Fleet level action, Luce Hall, Newport.

Courtesy U.S. Naval War College Museum

Professionalizing Command, Education, and Doctrine

By THOMAS C. HONE

Since the passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Act in 1986, Congress has encouraged—some would say pressured—the Armed Forces to develop joint doctrine. Moreover, influential members of Congress have called for changes in professional military education (PME). At times these two objectives have merged; that is, PME advocates have assumed that better programs would be more joint and that the officers who graduate from them would inevitably enhance joint doctrine.

That assumption is cast into doubt when one examines the record of the Naval War College since 1911 as its leadership and faculty developed four primary PME models. The first three were largely complementary with the later two tending to rest on concepts that underpinned the first. The fourth, initiated after 1972, was very different and has become the ideal against which reforms at the senior colleges administered by the Army and Air Force have been measured. But is that last model adequate to promote the development of joint doctrine? Can it achieve what some critics in Congress want? The answer seems to be no.

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Neither Art nor Science

The first model is the professional naval commander. This does not mean the professional naval officer or sailor, but one who is expert in commanding naval forces. This model was seen as revolutionary when it was adopted by the

Naval War College in 1911. Command was regarded as an art peculiar to the temper and intellect of the commander himself. Many successful commanders (such as Horatio Nelson) were studied at institutions such as the U.S. Naval Academy. But to suggest that commanding either a squadron or a fleet was a profession like command of a ship, and thus that naval officers needed to be schooled in commanding fleets, was considered novel.

How was this model taught? First by instructing officers in a standard means of analyzing combat at sea. With such a common thread officers would use the same ideas and terms. The goal was to provide a basis for rapid, clear communication in war. Once achieved, coordination would be easier and faster, reducing the risk of misunderstanding among officers and between superiors and subordinates. Another element of instruction was a standard order form. Again, the goal was to facilitate clear communication and reduce errors. Finally, wargames enabled officers to practice giving and interpreting orders and to test doctrine which was the foundation of fleet actions. These three elements constituted the applicatory system of professional naval command.

military doctrine is "the bridge between thought and action"

Note the use of the term *system*. Not *art* or *science*. A system can be taught because it is an ordered process governed by rules. But it is not a bureaucratic routine or rulebook. Indeed, the system was intended to preclude commanders from providing detailed instructions to subordinates. As one observer noted, adopting this system "meant acceptance of the principle that subordinates should be granted wide discretion . . . and make decisions at their level of responsibility with only very general guidance from their superiors."[1] It was designed to replace orders with doctrine as the link between seniors and subordinates, and the doctrine would first be tested in wargames.

This model had major implications. It assumed that direct, immediate control of large naval forces was impractical. Senior commanders could direct forces under their command, but control over them would be more a matter of implementing doctrine than following instructions. Instead of force commanders ordering individual ships to steam at specific speeds on specific courses, they would state: "Reach such-and-such position by such-and-such time" or "Support the flagship in the engagement without obstructing fire by friendly ships." Moreover, fleet or task force commanders would not send such orders to a ship in engagements. Instead they would exercise responsibility beforehand by explaining their objectives, plans to achieve them, and views of applicable doctrine. Subordinates would issue their own orders in a coordinated effort to turn guidance into action.

As one historian reminds us, military doctrine is "the bridge between thought and action."[2] The goal of the Naval War College in 1911 was to turn the concept of naval command away from detailed instructions and toward developing doctrine. It focused on the bridge and was successful despite the advent of radio, which held out the promise of tighter control by a fleet commander and even direct control of forces at sea from ashore. But this was a two-edged sword; it could be used too often. Thus doctrine was needed for communications before and during battle.

The Heart of the Navy

But what was doctrine—as a bridge between thought and action—meant to support? What was the proper way for commanders to think? Such questions led to development of the second PME model at Newport—the senior officer as a campaign planner. As envisioned by Admiral William S. Sims, President of the Naval War College immediately following World War I, "the war college should be made the principal asset of the Navy." This was an audacious claim—that the institution was in fact the heart of the Navy in peacetime. But Sims was adamant. In his view the Navy, no matter how strong, would fail unless led by a cadre of naval officers skilled in planning and implementing campaigns. He held that no officer who is "not a war college graduate [should] be assigned to any important position, either ashore or afloat."[3] For Sims, doctrine was rooted in campaign planning. Such plans had to be anchored, in turn, to strategic thinking, or at least thinking on the theater level. And there was no more effective means of preparing officers for theater or strategic level thinking than wargames.

