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# The Naval Officer in an Age of Revolution

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*In the first of the Spruance Lecture Series, and the initial lecture delivered in the college's newly dedicated Spruance Hall, Mr. Herman Wouk presents a timely and fascinating perspective on the revolutionary changes affecting our world. To be effective in his profession, the naval officer must possess an understanding of the social forces that have molded contemporary society.*

## THE NAVAL OFFICER IN AN AGE OF REVOLUTION\*

Spruance Lecture

by

Herman Wouk

In greeting the many distinguished guests who are here tonight, I want to say a word of special greetings to a man without whose work neither I, nor anybody who writes on World War II, would be able to function. I am proud that among those present is the great historian Samuel Eliot Morison.

When the creator of Captain Queeg addresses the Naval War College, a smoky trace of revolution already is in the air. Evidently you have even decided to overlook that well-known aphorism, "The Navy is a master plan designed by geniuses for execution by idiots." Of course I never said this; Lieutenant Keefer of the U.S.S. *Caine* said it. Much like a flesh and blood parent, an author has limited control over the utterances of his phantom offspring. I suppose forgiveness comes the more easily here at the Naval War College, where obviously I address only the geniuses.

The predicament of the naval officer in our revolutionary times is a somber one. In making this the topic of the first Spruance Lecture, I have tried, in Raymond Spruance's spirit, to go to the heart of the current naval problem.

"Revolution" is a word toward which we Americans have ambivalent feelings. We are getting ready for the bicentennial, 3 years hence, of the revolution that gave birth to our country. We consider it a glorious overthrow. Our most conservative female blue-bloods proudly call themselves the Daughters of the American Revolution. They do not think of the Boston Tea Party as an unlawful destruction of property, like the burning of Watts. They do not sympathize with the embattled soldiers, taunted and threatened

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\*The address was extemporaneous, and the text is adapted from a taped recording.

by a mob, who fired on and killed a few people—as the National Guardsmen did at Kent State—and thus committed the Boston Massacre. They do not even remember the angry swarm of their ancestors who broke into a British Governor's mansion, destroyed his papers, and looted and set fire to it, precisely like activists in a college president's office. Theirs—and ours—has become a storybook revolution tamed and stiffened into pretty costumed wax-works. It has no smell of blood and burning.

Revolution today really means for us, as for them, the world Communist revolution, which sends horrid hot winds, full of the smell of blood and burning, eddying across our borders into our cities and our campuses. Few naval officers doubt that it is an evil. This evening, for a start, I want to doubt it. I want at least to look clear-eyed at this international stirring of the peoples, which so many Americans take as the chief threat to our survival.

To begin with, are we talking about socialism or communism? It is an old quibble. I propose to bypass it. The revolutionaries themselves always claim they are "building socialism." We are on their ground; let us use their word. Socialism is, in historical perspective, a novel and radical critique of human society not two centuries old. It poses one stark question to all established economic structures: "*Who gets how much, and why?*" Year by year, generation by generation, every society divides up its natural wealth and the product of its labor. Socialism takes a hard look at the existing rules for sharing and passes some bellicose judgments.

The 17th century philosopher John Locke, whose ideas sparked the American Revolution, said that government exists for the protection of "property"; a word he meant to include the life and liberty of each individual. Early in the 19th century Joseph-Pierre Proudhon, one of the pioneers of socialist thought,

rocked Europe with the slogan, "*Property is theft!*" What happened in less than a century and a half to open such a gap between two such first-class minds?

The answer is a familiar one; the industrial revolution happened. Substances lying in the ground since the dawn of time, useless and unwanted, became rich sources of energy and therefore of wealth. Newly contrived machines which used that energy fantastically multiplied the product of one man's daily labor, further increasing human wealth. But this flood of fresh riches continued to be divided under old rules. If a feeble-minded fop happened to own a thousand square miles of land because a remote ancestor had once received a piece of paper from a king or a czar, he could live out his days in wild luxury while thousands of people worked for him at starvation's edge. The land was his "property"; government existed to protect it; and government did so, when necessary, by putting down peasants' or miners' revolts with sword and grapeshot. Or if a keen-minded man bought some of the new machines and hired workers to produce a hundred times what they could with their bare hands, he could pay them for working with their bare hands and keep all the extra wealth. The machines were his "property."

