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## THE WAR COLLEGE YEARS OF



## Admiral Harris Laning, U.S. Navy

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Edited by

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**Introduction.** The account which follows this introduction was extracted from the unpublished autobiography of Admiral Harris Laning, U.S. Navy. The manuscript, *An Admiral's Yarn*, was written in 1937-1938 during the admiral's final active duty as Governor of the Naval Home in Philadelphia. The original manuscript is in the custody of the admiral's daughter, Mrs. D.S. Pepper of Hartford, Conn., and a full copy is in the library of the Naval War College.

Admiral Laning begins his autobiography with the observation that "It is a far cry from the rolling prairie of Illinois to the rolling sea, and a still

farther cry from moving flat-bottomed boats on the Sangamon River to commanding the Battle Force of the United States Fleet." In traversing that distance, of space and time, Harris Laning moved steadily, unobtrusively, and always competently ahead. Lacking a political patron or a senior friend to clear a path for him, and spending little time in Washington to mend fences or build new bridges, he was forced to depend on his own intelligence, energy, and old-fashioned "devotion to duty" to move forward and upward. Occasionally chance put him under the command of men who remembered his outstand-

ing work and they saw that he had further opportunity to use his great talent. Occasionally Laning "bucked the system" in order to get duty he desired or to work in a way he felt was correct; in almost all cases he succeeded. Perhaps this luck was also determinant in his progress.

Harris Laning was born in Petersburg, Ill., on 18 October 1873. He entered the Naval Academy in the spring of 1891, after a year at the Peekskill Military Academy, and graduated eighth in his class of June 1895. As a Naval Cadet (later called Passed Midshipmen) he served in *Philadelphia*, a small cruiser and flagship of the Pacific Station. From *Philadelphia*, Laning was transferred to *Oregon* and had his first exposure to the large ships and gunnery departments of the new Navy. Commissioned ensign in June 1897, Laning was detailed to *Marion*, a second-rate wooden hull sailing cruiser. The major armament was smoothbore and muzzle-loaded. From *Marion* he moved to her newly rebuilt sister ship, *Mohican*; still in wooden walls.

The Spanish-American War brought rapid changes to the Navy and to Ensign Laning. Risking reprimand, he requested transfer to a fighting ship and in the spring of 1898 was assigned to *Monadnock*, a west coast monitor. *Monadnock* was steamed, and towed, to the Philippines to reinforce Dewey's fleet but only arrived in time for war's end. With the outbreak of the Philippine Insurrection in February 1899, Laning got all the action he desired. In *Monadnock* he directed gunfire support to Army troops in the so-called "battles" of Malate, Parañaque, and Colocan. He refurbished and commanded the antique Spanish gunboat *Panay*. In this maritime relic he suppressed smuggling to the insurgents, patrolled and mapped the waters throughout the islands, and managed to survive several typhoons at sea through superb seamanship.

Upon return to the United States in the summer of 1900, Ensign Laning married Mabel Clare Nixon of Santa Barbara and took up his new duties at the Naval Academy in the Department of English, History and Law. In June 1901 he was promoted to lieutenant junior grade and a year later to lieutenant. After a tour as watch officer and gunnery officer in *Dolphin* (1902-1905), Laning returned to the Naval Academy to the Ordnance and Gunnery Department. He had caught the attention of Lt. Comdr. W.S. Sims, Inspector of Target Practice, because he had brought *Dolphin* up to number one rank in gunboat class shooting. At the Naval Academy he made his mark in training the Naval Academy and the U.S. Navy's rifle teams. In 1907, largely due to Laning's training methods, the Navy team swept all national competition. During this tour Laning's only daughter, Hester, was born in 1906.

From 1907 to 1910 Lieutenant Laning served in the new battleship *Nebraska* as navigator and electrical officer. The jump from *Oregon* to *Nebraska*, in terms of gun batteries and electrical systems, was almost of the magnitude of the change from *Marion* to *Oregon*. In *Nebraska* Laning made the famous world cruise of 1907-1909. During it he trained a Navy rifle team that defeated the Australians in a special challenge match.

In the summer of 1910 Laning was promoted to lieutenant commander and was again detailed to the Naval Academy. He directed athletics; captained the U.S. Rifle Team to gold medals in the 1912 Olympic Games; and returned to head the Department of Navigation during his last year. Ever interested in navigation, Laning changed the department's stress away from theory and back to practical application. For this he almost acquired sainthood among the midshipmen.

At the close of the academic year in

June 1913, Lieutenant Commander Laning was ordered to Bath, Me., to command the newly built destroyer *Cassin*. A year later, with the close of the Tampico incident, he took command of the Atlantic Fleet's Reserve Destroyer Flotillas at Charleston. With this he was promoted to commander.

From October 1916 to April 1919, Commander (then Captain) Laning worked in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations as Head of the Officer Personnel Division. With America's entry into war in April 1917, the Navy quickly divined that all regular officers barely met the needs of the existing fleet. The nation had an enormous naval building program underway, and this was soon augmented heavily by ships needed for antisubmarine warfare and convoy duty. Laning's assignment was to see that the Navy was properly manned and that the incoming flood of Reserve officers received proper indoctrination and training before sea duty assignment. Frozen in his position by Chief of Naval Operations W.S. Benson, he never got to sea during the Great War. By spring 1919 Captain Laning was Acting Chief, Bureau of Navigation.

From Washington Captain Laning went to sea as Chief of Staff to the Commander, Destroyer Forces Atlantic and in 1921 was detailed to the Naval War College as a student and then as Head of the Department of Tactics. His friend from *Dolphin* and *Cassin* days, Rear Admiral Sims, was then President of the War College. He had recognized Laning's talents and saw that they were utilized. The autobiography extract below tells the story down to 1924.

