

Naval War College and Torpedo School,

Newport, R. I.,

July 27, 1892.

My dear Mr. Chambers:

Notwithstanding my
partial and hurried reply of last week your
letter of the 16th has remained in my mind as
unanswered, though acknowledged.

I wish very much to meet the objections
you raise, for I am sincerely desirous of so far
arousing your interest and convincing your mind
as to lead you to accept orders here. I am so,
partly from personal reasons, wishing to secure
the success of an undertaking largely committed to
me; and also because I believe the College
represents a side of naval interest to which little
attention - systematic attention, at any rate - is
being paid.

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It was not my purpose to deny, much less to deny the Navy's share in the responsibility for its material development. It is the tendency of all subordinates to shirk their shoulders, thank God it is none of their business, and disclaim responsibility; and the Navy is so thoroughly drilled into the theory of subordination, both by its military constitution and by the much-visited-on truth of the subordination of the military to the Civil authority, that it is especially prone to the fault. I concede freely that we should be on our guard against this besetting weakness, and that we may do much. Nevertheless, responsibility ultimately is inseparable from power; and in the last analysis the power resides over

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deficiencies met with the taxpayers and their representatives. I fancy the difference between our views, here, is not radical.

Nor do I believe it is in the matter of Naval Architecture. The latter is our — and the only one you cite in your letter — of those technical specialties, with whose methods my address said the College has direct concern. I have not a copy of the address with me and so must depend upon my recollection of its words. I must also bear in mind the fact that in a short address, meant to make a clear sharp impression upon hearers, it is easy to fall into a seeming exaggeration of expression. To correct this on every point involves not only loss of time, but wears the hearer and blurs the impression essential to be conveyed.

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To my statement about methods and details, you oppose such a correction: 1 One of the chief points in the study of Naval Strategy should be to shape a course of Naval Construction Policy. This I have, as a lecture on naval strategy, enlarged on from time to time; expressing my views by illustration, though my aim at affecting our policy has been not by direct action, but by the indirect influence of spreading sound ideas (as I consider them) 2 (you say) such important affairs cannot be wisely directed without some attention to methods and details. But have I said ~~that~~ such attention should not be given? I have said that the College, existing for a certain purpose, should concentrate its effort on that purpose and matters akin to it, but I certainly never meant to imply

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that it should look disdainfully or contemptuously on the processes which underly its own investigations.

In the specialisation which is so marked a feature of modern life, each specialty has to accept the work of the others that ~~to~~ exist alongside of it. It neither rejects nor ignores their conclusions, which are often essential to its own work; but it takes them at second hand. If it insists upon independent investigation of matters outside its own field, it loses the concentration essential to success, and in fact ceases to be a specialty.

Viewed thus, the question of the amount of detail, or "methods", that enters into the work of the College, or of any particular lecturer at the College, becomes one of more or less; and I am far from

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affecting to consider that my own postscript definition of the quantum is conclusive. It is not from some man to define accurately the length, breadth and height, to which a new institution is to attain. Personally, I believe rather in growth along general lines, accepting day by day the influences that legitimately commend themselves, than in a hard and fast 'a priori' dogmatization. Such general lines I sought to lay down in my address.

You say truly this is a mechanical age; and it is useless to kick against the pricks. We must take the age as we find it; but if convinced, as I am, that the trust in machinery has been pushed beyond reason, that the living human factor is more and more relegated to a position hopelessly inferior,

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one must try, not to force the current back, but to deflect it somewhat. If you had had listened to all the propositions made to me, or will read the original report of Luce's board ~~establishing~~ recommending the institution of the College, you can scarcely fail to realize that there was danger of the art of war disappearing under a deluge of machinery. The College would become a simple (or complex) School of Technology; and as such, in view of the many already existing, would have no excuse for continuance.

What the upshot will be, I know not. Of one thing I am certain — survival or perich — that the leading idea of the College carries with it an opportunity for original work that will

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live or die with it. Of this the success of my own work, abroad and at home, is a proof — for the success is not due to me (at least primarily) but to the College thought.

I do not think that there is between us any such divergence of thought as necessitates our remaining apart, or would invalidate your usefulness here. Certainly I should deprecate the using of much of your time (as a teacher) in the explanation of the processes of naval architecture, of gun building, or steam-engineering; but I should with equal certainty not object to your dwelling upon the principles that govern methods of construction, showing the bearing of them upon this or that point of the handling of Ships, or upon their efficiency in action.

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The usefulness of the College in the long run will result not from the predominance of my views, or your views, but from the fair collision of opinion among men connected with it, who are willing to accept the fact that excellence is a plant of gradual growth and gradual evolution, and are not impatient of waiting as well as striving.

Let me hear from you again before very long.

There is no haste about your coming here, but there should also be no needless delay in reaching conclusions, for if not you, (as I hope), then I must be looking out elsewhere. I think I shall remember those - with yourself our staff will be, for the time, complete.

Very truly Yours

A. J. Mahan