



History of the Office of the  
CHIEF OF NAVAL  
OPERATIONS

1915–2015

THOMAS C. HONE AND CURTIS A. UTZ

This centennial history of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations (OPNAV) is organized around those individuals who have had the greatest impact on OPNAV. Most of these have been admirals, especially the Chiefs of Naval Operations. At times, however, a Secretary of the Navy, a Secretary of Defense, or a President has taken center stage, forcing the Navy's senior officers to react accordingly. In addition, the Navy obviously does not operate in a vacuum: What affects the country influences the Navy and its senior leadership.

One theme that is a constant across OPNAV's history is the desire of the Chiefs of Naval Operations to leave the Navy stronger and better managed than they found it. How have they done that—or attempted to do that? What has worked? What has not? How can a Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) lead OPNAV effectively? What is the relationship between leading OPNAV and leading the Navy? What are a CNO's "measures" of effectiveness and/or success? Although this study is not intended to be a manual of leadership, in a sense it is that, though readers should be aware that the leadership required of a CNO changes as the environment—both in Washington and in the world—changes.

This history will also give the interested citizen some idea of what is done at the Navy's highest leadership level. On its own right, this story of OPNAV and the CNOs is a fascinating one—bureaucratic "battles" instead of actual combat—and provides many trenchant insights into how the U.S. Navy's organization, planning, policies, and strategy have evolved over the past century.

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## INTRODUCTION

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This is a centennial history of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations (OPNAV). It is organized by the individuals who had the greatest impact on OPNAV. Most of those individuals have been admirals, especially the Chiefs of Naval Operations. At times, however, a Secretary of the Navy, a Secretary of Defense, or a President has taken center stage, forcing the Navy's senior officers to react. In addition, the Navy obviously does not operate in a vacuum. What affects the country certainly influences the Navy. Yet the story of the interaction between the Navy and the nation is too great to be covered in depth here. To cover OPNAV's first century in a reasonable number of pages meant that the authors had to pick and choose among a number of potential topics that were relevant to OPNAV in each segment of its history. Readers, including active and retired officers with experience in OPNAV, may disagree with our choices of topics and our treatments of them. But our choices were shaped by the audiences that we were writing for.

### **Our Three Audiences**

The first of our audiences is composed of younger officers committed to a career in the Navy. To them we say, "Here is our 'biography' of OPNAV and our study of the officers who have led it. Read this to learn where OPNAV came from, what it was, how it has changed, and why it has survived. This is a story about your Navy. It's designed to help you understand it."

The second of our audiences is composed of senior active duty officers searching for ways to make OPNAV work better. One theme that is constant across OPNAV's history is the desire of the Chiefs of Naval Operations to leave the Navy stronger and better managed than they found it. How have they done that—or attempted to do that? What has worked? What has not? How can a Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) lead OPNAV effectively? What is the relationship between leading OPNAV and leading the Navy? What are a CNO's "measures" of effectiveness and/or success? Though this study was not intended to be a manual of leadership at the highest levels, in a sense it is that, though readers should be aware that the leadership required of a CNO changes as the environment—both in Washington and in the world—changes.

The third audience we have written for is composed of interested citizens. "Just what do those people do in the Pentagon?" This book will give a citizen some idea of what's done in the Navy's portion of the five-sided building and why it's done. We think the story of OPNAV and the CNOs is a fascinating one—bureaucratic "battles" instead of actual combat—and we hope that readers will agree with us. If not fascinating, the stories in this book may at least be useful in helping readers understand what usually does not make the around-the-clock news cycle.

Our work has been shaped by our desire to inform these three audiences and by one major constraint—the need to keep the study unclassified. The farther back we go in OPNAV’s history, the less concern there is for classification and the more we can rely on the work of other investigators—historians, especially. That is why you will see secondary sources used extensively in the chapters that deal with the early years of OPNAV and the changes in OPNAV during World War II. Some very good historians have covered those periods. Where we needed to, however, we relied on primary sources, especially the documents preserved in the National Archives.

The closer we got to the present, the more we had to rely on material in open sources such as the *Proceedings* of the U.S. Naval Institute and the institute’s oral histories, and “trade press” publications such as *Inside the Navy*. As far as governments go, that of the United States is surprisingly open. A careful reader, with an understanding of what to search for, can glean a great deal from unclassified reports and publications.<sup>1</sup> The Navy wanted this history to be open and available. We have written it accordingly. Does this mean that we have not included some interesting facts because they remain classified? Yes. But we believe that what we have written will stand up well once more recent files have been declassified and opened to researchers.

## **General Themes**

There are some general themes that we can describe here and return to in our conclusion. The most important is the way that Chiefs of Naval Operations have, over time and through deliberate acts of the Congress, lost command of actual military operations. The CNO is no longer a “chief of naval operations.” Does this mean that a Chief of Naval Operations is not important? No. Every CNO has both formal powers and access to a variety of audiences, ranging from the public to the President. Effective CNOs know how to use their formal authority (over appointments, for example) and they also know how to address the very different audiences who watch and comment on what they do. CNOs necessarily represent the Navy to members of Congress, deal directly with the other military service chiefs and with officials in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and communicate with the public and with the men and women, uniformed and civilian, in the Navy and the Marine Corps.

In a sense, the CNO is like the President of the United States. Like the President, the CNO must persuade others to take up his causes and act to put them into effect. The CNO, like any President, must have a “program,” and must know how to help his supporters and disarm his opponents. Like Presidents, CNOs must persuade. They must also know how to bargain, appealing if necessary to public opinion. True, CNOs today find layers of decision makers between themselves and their Presidents. There can hardly be a repeat of the later 1930s, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt could pick up the phone and call CNO William D. Leahy directly when Claude Swanson, then the Navy secretary, was ill and absent from the Main Navy building on Constitution Avenue. But despite the existence of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, a persuasive and knowledgeable CNO can influence the other members of the Joint Chiefs of

Staff, members of the Congress, and even a President—as CNO Admiral James Watkins did in shaping President Ronald Reagan’s ideas about ballistic missile defenses in the 1980s. Politics in Washington is not just about formal authority and informal influence. It is also about access, and the CNO’s official role gives him (or her) access—directly and indirectly—to many important people.

Since 1898, the Navy has been a tool of American power. At the same time, advocates of a large, strong Navy have had to contend with political opponents critical of the cost of such a navy, especially if it is deployed around the world in force. CNOs are right in the middle of the back-and-forth between proponents of a “big Navy” and their opposites. That means CNOs have to walk a kind of tightrope. If they are not careful, they will generate political opposition to a large and powerful Navy, especially when budgets are tight. But they must also be aggressive enough to represent the modern, forward-deployed Navy in such a way as to satisfy the legitimate concerns of members of Congress.

Put another way, any CNO must be a “politician” in the highest sense of that term—as a leader with great public responsibilities and (as with a President) limited authority to fulfill those responsibilities. No CNO is a dictator. A CNO may be a hard-driving executive, but no CNO can ignore the leadership qualities that have brought him (or her) to the Navy’s highest uniformed position. The CNO must never forget the fact that every officer holding that office must work in tandem with the Secretary of the Navy (SECNAV) and subordinate to the Secretary of Defense (SecDef).

If there is one theme that flows through writings by naval officers in the last century, it is distaste for partisan politics. Military officers are sworn to protect and obey the Constitution. They support Presidents and respond to members of Congress because Presidents and members of Congress have constitutional standing and authority. In that sense, CNOs are “political.” They are—and must be—public officials participating in debates about how the public’s resources and authority should be used.

At the same time, CNOs must heed their sincere doubts about engaging in partisan politics. To venture there openly is to endanger the authority of the office they hold and the standing of the Navy in the eyes of the public. And so, with rare exceptions, they don’t. Yet they must still “organize, train, and equip” the Navy. To do this effectively, they must interact with the political partisans in Congress and with the President’s men and women serving as appointees in the executive branch. Under the overall leadership of the Secretary of the Navy, the CNO must work with the Commandant of the Marine Corps to field maritime forces that are equal or superior to any found elsewhere in the world. OPNAV exists to aid a CNO to do that. OPNAV is the CNO’s immediate tool for influencing the Navy.

But no CNO can take OPNAV (or the Navy’s systems command) for granted. OPNAV must be led. Leading it requires a deft hand. Tommy Lasorda, former successful manager of the Los Angeles Dodgers, was once asked what it was like to “manage” aggressive and energetic young baseball stars. He said it was like holding a bird in your hand. Hold too tight and you crush

the bird. Hold too loose and the bird flies away. This is an appropriate model for any CNO. But how should OPNAV be structured to enable a CNO to lead the Navy? How can a CNO delegate authority without losing it? If the manager of a professional baseball team has to have a knack for leadership in order to foster winning teams, then what must a CNO have to lead the much larger and far more diverse OPNAV?

