Franklin D. Roosevelt — ‘The Great Communicator’
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May be a longhand draft of the speech FDR delivered (presumably) to the graduates of the U.S. Naval War College, Newport, R.I., Dec. 22, 1915.

[He spoke informally, no reporters were present]

RLJ
The Purpose of the Navy

"Let us forget"

You, who have successfully completed the course of the Naval War College, are to be congratulated on admission to the distinguished company of the scientists of warfare, and on the opportunity also which you now have of going out into the service and into the world of your fellow Americans with authority to tell the truth. It is time that the people of this country, who sentenced you and I are, should be told that truth in simple language, by you and by me, or else we fail in our very manifest duty.

For while you have been studying here for the highest degree in your profession, the civilian citizens have almost been going to school, taking a kind of kindergarten course in a subject not previously studied since the days of their grandfather. In fact the safety of the nation has seemed so long
secure, that people have gone along for
years living in a fog of inaccurate and
desultory tradition, and it has been
only since they greater part of the civilized
world have entered into war that they have
sought answers to a hundred questions
presenting themselves in vital form to
their contemporaries. They have had things
happen which they had fancied quite impossible; they have seen the passions
of the dark ages reawakened in so-called
civilized communities; they have witnessed not
mere armies or mere navies, but whole
nations, men, women, and children mobilized
for the sole purpose of winning the national
competition called war. It has followed
very naturally that most of them have
raised the great question: "How does it
all affect us?" A very few of our
citizens, well meaning perhaps, who
without much mental effort satisfy their
Pauls by reiterating that the millennium has come, answer that the United States has nothing to fear, or that non-intervention is more moral than armed. But the very great majority of Americans, I am glad to think, are still believers in the conception of the word "nationality" that calls for the protection of the nation itself and this may be those who have been going to kindergarten. It is to them and to ourselves that we owe the truth about the needs of the nation. Today, more than ever before in our times, we can secure the concentrated attention of the people: they are at school, and I take it there has been no prohibition and will be none, against you as citizens or as officers from exercising your right and duty to instruct in the fundamental truths that apply to the subject of national safety.
If a vote, pro or con were taken in the United States tomorrow on whether we should have "adequate national defense" the issue would be scarcely worth locating. As an abstract term it may not be a widely accepted national policy. But it is quite conceivable that people may differ over the definition of the word "adequate"—that is, not what I want to consider today, for while you and I may agree entirely on what the naval branch of the service in material and personnel needs to make it adequate, and while we ought to do everything in our power to attain this end, yet we will fail in the end unless we build our reasoning on sounder logic by first defining, in clear terms, that essential word "defense."

In the hurry and confusion of trying to learn a new subject one...
right, the people of the United States have
thought of national defense almost wholly
in terms of an invasion of their own homes
and fields. Books and articles, hurriedly
conceived and hastily compiled have drawn pictures of foreign
fleets bombarding down skyscrapers and
foreign armies turning our homes and
carrying off our wealth. Some of these
discourses have been highly colored, but
most of them have, in view of the
perceived readiness of the nation against
war as compared with other peoples of the
earth, have in them an element at
least of possibility. Invasion is so
far as the army and its needs are con-
cerned a perfectly proper matter to
consider when we are defining "defense.
Our history and the whole theory and
policy of our government from earlier
times have accepted as the criterion
of army strength the force necessary to
repel external attack from outside in
our own soil of the continental United States. We have had no 'entangling alliances,' we have aimed at no foreign conquests, and with the exception of certain army garrisons in detached territories which depend on the navy for their ultimate safety, it can be fairly stated that "defense" in the purely army sense may be limited to the prevention of armed invasion of our home soil.

But there is a real danger in too wide an application of this definition. Let me be specific: there is a real danger in too many pictures of coast cities in ashes or foreign troops marching up Broadway. There is real danger in too many headlines in the newspapers, spring and autumn to the effect that the "Red Fleet" in the Far East has defeated the "Blue Fleet" and effected a landing.
in the Chesapeake or the Delaware. Too much of this sort of thing—and I will say a word about war games later—has led a great many people in this country to apply to the Navy the same definition of "defence" as the Army. Hundreds of people with whom I have talked ask me what the Navy can do to prevent invasion, and what harbors our battleships would enter in the event of war.
1. Man who has never thought before.
2. Man who has so specialized that he is inclined to barbarize all to his specialty.
Speech of Franklin D. Roosevelt at U.S. Naval War College, Newport, R.I.


"At eleven o'clock he awarded diplomas and spoke to officers who gathered behind closed doors. His speech was not written and he spoke with freedom upon the general subject of the relations of the War College to practical naval operations.

Many things were said which naturally were only for service ears particularly in times like these when countries are spying on each other to learn their secrets of preparedness and technical matter."
