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# THE U.S. NAVY AND THE PUBLIC

A lecture delivered to the Naval Command Course  
at the Naval War College

by

Mr. Morgan L. Fitch, Jr.

on 29 May 1969

My assigned task is to discuss the Navy League of the United States, which is known as the "Civilian Arm of the Navy." This concerns what it is supposed to do and what it does. Before doing so, it is important to reach some initial understandings or this can be very short indeed.

First, a Navy must understand that it is responsive to, and subservient to, the people. The cliché that "there will always be a Navy" will neither sustain nor maintain a modern Navy. I think that our Navy understands its responsibility to the civilian Commander in Chief and its relation to the Congress, which supplies the money. I question whether the U.S. Navy fully *understands* the next step, i.e., the direct responsibility to the people. The same

question can be asked of the naval service of any country. Does any navy understand its direct responsibility to the people? In years past the Armed Forces of the United States have prescribed their needs, and the Administration and Congress have largely followed the prescription. Within the Congress, the Armed Forces Committees, the Congressional specialists in military needs, have had their way. Three principal things have happened in America which are changing this in a significant way.

First, our enemies have found that public opinion at home is equally as potent as guns on the battlefield. Hanoi, after success with France, has achieved some success in the United States. In any event, psychological warfare is just

as clearly being fought at home as in Vietnam. Military commanders find that derogatory remarks in our press not only erode the morale of our forces but also sustain the morale of enemy forces. Indeed, critical excerpts from the American press repeatedly appear on the persons of captured soldiers.

Second, the cost of national defense is interfering with the carrying out of our obligations to the people in the fields of housing, education, and dietary deficiencies, if not hunger. There is now contest for money in Congress, regardless of the recently reported comments of the Secretary of Defense. A few nights ago a news story carried the lamentations of a medical student over cuts in scholarship funds because of support for national defense. Guns are in conflict with butter.

Third, there has been considerable loss of confidence in Government, and it is not merely a "credibility gap." A number of things are indicative of this. One Government official testified a few years ago that the Government has a right to lie to protect itself. A Supreme Court Justice has recently resigned, apparently to prevent worse revelations, and others are under attack. The Department of Defense has been caught manipulating figures to reduce overruns in Government contracts, and the overruns in number and amount have called into question the management ability of Government. The judgment in Government as to Vietnam and, subsequently, in Vietnam, have greatly reduced confidence. Here, papers carried stories that we were foolish to try to take "Hamburger Hill," and now we are foolish to let it go.

The Navy's image has been greatly tarnished in the Arbeiter situation, the *Pueblo* affair, the loss of the submarine *Scorpion*, the problems of Sea Lab II, and the dockside sinking of a nuclear submarine and the shooting down of one of its planes in the Sea of Japan. We need not debate the merits or justifiable

cause of each of these situations, but, rather, you should note the effect of them upon the public. They have greatly affected the Navy's relation to the public. On the other hand, the handling by the Secretary of Navy of the *Pueblo* crew was a coup from the point of view of the public if not from the naval command viewpoint.

The Navy, as well as the other Armed Forces, is feeling the impact of the university campus revolt by loss of Reserve officer training programs and by difficulties in campus recruiting. This is only the beginning, as the militants are targeting upon our high schools for the next 5 years and the grammar schools in the succeeding 5 years. They also seek to establish honorability among young people for those who reject military service. The attack upon universities for undertaking military research programs has been serious, and one major university has cut its relation to its research arm for this reason.

These matters have had an effect on the public mind and peril our military forces both as to personnel and as to maintenance of and obtaining facilities. It should be noted that a few weeks ago it was suggested that the Navy retire 10 *Polaris* submarines to save \$150 million per year.

What effect do these attacks in public have? A short time ago in a speech, the Chairman of the House Armed Forces Committee noted that *public opinion* is more important than the *legislature* and is only slightly less important than the Biblical Ten Commandments.

The Navy, in its traditional mission, is almost uniquely dissociated with public matters because of its duties in Washington, at sea, and abroad which inherently result in certain remoteness from the people. It suffers, as many of you do, from reliance upon the media such as television and newspapers. And here a point should be driven home. Never mistake the statements in the

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media for the will or the feelings of the American people, and this applies to representations and alleged statements of our politicians as well. The German Kaiser made this mistake, as did Hitler, and, more recently, as did Hanoi.

Another serious problem is the inherent weakness of a military man trying to convey to the people the need of a Navy. A military man is doubly handicapped, first, in his public image in a sector of our society which pictures him as playing war games and, second, in a public belief that he is speaking in self-interest.

This time has been spent in developing the thesis that public opinion is extremely important to the Navy and that it has difficulties in achieving appropriate communication with the public. It is questionable whether the U.S. Navy fully appreciates the necessity of the people's direct support and of the need for appropriate direct liaison with the people. Assuming that you are reasonably convinced that public opinion and support are needed for a Navy and that the Navy itself cannot wholly carry the word, then you need some mechanism to translate the need for and needs of a Navy to the people and, as important, to translate the feelings of the people to the Navy. That mechanism should be a civilian organization oriented toward the Navy.

