

1990

My Parents, Rear Admiral and Mrs. Alfred Thayer Mahan

Lyle Evans Mahan

John B. Hattendorf

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Mahan, Lyle Evans and Hattendorf, John B. (1990) "My Parents, Rear Admiral and Mrs. Alfred Thayer Mahan," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 43 : No. 4 , Article 7.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol43/iss4/7>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

My Parents, Rear Admiral and Mrs. Alfred Thayer Mahan

Lyle Evans Mahan
(Edited and Annotated by John B. Hattendorf)

To his contemporaries as well as to later students of his writings, the personality of Alfred Mahan has been remote and difficult to understand. Held in awe by some and ridiculed by others, there has been no consensus. In these previously unpublished recollections, Mahan's youngest child and only son sketches his view of his parents. Despite some minor inaccuracies, these impressions provide useful insights into Admiral Mahan's character and personality.

Lyle Mahan went on to a successful legal and financial career in New York after having graduated from Groton School and Columbia University in 1902. He wrote the recollections of his father in 1935, more than 20 years after his father's death. Then in his mid 50s, he may well have been responding to a request from Captain W.D. Puleston, who was then writing a biography of Mahan. Lyle wrote the reminiscences of his mother in 1936, nine years after her death, apparently in response to a separate request from an unidentified source.

These reminiscences are reprinted by permission of the Special Collections Department, U.S. Military Academy Library. The original typescripts are dated as follows: 11 July 1935 for the recollections of Admiral Mahan, and 30 January 1936 for the recollections of Mrs. Mahan. These documents complement the "Recollections of Ellen Kuhn Mahan," Lyle's sister, which are printed in Robert Seager II and Doris D. Maguire, Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1975), vol. 3, pp. 719-730.

My Father

At the time of my birth in 1881, my father was over forty years of age. While I was still a baby, he went to sea on the *Wachusett*, which, as I recall,

Dr. Hattendorf is the Ernest J. King Professor of Maritime History at the Naval War College.

82 Naval War College Review

was on duty in the Atlantic and for a time was stationed at the port of one of the Central American Republics in which there was a revolution. He did not return from this cruise until I was about four years old, so that my first recollections of him are at about that date.¹

I remember standing in considerable awe of him, and, as a matter of fact, the same frame of mind continued until I was almost grown up, because, while never unkind, he always insisted on strict and implicit obedience. He was, however, always absolutely just. I never was on the terms of intimacy with him that I could have wished. There was a certain reserve in his character that seemed to prevent this, and the unfortunate situation may have been accentuated by the fact that he was in his later middle age before I knew him at all.

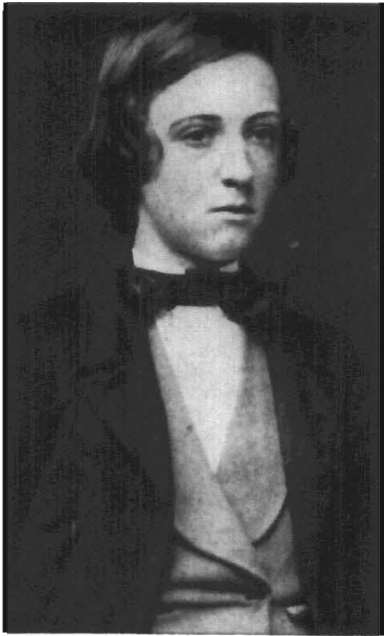
At the time my father returned from the cruise on the *Wachusett*, my mother and sisters and I were living with my mother's mother, Mrs. Manlius G. Evans, at the Hotel Hanover, 2 East 15th Street, New York City. Shortly after that time, my father was appointed to the Naval War College at Coasters Harbor Island, Newport, R.I. In *From Sail to Steam* my father gives an account of his experiences at that time in opening the sessions of the War College and getting the necessary furnishings, etc.²

The building, as he said, was formerly an alms house. It was an unpretentious structure and was divided into two separate portions. The westerly one, looking towards Narragansett Bay, was assigned to my father and his family. The easterly portion was occupied by Commander Duncan Kennedy and his wife and son. Just what his duties were, I do not know.³

The lower floor of my father's house, if it may be so called, were the living quarters. Of the upper floor, I only remember one room which was a large room with three exposures in which the lectures were given and in which my father worked. It also crosses my mind that one or two card parties were held there.