The emphasis Sims put on wargames led to a blossoming of simulations and gaming at Newport in the early 1920s and supported the fledgling Office of the Chief of Naval Operations. But though the latter developed a war plans division, it never contained more than a dozen officers. Hence it relied on results of games played on large, blue-tiled floors. Gaming, however, was only one element of a multiphase process that pioneered doctrinal and tactical innovations in the Navy before World War II. Concepts that appeared worthwhile to war planners were tested in games. The more promising were forwarded to the staff of the commander in chief, United States Fleet, or to his subordinate staffs. These staffs

Finale of RIMPAC exercise, 1998.

U.S. Navy (Christopher Holloway)

were the source of proposals for the annual fleet exercises. In effect, ideas, doctrine, and command procedures that were developed first in war college games were then tested in major exercises. Next the results were circulated to faculty and students, war planners in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, and bureaus responsible for weapons development and ship design.

The cycle of planning/games/exercises/acquisition was instrumental in allowing the Navy to form an air arm in the 1920s. In 1924 the Navy had an experimental aircraft carrier, the converted collier *USS Langley*. The experiment employed twelve aircraft at most. Then, in 1925, Captain Joseph Reeves, who had watched the testing of aviation concepts and taught tactics at Newport, took command of the fleet's aviation squadrons. Under his leadership, *USS Langley* was converted from an experimental to an operational carrier, eventually with 42 aircraft. At the same time, the Bureau of Aeronautics pressed ahead with the development and procurement of rugged, powerful aircraft for use on carriers. As ideas from fleet exercises flowed back to the war college, they were married to projections made by the bureau. The result was a systematic examination of the strike capability of aircraft carriers, precisely the sort of interaction Sims wanted.[4]

during the war creation of doctrine became a fleet responsibility

A Ladder of Education

The third model adopted at Newport prior to World War II was the war planner. Campaign plans focus on a theater. War plans direct the resources of the whole nation. This was the highest level of professional military education. Graduates were judged capable of advising the President in wartime. If campaign games prepared officers to serve on the staffs that would wage a Pacific campaign against Japan, the study of strategy prepared them to lead forces in a modern total war. The best way to study strategy may not have been clear at the time, but the goal of this model was obvious—to prepare senior officers for command on the national versus theater level.[5]

Indeed, by the late 1930s the Navy had developed a ladder of education to produce officers who could respond to challenges at various levels of command. The first rung was the U.S. Naval Academy, which was accredited in 1931. Its object was to graduate officers who understood that formal education was essential to their development as officers. The second rung was the junior course at the Naval War College, established in 1924. Though it later copied the course offered to more senior officers, its initial focus was on both tactics and doctrine. The third was the senior course at Newport, which combined lessons on commanding naval forces with experience in mock campaign planning. The top rung was the advanced course, created in 1933. It prepared officers for national level command. A common theme at the second, third, and fourth rungs was the need for doctrine as the basis of command and coordination of naval forces.

But what was this doctrine? The founders of the Naval War College in the late 19th century would have understood it: gain control of the sea and then use it for some larger purpose such as blockading an enemy nation or assaulting it from the sea. For decades, "gaining control of the sea" meant "defeating the enemy main battle force"; so the central idea of naval doctrine spawned other, logically subsidiary doctrine like a river spreads its muddy tentacles throughout a delta. Imperial Japan, the Britain of Asia, was particularly vulnerable to such doctrine once it went into effect.

But carrying out doctrine changed the way that doctrine was created. Before World War II, the staff of the commander in chief of the United States Fleet was too small to originate it. During the war, however, fleet staffs grew and gained responsibility. Creation of doctrine became a fleet rather than Naval War College oblilgation. Moreover, once Japan and Germany were defeated, Newport did not regain its role as the primary source of strategic concepts and doctrinal advances. World War II had produced a revolution in Navy organization. Both the naval staff—that is, the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations—and multiple fleet staffs (including the type commanders) had grown in size and sophistication. Equally critical to the process of developing doctrine was the shift to a forward deployed Navy during the Cold War.

As one historian has indicated in a study of what might be called the first maritime strategy, the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations and multiple fleet staffs (those for the Atlantic, Pacific, and numbered fleets) were the source of new strategies and doctrine.[6] The role of Newport shifted from innovator to sometime educator of flag officers. Instead of being central to doctrinal, tactical, or strategic innovation, the college slipped to the periphery, and its programs prepared officers for key billets in organizations such as the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations or fleet staffs.

