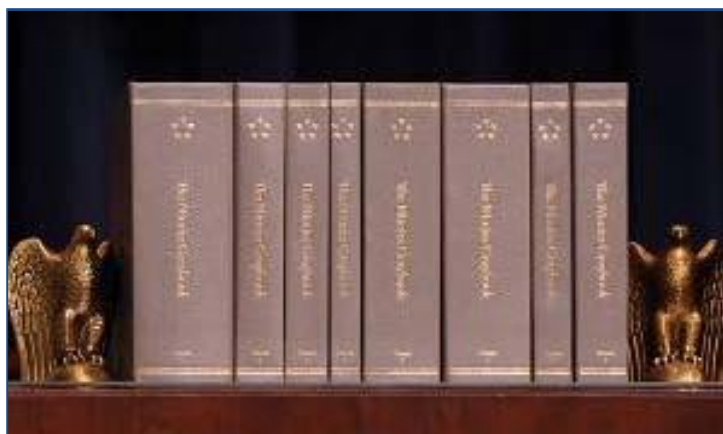


The Naval War College and Fleet Admiral Nimitz's "Graybook" By John B. Hattendorf



Among the vast number of documents to be found in the seventy-one feet of the Papers of Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz in the Archives Branch at the U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command in Washington, D.C., are seven large bound books from the period between 7 December 1941 and 31 August 1945. An eighth book contains selected dispatches relating to the battle of Midway.

The books were originally bound in gray covered binders that gave the document the nickname that Nimitz's staff used: "The Graybook". More formally, it was labeled on the cover as "Command Summary." A closer look inside, however, reveals that this document is far more important than its title might suggest. It is the daily record of the combat situation that the Commander in Chief, Pacific, and Pacific Ocean Areas, faced every day of the war, and it tells us what Nimitz knew and what the basis and reasons for his daily command decisions were. As one historian has written, "It is the most authoritative source on the Pacific war available anywhere."

Nimitz and the Naval War College, This document has several important connections with the Naval War College. First, Nimitz had long series of connections with the Naval War College. He was one of the very few officers who gave their first lecture to the Naval War College as a lieutenant in 1912. While serving as executive officer in the battleship South Carolina (BB 26) in 1918, he took a Naval War College correspondence course. Then, in the autumn of 1922, he joined the eleven-month resident course at Newport during Admiral William S. Sims's final months as War College president.

Among his classmates under that great naval commander from World War One, there were others in the Class of 1923, who would later become prominent. Among them were future Chief of Naval Operations Harold Stark, and other future flag officers, including Thomas C. Hart, Ralph Earle, and Frederick J. Horne. The faculty included future inter-war era Battle Fleet commander Harris Lanning and World War One mine force commander Reginald R. Belknap. **Continued on next page...**

In Newport, as a commander, Nimitz studied war planning and strategy and used war gaming as a tool in his education. During a lecture in Newport in 1960, Nimitz summarized the role of the college and its war gaming exercises in his education and preparation for high command by recalling that “. . . the war with Japan had been re-enacted in the game rooms here [at the Naval War College] . . . in so many different ways that nothing that happened during the war was a surprise—absolutely nothing except the kamikaze tactics toward the end of the war, we had not visualized those.”

At the same time, he and his fellow students were required to work out logistic support plans for an advance across the Pacific. Nimitz recalled that he and his fellow students found the logistics part of the Naval War College curriculum an academic nightmare, but in retrospect “it forced us to look into the Pacific and study the geography of the Pacific. All through World War II in the Pacific, I didn’t even have to look at a map of the Pacific to know where all of those little atolls and tiny pinpoints were.” Nimitz clearly understood the value of a Naval War College education and had used his own education in Newport during World War II.

As a Rear Admiral and Chief of the Bureau of Navigation from 1939 to 1941, he found that the war plans called for closing the Naval War College during wartime, as had been the Navy’s policy during the Spanish-American War and during World War I. In March 1941, Nimitz formally changed that policy in order to allow the College to carry out an educational role during wartime and be prepared for its expanded role in the postwar period.