Upon completion of 3 years at the Naval War College, Captain Laning was ordered to the command of the battleship *Pennsylvania* and took it on the great 1924-1925 cruise to the Antipodes. In 1926 he was placed in command of the Naval Training Station, San Diego. Here he was promoted to rear admiral in the summer of 1927. He

immediately went to sea in September as Chief of Staff to the Commander, Battle Fleet, and in June 1928 began a 2 year tour at sea as Commander, Battleship Division Two in the Scouting Fleet. Despite their age, coal-fired boilers, and employment for midshipmen summer cruise ships, Admiral Laning brought his division up to a level of smartness and gunnery efficiency equal to the newest divisions in the Battle Fleet. In June 1930 he was relieved of Battleship Division Two and assumed the presidency of the Naval War College. The extract below gives more detail on this duty.

After being relieved at the War College in May 1933, and a hurried cross-country drive, Laning broke his new three-starred flag in *Chicago* as Vice Admiral and Commander, Cruiser Divisions. In fleet operations he proved to be resourceful, and several surprises in the maneuvers of 1934 and 1935 were the result of his initiatives.

On 1 April 1935 Laning began his final year of sea duty. He described it in his *Admiral's Yarn*:

On April 1, 1935, with all the pomp prescribed for the ceremony, I took command of the Battle Force. After reading my orders aloud and announcing assumption of command, I directed the Captain of my flagship, the *California*, to break my flag. The four starred flag of an admiral then flew out from the masthead and as it did, the *California* fired a salute of seventeen guns. The moment was tense for me marking as it did attainment of my life's ambition—the rank of Admiral in the Navy.

At the conclusion of that year of high command, Admiral Laning hauled down his flag, "flected down" to his permanent rank of rear admiral, and began a terminal tour as Commandant of the Third Naval District. Upon retirement in December 1937, he was requested to continue on active duty as Governor of the Naval Home, Philadelphia. The work was not pressing and here he completed his *Admiral's Yarn*.

## 72 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

Admiral Laning died at the Philadelphia Naval Hospital on 2 February 1941 and was interred in the cemetery at the Naval Academy. On 1 August 1943 the Admiral was further honored when DE 159, U.S.S. *Laning*, entered service.

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**Naval War College Student.** Though the Naval War College has a vital place in our national defense, few nonmilitary people know anything of it. The College is on an island in Narragansett Bay in Newport, R.I., but as there is not anything spectacular to be seen there and as the War College is not open to the public, even sightseers do little more than glance at it from a distance. Excepting those interested in naval features of our national defense, few people give any attention to the War College.

Yet, in spite of that, the College does more toward the development of sound fighting ideas in the U.S. Navy than does any other agency. Most Americans seem to believe that naval fighting power is measured by the types and numbers of ships possessed, little or no thought being given to the fact that unless men give life to them, ships are as inanimate as ore in the mountains. In any country fighting ships are merely the tools of its navy. What is done with those tools depends on the skill with which they are handled. It is the aim of the Naval War College to develop in the higher officers of the Navy such skill in the use of their ships and weapons as to obtain the utmost power should war come.

Another idea also prevalent in the country is that having been 4 years at the Naval Academy, its graduates are fully prepared for practically everything pertaining to naval warfare. Nothing could be farther from the fact. At the Academy young men of college age simply learn the A.B.C.'s of a profession that requires a lifetime to master. When

a young man graduates, he is merely beginning the naval profession, and what he later becomes depends, naturally, on his ability. Like great surgeons or doctors, our great war commanders become great through practicing their profession, not through intuition or inspiration. However, in the medical profession, doctors and surgeons have almost instant practice while in both the Navy and Army actual professional practice is to be had only in the event of war—which we endeavor to avoid.

Every nation must develop skill in war so vitally important, or ultimately pay for not having done so.

To develop war skills without being at war is difficult. A man may spend a lifetime thinking of and studying war operations and by so doing develop many ideas as to how to win them but unless they can be tested in practice, he will never know whether they will win against those of an opposing commander. The Naval War College was devised to provide such tests. In miniature, it pits naval forces against each other in every conceivable form of war operation and by constantly measuring results and applying losses as they occur, the miniature operations become almost exactly those of actual war.

By carrying out battles, campaigns, and even entire naval wars in miniature, the College develops in officers the skill and wit essential to operating the Navy's fighting tools successfully so vitally important in our national defense.

The system used at the College is spoken of as the "Applicatory System" because student officers train for high command in war by actually applying their knowledge of fighting to the winning of war situations, since in war no one situation is quite like another and what might win in one case could bring complete disaster in another.

All that can be done for prospective high commanders is to give them an understanding of the principles of fighting that tend to success when followed,

and then have him practice in applying those principles to the fighting of the force he commands.

Because ability to fight skillfully, regardless of the situation, comes only through practice, the War College does not have lessons, recitations, or examinations, nor is there any attempt to measure the relative ability of students. Thus there is not any competition in class standing, each student working solely to perfect himself in war strategy and tactics. Certain students do, of course, show up better than others as winners of fights but no attempt is made to rate them in that ability. Each officer is therefore strictly on his own and works his utmost to perfect himself in the art of naval warfare.

The student course covers 11 months and during that time an officer taking it has no other duty than perfecting himself for high command in war and preparing himself for the greatest responsibility a man can have, that of winning for his country should he be chosen for high war command.

Had an officer no other incentive, the game of war even when played in miniature is one of intense fascination for it surpasses all other competitive games. In other games the stake, if any, is small and the reward of winning applies generally to an individual or to small groups of individuals. But the stake in war is often the very existence of a country and its people, and the contestants are entire nations. The teams for war contests often have as many thousands or even millions of men on them as other teams have persons, and those men operate the most powerful weapons of destruction man can devise or create. A country's navy is a team made up of many teams. One large ship often requires a team of over a thousand men to work it, groups of ships of one type form type group teams, and type group teams are formed

into fleet teams to fight the battles of war.

Little wonder there is fascination in practicing war with such teams, and still less wonder that the officers who are to command and operate such teams in war should devote every minute of their 11 months at the War College to perfecting themselves for that task. But even so, they are not completely prepared for war when they finish the course. They may be well versed in the principles to observe when fighting, but constant practice in operating fighting teams must ever continue to win the finals in war contests.