In these conditions of the early industrial age, the socialist movement was born. It sprang up, not in one place, but all over industrialized Europe. It murmured up out of the ground. The brutal question began to echo on the farms, in the streets, in the factories, and in the intellectual salons: "*Who gets how much, and why?*" When the old answer came that the old divisions would continue, because property was sacred, the cry was torn from Proudhon, "*Property is theft!*" In this simple-minded cry there was so much human truth that socialism grew and grew, through the 19th century and into the 20th, as a sort of secular Islam that

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threatened to sweep the earth.

For the radical solution proposed by socialism—inside much thick difficult philosophical verbiage—emerged seductively plain and clear. It was this: scrap the iniquitous old rules for sharing, set up new rules by which all the people own all the land and all the machines, and enforce through law the equitable sharing of the national wealth. Such political cure-alls never work out exactly as expected, and socialism in practice has showed wretched defects; but the panacea, with its romantic rhetoric of a golden age, lying just beyond a soul-satisfying orgy of violent destruction, remains for some people—the enslaved, the deprived, the young—an almost irresistible marching song.

Paradoxically, however, socialism has never become a serious movement in the United States. To this day, for all the early experimental communes, the waves of populism, the 50 years of Communist agitation, the persisting chic leftist salons and journals, it wilts and languishes here. The United States of America, the present-day cutting edge of the industrial revolution, throws off socialism like a world-infecting flu to which it is somehow immune. Were this not so, the American naval officer would have very different problems.

How has this happened? "Once," says John Locke, "all the world was America—"that is, a limitless virgin wilderness, with enough land for everybody for the taking. Elsewhere ancient privilege might grip its advantages, squeezing out those who did the real work. But North America offered a fresh and agreeable answer to the question, "*Who gets how much, and why?*" Here was the American answer: "*Every man gets what he earns with his energy, wit, and labor; for there is enough for everybody, and we all start even.*"

(*The Naval War College audience applauded.*)

Hold your applause. In our first 200 years, this American answer, often has

not worked. Panic and riot have then troubled the land. It is not working now for many of us, and therein lies the chief disquiet of our times. Nevertheless, it has worked long enough, for enough of us, to remain until this hour our political faith. That is why you just applauded; you believe in it.

I would add, not without cause. We are not yet far in time from Locke's virgin wilderness, the land of unlimited opportunities. My mother-in-law was born in Indian territory. My father, a Russian-Jewish immigrant, went to work here with bare hands and worked up to a prosperity that sent three children through college. Yet even when I went to college, our system seemed to be tottering. The great depression was closing banks, throwing millions of men out of work, and on the campuses generating student riots and Communist cells. That passed, but it happened. Today the impacts of the Vietnam tragedy and the race crisis again shake the ground under us.

The black man was dragged here. He did not come, like my father, to take his chances with everyone else in limitless America. He came in chains. Much white American blood was shed to strike off those chains; our Nation paid for a horrible crime with a horrible war. The price, however, was proved even higher than that. Naively it was thought that striking off the chains would be enough, but in an industrial society it was not. There simply was no way in for freed slaves. Bondage had brutalized and disabled them and their children.

Eighty years after the Civil War, a million black soldiers and sailors fought in the Second World War. When it was won they would not go docilely back to the nigger towns. By laying their lives on the line, they had authenticated their rights in America. The acute race problems today stem from these plain truths. One does not have to condone present-day crimes to acknowledge past crimes; but it is important to grasp that the,

half-mad anarchists, the self-seeking activists, and the idealistic revolutionaries of the black community alike owe their followings to what has happened to the black man in America. If black protest seizes on the timeworn rhetoric of socialism, nothing could be more natural. For socialism is not the voice of the devil but a recurring human response, in the industrial age, to things that are going wrong.

