TALK ON THE HISTORY OF THE WAR COLLEGE

By Rear Admiral S.B.Luce, U.S.N.,

LECTURE DELIVERED BEFORE THE CONFERNCE.

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The question has been asked why the War College and the Training Station were placed so near each other on one small island, as if, in this broad land of ours, there were not sufficient space for each to have its own particular habitat. The early history of the two institutions are closely interwoven.

In 1863 (to go back to what seems like ancient history), on my return from the Practice Cruise in the MACEDONIAN, Commodore Blake, then superintendent of the Naval Academy, at that time in the Atlantic Hotel, Touro Park, Newport, R. I., invited me to accompany him on a drive to look at a site on Coasters Harbor Island for a new building for the Naval Academy. Mr. George Mason, an architect of Newport, made one of the party. Mr. Mason was then engaged in preparing plans under the Commodore's directions for the building; for there were good reasons then for thinking that the Naval Academy would remain at Newport permanently.

(I may say right here, by way of parenthesis, that the Academy in all probability would have remained here but for political reasons. Maryland wanted the Naval Academy once more to be within her borders. An agreement was entered into between Senator Reverdy Johnson of Maryland, and Senator Grimes, Chairman of the Senate Naval Committee, by which the Academy was to be restored to Annapolis, and that it should not be moved without the consent of Congress, the act of May 21, 1864, was passed which established it at Annapolis by law.)

The proposed site was on Coasters Harbor Island.

As we stood on the highest point of the Island, that part where the reservoir was built, and looked upon the broad ex-

panse of the waters of Narragansett Bay, the Commodore grew very eloquent upon the many advantages of the hrabor and bay as a naval station, and the perfect adaptability of the site where we stood for a Naval Academy. The very favorable impression made upon my mind at that time was never effaced.

During the practice cruise in the MACEDONIAN just referred to I had an opportunity, which I had long desired, of seeing something of the English and French methods of training naval apprentices. On my return home I made a report upon the English training system; but the Navy Department took no interest in the subject and so the matter dropped, that is, for the time being; but in 1875 a system of training was established. Time passed, when, in 1878, I found myself on board the MINNESOTA which, at that comprised our entire training system. The practice then was to anchor the MINNESOTA off West 23rd Street, North River, during the summer, and in winter tie her up to a wharf at the New York Navy Yard. Commodore J. W. A. Nicholson was then in command of the yard. It soon became clear to me that the presence of the MINNESOTA at the Navy Yard was considered a nuisance, and that some other place must be found where the boys under training could be landed for drilling under arms and for the purposes of recreation, without thefear of disturbing any one. The Naval Station at New London seemed to offer all the advantages desired. On the 22nd December, 1879m we left the New York Yard and, in due time, were comfortably moored at the wharf of the New London Station, where we spent the remainder of the winter. With certain advantages offered by New London there were coupled certain decided (dis) advantages, the latter predominating to a large extent. To my mind the fact of the ship being tied up to a wharf for so long a time was an insuperable objection.

We passed a delightful winter at New London, but as a place for a training station I left it without regret.

The Summer of 1880 found the MINNESOTA at Hampton Roads. There was a great gathering there, including the President, Mr. Rutherford B. Hayes; Secretary of the Navy, Mr. Richard Thomson; Commodore English, Chief of Bureau of Equipment and Recruiting (under whom came the training ships) and others of more or less note. For some reason not known to me, there was a disagreement between Secretary Thompson and Commodore English which disposed the latter to listen to any suggestion regarding the MINNESOTA. That suggestion was that the MINNESOTA should have an abiding place —a locus — of her own. As a consequence a board, of which Commodore English was President, was ordered to examine and report upon a suitable place for a Naval Training Station. That Board, under date of December 4, 1880, reported in favor of Coasters Harbor Island. The City of Newport forthwith ceded the island to the State of Rhode Island and the State, in turn, ceded the property to the United States. I do not mean to convey the idea that I had anything whatever to do with bringing this about. But by a singular train of events over which I had no control whatever, it was decided by an impartial Board of officers that Coasters Harbor Island was the best place for the headquarters of the training system.

