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# An Introduction to the Naval War College Courses

Thomas H. Robbins Jr.  
*U.S. Navy*

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## **AN INTRODUCTION TO THE NAVAL WAR COLLEGE COURSES**

An address delivered  
at the Naval War College  
on 19 August 1955 by  
*Rear Admiral Thomas H. Robbins, Jr., U. S. N.,  
Chief of Staff*

Gentlemen:

As Chief of Staff, it is a pleasure to add my personal welcome to all of you. We are devoting the first day to this orientation in order that you may begin your studies here with a clear understanding of your goal, and the manner in which you will be working towards it during the coming year. Accordingly, it is my purpose in the next half hour or so to give you a general introduction to the Courses of the College as a whole. Later on today, you will be given additional and detailed information on your own courses.

To review for a brief moment, let us look at the Mission of the College. It has been somewhat changed from that contained in the Catalog of Courses which was mailed to you prior to your arrival. As recently promulgated by the Chief of Naval Operations it is:

**TO FURTHER AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE  
FUNDAMENTALS OF WARFARE, INTERNA-  
TIONAL OPERATIONS, AND INTERSERVICE  
OPERATIONS, WITH EMPHASIS ON THEIR AP-  
PLICATION TO FUTURE NAVAL WARFARE IN  
ORDER TO PREPARE OFFICERS FOR HIGHER  
COMMAND.**

Now let us analyze this Mission.

There are certain abstract factors which apply to warfare wherever it is fought, whether on land, at sea, in the air, under the sea, or in any combination. But a study of abstract factors alone is of questionable value to a commander, unless he practices weighing the fundamentals of warfare in relation to the situation facing him, thereafter practicing at arriving at sound conclusions; making his decisions; and preparing plans for the conduct of his current and future operations. Such practice enables the commander to bring his own personal characteristics and abilities to bear on his problems, and thus lifts the process of military planning and decision from the routine of a check-off list to the level of an art. The sound basis of the art of naval warfare, therefore, rests upon the knowledge of the fundamentals — the abstract factors, if you please — projected into the situations of today and of tomorrow, all vitalized by the brains, character, boldness and determination of the commander.

You will note that the Mission of the College takes these matters into account in stressing the words “fundamentals of warfare”, “application to future naval warfare”, and “preparation for higher command.”

The College has derived from this mission three overall objectives:

1. **“THE INCREASE OF EACH OFFICER’S KNOWLEDGE OF THE FUNDAMENTALS OF NAVAL WARFARE AND OF OTHER RELATED SUBJECTS WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO AN UNDERSTANDING OF WARFARE**
2. **“THE IMPROVEMENT OF EACH OFFICER’S MENTAL POWER AND ABILITY TO RELATE KNOWLEDGE TO THE SOLUTION OF MILITARY PROBLEMS: AND**
3. **“THE PROVISION OF INTELLECTUAL LEADERSHIP IN THE FIELD OF SEA POWER AND**

## **MARITIME STRATEGY FOR THE ARMED FORCES AND FOR THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA."**

The first of these objectives may be described as the core of the naval commander's problem. Naval warfare is a highly technical field. As in every other form of warfare, its basic elements lie in the minds, hearts and souls of men — that is, in the human spirit. The tools — the machines — which men must use in the practice of Naval Warfare, however, are highly complex and are continually changing. As the President of the College has stated, our higher commanders must be thoroughly competent in the operation of the tools of today and above all in the tools of tomorrow. The strategy and tactics, and operations, devised by a commander must rest upon a firm — in fact a solid foundation both of technical knowledge of his tools — his ships, his aircraft, his logistics, his weapons: and also of knowledge of national and international affairs.

The second objective is one concerning education — that of improving the mind in order that a commander may quickly and logically solve his problems of the present and of the future. This objective involves, also, an element of self-training. A commander must actually make decisions if he is going to solve any problem. Because there is something inherent in human nature that encourages procrastination, the commander must practice and train himself to call a halt at the proper time, to the business of weighing factors and looking for new evidence. He must face up to — and make — his decision. It is this type of exercise — this objective — for which the College provides much practice for the student.

The third objective reflects a function of the College which is traditional, and of greater importance today than ever before. The Naval War College must strive to send out officers who, in addition to being professionally competent, have a keen understanding of the effects and benefits of sea power, and of the Navy's present and future role in its employment. Our graduates

will then be competent to visualize and apply the unique attributes of sea power, now and in the future, in the furtherance of a National strategy involving the use of all arms and forces.