My principal memory of my father at this period is seeing him make the maps or plans of the various battles which he discussed in the lecture room. He had large pieces of red and green paper or very thin cardboard which he cut out roughly himself in the shape of ships and pasted on to large sheets of heavy paper to show the positions of the ships in the battles. This was something I had to imitate so I always wanted to cut out ships and paste them on paper too, which is undoubtedly why I recall this so well.

When my father was in deep thought, he would pace up and down the room with his head sunk forward a little bit and generally with his hands clasped behind him. He was slightly over six feet in height and very spare. His weight, I think, averaged between 150 and 160 pounds. His carriage was erect except that his head was apt to be bent slightly forward. On the whole, his carriage was graceful and easy.



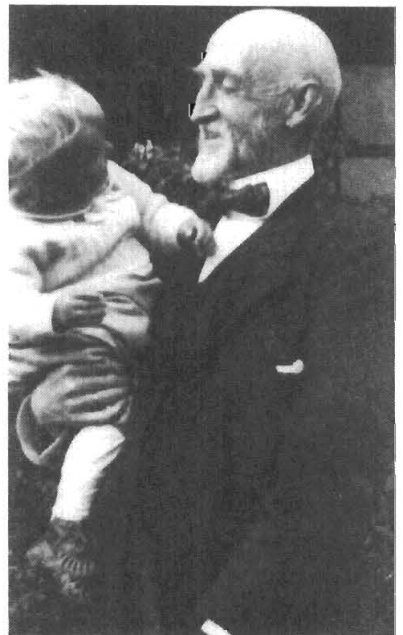
Midshipman Alfred T. Mahan



Lieutenant Alfred T. Mahan



Captain Alfred T. Mahan



Rear Admiral Alfred T. Mahan

I have heard it said, and I believe it is true, that my father was a strict disciplinarian on ship, although entirely just there as at home. My son,⁴ who was nine years old when my father died and who could take more childish liberties with him than I ever dared to, and in that way probably knew him better, and who was also very observant, said that there were two people in the world whom he knew who he thought were actuated only by what they believed to be right in their every action. One being his grandfather, and the other the Rector, meaning Reverend Endicott Peabody, Headmaster of the school which both my son and I attended.⁵

I recollect two incidents with regard to my father's disciplinary measures on shipboard which I heard in my childhood and which might have been told to me by him or by my mother who heard them from him. In one instance, there was a sailor who was always late in coming on deck. My father asked him what the trouble was and he said that he did not have time to get dressed. When my father told him that he would be called a half hour before the rest of the watch, the trouble did not recur.

In the other instance, there was a sailor who habitually failed to keep his feet clean. After several warnings, my father had one or two of the other sailors wash them with a broom, which cured this particular failing.

I believe that my father naturally had a violent temper but he had worked hard all his life to get it under control. I can only recollect two incidents of what I should call loss of temper on his part, both occurring when I was a well-grown boy or young man. In the first case, the incident was connected with a stage driver. In Quogue [Long Island], where the family has spent the summers ever since 1893, the station was a mile or so from the village, and anybody who wanted to go to New York before the days of the automobile, went to the station by stage. Each house in the village was supplied with a red flag which was hung up when the stage was wanted. My father wanted to go to the station one day and hung up the flag, but the stage driver did not see it. My father accordingly had to go to the station on his bicycle on a very hot day, and seeing the stage driver when he got about fifty yards from the station, began to berate him in no uncertain language, although not in the least profane. I know that he was very sorry for it afterwards and I believe apologized.