Our history may provide some answers to these questions—and to others. As an earlier study of OPNAV put it in 1989, “The Office of the Chief of Naval Operations is not the way it is by accident. . . . In plain terms, [OPNAV] must be understood as an organization assigned certain crucial tasks. How it carried out those tasks and how the nature of the tasks themselves changed over time are [the] central topics of this study.”<sup>2</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For an excellent example of this sort of study and analysis, see Thomas C. Lassman, *Sources of Weapon Systems Innovation in the Department of Defense, The Role of In-House Research and Development, 1945–2000* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Thomas C. Hone, *Power and Change, The Administrative History of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, 1946–1986* (Washington, DC: Naval Historical Center, 1989), xii.



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# The Office of the Chief of Naval Operations

## Introduction

Why is there an Office of the Chief of Naval Operations? Where did it come from? Who wanted it? What was it meant to do? In 1900, according to Captain Henry C. Taylor, a former President of the Naval War College, and soon to be chief of the Bureau of Navigation (BuNav), “The need for a General Staff in our Navy is not unnatural: All military organizations, afloat and ashore, experience the same necessity, as do all large business enterprises in civil life, though under other names than that of General Staff.”<sup>1</sup> But Secretary of the Navy John D. Long, a contemporary of Taylor’s, argued that, “Under the circumstances [proposed by Captain Taylor], the Secretary [of the Navy] could hardly fail to lapse into a figurehead in the administration of the Navy.”<sup>2</sup> What was going on? Why were these individuals in conflict? Why were there such strong and different opinions about how the U.S. Navy should be directed? To answer these questions, it’s necessary to go back 15 or so years before the creation of the position of the Chief of Naval Operations.

Along a portion of the Pentagon’s “E” ring is a collection of portraits of secretaries of the Navy from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Just looking at these gentlemen brings to mind a now-very-distant past, and that past seems settled, tradition-bound, and not especially exciting. But the portraits are deceiving. For the Navy and the U.S. Army, the period from the end of the war with Spain in 1898 to the beginning of American participation in World War I in 1917 was a time of great change and great uncertainty. The government of the United States

was committed to building a world-class navy and a modern army, but getting that navy and army would require a dramatic transformation in how the two military services were managed, directed, and financed.

Put another way, political and military leaders in the United States proposed to create a modern navy and a modern army without knowing quite how to do it. There were European models of army and navy command staffs, but those models were often judged by American political leaders as being incompatible with the American constitutional tradition of civilian leadership. This history focuses on the efforts by Secretaries of the Navy and senior Navy officers to find a particularly “American” solution to this problem, but readers need to keep in mind that the problem was also one for the civilian and uniformed leaders of the Army.<sup>3</sup>

These efforts at change and reform took place in the context of increasing professionalism in American life. Often through regulations imposed by states or the federal government, citizens required education and specialized training of practitioners in a number of fields, including medicine, education, and engineering, and in many industries, such as railroading, manufacturing, mining, and food processing.<sup>4</sup> The demand for professionalism in the Navy by a group of dedicated officers was a part of this general movement, reflecting what was happening in fields like medicine and also building on the general pressure to make people in specialized areas of endeavor both more skilled and more accountable. Being “modern” meant being educated and trained. It also meant that a practitioner was judged on the basis of performance—on what he could do instead of his political connections or his seniority. This is the “deep background” to the history that follows.

## **Navy Secretaries and “Modern” Navy Management**

During this period, successive Navy secretaries created three different combinations of organizations to shape and direct the Navy. The first was established in March 1900, when SECNAV Long created the General Board, a small organization of senior line and staff officers who advised the secretary directly.<sup>5</sup> With the General Board in place, the Navy’s work was directed by it and by (a) the Navy secretary, (b) the Naval War College, (c) the Board on Construction, and (d) the Navy’s bureaus. These five organizations decided Navy policy and planned the Navy’s future. George von Lengerke Meyer, Secretary of the Navy from 6 March 1909 to 4 March 1913, changed this confederation of organizations. He eliminated the Board on Construction and used a staff of senior uniformed “aids” (later called “aides”) to assist him in setting policy and developing building programs and strategic plans. In 1915, SECNAV Josephus Daniels eliminated the system of “aides,” and Congress provided for a “chief of operations,” a senior military officer serving under the Navy secretary, but responsible for fleet operations and readiness. This chapter will explain why those organizational changes were made and show how members of Congress and senior officials in the Navy Department gradually came to accept a uniformed chief of operations.

## **The Traditional and Legal Domination of the Secretary**

By law and by tradition, the Secretary of the Navy—a civilian—was in charge of the Navy—in charge of both operations and shore-based support of the fleet. For example, it was SECNAV Long who sent Commodore George Dewey, in command of the American squadron in Hong Kong, his orders after the United States government declared war on Spain. “War has commenced between the United States and Spain,” cabled Long. “Proceed at once to Philippine Islands. Commence operations at once, particularly against the Spanish fleet. You must capture vessels or destroy. Use utmost endeavors.” But the war with Spain made it clear to Long and others that the SECNAV needed help. Long created the advisory Naval War Board during the war, but it was only a temporary organization.<sup>6</sup> Already in existence in 1898 were (a) the Board on Construction, formed in 1889 and composed of the Navy’s bureau chiefs; (b) the Naval War College, founded in 1884; (c) the Office of Naval Intelligence, created in 1882; and (d) the Navy’s bureaus, most of which dated back to 1842.<sup>7</sup>

The bureaus were semi-independent organizations that had their own budgets and were led by rear admirals or their equivalents. The bureau heads sat on the Board on Construction; their task was to provide the Navy with ships, weapons, equipment, trained sailors, and facilities. By contrast, the Naval War College existed (in the words of its first president, Rear Admiral Stephen B. Luce) to “*raise naval warfare from the empirical stage to the dignity of a science*” (emphasis in the original).<sup>8</sup> To do that, a small number of officers studied and taught at the college, developed war plans, and refined the art of war gaming. But Long wanted—and needed—more assistance, especially in Washington. Captain Taylor had therefore suggested to the SECNAV that Long persuade Congress to create a naval general staff. Strong opposition to this proposal from Senator Eugene Hale (R-ME), Senate Naval Affairs Committee chairman, led Long to instead create the General Board, composed of Admiral of the Navy George Dewey; Taylor, the Navy’s senior intelligence officer and his principal assistant; the president of the Naval War College and his principal assistant; the chief of the Bureau of Navigation; and three other senior line officers.<sup>9</sup>

Admiral Dewey, in a 29 June 1901, letter to Secretary Long, explained that the War College was “an essential part of a General Staff—a place for the consideration of war plans, the working out of schemes of campaigns, for the study, in a word, of the art of war in its broadest and highest sense.” The college and the Office of Naval Intelligence were “two indispensable adjuncts of the General Board—the three together constituting a General Staff. The whole bears a close analogy to the German General Staff system . . .”<sup>10</sup> This comparison with Germany’s naval command did not please Secretary Long or his successors. The civilian secretaries were very suspicious of the German General Staff model and they made sure that the senior officers of the Navy knew it.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, they were often frustrated by the fragmented nature of naval administration. In April 1904, for example, Navy secretary William H. Moody told the members of the Naval Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives that the Secretary of the Navy needed a senior uniformed advisor. But before the same committee, Assistant Secretary of the Navy

Charles H. Darling argued that the recently created General Board had “already invaded the province of civil administration and planted there the standard of conquest.”<sup>12</sup>

So why did Navy officers continue to argue for a general staff? Because they wanted a *modern* navy—one capable of deterring or fighting other modern navies, navies equipped with the latest naval technology and directed by formally trained officers. The key to such a navy was professionalism. Navy veteran and author Frank Uhlig Jr., put it this way:

The war with Spain . . . , the strategic views expressed by Captain Mahan (one of the most important of which was “do not divide the fleet”), the growing concentration of foreign navies into coherent battle fleets, and the sense that at some time in the future the United States might have to fight one or another of those fleets, meant that the U.S. Navy must also form its ships into a tactically coherent fleet.