Before continuing with an explanation of how the College functions, I would like, at this point, to take a close look at this term "Sea Power" — for it does form the basis for the very existence of this College. It has often been misunderstood by many.

The Naval Officers among you have been acquiring throughout your careers knowledge of the significance of the term "Sea Power." All of you, whether naval officers or not, are aware of Sea Power. In its simplest and broadest terms, Sea Power may be considered to represent the ability to make use of the sea as an instrument of national power. You will note that I emphasize the "use of the sea."

The phrase "use of the sea" — has many implications that are worthy of examination. In peace, its uses may be more or less obvious; such as use of the seas for fishing grounds, as a source of food; — the use of its surface for avenues of trade; — its use as a means for the importation of strategic raw materials; — its use for peaceful contacts between nations; — and last, but by no means least, its use to deploy and sustain naval and other armed forces throughout the world — either for peaceful purposes or to counter anticipated aggression.

In a war of the future, use of the seas would embrace the same uses as in peace but would be expanded to include: exploiting areas of the sea (and the air above and the waters beneath) for offensive purposes and thus applying the pressure of destruction on the enemy by naval campaigns; — supporting generally a forward strategy that includes the use of land, naval and air forces in vital areas throughout the world; supporting logistically and tactically our army and air forces overseas by naval operations; protecting our shipping against critical losses; denying the use of the sea to the enemy — his trade and his fisheries both on the

high seas and in coastal waters, thus imposing on him the pressure of scarcity; denying the sea to the enemy for his military operations of any character; and, finally, providing us access to the shores of the enemy for raids or invitation as may be demanded by our overall national strategy.

By its very nature Sea Power enters into every other element of national power. Sea Power does not and cannot stand alone as a separate element of national power. It is interwoven through the fabric of our national existence — a part of our political power, our economic power, and our military power. In this connection, we must bear in mind that the term sea power is a very broad one. There may be a tendency to consider sea power as the equivalent of naval power. This must be avoided, as naval power is only one of the elements, one of the means, of sea power. With sea power developed to its fullest extent, a nation can make use of all the world's resources, and can thus grow in prosperity and in security. Without sea power, a nation may be limited to the resources, and the limits of one land continent. Considering the expanded world responsibilities of the United States, the need for a healthy and expanding American industrial economy, and the close interrelationship between world conditions and the political freedom and independence of the American people, it is obvious that sea power and the ability to use the sea, are, and will be, vital to the attainment of the objectives of the United States in peace and war.

To use the sea — to develop sea power as part of national power — requires the means to use it, the knowledge of how to use those means, and the will to do so.

The means which make up sea power include:

1. A sound economy. (This we have — and we hold it largely because of seapower. Without seapower, in peace and war, we would lose it, as did Britain during and after the last war).

2. A favorable geographic location — (We have had this since 1492).
3. Well developed and efficient ports — (We could improve on these today. We need much research to give us the answer on improvising new port facilities in the face of atomic attack).
4. An effective and efficient industrial organization — (This has always been a peculiarly American genius).
5. Physical access to outside natural resources — (We have that, and in war we must fight to keep it).
6. A well-developed shipbuilding industry and a strong and healthy and loyal merchant marine — (This we do not have. Foreign shipbuilding, foreign subsidies, and personnel problems of our merchant marine, have placed us in a very weak position).
7. Secure bases at home and overseas — (This falls within the military category).
8. A strong, active nucleus of trained personnel supported by a powerful reserve potential. (This is a continuing problem. As is the case with every other field of endeavor, the achievement of sea power requires trained men).
9. Naval strength for the exercise of the control of the sea. (We cannot rest on our laurels or on our reserve fleets for this one. Research is needed — much research, and development, to bring to us the most modern and effective ships, aircraft, weapons and techniques of the future.)

Now, possession of the means alone is not enough to make use of the sea. We must know how to use the means. That knowledge is arrived at by study and research into the future. That knowledge, it is the duty of this College to develop.

With the means — and the knowledge — there is still one vital requirement. A nation must possess the will to develop its sea power and benefit therefrom. That will must lie in our people. It must grow from realization of the fact of the importance of the sea to our way of life, to our national economy, and to our national security.

Now that I have touched on the foundation of our courses at the College, I should like to give you some information on our procedures.