Until I became a student at the War College, I thought my previous work was as important as it had been interesting and, of course, for one in low command, it was. However, as soon as I realized, from the College course, what I would be responsible for if chosen for high command, the picture of life changed for me. Instead of dealing with only the relatively minor war duties for which officers in low command are responsible, I had come to the point where I might be responsible for the important war duties of a high command. Not much longer would I have only to carry out the plans and orders of someone else. I, myself, might be called on to do the planning and ordering, and since it was ever my ambition to be an able high commander in the Navy, I bent every energy to preparing myself to make good in the role.

Looking at my future in that light I worked feverishly on the War College course and, in particular, strove to perfect myself in naval fighting through the war operations conducted in miniature. It proved worthwhile, for about a month before my student course ended I was sent for by the President of the College, Admiral Sims, who, having told me that my work at the College warranted it, invited me to join the War College Staff as head of the Department of Tactics.

## 74 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

That invitation to be head of the Tactics Department hit me like a thunderbolt for, until I received it, I had no idea my work as a student warranted such recognition. I knew I had given all of my time, energy, and ability to the course and had been quite successful in winning miniature war games, but I had never thought of even a minor place on the War College Staff. I had given a little consideration to the duty I would have after completing the course and, being desirous of continuing my study of war, had decided to request assignment to the Army War College as a student. Should that request be granted I would have 2 months between courses, and my little family and I had planned to spend them with my wife's sister who had a delightful summer place in the almost virgin forests of Western Oregon.

As we had practically made up our family mind as to what we wanted to do after my graduation I was completely surprised when Admiral Sims asked me to join the College Staff. Since I was not too confident of my ability to make good on the job, was keen to continue my study of war by going to the Army War College, and realized that 2 month's vacation in the woods of Oregon was quite essential to my keeping physically fit, I felt compelled to explain the situation to the Admiral. When I had done so he said,

Laning, the College wants you and if you will take the position I believe I can arrange everything else to your satisfaction. As the tactics work of the College course does not start until a month after the course opens, you can have your two month's leave and still be back in time for it. When that course is ended and you wish to attend the Army War College course, I think I can arrange it. Under those circumstances, will you accept the billet?

Quite naturally I said I would.

On the War College Staff. The War College was just starting the second month of the course when I assumed charge of the Tactics Department.

During the first month the students had devoted their time to reading and studying the causes, nature, and conduct of wars, but in the second month they began strategy and tactics. The work covered the same ground mine had, in the course, except for the addition of a pamphlet on tactics titled *The Naval Battle*, a not too long treatise on the team play of a modern fleet when fighting which, without my knowing it, had been called from the thesis on tactics I had submitted at the end of my student year.

At the time I took the course, students were required to submit four theses on war subjects during the year, and I utilized mine to make a rather complete resume of the general principles I would observe were I responsible for fighting operations. As I wanted to be ready to win in battle I went into considerable detail in the one on tactics but since what I wrote was intended only to crystallize sound ideas in my own mind and was in no way intended for anyone else, you can imagine my surprise on returning from leave to find it had been published by the College as a guide for students in the conduct of naval battles. By that action the College brought home to me that I was no longer responsible merely for perfecting myself for high command in battle but was responsible for training all officers who came to the College for it.

For two years, until that tour of shore duty ended, I remained Head of the Department of Tactics. I had learned much during my student year but it was only a smattering to what I learned in the 2 years I was on the College Staff. Although my department was an intensely busy one I was able, during these years, to attend the weekly lectures and discussions of national and international affairs, enter the discussions of international law, study the strategic problems under consideration, and participate in all critiques on them.

But of all the College work, what I considered the most interesting as well as the most important, was that of training officers for battle command.

Although preparing officers for conducting war has always been the primary purpose of the War College, a byproduct of doing that had become of tremendous importance since the miniature war operations of the College are really research by which every detail of naval warfare becomes tested and evaluated. Because of that fact the College had gradually grown to be a guide for the entire Navy.

Its influence may not be realized even by naval officers, but it is my opinion that much of our naval advancement in recent years has resulted from War College research.

Because of the importance of the College, both to the Navy and to the entire United States, it appeared to me that its work in naval tactics should be progressive from year to year and that student officers of our class should take up tactical work at about the point the preceding class left off. As a student, I had found it impossible to do that since no record had been kept of the miniature battles of the preceding classes, and it was largely because of that deficiency that I summarized in my thesis on tactics what my class had learned.

That summary had now been made a starting point for the new classes and hence *The Naval Battle* had become the connecting link for a progressive development of battle tactics.

Realizing that, it occurred to me that if we would correct, revise, and add to *The Naval Battle* pamphlet each year the sound fighting ideas developed by successive classes, we would have not only what would enable one class to start tactical work where its predecessor stopped but also the pamphlet would be a guide for even a fleet in battle. I therefore determined to use the pamphlet that way, and in order that the principles enumerated in it would be

based on recorded data, I started making full records and analyses of each miniature battle fought as I was confident the results would be well worth the effort.

Histories and analyses of battles from which sound principles of fighting can be deduced are essential in the study of tactics. However, because real naval battles are fortunately few and far between, not only are they too rare to provide sufficient information but also the only records we have of them are not from exact data but from recollections of men participating in them. For that reason what we have concerning real battles is both incomplete and incorrect, often leading us to wrong deductions.

In miniature battles which can be stopped instantly to permit the accurate plotting of movements and the measuring of the effects of gun fire, torpedoes, bombs, mines, et cetera, there are no uncertainties. Causes and effects are accurately determined.

When I was a student we had but one modern naval battle to study--the Battle of Jutland. Though that battle had been fought 4 years before, I started to study it closely and found the records too incomplete to permit more than a general conclusion.

Although we studied that battle thoroughly we learned little from it. However, great and important though the Battle of Jutland was, we could not learn everything about naval fighting from it. Worse than that, even when I studied it, the Battle of Jutland was already almost as outmoded as the Battle of Trafalgar. The characteristics of naval ships had changed greatly after it, and two startling new types had been added to fleets, which were not present at Jutland at all. We were in a new area of naval warfare, one quite different from Battle of Jutland days.

The changes in characteristics so affected the capabilities and limitations of surface ships alone as to necessitate,



radical changes in the battle tactics of a fleet made up only of surface ships, but the addition of underwater and air forces to fighting fleets brought about still greater changes. At the time the World War ended, neither submarines nor aircraft had taken part in a major naval battle so no one knew much about their use.

