ADDRESS BY REAR ADMIRAL P. W. FOOTE

As I stand here looking into the faces of you young gentlemen starting out in the beginning of your career in the Navy, I am sure that you feel and wonder what you will do and where you will go from here.

It reminds me of an experience I had when I was about the age of you boys—in fact, I was a little younger. When I first went to the Naval Academy it was in the summertime and an old sailing ship was being prepared for a cruise, and as I was standing down on the dock looking at that ship I thought that it certainly looked like a complicated mess of ropes and sails. When I looked at that ship, I wondered if I would ever learn how that ship sailed. Well, as I was standing there an upperclassman came along and I guess he saw the surprised look on my face, because he said, “What are you looking at, Mister?” (All plebes are called “Mister” at the Naval Academy.) “Looking at that ship?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Well,” he said, “you’d better look at every rope, every sail, and every piece of gear, because you’ve got to learn everything about that ship.”

To me it was a pretty discouraging thing, and I thought of going back to North Carolina as a farmer; but I went on, and by and by I learned the secret. Nearly all of those things had a purpose, and I found that learning the names of those things and the ropes is not so difficult and in due course I learned them all. That little lesson in the very beginning of my naval career has really taken me in hand for much more difficult situations.
Address by Rear Admiral P. W. Foote 157

And now you young gentlemen are starting in the Navy with practically no instruction in the naval sciences, and you are going to find it a lot like an electric clock. An electric clock is composed of a great many intricate pieces. When taken apart it is a complicated thing. Things are going to look complicated to you when you leave here. I am somewhat amused, in a way, when I think of what you are going to be up against this summer, because I understand you are going aboard a training ship. It is going to be tough for a while, but you will learn it all and after a while it will be something to be proud of.

In a recent address to the midshipmen in their mess hall at the Naval Academy, Admiral King stressed the importance of realization by every midshipman, from the day he takes the oath of allegiance and enters the Navy, of the tradition and high ideals which those who have gone before him have, and of the resolution to "carry on" throughout his service in the Navy in keeping with those traditions and, if possible, to add to them.

The Admiral likewise compared service in the Navy to a team of runners in a relay race where each runner carries a wand which, when he finishes his lap, he passes to the one who follows him. In this race, the success of the team depends upon the stamina and speed of each runner. So it is in the Navy. Each man has his part to play, and he must play it in keeping with the rules and traditions to the end that the safety of the nation shall ever be preserved. If he falters and falls by the wayside, he may bring disgrace not only on himself but on all others on the "team" in the Naval Service, and the safety of the nation may be endangered. On the other hand, if he "keeps the faith" and runs a good race, he will receive the applause and high regard of his teammates, and when he "passes on the wand" he will have
that peace of mind and of conscience which goes with a
knowledge of duty “well done.”

You young gentlemen who have completed your course of
study here at the Rice Institute and who are now to enter
the Navy as commissioned officers, but who have as yet to
receive instruction in the art and science of the profession of
a naval officer, feel, I am sure, that you are taking on a
tough job and are entering a hard race. In this you are
correct. Service in the Navy is no sinecure. It challenges
all the intelligence, all the energy, and all the determination
that anyone can possess. It is not the place for one who
seeks a life of ease or of the “flesh pots of Egypt.” To the
strong in heart and mind, these conditions serve as an at-
traction rather than as a detriment.

Naturally you are eager to have the “rules of the game”
of this great race which you are now to enter—to know
what are the beacon lights which will guide you on your course.

I am pleased to accept the invitation of Captain Cooper
to come here today and try to say something which may
help to guide you on your chosen course as an officer in the
Navy. In doing so I think it is more important to stress
principles of action rather than details of technical knowl-
edge, because technical details change from time to time,
while principles of action never change.

This is of particular importance today when many people
are wondering if the atomic bomb will make the Army and
the Navy obsolete and may entirely eliminate them from
their role in national security. Unless all the teachings of
history and of science are to be discarded, the thought that
the atomic bomb will bring about the end of everything is
fallacious. This bomb is a “technical detail” as far as the
Naval Service is concerned.

In the commissions which you are about to receive, you
will see it stated that the President of the United States, “reposing special confidence in your virtue, honor, and patriotism, hereby appoints you to the office of Ensign in the Navy,” or words to that effect. I command you to ponder well those words “virtue, honor, and patriotism.” Think of what they mean and remember that sound knowledge of these words will serve as a beacon light to guide you on your way.

“Virtue” means “integrity of character,” and “character” embodies nearly everything that is good or bad in one. “High character” is the cornerstone of the military profession of arms. It is in the study and knowledge of those things which go to make up good “character” that is found the guiding light, the compass needle, which will lead to success and will enable you to carry the “wand” in the relay race which you are to run, with honor and distinction.

To understand all that this means, you should study well the records of those who have carried the “wand” before you. Although traits of character are to a certain extent born within each and every one of us, yet through study and knowledge we can improve the good traits and perhaps eliminate the bad ones.

When we speak of traits of “military character” we refer especially to certain personal traits which are of greatest importance in the military profession. Those are “intelligence,” “judgment,” and “loyalty.”

“Intelligence” to understand, “judgment” in execution, and “loyalty” to plan of superior authority: from these traits flow a high sense of devotion to duty and readiness to face danger without regard to personal safety. In this way have the glorious pages of history of the U.S. Navy been written by those who have preceded you in this honorable profession.
When John Paul Jones wrote his famous letter to the Continental Congress in 1775, he said that “not only must an officer in the Navy be a capable mariner, but he must be a great deal more.” In this letter Jones laid down the guiding principles of the naval profession, and I strongly urge each of you to read and reread it. Nothing better has ever been written on this subject.

In speaking of the most important thing with which an officer has to deal—that of commanding, directing, and controlling the men and crew placed under his command—Jones said that no fixed rule could be laid down but that the officer must be guided largely by intuition. There are good and bad intuitions. The former will result from a study and knowledge of high character.

At the Naval Academy there are many records and monuments in memory of heroic deeds of those who have been trained within its walls. In the chapel there is a tablet in memory of an officer who sacrificed his life in trying to save another as they were trying to fight their way through the surf to bring the word to a place in the Pacific when their ship had been wrecked. Under this tablet is written these words: “Greater love hath no man than he who giveth his life for his friend.” He had kept the faith. He had demonstrated the highest traits of character. His conduct was in accordance with the highest traditions of the Naval Service. Those words are the most that can be said of any man; they are higher than medals.

It was “character” that caused Captain Craven to hold back and push the pilot forward when there was time for only one to escape from the sinking ship. Craven’s last words, “After you, pilot,” are written high on the tablets of fame in the Navy.

It was “character” which caused the Captain of the sub-
Address by Rear Admiral P. W. Foote 161

marine, as he lay mortally wounded on her decks, to give
the order “Take her down” so that the ship and her crew
might escape the heavy gunfire of the Japanese cruiser when
he knew he would be washed overboard and lost. Another
page in naval tradition was written.

In October we celebrated the one hundredth anniversary
of the establishment of the U.S. Naval Academy. Since then,
several thousand young men of America have gone from
its doors to serve their country. Some of them sleep in Ar-
lington; some lie deep in every ocean of the world, where
they died in the performance of their duty as officers of the
U.S. Navy.

As the “wand” is now passed to you, keep your eyes and
minds on the tablets and records of those who have gone
before you, with the high resolve that you will ever strive
to excel their records and that you will stand “four square”
to the demands of duty, and that when you “pass on the
wand,” it will be in keeping with the highest traditions of
the Naval Service.

P. W. Foote, Rear Admiral, U.S.N. (Ret.)