Such fleets require that . . . the ships of which they are comprised be as much alike as possible, that those ships sail together and exercise together, and that the formerly independent captains become used to following the tactical commands of the flag officers placed over them.<sup>13</sup>

This shift from a navy where individual ships or small squadrons of ships protected commerce and showed the flag to a navy of powerful fleets required innovations. One was measuring the skill of enlisted and officer personnel through regular and fair peacetime competitions, such as gunnery and engineering performance contests. A second was promotion by ability instead of seniority or favoritism. A third was creating vigorous training and education programs. A fourth was weaning the Navy’s “shore establishment,” especially its dockyards, from being primarily a source of largess for the constituents of members of Congress.<sup>14</sup>

Secretary Long contributed to this process by giving the Navy’s Bureau of Construction and Repair (BuC&R) control over ship design and construction in July 1899.<sup>15</sup> The Navy relied on private firms for the detailed designs of its ships, but Long wanted to begin a process that would give uniformed officers the skills to make systematic trade-offs among the critical characteristics (speed, firepower, and protection, for example) of warships *before* the Navy sought bids from commercial ship builders. He also wanted to focus responsibility on one bureau for construction, maintenance, and modernization. The Navy already relied on institutions like the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) to train the brightest graduates of the Naval Academy in the fields of naval architecture and marine engineering. Long wanted to give these officers authority commensurate with their technical skills.

Secretary Moody picked up where his predecessor—Long—left off. In December 1902, for example, Moody had most of the Navy’s new ships participate in a “war game” in the Caribbean to test the ability of the new fleet to quickly assemble and then move *as a fleet* a great distance in order to confront an enemy force. Admiral Dewey was in overall command of this “game” and Henry C. Taylor, now a rear admiral, was his chief of staff. The exercise showed the need for effective scouting; scouting—reconnaissance—was the necessary prerequisite to fighting,

and the Navy needed both ships to do the scouting and a doctrine to link scouting with a fleet engagement.<sup>16</sup> Navy ships staged another major scouting exercise in the Caribbean in 1903—again, to learn how best to maneuver and control a fleet.

At the urging of Rear Admiral Taylor, the Secretaries of the Navy and of the War Department created in July 1903 a joint board to coordinate Navy and Army strategy and planning. This board proved its worth later, when the government of the United States supported the separation of Panama from Colombia in late 1903 and early 1904.<sup>17</sup> Secretary Moody also asked the General Board in September 1903 to put together a long-range building program. The General Board, under the leadership of Admiral of the Navy George Dewey, produced a confidential report the next month; it recommended that the Navy construct 48 powerful battleships by 1920—32 of the warships for the Atlantic Fleet and 16 for the Pacific Fleet.<sup>18</sup> But the battleships were just the core of an enlarged force. “Every two battleships [would] be supported by one armored cruiser, seven protected and scout cruisers, three destroyers, and two colliers, and each division of four battleships [would] be supported by five auxiliaries, supply, repair, and hospital ships, and two transports.”<sup>19</sup>

Why so many battleships? First, because it was estimated that such ships would have an effective life of only ten years; after that, they would need to be replaced. The first group, once built and sent to sea, would be wearing out as others were being designed and built to replace them. Second, because other navies—especially Britain’s Royal Navy—were building numbers of battleships, and the U.S. Navy had to keep up the pace. Third, because a planned program of construction would support an industrial base; firms would deal with the Navy if they were certain of a long-term relationship with the service. Fourth, because technology was advancing rapidly; as a consequence, ships were becoming obsolete at a rate much faster than before, and more modern ships would polish off obsolescent opponents the way that Admiral Dewey’s ships had overwhelmed obsolete Spanish ships at Manila Bay in 1898.

Secretary Moody was pleased with the work of the General Board. He wanted to strengthen its authority and make one of its members the official military advisor to the Navy secretary.<sup>20</sup> He favored the creation of a naval general staff.<sup>21</sup> He also sanctioned and supported meetings among the members of the General Board, the faculty of the Naval War College, and officers from the fleets every summer at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island.<sup>22</sup> Supporting and shaping Moody’s initiatives was President Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt made no secret of his desire for a large and modern U.S. Navy. He was quite capable of acting as his own Secretary of the Navy, as well as the commander-in-chief of the nation’s military forces. In October 1903, for example, Roosevelt broke a “three-year bureaucratic logjam surrounding the selection of a new gun sight for the fleet’s large-caliber weapons.”<sup>23</sup> Roosevelt also supported the work of Lieutenant Commander William S. Sims, whom Rear Admiral Taylor had appointed the Navy’s Inspector of Target Practice in November 1902.

Sims was one of a group of officers—including Bradley A. Fiske, Albert L. Key, and Reginald R. Belknap—pressing for reforms in the Navy. In 1901, Sims had written to President Roosevelt

directly, expressing his concerns about naval gunnery. Roosevelt answered and encouraged him.<sup>24</sup> In 1902, Sims challenged the leaders of the Bureau of Ordnance (BuOrd) by writing “The Crushing Superiority of British Naval Marksmanship over Ours, as Shown by Comparisons of Recent Record Practice.”<sup>25</sup> He wondered if it might get him disciplined. Instead, under Rear Admiral Taylor’s mentorship, it gave him a chance to prove that his proposals for improving Navy gunnery were sound. They needed to be. If the Navy was to operate as one or more fleets (there was no Panama Canal at this time), its gunnery needed to be first-rate; so did its engineering and seamanship. In urging Congress to support the creation of a world-class fleet, Roosevelt needed not only modern ships but also professionally minded officers and trained sailors. Though outspoken and at times confrontational, Sims was aggressively professional. As he noted in 1902, “I loathe indirection and shiftiness, and where it occurs in high places, and is used to save a face at the expense of the vital interests of our great service . . . , I want that man’s blood and I will have it, no matter what it costs me personally.”<sup>26</sup> In effect, the behavior of a reforming officer like Sims was an inevitable consequence of Roosevelt’s desire for a world-class navy. The President understood this; when he and Sims finally met face-to-face in January 1904, they began a “long and fruitful personal relationship.”<sup>27</sup>

Navy officers around the world perked up when Russia and Japan went to war in February 1904. What would the war at sea tell them about the performance of modern ships and about the ability of naval officers to use them effectively? Theodore Roosevelt followed the fighting closely. “He depended on [the Office of Naval Intelligence] to provide him with reports to justify his naval building plans,” and he was instrumental in getting the Russian and Japanese governments to a resolution of the conflict.<sup>28</sup> In June 1904, Secretary Moody resigned to become Attorney General. Roosevelt appointed Paul Morton to take Moody’s place, but Morton—unlike Moody—was not interested in administrative reforms. However, Lieutenant Commander Sims and his officer allies were. In a series of trials, Sims’s ideas about continuous aim firing were shown to be correct, and by 1905 it was clear that his “system of gunnery” had become the standard.<sup>29</sup> The major naval engagements between the Russian and Japanese fleets, especially the battles of the Yellow Sea in August 1904 and Tsushima in May 1905, prompted a debate about the value of the all-big-gun battleship, but Roosevelt sided with Sims’s argument that the all-big-gun ship was superior.<sup>30</sup>

Roosevelt’s next Navy secretary was Charles J. Bonaparte. Bonaparte, distantly related to Napoleon Bonaparte of France, was a political reformer from Baltimore. From 1901 to 1905, he had served as chairman of the Council of the National Civil Service Reform League.<sup>31</sup> However, Roosevelt had not selected him for the post of Navy secretary to make major changes. Accordingly, in his 1905 annual report to the President and the Congress, Bonaparte approached the issue of reforming the Navy’s leadership cautiously. On the one hand, he argued that “The system of autonomous bureaus seems to me open, in theory, to very serious objection, and it is in practice attended with some measure of friction, circumlocution, and delay.”<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, he was convinced that the Navy Department’s “work is done, on the whole, with great fidelity and marked



efficiency,” though he considered “these results the fruits not of the system but of the high character, both with respect to integrity and with respect to competency, of the officers employed.”<sup>33</sup>

Bonaparte did not favor the sort of change that Rear Admiral Taylor had proposed. As the secretary noted, “before deciding upon any changes in an organization which fulfills its purposes we should feel a reasonable certainty that these changes will prove improvements. I do not advise, therefore, any immediate changes in the organization of the Department . . .”<sup>34</sup> At the same time, however, Bonaparte’s own report cited just the sorts of problems that Rear Admiral Taylor and other officers had said needed to be dealt with, including (a) the debate within the department over the proper speed, size, and gun power of new battleships, (b) the inability of BuOrd to deal effectively with its increasing workload, (c) the frustration of the chief of BuC&R with repair work done “at private shipyards on the Asiatic Station,” and (d) the slow progress of amalgamating the line and engineering officer groups.<sup>35</sup>