Inasmuch as both were extremely powerful hitting types, it was essential that the U.S. Navy know how to utilize them to best advantage and how to defend against them. It was therefore to a post-Jutland type of naval battle that the War College devoted its energies, paying particular attention to air and underwater forces of modern fleets.

As can be imagined, the changes in tactics necessitated by the makeup of naval fighting teams were very great. The fundamental principles of fighting that centuries of war had proved to be immutable were, of course, the same as ever, but in the application of those principles almost everything was different.

Still, great though the changes in fighting methods would be, we went into them with zest. We assembled all known data on characteristics, capabilities, and limitations of each of the modern types of naval craft and having established rules based on them to govern our miniature battles, we went to work.

The task of making a complete record and analysis of every battle fought was enormous, for the ramifications in naval battles are innumerable. They come from the complicated operations of opposing fleets, the ships of which fight not as individuals but as teams made up of many groups of ships. Of the half dozen or more types of ships in a modern fleet, only battleships operate together as a unit. Cruisers, destroyers, aircraft carriers, submarines, and aircraft operate in groups, each having a particular position and role in the team play of a battle.

Since sea battles are between fleets, every part of which does its fighting while maneuvering at high speed, it is practically impossible to picture actual battle for any particular instant even though every part of each fleet knows exactly where it is and what it is doing at the instant.

To visualize such a picture for an entire battle at sea is, of course, impossible. Nevertheless we could and did make them of our miniature battles from which we deduced the corrections, additions and changes to make in *The Naval Battle*.

Doing that work took much time and application but by it I, myself, gained considerable knowledge of the new naval fighting as did both the College staff and students. Still it took a man from outside the College and Navy to make us realize the extent of our learning.

Usually civilians are not permitted to watch the College war games, but one day while we were at work on the big game at the end of my first year on the staff, the President of the College, Admiral Sims, sent for me, introduced me to Mr. — of Harvard University, told me the gentleman was making a study of the research work being done in our colleges and universities, and was particularly interested in the work we were doing.

He directed me to allow the gentleman to watch our battle and to explain our method of fighting it.

Our visitor watched our fight closely for several days and on departing said to me:

Captain, I am reluctant to leave this fascinating game, the most interesting I have ever seen. No wonder you Navy men enjoy it. But I did not come here to see your war game but rather to study what you are doing in research work. I am making a study of such activities for Harvard University so felt obliged to see what the Naval War College is doing. I want you to know that I am amazed at what I have found here. I thought the research conducted

at our universities was about the last word on that work but at the Naval War College I find the most thorough example of it. Through the work here not only do naval officers learn how to fight their fleets but at the same time you determine for the United States the line it should follow in its naval policy, naval building and naval operations. The United States is indeed fortunate in having this kind of a research laboratory and in deriving such great knowledge from it.

As that statement not only encouraged us but made us realize clearly the value of our teachings, we could not but work the harder to perfect the new edition of our pamphlet on battle. No attempt was made to force the students to observe the principles and methods of fighting set forth in it. On the contrary, the idea was simply to make available what the College had learned so as to give the United States the best battle Navy in the world.

Not all officers agreed with the ways of fighting suggested in the pamphlet, and, of course, every officer sought to improve on them if possible. During my second year on the staff, a group of the cleverest tacticians among the students came to me and said that though the conclusions enumerated in the pamphlet seemed sound, they believed there were better methods and they intended to find them. As I was merely the analyst of the battles fought, held no brief for what seemed proved by them, and wished only to make the U.S. Fleet the best at fighting in the world, I was delighted at their attitude. Therefore, the group took up its self-imposed task with all the support I could give.

The group looked into every idea in the pamphlet and thought up many new ones to try out against them but strange as it may seem, the methods of *The Naval Battle* proved so sound that one by one the group members became convinced that if there were better ways to fight, they could not discover them. Nevertheless, they could and did suggest a few improvements in the pamphlet.

That proof of the soundness of our ideas impressed me greatly and I had considerable faith in them not only as regards the tactical employment of modern surface ships but even of submarines and aircraft. As these latter types, having proved their hitting power in the World War, were being proclaimed by the press as having revolutionized naval warfare, it was essential that the U.S. Navy learn immediately the best ways to use them and for the War College to ascertain those ways.

It mattered not to the Navy what type or types of craft—surface, sub-surface, or air—might dominate the war, provided the United States was better prepared to use them than anyone else. The College research therefore had first to make certain what could be done with the new types and then how to accomplish it.

Through the research, the War College became the pioneer of modern ways of fighting on the sea, and although I did not realize it at the time, I soon found, however, that what we were learning was considered most important by both the Fleet and the Navy Department. Although we made no direct recommendations to either, both began studying our pamphlets based on the research work we had done. I also noted that several officers in places of responsibility in the Fleet and Navy Department often inquired in personal letters about the work we were doing at the College concerning certain jobs for which they were responsible. One was from a friend holding an important post in the Navy Department's Bureau of Aeronautics which is largely responsible for the aircraft policies of the Navy. He asked what our research seemed to prove.

As in the case of submarine and surface craft, the College had devoted much energy to aviation research, not as to aircraft design but as to the place of aircraft in up-to-date sea warfare. About all that had been done in naval aviation

up to that time was to develop airplanes for it. How the planes would reach enemy ships and how they would operate when there, was still unknown to the Navy though nonseagoers were shouting that airplanes would blast surface ships from the sea. So we researched naval air activities thoroughly both as to offense and defense. In investigating aircraft, we gave the officers commanding miniature fleets a rather free hand in the use of aircraft.

They were allowed to have planes of any type and to carry as many as their ships had room for, the only restriction being that planes had to operate in accordance with the capabilities and limitations as established by aviators familiar with planes.

That freedom of action in aviation work brought forth an extraordinary number of ideas, both as to the offense and defense. No sooner would officers on one side try something new in offense than the officers on the other side would work up a defense against it. With about 50 keen officers familiar with sea conditions in each of the opposing fleets, each trying to win for his side, everything that any of them could think of was tried out. But from that welter of tests, certain points as regards aircraft and air fighting in sea operations, began to establish themselves as facts. Gradually we came to know what aircraft could do or could not do.

