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# Mahan on Naval Strategy: Selections from the Writings of Rear Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan

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given command of the 1st Marine Division, which had just battled its way back from the Chosin Reservoir. He was criticized for taking too many casualties during the battle for the Punchbowl (sixty-seven killed and 1,044 wounded—more losses than the entire Chosin Reservoir campaign); still, he received the Distinguished Service Cross.

However, most of Thomas's strife took place in Quantico and Washington D.C., where Thomas fought as a politician-general within the military-political establishment. Gerald Thomas was forceful, blunt, and loved military-political intrigue. He played the Corps' "old boy" network with great skill and helped shape the modern Marine Corps as an amphibious force in readiness. He believed that the Marine Corps' mission should be amphibious assault against defended enemy shores; that admirals should not act like generals (as had Rear Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner at Guadalcanal); that the Marine Corps should control its own close air support (the Air Force disagreed vigorously); that the Commandant should report to the Secretary of the Navy and not the Chief of Naval Operations; and that Congress, not the Joint Chiefs of Staff, should define the Marine Corps' roles and missions. (Both he and Vandegrift feared that if it were left to the Joint Chiefs, the Army would drown the Corps. Their intense lobbying made sure that the National Security Act of 1947 protected the Marine Corps.) Finally, he was convinced that the advent of nuclear weapons required that amphibious assault convert to vertical envelopment, sending Marines to future beaches entirely by helicopter—a

view officially endorsed in 1954. Millett writes that "the decision was the most important change in Marine Corps doctrine since Commandant John A. Lejeune endorsed the concept of the waterborne amphibious assault in 1921."

Allan Millett is a retired colonel in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve and a professor of military history at Ohio State University. He has managed to be true to both professions in this commissioned volume. The Marine Corps Historical Foundation awarded *In Many a Strife* the 1993 Wallace M. Greene, Jr., Award for the year's best work of Marine Corps history.

This book is not a page-turner; the author loves facts and uses interminable lists—of this volume's 456 pages, 103 are academic impedimenta. On the other hand, his attention to detail makes the work a valuable one for military professionals who want to analyze how things get done.

In his foreword, Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, Director of Marine Corps History and Museums, says of General Thomas, "He has been called the Richelieu of the Marine Corps—the 'gray eminence'—and that is not far off the mark." Bull's-eye!

J. ROBERT MOSKIN

author of

*The U.S. Marine Corps Story*

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Hattendorf, John B., ed. *Mahan on Naval Strategy: Selections from the Writings of Rear Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1991. 432pp. \$32.95

Like most intellectual icons, Alfred Thayer Mahan is often quoted but rarely read. Many are the naval officers and defense intellectuals who will passionately argue the validity of what passes, after digestion by generations of historians, for Mahanian thought. Few are those who actually crack the cover of *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783* to see for themselves, let alone track down one of Mahan's articles in the *North American Review*. This is understandable, since Mahan's ponderous prose and elaborate style, suitable for turn-of-the-century readers, have not aged well; he was no Hemingway. For those still willing to proceed slowly and admire the verbal topiary of his logic, the question is where to begin. Like most prolific commentators, the Admiral wrote a number of tracts that are repetitive or peripheral to his genius. Happily, Professor John B. Hattendorf of the Naval War College has edited a collection of Mahan's works that is both the best brief introduction to them and the one book on the subject to read if you intend to read no other.

*Mahan on Naval Strategy*, a volume of the U.S. Naval Institute's "Classics of Seapower" series, is no mere collection of quotes; it is Mahan in the raw, albeit in the form of selected chapters rather than complete works. It consists of eleven book chapters or essays, ranging from the prime thoughts of *The Influence of Sea Power* (1890), to a discourse on the importance of the new Panama Canal, to the (then single-ocean) fleet. Of all original sources, the book *Naval Strategy* (1911) is mined most deeply (five chapters), which is appropriate,

since it is there that Mahan lays out the elements of naval operations in precise terms along with his trademark historical illustrations. These are truly the best selections. In contrast, the article "The Persian Gulf and International Relations"—obviously chosen because of current interest in that eternal topic—falls short of its promise. In perhaps his densest prose, the Admiral concludes that the British Empire had a legitimate interest in dominating the Gulf region to keep open the sea route to India, surely not an original thought even for its time (1902). The essay does contain, however, the germ of a modern "joint service perspective": "Purely naval control is . . . [in the Gulf] a very imperfect instrument, unless supported and reenforced by the shore on which it acts." I recall General Norman Schwarzkopf saying something to that effect.

Professor Hattendorf should be commended; this is indeed the best of Mahan currently in print. However, his otherwise excellent editor's introduction seems to imply, probably unwittingly, that this is the first attempt of its kind. In fact, Naval Academy history professor Allan Westcott compiled a similar collection in 1918 for Mahan's original publisher, Little, Brown and Company. Westcott's volume can still be found in a few naval base libraries.

Professor Hattendorf has thoughtfully included "A Topical Catalog of [Mahan's] Quotations on Naval Strategy." For those desiring a few pithy quotations (call them "Mahanisms") to enliven a research paper or speech on naval matters, this part alone is worth the price of admission. There is even one appropriate for the new

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administration's thinking on defense matters: "A country can, or will, pay only so much for its war fleet. . . . Will you have a very few big ships, or more numerous medium ships? Where will you strike your mean between number and individual size? You can not have both, unless your purse is unlimited."

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Reynolds, Clark G. *The Fast Carriers: The Forging of an Air Navy*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1992. 503pp. (No price given)

*The Fast Carriers* by Clark G. Reynolds is a reprint, with minor changes, of a milestone book originally published in 1968. It provides a useful, provocative, and unique view of the development and employment of fast (or attack) aircraft carriers, with primary emphasis on the Second World War.

This is a book with a viewpoint; Clark Reynolds is often critical of both individuals and of the Navy in general and is given to broad, strong, and often unsupported statements. One may agree or disagree with the author's opinions but will never be in doubt about his position while reading this book; *The Fast Carriers* is clearly pro-carrier-aviation and pro-carrier-admiral.

The evolution of fast carriers and of their tactical and strategic employment is covered in an effective and interesting manner. This work is unusual in focusing on the interaction of flag officer and staff personalities, and on the unglamorous administrative and logistic

factors that are vital in successful campaign planning and execution. These factors, above all others, make this book "inust" reading for future flag and staff officers.

Although Reynolds (and, presumably, the aviator flag officers he interviewed) emphasizes the importance of the creation of an "Air" billet on the staff of the Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet (known as "COMINCH"), one could argue that the decision to require surface flag officers to have aviation chiefs of staff (and vice versa) had more immediate, and perhaps greater long-term, impact, especially inasmuch as this policy continues in force today.

One conclusion the U.S. Navy repeatedly drew from the Pacific operations, particularly the Okinawa campaign, was that the fast carriers (CVs) were vulnerable to land-based air, especially when they were "tied to a beachhead." This perception, and the Navy's command quarrels with the Army (in the person of General MacArthur), were apparently the genesis of the Navy's "in support of" policy, which avoided whenever possible giving operational or tactical command of large or "fast" aircraft carriers to non-navy commanders. This policy endured until carrier battle groups were "chopped" to the Central Command during Persian Gulf escort operations. To support this perception of carrier vulnerability, Reynolds quotes the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey as saying that "major carrier operations in World War II against land-based aircraft were conducted after the Japanese Air Forces had been reduced to a relatively impotent and ineffective force [excepting, of