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President's Notes: Challenge!

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CHALLENGE!

Because of the emphasis on operational experience, the officer selected to attend the Naval War College is sometimes beset with doubt as to the true career value of this assignment. In response to this doubt, in my opening remarks to the students this year I emphasized that attendance at the College afforded an unparalleled opportunity both to widen their perspectives and to deepen their professional knowledge. How much of this broadening and deepening has been accomplished in the brief time since those remarks were made is difficult to measure, but I am sure that it is far in excess of what was anticipated.

The Naval War College emphasizes the ingredients basic to educational excellence in an effort to engender imaginative thinking about new problems and about old problems in new ways. This imaginative thinking is a product of broad perspectives and deep professional knowledge. To illustrate this, let us view the example of an early great military leader, who happened to be the father of this great nation of ours.

Gen. George Washington, Commander in Chief of the Continental Army, had little familiarity with seamanship or, for that matter, even the basic techniques of the naval profession. Yet the clear perception of the functions of naval power which become so obvious in a study of his campaign illuminates a genius rarely equaled afloat or ashore.

For the first 3 years of the Revolutionary War, the British Army enjoyed the strength and luxury afforded by an almost complete freedom of sea communications. Ample supplies were assured by the easy flexibility and rapid mobility of troop movements and the powerful support of artillery fire and



landing forces from numerous great men-of-war. In striking contrast, the American Army began with a critical need of obtaining munitions from overseas. Its ordinary supply of food, clothing, and other necessities of mere daily living were frequently most precarious because of the hold of the British Navy on the coastal and inland waterways of this country.

Washington stressed extreme shortages and lack of mobility in his first report to Congress in July of 1775. In his need he turned first to Governor Cook of Rhode Island who controlled a few small vessels of the state naval forces. As the result of General Washington's appeal, six armed vessels were operating in Washington's Navy by November fifth, serving the double purpose of reducing the supplies to the besieged British in Boston and replenishing the poverty-stricken American Army.

During the first 3 years of the Revolution, the General was balked at every turn by the overwhelming British sea supremacy, with the minor exception of a respite gained by the temporary American naval control on Lake Cham-

plain. After spending 8 months outside of Boston in the reorganization, training, and equipping of an army to defeat the British troops, their seapower and the mobility it provided robbed him of his goal. Moving to New York, which he correctly surmised as the next hostile objective, Washington was suddenly faced there with overwhelming numbers brought against him by the same maritime forces which transported the troops who menaced his rear. British naval forces were the instrument in the ensuing campaign which threatened his flanks and rear constantly and finally forced him into New Jersey in retreat.

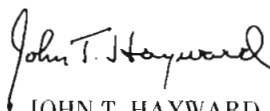
From this location in December of 1777 he faced frustration on all sides. Lack of communications cloaked the movement of the enemy. His troops were exhausted from a series of marches and countermarches which resulted from trying to outguess the mobile movement by sea of the British troops. Finances, supplies and equipment, and the lack of these would have shattered the morale of a lesser man. With arrival of word that the British Army was sighted embarked in transports, he reasoned that they would strike either up the Hudson, where Burgoyne was advancing from the north, or at Philadelphia.

Between the frequently alternating probability of these two objectives, the American Army was further weakened by detachments sent to the north at the request of Congress. When they finally met Howe below Philadelphia, where seapower had transported him in stealth, the burdens which this same

seapower had imposed on Americans made it impossible for them to offer effective resistance.

France's entry into the war completely changed the strategy of General Washington. The French Fleet opened to him for the first time the opportunity of effective employment of seapower to his own end. The prompt vigor with which he grasped the situation was most extraordinary, considering his lack of experience in this field. Crushing burdens which naval superiority had levied upon him, however, were sufficient to convince him of the imperative need for utilization of naval power on a broad and effective scale. From the arrival of the French Fleet until the conclusion of the War, American military operations consisted of an army held in readiness for close cooperation with the fleet. This was to be the military strategy during the last 4 years of the American Revolution. History shows the soundness of this strategy.

While the Naval War College makes no attempt to recreate the genius that was Washington in the balance and breadth of its curriculum, his genius should be an inspiration and a challenge. And the quick and inspired grasp of the importance of seapower by a man who disclaimed any knowledge of naval operations should show how vital it is to broaden the potential of each individual student. This must be the primary goal of the Naval War College, for its assigned task is to prepare every officer in attendance for the higher responsibilities toward which he aspires.



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