The other incident is connected with myself. We had a new waitress who had done something that startled my mother, I have forgotten just what it was, and my mother started to scold her, which I thought unfair and at which I remonstrated. My father told me to stop talking, which I refused to do, and he raised his voice very markedly to make me stop. These were the only two incidents which I remember of his having lost his temper even momentarily.

I never remember my father using any profane language beyond perhaps a very mild "darn." One of my cousins who recently died, told me that my

father had used such language on occasions and intimated that it might have been usual with him on shipboard. He said that once when his own father or uncle, I forget which, was walking along the waterfront with him, a boat was upset and a man fell into the water, and my father jumped into a boat in which there were some oarsmen, and in order to get them to hurry, swore at them roundly. This is a second- or third-hand account of what happened and I cannot vouch for its truth. I am merely trying to put down everything that may show any sidelight on my father's character.

About 1889⁶ we moved to New York City taking an apartment at 75 East 54th Street, which was the northwest corner of 54th Street and Park Avenue. We were on the top floor, the 5th, and there was no elevator. In those days, Park Avenue was very different from what it is now; the railroad tracks not being covered over so that every train that passed was very audible and sometimes in the early morning an engine would stop under our window and let off steam. I was sent to school in 42nd Street opposite what is now the site of the Public Library, which was then occupied by the old reservoir. It was very customary for my father to walk down with me at least as far as 42nd Street. I do not know for what purpose except that it was probably to exercise our dog, who was very much a part of the family. We had owned his mother and could not think of the family apart from the dog. He was a bull terrier, quite a bit larger than the average, and not of the present Boston type, but with a pointed nose. His name was Jomini, after the French General, author of *The Art of War* which exercised a very profound influence on my father's writings. My father either was very fond of walking or thought that he ought to take exercise. At any rate, he took the dog out every morning and afternoon, as far as I remember, and it seems to me in these walks he was more relaxed than at most other times. I remember that there was a small boy, I should say about six years old, who caused him a great deal of amusement. He wore a derby hat and we passed him frequently on the way down. My father also got a great deal of amusement because when Jomini first went out in the morning, he would make a dead-set at the birds in the street, and there were always quite a few of them. Once, to his great surprise, he caught one and immediately let it go. My father always urged him on his usually abortive charges.

My father took great pains with our religious training. He was a very devout Episcopalian himself, not one of the lip-service kind, but one who read the Bible and studied it very, very carefully. This is shown by his book *The Harvest Within*⁷ which has been praised by a great many churchmen. We were all taught to catechism, and each Sunday, one year, I had to learn by heart the collect for that day. One day I remember saying that I could not learn the collect and was told that that was all right, but that I would not go out to play until I did. I soon mastered it.

Not content with the catechism, my father himself got up what might be called a supplementary catechism explaining various things and the meanings of certain words used frequently in the church service, but which would be entirely unfamiliar to children. This I was also required to learn by heart.

When my father again resumed work at the Naval War College, a new building had been built, as narrated by him in *From Sail to Steam*.⁸ It was a very nice stone building, as I remember it, very close to Narragansett Bay, that is, on the west side of the island. His quarters again overlooked the Bay.

I cannot remember the exact time that we were in this place, but it was there, I believe, that my father was first urged to publish his lectures in book form. I think it must have been about 1890 and 1891. Of course, I was too young to know much about what was going on, but I afterwards learned that my father sent *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History* to several publishers, I believe about eight or ten, and that it was consistently turned down.⁹