With that knowledge we were able to decide on the proper aviation equipment for our miniature fleets and to know the principles of fighting that equipment should observe.

I wrote to my friend in Aeronautics, giving him the summary of our deductions not thinking they would be of great help. You can imagine my surprise, a few weeks later, when I received a dispatch order to appear before the General Board of the Navy for a hearing on naval aviation. The General Board of the Navy recommends to Congress the

naval policies and building program for our country, and I knew that in preparing its recommendations the Board often called on the Navy's experts for information on technical points. However, not being an aviator, I thought some mistake had been made when the Board called me on an aviation hearing and as soon as I reached the Navy Department, I hurried to my friend to learn what was up.

In reply to my query he said:

You know, Laning, the General Board is now at work on its recommendations to Congress and a few days ago called on this Bureau for aviation suggestions. Probably influenced by the insistence of the press that planes would blow up all surface ships, the Board had about decided to recommend only one type of plane for the Navy, a heavy bomber. It may be that if you had not written that letter to me, the Bureau would have concurred in the recommendation, but the letter opened our eyes. Until we received it the officers of the Bureau could suggest only such aviation procedure as could be deduced through sitting here thinking. But the War College deductions were not of that kind for instead of presenting untested visions, you have conclusions drawn from many visions all thoroughly tested to determine the soundest ones. The correctness of your deductions were so self-evident that, as soon as we read them, we decided to make them our recommendations to the General Board. However, when we did that, the Board thought them only the flights of fancy of aviators so we suggested they call on you to give the results of the War College research. All you have to do is to give the Board your War College conclusions and explain how they were reached.

What my friend said did not particularly reassure me so when I appeared before the Board at ten o'clock I still was not convinced I could give any worthwhile information. However, the longer the Board and the aviators before it quizzed me, the more important the results of our research appeared to be. We had started with the newspaper idea that airplanes could destroy ships, ports,

and anything else on the earth's surface with their bombs and machine guns, and we went on from there only to find from our miniature battles the bombers would encounter every form of defense the opponents could devise. From those defense activities it quickly became apparent that not all planes, carried by a fleet, should be of the bombing type but that an efficient air force had to have speedy fighting (or combat) planes too. Then, again from using planes for other essential purposes, we found that types other than fighters were required in sea work--scouting planes and observation planes. Now since the total number of planes any fleet can have is the number it can carry in its ships, we had to apportion that total number among the several types we found to be necessary. By actual trial we established for our tiny replicas of the navies of the world, the air equipment each should carry.

It was as to the equipment for our own fleet that the General Board wanted information, so I gave our conclusions as best I could without notes or preparation.

As I told of our "step by step" progress, the members of the Board and the aviators present showed intense interest and asked innumerable questions. I think the Board was antagonistic to me when the hearing started but as it went on the conclusions the War College had arrived at seemed to be axiomatic, once the Board had a picture of our battles. At the end of the hearing, the President of the Board said to me, "Captain, what you have said has cleared up many points for us. The War College research seems to have developed such sound conclusions as regards naval aviation that this Board will call on the College soon for its conclusions on other naval matters."

It was some weeks before I knew the extent to which our College deductions on aviation had been adopted by the General Board and then I learned that

its recommendations to Congress exactly conformed to the conclusions the College had come to for its fleets. That recommendation further proved the value of our aviation research but inasmuch as our researchers also covered underwater and surface craft operations, I came to the belief that at the College we had probably learned as much about other features of naval warfare as we had about aviation. To one whose great ambition was to be an able high naval commander, that belief was a great comfort.

Among the many points our researchers studied was the effect of the Treaty Limiting Armaments on the United States, which Treaty came into being while I was at the College. You may recall that the conference leading to the Treaty was suggested by the United States, as was the proposal to reduce the likelihood of war by so limiting and balancing naval armaments that though each of the great powers would have a navy sufficient for its defense, none would have one sufficiently strong to be sure of winning an aggressive war against another signatory power. As the United States was, at that time, about to become the greatest naval power in the world, and as everyone wished to avoid the terrific cost of competitive naval building, the other nations were quick to accept our proposals.

To my mind, the treaty that resulted was probably the best move toward peace the world has ever known, for if the signatory powers lived up to its terms, rival navies would be so nearly balanced that none would have a winning advantage over another in war. However, it should be noted that the value of the treaty came entirely from the balancing of naval strengths. Unless they were kept in balance in accord with the terms of the treaty, it would be worthless as a war preventative.

Until the terms of the treaty were known, the miniature navies of the War

## 80 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

College continued to be replicas of the navies of the world. However, as the various changes in navies were made, our little navies were changed to conform to them. For most navies those changes were small and were generally additions, but for the United States, the changes were great and were subtractions. The United States had to scrap most of the splendid new ships it was building to reduce its navy from the strongest in the world to what it was allowed by the treaty.

To those who believed that having the strongest Navy in the world was the surest way of preventing another country from attacking us, our scrapping of the best fighting ships in the world seemed a terrible calamity. However, if by the United States suffering it, war between any of the great powers could be prevented, it was perhaps not too great a price to pay. As the terms of the treaty became known, the College changed its little navies to conform to them, and by the time the treaty was ratified our research was being based entirely on "treaty navies." We soon knew what the changes meant to the United States.

Shortly after it had been ratified I was in Washington and on the street encountered the Chairman of the House Naval Affairs Committee. As I had previously had many contacts with him during the World War, he greeted me warmly, but I was surprised when he said, "Captain, you are just the man I want to talk to about this Disarmament Treaty. Can you meet me in the Naval Committee room at the Capitol this afternoon?" I said I could, and when I arrived there, he drew me at once into his private office and demanded to be told whether or not the treaty was a success. As no one could answer that unless he knew the treaty was really preventing war, I had to admit I did not know. Then I added,

Of course you realize it cannot possibly be a success unless the powers

signing it maintain their navies at exactly the strength assigned them by the treaty. That fact applies to the United States as well as to other countries. The treaty is not a disarmament treaty but one to balance naval strengths by limiting armaments. Therefore, although we have to scrap ships of certain types to get down to our limit in them, we must actually build ships of other types.

