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REPORT OF SUPERINTENDENT NAVAL WAR COLLEGE

United States Naval War College,  
Newport, R. I., Sept. 30, 1885.

SIR: I have the honor to inform the Bureau that the first term of the War College ended to-day.

As a matter of record it may not be out of place to state that under date of May 5, 1884, the Department directed a board of Naval Officers to "report upon the whole subject of a post-graduate course for officers of the Navy, etc.," The report of the Board, dated June 13th, recommended in the most emphatic terms the adoption of a post-graduate course; and on the sixth of October following, General Order No. 325 announced to the service the establishment of the United States Naval War College.

A copy of the report of the Board and the order authorizing the College are herewith appended as part of the record.

Soon after the promulgation of General Order No. 325, instructions were issued to the following named officers to prepare themselves for duty as members of the college faculty, to wit: Capt. A. T. Mahan, U.S.N., to prepare to instruct in Naval History and Naval Tactics; Prof. James Russell Soley, U.S.N., to prepare a course of lectures in International Law, and Paymaster R. W. Allen to prepare himself to instruct in Naval Law and the Administration of Justice.

In accordance with the recommendations of the Board, that the science and art of war "would be best taught by one learned in military science", the Department made application to the Hon. Secretary of War for the detail of an Army Officer to take charge of that branch of the college course.

In compliance with this request, Lieutenant Foster W. Bliss First Artillery, U. S. Army, was assigned to the duty, and I may say here, in passing that the choice was an exceedingly fortunate one for the college. But Captain Mahan, who was at this time on the Pacific Station, in command of the U. S. S. Wachusett, was not ordered home in time to allow him to prepare his work, and Paymaster Allen was subsequently assigned to other duty, leaving Professor Soley and Lieutenant Bliss the only regular instructors.

To make good the deficiency, the services of other officers were asked for.

Medical Director Richard S. Dean was invited to give a course of lectures on Naval Hygiene; Rear-Admiral Daniel Ammen was requested to give a lecture on any topic connected with naval warfare he might select, and Commanders Henry C. Taylor and William Bainbridge Hoff were asked for for similar service; but of the four officers named, but one; Commander H. C. Taylor was ordered by the Department. Rear-Admiral Ammen being on the retired list, was not subject to orders; but he generously volunteered his services and to travel at his own expense.

As it was necessary to supply other lectures besides the two regular instructors named, personal solicitation was resorted to with the happiest effect, as the following list will show:

Rear-Admiral Daniel Ammen read a lecture to the class on the 8th of September covering subjects ~~of vital importance~~ ~~of vital importance~~ ~~of vital importance~~ ~~of vital importance~~ ~~of vital importance~~ of vital importance to the naval student and containing some valuable hints to naval officers.

September 17.--- General J. C. Polfroy, formerly of the United States Army, but now a citizen of Boston, read a lecture on the Peninsular Campaign of 1862.

September 21.--- General George H. Gordon, formerly of the Army, but now in civil life, delivered a lecture on Pope's Campaign in Virginia.

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On the 22nd, Commander Taylor read his paper, the subject being the necessity of concentration in the formation of the naval line of battle; and on the 23th, Mr. John C. Ropes, of Boston, a gentleman widely known for his existence and accurate knowledge of military history, delivered a lecture on the Virginia Campaign, which included the series of battles from the Wilderness to Cold Harbor.

Captain E. O. Matthews had kindly consented to read a paper to the class, and he had been set down for the 29th, but he was assigned to duty just before the date fixed upon, and was obliged to leave town.

Of the three military lectures it is but just to say that they were of the highest order of excellence and contributed very materially to the success of the course. I gladly avail myself of this occasion to make the formal acknowledgment and to express my gratitude to the several gentlemen named.

The first of the three military lectures treated of the engagements between ships and shore batteries, and was not wholly very instructive, but wholly within the line of our studies. The other two lectures were illustrated by military maps and gave in the most graphic manner the principal features of the campaign. As lessons in grand tactics and strategy they were of very great value. But, however much importance may be attached to lectures of this class, I would hardly venture a second time to solicit these voluntary contributions to our regular course, unless there should be some means provided for defraying the expenses of those who accepted an invitation to lecture.

To this end I would recommend that a small fund, not exceeding \$500.00 be asked for of Congress to cover expenditures of this character.

Among those who were invited to lecture, but who for various reasons were obliged to decline, was Mr. John Ericsson, of New York. In a very courteous letter that gentleman said it would afford him much pleasure to present to the class under instruction his views on defensive naval warfare but for engagements which demanded his attention at the time named in the invitation.

A general but very informal invitation was extended to the officers of the Marine Corps through the colonel-commandant, but the time was too short to admit of acceptance on the part of those willing to prepare lectures.

Of the regular course of lectures on international law and military science, I am happy to be able to say that they were more than realized my expectations.

The lectures of Professor Soley are so admirably adapted to the wants of naval officers that they must hereafter form an indispensable part of our system of professional education. Indeed, I am forced to the conclusion that the branch of international law which he treats of in such a masterly manner belongs to and is inseparable from a thorough course of the study of war. I can no longer be considered a separate department of study.

Lieutenant Bliss, having been detailed for duty at the college for two months prior to the commencement of the term had but little time to prepare his lectures, yet his intimate knowledge of military history and his familiarity with the standard works of military writers enabled him to acquit himself with credit. The experience gained during the term and his great interest in the work will enable him to still further perfect himself for the duty to which he has been assigned.

In addition to the foregoing, there were read to the class four papers on naval topics.

There were no recitations required of the class, and no original papers called for.

Taken as a whole, there is every reason to be satisfied with the results of the term, and good grounds for expecting still better results in the future.

The full development of the college course must be a question of time. But with instructors deeply interested in their work and the many officers desirous of professional improvement, from which to form classes, that time need not be very far distant. Of the great influence on our future Navy even a moderate development of the course must exercise no one can doubt who has even a slight acquaintance with what has already been accomplished.

Estimates for further repairs and improvements of the college building and for books to complete the library have been submitted.

It is hoped that the department will ask for the necessary appropriations of Congress and commend to that body the favorable consideration of this important institution.

Very respectfully, Your obedient servant,

/s/ S. B. LUCE,

Commodore, U. S. Navy.

Captain John G. Walker, U. S. Navy.  
Chief of the Bureau of Navigation,