The “Graybook” and Naval War College Education. Admiral Nimitz’s personal connections to the Naval War College as an alumnus and key supporter are the emblematic background to the story of the “Graybook.” As a commander in chief, Nimitz certainly reflected his Naval War College education that he, most of his flag officer colleagues, and their staffs shared during World War II. When the United States entered the war in 1941, every flag officer in the U.S. Navy, but one, was a graduate of the Naval War College. At the same time, the “Graybook” clearly reflects what the Naval War College had been doing in the interwar years to prepare officers for staff duties and to educate them to think critically when making operational decisions in positions of high command.

From 1910 through 1942, the Naval War College had been developing and refining a specific system for the naval operational planning process. This approach culminated with the College’s publication of what its students’ had called “The



Green Hornet” or as it was formally titled in its ultimate form, *Sound Military Decision*, published in 1942. This volume captured the essence of a Naval War College education in the interwar period, particularly in the refinements to it made under the guidance of Admiral Edward C. Kalbfus between 1934 and 1942. This book was unquestionably the crowning expression of the College’s philosophy and approach. It was the only approach to naval planning that American naval officers were trained in using and its influence is found throughout American naval operations during World War II.

The Nimitz “Graybook” is a very rare surviving example in the records of the U.S. Navy that documents the daily, sustained use, over an entire war, of the War College’s “Fourth Step,” the highest level in the military planning process.

Sound Military Decision clearly explained what this was all about: The “fourth step, which calls for mental efforts in the solution of the problem of supervising the action, requires a constant, close observation of the unfolding of the original situation. The procedure employed is customarily termed ‘The Running Estimate of the Situation’. Only an alert commander can invariably determine whether the situation is unfolding along the lines desired by him, as promulgated in the directives of the third step. In effect, the commander, after action is begun, considers the changing situation as a variable in the problem presented for his solution by the original (basic) situation. With the march of events, he is therefore, constantly critical to detect whether variations have introduced new incentives which demand modification or alteration of his plan, or its complete abandonment.

In a chapter-long discussion of this fourth supervisory step in the operational planning process, *Sound Military Decision* stated that a running estimate is “intended to keep pace with the flow of events, so that the commander may be assured, at any time, that his concurrent action will be based on sound decision. To this end, there is a definite technique . . .” The aim of the technique is “the rapid and successful exercise of mental effort in the fast moving events of the tactical engagement. It is under such conditions, more especially, that effective supervision of the planned action becomes a problem, calling for every facility that can be afforded the commander.”

The technique here was to assemble in writing all the information bearing on the operational situation and to organize it in a readily usable fashion. Among alternative approaches, *Sound Military Decision* recommended the use of a journal of events backed up by a file supporting it that would serve as aids to the commander’s continuing mental, decision-making process. This process was normally accompanied by a work sheet to assist the staff in organizing the journal, but the work sheets were normally to be destroyed, as the journal formed the permanent record.

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The "Graybook" and the CINCPAC-CINCPOA staff, prior to World War II, naval staffs had a degree of uniformity in organization and composition, based on Navy Regulations, personnel allowances, the particular requirements of a command and its commander, and evolving naval practice.

During the war, the problem of how to best organize a staff was at one time an assigned topic for a Naval War College student thesis, and the topic of many articles in the Naval Institute Proceedings. Each major naval staff had its differences from the others and there was initially little standardization. The war created many changes to the U.S Navy's approach to staff organization with a gradual standardization becoming apparent and the separation of administrative staffs from operational staffs, with large operational staffs moving ashore.