It would be impossible to write anything about my father's life without saying a great deal about my mother.¹⁰ To my mind, they constituted a perfect team. I can never remember a cross word being spoken on either side. The few occasions on which my father ever expressed any annoyance was when he thought that my mother was doing too much work and tiring herself unnecessarily. She was a woman of very strong character and absolutely indomitable determination. She was also a wonderful manager. The problem of bringing up and educating properly three children on a captain's shore pay of \$3,500 a year was quite a serious one even in those days. During the early part of her married life, my mother kept a strict account of literally every penny that was spent. My father always turned his entire pay over to her each month and she gave back to him whatever he needed. This was because of no insistence on her part, but because he preferred to have it that way. He knew that she had excellent business sense and was very careful, and the care of money was something that he was glad to be relieved of. I don't think he even had a bank account until the latter part of his life. I remember my mother telling me once that she had never spent more in a month than my father's pay for that month, that is, up to the time that their income was increased from his writings and other sources, but that in one month she spent only seven cents less than the amount of his pay.

In addition to taking care of the house and the children, she was only too glad to turn her hand to anything that would help my father. When he started to write his lectures, it soon was evident that they would have to be typewritten. Without ever having had any experience, my mother bought a typewriter and learned to operate the machine by herself, and I believe that she personally transcribed every word written by my father that he published, certainly by far the greater part of it. This, I am very certain, was her own suggestion. She could deny herself any luxury or even necessity

if the occasion demanded, but she would do anything for her husband and children.

I do not believe that my father's books would ever have been published if it had not been for my mother's determination that they should. He was easily discouraged and had a very humble opinion of himself and his own abilities. She was, as I have said, indomitable and had supreme confidence in him. She was absolutely determined that what he wrote should be published and kept at him to make sure that he left no stone unturned.

Mr. James Russell Soley was Assistant Secretary of the Navy at about this time or shortly before. He was a successful New York lawyer and had published a book which I read with avidity when young called *The Boys of 1812*. It was a history of the naval war of 1812 between this country and Great Britain. My father came to know Mr. Soley when the question of the continuance of the War College was discussed, or he may have known him before, I am not quite sure.¹¹ At any rate, he happened to tell Mr. Soley of his difficulties in having the books published, and Mr. Soley, who believed in the value of his works, said, "Take them to my publisher, Little, Brown and Company of Boston, and I am sure that they will publish them." My father told me that Little, Brown and Company said that if Mr. Soley said the book was valuable, they would publish it without reading the manuscript. In this way the *Influence of Sea Power* was brought out, and my father always insisted on giving Little, Brown and Company the right to publish any of his books if they wanted to. The sale of books in England was taken care of by Messrs. Sampson, Low, Marston and Company, and Mr. R.B. Marston of that firm in London became a warm friend of my father's.

When my father was ordered to the *Chicago*, we moved permanently to New York. About 1891 or 1892, my father and mother bought a house, 160 West 86th Street, where the family lived until about 1905 or 1906.¹² Both my father and mother had a horror of owing any money except current bills which were always paid promptly on the first of the month. They carried this feeling to the extent of insisting upon paying for the house entirely in cash. The idea of owing money, even when it was secured by a mortgage, was thoroughly distasteful to both of them. The first summer that my father was away, we went to Quogue, Long Island, for the first time. This, I think, was in 1893, and we had a small and by no means water-proof house in what is known as Quogue, which is separated from Quogue proper by a small body of water known as Quantuck Bay. My oldest sister¹³ had several friends living there and my mother liked the place so much that she decided to build a house there, even in my father's absence. This shows very clearly the thorough understanding between them, that she should undertake something of this kind without consulting him except by letter. Of course, he approved of everything that she did. I say that the bringing up of the children and all matters relating to the household were always left to my mother without question. My father

88 Naval War College Review

considered that his job was to see that everybody did as my mother wanted them to do, although he would never hesitate to make a decision in an important matter where one had to be made, but on the whole, my mother was the manager, my father, the president, and felt that his main duty was to say "yes."

