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PUBLIC RELATIONS IN THE NAVY

A lecture delivered
at the Naval War College
on 5 February 1957 by
Rear Admiral Edmund B. Taylor, U.S.N.

It is a signal honor for any officer to be asked to address students of the Naval War College and, to some extent, a frightening one. Seldom does any officer have to face such an "unsnowable" group. Any speaker who does attempt to overwhelm you with oratory finds himself in an extremely uncomfortable position during the Question Period.

I regard it as significant that the Chief of Information is here today. It is a striking example of the increasing awareness of the need for a more articulate Navy which can present the accomplishments and capabilities of this Navy of ours, not only to the civilian public but to our own Navy public.

Public Relations is so broad in scope that it would be impossible for me to delve into all the varied facets of the subject, even when applied specifically to the Navy. Therefore, I should like to touch briefly upon five areas which can be conveniently examined this morning. First, I should like to present a short resume' of the history of Navy Public Relations; second, some of the concepts which govern our operations; third, the objectives we are striving to achieve; fourth, what your responsibility in public relations will be; and, finally, a few suggestions for you to mull over prior to or just after you get your next command.

The Navy is a real neophyte in this public relations profession. We really have been in the full-time business only since World War II, when Secretary Knox established the Office of Public Relations. Prior to this, relations with information media and with the public were handled by hastily contrived organizations which were established for a particular period or for a particular

purpose. When that period or purpose had been served, public relations endeavors were usually left to fend for themselves. A case in point was our World War I experience. The public relations organization established by Secretary Daniels was allowed to die after hostilities ended.

During the early days of the present office, a great deal of effort went into acquainting the Navy with just what Navy Public Relations was and where it fitted into the scheme of things.

The Navy was really "The Silent Service" in those days. Such comments as "The public KNOWS what the Navy has done and can do; let's not pat ourselves on the back" were frequently heard. The skid of the Navy in public recognition after World War II is ample proof of the fallacy of that kind of statement.

Public relations in the Navy has probably had more ups and downs than any other branch. When the Navy enjoyed good relations, public relations effort was considered a waste. When the Navy got in trouble, public relations was derelict for letting it get into trouble. It was an outstanding case of "damned if you do and damned if you don't."

I am happy to say that the attitude toward public relations in the Navy has passed through a metamorphosis to the point where we feel we are really on the way to becoming an accepted part of the Navy Structure.

The foundation of our recent efforts was laid in 1954, when the Secretary of the Navy and the Chief of Naval Operations approved the issuance of a series of public information objectives applicable to then entire Navy. In the three-year period since their issuance, public relations has followed a course which, while not always leading through safe waters, has, nevertheless, been a defined course. With the continuing understanding and support of Secretary Thomas and the dynamic leadership of Admiral Burke, we are making steady progress and receiving increasing support from the Navy.

As to our second point, no discussion of public relations can proceed very far before you are forced into a statement of principles or concepts. These must be established in order to set forth the ethics which will govern our operations.

Right now I would like to establish the difference between public relations and publicity.

Too many of our people are still of the opinion that publicity is synonymous with public relations. Nothing could be further from the truth. Publicity is about 10% of public relations. Because a story appears in a magazine, newspaper, or similar medium, or a TV show about the Navy receives favorable attention, does not necessarily mean that the Navy enjoys good public relations.

Publicity is a tool of public relations. It provides channels for accomplishing a specific public relations project. The field of public relations itself is much greater than the channels through which we publicize projects. (Annual Global Strategy Discussions is an outstanding example).

Whether the services enjoy good public relations is contingent on how people regard the military. The attitude of your neighbors and friends toward your service; the success or failure of the services to obtain sufficient appropriations to operate and carry out the missions assigned; the number of recruits we enlist; the rate of reenlistments; attrition in our officer ranks; the support we receive in cities and towns throughout the country — all these things, plus a good many more, are the yardsticks that must be used to measure the public relations climate toward the Navy, the Army, the Marine Corps, the Air Force. The same is equally applicable to the other executive agencies of the Government.

I should like to digress for just a moment to touch upon a subject that has presented itself to some of our public information officers.

There is nothing quite so important or so significant as our own opinion. This is quite natural. The older we get the more important these attitudes become. In the military, we give an order and know that it will be carried out. When it isn't carried out somebody gets told about it, and told in very concise understandable terms.