In pretty much the same way it came to pass that a Board of officers, after mature consideration, reported that Coasters Harbor Island was the best place for the War College. When the latter report was made the island was practically uninhabited save by Mr. Whaley, who had been Superintendent of the Poor House and who was retained in the capacity of farmer. For it must be remembered that the Training Service was at that time entirely afloat. The NEW HAMPSHIRE had been sent to Newport for the express purpose of being used as a stationary school ship and no thought was entertained of attempting the training, on shore, of boys intended for life on board ship. Hence it was concluded that there was plenty of room for the College on the island and for the training service in the harbor on board ship. No one

at that time could have foreseen that the ship was to be abandoned and the whole primary school of naval training for young seamen would be in barracks on shore. I did not believe in that plan in the beginning, and subsequent experience has only confirmed me in that belief. But I had no power to change the trend of events. Thus it is that we find the War College and the Training School on this Island.

There were many minor incidents connected with the early days of the Training Station as well as of the College that illustrate the difficulties we had to contend with and our very peculiar methods of naval administration. While still in command of the training ships, one day I received the following letter from the Department.

"Navy Department,
Washington, August 3, 1881.

Sir:-

In view of the large number of desertions from the Training Ships, and the complications that have arisen among the officers of the Fleet, it seems proper that at the earliest practicable moment as large a portion of your command as you can properly detail for that duty, should set sail for other portd. Occupation and a change of scene will soon obliterate discontent in the minds of the boys. The attractions of Newport, so great to officers, seem to be growing infections with the boys; and you will, so far as you deem expedient, not lead them into such temptations.

Very respectfully,
/s/ William H. Hunt,
Secretary of the Navy.

Captain S.B.Luce, U.S.N.,
Commanding Apprentice Squadron,
U.S.Flagship Constitution,
Newport, R. I.

I cannot, even now, after a lapse of 25 years, read that letter without a feeling of amusement. I made no reply to it or noticed it in any way in so far as my memory serves me. But, amusing as it is in one sense, it yet demands serious consideration. The Secretary of the Navy, new to his office and totally unfamiliar with naval affairs, could not possibly know that his entire letter was based on newspaper reports, the falsity of which could have been readily exposed.

There was <u>not</u> a large number of "desertions" from the

training ships.

There were no "complications" among the officers.

There was no "discontent" in the minds of the boys — none at least that were noticeable.

The "attractions of Newport" were not great to the officers, and those attractions, whatever they may have been, were not growing infectious with the boys. It is hardly necessary to say here that "attractions" which might appeal to officers would not be likely to influence a young apprentice. It is difficult to understand how one could believe that there existed between officers and apprentices any such relations as implied by the Secretary's letter.

I may add that I did not deem it expedient to lead the apprentices into "such temptations".

The pity of it is that the false allegations on which the Secretary's letter was based, were made, or suggested, by a naval officer or officers, one of ourselves. My reason for giving this letter now, is simply to illustrate our methods of naval administration, and to show how ill advised it is to place certain matters of naval administration in the hands of a gentleman in civil life, utterly and entirely unfamiliar with naval affairs and the customs of the sea service. The early history of the War College furnishes a similar example. The Secretary of the Navy, wholly unacquainted with the conditions of affairs here, acted on the suggestions of officers inimical to the College and those who had to do with it. It was on just such ex-parte evidence, or, let us say, misrepresentations, that one Secretary of the Navy removed the College from this island, and another was on the point of abolishing it altogether.

In 1888 the Department "requested" the President of the War College to limit the College term to three months. This limit the Department thought would not impair the College Course, inasmuch as there were less than an average of two lectures delivered a day, excluding Saturdays. With this order was a

memorandum both of which the Department promptly gave to the press, stating that Congress had decided to transfer the College to the Torpedo Station, in the interests of both institutions. And the Secretary added "I do not deem the present arrangement wise or sensible; and I have not seen anyone who does." The facts were simply that the transfer of the College by Congress was done at the instance of the Secretary himself; it was soon shown that the transfer was not in the interests of both institutions, but rather the contrary; and the reason why the Secretary had not seen anyone who deemed the present plan sensible was because he did not want to see them. The College faculty was not consulted. The Secretary's order came "like a bolt out of the blue sky" and cut off thirty lectures already prepared or in the course of preparation. It was very clear that the Secretary was acting on the suggestions of officers inimical to the College.

