PRESIDENT'S FORUM

Taking Stock

AS I WATCH THE MORNING SUN come up over Narragansett Bay and the Claiborne Pell Bridge, let me share some thoughts with our readers, the Navy leadership, and, of course, our students. We at the College are preparing to embark on our 125th year here in Newport.

With every passing day, I am more and more convinced of the value of the education that we provide for our naval officers, as well as for the international officers, for officers of our sister services, and for the agencies of government. Contrary to recent discussions in blogs and the press, I also believe that we are offering the best courses on strategy anywhere. Our students will not be outclassed by those educated at major research universities. In fact, our student body is made up of serving professionals, many right off the front lines of current conflicts. This is one of the factors that make us truly unique. The students' experience enriches the curriculum and represents a vital component of our educational enterprise.

Admiral Turner's words from his convocation speech still ring true almost 40 years later: "Another sample of the ineffectiveness of our military educational system is our increasing reliance on civilians and on 'think tanks' to do our thinking for us. Do not misunderstand. These people have done outstanding work for us. We very much need their help and stimulation into the future. We must, however, produce military men who are a match for the best of the civilian strategists or we will abdicate control of our profession."

I recently read a criticism of our military today that we are not taking more "institutional risk"—with the implied remedy of closing the war colleges, considered by some as "second rate"—to put more effort into today's fight. It is my recollection that George C. Marshall once said that closing Leavenworth was one

of his biggest mistakes during the Second World War. What some would call "presentism," or thinking that the way the world is today is the way it will always be, is a very shortsighted view. The corollary would be to ask what the "return on investment" on this education is. We, after all, are called to serve as good stewards of the taxpayers' dollars, and we are accountable for what we're doing in Newport. We absolutely must carefully husband the scarce resources entrusted to us and plan effectively. The importance of constantly assessing return on investment was underlined to me on a recent visit to a well known company's executive education center, which is also used by the firm's chief executives as a place they meet to discuss big changes. When I asked the question about return on investment, I got a quizzical look and the answer "No one has ever asked me that question." I was floored.

Education is not training. It is about conveying bodies of knowledge, developing lifelong habits of thought and learning, critical thinking skills, and the ability to solve highly ambiguous and formless problems. In our case, the student body brings in tremendous experience. It's like flint to the steel of our distinguished faculty: you need both to make fire, and that's the deal. I recently approved a plan to place a Naval War College "alumni hall of fame" in Spruance Hall. What really struck me was the number of Medal of Honor recipients on that list of alumni from the Second World War.[1] It is a long list and a familiar one to naval officers who know the Navy's history. Additionally, we expect to add the hundreds of international officers to this list, graduates from Newport, who have risen to positions of high responsibility in their governments—that is quite an impressive list too.

Of course, today there are other options in the "path to jointness"—National Defense University, as well as the other fine service institutions at Leavenworth, Quantico, Maxwell, and Carlisle. As we pursue a more joint force, it's only normal, then, that the number of senior leaders coming exclusively to Newport becomes smaller. That said, the current military commanders in Iraq, Afghanistan, and now in Europe, as well as our ambassador in Iraq, are today all Naval War College graduates.

So what?

As Sun Tzu puts it in the opening lines of *The Art of War:* "War is a matter of vital importance to the State; the province of life and death; the road to survival or ruin. It is mandatory that it be thoroughly studied." Churchill's view was that skilled planners must have a thorough education on strategy, and that requires time at a war college. Otherwise, as he stated of the Royal Navy's leadership during the First World War, the service will have only captains of ships rather than captains of war.[2]

So, in the aggregate, the Naval War College is working to ensure that we naval officers do not abdicate control of our profession, while getting our arms around what's going on in the world and helping the Chief of Naval Operations determine what the Navy should look like in the future. It's about anticipating—both the international environment and what we should be doing about it. We have the facilities, the faculty, the analysts, the seasoned professionals in the student body, and the concepts to game what we anticipate—as we have done in Newport for over a hundred years. A recent YouTube video makes the statement "We are living in exponential times."[3] There is much truth in that. To quote Ernest, Lord Rutherford, in the face of complex and quickly changing world events and decreasing budgets, "We don't have money, so we have to think."[4] My bet is on Naval War College graduates.

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NOTES

1. Eighty-nine of ninety flag officers who served in the Second World War were graduates of this institution, and some, like Raymond A. Spruance and Richmond K. Turner, also served on the faculty.
2. Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis, 1911–1914* (London: Butterworth, 1923), p. 93.
3. Karl Fisch, Scott McLeod, and Jeff Brenman, *YouTube: Did You Know?* 3.0, 2008.
4. Ernest, Lord Rutherford, of New Zealand, a famous nuclear scientist and a Nobel Prize winner in chemistry.

*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.