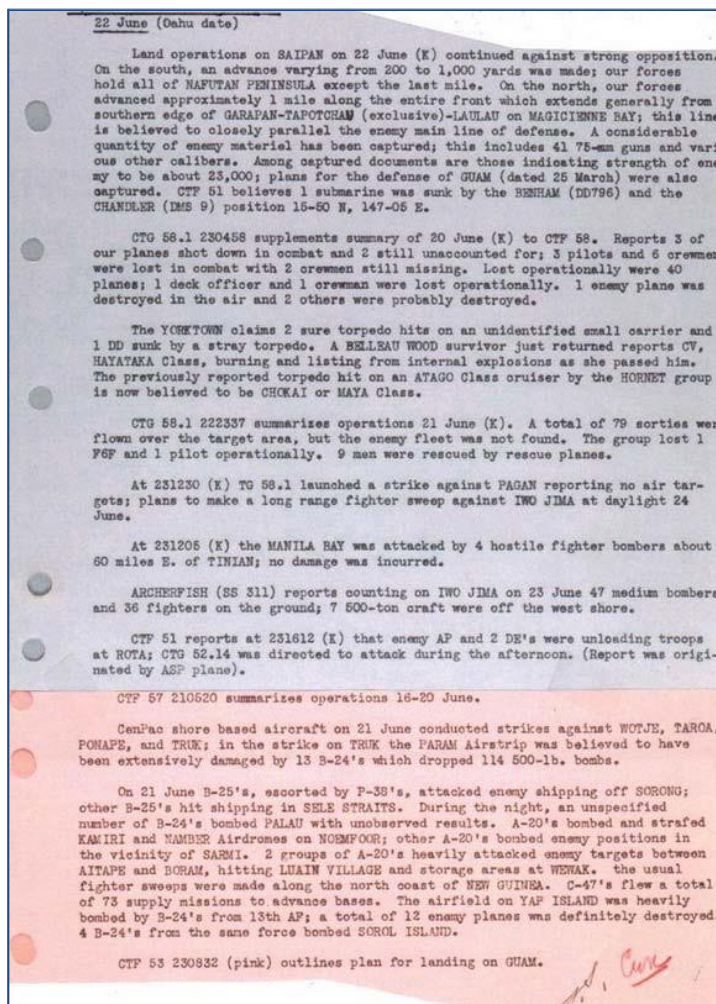
At the same time, the experience of the Second World War gradually influenced the Navy into adopting some of the features of the Army's General Staff system as part of the standardization process.

The staff of the Commander in Chief, Pacific and Pacific Ocean Area (CINCPAC-CINCPOA) under Nimitz and located at Pearl Harbor, went through a number of changes. In September 1943, for example, there were three separate, interrelated staffs— Fleet, Army, and Joint, each with five sections. In May 1944, the Fleet and Army staffs disappeared and all were combined into one Joint staff.

The "Graybook" covers the period from 7 December 1941 to 31 August 1945. The first three weeks that it covers pre-date Nimitz's arrival and serve to document the running estimate of the situation under his predecessors, Admiral Husband Kimmel from 7 to 17 December and Vice Admiral William S. Pye, the acting Commander in Chief, from 17 December to 31 December, when Nimitz took command. The volume ends in late August 1945 with the surrender of Japanese forces. The document remained classified until 1972.

This document appears to have been maintained by the Naval Staff's plans division (designated as N-1, later J-1). Even when the CINCPAC-CINCPOA staff became a Joint Staff, the J-1 section was headed by a naval officer. The officers in charge of the planning section were Captain Charles H. McMorris until March 1942, Captain Lynde D. McCormick (the future first Supreme Allied Commander, Atlantic, and later a Naval War College President) from March 1942 to 14 January 1943, Captain James M. Steele from January 1943 to January 1944, and Rear Admiral Forrest P. Sherman, the deputy chief of staff from 9 January 1944 until the end of the war. McMorris and McCormick were classmates in the Senior Class at the Naval War College in 1938. Steele graduated with the Senior Class of 1939 and stayed on as a faculty member in the College's Intelligence Department until June of 1941. Forrest Sherman, a future Chief of Naval Operations, had been a student at the Naval War College in 1927 when Raymond Spruance was also a student.

The "Graybook" shows some evolution due to changing staff members, but the basic organization is followed throughout the document. For every day of the war, there is a running summary of events that was originally classified Top Secret. This is followed by various supporting documents. Among them are occasional "briefed estimates of the situation" that provide alternative courses of action, with advantages and disadvantages as well as operation plans.