The most serious of all the efforts of those in authority to injure the College — the one that threatened the very existence of the College itself — occurred in 1893. In July of that year the Secretary himself came here for the avowed purpose of breaking up the College. The building was wanted by the officers of the Training Station; the two sets of quarters at the Eastern end of the College were already occupied by officers of the Training Station and the Commanding Officer publicly declared that "in six months the apprentice boys would be eating their grub in the War College". The days of the College now indeed seemed numbered. Happily, as in the days of old, curses were turned to blessings. "What hast thou done?" cried Balak, King of Moab, to the prophet, as they looked upon the hosts of Israel on the plains below, "I took thee to curse mine enemies, and behold thou hast blessed them altogether". The Secretary said "I came here to break up the War College; but now I am going to do all I can to assist it". And he did.

I will read the memorandum just as it was given to me, with the exception that I have given (in brackets) names of the officers referred to.

Memorandum in Relation to the War College.

In July, 1893, a naval officer interested in the success of the War College (Captain McCalla) called upon the officer temporarily in charge (Captain C.H.Stockton) and learned from him that there was imminent danger that the College would be abolished. The grounds for the apprehension were the well-known hostility of the Chief of the Bureau of Navigation, (Captain F. M. Ramsay), a quite recent visit of inspection by that official (who was spending his leave at Jamestown) and the public statement made by the Commanding Officer of the Training Station (Captain F. M. Bunce) to the effect that "in six months my boys will be eating their grub in the lecture room of the War College."

Hoping that some good might come from an indirect personal effort to place before the Secretary of the Navy (Mr. H.A.Herbert) the true objects of the War College, the officer above mentioned wrote to the Commanding Officer of the DOLPHIN (Lt. B. H. Buckingham), an excellent officer and one entirely in sympathy with the War College, asking him to do what he could to prevent the consummation of the plot to abolish the institution.

Shortly after the Secretary of the Navy embarked on board the DOLPHIN, in August 1893, the Commanding Officer called his attention to Captain Mahan's "Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire", and so interested the Secretary in its contents, that the latter read it carefully.

The day before the DOLPHIN arrived at Washington in September, the Secretary of the Navy sent for the Commanding Officer and said in substance, "I want to tell you that when I started out on this trip, I meant to break up the War College, but I have read this book (Mahan's volumes above referred to), which alone is worth all the money that has been expended on the War College; and now I intend to do all I can to assist it".

Mr. Herbert was as good as his words. In his address before the War College Class, August 10, 1896, he spoke in part as follows:

In conclusion, Mr. President and gentlemen, I am glad to have the opportunity of making the contribution, insignificant as it is, to the literature of the War College, a grain of mustard seed cast into what I know to be fertile soil.

This institution is at last, I think, on a sure foundation and destined to become a permanent feature in our naval administration. For its present position and future prospects it is indebted primarily to the officers who have had it in charge, and secondarily to the zeal and fidelity with which those sent here, year after year, have lent themselves to the honest work they found awaiting them within these walls. The Navy, for this College, owes a debt of gratitude to Admiral Luce, who was its early and fast friend; to Captain Mahan, who made a world-wide reputation by the lectures he delivered here; and to Captain Taylor, who has brought it to its present state of efficiency in practical work.