As a result, when we make a speech we assume that because WE made it, that speech automatically takes precedence over the rise and fall of governments, the activities of movie stars, the condition of the market, or any other minor item you chance to see in the papers. Unfortunately, some of the unenlightened people who edit the various media fail to recognize this fact. We have had isolated occasions where a senior officer, because a speech or appearance he made was not on the front page or in the news at all, was apt to criticize his PIO.

I shall take advantage of my position today to advise you that because *you* make a speech does not necessarily mean that every medium is going to give full coverage to that speech. If its news, they'll cover it. If it isn't — they won't. If you accept this concept in the beginning, you'll save your blood pressure and decrease the number of ulcers your PIO probably already has.

The basic concept of Navy Public Relations is based on truth. We can not deal in propaganda, half-truths, or evasion. As does every organization experiencing growing pains, some of the people in the Navy have, in the past, attempted to fence with media representatives or have attempted to present the Navy wreathed in a halo on every occasion. The results of such tactics have ranged from embarrassing to near disastrous.

We must deal in facts and treat the media and our neighbors fairly. By so doing we cannot go far afield, nor can we be criticized for our efforts.

Do not get the impression from the foregoing that public relations is a passive operation. In this era, such a notion is tantamount to extinction.

Reasonable competition is not only encouraged, it is essential. This is true not only in civilian enterprise but within the Defense Department and within each service. Without such competition, any organization must become stagnant. The world situation which confronts our country today does not permit such stagnation.

The capabilities, the accomplishments, the activities of the Navy — and of the other services — must be presented to the country so that they may evaluate what they are getting for their money. The days of getting something for nothing have not yet arrived, and I doubt that such a condition will ever exist in our lifetime.

In the past, perhaps time was available for a more leisurely appraisal of the activities of the Navy. Such time is not available today. People are too busy keeping up with the accelerated age in which we live to focus their attention on expenditure of funds for defense. That's one of the jobs they delegate to their elected representatives.

But do not let this delude you into thinking they are not interested. Just let one unsavory project in Government come to the surface and watch how quickly the reaction comes!

Thus, it becomes mandatory to present to the public the facts of the Navy's part in perpetuating what has been tagged as "The American Way of Life." No amount of icing, or bumbling attempts to "hush things up" can long withstand the pressure of public inquisitiveness.

A word now about adequate public relations planning.

All of us have spent most of our service careers "planning" things, from military operations to household moves. The need

for following this procedure in the execution of public relations projects has become obligatory. No more can you set up an open house and, the day before, issue a release to the local paper. Too many side issues are involved. The public relations aspects are far too complex for such bizarre treatment.

An additional problem encountered in public relations planning which is not common to other prearranged events is the lack of a standard format. No matter how many previous projects have been conducted or how successful they were, there is no guarantee that the next one will come off the same way.

Too many extraneous and sometimes apparently unrelated factors have a way of throwing a big wrench in the project. A great many potential trouble spots can be avoided, however, by a thoughtful and planned approach. Common sense should dictate just how far in advance you should start planning. If you have an annual open house which is THE big public relations project for the year, start a year ahead of time.

No man is now alive who can give you all the things you should consider when you start your public relations planning, but there are some things that are common to every public relations endeavor.

Consider, first: "What do you hope to gain from the project?" "What will be your object?" "Do you desire to show off new equipment?" "Do you hope to gain new recruits?" "Are you trying to show what a good neighbor your command is?" "Is your program to be aimed at the civilian community, at the dependents, or at the servicemen themselves?"

These items constitute fundamental approaches which must be considered before you even begin to contemplate the mechanics of how you are going to conduct the project.

Let us assume you are appealing to a civilian group and have determined what message you want to get across. The next

step is to make absolutely sure that everybody, and every department participating, has the same understanding.

The premise that public relations is an "all hands' job" has been repeated time and time again, but it is just as applicable today as it was in the beginning. Arrange staff conferences to explain the project. Have a presentation prepared, if necessary, to define what each department's responsibilities will be. Over-information is far better than lack of information.