Some of the pages are color-coded. At first, the pages are on white paper, and interspersed occasionally with sheets of green paper that included directives and operational messages affecting the situation that were originally classified as secret. From May 1942, one begins to find pink pages that provide further information at very high classifications, to and from Admiral King, and some involving allied forces. From January 1945, one begins to find yellow pages which are marked "Nimitz Only".

The Story of the "Graybook's" Digitization, A number of historians have used the "Graybook" in their research. Among them, E.B. Potter lists it among his sources in his 1976 biography of Nimitz. John Lundstrom used it extensively for his study of Vice-Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, and Craig Symonds used it for his work on Midway.

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Professor Douglas V. Smith, former head of the Strategy and Policy section of the Naval War College's College of Distance Education (CDE) became aware of the "Graybook" during his graduate work at Florida State University and in teaching a Naval War College elective course on World War II.

Recognizing the value of this document for research and for teaching at the Naval War College, Smith discussed the prospect of finding funding for the digitization of the document with Rear Admiral Roger Nolan, then the executive director of the Naval War College Foundation. The Naval War College Foundation took up the suggestion to look for possible funding. In 2008, Smith—who was then the commander of the Newport Commandery of the Naval Order of the United States and has since become Historian-General of the Naval Order—interested the Naval Order in the project as part of their mission to promote naval heritage. The Naval Order donated \$5,000 to the Naval War College Foundation, while 46 members of the Naval War College Foundation donated additional funds to make a total of \$10,535.

In the Spring of 2009, the Naval War College Foundation worked with the Naval Historical Foundation in Washington, D.C, to scan the "Graybook". The first estimates indicated that it would be too expensive to digitize the original copies, as the books would have to be disbound at great cost. Soon, a more cost-effective method was found in scanning the loose carbon copies of the document rather than the original bound copies. This was completed in 2009 at reasonable cost. The scans were put on a CD that was distributed widely. The American Naval Records Society posted it on its website at navalrecords.org.

Usage showed that there were serious drawbacks with the scan. First, the copies did not reproduce the different color-coded papers in the original manuscript and, second, many copies were too blurry to use with searchable text. A high resolution digital facsimile was needed to capture all the markings on each page, the different colors of paper, and handwritten marginalia. A new copy was needed to support browsing, full text and key word searching to maximize its research value. Making the "Graybook" searchable was especially challenging because many of the pages contain tabular and other heavily formatted text.

Fortunately, the Naval War College Foundation, now headed by Captain John Odegaard, USN (ret.), had some \$10,000 still available after its first effort. At that point, the Naval War College Library, headed by Dr. Allen Benson hired a Providence, Rhode Island, firm, The Digital Ark Corporation, to create a high-resolution archival master file consistently and accurately rendering all of the manuscript's fine detail with no distortions. Under the direction of the Library's Naval Historical Collection archivist, Dr. Evelyn Cherpak, and the Digital Initiatives Librarian, Sue Cornacchia, the Naval History and Heritage Command team in Washington, headed by Mrs. Joyce Conyers, shipped the eight volumes of the original copies to The Digital Ark, where the documents were carefully disbound

and scanned by hand one page at a time in an environmentally controlled room. The results of this effort transformed the nearly inaccessible and fragile "Graybook" into a digitally preserved naval cultural document now available to researchers worldwide.

Rear Admiral Ted Carter, Jr., President of the Naval War College, recently noted: "The Nimitz "Graybook" has been hidden from the general public for nearly seven decades, first because of its formal military security classification (until 1972), and then due to its restricted availability to only those serious researchers who could travel to Washington, DC, to visit the Navy History and Heritage Command at the Washington Navy Yard.

To greatly improve this situation, on February 24, 2014, a dedicated team at the Naval War College opened the door on this historical treasure to historians and naval enthusiasts around the globe through the release of the "Digital Graybook."

He went on to state: "This project is in keeping the Naval War College's long-term commitment to preserving and sharing the full-range of historical resources to the widest possible audience." It can now be accessed on line through the College's website <http://usnwc.edu/archives>.

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Submitted by Doug Smith