As I said that the Congressman appeared enraged, shook his fist at me and shouted, "That is just the way with you Navy men. No sooner than we agree to disarm then you tell us we must keep armed. We cannot count on you for anything." With that the "pow-wow" ended.

That gave me my first intimation of the danger to the United States in the treaty. All during the conference leading to it, the press and pacifists spoke of the conference as a "Disarmament Conference." When it ended in a treaty intended to prevent war by limiting and balancing naval armaments, the treaty was spoken of as the "Disarmament Treaty." Because of that wrong title many unthinking people believed there would be no war if only the United States would disarm itself.

In this way a mere misnomer caused great trouble for the United States as foreign countries, pacifists, and even some of our legislators playing politics advocated our practical disarmament. I have since seen misnomers create similar trouble as, for instance, when an embargo act meant to eliminate a possible cause of war became spoken of as the "Neutrality Act." However, it did not prove as harmful as did the calling the treaty limiting naval armaments a "Disarmament Treaty." That name so befuddled the country that after scrapping our excess ships in certain classes, we would not build up the classes we were short in. For years the country did no naval building and, as a result, the United States not only ceased to be the greatest naval power in the world but

quickly went so far below the strength assigned to it, that it was almost down to third place.

Our failure to do our part in keeping naval armaments in balance completely wrecked the scheme of making war improbable. Although the idea had originated with us and was a splendid one, it was the failure of the United States to do its part that ruined us. When other countries realized we had permitted our Navy to drop from first place to a poor second, they refused to renew the treaty, so not only has rivalry in naval building returned but also the United States is forced to far greater building programs to catch up than would have been necessary had its Navy been maintained at treaty strength. Not only has preventing war by balancing naval armaments been lost to the world but, in addition, our country is forced to enormous expenditures to regain its naval standing.

Of course we could only surmise these results as that tour of duty at the War College was drawing to a close. The knowledge I had gained there on naval fighting I hoped would be of use to the fleet were I Chief of Staff to a high command but I realized that should I be given such an assignment at that time, it would probably finish me in the Navy since too much staff duty seemed frowned upon in the selection of officers for flag rank, and I was soon to be up for selection.

I never quite understood why staff duty was not considered important since not anything else better prepares an officer for high command than being an assistant to an officer in that position. Apparently the important thing with selection boards is whether an officer under consideration has commanded a capital ship. Although I might be of vastly more value to the Navy, at the moment, in a Chief of Staff job, I knew that if I were to be of any value to it later on, I must qualify for selection.

Accordingly I made a written request

for command of a battleship and was informed I would be so assigned.

While waiting for the orders, I received a letter inviting me to become Chief of Staff to the Vice Admiral in command of battleships. As I was a great admirer of that admiral and would have dearly loved to assist him in operating the Navy's battleline, about which I had learned so thoroughly, declining that invitation was not easy. Nevertheless I felt obliged to say the only duty I could afford to accept was the battleship command promised me.

At that point I understood one of Satan's temptations, for the admiral promptly sent word that if I would be his Chief of Staff for the 1 year more he would command the battleships, he would see to my getting command of our best battleship at the end of that time. As the proffer was flattering and apparently met my requirements, I was rather prone to accept it but decided to think it over before doing so and after much thought declined the offer once more.

When my orders came they assigned me to command the battleship *Pennsylvania*.

**President of the Naval War College.**  
In June 1930 I took over my new duty, and on 14 July the College year opened. Inasmuch as training for high naval command must keep abreast or even somewhat ahead of the changes in sea warfare brought about by new inventions and improved methods and equipment, the College courses are anything but static. They must keep up with naval developments, actual and proposed, and by employing them in miniature war operations, practice students in their use. It is through doing so that the applicatory system of training prepares officers not only for conducting the wars of today but also those of tomorrow.

Though not always credited with being "up-to-date" in making the most

## 82 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

of new ideas in sea warfare, the U.S. Navy, thanks to its War College, probably has the most advanced officer personnel in the world. Although the fleet as used by the College for its games is only such fleet as our country has actually built or is building, the navies that oppose it are given every known improvement whether the United States has adopted it or not.

Since students operate other navies as well as our own in the war games, nothing new is overlooked, be it for the surface of the sea, under it, or in the air. Every form of attack and defense that hundreds of skilled officers can think of is tried out so that very little, if anything, connected with fighting at sea is neglected. Nevertheless, in spite of that fact I have often heard men completely uninformed concerning war on the sea express a belief that a certain weapon or type of ship will dominate all others and should replace them when, as a matter of fact, what they advocate has generally been thoroughly tested at the College and perhaps been found wanting.

For instance, the Navy is frequently criticized because it does not accept as a fact the complete domination of the sea by air or underwater forces, and its officers are said to have some ulterior motive because they do not admit it.

Those critics fail to realize that naval officers, more than anyone else, want to win our wars on the sea and care little as to the kind of weapon used, if the weapon is legal and will bring victory. For that reason they try out every device, every method, and every suggestion, but they advocate only such as bring satisfactory results. The writings and talks of columnists and others unacquainted with sea warfare or with the practical utilization of sea weapons cannot make the Navy adopt their ideas unless proved sound. It tries out every new and feasible suggestion in the hope of finding a more certain way to win in war but it does not and should not accept an idea unless it is very worth-

while. Novice suggestions are seldom that.

Though the Naval War College devotes most of its time to practicing war operations, its students are required to study the policies of the various world powers to ascertain how they may conflict with our own. Where friction appears possible, students study ways to fight best in support of our policies should war come because of them. That of itself takes much study and time and, coupled with practicing the actual fighting operations of the war, fills the College with work. Every detail of possible wars must be tested if students are to derive the maximum of preparation from the course. Perhaps the College staff gets even more from it than do the students since for the 2 or 3 years an officer serves on the staff he must analyze and actually measure the results of the fighting operations.