I remember the first summer the house at Quogue was built,¹⁴ my mother's brother came down to stay with her and he used to recall with glee the conversation he had with her at that time. He said, "Ellie, Alfred will hate this place," to which she replied, "Well, then we'll move away." He said, "What will you do with the house?" She answered, "Sell it." My uncle always said, "By jove, she would and would make a profit on it too." He was a successful business man himself, but this showed his confidence in my mother's business judgment. His own opinion as to my father hating Quogue was entirely wrong. He loved the place from the moment he saw it and as the years rolled by, the family steadily spent more time there.

During the years of my father's absence on the *Chicago*, we were naturally very much interested in his letters. Of course, as I remember, he told us about dining with the Queen of England and the Emperor of Germany, and also of some of the other honors which were conferred on him, but I fear that he did not do the various occasions justice. He was by nature an extremely modest man. It was very difficult even for his family to get him to talk about himself or what he had done. I knew, for instance, that he had been in the engagement at Port Royal during the Civil War, but I never could get him to tell me anything about it, nor did he say much of his other experiences. This accounts for the fact that I am able to tell so little about his earlier life.

He was modest too in other ways; for instance, at Quogue the men's bathhouse quarters and the women's were entirely separate and were so built that it was impossible to see into either of them from outside. Most of the men took advantage of this after bathing to take what we always call a sun bath, each man lying in the sun for periods varying from five minutes to an hour, in a state of nature or at the most with only the protection of a small bath towel. I know that my father thought this disgusting, to use his own words, although I am sure that very few men will agree with him. When I was approaching adolescence, he attempted one day to tell me something about the nature of the sexes, but it embarrassed him so that I hardly got any idea at all of what he was driving at and my knowledge had to be obtained from outside. Fortunately, it came in a way that was not at all injurious.

To return to the trip on the *Chicago*, I cannot remember anything of my father's letters distinctly, except that I do recall that he told, either in a letter or personally, after he came home, that one of the undergraduates at Oxford called down from the gallery, where they sat during the conferring of the degrees, "Look at the red man from the West." This was supposed to be very appropriate, since the persons upon whom the degrees are conferred

wear red gowns. If I remember right, my father was the first American who was honored with the degree of D.C.L. by Oxford.

My father had always seemed to me lacking in affection, but I believe that this was due to an inability on his part to show affection or it may have been some idea that demonstrations of affection were not the proper thing. He returned in March or April, 1895. I was just recovering from a very severe illness of which I almost died. My mother had not let him know that I was ill because she was afraid that it would worry him too much on his return voyage, but I remember that when he did return, one evening while I was lying in bed in a room adjoining the living room, that my mother told him about my illness. He certainly was terribly shocked and asked over and over again if she was sure that I was all right now. It was the first inkling I had of the feeling which lay beneath the surface.

The house on 86th Street was bought shortly after this and from that time until my marriage in 1904, our winters were spent there and our summers in Quogue in the house which my mother built during my father's absence. This is not the house in which my sisters live now,¹⁵ which was built in 1908 or 1909, but a smaller one on what is known as Quaquanantuck Lane. The only break in this routine was in 1898 when we took a trip abroad. My father had planned this trip for a long time, having retired from the Navy in 1897, I think it was, after completing forty years of service. War with Spain was in the air, but my father made particular inquiries of the Navy Department as to whether it was proper for him to go under the circumstances and was assured that it was. He had planned this trip with the utmost care. We were to be gone for six months, returning in the latter part of September from Southampton. I believe that all the tickets both ways had been bought before we left, and the itinerary mapped out exactly with each place that we were to stay and the dates set down.