Is it an adequate response? Is it, in fact, the final answer, the glorious goal of history described by Marx? I have my inborn American doubts. First and last, to my very bones, I am a free man, and I know it. Marxism—the militant and triumphant form of modern socialism—calls for the immediate violent imposition of a police state in the name of social justice, the famous “dictatorship of the proletariat,” which will fade away like the morning dew once the great revolution is secure. This is the socialist version of pie in the sky: “Police state now, freedom later.” The stated purpose of the police state is of course purely benevolent—to change once and for all the old bad rules; to make very sure that everybody shares alike; and, above all, to protect the people against a counterrevolution, an attempt by the old crowd to restore the unfair old system.

I have put here in very simple language concepts that have generated thousands of books, some of them a thousand pages long. But the essence of any major idea can usually be simply put, for only simple concepts can generate a great human tide like a religion or a revolution.

It seems to me that Marxist socialism is an unmistakable retreat from the ideas and the achievements of the American Revolution; a second-best solution, for less advanced lands, of the industrialization problem. For the sake of achieving a fair shareout of the wealth, Marxism demands a so-called temporary suspension of our liberty

but the notion of a temporary tyranny is a tragic joke, alike of history and of philosophy.

Let me run up my flag. I think that freedom is man's most precious right and possession, the ultimate end of good government; that economic justice can be developed in freedom; and that American history moves steadily toward that goal. The American labor movement, for instance, has long since crushed the injustice of paying a machine worker the pittance of bare-hand work. The American working man shares in the yield of the machines, and drives tough bargains for his share each year or two, a process forbidden to the unfree workers in Marxist lands. A virtue of the free, open American society is its capacity for this sort of steady and progressive self-correction.

But the rate of progress is slow; ever too slow for the revolutionary temper. “Freedom for what?” is the classic sneer. “Freedom to starve?” Yet with all our weaknesses and inequalities, for all the chronic abuses of monopoly capitalism, it is we who are today, out of our abundance, feeding the Soviet Union. This is no accident of geography or technology. The United States and the U.S.S.R. are both advanced peoples with rich, vast lands. It is the difference in productivity between free men and unfree men. That is the long and the short of it, choke on the fact though a Marxist must.

Nevertheless, in underdeveloped lands, in exploited lands, in lands that have known only tyrannies of old privilege, in lands where there are a few idle rich and a whole population in misery, the forcible socialist solution continues to murmur up as once it did in Europe, on the farms and in the city streets, inside the factories and on the campuses. Not only is it useless for America to try to stamp it out everywhere, no matter how cruel, backward, or blind existing governments are; it is not in our interest, and it is not right. Whether the

long-suffering Russian people are better off under the Communist oligarchy than they were under the Czar is their business, so long as that oligarchy does not try to lead them against us in war, or to foment disorder in our own national life. Whether the unhappy Cubans, for that matter, have bettered or worsened themselves in exchanging Batista's torturers for Castro's torturers is a Cuban question; only Russian missiles on Cuban soil, zeroed on Washington or Chicago, are—and will remain—our affair.

It is very important to get these distinctions clear, for they imply foreign policy positions, and therefore military lines of action. A natural hostility exists between socialist oligarchies and individualist America, but it does not absolutely divide the world into white hats and black hats. That was a lesson that we learned fighting the Nazis and Tojo and overlooked when we sent half a million men into Vietnam. Side by side with a recalcitrant, difficult, suspicious Marxist ally we won the greatest war in history, and it will do us good never to forget that the chief winning weapon against Hitler was Soviet Russian blood. If some American businessmen are now taking a beating in crumbling, distraught socialist Chile, other American businessmen are rushing into the new trade opportunities in socialist China and Russia. The time is past, in any case, when our guns could make the way for our dollars. Our dollars will make their way because of our unequalled productivity, which can still be much increased by peace and social justice at home; or if we become foolish and decadent enough to neglect our main strength, the productive power of free and happy men, the dollar will become weaker paper than even the ruble, and guns will not help.

