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## President's Notes

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*U.S. Navy*

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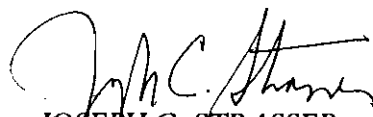
## President's Notes

**I**N MY PRESIDENT'S NOTES FOR the Autumn 1993 issue I had a good deal to say about Frank Uhlig, Jr., who was then approaching the end of his twelve years as the editor of the Naval War College Press (which produces this journal). Frank retired at the end of September and became Editor Emeritus and a Sponsored Research Scholar of the College. On 8 October we held a retirement ceremony for him in the Mahan Rotunda, and there, in his turn, Frank had a good deal to say about us—that is, about this institution, its founder, and the people who have made it what it is today, the nation's preeminent service college. His theme, of course, is a major part of the message I have tried to communicate in my own years at the Naval War College, both in these pages and in many other ways. But Frank, as you would expect of him, makes the point in a most

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Admiral Strasser holds a B.S. from the Naval Academy, two master's degrees from the Fletcher School, Tufts University, and from the same school a Ph.D. in political science. He graduated from the command and staff course at the Naval War College in 1972. He commanded the USS *O'Callahan* (FF 1051), Destroyer Squadron 35, Cruiser-Destroyer Group Three, and Battle Group Foxtrot. His seven years in Washington included two years in the office of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff.

*authoritative and memorable way. I take this opportunity, then, to share Frank Uhlig's remarks with the readers of the Naval War College Review.*



JOSEPH C. STRASSER  
Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy  
President, Naval War College

**T**HANK YOU FOR THIS MARVELOUS OCCASION. I am glad each and every one of you is here. Your presence honors me, and I shall not forget it.

I would like to talk a little bit about this college and say something about its people. But I am afraid I must begin with me. A few days ago I came across the draft of a note I had written to Admiral Strasser thanking him for a generous act of his. I said, "Such surprises are rare events." I went on to say, "What is not rare, however, is the daily pleasure of working with people who know that what they are doing is important, who like doing it, and who do it very well. From one end to the other, from top to bottom, the Naval War College is filled with such people. Largely because of them the ordinary work day is filled with satisfaction."

I do not know who created such an atmosphere for people to work in, but whoever he was—or whoever they were—it must have happened a long time ago. My candidate as the creator of this atmosphere is Rear Admiral Stephen B. Luce, who created so much else around here.

As a lieutenant commander in the Civil War, Luce not only took part in the Navy's failure to capture Charleston, South Carolina, but he also talked about it with General William T. Sherman, who was approaching that Southern stronghold from inland. Sherman told Luce that he would make the city fall without a battle: "I will cut her communications and Charleston will fall into your hands like a ripe pear." He did what he said he would do, and Charleston fell "like a ripe pear."

Luce had long admired the Army's "wealth of professional literature." He likened the Navy, in contrast, to "the nomadic tribes of the East who are content with the vague tradition of the past." This insight and his conversation with Sherman helped him see clearly the Navy's need for a college of war and for some serious writing on the subject so that in the future the Navy's senior officers could fight more successfully than they had at Charleston.

## 6 Naval War College Review

It took him nineteen years to bring such a college into existence. By that time he himself was a senior officer, with the rank of commodore. In order to become the first president of his new creation, Luce gave up his opportunity both to fly a rear admiral's flag and to command the Navy's principal fighting unit, the North Atlantic Squadron.\* When he opened his college in the old Newport Poor House, he began with the declaration, "Poor little poorhouse, I christen thee the United States Naval War College."

We are surrounded here by visual evidence of the men who made this college what Luce intended it to be and what it still is: the Navy's home of thought. There is a fine portrait of Luce himself at the top of the stairway to the next building—that is, Luce Hall. We are gathered in a room named for Alfred Thayer Mahan, the unknown officer whom Luce brought here from command of one of the Navy's small wooden warships cruising singly on a distant station. It was he who was to do the serious writing on war that Luce knew would be essential. Mahan did the job, and did it so well that he became more famous than the College itself.

At the top of the stairs leading here, to the Rotunda, there is a little room to one side. There you will find three portraits. One of them shows our first civilian professor, James Russell Soley. It was Soley who began our long and useful dedication to the advancement and teaching of international law. Soley later became the assistant secretary of the navy, a post to be filled also by both Theodore Roosevelt and Franklin D. The second portrait is of William McCarty Little. McCarty Little became the driving force behind the development and use of war gaming as a learning instrument and so led the way to the College's preeminence in that valuable field. He, who had injured an eye in service, came here as a lieutenant on the retired list. But he was so highly regarded that the Navy advanced him to captain, though still on the retired list. His portrait shows him so, with four stripes on his sleeve.

The final picture is that of Tasker H. Bliss, a soldier. Bliss was our first instructor from another service. Under Luce and Mahan he taught military tactics and the principles of modern strategy—not bad for a lieutenant. The portrait shows him wearing four stars. He was one of the first officers in the U.S. Army to reach that rank.

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\* *Author's note:* In the interest of both brevity and clarity, in my remarks I simplified some of the events in Luce's life. In fact, for two months in mid-1884, before taking over the College, Luce had held an acting appointment as rear admiral and the temporary command of the North Atlantic Squadron. But, as the College's official history puts it, "with approval for his fledgling Naval War College imminent, Luce preferred to continue his work for the college rather than accept permanent appointment as rear admiral in command of the squadron." See John B. Hattendorf, B. Mitchell Simpson III, and John R. Wadleigh, *Sailors and Scholars: The Centennial History of the U.S. Naval War College* (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press, 1984), p. 19.

It was in 1886 that he was commissioned a rear admiral and gave up the presidency of the College for a two-and-a-half-year tour in command of the North Atlantic Squadron. See John D. Hayes and John B. Hattendorf, eds., *The Writings of Stephen B. Luce* (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press, 1975), pp. 243–5.

Now we have many civilian professors in our intellectually powerful teaching and research faculty, as well as a fair number of retired officers, and a lot of officers from the other services. But these men were the first, and Luce picked them all.

Stephen B. Luce did become a rear admiral after all, and he did command the North Atlantic Squadron. Despite the small size of his command and the antiquity of his ships, he exercised the squadron hard. Thrice he exercised it in multi-service operations in local waters, once at Fishers Island off Mystic, Connecticut, and twice at Coddington Cove, only a mile from here. Each time, under the supporting fire of his ships, he landed an assault force against a defended shore, even—as was then the custom—sending officers and men from the ships' companies to take part in the battle on the beach. That truly was preparing to fight war from the sea.

And so it seems to me that this man of remarkable mind and spirit, who with so little achieved so much, was very likely to have been the source of the atmosphere which a hundred years later makes this college so attractive and exciting a place to be.

In times past, famous men such as Admiral William S. Sims at the end of the First World War and Admiral Raymond A. Spruance at the end of the Second, each of whom could have had almost any position in the Navy he wished, wished to return here for a third time, or a fourth.

Nowadays famous men are scarce in the Navy. But there are plenty of first-class people in the service and at the College. As we know, some of the best of them are drawn, or drawn back, to this college just as Sims and Spruance were.

I am fortunate that my new space in Luce Hall will be next to the office of one such, Captain Frank Snyder, and immediately above the office of another, Professor Joseph G. Brennan. I could not be in better company.

Another such person is my successor at the Naval War College Press, Dr. Tom Grasse. Tom, who came to us from the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California, is on board now. Between him and the rest of the splendid staff of the Press, you can be sure that the *Review* is in good hands.

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