Indeed, Rear Admiral George A. Converse, Taylor’s successor as the chief of BuNav, went against Secretary Bonaparte in his own report, first asking “Is our departmental organization the best we can have for efficiently providing, organizing, preparing, and directing the fleet?” and then answering by saying, “In the opinion of the Bureau, it is not. . . . [C]ommon sense dictates that the highest naval efficiency, demanded as never before for national success in war, must come from knowledge born of study, training, and experience—a knowledge that is essential to intelligent organization and preparation.” The problem, according to Converse, was “the lack of military initiative and directive force—military administration under the Secretary.”<sup>36</sup>

One cause of the problem identified by Rear Admiral Converse was rapid technological change. In a series of detailed studies, Norman Friedman has traced the progress in naval technology during Theodore Roosevelt’s presidency.<sup>37</sup> In 1905, for example, studies at the Naval War College suggested that long-range torpedoes could well drive battleships from the seas. Soon thereafter, however, the ability of battleship guns to shoot accurately beyond effective torpedo range kept the battleship in play. And battleships were not the only ships changing dramatically. What had been small torpedo boats (like *Cushing*, Torpedo Boat No. 1), at 105 tons in 1890, had become larger—like *Blakely* (Torpedo Boat No. 27) of 196 tons in 1901. Soon the torpedo boats were superseded by torpedo boat destroyers such as the 408-ton *Hopkins* (Destroyer No. 6) of 1903 and—eventually—torpedo boat destroyers of 700 tons, such as *Flusser* (Destroyer No. 20) and *Reid* (Destroyer No. 21) of 1909. Other actual or potential technological additions to the Navy included submarines (or, as they were known, “submarine torpedo boats”), aircraft, and radio.

These rapid and dramatic changes strongly influenced Secretary Bonaparte. In his 1906 report (published in 1907), he therefore returned to the issue of Navy Department organization, arguing that “a very radical and thoroughgoing change should be made in the organization of the Department.”<sup>38</sup> Rear Admiral Converse was even more emphatic than Bonaparte:

[W]ith each year that passes the need is painfully apparent for a military administrative authority under the Secretary, whose purpose would be to initiate and direct the

steps necessary to carry out the Department's policy, and to coordinate the work of the bureaus and direct their energies toward the effective preparation of the fleet for war.<sup>39</sup>

The bureaus had been created in the first place to pursue special fields of technology—ordnance, for example, navigation, and steam engineering. They continued to do that, and their efforts had produced better torpedoes, improved engines, guns of greater hitting power and longer range, and electric motors and control systems on ships. But how were all these innovations to be combined in one or more fleets? And how was any fleet to be used?

Use is what Theodore Roosevelt cared about. Navy “reformers” such as Lieutenant Commander Albert L. Key, Roosevelt’s naval aid from 1905 to 1907, and Commander William S. Sims, Key’s successor from 1907 to 1909, knew this. They had watched Roosevelt in action. In 1902, ships of the German, British, and Italian navies had blockaded Venezuelan ports, demanding payment of Venezuelan government debts. Admiral Dewey and President Roosevelt could not stop the blockade, but they determined to field a Navy that could force foreign navies to forego such action in the future. By the end of 1905, the rapid build-up of the U.S. Navy had produced such a force, and Roosevelt did not hesitate to threaten to use it.<sup>40</sup> This was real drama—the United States government asserting what became known as the “Roosevelt Corollary” to the Monroe Doctrine. The United States, said Roosevelt, would decide whether and when European navies would act against the nations around the Caribbean. The next step was to use the Navy to influence world—and not just regional—events, as Roosevelt did when he acted to help settle the 1904–1905 Russo-Japanese War.

But if the Navy was to serve as Roosevelt’s “big stick,” then the Navy had to be *modern*—professional, and properly managed. This was the argument that Bonaparte and officers like Sims made. Roosevelt listened. The President dispatched the “Great White Fleet” on its around-the-world cruise in December 1907 in order to show other naval powers that the U.S. fleet had a long reach. But while the fleet was away, Roosevelt returned to the issue of how best to make it a truly world-class force. In January 1908, Henry Reuterdaahl, the American editor of *Jane’s Fighting Ships*, had published an article entitled “The Needs of Our Navy” that was critical of Navy Department administration. The article triggered hearings conducted by the Senate Naval Affairs Committee in February and March of that year.<sup>41</sup> Commander Sims then persuaded the President to hold a major conference on battleship design at the Naval War College. The now-famous conference may have begun by focusing on the design of new battleships such as *North Dakota* (Battleship No. 29), but it quickly enlarged its scope to cover the way the Navy Department was organized and led. Sims, however, did not get what he and the other “reformers” wanted, which was an organization for *operations*, headed by a senior officer. President Roosevelt’s time in office was running down by the fall of 1908, and Sims and his allies had no strong champions in Congress. But the Newport conference did recommend that all future warship designs be reviewed by a board of “seagoing” officers. This board would be a modified General Board, and it would do what President Roosevelt wanted—“to lead other nations” in the development of modern warships.

Yet Sims was not done. He kept after Roosevelt, telling the President at the end of 1908 that the great improvement we have made in the last few years was really due to the fact that your powerful influence has largely suspended the evils of the bureau system; but that if you should leave us with an unsound organization, unrestrained by your influence, not only must we relapse into our former condition, but our failure in this respect would be remembered long after our minor improvements were forgotten.<sup>42</sup>

Supporting Sims was the famous Alfred Thayer Mahan, who told Roosevelt that “The only means by which such consecutive knowledge can be maintained is by a corporate body continuous in existence and gradual in change. That we call a General Staff.” Moreover, the head of this staff needed to be “solely responsible for information and advice given the Secretary.”<sup>43</sup>

In early 1909, Roosevelt convened a special board, composed of three ex-secretaries of the Navy and five accomplished admirals, to review and evaluate all the different reorganization proposals. After a month, the board came down on the side of change. No administrative system, the board informed the President and Congress,

can possibly be effective which does not recognize that the requirement of war is the true standard of efficiency in an administrative military system; that success in war and victory in battle can be assured only by that constant preparedness and that superior fighting efficiency which logically result from placing the control and responsibility in time of peace upon the same individuals and the same agencies that must control in time of war. There should be no shock or change of method in expanding from a state of peace to a state of war. This is not militarism; it is a simple business principle based upon the fact that success in war is the only return the people and the nation can get from the investment of many millions in the building and maintenance of a great navy.<sup>44</sup>

Congress, however, was not then moved to act.

### **Changes Under President Taft**

Roosevelt’s successor, William H. Taft, took action. On Roosevelt’s suggestion, he appointed George von Lengerke Meyer as Secretary of the Navy. Meyer understood what Roosevelt’s board had suggested. But he also knew that there was strong opposition to those suggestions within the Congress and even within the Navy. Senator Hale, still chairman of the Senate Naval Affairs Committee, disliked Sims, distrusted Secretary Meyer, and blocked every effort to have Congress review the recommendations of Roosevelt’s special board. Hale was supported by Rear Admiral Washington L. Capps, the Chief Constructor of the Navy and the Chief BuC&R, and by Rear Admiral Caspar F. Goodrich, who had commanded the Navy’s Pacific Squadron.

