

Naval War College Review

Volume 37
Number 5 *September-October*

Article 3

1984

The Naval War College in Transition, 1965-1984

Frederick H. Hartmann

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Hartmann, Frederick H. (1984) "The Naval War College in Transition, 1965-1984," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 37 : No. 5 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol37/iss5/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

The Naval War College in Transition, 1965-1984

Frederick H. Hartmann

I first came to the Naval War College twenty-one years ago, as an international relations consultant on temporary reserve duty. In 1965 I was hired full-time by Admiral Melson in an academic billet. There had been a plan in existence for some time to hire a civilian academic—of some recognized standing—who would lend continuity to the operation while the military personnel changed. In 1965 there was only one civilian faculty member who had tenured status, August Miller, now emeritus, who worked exclusively for the Naval Command College. What was envisaged for the new Chair would be tenured status, available to the entire War College for teaching, with the occupant advising the President of the Naval War College on academic policy matters. When I arrived for duty on 1 July 1966, it was to a new president, Vice Admiral John T. Hayward. Under the impetus of his boundless energy and enthusiasm, we were soon embarked on the first (but not the last) effort I have known at Newport to once more put the War College *out in front*.

Since that time I have served as advisor to nine successive presidents, covering a span of almost one-fifth the hundred-year history of the Naval War College. Because “academic policies” never seem to be clearly differentiated from “other policies,” I soon found myself involved in policies of all kinds. In this sense I am probably in as good a position to judge the last two decades at the college as anyone alive: as to what we tried to do, where we fell short, and where we achieved our goals.

The first eight of these nine presidents, like many of their predecessors, struggled with a “Navy” attitude toward professional military education at either the command and staff (intermediate) level or the war college (senior) level—an attitude that appeared less supportive of its college than was the case for the other services. As the Centennial History of the College, soon to be published, amply demonstrates, this hostile attitude was strongest just after the college’s founding when the college was almost abolished. It was weakest in the period between the two world wars, when just about every

Professor Hartmann holds the Alfred Thayer Mahan Chair of Maritime Strategy and is Special Academic Advisor to the President of the Naval War College.

senior admiral in World War II was a graduate. While support for the college has varied since 1945, the present CNO and his immediate predecessor have each made sincere and sustained efforts to use the college "as it should be used."

To say the Navy has been historically less supportive than the other services is really to say that the Navy tends toward three attitudes which have at least mitigated enthusiasm about the college.

The first is very easy to understand: it stems from the sound observation that a Navy man must spend considerable time at sea to be professionally proficient. In his short career, he can be preoccupied with "ticket-punching." All too often attendance at the Naval War College is avoided in favor either of operational assignments or Washington tours. This contemporary truncated and frenetic career pattern makes little sense, but it is common to all the services since World War II.

It is in the second Navy attitude dealing with personnel detailing where much of the real damage is done. Because Navy men instinctively realize the need to "stay loose"—an ingrained behavior probably learned from many sudden emergencies at sea—the "Navy" shies away from a planned or systematic approach in the formal education of its officer corps. It takes a very determined CNO to counteract the instinctive preference to make choices of students for the college on an ad hoc basis and to keep promotion firmly disconnected from War College attendance. War college selection panels, which once functioned with a certain amount of "quota filling" through "administrative selection," have more lately been functioning properly. But the whole approach horrifies the Army which lays on a very specific sequence of schools, and which ties promotion very deliberately even if unofficially to that sequence—something the Navy has no real handle on at all.

These first two attitudes center on obstacles, but what about the pull or attraction of the college's academic program.

It is a rational although incorrect reaction to think that any serious War College student attendance problems can be remedied by a better curriculum, widely advertised. I recall Vice Admiral Stansfield Turner saying to me in 1972 or 1973, "In seven years' time, with my new curriculum, students will be beating on the doors to get in." (He was speaking to my plea that we encourage attendance by trying to connect war college attendance and promotion together in *some*, even if loose, way.) I responded (incorrectly) that in seven years' time the curriculum would have changed entirely. As it turns out, we were both wrong. It took much more than a good curriculum to turn the trick. In fact, the "Hayward" curriculum in effect before 1972—although it had some problems—was excellent, and features of it were then copied widely by the other war colleges. My two decades of experience with the curriculum tells me to be highly wary of expecting a very substantial

connection between the worth of the curriculum and the attitude of the “Navy” toward the Naval War College in general.

