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President's Notes

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"Throughout his career, [Admiral Spruance] exemplified his view . . . that a commander's judgment is best when he can forget himself and concentrate wholly on making the right decision."

President's Notes

ON 1 MARCH 1946, ONE OF THE MOST CAPABLE and celebrated commanders of the Second World War became President of the Naval War College. Admiral Raymond Spruance, as the victor of Midway and successful commander of the Fifth Fleet in the Central Pacific campaigns, could have had the pick of nearly any assignment he wanted. Among all those possibilities, his first choice was to return to the Naval War College, where he had been a student in 1926–27, and had twice served as a faculty member during the 1930s. By returning to the College, Admiral Spruance firmly believed that he could make his most enduring, long-term contribution to the Navy's future.

Rear Admiral Stark was commissioned in 1965 at the U.S. Naval Academy, studied at the University of Vienna as a Fulbright Scholar, and earned a doctorate in political science at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University. He has served on the Navy Staff, the National Security Council Staff, and as Executive Director of the Chief of Naval Operations Executive Panel. His sea service has included command of USS *Julius A. Furer* (FFG 6), USS *Leahy* (CG 16), and, from 1994 to 1995, the Nato Standing Naval Force Atlantic, deployed in the Adriatic Sea. He assumed the duties of President of the Naval War College in June 1995.

Fifty years later and a quarter-century after Admiral Spruance's death, on the evening of 1 March 1996, nearly a hundred faculty, staff and friends of the Naval War College gathered to remember and to celebrate his presidency of the College. Organized by the Naval War College Foundation, the evening was graced by many old shipmates and friends of the Spruances, including his grandson, Delmont Bogart, and his Flag Lieutenant, Charles F. Barber, who had served with Spruance throughout the Central Pacific campaign from 1943 until the end of the war. Senator Claiborne Pell of Rhode Island gave the main address of the evening, honoring Admiral Spruance. In parallel with this event, the Naval War College Museum has mounted a new exhibit, "The Spruance Touch." Comprising models, paintings, charts, and memorabilia, it is a fascinating glimpse of the man and his accomplishments. The exhibit will remain until September 1996. I encourage all of you to visit it.

During the 1920s and 1930s, virtually every senior U.S. naval officer had examined a wide range of possibilities in a future Pacific conflict, through study, reflection, discussion, and war gaming in Newport. At the time of Pearl Harbor, only one flag officer eligible for command at sea had *not* attended the College. Spruance was unusual, however, in having spent six full years at the Naval War College, analyzing complex problems, reflecting on strategy and tactics for a future war, and participating in the most challenging depictions of future decision-making that were then possible. These experiences bred in Spruance's methodical mind the lesson that "making war is a game that requires cold and careful calculation." It was a lesson he learned and applied to his nation's great benefit.

"It must be noted," wrote Rear Admiral C. J. Moore, Spruance's chief of staff during the Central Pacific campaign, "that there was nothing arrogant or domineering about the man, that his quiet reserve and modesty was genuine and not used to conceal weakness or indecision. He gave the impression of thoughtful judgement rather than impulsiveness. His directives were clear and specific, and his manner inspired confidence."

Spruance's modesty was an important element in his professional approach. He strongly believed that publicity might adversely influence his professional judgments and decisions. Throughout his career, he exemplified his view that a commander's judgment is best when he can forget himself and concentrate wholly on making the right decision.


Spruance's knowledge, his wisdom, and his self-control allowed him to confine his thinking and his actions to the broad problems of strategy, tactics, and organization, the appropriate concerns of a fleet commander in wartime. He reached his decisions after full consideration of all the essential factors and after full consultation with all his advisors. Once he reached his decisions, he had the capacity to dismiss the details of planning and execution from his mind,

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leaving those aspects to subordinates, to whom he gave his full support and trust. It was these qualities, nurtured in his years of thought at the Naval War College, that made Spruance such an outstanding naval officer in World War II.

At the Naval War College in 1946–48, Spruance played a very important role in establishing a curriculum that would educate officers to face the new challenges of the postwar era. Even more importantly, he played a key role in helping the Navy to establish a clear mission for the Cold War. In this, he became the Navy's bridge between its old thinking and the emerging ideas of the nuclear age, helping to pick and choose what areas were appropriate to remold for the future, what to discard, and what needed inventive new thought.

Today, just as it was in Spruance's day, the Naval War College remains a place for individual professional study, a place to search for professional excellence. It is a place that encourages us all to grow and to expand our horizons, leading us to understand more fully the nature, capabilities, and limitations of our profession as we make the best use of our past experiences and develop new approaches to face future challenges. Fifty years after his presidency, Admiral Raymond Spruance remains a model of professional achievement, intellectual vigor, and personal integrity. We could have no finer example.


 J.R. STARK
 Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy
 President, Naval War College

