II

ADDRESS BY COMMODORE W. W. BEHRENS

WHEN I was commanding officer of the cruiser Houston, little did I think then that I'd be helping to celebrate the 170th birthday of the United States Navy in the city for which the Houston was named, or that I'd be given the opportunity to speak to you, the graduating class of the Naval R.O.T.C.

The origin of the U.S. Navy is mingled with the very roots of American life and thought. From the era of the wooden ships to the mighty battlewagons of the present day, its tradition of seamanship and courage has contributed to the proudest chapters in American history.

On this, the first Navy Day celebration since Pearl Harbor, our Navy is the greatest and most powerful that has ever sailed under the Stars and Stripes. On all the seas of the world, it has written new and glorious annals in the struggle for freedom.

You men graduating today have a place in the Navy, and it is your destiny—or should I say opportunity—to write those future chapters in our nation's history that will tell if this war was fought in vain.

Today most of the American people stand at the crossroads of decision. One road leads to complacency, to over-confidence, to a few decades of peace and finally to disaster—a disaster far greater in scope than any we have ever known. If our country suffers another Pearl Harbor, it will be the last. There will no recovery from the next one. Our enemies will not give us the chance. They will make it a complete and final blow.
Address by Commodore W. W. Behrens

The other road leads to planned world order, to security at home and abroad, to powerful defenses at every vulnerable spot, and to lasting peace.

It is clear that Americans must face with realism the fact that we are now the world's foremost seagoing nation and it is our duty and obligation to international security, as outlined in the United Nations Conference at San Francisco, to maintain our Navy as a powerful striking force, ready for any emergency.

To be sure, no one puts forth the claim that it is necessary for us to retain our wartime fighting strength; but we must maintain a strong, well-balanced Navy in a peacetime world, and such a force requires ships and planes and well-trained personnel. You men here today will in a large part maintain the future control and striking force of our peacetime Navy, and must do so to assure yourselves that what happened in the recently ended conflict will never happen again.

Present estimates for a post-war Navy call for some 50,000 officers and half a million men. This is a sizable reduction from the 300,000 officers and more than 3,000,000 men at the time of the Japanese surrender.

With this great reduction in personnel it becomes clearer every day that this nation must institute a program of universal military training in order to provide the officers and crews necessary to man a strong peacetime Navy. You men are the forerunners of such a program and know now that it is impossible to train effective officers and seamen overnight. You know, too, that to be ready to meet the Navy's obligations, these men must be kept trained and ready. They must be acquainted with the latest developments in their equipment. Universal military training and an active reserve force are the answer to that problem. Their primary purpose is not to militarize the nation, but rather to provide
adequate security. I feel certain all level-headed Americans agree that this is an essential aspect of national security.

Let us beware of the type of thinking that dictated our pre-war naval policy—the type of thinking that calmly permitted the Japanese to seize and fortify the key points which have cost so many American lives to recover.

The future is in your hands and in the hands of the American people. With foresight and courage and pride in our own strength, we can employ the tremendous power of our armed forces as an instrument for the maintenance of world peace rather than as a stimulus to war. Today the Navy needs men like yourselves to maintain that world peace, for all our words are useless without the power to check an aggressor nation. Today we have that power. Let us make sure that tomorrow we do not squander it.

W. W. Behrens, Commodore, U.S.N.