We went by the South Atlantic to Naples arriving there early in April and making a short trip through southern Italy. We returned to Naples after about ten days or two weeks, and either there or at our next stop which was Rome, a cablegram came to my father calling him back to serve on the Board of Naval Strategy. Of course, he left us immediately, travelling through England and from there under an assumed name, taking a liner to the United States, but at his express wishes, the rest of the family finished out the trip as originally planned with very slight variations.¹⁶

A day or two after my father left, a cablegram came from William Randolph Hearst offering him a dollar a word to write as much as he cared to about the war. My mother immediately cabled back, "No," knowing that my father would not write for Hearst under any circumstances, and I may say that he entirely approved what she did. He was convinced that Hearst was an undesirable citizen and would not, under any circumstances, accept his money or write for his papers, and would never allow a copy of any of

Hearst's papers to be brought into the house. Sometimes he seemed almost fanatical upon certain subjects of this kind, but his feelings were always based on what he believed to be his duty, and he felt that to aid in any way the circulation of papers which he believed were doing harm was a sin on his part, even if it were to spend a cent, the price of the paper in those days, for a copy of one of the papers or even to seem to give them his approval by allowing a copy in the house.

I remember another circumstance which is not particularly appropriate at this spot, but which just came to my mind, this was during Wilson's administration when Daniels forbade the use of grog in the Navy. My father was highly incensed at this. He was not a drinking man, although he occasionally enjoyed a glass of wine, but to deprive a sailor of his grog was to him unthinkable. In fact, I believe that he strongly disapproved of any legislation designed to control people's private lives beyond preventing them from committing crimes.

The doings of the Naval Strategy Board¹⁷ are a matter of history so that all that I need to remark on is the heat which my father displayed at home with regard to the so-called Sampson-Schley controversy. As I remember it, without referring to any documents, not only did the question arise of whether Sampson or Schley should be given credit for the victory over Cervera's fleet, but whether either or both of them should be made vice admirals. My father, of course, was absolutely convinced that the credit belonged to Sampson as Commander-in-Chief, even though he was not with the fleet at the time that the Spanish ships came out of port. He said that all arrangements for possible contingencies had been made by Sampson before he left on a short trip for a conference, and that his orders were strictly carried out by everybody, except possibly Schley. He had never had any confidence in Schley, who was almost a contemporary of his, and said that he had caused the Strategy Board two days of intense anxiety because of disobedience of orders prior to the time of the battle. He felt that no credit was due to Schley any more than any of the captains in the fleet, possibly even less, although Schley was in temporary command. I remember at the time that he told us that at the Naval Academy in referring to Schley they used to say "Schley by name and 'sly' by nature."

The anxieties of the Strategy Board were not alleviated by the fact that they had an intensely hot summer in Washington that year.

In 1899, my father was appointed as the Naval Delegate of the United States at the Peace Conference at The Hague. With regard to this, the only noteworthy feature that comes particularly to my mind is his account of what happened when the final draft of the document prepared for the signatures of all the powers was submitted to the American Delegation.

That Delegation had agreed, from my father's insistence, that a reservation should be made that the United States would not submit to arbitration any

matter arising under the Monroe Doctrine. When the final draft came in, this had been omitted, and the document had almost received the approval of the American Delegation without noticing the omission, which was apparently due to an error of Holls,¹⁸ the Secretary of the Delegation. My father, however, noticed that it was omitted and in considerable excitement brought it to the attention of Mr. White,¹⁹ the Chairman of the American Delegation, so that the omission was corrected in time.²⁰

From that time on, our lives were comparatively uneventful. My father, having retired from the service, was not called to any active duty and spent his entire time at home, either in New York or at Quogue. He had very few amusements. He liked to take exercise, but only in the form of walking in the winter and either walking or bicycling in the summer. He also went in bathing, with considerable regularity, in the summer and thoroughly enjoyed it. Most of the time in the water he spent floating, and particularly enjoyed floating with his head towards the sea and letting the waves break over him. He always wore a jersey cap with a cork sewed on it so that he would be able to retrieve it if it was washed off, which was frequently the case.

He was extremely regular in his habits. Breakfast was supposed to be at 8:00 o'clock in the morning, and all of the family was expected to assemble for family prayers at that time, promptly, after which we had breakfast. Promptness was also the rule for all meals.

