community, and others). There is now a significant research faculty, which includes the War Gaming Department. For U.S. officers, we issue a master’s degree in national security and strategic studies accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. Over two-thirds of our faculty is civilian.

Throughout, the attention to gaming has remained a constant. The Global War Game series spanned over two decades of the Cold War, ending in the run-up to the attacks on 9/11. Its success not only for the Navy but for the nation is chronicled in two Newport Papers.⁶ When I arrived as President, now almost two years ago, I was surprised at the variety of gaming in progress, though also at how much it had been scaled back in comparison to those halcyon days of “Global,” when a thousand players participated from high levels and most departments of government. Even so, there is interesting work going on here, and it is continuous. I tell my parents in Ohio that we are looking at all those things they would want us looking at, and some that might surprise them—topics such as maritime domain awareness, cyber warfare, regional issues, piracy, the Arctic, international law and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, bilateral games. The list is endless. As this goes to press, we’re conducting a game looking at irregular challenges and some of the stressors that could lead to potential conflicts. This is consistent with Rear Admiral Stephen B. Luce’s charge over a hundred years ago for the Naval War College to be “a place of original research on all questions relating to war and to statesmanship related to war, or the prevention of war.”⁷ It is also a fundamental part of today’s “Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower,” which raises “prevention of war” to a level equal to the “conduct of war” and elevates humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to core elements of maritime power.⁸

There is a tremendous tradition of gaming here in Newport. At its zenith, the Naval War College and the lessons from decades of gaming helped the Navy and the nation figure out a way ahead at critical junctures, and many graduates and some of its faculty were players on the world stage.⁹ The gaming tradition is alive

and well today, but we face an increasingly complex world of wicked problems coupled with budget squeezes. Our challenge, then, becomes using our best professional judgment over the long haul to help the Chief of Naval Operations and the Navy answer the question, “What will be asked of us in the future?” You can bet that gaming will play a part in finding the answer.

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NOTES

1. Robert C. Rubel, “The Epistemology of War Gaming,” *Naval War College Review* 59, no. 2 (Spring 2006), pp. 109–28.
2. As quoted in *U.S. Naval War College: War Gaming: McCarty Little*, www.usnwc.edu/Research---Gaming/.
3. Lecture, Naval War College, 12 October 1961, Naval War College Library Historical Collection.
4. J. O. Richardson, *On the Treadmill to Pearl Harbor: The Memoirs of Admiral James O. Richardson as Told to George C. Dyer* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Library, 1973).
5. George H. Baker, “The Rickover Story: A Compilation of Selected Works” (course paper, Naval War College, National Security Decision Making Department, August 2008).
6. See Bud Hay and Bob Gile, *Global War Game: The First Five Years*, Newport Paper 4 (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press, 1993), and Robert H. Gile, *Global War Game: Second Series, 1984–1988*, Newport Paper 20 (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press, 2004).
7. Quoted in John B. Hattendorf, *Faces of the Naval War College: An Illustrated Catalogue of the U.S. Naval War College’s Collection of Portrait Paintings and Busts* (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College, 2009), p. 2.
8. J. T. Conway, G. Roughead, and T. W. Allen, “A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower,” October 2007, available at www.navy.mil/; repr. *Naval War College Review* 61, no. 1 (Winter 2008), p. 15, available at www.usnwc.edu/press/.
9. Joel Ira Holwitt, *Execute Against Japan: The U.S. Decision to Conduct Unrestricted Submarine Warfare* (College Station: Texas A&M Univ. Press, 2009).



Rear Admiral James “Phil” Wisecup became the fifty-second President of the U.S. Naval War College on 6 November 2008. He most recently served as Commander, Carrier Strike Group 7 (Ronald Reagan Strike Group), returning from deployment in October 2008.

A 1977 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, Rear Admiral Wisecup earned his master’s degree in international relations from the University of Southern California, graduated from the Naval War College in 1998, and also earned a degree from the University of Strasbourg, France, as an Olmsted Scholar, in 1982.

At sea, he served as executive officer of USS Valley Forge (CG 50) during Operation DESERT STORM. As Commanding Officer, USS Callaghan (DDG 994), he was awarded the Vice Admiral James Stockdale Award for Inspirational Leadership. He served as Commander, Destroyer Squadron 21 during Operation ENDURING FREEDOM after 9/11.

Ashore, he was assigned to NATO Headquarters in Brussels, Belgium; served as Force Planner and Ship Scheduler for Commander, U.S. Naval Surface Forces, Pacific; and served as action officer for Navy Headquarters Plans/Policy Staff. He served as a fellow on the Chief of Naval Operations Strategic Studies Group; as Director, White House Situation Room; and as Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Korea.

Rear Admiral Wisecup’s awards include the Defense Superior Service Medal, Legion of Merit, Bronze Star, and various unit, service, and campaign awards.