Do not hesitate to ask for expert help from outside your immediate command if you feel any qualms about the project at all. Once the thing comes off, it's no good trying to retrieve the bobble. We have almost half a hundred Reserve Public Relations Companies throughout the country which are made up of experts of sorts and degrees. Call on them for help if you need it. A call to the nearest District PIO will give you names and addresses — if he is not able to handle it himself.

As a rule of the thumb the more people that know about the project in its initial stages, the more pitfalls can be avoided. A word of caution here, though. Be sure your original objective is not sidetracked for a pet scheme of some division or branch. Information about the project should be in the form of an explanation of what's going to happen, not a request for each division or branch to plan the overall program.

Place the responsibility for this planning in your Public Information Officer, if you have a full-time man. If you don't, go to the next nearest competent source. He may be a Reserve Officer experienced in the field, or an Enlisted Journalist. The main thing is: get EXPERT advice. We have found the Regular Line Officers are tremendous assets for accomplishing public relations jobs which involve an understanding of Navy Organization. They are generally, at their weakest, public relationswise when they step out of that role.

I should like to make another aside here. Don't be prejudiced by the age of your PIO or Journalist. Within strictly Naval channels rank must be and is recognized because of the inherent experience attached to that rank. The more senior the rank, the more knowledge of things Navy. This does not necessarily hold true in the case of public relations.

A majority of our full-time PIO's are well trained in public relations techniques and have, as well, a good grasp of how the Navy operates. Therefore, when you require public relations advice, don't disregard such advice because it comes from a Junior Officer or Enlisted Journalist.

During the recent evacuations in Egypt, the entire public relations aspects were handled by a Commander. Officers in charge of the actual evacuation were senior to him, and, in some cases, very senior. The success of the public relations story on that evacuation must in large measure be attributed to Admiral Brown's confidence in that Commander.

A few moments ago, I mentioned that a series of public information objectives had been issued to the Navy in 1954. I'd like to dwell on those objectives in a little more detail.

These objectives are seven in number, and I should like to mention them:

Public Understanding of Seapower

Public Understanding of the Navy's Role Today

Public Understanding of the Navy's Future Role

Encouragement for Career Service

A Vigorous Reserve

Need for a Modernized Fleet

Awareness of Growing Soviet Naval Strength

As you will note, these objectives are general in their phrasing. That was done intentionally in order for them to be applicable to all parts of the Navy, regardless of geographical location. These objectives are the keystones upon which our public relations programs should be built. They provide the course that must be followed if there is to be an accrual of effort by Naval Commands.

Too much of our public relations effort is still being disseminated on one-shot deals that lack direction. The strength of the overall public relations program is derived from the cumulative effects of many small programs that are carried on by all parts of the Navy.

It does very little good if one command has a good public relations project that has no aim or goal. The effect of the program is lost immediately upon completion. If programs all over the Navy are tied into a series of objectives which are common to all, the end result has more lasting power.

Your public must receive a "message" as a result of your public relations efforts. It is not enough for them to leave your command saying, "Weren't they nice people?" Or, "Did you ever see such a clean ship?" There must be some connection between the "niceness" of the people or the "cleanliness" of the ship with the job the Navy is trying to do.

How you get this message across can be done in a variety of ways. Let's take an open house at a Naval Air Station, for example. If you have a big — and I mean really BIG — sign hanging over the gate saying "NAVY AIRPOWER CAN REACH ANY LAND TARGET IN THE WORLD," they may remember that. If you have the same phrase placed at strategic places over the station, there is more than an even chance they will also remember that. Thus, you give your visitors something to think about, something to talk about, something they will automatically

recall whenever they are discussing their visit to your ship or station.

Another example concerns speeches. Most of you have already come to grips with this chore of speech-making. If you haven't, you've been lucky so far. Believe me, it won't last! The point I should like to make here is that, whenever practical, you should hang your speech on one of these objectives. You don't have to repeat it verbatim, but get some point across which is closely akin to one of the objectives.

If you magnify this example by the number of officers in this room, and consider that each one makes a speech before a different civic organization, you see how this accumulation of effort begins to pay off. Everyone is talking about similar concepts. The words and approach may be different, but the goals are the same.

To amplify these objectives a bit further, let me say that no public relations program can be a good one unless there is a theme or message upon which, or around which, all public relations efforts revolve. The use of themes which support the objectives are especially useful to point up local aspects of the objectives. They act as tie-in "gimmicks" which illustrate how the local station fits into the job the Navy is trying to accomplish.