Meyer was committed to “reforming” the Navy, and, to keep both the opponents and the supporters of change occupied, he set up a special board in July 1909, headed by Rear

Admiral William Swift, a former Commandant of the Boston Navy Yard, to consider existing reorganization proposals.<sup>45</sup> While the Swift Board was considering the different views, he took actions that were clearly within his responsibility as Navy secretary but not a direct threat to those officers and members of Congress set against creating a Navy “general staff.” In the early spring of 1909, Meyer toured the navy yards at Norfolk, Boston, Philadelphia, and New York. In May, he met with the navy yard commandants and explained to them that he planned to restructure the ways that they performed their work. He then “prohibited the sending of ships to yards merely because the [yards] needed work” and “assigned to yards only officers knowledgeable of the needs of operating ships . . .”<sup>46</sup> After gaining President Taft’s permission to experiment with new methods of managing the navy yards, Meyer hired an accounting firm to overhaul the method used in the Boston yard for cost accounting. After seeing it work, Meyer “gradually extended” the method to the remaining navy yards.<sup>47</sup>

In June 1909, Meyer began removing retired officers from “temporary” active duty and replacing them with younger men. He also openly criticized the officer promotion process, which he said produced admirals who were too old. Unfortunately, his efforts were sometimes blocked by Congress. As former Naval Academy historian Paolo Coletta observed,

On providing the rank of admiral and vice admiral, Congress did nothing. Meyer sought authority to bring capable young officers to early promotion . . . Congress did nothing. He wished to amalgamate the Pay Corps and Construction Corps with the line. Congress did nothing. He recommended the abolishment of the restriction . . . on the employment by the department of retired officers in a civilian capacity. Congress did nothing.<sup>48</sup>

But Meyer persisted. He worked with Congress when he had to, but he also adroitly used what powers he had as navy secretary. As he informed his mentor, Theodore Roosevelt, in July 1909, “we must have our navy yards and our fleets in actual readiness for any emergency, and . . . this is as important as it is for a fire-engine to be prepared to quell a fire at a moment’s notice.”<sup>49</sup>

The Swift Board issued its report to Meyer on 11 October 1909.<sup>50</sup> As historian Henry Beers noted, “Secretary Meyer, familiar with the temper of Congress, acted before [the legislature] came into session” and chose to implement those of its recommendations that did not require congressional action. On 18 November 1909, Meyer promulgated changes in Navy regulations that created a set of “aids” —four senior officers in the fields of personnel, material, inspections, and operations.<sup>51</sup> As Meyer put it in his 1912 annual report, these officers “are without executive authority, but have a supervisory function and serve in an advisory capacity.” Through them, “the Secretary of the Navy receives expert responsible advice and is kept informed daily of what is going on in the department. They also serve in coordinating the work of the various bureaus of the department.”<sup>52</sup>

The Aid for Personnel was “instrumental in coordinating the work of the Bureau of Navigation, the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, the Marine Corps, the Offices of Naval Militia,

Naval Reserve, Aviation, Radio Telegraphy, and of the Judge Advocate General . . .” The Aid for Material was a member of the General Board and “has labored to coordinate the work of that board and the work of the technical bureaus . . .” The Aid for Inspections was “specially charged with the supervision of the work of the two permanent departmental inspection boards, the one for ships and the other for shore stations.”<sup>53</sup>

But it was the aid for operations who mattered the most. Secretary Meyer noted that this aid devoted

his entire attention and study to the operations of the fleet. He works in conjunction with the War College and the General Board on war plans and strategic matters. . . . In any emergency the aid for operations is prepared to advise promptly as to the movements of ships and to submit such orders as are necessary to carry into effect campaign plans recommended by the General Board and approved by the Secretary.<sup>54</sup>

This position was very close to what reform-minded officers like Sims wanted. As historian Beers recognized, “The creation of [the operations] division initiated the decline of the Bureau of Navigation as the most powerful organization in the department.” A clear sign of the change was the fact that the aid for operations “took the place of the Chief of the Bureau of Navigation on the General Board.”<sup>55</sup>

Meyer described how the aids supported him: “. . . the aids meet in full council daily and take up questions of departmental policy, general orders and changes in regulations, and submit recommendations on those that require action by the department.” The SECNAV met with his “Council of Aids . . . at least once a week,” whereas Meyer met with the bureau chiefs *and the aids* once each month. Meyer acknowledged that the bureau chiefs could “confer freely” with him “whenever any matter arises that affects their particular bureaus,” but it was clear that it was the aids who were closer to the secretary and that Meyer wanted it that way.<sup>56</sup>

Using his system of “aides,” Meyer made further changes. In January 1910, the House Naval Affairs Committee agreed with Meyer’s decision to eliminate the Bureau of Equipment and also agreed to give the Navy secretary time to test his plans to reorganize the navy yards. This was a sticky point. If Meyer could improve the efficiency of the yards, and if he could consolidate yard functions, then it was obvious that he would try to eliminate yards that he considered unnecessary. That was a direct attack on the desire of many in Congress to use the yards as sources of largess for their constituents. Meyer understood this and therefore moved carefully. But he also proposed to the naval affairs committees in both houses of Congress a way to set the officer and enlisted levels for the Navy—a way that depended on the Navy’s overall ship tonnage. It’s important to recall the detail with which Congress then managed the Navy. The Congress set pay scales, decided how many officers and enlisted personnel the Navy could have, decided what ships to authorize, and even told the Navy what sorts of food could be served to sailors aboard ships. In pressing for modern forms of management, Meyer ran up against tradition—a tradition that had not been based on modern notions of business

efficiency and military effectiveness. In his campaign against the past, Meyer usually had the support of the General Board.<sup>57</sup>

Meyer continued to use his authority to make changes. In 1910, he approved the organization of torpedo and submarine flotillas in the three Navy fleets (Atlantic, Pacific, and Asiatic). On the advice of the Aide for Operations Rear Admiral Richard Wainwright, Meyer also reorganized the Atlantic and Pacific fleets to make each a force better suited to its mission.<sup>58</sup> You see in these changes further efforts to figure out how best to use the technology that was coming from the Navy's bureaus. How could destroyers be combined with the battleships? What was the mission of the submarine—coast defense, or work with the fleet? Meyer did not stop. He persuaded President Taft to create two Navy "oil reserves" in 1910. The fleet was switching from coal to oil, and Meyer understood the need to have sources of oil that were under the Navy's direct control. He even tried to modernize the weapons and infrastructure of the Marine Corps.<sup>59</sup>

But Meyer's greater contribution was to prepare the Navy for a major campaign. He directed "all the first line and reserve ships of the Atlantic fleet to mobilize on 30 October 1911 and the Pacific fleet to mobilize at San Diego on 1 November."<sup>60</sup> In 1912, the Atlantic fleet mobilized again—123 ships of all classes, including 31 active and "reserve" battleships. The "reserve" was another product of Meyer's diligence. He wanted a force of older ships kept in readiness for an emergency. On his own authority, he could create a reserve fleet, but he needed the support of Congress to man it, and so he proposed enlarging the Navy Reserve and training members of the state naval militias at sea on active ships. He didn't get the funding for more reserve personnel, but he used the authority of his office to improve the training of the state naval militias.<sup>61</sup> And on 12 May 1912, Rear Admiral Austin M. Knight, author of a classic book on seamanship, took command of the Atlantic Reserve Fleet.<sup>62</sup>

President Taft was impressed. After watching the 1912 fleet review, he complimented Meyer and the Navy's officers for their efforts. As he said, Meyer had worked to "bring about a system of control in the Navy Department which shall be military rather than civil, and directed to fighting rather than merely to manufacture and industrial work."<sup>63</sup> But Meyer wasn't done in 1912. On 10 February 1913, with just three weeks remaining to the Taft presidency, Meyer appointed Rear Admiral Bradley A. Fiske his Aide for Operations, and he "made the Aide for Operations his liaison man with all the offices and bureaus of the department."<sup>64</sup> This elevation of the operations aide to the role of *de facto* naval military chief was a dramatic move—a fitting end to a busy and productive term as Navy secretary.<sup>65</sup> As Meyer told then-Commander Yates Stirling Jr., before he left office, "Congress was violently against" creating a Navy general staff, but Congress would approve reforms "peacemeal" [*sic*].<sup>66</sup>

## **The Creation of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations**

Meyer's successor as secretary was Josephus Daniels, and Daniels came with an agenda. First on that list, as he said in his first annual report, was his plan to "make the Navy a great university,



Figure 1-1. Rear Admiral Bradley A. Fiske, 1912. Admiral Fiske was an articulate and persistent advocate of what would become the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations (OPNAV). In 1915, he went around Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels and worked directly with congressional allies to get the necessary legislation passed. He knew Daniels would then keep him from becoming the first CNO. (NHHC Archives NH 49555)

with college extensions afloat and ashore. Every ship should be a school, and every enlisted man, and petty and warrant officer should be given the opportunity to improve his mind, better his position and fit himself for promotion.”<sup>67</sup> Daniels had other ideas, too. He’s still remembered as the secretary who shut down the officer’s wine mess and in doing so made coffee (“cup a’joe”) the Navy’s staple beverage. Daniels did much more than that, however. He was an odd combination of reformer—successfully advocating “the Navy, school of the nation”—and at the same time a supporter of racial segregation. If you were a white enlisted sailor, Daniels was for you. If you were black, he wanted no part of you, except as a steward. In that, he was very much like his political ally and mentor, President Woodrow Wilson.