One of his regular duties, as he considered it, was exercising the dogs in winter. In summer, of course, they exercised themselves. Having them with him and seeing them play gave additional pleasure to his walks, which were generally along Central Park. He was certainly a home-loving man in every sense of the word, hating to be separated from his family and enjoying trips only if they were along, but if they were with him, he thoroughly enjoyed them.

I was married in 1904 and after this, unfortunately, saw very little of my father. The house in 86th Street was rented shortly after that time, and from then on most of the year was spent in Quogue and the family only came to New York for three or four months in the winter. Owing to the friction that unfortunately existed between my wife and my parents, I did not see nearly as much of them as I should have, for which, of course, I was largely to blame.

I think this concludes about all of my recollections. My father died on December 1, 1914, while in Washington. His death was unexpected and I was not informed of the seriousness of his condition in time to see him before he died. I do not think, however, that even the doctors expected the end to come as suddenly as it did. My father had not been in the best of health for several years, but when I last saw him, in the August before he died, there was nothing to indicate that he might not live for several years longer.

92 Naval War College Review

At this particular time, the World War had just broken out, and he was, of course, intensely interested and had written two or three articles for newspapers and magazines. It is well known that within a few weeks of the outbreak of the War,²¹ orders were issued that no Naval officer, either on the active or retired list, should write any article commenting on the War. This was to uphold Wilson's policy of neutrality in word and deed. My father was the only officer, so far as I know, who had written anything up to the time of the promulgation of this order, and he considered it a direct slap at him, especially as the order came to him not through the usual channels by way of the Brooklyn Navy Yard, but direct from Washington.

It also was widely known that he disapproved of the Administration's policies with regard to the Navy. He was a very nervous and sensitive man and this direct slap, as he considered it, preyed on his mind, and was, I am certain, the cause of his early death.

While he had been ill, he was quite hardy, and I am sure that he would have overcome his ailments and lived for a long time in the natural course of events. A manuscript which he had started for a new article remained unfinished. He obeyed the order so far that he would not even set pen to paper to write, even though he would not have thought of publishing what he had written.

My father was half Irish, as I believe that both of my Grandfather Mahan's parents were fullblooded Irish people. On his mother's side, however, there is a mixture of blood—English, French and Dutch. With the exception of his mother's father, who was English by birth, the rest of his ancestors had been in this country for many generations . . .²²

. . . he was related to the Van Countlandts and Jays in New York, but the relationship is not very generally known due to the fact that his great grandfather, James Jay, was never legally married to his great grandmother. James Jay lived in what is now Tenafly, New Jersey, and, as I am informed, took to live with him the daughter of some prosperous farmers in New Jersey. Neither he nor she believed in marriage, although at one time, at the solicitation of John Jay, the first Chief Justice of the United States, acting for himself and other members of the family, James did offer to marry his consort. She refused, saying that she had agreed to live with him as the lady of his household as long as they both wanted to continue the relationship, and that she would abide by that agreement, but that if he insisted upon a marriage, she would leave him immediately. Whether or not one agrees with her ideas, one must admire her courage, and the relationship was certainly far more moral than that of 75% of modern marriages.

James Jay and his consort lived together in love and harmony until her death, but because of the lack of a ceremonial marriage, as I understand, the relationship with the other members of the Jay family was never recognized.

My Mother

My mother's maiden name was Ellen Lyle Evans. She was the daughter of Manlius G. Evans and his wife, who was formerly Ellen Kuhn. She was born on November 27, 1851. She always had a very strong character and will and was positive in everything that she did. She was also, in her younger days, very alert mentally and physically. She was quite tall, about five feet nine inches, and also broad and heavy-set. I know very little about her earlier life except some fragments which she told me and which emphasized what I learned myself in later life. She was extremely punctual and very quick in everything that she did. In her earlier years, certainly she did not have the vice of procrastination to any degree.