So far, my remarks have dealt with some general items which concern what public relations can do for you. Now, I'd like to touch on your responsibility toward public relations.

The success or failure of any public relations program does not rest with the Chief of Information, your PIO, or your Executive Officer. That responsibility is exclusively the burden of the Commanding Officer. It's an obligation that cannot be delegated. And, in the Navy, it's a function of command which has been spelled out as a responsibility of command by the Secretary of the Navy. But no amount of command assignment or pleas from seniors can do

the job if you don't believe in it. Oh, yes, you can pay lip service to directives and do your duty so you will not be accused of side-stepping your responsibility. But, unless you exercise your initiative and get the word out to your people that you really believe in public relations — very little will actually happen.

We all recognize the effect that personalized directions have. If your immediate boss tells you to do something, his work gets done right now. If the directions come from far away, the tendency is to say, "That's nice. I'll have to do something about that some day."

Your subordinates have the same attitude. If you pass a public relations suggestion or paper along "for information," that's just what it is going to get. If you interpret that paper in local terms and indicate you want something done, then something will be done. But it can't be done from Washington. You've got to give public relations *your* support before anything happens.

The final subject which I should like to cover concerns a few things in which I think you will be interested because they concern some practical suggestions you may wish to investigate when you get your next command.

First of all, have a frank discussion with your PIO. Find out what the climate is in the nearby community toward your command. If you are lucky enough to get a ship, find out what the men aboard think of the ship. What's more important, try to find out what their families think of the ship and the Navy. Once you have this information, you can take solid public relation steps.

If you feel you cannot place your utmost confidence in your PIO, appoint another one. If he is a full-time man — a 1650, public relations specialist — drop me a note and I'll see if we can't get someone in whom you can place your confidence.

Next, see that the PIO is cut in early on anything which may have a public relations aspect. This means he should be in-

cluded in almost all staff conferences. In this connection — if you run into a messy situation that appears to be getting messier, please let the nearest District PIO know as soon as possible, or let my shop know. So many times we could have avoided unpleasant problems if we had just known about them in time to have taken some corrective action.

The PIO should also have direct and immediate access to you at all times. Time is an essential ingredient in public relations, and if you have the PIO beating his way up through the normal chain of command you'll find yourself in the thick of a large hassle before he gets to you. And be sure that everyone in the chain of command knows the PIO can see you at all times. This doesn't mean that the PIO will bypass everyone. In the normal course of events he cuts everybody in, but there are time when this procedure just doesn't work.

If you get command of a shore station, consider the establishment of an advisory board, so to speak, made up of yourself and your Exec and representatives of the local community. Have regular meetings. Cut them in on what your command plans to do in the ensuing months that may effect them. You don't have to breach security in doing this, either.

One advantage of this type of group is the easing of unpleasant decisions which have to be made. It is much more palatable to the local community if these decisions are announced by a joint group rather than unilaterally by the Navy.

Check in with the local civic organizations. Join at least one. These groups are powerful influences in forming opinion in the community and, in addition, you'll derive a great deal of pleasure out of the associations you form.

Make a sustained effort to cultivate the acquaintance of the local media. These people are very important to you. They may not be Hanson Baldwins or George Fielding Eliots, but they are

the ones that get the news to the local people and from their stories may come the coverage by the big news syndicates. Have the publisher of the local paper and the manager of the local radio station for lunch, or invite them to the club on suitable occasions. Then when something unpleasant comes up you'll find they give sympathetic treatment to the event rather than purely surface investigation.

Finally, when you embark on a purely public relations program — as opposed to publicity — don't look around for measurable results right away. Public relations is perhaps the most difficult thing in the world to measure. Tangible expressions are sometimes not evident immediately, and perhaps they may never be apparent.

I should like to briefly touch upon the organization of public information in the Department of Defense and where my office fits into this organization. The Office of Public Information, Department of Defense, comes under the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative and Public Affairs. Major policy concerning the conduct of service public information activity originates from this office. These policies are sent to the individual service secretaries, who reissue them in the proper format — either a SecNav Instruction of Notice.

Most of the policies affecting more than one service are discussed by the Public Information Coordinating Council, which is made up of all Chiefs of Information and representatives of the Department of Defense.