If we are to have such an organization, what should it be like, and how should it function?

The organization should be civilian in character and avoid any membership from active duty personnel so as to be free from a complaint that its acts are self-serving. The organization should include members from all segments of the society so that business and labor, young and old, Republican and Democrat, liberal and conservative, and highly and lowly educated people of all races, creeds, and colors are adequately represented in the organization. The organization should avoid control by or

dependency upon defense industry, Reservists, or any group which stands to profit from the mediations or actions of the group. It should educate the people so that the people, in turn, advise their elected Representatives, and thereby the organization avoids direct involvement in the legislative processes. Basically, the organization should be independent but representative, while maintaining a maritime orientation.

The organization should be aware of the Nation's interest in the seas and should be briefed in the Navy's problems, interests, and requirements. On the other hand, it should be tuned to the feelings of the people in respect to the Navy.

The organization ideally should be able to inform the public of the maritime problems in a responsible manner, support the Navy in discharging its functions and solving its problems, and intelligently advise the Administration and the Navy of the feelings of the people. In other words, the organization should look out and look in.

It is important to question the wisdom of involvement of the organization in certain matters. In this area there is doubt as to its becoming involved in debate on public policy, matters which are political, and military strategy. The Navy has no right to question the public policy of the United States. Quite to the contrary, it is charged with the responsibility of carrying out the public policy. The Navy is prohibited by law from becoming involved in political debate or political matters since it must serve any elected political party. For a Navy-oriented organization to question public policy or engage in political partisanship is to betray a trust to the service which it espouses.

The U.S. Navy is politically weak because it does not vote. In this respect it has earned the contempt of some legislators. Insofar as concerns military strategy, the organization just cannot be sufficiently informed to pass upon this

matter. Whether we mine Haiphong, send bombers into North Korea, fire upon Russian ships off Cuba, or support the Israelis or Arabs are matters requiring much more advice than is available to a civilian organization. Equally, the selection of airplane types, ship designs, and missile capabilities are beyond the ken of a maritime-oriented civilian organization.

However, there are areas in which a maritime-oriented civilian organization can be quite effective and even more effective than a Navy. For example, a civilian can talk to audiences where a military man would be unwelcome. A civilian can work more effectively in some schools than a Navy man. By law, the Navy cannot seek forums in which to present its case on Navy matters, but a civilian organization can provide arenas. A military man has little effect upon a Congressman, but a constituent has considerable effect. The Navy is at a disadvantage in dealing with youth, particularly today. The U.S. Navy is disadvantaged in seeking its place in the field of oceanography and having its voice heard in respect to the merchant marine. A very difficult problem for the Navy is to deal with the ROTC program on campus and recruiting at the college and high school. These are but a few examples of areas where a maritime-oriented civilian organization can function to advantage.

So, I have tried to tell you of the significance of the people in maritime matters, and I have tried to tell you how a maritime organization should be constituted and how it should function. Before we consider the Navy League of the United States under the test suggested, we should look at major maritime problems of the United States today. These are not given in order of importance, but they are suggested in increasing order of specificity.

A first problem is the overall position of the United States in the field of oceanography and the nature of

involvement of the Navy. This is quite complex but, nevertheless, a significant national and Navy problem. Who will measure the Navy's involvement in oceanography?

A second and related problem is the problem of seapower, the meaning and significance of which are not understood by the people. An interesting facet of this problem is that the scope of the term "seapower" is not agreed upon within the U.S. Navy. This does not mean that the U.S. Navy does not understand seapower, but we do not have a basic definition. A recent brilliant Secretary of the Navy gave three different definitions in three different speeches. I will challenge you, as I have your predecessors here at the War College, as to the definition of seapower. I have collected over 20 definitions, running from "all things wet" to the Mahan definition of "control of the Seas" to a more recent one that "Seapower is what the Russians are doing."

A third problem is one of major Navy concern but restricted Navy responsibility and that is the deteriorating American merchant marine. The public has very little consciousness of the plight of its merchant marine and the effect of this on them. You undoubtedly have had this information in your course here.

Navy ship obsolescence and maintenance are increasing problems which lack public understanding. It should be noted that some 50 new ships have recently been cut from the Federal budget.

Maintenance of naval personnel is a fifth problem of public concern. Recruiting, retention, pay, housing, and recognition of the sailor and marine all need support of the people to maintain an adequate naval force. While the draft has alleviated current recruiting problems, the President is working toward a volunteer service with elimination of the draft, and it is obvious that the Navy is going to have to show an increased

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interest in youth for the long-range manning of its forces. The Department of Defense, in considering pay for military services, has edged away from pay "comparability" to a more amorphous doctrine of "equitability" which means that retention will have to rely more heavily on recognition of the sailor and marine by the public.