For most of you, probably, I have so far spoken only commonplaces. I have taken this look at the Marxist revolution and offered my view of it in order to

clear the way to a more central problem. Tonight as I speak, three Americans lie in the tip of a great rocket down in Florida, about to fly to the moon, perhaps the last such voyage in our century. This American voyage to the nearest world in outer space, the small dead world that has lit man's steps at night since he first walked the earth, has shocked all of us, and all mankind, more than we yet know. Its implications are just dawning on us. The sense grows that we live together on a tiny beautiful ball lost in eternal dark space. We start to see ourselves through the eyes of Armstrong and Cernan, and the view is disturbingly like God's. In that perspective our quarrels, our crises, our wars seem the pathetic yammerings and hair-pullings of inept children and our military establishments gigantic exercises in poisonous suicidal futility.

One astronaut has said, "When I flew around the world 151 times, I saw no national boundaries. I saw one world where one kind of man lives." Such words go to our hearts. He tells us what we always knew and have kept forgetting; that the real world is not a mapped globe, that the United States is not red nor Mexico brown nor the Soviet Union yellow, but that it is all one blue, cloud-girt ball and that we are all dwellers or, if you will, voyagers or, if you will, prisoners, but in any terms all here together: the black man and the yellow man, the Christian and the Communist, the revolutionary and the rich man in the mansion behind the electrified fence. We are all in the same cosmic boat, and we all have but our few pitiful years in the starlight. For us to spend our brief time piling up armaments, the sterile iron fruit of the industrial revolution; to go on amassing these weapons, I say, at huge cost in unstable explosive heaps while so many men lack food, clothing, and shelter begins to seem the most disgusting of absurdities. Yet, you must go on serving in such a military system; and not only

that, you must recruit clear-eyed, free, critical young men in great numbers or the U.S. Navy will wither. There is the radical problem of the naval officer in this age of revolution.

One of the most candidly subversive men I ever met was the ex-commander of a nuclear submarine. He questioned—in unguarded late-hour talk over whiskey—the whole concept of nationalism and of “national survival.” It had been his responsibility to cruise in the black ocean depths, months on end, waiting for the order to fire and thus to poison the air and perhaps put the torch to civilization. Why? Because men were of different nationalities; it came down to that. Perhaps, he said, we had better rethink the whole question of nationality while time remained.

From the surface of the moon or the bottom of the sea, the view is strangely the same. Our military activities begin to look like dangerous and loathsome nonsense. How then can sensible men give their hearts and their days to such dirty work? This puts the case no more harshly, I think, than it is being put in a hundred nightly bull sessions at Annapolis or West Point. For whatever you may think of the new generation, they are not damned fools, and only a damned fool can remain oblivious to these things.

Another astronaut said—and all but one were military men and many were officers of the U.S. Navy—“When I was out there in deep space and looked back on the earth, I suddenly stopped feeling like an American. My national identity dissolved, and I was a human being.” That is the essence of the real revolutionary challenge of which I speak; and now I want to suggest a reply. It is the core of what I have to say to you.

Nationalism does generate all the dangers that threaten us, yet in itself it is not evil; it turns evil when it arms to inflict its ways and its will on others. Nationalism gone cancerous is Nazi Germany. Nationalism can be a peaceful

Switzerland, a civilized Sweden, and a cultured France. The burgeoning of nationalism in the past two centuries I see, at least in part, as a reaction to the industrial revolution, a deeply human protest against its drift. The machines and the mass culture press to homogenize us, to make us dress one way, think one set of thoughts, live one sort of life. This is the repulsive prospect of Huxley's *Brave New World*, a humanity of interchangeable cogs.