It is evident that members of the College staff become unusually well versed in naval warfare, from the "grand plans" for an entire war to the very details of the fighting that may occur in it. That fact is as true for the President of the College as for any other staff member but since the President has to direct all College activities to the end of best preparing our officers for high command in war, I soon found myself an unusually busy person. Fortunately there was no necessity to drive the students. Being mature and energetic officers of middle age seeking skill in the use of naval fighting material and desiring only to perfect themselves in operating it in war, the College had only to point the way for them. As with everyone else in the Navy, students immediately put every energy into accomplishing it when informed of the task ahead of them.

Few activities in life are carried on with as great intensity as those of the Naval War College and for that reason the work is not only of great importance to the United States but also to

every other country that might become our enemy in war. There is little doubt that possible enemies would give much to learn the ways our Navy would fight in war and because of that fact they are constantly seeking information about the course at the War College. Not only do they study all public utterances of those at the College in the hope of obtaining some hint as to what may be developing there but also their naval attachés make periodic official visits to the College for any information that may be gathered by looking it over. The visits of foreign attachés probably net them little since in appearance the College is supremely innocuous.

In the large, somewhat rambling building, with desk-filled rooms of staff officers and students, fairly good-sized but rather bare game rooms, and a library, there is little to be seen.

War games are not carried on before visitors so about all they see is a number of officers working at desks. Game equipment is almost nil, and the tiny lead ships used in the games tell nothing of the characteristics of the ships they represent in battle. Since visitors to the College may look at its interior without learning a thing about its work, attaché visits are infrequent and not too worrisome. But talk outside the College can be.

This bothered me, personally, for no sooner had I become President than I found myself in considerable demand as a speaker. Since I am gifted in that art, it was apparent, however, that I was wanted not for my oratorical ability but rather because as President of the Naval War College I was a student of international policies and how our Navy would operate in war in support of a U.S. policy.

This was of great interest to the citizens of our country, of course, but probably of even greater interest to the foreign governments with which we might have war. For that reason, and

because of my position as that of a follower rather than that of a leader in national affairs, I dared not talk about them lest, inadvertently, I give away what might be national secrets. Accordingly, I resolved never to speak publicly on War College affairs.

Although that resolution caused me to decline most of the invitations to speak on Atlantic or Pacific problems sent me by organizations especially interested in them, I still had much talking to do. Having the prestige of the War College behind me and being the senior naval officer thereabouts, I think every patriotic, civic, or historical organization that met in the vicinity requested me to be present and to give a talk, the Society of Cincinnati, Sons of the Revolution, D.A.R., G.A.R., Spanish War Veterans, American Legion, Chambers of Commerce, Rotary Clubs, and many others. Fortunately, I was generally expected to talk about patriotism, civic affairs, or history, hence I succeeded in complying with such requests, but they proved an onerous duty and took far too much valuable time. Even though not forewarned, I would be called upon to "say a few words" so I had always to be prepared for an extemporaneous talk at any gathering of that type which I attended.

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Not all of my activities outside the War College were of a speech-making nature. Many were social, since my official position opened much of Newport's society life to us, and many were civic since I was the highest naval or military officer on duty in that locality. We became familiar with the Casino, the Reading Room, Bailey's Beach, the annual tennis tournaments, horse shows, flower shows, the Clambake Club, and, in fact, with all the centers of Newport's social life.

There were conventions, yacht races, and dedications of historical spots, as well as visits by high U.S. officials, foreign military or naval leaders and



## 84 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

contingents of our own and foreign fleets. In arranging to handle those important events, city officials of Newport always invited the local naval and military authorities to assist, and we took pleasure in doing so as they generally were most interesting.

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The distinguished men who came, unheralded, to Newport to address our classes were indeed an important factor in our work. Almost every Friday afternoon during the College year, one of them would give an "up-to-the-minute" confidential talk on some aspect of world affairs, so what we termed the "lecture course" was possibly as complete a presentation of the international situations of the moment as could be made. Fortunately for the College, which had but little money to spend on them, the lectures were not expensive, usually costing little more than the expenses incurred by the visitors. They were patriotic citizens doing what they could for our national defense without monetary reward. If reward was theirs, it possibly came from the prestige of being a Naval War College lecturer. Hence, at small cost to the Government, the officers who were being prepared to lead its Navy in war gained much knowledge that would be extremely useful to them.

Perhaps the College President gained most from the lecturers as they were not only guests at his house for luncheon but all during their visits, and the intimate contacts were not only tremendously interesting but I learned much concerning international relations.

Among the most famous of Newport's visitors were France's great military leader, Marshal Petain, and our General Pershing. They came the year of the sesquicentennial of the surrender at Yorktown, and in recognition of the part it had in bringing about that surrender, an official delegation from France had been sent, headed by Mar-

shal Petain, to represent it. The celebration was quite elaborate but Newport was a bit chagrined not to have had a part in it as the French forces had first landed there but, although the help of France had made winning at Yorktown possible, there should have been some recognition of the close connection of Newport with the Yorktown forces. The city of Newport invited the French delegation to visit it officially. The invitation was accepted, and immediately after the Yorktown celebration the French Squadron that brought the delegation came to Newport with it, accompanied by General Pershing.

That visit helped to refresh our memories of many details of the part that Rhode Island, Narragansett Bay, and particularly Newport had taken in the birth of our country. Histories made mention of them, of course, but I had only a brief knowledge of them. However, when Marshal Petain came to Newport they were recalled in full, and I came to realize the historical importance of my surroundings.

Though Newport's sesquicentennial observance of the arrival of the French forces in the Colonies could not compare with the elaborate ceremonies that pictured the Battle and Surrender at Yorktown, it was illuminating. All of Newport and much of Rhode Island took part in it, and Marshal Petain was given a busy day, even including a banquet at night where I was called upon to "say a few words," and somehow they managed to visit the War College where they made brief addresses.

It might appear that with so many outside diversions the training of officers for high war command would suffer but it was so arranged that every forenoon and most afternoons were devoted entirely to it with no interruptions permitted. Thus there was a vast amount of training from which emanated byproducts of inestimable value to our national defense.