These foregoing attitudes have combined with a third to undercut a full, constant, and continuous “Navy” support for the college. That third attitude—admirable in and of itself—is the Navy’s “can-do” reaction to tasking. When the Navy executes a highly active US foreign policy, but maintains lean attitude toward personnel numbers, the professional military education of the Navy officer is reduced. Just to illustrate a contrast, when Navy numbers went down at the college during Vietnam, the Army volunteered to fill the vacant spaces!

It is hard to fault a “can-do” attitude, and it would be difficult to argue that the Navy should be unresponsive to policy needs. Whether the Navy should cultivate such leanness in numbers is something else. The Army policy, as their personnel command once explained to me, *adds* personnel in education, training, or sick or on leave, on top of operational requirements. The Navy tends to try to squeeze these categories down and considers them from a base which is less generous, as I understand it.

When we consider these attitudes and their consequences for the Naval War College, we also need to keep in mind some salutary features enjoyed by the Naval War College. One feature which the other services have, with reason, always envied is the legislation that sets up civilian faculty billets. This enables the Naval War College to have more civilian faculty than all the other War Colleges combined (excluding ICAF). This feature is an overriding strength. It allows the selection of very capable civilians and permits a civilian-military team approach to the curriculum. And since the Navy uniquely teaches both the intermediate and senior levels with a single faculty under a single command, it permits a “task force” concentration of faculty who can teach each level sequentially. In effect, it doubles the numbers of faculty that can be brought to bear. Progress toward this goal was made incrementally. A half-dozen ten-month civilian appointments were made in 1965-66. This number doubled by 1972, and was doubled that year again for the present approximate 24 civilians. Implementation of Military Chairs began in 1960 followed by a separation between military staff and military faculty which in 1972 instituted the present arrangement of about 48 military faculty. The move to really significant civilian numbers and a specific, dedicated military faculty, while foreshadowed in the late 1960s, is a credit to Stansfield Turner and was, in my opinion, a more important change than the so-called “revolution” in the curriculum.

There is a second feature which distinctly contrasts the Naval War College with its sister services—the existence of both the intermediate and the senior level courses colocated under a single command. Because they are colocated there is always a certain temptation to treat them alike. During the Turner tenure, these courses were blended almost into the same course. The

rationale being that only about 15 percent of the students returned for a second course, therefore, would it not then be better to give everyone the best course available, regardless of level?

But there were difficulties with this approach. It put the *need* for two levels in doubt (for the other services as well, who resented it). It also put students with very different future career patterns into a fairly uniform intellectual experience. It was some years before the more fruitful rule was reintroduced that the Command and Staff perspective should be from the two-star level, and the Naval Warfare (senior) course should be from the four-star level. The C&S student, immersed technically in his specialty, does not appreciate the role of the other parts of his own service—he has been in the cockpit or in the submarine or in a surface ship, and has had little chance to understand the rest of the naval environment. The senior student has a different set of blinders. He generally does not fully appreciate the joint and combined perspective. So, in terms either of what the students lack when they arrive, or face when they depart, the two levels are distinct and should remain so.

There is another aspect in which the Navy's war college has usually functioned quite differently from that of the other services. It is in the realm of chief-of-service supervision. The Army and the Air Force chiefs regularly exercise very specific controls over curriculum changes; the Navy practice is (or was) much looser and is open to mixed reviews. It permits more command latitude, more command initiative. It has sometimes resulted in an unintended drifting apart or changes that the CNO in a given case really did not intend or with which the Chief of Naval Personnel (CNP) may have had little sympathy. It was only during the tenure of the present CNO as CNP that an overall Navy educational council under the CNO was really established. The present practice of holding CinCs conferences at Newport, with the Naval War College as a prominent agenda item, represents a significant improvement over the occasional benign neglect of ten or fifteen years ago.