You may be interested to note that news releases *in Washington* are not made by the individual services. The only approved releasing channel is the Office of Public Information, Department of Defense. We write up the release and then send it to the Office of Public Information, Department of Defense, for distribution to major news media representatives who have their offices in the Pentagon.

Navy public information is conducted by the Chief of Information on behalf of the Secretary of the Navy and the Chief of Naval Operations. Therefore, I work in a dual capacity as the executive agent of public information policy for the Secretary and carry this policy out under the Chief of Naval Operations.

The overall guide for Navy public information is the *Public Information Manual*, which was first issued as an enclosure to SEC-NAV INSTRUCTION 5720.7 in 1953. This manual should be your bible on any item concerning public information operations. It covers a wide variety of subjects, from accreditation of news media to the staging of air shows. It may save you embarrassment and save us time if you get a working knowledge of this Manual. However, my office, in addition to its other functions, is a service agency for the entire Navy and is ready and willing to offer advice and assistance when possible in solving your public relations/public information problems.

Now a word about public information coordination between services and agencies of the Government overseas.

The closest cooperation is required and is enjoyed between the services based overseas. There is mutual support and a great deal of *rapport* between their operations, and this must be the case in order to provide as united a front as possible to foreign publics. That the coordination is working is obvious, and we assume it will continue.

Another agency that is very interested in service public information abroad is the United States Information Agency. They bear the primary responsibility of portraying America to the country in which they operate. They have the experienced personnel and know-how of the local scene and should be consulted as soon as possible when no Navy public information officer is readily available.

In this short period — short to me, at least — I have tried to give you some background on the early development of Navy

public relations and the increasing acceptance this field is experiencing in the Navy.

As long as you stick to the concepts of truth and adequate advance planning and utilize your public relations advisers properly, you can't go far afield.

The objectives have been tried and found to be stable and good for the foreseeable future. So long as you use them intelligently and bend local efforts toward their achievement, we believe that your command will benefit — and so will the Navy.

The entire progression or recession of public relations is the responsibility of the individual. No set of directives or suggestions can ever replace the commanding officer's opinion toward public relations.

I have tried to give you a very few suggestions on some public relations programs or steps that you can use if you so desire.

In closing, I should like to again emphasize that if this Navy of ours is to endure and advance in the form that we anticipate, it will be a direct result of the support we receive from the people of this country. If we don't convince them that the Navy is an essential ingredient for sustaining the freedom that has been won over the past 150 years or so — it will be our fault, not theirs.

BIOGRAPHIC SKETCH

Rear Admiral Edmund B. Taylor, U.S.N.

Admiral Taylor was graduated from the United States Naval Academy in 1925. During the early period of his career, he had sea duty in the Battleships U.S.S. NEW YORK, U.S.S. TEXAS and U.S.S. WYOMING and the Destroyers U.S.S. HATFIELD, U.S.S. LEARY and U.S.S. PERRY, interspersed with assignments to the Naval Academy as Assistant Football Coach and Assistant Lacrosse Coach and as an instructor in Ordnance and Gunnery.

Duty as Aide and Flag Lieutenant on the Staff of Commander Destroyers, Battle Force, and in the Officer Personnel Division of the Bureau of Navigation, Navy Department, preceded his World War II service in command of the U.S.S. DUNCAN. That vessel, under his command, rescued survivors of the U.S.S. WASP and was later lost from severe damage received while launching a successful torpedo attack against the Japanese Cruiser FURUTAKA.

After serving as Commanding Officer of the U.S.S. BENNETT, Admiral Taylor served successively as Commander of Destroyer Division 90 and Destroyer Squadron 45 in the South and Central Pacific areas. During the last eight months of the war, he served as Aide to Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal. In May, 1946, he returned to the Naval Academy as Head of the Department of Physical Training and Director of Athletics. In July, 1948, he became Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations to the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet, and during 1950 he was in command of the U.S.S. SALEM.

Since that time he has again served in the Navy Department; first, in the Bureau of Naval Personnel; and, later, as Assistant to the Under Secretary of the Navy. In late 1952, he returned to a sea command as a Destroyer Flotilla Commander in the Atlantic Fleet. Admiral Taylor served one and a half years as Commander, United States Naval Base, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Since 1955, he has been the Navy's Chief of Information.