Daniels inherited Admiral Fiske as his Aide for Operations. As Fiske noted in his published memoir, “the upper officers of the navy realized that while the navy was in good condition for times of peace, it was not organized for war,”

and it was thinking about possible war with either Germany or Japan that troubled him deeply. As he recalled, he and his closest colleagues

did not like the German idea of war or the German belief that might makes right . . . But we realized that the German naval machine was immeasurably better than ours . . . and the only man in the United States Navy who could remotely pretend to occupy the position of a naval strategist was myself!<sup>68</sup>

And *that* was the problem. Like Sims, Fiske had a strong personality, and for that reason debates over the proper direction of the Navy took on a personal cast, with people taking sides based on their like or dislike for Fiske or Daniels.

The two men—so different in temperament, yet so alike in intelligence—locked horns almost immediately. What held them together for two years may be guessed from Fiske’s assessment of his boss: “a man of refinement, sympathy, and good nature, whose serenity was rarely ruffled and whose politeness was unflinching.” Fiske liked Daniels personally, but he also felt that Daniels “did not see the Navy as a whole, but only certain parts of it; with the natural result that the parts upon which he fixed his attention seemed to him larger than they really were.” Fiske

set out to show Daniels that “the navy was really a vast and highly specialized machine, and not an aggregation of separate parts.”<sup>69</sup> The Navy as a *fighting machine*. In 1916, Fiske published a book with that title. It was a powerful image, but not one that Daniels was comfortable with.

As Fiske recalled, by the fall of 1914 “I had done all I possibly could to impress the Secretary with the fact that our navy was not prepared for war with any navy like the German navy, and that there was an actual danger of our being drawn into [World War I]; but I could make no impression on him.”<sup>70</sup> Frustrated, Fiske chose to do an end-run around Daniels and testify to the Committee on Naval Affairs of the House of Representatives. He persuaded Representative Richmond P. Hobson (D-AL), a retired Navy hero in the war with Spain, to sponsor him. Fiske’s December 1914 testimony made the papers, made him popular among Navy officers, and was the first step in a deliberate campaign to maneuver Secretary Daniels into asking Congress for a naval general staff.

Step one in this campaign was to win the support of Representative Hobson. Step two was to develop the basis of legislation that would create what would be called the “chief of naval operations.” It was the stuff of a matinee drama. As Fiske’s diary for January 3, 1915, put it,

I asked Cpts. H[enry] S. Knapp, [John] Hood & [James H.] Oliver, & Lt. Comdrs. [William P.] Cronan, [Zachariah H.] Madison & [Dudley W.] Knox to be at Hobson’s at 8:30 p.m. We all met there in Hobson’s study, & sat till after 11 p.m. when we adjourned. We agreed on program whereby Chief of Naval Operations is to be legislated for & to have 15 assts!!<sup>71</sup>

Fiske had the six other officers keep the meeting secret “because they were engaged on an exceedingly dangerous mission.”<sup>72</sup> On January 4, Fiske met again with the six officers who had worked with him the night before, and they wrote a draft of the proposed addition to the naval appropriations act.

Step three was for Representative Hobson to persuade his subcommittee to accept the idea for a chief of naval operations. Hobson first picked up the draft proposal that morning (January 4) from Fiske. Then, according to Fiske, Hobson approached Daniels and “took up the matter” with the secretary. Daniels was completely opposed, but he apparently did not know that Fiske and the others had actually drafted the proposal and given it to Hobson. By 2:20 that afternoon, Hobson informed Fiske personally that his subcommittee had “passed the proposition unanimously!”<sup>73</sup>

Step four was to persuade the House Naval Affairs Committee to accept the recommendation of Hobson’s subcommittee. To do that, Fiske worked with Madison, Cronan, and Knox to draw up a brief, which Knox delivered to Hobson the next morning. As Fiske noted in his diary, “Hobson telephoned me at 1 p.m. [on January 6] that full House Naval Committee agreed unanimously on incorporating in naval appropriation bill the provisions for a ‘Chief of Naval Operations’!!”<sup>74</sup>

Step five was to get around the objection that the provision creating the office of the Chief of Naval Operations was not germane to an appropriations bill. Hobson expected that and persuaded



his counterparts in the Senate to put the provision back in the legislation. Before that could happen, however, Secretary Daniels had to be given the opportunity to suggest changes, which he did. The version of the bill prepared by Fiske and his colleagues read as follows:

There shall be a Chief of Naval Operations, who shall be an officer on the active list of the Navy not below the grade of Rear Admiral, appointed for a term of four years by the President, by and with the advice of the Senate, who, under the Secretary of the Navy, shall be responsible for the readiness of the Navy for war and be charged with its general direction.<sup>75</sup>

Daniels's version—the one finally passed in March 1915—read differently:

There shall be a Chief of Naval Operations, who shall be an officer on the active list of the Navy appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, from the officers of the line of the Navy not below the grade of Captain for a period of four years, who shall, under the direction of the Secretary, be charged with the operations of the fleet, and with the preparation and readiness of plans for its use in war.<sup>76</sup>

*Note the differences.* Fiske's younger supporters thought he was the obvious choice to be the new Chief of Naval Operations, but Fiske knew otherwise. He would receive no reward for going behind Daniels's back. Accordingly, Fiske compared himself to "the well-known gentleman who sawed off the branch of a tree at a point between himself and the branch, except that that man did not realize what he was doing, and I did."<sup>77</sup> Secretary Daniels could—and did—reach down into the ranks of the Navy's captains for the first Chief of Naval Operations. Daniels also denied the office of the chief the "general direction" of the fleet, and he made sure that the law put the new Chief under "the direction" of the civilian secretary. Fiske nevertheless thought the whole struggle had been worth it. As he put it in his memoir, "Most officers said that it was as great a boon to the navy as the act of Congress, in 1880, which had authorized the 'new navy' in the shape of the steel ships *Chicago*, *Atlanta*, *Boston*, and *Dolphin*."<sup>78</sup>

But Fiske was not done. Step six was to give the new Chief of Naval Operations the rank of admiral, the pay commensurate with that high rank, and a staff of "no less than fifteen officers of and above the rank of lieutenant commander of the Navy or major of the Marine Corps." Congress took that step in August 1916, and also changed the wording of the law to "All orders issued by the Chief of Naval Operations in performing the duties assigned him shall be performed under the authority of the Secretary of the Navy, and his orders shall be considered as emanating from the Secretary, and shall have full force and effect as such."<sup>79</sup>

Secretary Daniels tolerated the change. As he put it in his annual report for 1915, the reorganization and realignment of the machinery of the Navy Department was finally rounded out and completed by the creation of the Secretary's Advisory Council, composed of the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, the Chief of Naval Operations, the Chiefs of the Bureaus of Navigation, Ordnance, Steam Engineering, Construction

and Repair, Yards and Docks, Supplies and Accounts, and Medicine and Surgery, the Major General Commandant of the Marine Corps, and the Judge Advocate General.<sup>80</sup>

Daniels added that “The result of this reorganization has been the using to better purpose all existing departmental machinery while securing the maximum of cooperation between its constituent units.”<sup>81</sup>

And there, in just a few words, was the view opposed to Fiske’s. Fiske wanted a senior officer *from the fleet* to direct Navy operations, supervise war planning, and coordinate among the bureaus to make sure that what they did in fact supported war planning. Daniels, by contrast, wanted all this done *under the authority* of the secretary. But how could the SECNAV best exercise that authority? The answer was through an advisory council, where there would be no officer between the secretary and the bureau chiefs. Like his predecessors, Daniels did not want to be insulated from the bureau chiefs by a serving officer.

Daniels also got the last word:

The present plan of organization accords with the genius of American institutions. The militaristic idea does not. And, if ever our country seriously desires to reverse its traditional policy of civilian authority in the Navy Department it ought to do so with eyes wide open and with full knowledge of all that such a radical departure from Americanism means. . . .<sup>82</sup>

But why did Secretary Daniels, a confidante of President Wilson, accept the establishment of the post of Chief of Naval Operations if he was basically opposed to it? Charles Oscar Paullin suggested the reason in his 1914 essay on Navy administration:

It is scarcely too much to say that the Secretary of the Navy, the chiefs of naval bureaus, the members of the General Board, the President of the United States, the Speaker of the House and the leading members of the two naval committees, constitute a grand committee on naval legislation, whose members . . . resolve differences, compromise conflicting interests, bring the legislature and executive to an understanding and reach an approximate agreement upon naval legislation.<sup>83</sup>

Over a period of about 15 years, a majority of the most influential members of that “grand committee” had participated directly or indirectly in changing the administration of the Navy—from the creation of the General Board by Secretary Long to the creation of the system of “aides” by Secretary Meyer. Gradually but steadily, the executive and legislative branches had made these changes and then assessed their value. Put another way, by 1915 there was a coalition favoring a chief of operations, and Josephus Daniels knew it, and so he compromised.

