Industry and the Navy

The Civilian Power behind Our Sea Power

Fleet Adm. Chester W. Nimitz

SINCE its inception, the Army Industrial College has been a joint undertaking of the fighting services, and few of our activities have proved more valuable. The graduates of this college have exerted noteworthy influence on naval procurement and planning and have helped industry make its great contributions.

If there has been any mistake made in the conduct of this institution, I would say it occurred in discontinuing the college during the years of the war. I had a similar experience when I came to Washington in 1938 and began to examine the war plans of the Bureau of Personnel.

I discovered that it was planned that the Naval War College, then under the Bureau of Personnel, the Postgraduate School at Annapolis, and many other schools were to be closed at the outbreak of war. That was obviously based on the idea that any war we might have would be of very short duration. But we changed the plans, and I think it was the correct thing to do. I hope that there will be no plan to close the Industrial College during any future emergencies.

In the war just ended the road from initial disaster to victory was long and bitterly fought. The first enemy blow in the Pacific sent us and our allies staggering. We lost base after base—Hong Kong, Singapore, Manila, the Dutch East Indies.

We recovered our strength and multiplied it many times within a period we would have considered impossible five short years ago. In the very dark days at the beginning of the Pacific war, when our small forces were outnumbered and outequipped, a great moral strength enabled us to fight a delaying action which afforded the precious time needed to produce for our recovery.

And it was faith that our Nation's industry would turn out the goods that helped immeasurably to sustain this moral strength in our fighting services. With most heartening determination and ability the industrial machinery to get what was needed to the place it was needed, on time, and in sufficient quantity, was set in motion at every level of the country's industrial and military life. Militarily speaking, then, the sacrifices of our fighting men in all the delaying actions were justified.

But even a valiant delaying action, fought over a period of months, may not afford us sufficient time to arm ourselves fully in the event of another war. The demands will probably be immediate. To that end it is imperative that the country's fighting services, the nonmilitary governmental agencies, the industrial elements, and the people in general, work and plan more closely together than ever before, maintaining an active interest in each other's problems, so that their primary collective concern—our national security—may be assured.

The graduates of the Army Industrial College will hold key positions in bringing this about. The combined application of your interest, knowledge, and skills will make the difference between a satisfactory military materials potential and an excellent one. We must have an excellent one. Modern war is total. No nation can wage successful war which fails to utilize its industrial capacity to the fullest extent. It is not enough to have a great industrial plant. That plant must be mobilized, supplied, and made an integral part of the war machine.

I was frequently made sharply aware of the vital necessity for adequate material support in this past "war of supply." Every phase of our operational planning in the long reaches of the Pacific was tempered in one way or another by the element of logistic support. Strategic and tactical plans to defeat the enemy were on every occasion dependent for their success upon the availability of supplies and equipment. This statement appears obvious.

But in the case of long-range and large-scale strategic and tactical plans, concern over the matter went far deeper than the number of days' supply on hand in our supply facilities in the immediate areas of operation. Such plans went into the ability of United States industry to meet the constantly growing material requirements of the fleets and armies.

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THE word "industrial" in the title of the Army Industrial College has many implications and meanings. It is impossible to explore them in detail here. But, taken collectively, it means the living heart of our entire system of material livelihood. As applied to the Navy, it is a fundamental factor of the Navy's existence. Of the basic elements which comprise the operating forces of our Navy—ships, planes, bases, supplies, and personnel—the first four are the direct result of industrial effort. The importance of maintaining our industrial production potential is paramount; in fact, it is absolute.

Grand strategy and joint action in military matters are the province of the Army and Navy Staff College. The field embraced by the Industrial College in its studies of the industrial and economic structure for war is at the same level of importance. Its plans must support the concepts evolved by the Staff College. Its conclusions will have a controlling effect on strategy. Obviously the two institutions should work in closest harmony. Strategic and industrial mobilization plans are distinct but must be closely integrated.

The Industrial College can perform a tremendous service for our country at this time. Its students are here, not so much to learn what has been done in the past as to devise new and dynamic plans for the future. It is only from a group like this that such plans can come.

Admiral Nimitz is Chief of Operations, U. S. Navy. These remarks are based on an address given at the convocation of the Army Industrial College, Washington, D. C.