

Naval War College Review

Volume 32
Number 3 *March-April*

Article 1

1979

Taking Stock

James B, Stockdale

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

Recommended Citation

Stockdale, James B, (1979) "Taking Stock," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 32 : No. 3 , Article 1.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol32/iss3/1>

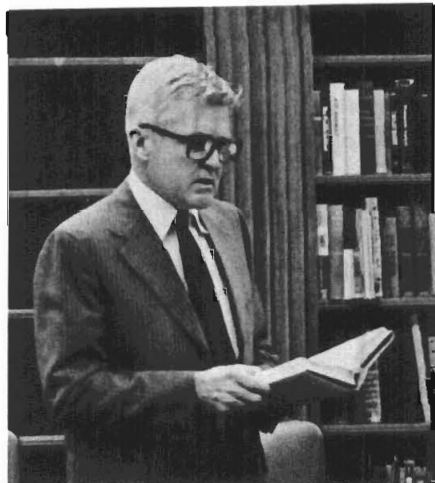
This President's Forum is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

TAKING STOCK

After nearly 2 academic years at the helm of this institution, I can appreciate the thoughtful and studied progress of its 95-year history and can understand the changes in style, curriculum and focus that have evolved over time to support the original goal of studying the profession of arms. That goal remains our *raison d'être* and hasn't changed since General Order No. 325 was issued in 1884. As we shape our curriculum and procedures for the Class of 1980, I'd like to take the opportunity to review the bidding and to express some of the educational philosophy that underlies the changes I've made and determines the direction we're going.

Educating people to make sound decisions has never been a simple process, nor is designing the curriculum to do it. A realistic program of study must be uniformly rigorous yet encourage original thinking. It must include a survey of what's new in technology, tactics and foreign affairs as well as foundation work in the immutable lessons of history. Four principal activities comprise our curriculum: the traditional prescribed courses in Strategy and Policy, Defense Economics, Naval Operations and the Electives program. The three prescribed courses are offered at both the senior and intermediate levels with a distinct variation in focus that reflects prospective needs of future assignments.

We've made a conscious shift to war gaming in the Naval Operations course, and our students participate to an ever increasing extent in major CINC-level games during the year. With the completion of our new facility in 1980, I see the trend continuing towards more and more gaming activity at all levels. The reputation of the Naval War College was built largely on the tremendous impact gaming had on World War II. As Nimitz later wrote, "The enemy of our games was always Japan and the courses were so thorough that after the start of



WWII—nothing that happened in the Pacific was strange or unexpected."

The Electives program has been a most enlightening educational experiment and for the Class of 1980 it will have equal status and credit weight with the prescribed courses. About 90 percent of our students are able to get their first choice of an array of 16 electives each trimester. The selections thus far have revealed a marked interest in area studies (Russia, China, Middle East), Electronic Warfare and Soviet studies. I am of course delighted with the response to my "Foundations of Moral Obligation" which I team teach with Dr. Joseph Brennan, professor emeritus of philosophy at Columbia University. We will offer that twice again next year. Additionally, the Naval War College will be privileged next spring trimester to have in residence Dr. Philip Rhineland, professor emeritus of philosophy at Stanford University where he was also Dean. My old friend Philip has additionally been director of general education at Harvard, and a Boston lawyer before that. He is now teaching philosophy of law at Stanford while writing a new book on law and morality that will be the text for a special elective course entitled "The Scope and Function of Morality" for the NWC Class of '80.

Philosophy is the logical discipline from which to draw insights and inspira-

2 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

tions into military leadership in general, and combat virtues in particular. In my view, trendy psychological chitchat case study leadership courses usually wind up in a welter of relativism. In fact, current literature tells me that the social sciences as a whole are becoming committed to a veritable ideology of relativism, an "egalitarianism of ideas" via the route of a logical positivism that most philosophers have long since rejected. If one leads men into battle while committed to the idea that each empirically unverifiable value judgment is just as good as the next, he's in for trouble. Thus, I think offerings of a discipline whose founder (Socrates) was committed to the position that there is such a thing as central, objective truth, and that that which is just transcends self-interest, provide a sensible contrast to much of today's management and leadership literature.

A quality program is thus in store for this first class of the new decade, in each of the four parts of our curriculum. Throughout its preparation we in Newport will be guided by a historic precedent that has consistently emphasized process over perishable content, concentration over fragmentation and education over training. We will continue to require that students read widely and critically, write extensively and analytically and define their ideas forcefully and logically in graduate-level seminars.

The quality of the academic excellence of any institution is tied directly to the rigor of its curriculum. Grades are an important and necessary adjunct to this rigor. For the Class of 1980, I have made a departure from the traditional 4.0 grading system and have implemented a straightforward A, B, C format. However, grades will be considered privileged information, and they will not appear in any fitness or efficiency reports. In fact, they will be released from the college only on the request of the student who earned them; this is an

important provision, particularly because Naval War College transcripts have become increasingly valuable for accreditation and admission to other institutions. (Each year our Registrar processes 150 transcript requests from our graduates.) To summarize my position on grades for the Class of '80, I am continuing to assume that they are an important form of communication between professor and student in our education process. But I do not want the process of grading to generate a rat race or result in a senseless competition that inhibits a mature officer's desire to concentrate study time on issues in which his interest is peaked. Subordination of our educational goals to the relentless logic of a measurement system based on weighted coefficients is not what is desired here. The provisions herein are designed to free all from any shackles, save their desire to learn and thereby better serve their country.

I hope this "academic report" gives the alumni, friends and particularly the inbound Class of 1980 a clear picture of what we're doing in Newport. I think of the academic year as an intellectual and philosophical "pit stop" that should give military officers a fresh, positive frame of mind as they glance down the track at the second half of their careers. This is where the creativity and measured outlook gained (I hope) during their War College experience realize utility. We try to build the self-confidence our students will need to fashion that most important and productive part of their careers around their individual strengths. So, Class of 1980, we see our job as one of boosting you to a tall ship and hope that in the process we may help you find a star to steer her by.



J.B. STOCKDALE
Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy
President, Naval War College