But what was the new office of the chief of operations like? What did it consist of? The most important elements of the new office were those that had reported to Rear Admiral Fiske: the Office of Naval Intelligence, the Naval War College, the Office of Target Practice and Engineering Competitions, the Naval Radio Service, and the Office of Naval Aeronautics.<sup>84</sup> But Secretary

Daniels also gave the new Chief of Operations—William S. Benson—the duties that had been performed by the Aide for Material. Rear Admiral Benson then appointed Captain Josiah S. McKean, “an expert in logistics and a graduate and former member of the faculty of the Naval War College,” his deputy for material.<sup>85</sup> The bureau chiefs approved. Though small, the new office of operations had the basics for effectiveness: legitimacy and authority.

## **Enduring Issues**

Could the very different views of Admiral Fiske and Secretary Daniels be made compatible? If so, then reconciling them would not be easy. Historian Elting E. Morison got to the heart of the problem in a book published in 1942: “Any successful system of administration . . . must bring into combination the three elements which can claim an interest in the Navy—that is, the professional who fights the ships, the civilian who superintends the maintenance of the establishment, and the politician who represents the people for whom the Navy exists.”<sup>86</sup> Balancing these elements is the job of the Congress, which writes the laws empowering Navy officials, and of the senior civilian and uniformed leaders of the Navy. As Morison put it in his biography of Admiral Sims, all three “elements” must be present in the administration of the Navy Department, “the influence of each must be permitted to operate, and the predominance of any one avoided”—without at the same time stripping the gears of effective leadership and efficient management.<sup>87</sup>

But Rear Admiral Taylor had put his finger on a problem: How to coordinate the various parts of the Navy Department without at the same time weakening civilian control of the Navy. Taylor knew what he was talking about. For example, when he became chief of BuNav in 1902, he directed “the widely scattered individual units of the Fleet to come together for yearly manoeuvres” in order to give ship and squadron commanders experience they would need in the event of war.<sup>88</sup> Some senior officers objected to this and resisted Taylor’s order. They could not see the need for the Fleet to concentrate. After all, it had not done that during the war with Spain, and their separate squadrons had been victorious. But Taylor knew that the new, modern Navy the nation was creating—a navy able to challenge the naval forces of Germany or Japan—needed to be built and run on a level of professionalism significantly greater than that of the past.

Rear Admiral Taylor died suddenly in 1904, but the issue he had raised—the proper administration of the Navy in Washington—did not go away. By law, the Secretary of the Navy was responsible for the operations and management of the Navy Department. By law, the chiefs of the seven Navy bureaus (Yards and Docks, Construction and Repair, Steam Engineering, Ordnance, Supplies and Accounts, Medicine and Surgery, and Navigation) were the senior advisors of the secretary and managers of their own organizations, with their own congressionally approved budgets. The fleet’s commander and his subordinates were responsible to the SECNAV. But Navy officers wanted one of their own to direct operations and, if possible, coordinate the work of the Navy’s bureaus. As already noted, Secretary Long was opposed to this idea. However, he did create a General Board of the Navy on his own authority in Washington in 1900.

This board, composed mostly of Navy line officers, was responsible for developing war plans and for helping the secretary see to it that what the bureaus produced did in fact support those plans. The creation of the General Board, an organization intended to assist the Secretary of the Navy, was actually a step toward the creation of the position of the Chief of Naval Operations. The reason it became that was because the General Board gradually grew to be a place where critical trade-offs were made by line officers who held hearings—often adversarial—where bureau representatives and fleet officers offered their opinions and presented supporting evidence. If the Navy was to become truly modern, then its leaders would have to be able to make decisions about force structure and strategy based on the systematic analysis of evidence. You can see this in the debate in 1906 between Sims and Rear Admiral Mahan over the meaning of the major engagements of the Russo-Japanese War. Who had better interpreted the evidence? Theodore Roosevelt (no mean thinker himself) sided with Sims. The General Board was a place where the sort of analysis done by Sims was becoming routine. This analysis was the basis—as Sims and many other officers recognized—of modern command.

This changed the nature of the debate over whether a Navy officer should share power with the civilian secretary. For example, the basis for the authority of Navy secretaries such as Meyer and Daniels was the Constitution. Sims and Fiske wanted to root the authority of officers in their proven abilities to lead and to think. In effect, the “reformers” who wanted a chief of naval operations saw the chief’s authority based on his competence—on his professionalism, and his professionalism would be based on his intellectual integrity, or, putting it another way, on his willingness and ability to analyze evidence objectively. Both Daniels and Fiske were concerned about accountability. Daniels feared that a senior naval officer would not be as faithful to the Constitution as he was. Fiske feared the damage a secretary could do if he were not as faithful to the “new Navy’s” commitment to intellectual integrity as Fiske was. In short, what you had was an argument about the source of integrity—not a confrontation between integrity and the lack of it. This argument is still with us.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> RADM Henry C. Taylor, quoted in *Naval Administration: Selected Documents on Navy Department Organization, 1915–1940*, ed. by LT Elting Morison, USNR (Washington, DC: Dept. of the Navy, 1945), Navy Dept. Library, I-2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I-3.

<sup>3</sup> This approach, which portrays the civilian and military leaders of the Navy as “problem-solvers,” is presented and critiqued in detail by Donald Chisholm in his *Waiting for Dead Men’s Shoes: Origins and Development of the U.S. Navy’s Officer Personnel System, 1793–1941* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2001), 779–881 and 795. See also, *Establishment and Evolution of the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans, 1903–1983*, by Terrence J. Gough (Washington, DC: Dept. of the Army, 1983).

<sup>4</sup> The literature on this topic is very large. One award-winning example is *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*, by Paul Starr (New York: Basic Books, 1984). See also, *The Engineer in America: A Historical Anthology from Technology and Culture*, ed. by Terry S. Reynolds (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> Ltr, ADM George Dewey, Chairman of the General Board to Secretary of the Navy John D. Long, 30 March 1900, (GB No. 2), in General Board Letters, vol. I, Box 3, General Records of the Department of the Navy, 1798–1947, Record Group 80, National Archives (hereafter RG 80, NARA).

<sup>6</sup> Charles Oscar Paullin, “A Half Century of Naval Administration,” U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings*, vol. 40, no. 1 (January/February 1914), 116–17.

<sup>7</sup> Henry P. Beers, “The Development of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Part I,” *Military Affairs*, vol. 10, no. 1 (Spring 1946), 40–68.

<sup>8</sup> Ltr, RADM Stephen B. Luce to RADM Alfred T. Mahan, 15 July 1907, in Naval War College Records, 1884–1914, Folder 2 (“Correspondence”), Manuscript Collection, Library of Congress.

<sup>9</sup> Secretary Long’s 13 March 1900 directive stated that the Admiral of the Navy (George Dewey) was the new board’s president. The General Board’s membership was changed in April 1901 and again in 1905. Paullin, “A Half Century of Naval Administration,” 118–119; <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/g/general-orders/general-order-no-544-1900-establishment-general-board.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Ltr, General Board to Secretary of the Navy John D. Long, 29 June 1901, (GB No. 197), in General Board Letters, Vol. I, Box 3, RG 80, NARA. In 1900, as part of his work while attending the Naval War College, CAPT Asa Walker prepared for Navy Secretary Long a “Memorandum on a Naval General Staff” in which he argued that “the American Navy has *for some years* (italics added) felt instinctively that [a general staff], or something like this, was needed for future efficiency.” Walker had been promoted as a result of his command of gunboat *Concord* in the Battle of Manila Bay. He served briefly on the General Board in 1904 and retired as a rear admiral in 1906. Walker’s memo is in the Collection 8, Box 70, Folder 1, Naval War College Archives (Hereafter cited as NWC Archives).

<sup>11</sup> Paullin, “A Half Century of Naval Administration,” 120–21.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 121. When Darling gave his testimony, William H. Moody was Secretary of the Navy. Long had relinquished the secretary’s position in 1902.

<sup>13</sup> Ltr, Frank Uhlig Jr. to: Thomas C. Hone, “The Nature of a Modern Navy,” no date. This was also the view of RADM Henry C. Taylor, Chief of the Bureau of Navigation in 1902. See Elting E. Morison, *Admiral Sims and the Modern American Navy* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1942), 70.