> The opinion was once widely entertained that this College was intended for a post-graduate course and that, this being so, it should be located, if allowed to exist at all, at the Naval Academy. I was of this opinion myself until three years ago on a personal visit I inspected its workings and examined fully into its plans and purposes. Then I discovered what the public is beginning to understand, and what the Navy itself is now coming fully to appreciate, that it is in no sense a post-graduate course that is being pursued in these walls; that not only are the theory and art of war being thoroughly studied and developed here, but knowledge is being acquired and practical information is being amassed without which the Navy Department cannot possibly, in the event of War, utilize the naval resources of our country.
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> Ships and guns, and torpedoes and men, are all of little use unless officers know how to fight them. Individual ships, however bravely and skilfully they may be handled and fought, can accomplish but little if officers do not know when, where and how to dispose of them; while at the same time skill in handling, courage in fighting, and knowledge of the proper disposition of ships in battle will often all be of little avail without continual and prompt supplies of everything needed in the exignecies of war, all of which must be reckoned for beforehand. Successful war means all of these things and more besides. It means, if the exigency requires, the exertion by a nation of its utmost power, the utilization of all its resources, the tapping of every source of supply, the employment of every manufactory, every ship and every man that can be useful, and all this with the utmost promptitude and dispatch. Further than this, plans of attack and defense must be devised, and these cannot be successfully made without the most accurate knowledge of harbors, inlets, safe and unsafe passages, tides and everything else pertaining to the possible theatres of impending war. A study of these and of still other problems constitute the work which, I am glad to say from a careful personal inspection of results, you have been successfully performing during the years just passed. I congratulate you, gentlemen, and you particularly, Mr. President (the late Rear Admiral H. C. Taylor), upon the results you have achieved. For myself, I shall rejoice, if when I shall lay down the office I now hold, it can be said I contributed, in such manner as I could, to the successful workings of this institution.

This frank and manly admission by Mr. Herbert of his former error in judging of the College on insufficient grounds; and the very handsome manner in which he atoned for that error, redound greatly to his credit.

I may say here, before leaving this part of the subject, that Admiral Porter was one of the strongest and most consistent friends of the College as he was of the Training Service, but the Navy Department had no use for him after the Civil War, except when it got into a tight place.

The Bureau of Navigation, on the other hand, was so much opposed to the College that it (the College) was transferred from that Bureau and placed under the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, who was known to be friendly to the College. Another one of the many curiosities of our system of naval administration was that the Bureau of Navigation showed such a hostile spirit in regard to the Training Service that it was finally taken from that Bureau and placed under the Admiral of the Navy.

Let us now see what sort of a thing it was that the Department has been trying to break up. I shall confine myself to the work of the College. Everybody knows that certain lectures delivered at this College and subsequently given to the world under the name of "Sea Power", profoundly influenced the naval policy of every maritime state save our own. Let us see what the College was striving to accomplish for the United States Navy in spite of the adverse influences in Washington.

In 1884 then, while the training of boys was still conducted exclusively on board ship, this College was established for an advanced course of professional study where officers could bring to the investigation of the various problems of naval warfare the scientific methods adopted in other professions. Hence the primary idea of the War College was, as stated in a former paper read here, to raise naval warfare from the empirical stage to the dignity of a Science. And I will say right here that that end has been accomplished.

Science, it has been observed, is organized knowledge. But before knowledge can be organized it must be possessed. Not only this but there must be practice, and an accruing experience with its empirical generalizations, before there can be Science. "The highest art of every kind", says Herbert Spencer, "is based upon Science", or, to put it in other words, "Every science is evolved

out of its corresponding art". One of the principles of the Science of Education is that throughout youth and in maturity the process shall be one of slef-instruction. "What the learner discovers by mental effort", it has been said, "is better than what is told to him." This applies with peculiar force here among officers of mature years who have been practicing the elementary rules of naval tactics at sea, and are now prepared, each one for himself, to discover and formulate the general principles underlying the Science of War, as applied to fleets. Thus from the empirical we reach the rational; from the concrete we reach the abstract. This is what Captain Mahan did and what each one of us can do. He was obliged first to possess himself of knowledge. He then organized his knowledge and in his treatment of naval strategy he resorted to the "Comparative Method" to which modern science owes so much. In a word, Captain Mahan's methods were scientific.

It has been said here, in this College, that there are no instructors, save only such as are inclined to self-instruction. To this I make one exception - Captain Mahan was an instructor in a very real sense, but he became one (and this is the point I wish to emphasize) he became one by first instructing himself. Confessed ignorance in the first step is the acquisition of knowledge and such ignorance he confessed in the following letter dated on board U.S.S. WACHUSETT, Guayaquil, Sept. 4, 1884.