Borrowed from Civilian Life

Things changed when Admiral Elmo Zumwalt appointed Rear Admiral Stansfield Turner as President of the Naval War College in 1972. Zumwalt had been strongly influenced by

Courtesy Naval War College

Colbert Plaza, Naval War College.

the use of techniques such as systems analysis to manage the Pentagon, including the Navy. As the Chief of Naval Operations, he had organized his own systems analysis branch within the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations. But when it came to the war college, he and Turner chose to emphasize the study of strategy at least as much as systems analysis.

Why? The answer is found in a need to give officers the tools to succeed in the Pentagon, where the management of national defense was increasingly accomplished through techniques and processes borrowed from civilian (especially industrial) life or created by a small corps of defense analysts in policy centers and think tanks such as the RAND Corporation. Naval officers had to be familiar with these techniques and their use in national defense. At the same time, officers had to demonstrate that they could contribute to the development of strategy in unique and valuable ways. President Kennedy had complained after the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, for example, that senior military advisors had not really demonstrated creative strategic as opposed to military thinking. Turner set out to prepare naval officers to work with leading defense officials in managing national military resources or advise the President and Secretary of Defense.

A fourth professional military education model for naval officers was devised under Turner by the faculty at Newport. One part emphasized decisionmaking in the Pentagon; another focused on the roots of strategy—not just concepts but their sources. As a result, teachers of strategy were largely historians selected from academe, and the strategy curriculum became an exercise in reading and understanding key episodes in military history.

The new approach did not emphasize doctrine and was thus a break with the earlier models. It correctly assumed that doctrine was something officers learned elsewhere, such as on operational fleet staffs. In the 1930s, doctrine had been the thread linking early professional military education with preparation for flag rank. By

the early 1970s, Zumwalt and Turner were worried less about doctrine than the loss of influence of officers at high levels of national defense. Turner, especially, felt the need to ground senior officers in the intellectual roots of strategy. He wanted them to think and speak as national strategists, not as service representatives or parochial military specialists.

Of course there was a reaction. One was a focus on the lack of training in ethics for senior officers. A later (and continuing) critique was that none of the war colleges paid adequate attention to the doctrinal implications or the conceptual and organizational keys to effective joint operations. Another concern was innovation. Senior leaders feared that more promising junior officers lacked an opportunity to develop new ideas to be realized when (and if) they were promoted to flag rank. The curriculum and organization of the Naval War College were modified after Turner's tenure to account for these concerns.

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What about doctrine? It became those concepts that deployed fleets developed, tested, and implemented. The deployment process itself became a laboratory and school; officers learned and developed doctrine on fleet staffs and at sea. Because the Navy deployed to regions such as the western Pacific and Mediterranean where conflict was likely, this process assumed the function of pre-World War II fleet problems. Preparing for and executing deployments became a mechanism of continuing change, especially tactically. Fleets prepared and tested concepts such as composite warfare: that was doctrine.

Nor did the Naval War College gain influence over what could be called strategic doctrine. Consider maritime strategy during the mid-1980s. It came from leaders infused with the thinking of Chiefs of Naval Operations such as Thomas Hayward and James Watkins and of an ambitious, aggressive Secretary of the Navy, John Lehman. While maritime strategy was not doctrine, it was an operational concept with strong doctrinal implications—similar to the Orange Plan of the 1930s, which set the role of the Navy and Marine Corps in a potential war with Japan as a transpacific, island-hopping campaign. Maritime strategy came along as the services took a renewed interest in doctrine; and it met the standard of being a bridge between thought and action.

Fleets and Doctrine

Where should doctrine come from now? The development of the Naval War College in the 20th century suggests an answer. The PME model matured with the concept of military command. Step 1 professionalized the practice of fleet command, then step 2 focused on preparing officers for theater-level command, and finally step 3 stressed educating senior officers for the national level. These efforts paid off in World War II. One of the Navy's greatest assets in that war was a cadre of staff officers who could plan and conduct theater-level campaigns.

But that conflict and its aftermath brought about changes in technology (including nuclear weapons), the enemy, the nature of the Navy organization, the defense establishment (in both 1947 and 1949), and the roles of the services. Under such circumstances it is surprising that the Naval War College survived. The Navy did not need it as a source of doctrine, an aid to the Navy staff, or a source of innovative concepts or plans. The vision of Newport as the intellectual center of the Navy which Sims espoused was spent. The idea of doctrine as a means of unifying professional military education also faded—the proof being the success of Turner's curricular reforms in 1972.

The history of the Naval War College before World War II is a story of both professional military education and the process of professionalizing naval command. The two evolved together since Newport was where the latter process was institutionalized. Professional command required doctrine, so the college assumed a major role in its development and propagation. The performance of naval forces in World War II proved that professionalizing naval command had succeeded. Officers produced by that process became leaders of the Navy and members of the Joint Chiefs following the war. They bequeathed a number of effective institutions (including the Naval War College), a firm concept of professional naval command, and a military-industrial complex which pioneered technological innovations.