The educational policy of the College is as follows:  
TO DEVOTE PRINCIPAL EMPHASIS TO THE  
PROMOTION OF THE GOOD JUDGMENT AND  
INTELLECTUAL LEADERSHIP EXPECTED OF  
A NAVAL OFFICER IN HIGH COMMAND.

The philosophy underlying this policy and the Objectives of the College — this philosophy requires that we advocate no dogma nor fixed rules for Naval Warfare. On the contrary, this philosophy is based on the general proposition which Admiral McCormick just gave you, that the art of war may be learned but it cannot be taught. Consequently, the College offers you every facility for you to train yourself in the making of sound decisions — decisions arrived at by careful weighing of facts, by the exercise of logical thinking, and finally by the exercise of educated judgment.

The College, therefore, offers you a vast amount of information on many subjects involved in, and related to, the conduct of modern warfare — but, it provides you with only such guidance as is necessary to prevent undue loss of time.

In support of this feature of our Educational policy, and as a most important corollary to your academic activities while you are here, is one which I believe you will find most refreshing: For the first time in many years and perhaps for the first time



in your military careers you will find yourselves quite free of administrative detail. This is made possible by a splendid group of civilian supervisors and other personnel of the Administration Department; and also an excellent group of Library personnel. These latter will, I am sure, prove to be of invaluable assistance to you in your research work. Incidentally, the College takes great pride in all of our civilian employees, most of whom have been here for many years — several, in fact, for over 30 years.

Now let us look at the courses themselves.

A general description of the various courses, was contained in the "Catalog of Courses" which was mailed to you. A somewhat more detailed outline of the curriculum of the Course in Naval Warfare and of the Command and Staff Course has just been issued to you in a pamphlet the "Supplement to the Catalog of Courses 1955-56." I want to review very briefly the purposes of each Course, in order that you may have a picture of the College's field of education as a whole.

The purpose of the Command and Staff Course, like our other courses, is to further an understanding of the fundamentals of warfare in order to prepare officers for higher command. In this course, emphasis is placed on the operational functions of command, including operational planning and command decision; and the organization, functions and procedures of operational staffs, together with participation in joint and combined committee work.

Similarly the Course in Naval Warfare has the same broad purpose of furthering an understanding of the fundamentals of warfare, in order to prepare officers for higher command. The course is two years in length, each year being a complete unit, both on the same academic level. However, the First Year of the Course emphasizes the integrated employment of the elements of naval power in the accomplishment of Navy missions. The Second Year emphasizes the strategic employment of Naval Power

in the furtherance of National Objectives. In both years, high command, and methods of participation in joint and combined work, are stressed.

The Course of Advanced Study in Strategy and Sea Power has a limited enrollment and is of 2 to 3 years duration. Members of this course pursue studies designed not only for the education of a small group of officers in advanced phases of strategic concepts, but also to foster creative thinking, and to produce studies of long term value to the Naval War College and the naval service in general.

The Flag Officer's Refresher Course is conducted "on call." When in session, the course is tailored to meet the individual needs of the officers enrolled.

The College has two additional short resident courses of two weeks duration, in session only once a year, in May. Both of these courses are for a limited number of Reserve Officers on annual two weeks training duty.

So much for the resident courses. As for the College's Correspondence Courses, you may be interested to know that there are now some 1600 enrolled. The several correspondence courses are offered in order to extend the facilities of the Naval War College, as far as practicable, to officers who are presently unable to attend the resident courses.

One additional program is shortly to go on the road. It is the Naval War College Reserve Officer's Lecture Program. In this, a team of officers from the College will go to each Naval District to present a series of classified lectures to reserve officers.

Having taken a look at the separate courses, I should now like to discuss briefly certain features common to all the resident courses.

All of the resident students study a number of subjects together where the areas are common to these courses. Probably

the most recurring element to all, lies in the field of strategy. Therefore, in all the courses, the College specializes in the development of the officer's ability to reason along strategic lines, and to further his understanding of strategy.

Also, in other fields, there are many additional studies that are conducted jointly or concurrently by students of the various courses. These fields in particular, are International Relations, Interservice Operations, and Naval Operations.

Although certain general fields of study of the courses may be the same, the different courses include the study of war at various levels of command; that is, from the unit command to that of the highest governmental level. The emphasis on level in any particular course is generally obtained by increasing the length of time devoted to the study of the problems of that particular level of command.