The Naval War College thus must be seen from different perspectives. If we ask "how good is its curriculum and the education it provides?" we start out from an entirely different point of view than if we ask "how important has graduation from the College been for promotion purposes over the last twenty years?" And, in 1984, that second question itself would get a very different answer than it used to a decade or so ago.

Educationally, in the time I have known it, the Naval War College has never been second in quality to any other such institution. (I have lectured frequently at them all and been briefed in detail regularly and repeatedly on their programs.) Indeed, the Navy has been the great innovator among war colleges. As the oldest of institutions, it has mature experience, possesses self-confidence and has a faculty hard to imitate or excel. Before 1972 it had a very good curriculum. Since 1972, when the faculty was sufficiently enlarged

to permit seminar-focused instruction, a very good curriculum has also been very well taught.

But if we ask about the promotion record of graduates, or how students or the Navy have perceived the connection between attendance and promotion, the picture is both more complex and less unqualifiedly happy.

Between the two world wars it was considered promotion-enhancing to attend the Naval War College. But after World War II, the Navy changed radically in its structure and its concerns. Washington staff duty became a significant career step and being in the Pentagon could bring fast recognition for upwardly mobile officers. After all, in the 1930s when attendance at the War College was highly prestigious, there was virtually no Washington duty of this sort or tremendous weapons programs to design, develop, or defend. After World War II at least one of the individuals who would ultimately preside over the War College avoided assignment to classes at Newport on the presumption that it was "a waste of time." By the time of the Vietnam War, almost any gung-ho officer sought duty out there, "where the action was." Far down the list of choices was Newport. The student input suffered as the 1970s began, which was one of the reasons for the "Turner revolution."

I think that it is only reasonable for us to face the fact that, regardless of a quality faculty or a quality curriculum, the Naval War College cannot of its self produce very able individuals through a year's exposure here. All it can do—which is a *great* deal—is take very able individuals whose horizons have been restricted by the nature of their jobs and make those horizons broader so that, when promoted, these able individuals can do their later jobs better. That means that there is only one way to have an excellent promotion record for Naval War College graduates—by sending those officers who have most promise. In essence, an effective personnel goal is to pre-select potential admirals and send them as students.

This has been Admiral Watkins' rationale. By shortening the Navy training pipeline and using the man-years gained to convert into additional War College students, and by designating those additional students to come from the upper half of those who have just held command, he has made it possible to put the right people at Newport. The problem is solved for now. But this approach *needs to be institutionalized* and carried on by the present CNO's successors. One solution that I favor is to "pre-promote" students. That is to say, select students who will be advanced one rank at graduation. The arguments against this are obvious but if neither the Watkins' way is institutionalized nor promotion and attendance tied together, the risk of reversion to slacker standards is considerable. I base this judgment on a perspective gained in these last years of supervising the preparation of the Centennial History of the Naval War College. Able men in abundance have led this college. They were never able to achieve much without Washington's continuous support.

One issue which once consumed much attention at Newport has been, on the whole, satisfactorily resolved—the question of a graduate degree. When, in the 1960s, for example, the George Washington program existed, it was always seen by many as a distraction from a student's primary field of study. That is too simple a view, since the courses were largely complementary, and in a day when the college's civilian faculty was smaller, the enhancement of talent from GW was quite welcome. Nevertheless, it is true that research effort tended to be funneled off into less central professional, operational concerns. And two programs, side by side, are bound to compete. The statistics from those classes showed a consistent overlap of distinguished graduates of the War College with distinguished George Washington program graduates—meaning that the most talented officers did both well. At present, after looking into many possibilities, we have no official connection to any Master's program. Salve Regina, a local college, does offer a most generous set of credits for War College work toward a Master's degree. But it is strictly after hours and on a student's own time. Even so, because of the generous transfer allowance, it is fair to say that most students can obtain such a degree if they want one. As to an official, Congress-approved degree, this is always a possibility. Its feasibility probably turns on achieving a common policy across all the service colleges, for it is unlikely that only one service would receive approval.