Nationalism would cling to the ways of our fathers, to our colorful differences, to the deep heritages that have come down through hundreds of diverse languages and cultures. If we do not want a Sovietized earth, the other peoples do not want an Americanized earth; and if some animal species are endangered by modern times, so are some dear human values. To be Americans is for us a wonderful and irreplaceable thing. It has led us to build nuclear submarines, but I honestly believe we would sink them all tomorrow if we thought we could do it and remain Americans. The growing Russian Navy is the mirror image of our nationalist concerns and precautions; but it also flies a flag of world revolution, of the imposition of socialism everywhere, and that is how things seem to stand.

Now let me read to you from Alexander Solzhenitsyn's new novel *August 1914*. In this passage, which comes late in the story, the Battle of Tannenberg is in its final stages. The Czarist army is fleeing. A staff colonel named Vorotyntsev finds himself near the disorderly front. He rallies a handful of officers to gather up their men and try to hold a gap in the torn battleline. It is something of a suicide mission. Now here is Solzhenitsyn:

In a few sentences Vorotyntsev explained to these two lieutenant colonels and to half the surviving company commanders the situation of the town, the situation of the army, the fact that their regi-

mental commander had retreated back to Russia along with the remaining companies of their regiment, and the job that he wanted the rest of them to do. As he spoke, he looked into their faces and saw, as though in his own features, that fundamentally they all bore the indelible impress of a similar background: army tradition; long spells of garrison service in a world isolated from the rest of society; a sense of alienation, of being despised by that society and ridiculed by liberal writers; the official ban on discussing politics and political literature, resulting in a blunting or stultifying of the intellect; a permanent shortage of money; and yet, despite it all, the knowledge that they represented, in purified and concentrated form, the vitality and courage of the whole nation. Now was the moment they had lived for, and Vorotyntsev had no doubt what their answer would be.

I tell you, as the author of *The Winds of War*, that when I came on this passage in a book written by a Soviet author, I felt as an astronomer might when, on peering through his telescope at another galaxy, he saw a sudden blinking and winking that spelled in Morse code, "Hello, out there!" In this awareness of what the military man is or can be at his best, bridging socialism and the American system, one strikes the bedrock of our discussion. Take these words of a Soviet artist, gentlemen, and write them on your hearts, for those moments in this revolutionary time when you doubt the worth of your calling. *They represented, in purified and concentrated form, the vitality and courage of the whole Nation.*

These are not the words of a war-loving jingoist, any more than my words tonight are. I remain the creator of

a picture of the incredible failures and the callous stupidity of the Czarist high command at Tannenberg. What Solzhenitsyn is saying, what I saw at sea in the Second World War, is a plain truth that liberal writers tend to ignore or to scorn. The final guarantee of every human society, to this hour, has been the willingness of able men to learn war and to die if they must for their native lands. All men of sense have prayed, and still pray, for the day when a guarantee less primitive, less cruel, and more worthy of children of God will come to exist; and I believe that we of the 20th century live in the slowly waning darkness before the dawn of that day.

(The speaker turned to the widow of Admiral Spruance, sitting in the front row.)

Mrs. Spruance, I regard Raymond Spruance not only as a great seafighter, but as one of the great men of our history. He deliberately and successfully avoided the limelight of journalism, and his measure has yet to be taken by historians. The dedication of Spruance Hall is a worthy step toward the full recognition he will one day have.

Let me remind you, my friends, and fellow officers, what it was that Raymond Spruance did at the Battle of Midway. This officer of the surface fleet, this black-shoe admiral, took command of a carrier task group on 24 hours' notice, went out to sea with another man's staff, and fought an over-the-horizon, carrier-to-carrier duel such as had never been fought before. He fought this revolutionary fight against huge odds and won. In that victory came a great turning point of the war, and in that victory he gave freedom one more chance for one more generation.

That, I submit to you, remains the task of the naval officer in an age of revolution. Not to solve the great ongoing problems of social stress nor to despair at the immensity and complexity of these problems outside our



country and inside, but to stand and to serve. To improvise, to make do with what we have; to serve in still another kind of revolutionary warfare, a contest which one wins only if no weapon is ever fired; to do battle against great odds of political trouble within and without our land, odds of events running almost out of human control; and with this fight, and with this service, to give freedom one more chance for one more generation.