For example, in the Command and Staff Course a considerable amount of time is devoted to studies and applications of the "tools and techniques" of warfare. These studies are then integrated with further studies, and problems devoted to their employment at various levels of command. The predominant emphasis of the Command and Staff Course is on those levels of command having operational functions.

In the First Year of the Course in Naval Warfare also, a considerable amount of time is devoted to "tool and techniques." Well over half of the curriculum time, however, is devoted to studies of problems at the Force, Fleet, Theater and National Level. Here emphasis is given to those levels of command primarily concerned with the integrated employment of the elements of Naval Power in the accomplishment of Naval missions.

In the Second Year of the Course in Naval Warfare, the preponderance of time is devoted to the Departmental, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and National Security Council level. Problems of Theater and Unified Commands are also given a large amount of attention.

There are four other items in the College program to which all the Courses devote much time. They are: The Operations Problems, the Term Paper program, the Lecture Program and the Global Strategy Discussions.

Operations Problems have been used as an academic method at the College for many years. This method is similar to the "case study method" employed at many advanced civilian educational institutions. It is based on the precept that the value of knowledge, of itself, is greatest when knowledge can be applied to solve problems similar to those with which the student will be confronted in the future.

In our problems here at the College, the majority — because of their scope and complexity — the majority can only be solved by coordinated efforts of a group of students organized as committees or staffs. This method, as you know, is also that found in many high commands. In addition, however, and in order that each student may receive practice in making his own decisions — we introduce into each Operations Problem the requirement of the making of decisions by the individual.

Operations Problems, while concerned directly with operations, naval joint or combined, vary in purpose, scope, complexity, availability of weapons of the future; and in the type of operation, and in the level of command; and finally in geographic location — also with a view to the future. Naturally, the more elementary are conducted early in the College year.

In this regard, some of the first few will not include the "atom." Rest assured, however, that the College will provide ample study of this vital weapon. This stems from the fact that the College must give opportunity to study all aspects of naval warfare. Each problem is designed to illustrate a specific point and each has a different purpose and scope. Injection of nuclear weapons too early in the course would detract from the emphasis we desire to place upon the specific point underlying any given

operations problem. In any event whether or not nuclear weapons will be used by or against our forces, the fact remains that there are some features of our problems at the College which are basic to naval operations, and to war in general — features which illustrate basic points in strategy, in tactics, and in logistics, and which we must learn in order to be able to properly use any weapons, nuclear or otherwise. Further there may well be situations in cold wars, fringe wars, or peripheral wars where all fighting will be with conventional weapons and where the atom does not figure.

So much for the Operations Problem Program. The next item of general application at the College is the Term Paper program. You will hear more of this in detail later. For the moment I will merely mention the fact that each of the courses includes an extensive program of writing research papers — or staff duties. These are individual papers or studies — some quite lengthy, each in a different form and scope, and differing in subject matter as among the courses; and the existence of the program is based on the fact that formal writing is a major aid to clear thinking.

Next we have the Lecture Program. The College has lectures, both formal and informal, by outside guest speakers; presentations by members of the staff, and numerous seminar sessions in the various courses. In many of the lectures, the topics are intended to support the curriculum as a whole rather than any one particular course. All classes, or one or more classes, will be scheduled to attend, depending on the circumstances. In any event, if your particular class is not scheduled to attend a particular lecture or other program — and if you have the time available, you are urged to attend such programs.

Global Strategy Discussions will be your last scheduled curriculum item of the year. These Discussions consist of a series of round-table discussions in which the students are integrated into discussions groups along with outstanding civilian guests,

with Senior Reserve Officers, and with certain high ranking visiting Army, Navy, and Air Force officers.

So much for the separate courses and supporting programs. To get back to the overall picture, it is a basic premise of the College, in keeping with its Mission, to keep all of the courses dynamic, alive, and forward looking. For this reason the Courses are changed from time to time to meet the needs of the Navy and the evolution of warfare. Some changes are gradual, and others may be apparent while you are here. In this regard, the play of War Games at the College is undergoing — and will continue to undergo — major evolution. For instance, last year's Strategic War Game in the Course in Naval Warfare was one in which the College advanced beyond the limits of any similar game held in the United States. Before this Class graduates, there may develop the possibility of testing out the Electronic Maneuver Board System, which has been in the process of design and installation for several years. That installation will provide an extremely advanced method of playing two sided war games with weapons of the present and of the future.