Yet these graduates also advanced the practice of deploying fleets prepared for war forward in waters distant from the United States. Doctrine is now made in these fleets through operations and work-ups for deployment. The successes of the pre-World War II process created fleets that displaced the Naval War College as the locus of professionalism and doctrinal development. Thus after the war officers were exposed in the schoolhouse to doctrine actually made by someone else.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Newport was a problem-solving institution which concentrated on developing concepts and doctrine. Granted, students took courses to fill gaps in their education. But the faculty and students were also part of an institution engaged in important processes—such as

Naval Historical Center

Finale of fleet problem, Panama Bay, 1929.

preparing campaign-level planning staffs for a possible war with Japan and linking doctrine on the tactical and operational levels of naval warfare.

All this went away following World War II. Newport became a victim of its own success. Both strategy and doctrine were developed increasingly in the fleets, though the college continued to be comprised of officers whose efforts in areas such as defense economics and logistics were valuable to members of fleet staffs. Thus Turner could not restore the former mission of Newport in 1972; instead he gave it a new one. He assigned functions that suited the times: preparing naval officers to work in the Pentagon and think on the strategic level. In sum he combined a truncated graduate program in business administration with a compact course in military—not just naval—history. The goal was to produce intellectually sophisticated national defense managers. There were still outstanding officers who did not receive an education at the Naval War College. They were able to learn critical command and planning skills as well as doctrine through fleet experience.

Bridging Thought and Action

A professional military education can be graduate level study, preparation for serious staff work at the Pentagon, or a process of forming doctrine to facilitate effective command. It cannot be all three at once, certainly not in ten months. And it is not just a matter of time. An institution like the current Naval War College is not suited to develop doctrine. Navy leaders have a

difficult time explaining to members of Congress or officers of other services the folly of using Newport as a model for developing new doctrine, especially joint doctrine. Since the pre-World War II period, the professional and doctrinal heart of the Navy has been shifted to deployed fleets. That situation cannot be changed as long as the fleets deploy forward.

The other services have responded to the call for PME reform by instituting basically minor changes in curricula. These changes are not useless; quite the opposite. They amount to applying the Turner model, with some variations, to the Army and the Air Force. But members of Congress want professional military education to assume the function it had at Newport after 1911—creating a new profession of military command, though today it is not naval command but joint command. No PME institution modeled on the Naval War College can perform this function.

Naval officers do not know quite how to explain the above situation to Congress because they do not want to insinuate that the program and curriculum at Newport have been unsuccessful. Yet it is critical to distinguish professional military education, which takes various forms, from the process of transforming the profession of arms—which as annals of the Naval War College reveal was not identical to formal graduate education. A better understanding of this history may clarify and facilitate communication among those searching for improved professional military education and fundamental changes in the Armed Forces.

What remains missing is the bridge between thought and action. Doctrine is that bridge. It is closely intertwined with the nature of military command, so efforts to change the latter and make it truly joint must influence the development of the former. But this is a fundamental undertaking, not the incidental byproduct of improvements to professional military education. In other words, fixing professional military education will not make the services truly joint because that will require fundamental changes in doctrine and organization which can only come about when officers attend tailored graduate programs, especially in the Navy. Changes in doctrine will occur through joint exercises in which deployed fleets participate. In fact this is what is happening today. It seems inevitable, given the history of the Naval War College in the 20th century. **JFQ**

NOTES

[1] Ronald Spector, *Professors of War* (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press, 1977), p. 119.

[2] John Gooch, "Military Doctrine and Military History," in *The Origins of Contemporary Doctrine,* edited by John Gooch (Camberley, U.K.: Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, 1997), p. 5.

[3] Michael Vlahos, *The Blue Sword* (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press, 1980), p. 58.

[4] Charles Melhorn, *Two-Block Fox: The Rise of the Aircraft Carrier, 1911–1929* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1974); Thomas Hone and Mark Mandeles, "Interwar Innovation in Three Navies: U.S. Navy, Royal Navy, Imperial Japanese Navy," *Naval War College Review*, vol. 40, no. 2 (Spring 1987), pp. 63–83.

[5] Gerald Kennedy, "The United States Naval War College, 1919–1941," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1975.

[6] Michael A. Palmer, *Origins of the Maritime Strategy: American Naval Strategy in the First Postwar Decade* (Washington: Naval Historical Center, 1988).