<sup>14</sup> See CDR (later RADM) Yates Stirling, “Organization for Navy Department Administration,” U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings*, vol. 39, no. 2 (June 1913), 435–99, and “Discussion,” 501–502.

<sup>15</sup> Paolo E. Coletta, “John Davis Long,” in *American Secretaries of the Navy, Vol. I*, ed. by Paolo E. Coletta (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1980), 452.

<sup>16</sup> Norman Friedman, *U.S. Cruisers, An Illustrated Design History* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1984), 67.

<sup>17</sup> Henry J. Hendrix, *Theodore Roosevelt’s Naval Diplomacy: The U.S. Navy and the Birth of the American Century* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2009), 76.

<sup>18</sup> Paul T. Heffron, “William H. Moody,” in Coletta, *American Secretaries of the Navy, Vol. I*, 463.

<sup>19</sup> Robert W. Love Jr., *History of the U.S. Navy, 1775–1941* (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1992), 420.

<sup>20</sup> Heffron, “William H. Moody,” in Coletta, *American Secretaries of the Navy, Vol. I*, 465.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 464.

<sup>22</sup> Norman Friedman, *U.S. Battleships, An Illustrated Design History* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1985), 17.

<sup>23</sup> Hendrix, *Theodore Roosevelt’s Naval Diplomacy*, 140.

<sup>24</sup> Morison, *Admiral Sims and the Modern American Navy*, 101–102.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 116–18.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>28</sup> Hendrix, *Theodore Roosevelt’s Naval Diplomacy*, 114.

<sup>29</sup> Morison, *Admiral Sims and the Modern American Navy*, 147.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 170. See also Hendrix, *Theodore Roosevelt’s Naval Diplomacy*, 142.

<sup>31</sup> Paul T. Heffron, “Charles J. Bonaparte,” in Coletta, *American Secretaries of the Navy, Vol. I*, 475.

<sup>32</sup> Charles J. Bonaparte, Secretary of the Navy, *Annual Reports of the Navy Department for the Year 1905* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1906), 3.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, Report of the Chief of the Bureau of Construction and Repair, 543.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, Report of the Chief of the Bureau of Navigation, 369.

<sup>37</sup> Norman Friedman, *U.S. Destroyers: An Illustrated Design History*, rev. ed. (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2004); and *U.S. Submarines Through 1945: An Illustrated Design History* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1995); also his *U.S. Cruisers*; *U.S. Battleships*.

<sup>38</sup> Charles J. Bonaparte, Secretary of the Navy, *Annual Reports of the Navy Department for the Year 1906* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1907), 5.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., report of RADM George A. Converse, Chief of the Bureau of Navigation, 402.

<sup>40</sup> Hendrix, *Theodore Roosevelt's Naval Diplomacy*, 25.

<sup>41</sup> Beers, "The Development of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Part I, 59.

<sup>42</sup> Morison, *Admiral Sims and the Modern American Navy*, 222.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 227–28.

<sup>45</sup> As a captain, Swift was court martialed after his command, battleship *Connecticut* (Battle-ship No. 18), ran aground in 1907. Denied any further command at sea, Swift accepted command of the Charlestown (Boston), Massachusetts, Navy Yard, and was promoted to rear admiral on 30 January 1908. He retired from the Navy in mid-March 1908, but served as an advisor to Navy secretaries Victor H. Metcalf and Truman H. Newberry. Secretary Meyer selected Swift to head a board "to consider the question of the organization of the Navy Department" on 13 July 1909. Secretary Meyer's letter establishing the board is in Collection 8, Box 42, Folder 6, NWC Archives.

<sup>46</sup> Paolo E. Coletta, "George von Lengerke Meyer," in Coletta, *American Secretaries of the Navy*, Vol. I, 500.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 506.

<sup>49</sup> Mark A. DeWolfe Howe, *George von Lengerke Meyer, His Life and Public Services* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1920), 438.

<sup>50</sup> The so-called "Swift Board" report is in Collection 8, Box 42, Folder 6, NWC Archives. On the first page, its authors noted that they had found "many defects in existing organization both of the Navy Department and of Navy Yards; and these defects have become emphasized with the growth of a modern navy, the expenditures of large appropriations, the advent of new industrial and business method [sic], the increased importance of strictly military features involved in the assemblage of fleets, the tactical and strategic questions arising in connection therewith, and the imperative necessity of methodical preparation for war." The report went on to recommend the creation of the posts of the four "aids"—for operations, personnel, material, and inspections.

<sup>51</sup> Beers, "The Development of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations," Part I, 63–64.

<sup>52</sup> George von Lengerke Meyer, Secretary of the Navy, *Annual Reports of the Navy Department for the Fiscal Year 1912* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1913), 5.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>55</sup> Beers, "The Development of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations," Part I, 66.

<sup>56</sup> Meyer, *Annual Reports of the Navy Department for the Fiscal Year 1912*, 8.

<sup>57</sup> Ltr, General Board to the Secretary of the Navy, 15 June 1909, GB No. 446, General Board letters, Vol. VI, Box 5, RG 80, NARA. In this letter, the members of the General Board noted that

there was not, “. . . under the present practice of the Navy department, anything that insures reference of the details of military features as they are developed in the elaboration of the designs and in the building of the [Wyoming and Arkansas] to seagoing officers for their comment and recommendation.” The board would soon make this task its own.

<sup>58</sup> Coletta, “George von Lengerke Meyer,” in Coletta, *American Secretaries of the Navy*, Vol. I, 512.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 511.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 513.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 510–11.

<sup>62</sup> Benjamin Franklin Cooling, U.S.S. Olympia, *Herald of Empire* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2000), 173. Knight’s book is *Modern Seamanship* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1918).

<sup>63</sup> Coletta, “George von Lengerke Meyer,” in Coletta, *American Secretaries of the Navy*, Vol. I, 514.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 499.

<sup>65</sup> In a paper completed in August 1913 for a conference at the Naval War College, CDR (later RADM) Reginald R. Belknap noted that “opposition to a single Aid, the Aid for War,” was “certain.” But he argued that “no effort should be spared to win the single Aid system; for until we get it there can be neither unity of effort, nor military spirit, in our naval administration.” As a captain, Belknap was in charge of the laying of the North Sea Mine Barrage—more than 56,000 mines put into the water between June and the end of October 1918. He was head of the strategy department at the Naval War College from 1921 to 1923. His paper is in Collection 8, Box 77, Folder 1, NWC Archives.

<sup>66</sup> CDR Yates Stirling Jr., “Memoranda from Memory of Remarks Made by the Secretary of the Navy, Mr. Von Meyer, Upon Navy Department Organization,” 2 and 3, 1913, Collection 8, Box 42, Folder 6, NWC Archives. In his memoirs, Stirling argued that “Organization is lifeless. It is merely a skeleton. . . . A faulty organization may achieve successful results because of a great leader who controls it. It is far wiser not to place too great faith in genius but to perfect the organization in order to give effective results.” *Sea Duty: The Memoirs of a Fighting Admiral* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1939), 138.

<sup>67</sup> Josephus Daniels, Secretary of the Navy, *Annual Reports of the Navy Department for the Fiscal Year 1913* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1914), 6.

<sup>68</sup> RADM Bradley A. Fiske, USN, *From Midshipman to Rear-Admiral* (New York: The Century Co., 1919), 526–27 and 530.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 532.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 554.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 567.



<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 569

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Josephus Daniels, Secretary of the Navy, *Annual Reports of the Navy Department for the Fiscal Year 1920* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1921), 359. Digital version at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015025950646;view=1up;seq=369>.

<sup>76</sup> *Naval Investigation: Hearings before the Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Naval Affairs*, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., Vol. I, 720 (Hereafter *Naval Investigation*).

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 568.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 570.

<sup>79</sup> RADM Julius Augustus Furer, USN (Ret.), *Administration of the Navy Department in World War II* (Washington, DC: Division of Naval History, Dept. of the Navy and GPO, 1959), 110.

<sup>80</sup> Josephus Daniels, Secretary of the Navy, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy for the Fiscal Year 1915* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1915), 11.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels, quoted in Morison, *Naval Administration: Selected Documents on Navy Department Organization, 1915–1940*, I-6.

<sup>83</sup> Paullin, “A Half Century of Naval Administration,” 124.

<sup>84</sup> Henry P. Beers, “The Development of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Part II,” *Military Affairs*, vol. 10, no. 3 (Fall 1946), 13.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>86</sup> Morison, *Admiral Sims and the Modern American Navy*, 70.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 127.