I do not see this as service in a lost cause; I refuse to believe that the human case is without hope. We have a way of coming out of these things by the skin of our teeth. The industrial revolution is a ticking timebomb, and man's problem is to defuse it before it blows him up. I think he will do so, barely in time; but that he will do it, and that America will make an enormous, perhaps decisive contribution to that process. The way to world peace, my commonsense tells me, lies through this long, delicate, perilous defusing, not through the general carnage and overthrow so dear to the pessimistic clamorers of the Left.

A main cause for hope lies in this same menacing industrial revolution, for it has put in man's hands the means to create universal abundance. Lord Keynes said 40 years ago that the economic problem is now, for the first time in history, within the power of man to solve; what holds us back is only our own incompetence and muddle. War has had many causes, but the chief motive down the ages has been loot; and when all have enough, predation loses its point, if not its brutal fun. Certainly if all the world can again become America, in the Lockean sense, the socialist rationale for dictatorship falls to the ground.

Essentially I see socialism as a state of prefreedom, a perhaps necessary transition for some underdeveloped or decayed societies to enter into the industrial age. It is hard to argue against the visible gains of the Chinese people,

for instance, despite all their fearsome sufferings, under their new regime. I suspect that eventually the socialist societies, as they industrialize, may generate a large middle class of technicians and managers to whom the Marxist tyranny will become increasingly irrelevant and irksome, perhaps to the point of getting rid of it. I may be quite wrong in this. It may be that authoritarian rule, which has dominated so much of human history, is truly congenial to some cultures and not to others. I dimly see the future as a diverse political world with a trend to social justice prevailing everywhere made more practical each decade by more productive technology, but I cannot see a future for an unfree America.

The astronaut who said he stopped feeling like an American in outer space spoke a profound but still partial truth. He got out there—for that poignant and Godly glimpse of our mortal home in the universe—precisely because he was an American; because his free country, and no other, produced the industrial base, the thousand complicated control skills, and the armies of disciplined technicians that made possible the crowning technical achievement of the

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### BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Mr. Herman Wouk earned his baccalaureate degree from Columbia and holds an L.H.D. from Yeshiva University and an L.L.D. from Clark University. Early in his career he was active in radio with vari-

ous comedians, including Fred Allen, and in 1941 served as a presidential consulting expert to the U.S. Treasury. As a Naval Reserve officer in World War II, he served as a deck officer aboard destroyer-minesweepers in the Pacific for 3 years, including duty as executive officer of the U.S.S. *Southard*. Mr. Wouk is a celebrated novelist, author of *The Caine Mutiny* (Pulitzer Prize for fiction, 1952) and *The Winds of War*, a current bestseller.

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human race. History will never forget that the first giant step for mankind toward the stars was an American foot-fall on lunar dust.

Freedom works in human life better than any other condition. The 19th century doubted it, and Marx proclaimed the doubt. The 20th century is beginning to prove it in the heavens and on earth. For the sake of all mankind, not only for ourselves, our citadel of freedom is worth preserving.

Your role in this age of revolution—so I believe—is to preserve it, while

statesmen struggle through our generation and the next, and perhaps the next, to defuse at long last the industrial time bomb and bring in the age of cooperative world abundance and disarmament. Is that so very different, after all, from our Navy's mission down the years? The American fighting man at sea has ever been guarding the peace or winning it back from anarchy and chaos. I tell you, let the heathen rave; that remains as noble a calling as any that a man can follow on this beautiful but still unquiet earth.



The leader in a democratic country's fighting services needs to understand not only what the society of which he is a member stands for but how it has developed: since only so can he become mentally and psychologically equipped to withstand the virulent propaganda constantly directed against the system which he may at any time be called on to defend. Such understanding can of course only be gained from a study of history.

*S.W. Roskill, The Art of Leadership, p. 22.*