> I should like the position, like it probably very much. I believe I have the capacity and perhaps some inherited aptitude for the particular study; but I do not on questioning myself find that now I have the special accurate knowledge that I should think necessary. I fear you give me credit for knowing more than I do, and having given a special attention to the subject which I have not.
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> I take it the subject proposed to me involves an amount of historical narrative, specially directed toward showing the causes of failure and success, and thus enforcing certain general principles. Whether to this is to be added any attempt at evolving systems of tactics applicable to modern naval warfare, I dont understand; but I suppose by Naval Tactics you scarcely mean a reproduction of Parker. Taking simply the

> first subject, as I turn over in my mind the naval battles, and naval and mixed operations, scattered throut history, and think how little I know about them in detail, the work assumes very great proportions. To look out the authorities, master them, digest and arrange the material thus acquired, bring together examples illustrating the same lessons, above all the criticism, every one of these steps is big. Yet, if I rightly understand the subject, no less could be considered adequate treatment. And then how large a mass must be gone through and in the end found useless.* * * As to preparation here on board ship it is impossible. I have looked through the (ship's) library and find little material and less that is first-rate. I can go through it all in a few weeks. Besides I should have to give my whole mind to the matter, which in command (of a ship) is impossible. No man is less able to serve two masters. * * * * * * * * * My reply to you then is "yes" - I should like to come, if after reading my letter you still wish it. Indeed I don't think I would be right in refusing to help in a new, difficult and most needful work, if in the judgment of others I can be useful. Meantime, * * * * * * I will work up what is at hand as though the matter were settled.

Later when his ship was at Callao, he went to Lima and in a library there he found a copy of Mommsen's History of Rome. It is to this work he is indebted for the first glimpse he caught of the importance of "Sea Power". "It may be of interest to know" he writes, "that it was when reading Mommsen's History of Rome in the English Club at Lima, that I was struck by the non-recognition of the vital influence of Sea Power upon Hannibal's career." This lead to further generalizations. It occurred to him that the part played by maritime power, as shaping the destinies of nations had received but little attention. An analysis therefore of the course of events through a series of years directed to show the influence of sea power upon history would serve to imbue

> "Officers with an exalted sense of the mission of their calling, and, by throwing light upon the political bearings of naval force contribute to give the service and the country a more definite impression of the necessity to provide a fleet adequate to great undertakings, lest, if an occasion should arise for "statesmanship directing arms", we should be found unprepared through having no armed force to direct". (Preface, Vol.I,Sea Power and French Revolution.)

This was the original motive of his great work, a work he it observed that our Navy Department, in its ignorance of easily ascertained facts, sought to suppress. At the beginning he had no scientific appreciation of the naval history of the past. But

giving this the attention required by his duty here, in this College, of treating of naval tactics and naval strategy, and collating the various incidents of war with the teachings of military writers, he soon came to recognize that the principles (which they claimed to be of general application) received ample illustration in naval annals. Thus his earlier efforts gradually expanded into an attempt to analyze the strategic conduct of the naval campaigns, as well as the tactical features of the various battles in which any clear tactical purpose was shown by the commanders engaged. No better illustration than this could be adduced, showing how our best work is the product of self instruction during maturity.

It has been claimed more than once in this College that we have no professors - no teachers - that we all occupy a common plane in the fields of research. But we must make an exception in the case of the author of Sea Power as already stated. He began by teaching himself in order that he might teach others.