These are but a few problems of Navy-public concern, but they are problems which a Navy cannot handle alone. They are, nonetheless, problems which a maritime-oriented civilian organization could assist a Navy in handling or solving.

Now let us measure the Navy League of the United States in this environment.

First, the Navy League of the United States is civilian in its membership, and no active duty personnel belong. There is no requirement of prior naval service, and more than 25 percent have no prior Navy affiliation. Only some 10 percent of its members are related to defense industry. It is lacking in participation in minority races, members of labor organizations, and younger people. However, it is relatively apolitical and reasonably geographically distributed. Its membership is reasonably affluent and relatively influential. Accordingly, the Navy League of the United States has a generally effective membership with some weaknesses.

So far, its programs are substantially supported by membership income at \$15.00 per member, with \$10.00 going to the national office and \$5.00 going to the local council of which there are about 300 in the United States and abroad. The programs do not rely, presently, upon industry money or other special contributions so that the voice of the Navy League is not now tainted by special interests. The importance of this cannot be overemphasized, and other service-affiliated groups have lost considerable effectiveness because of outside support by special interests.

Accordingly, the Navy League voice has achieved considerable significance as an independent oracle.

The Navy League tries to draw attention and focus on particular problems of maritime concern by disseminating resolutions through all media.

The Navy League works through other organizations and its committees to achieve its ends. A listing of some of these with a brief description of what they do should give you a brief idea of how the work is accomplished.

The Navy League spawned the U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps, which is a separate, Federally chartered organization for training volunteer boys in the Navy. Sea Cadets are, of course, familiar to many of you here. We are at a force level of nearly 6,000, but we and the Navy project 100,000 boys in the next 10 years. Over 10 percent of the national budget of the Navy League is presently directed to the Sea Cadet program.

The Public Affairs Committee seeks cooperation with outside service clubs and other organizations to provide platforms and publications for telling the maritime story. The Navy League is trying to use this approach to achieve greater leverage. A weakness we have is in the Navy and the Navy League spending too much effort on those who are already "sold" on maritime matters and not enough effort in proselyting those who are unfamiliar with maritime problems.

Our Seapower Committee collects and disseminates information on all aspects of the Nation's maritime problems. It has staged seminars on oceanography and the merchant marine.

An Image Committee is working within and without the Navy to achieve improved recognition and understanding of the sailor and marine. This is truly a joint Navy-civilian undertaking.

Under a Publications Committee, we publish a monthly magazine—*NAVY, the Magazine of Sea Power*. Over 25

percent of the national budget of the Navy League supports this undertaking. The magazine seeks to keep the membership informed and provide information on maritime matters outside of our ranks.

We have an ADAPT-Highline Committee which is concerned with Navy personnel matters including pay, housing, family accommodations, and post-service employment. This committee is directed to showing concern for the Navy man and his family.

An Awards Committee tries to recognize men in service to show civilian concern and recognition as well as to recognize those in the Navy League.

The Navy League has tried to encourage dialog between the Navy and American industry, without becoming involved in supply or procurement, and biannually sponsors a symposium and exhibit in Washington for this purpose. We think that it is basic to a strong Navy to encourage ingenuity and accomplishment in the industrial segment of our country.

The Navy League annually sponsors Navy Day, assists in recruiting, supports various commemorative events, encourages other organizations such as the Wifeline Association and Navy Relief, cooperates with other Navy-oriented organizations, sponsors informative and nonpartisan Congressional breakfasts, and promotes Navy themes such as "U.S. Navy—the Mark of a Man," "The U.S. Navy on the Move," and "The U.S. Navy—Opportunities Unlimited."

The Navy League President travels throughout the country focusing on Navy problems. Our immediate past president has been emphasizing the need for oceanic education, and our new president says that he will stress the

plight of the American merchant marine. At other times our presidents have stressed the need for pay increases and housing improvements and have emphasized a strong and independent naval service.

We have formed Navy League Councils in some of your countries and have encouraged you to establish Navy Leagues of your own. We believe in the Navy League and that it is a necessary adjunct to any navy.

You have been given some flavor of the Navy League, but it is not possible to tell the whole story here. It was founded in the United States in 1902 with some funds from a Nobel Peace Prize given to Theodore Roosevelt. On this note and heritage of peace I will conclude.

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#### BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Mr. Morgan L. Fitch, Jr., received a B.S. in chemical engineering from the Illinois Institute of Technology in 1943 and following World War II entered the University of Michigan where he earned a

doctor of law degree (J.D.). He served in World War II as a naval officer, experiencing many of the actions in the Western Pacific aboard aircraft carriers. Mr. Fitch has had a long association with the Navy League, serving as National President from April 1965 until May 1967. During his affiliation with the Navy League, he directed considerable effort to promoting the U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Program and the Navy League's Shipmate Program. He was twice awarded the Distinguished Public Service Award of the Secretary of the Navy in 1960 and 1965. Mr. Fitch is a partner of Anderson, Luedeka, Fitch, Even and Tabin of Chicago, Illinois.

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