To say that the curriculum is a fine one is not to suggest it is perfect. Building a very good curriculum involves tradeoffs which continue to create tensions between the real and the ideal, no matter what bargain is struck. Of all the curricula problems at Newport, the most *difficult* in the last hundred years has been the question of depth versus breadth, which is closely connected to the question of specified versus discretionary. These questions are closely connected because achieving depth in study means ruling out many other options. This is the path which Stansfield Turner chose. He had three subject areas which were covered in depth and everything else was eliminated to provide the time. There are obvious advantages to doing this, for “a little learning is indeed a dangerous thing” and Turner's emphasis was on genuine intellectual rigor. But it means that students forgo learning (even if more shallowly) about other things.

Because Turner's three courses could not possibly cover the range of concerns which confront naval officers, successive presidents since his time have reintroduced, one by one, programs he eliminated. In form, the Naval War College looks much like Turner left it; in fact, the intellectual activities are far more widespread. I think myself, given Navy professional needs, that the instinct toward the broader program is sound, so long as it does not produce a shallow intellectual smorgasbord. The balance at Newport now is probably about right.

Of all the curricula problems at Newport, the most *persistent* has been the question of practical versus theoretical work. Operations versus theory. Tactics versus strategy. From the beginning under Luce, a succession of able presidents have by and large argued that this distinction is arbitrary and unreal. It remains, though, or did until recently, an oft-repeated charge that the War College was too theoretical, too much concerned with the “big picture,” that it strayed away from an operational focus. I have not found it so. My own judgment is that these two tendencies have been well reconciled, both in the classroom and in research. There are two problems in the curriculum, very loosely connected to this charge, but not the ones so often described.

The first problem is in the balance struck in the nonoperational side of the curriculum between the contemporary and the historical-analytical. For example, given the tremendous importance of the Middle East, any course in strategic analysis should give its present features some detailed attention. But to concentrate unduly on the contemporary shape of the problem would also rob the student of a proper perspective. Or again, analyzing the latest twists and turns of Soviet policy is necessary but hopefully against the backdrop of Russian policy and the behavior of the international system as a whole. An equivalent kind of problem exists in our “defense economics” coverage, where Navy-oriented concerns can only be properly addressed in a wider context. Finding the proper balance is extremely difficult.

The second problem is on the operational side. Naval operations and tactics have, even despite Mahan and a host of successors, never been reduced to more than very general guiding principles. So that teaching “operations” either becomes rather general or descends to the over-particular and immerses itself in tactics. Part of the cause of this problem is the constant effect of technological change, making old tactics obsolete. Another part of this problem is that naval officers, who after all are best acquainted with professional operational problems, are not steered by the daily life of their careers toward what professional full time teachers necessarily are—toward conceptualization and generalization based on a wide range of cases and examples. There are brilliant, in-uniform teachers, and I have known a number. But we all know that it is not the Navy intellectual who tends to achieve the fast track promotion, and certainly not unless he is also a superb performer. And these traits are not too frequently found in the same individuals. Luce dreamed of changing this but it has not quite happened. It is one reason why the most successful and appreciated part of the Naval Operations course at Newport has been wargaming. It appeals to students as obviously being practical; it appeals to the faculty because, short of war, it provides the most concrete test of what a student has learned.

These two last problems are built-in to what we try to do. Their existence is no cause for alarm or despair. By their nature they have to be resolved

again and again and any lack of continuous care here can be serious in its ultimate results.

No one who has any concern for his country or is not intellectually dead could fail to respond to the stimulus of Newport. It has been my privilege to share almost a fifth of the experience of our century-old institution. May it go on now to even better things!

— Ψ —

N. S. Naval War College.
September 2nd, 1885:

Order:

Lectures will begin on Sept. 7.
The working days will be Monday, Tuesday,
Wednesday, Thursday & Friday.

The lectures on International Law
will be delivered daily at 10.4 A.M.

The lectures in Military
Science will be delivered daily
at 11.30 A.M.

Additional lectures on Naval &
Military Science will be delivered
at 1 P.M. on Monday, Tuesday,
Thursday & Friday.

A. J. [Signature]
Commodore N. S. Navy,
President Naval War College.