We may profit by the example set us, for it must not be supposed that the subject has been exhausted. Naval history for the most part has been, in fact still is, a collection of single, isolated and independent facts. The ships of one nation encounter, at sea, the ships of another nation, with which it is at war. A battle ensues and the results are given with more or less detail. This is an isolated fact. The historian then proceeds to give an account of another sea fight, and still another, and so on to the end of the chapter. Thus we have a series of independent facts, each one interesting in itself, to the naval student, and worthy of critical examination in all its various aspects. But, not satisfied with the historian's bare statement of a single fact, or of a series of facts he, the student, asks himself whether it was through <u>accident</u> or <u>design</u> that thos opposing fleets met and fought at sea. On further examination he finds out that there is a relation between these facts. He thus

uncovers, or discovers, what had been hidden from him, that these several facts are related by a law. What, then, had appeared to him as a series of independent, unrelated facts, he finds out to be phenomena which fall within the Reign of Law. In short, he has by self effort gained knowledge; he has organized that knowledge, and has worked out for himself the Science of Naval Strategy. There is a still higher field of inquiry. Why were those two nations at war? The causes which led to our war of 1812, have been traced back for nearly 150 years, or to the middle of the 17th Century.

Captain Little was good enough to call my attention to the following passage in Captain Mahan's opening remarks on Naval Strategy. It will be observed that he justifies the publishing of his works on "Sea Power" by saying that (in book form) officers attending the College may consult them. The question naturally presents itself: do officers attending the College Course consult those works? Or, in general terms, do naval officers read those books?

The extract runs as follows:-

> One of the first steps in imparting, or in acquiring knowledge of any particular subject, is for the teacher to frame and the student to master accurate definitions of the terms, or words, peculiar to the subject. Unless these terms, or words, have such fixed meanings and are mutually understood, wrong impressions are almost sure to be conveyed, and teacher and learner are in the position of men endeavoring to exchange ideas by means of a language which to one or the other is unfamiliar. I can remember the time when drills at the great guns were preceded by no systematic instruction in the nomenclature of the piece and its carriage. Of course, with the simple character of the weapons of those days, the guns' crew day by day picked up, as a child does, the meaning of words by constant repetition and familiar use.
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> Nevertheless, there was a distinct loss of time from the failure to employ the more logical method of first imparting the names and terms to be used in the instructions.
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> By the decision of the College faculty, there has been assigned to me (1892) as my particular branch, the treatment of Naval Strategy and Naval Tactics; with these is also associated, necessarily and formally, Naval History. I say,"necessarily", for Naval History is, in every age, the handmaid of Naval Warfare. It contains the records of naval experience, which upon careful study are found

to verify and substantiate those general conclusions which are sometimes called the Rules, or Maxims, of the Art of War. These experiences of Naval War give the foundation, upon which alone, in all ages, a sound theory of War must be built.

They serve also afterwards to illustrate those rules, or teachings, which I shall hereafter lay down more or less dogmatically. It is upon this ground that I justify the publication, by myself, of certain works upon Naval History, although that publication is a departure from the sound general rule of the College, not to print its lectures. My own published works on Naval History, are simply the lectures delivered here, by me, in previous years. They embody numerous illustrations, and are accompanied by critical analyses, which I must now use again, to support and elucidate the systematic teaching I propose to give. They are, in truth, foundations upon which my coming course is erected; and, independently of other reasons for publication, the utility to officers attending the College of having the works with which the library has been purposely stocked to refer to, exceeds in my opinion the harm done by parting with so much of our stock in trade.

(Opening of Captain Mahan's Lectures on Campaign of 1796.)

He here states explicitly that his works on Sea Power (by furnishing numerous illustrations, accompanied by critical analyses) constitute the foundations of his course of lectures on Naval Strategy. Thus he progressed (by a course of self-instruction) and proceeded from the empirical to the rational, from the concrete to the abstract; and from empirical generalizations he has raised (to repeat it once more) Naval Warfare to the plane of a Science.

There is reason for hoping that these lectures on Naval Strategy will soon be revised by the author and be brought up to date, showing how the principles laid down have received further illustrations by our war with Spain and that between Russia and Japan. Printed in book form, for private circulation for the exclusive use of the College, and for those who attend the annual Conferences here, these lectures should be studied just as students of military science study Jomini.

In a paper read at this College about 20 years ago (Sept. 6, 1886) occures the following in regard to the College work: "Knowing ourselves to be on the road that leads to the Science of Naval Warfare, let us confidently look for the one who will lay the foundations of that Science and do for it what Jomini did for Military Science." And in a note added 15 years later it said: "He has come and his name is Mahan".