I have previously told how, during my first tour at the College, we came to understand the part aviation would have in sea warfare and were able to advise what the Navy's aviation policy should be. On this second tour we found the College could recommend policies as regards other types of naval craft too and thereby considerably increase its value to the country.

That the College could contribute much to the plans for national defense had long been recognized, so much so that its President was, ex officio, a member of the Navy's General Board. To my mind that membership was of inestimable value not alone to the Board in drawing up naval policies but also to the College in preparing officers to conduct war with the Navy created under the Board. I therefore took tremendous interest in the work of the Board and particularly strove to use my connection with it to aid both it and the College.

To illustrate how close the relationship is between the work of the College and that of the General Board, I need but to recall to you how the aircraft policy of the Navy had been established through their close cooperation. That policy however was but one of many that had to be determined. Not long after I took over the presidency, there arose a question as to the submarine policy we should follow. That policy had become badly obscured because of an interpretation given to the popular slogan "A Navy for Defense Only." For some reason a "Navy for defense" was believed by many persons of national influence to be one suited only to preventing an invasion of our homeland. Apparently defense against anything but invasion was not contemplated even though the country could be as effectively bled to death by the cutting of the distant arteries of its economic life as by a stab in the heart of its homeland. A question had arisen as to the type of submarines the country should

build. It was being strongly advocated that all our submarines should be of a small type suitable only for use close along our coasts.

Naturally the War College gave considerable attention to the use of submarines in national defense, and it soon became apparent that subs restricted by size to only coastal operation would be of little help in protecting far distant national interests. Furthermore, they would have to be so numerous as to actually cost the Government more than would a sufficient number of the deep sea type.

The College reported what it had learned about them to the Navy Department and our doing so had some effect. At least, the only subs built since then have not been solely for coast defense. They can go to any port where defense measures must be applied.

In such manner the value to the Navy and country of the "byproducts" of the War College training courses became emphasized, and the College was asked to develop more of them. We replied that if we had officers for the purpose we could do so but that as the College staff was already overworked in merely carrying out training operations, the only way to develop the "byproducts" fully would be to establish a "research department" for that special purpose. Accordingly, officers were sent to the College for it, and having only that work to do, quickly began to gather worthwhile facts concerning many details of sea warfare that theretofore had not fully materialized. We obtained data as to the amounts of ammunition, fuel, and supplies that would be required in certain distant operations; as to the probable amount of damage (not the kind) in such operations and for which repair facilities should be provided; as to where and what fleet base should be prepared for them, and of other vitally important details too numerous to mention. In addition to training the officers for high command, the College had

## 86 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

become an almost perfect research laboratory for every detail of naval warfare.

Among the many recommendations made by the College was one concerning the so-called "light cruisers." Under the terms of the Washington Treaty Limiting Armaments, the United States was permitted to have a specified amount of cruiser tonnage, of which a certain portion could be used only for "light cruisers" carrying guns of 6-inch caliber or less. The rest of the tonnage could be used for what is known as "heavy cruisers" with guns of not over 8-inch caliber, and the United States had already laid down its allowed quota of ships of that type. It had not, however, decided on its program for "light cruisers," and considerable discussion had arisen as to what the size and characteristics of such ships should be. Each of several types, all differing in size, armament, defense, et cetera were being advocated but which type would be the most effective for the United States could not be determined merely by argument.

The War College was directed to ascertain by miniature fighting operations the relative merits of the several types. The order came just before the Christmas holiday period, and there not being any other time for the research work required, the College staff devoted its supposed holiday period to it. What was proven surprised many of us but the conclusions reached were sufficiently irrefutable to decide the type of light cruisers the United States should build under the terms of the treaty. That type was adhered to as long as the treaty limiting armaments remained in force.

The War College's research activities being so valuable to the General Board, it was difficult to understand why, in later years, the President of the College was no longer a member of it.

During the winter of 1932 I was informed that in the spring I would accompany the fleet on the annual war

problem as assistant to the chief umpire. I was delighted with the assignment since it would place me in a position to observe all the fleet had accomplished at the time of its greatest training activity and the latest forms of war operations at sea.

**Interlude at Sea.** The umpire duty lasted about 2 months, and I enjoyed it thoroughly. I joined the fleet at San Pedro and as the Commander in Chief took me into his own quarters and mess, I had close contact with all fleet activities without being responsible for any of them. To one who theretofore exercised important responsibility in maneuvers, being in the midst of them without such responsibility was as delightful an experience as it was interesting and unique.

I will not dwell on the umpiring work of the trip as it would make poor reading for the layman though it was of intense interest to me.

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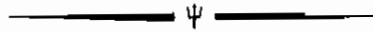
When I arrived once more at the War College, I still had another year as President before I was due for the last tour of sea duty I could have before being retired from the Navy for age. Having another year to devote to naval warfare in miniature, I worked harder than ever to prepare myself for my next command. Externally that last year the College was quite like the two that preceded it but internally it provided the finishing touch to my study of naval warfare.

It is sometimes said in our country that high war commanders are chosen for "political pull" rather than for fitness. This may or may not be the case but all of my naval life I have wanted my high command to come through fitness not pull. Not one peep did I hear concerning it during all that winter. I knew I would be sent to sea when summer came but not an inkling of my next command was even rumored.

About the middle of April a break came. As I left home one morning to go to my office, the garbage man with his wagon was in the roadway and as usual we passed the morning hail. Then to his "Good morning" the garbage man added, "Congratulations on your being made a vice admiral." When I questioned him, he said he had read it in the little Newport paper along with the new command assignments and I was to command cruisers with the rank of vice admiral. When I reached the office, clerks coming from town verified the news but it took me some moments to get over the jolt of the garbage man

knowing more about my future orders than I did.

I was greatly pleased over becoming a vice admiral and having a "three-star" admiral's flag hut even more so to command the "heavy cruisers," the Navy's newest and fastest large ships. For the 3 years I was President of the War College we had continuously utilized those ships in miniature wars so I felt well versed in their war operations. I did not have long to wait to utilize my knowledge as I was directed to assume command on 26 May. I therefore had to leave the College soon after the slate was announced.



A military, or a naval man, cannot go very far astray, who abides by the point of honor.

*Raphael Semmes, 1809-1877*