Other improvements in the Courses and in academic methods are arrived at:

1. - Through the study of new material received from the Fleet, the Chief of Naval Operations, the Army, Air Force and Marine Corps, and from many other governmental agencies; and,

2. - Through the evaluation, or criticism, of each item of the curriculum as submitted by the students. Each student is asked to comment formally and in detail, on the various phases of our work here; and much of our progress stems from the good thinking in those comments.

3. - Through the work of the officers on the college staff, and of the distinguished civilians who occupy our professional chairs and our consultant posts. The College policy of changing,

or rotating its staff — officer and civilian — each year, insures an ever fresh and modern outlook on many of the factors which lead to sound and modern military decision.

4. - Through the study of ideas which are generated or derived from studies and free discussion at the College. In this connection let me again emphasize the point made by the President of the College regarding "freedom of expression." You are free — in fact you are expected — to express your ideas at any time, and you can be assured that your ideas will receive consideration. This is a very important source of progress.

In general, we avoid a rigid adherence to methods, techniques and weapons which may have become outmoded; and we shall try to avoid an improper estimate of enemy capabilities, methods, techniques and weapons.

We try to stimulate the maximum exploitation of our own capabilities, both new and old. And we try to maintain a sound balance between the old and the new in order that we may be mentally prepared to operate with a maximum of effectiveness.

And lastly, we also attempt to maintain a proper balance between overpessimistic and overoptimistic approaches to the possibilities of future warfare — both equally undesirable.

To summarize: In this talk I have reviewed the courses of the College and their overall objectives, and I have shown you how these courses stem from and support the Mission of the College. Let us take another look at this Mission:

**TO FURTHER AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE  
FUNDAMENTALS OF WARFARE, INTERNA-  
TIONAL RELATIONS, AND INTERSERVICE  
OPERATIONS, WITH EMPHASIS ON THEIR AP-  
PLICATION TO FUTURE NAVAL WARFARE,  
IN ORDER TO PREPARE OFFICERS FOR  
HIGHER COMMAND.**

**This Mission of the College will be fulfilled in each of you in such measure as you contribute your best thinking to your studies here. Remember, when faced with a new situation, recollection of the past is not a substitute for thought; and here we expect you to do a lot of thinking.**

**Gentlemen, I hope that you will find this year at the Naval War College enlightening, rewarding and enjoyable. I wish you well.**



## **BIOGRAPHIC SKETCH**

### **Rear Admiral Thomas H. Robbins, Jr., U. S. N.**

Admiral Robbins was born in 1900 and was graduated from the United States Naval Academy in 1919 with the Class of 1920. After a year in the Atlantic Fleet, he saw service in the Mediterranean and Black Seas until 1924, when he commanded a submarine chaser for one year. Following a tour as instructor in Seamanship and French at the Naval Academy, he returned to the Atlantic Fleet for a year. In 1927, he was transferred to flight training at Pensacola.

Upon designation as Naval Aviator, he served for two years in cruiser-based scouting squadrons. Following duty as Aide to Rear Admiral W. A. Moffett, U. S. N., he served in the Pacific Fleet in command of an AVP and in carrier-based aircraft squadrons. He attended the Junior Course at the Naval War College in 1936, after which he served as a member of the staff for two years. He was Navigator of the U. S. S. LEXINGTON for two years and Aviation Officer on the Staff of Commander, Scouting Force for one year.

During 1942-1943, Admiral Robbins was Aviation Plans Officer at Headquarters, Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet. He became Chief of Staff and Aide to Commander, Fleet Air Quonset in 1943, after which he served as Naval Aviation Officer on the Staff of the Army and Navy Staff College until 1944.

He served aboard the U. S. S. ESSEX and U. S. S. LEXINGTON during the war. He was ordered back to the United States in 1945 to serve in the Office of DCNO (Air). During April-September, 1946, he had duty in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, followed by a term in the Office of the Secretary of the Navy. In October, 1949, he was appointed a Member of the Joint Strategic Survey Committee, Joint Chiefs of Staff.

**Admiral Robbins was appointed Chief of Staff at the Naval War College in August, 1953, the position which he presently holds, and from November, 1953 to May, 1954 he served as Acting President of the Naval War College.**

**He has been awarded the World War 1 Victory Medal (1 Star, Atlantic Fleet) ; Defense Ribbon (1 star, Pacific Fleet) ; American Theatre Medal ; Pacific Theatre Medal ; Philippine Liberation Medal (1 campaign star).**