

## PRESIDENT'S FORUM

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ON A RECENT FLIGHT FROM THE WEST COAST I was seated next to an articulate young business executive, who asked me, “Why does the Navy have a war college?” As a businessman, he was wondering about the “return on investment” that the American taxpayers get for the portion of the Navy’s budget that we consume each year. It was a fair question, and I think the answer I gave to this impromptu question is worth sharing with you.

### *What Do We Do?*

Contrary to some opinions, we don’t *train* our students—we *educate* them. Training is conducted to provide such skills as flying an airplane or driving ships. Generally these skills can be used to deal with the challenges that we expect to encounter. The education we provide is more along the lines of “mind shaping” that attempts to equip students with the ability to react effectively to unforeseen circumstances. The “bumper sticker” says that we *train for the known and educate for the unknown*. This is especially important as today’s crystal ball for national security studies is getting cloudier instead of clearer. It is harder and harder to predict what will be required of us in the years ahead.

### *How Do We Do It?*

The Naval War College curriculum is based upon three core courses of study and a multidisciplinary Electives Program. Courses in each of these four areas are designed to provide depth and perspective to the study of conflict, its causes, and its resolution.

- Strategy and Policy is designed to teach students to think strategically. The theory and application of warfare from the time of Athenian seapower

through the present are studied, and a set of strategic themes—the most central being the relationship between a nation’s policy ends and how its military means are used in pursuit of those ends—is considered.

- National Security Decision Making courses are uniquely designed for the military and civilian Defense Department executive. They consider the economic, political, and military factors common to decision making in the national security arena. Case studies exploring major contemporary nuclear, conventional, and contingency force-planning issues challenge students to develop personal frameworks for integrating the many, often competing, demands involved in planning, choosing, and obtaining future military forces.
- Joint Military Operations focuses on the planning and conduct of joint and combined military actions in support of national and coalition strategic goals. Stress is placed on effective planning processes and concepts used in the employment of military forces across the full spectrum of conflict. The operational level of war is examined through the use of real-world case studies and war gaming.
- Electives provide students with the means to explore subjects of professional significance not included in the core curriculum or to investigate in greater detail specific elements of that curriculum. Elective subjects range from military theory to area studies, from international relations to professional ethics, and from international law to media relations.

#### *What Is the Payoff?*

It is often the case that the real worth of an education is not recognized until long after the diploma on the wall has faded and yellowed. Major General William G. Pagonis, a highly decorated Army logistician, writing thirteen years after his graduation, stated: “I was admitted to the Naval War College[,] . . . and put simply, this was one of the great experiences of my life. The instructors were fantastic, and the subject matter uniformly absorbing. We were immersed, for example, in military history. We studied the Peloponnesian Wars, the campaigns of Napoleon, the strategies of Bismarck, the writings of Clausewitz; we steeped ourselves in the tactics of Alexander the Great and Rommel.”

This, then, is the true value of a Naval War College education: to provide historical perspective and teach the principles of war in the context of past, present, and future conflicts; to expose minds to new ideas, expand horizons beyond the familiar; to sensitize students to cultural differences; to hone analysis and decision skills; to establish a network of fellow scholars that can be useful for decades

to come; to challenge the conventional wisdom; to reinforce values and encourage ethical behavior; and to prepare tomorrow's leaders to deal with an uncertain future. We are not training students to deal with issues and challenges that we expect them to encounter. We are educating them to react positively to the unknown, to develop and analyze competing options, and to implement solutions that have the greatest probability of success.

This "future focus" has always been a hallmark of the Naval War College experience. Under Rear Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan, the class of 1897 considered "the naval problems arising in the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico out of French interest in an isthmian canal." In the 1930s, students studied the potential for war in the Pacific and developed the plans that were to serve as the blueprint for the Allies' ultimate victory in that theater. During the Cold War, the College was an active participant in analyzing, gaming, and teaching security concepts ranging from mutually assured destruction through guerrilla warfare. Today, we are helping to shape the future through our work with Sea Power 21 and the nuances of the Terror War. Our focus is ahead, but our vision includes the hard-learned lessons of the past.

While the greatest payback to the nation on its investment in Naval War College graduates will likely come sometime in the future, the College is having a positive impact in the near term as well. In fact, many leaders of today's military completed their educations here, five, ten, or even fifteen years ago. Recent graduates and former faculty members are commanding several Army combat brigades on the ground in Iraq. Others command ships, Air Force squadrons, Army divisions, entire fleets, and large joint forces. Alumni serve as ambassadors in the capitals of major allies, as congressional staffers on Capitol Hill, and even in orbit around the earth.

Even more visible are the numerous faculty members and alumni who appear regularly in print and in the electronic media as columnists and advisers, using their expertise to interpret military actions for the larger civilian audience.

#### *How Well Are We Doing?*

It is always difficult to gauge the success of an educational program, but some of our alumni have expressed their evaluations of how successful the program has been over a number of years. Admiral Gregory Johnson, commander of U.S. naval forces in Europe, recently wrote, "I would also note the year at Newport is really about an 'experience' and not just the education. It is a fantastic 'experience' and every one of our most competitive officers must be exposed; it will make our Navy much better. It's about intellectual stimulation and curiosity; camaraderie with fellow officers from other communities, services, and nations as well as the faculty; and a general opening and maturing of the professional

aperture that will enable each one of our officers to be that much more effective when they return to the fleet.”

General Charles Wilhelm, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret.), has described the value of the College in his own distinguished career:

I’ve finally figured out exactly where the War College fits in the long and challenging journey we call a military career. Whether we sail a ship, drive a tank, fly a plane or help those that do[,] . . . for the first half of a 30-year career the *physical* part of our vocation dominates the *intellectual* part. During those first 15 years, we spend the majority of our time actually sailing the ship, driving the tank, flying the plane or directly supporting those who do. In a like manner, during the first half of our careers we are heavily invested in enforcing regulations and learning and applying doctrine, tactics, techniques and procedures. During the second 15 years the process reverses itself, and the *intellectual* pursuits largely dominate the *physical*. Rather than sail the ship, drive the tank or fly the plane we design, test, or buy them. And we become less concerned with enforcing regulations and applying doctrine and more concerned with their conception and articulation. I have come to think of the Naval War College as the mid-career bridge that allowed me to pass over the gully separating the physical and intellectual segments of my career.

We are committed to ensuring that the College will continue to serve as a relevant and career-critical step in the professional development of our officers. The evidence of our success will be in the actions of graduates in positions of great responsibility as they correctly apply the principles of war to preserve the peace.

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