Her family used to go to Sharon Springs, New York, in the summer, and I believe that it was there that my father and mother first met. My father, of course, was extremely religious, and he was drawn to my mother not only for her personal attractions, but because he could see the same trait in her. I believe that my mother was quite an attractive woman when she was young and was very popular among the young men at Sharon Springs.

My father was eleven years older than she was. The match, I know, was very distasteful to my grandfather.²³ I believe this was because he did not feel that a naval officer would make a good husband both for financial reasons and also because he would be away from home so much. In any event, my mother has told me that he would not have that damned naval officer around his house. However, when my mother made up her mind to do anything, she generally went through with it and she had made up her mind that she was going to marry my father. I believe that she was not yet twenty when they met. The probabilities are that this was in the summer of 1871 or possibly 1870,²⁴ although I believe it is the later date. When my grandfather saw that her mind was made up, he finally said that he would consent to the marriage if they would agree not to see each other for a year so that my mother could be sure that she knew her mind. This was agreed to and my grandfather, when he saw that my mother had definitely made up her mind, ended the probation period after six months. They were married on June 11, 1872.

Shortly after the marriage, my father went to South America and took my mother with him. Captain Puleston²⁵ stated that he was attached to the U.S.S. *Wasp* with headquarters, I believe, at Montevideo.²⁶ They were there until after the birth of my oldest sister, Helen Evans Mahan, who was born at Montevideo on August 6, 1873.

My mother was, among other things, a very excellent household economist. They were determined that they would not accept any help from her family who, at that time, were in a position to give it if they had wanted to, which they probably would not have done, and always lived on less than my father's pay, keeping account of every cent that she spent. She told me once that the

94 Naval War College Review

nearest she ever came to living beyond her income was one month when she spent seven cents less than the amount of my father's check.

Shortly after my oldest sister's birth, but I do not know exactly when, yellow fever broke out in Montevideo and my father felt that my mother and my sister should leave there. I do not know whether he was relieved from the South Atlantic station²⁷ or just how it occurred, but they crossed the Atlantic from Rio to Bordeaux to spend some time with my grandfather, grandmother, and aunt, who had then moved to Pau, France.²⁸ It was there that my younger sister, Ellen Kuhn Mahan, was born on July 10, 1877. Some time later they returned to New York, and I was born in that City on February 12, 1881.

Living on a naval officer's salary with three children, even in those days when money went further than it does now, is no joke, but I never have heard of my mother making any complaint about any hardships that she suffered from lack of money. Although she had been brought up in an environment bordering on luxury, she appeared to demand nothing for herself and when clothes were to be bought, she always considered her children first, not to speak of her husband. My father, I know, was frequently very annoyed because she went around wearing shabby clothes. Indeed the only times in his life that I can ever remember his being annoyed with her was because she was sacrificing herself for the other members of the family.

My father was unquestionably a man of very fine character and a great deal of determination, but he did not begin to have the driving power that my mother did. My earliest clear recollections in life were when my father was stationed at the Naval War College on Coasters Harbor Island, Newport, R.I. This was when the War College was in the old insane asylum building. I can remember my mother pounding away on the typewriter. This was done at her own suggestion. My father probably chanced to say that he wished he could have his manuscript typewritten and that was enough for her to undertake to do the typing herself, although she had never touched a machine in her life. She bought one I think secondhand and started to work. I doubt if my father ever wrote a word for publication that she did not type. It has always been a source of amusement to me that frequently my father would ask my mother to read his own handwriting, words that he could not make out himself, but she always was able to do it.

When it came time to publish his books, it was my mother's driving power that kept him to it. After one or two publishers had refused them, he began to get discouraged, but I do not think that in those days she knew what the word meant. She had the utmost confidence in my father's ability, and, in addition to that, the assurances of the officers who had listened to his lectures, and she knew that my father had a message for the naval world that ought to be published. My father just did not seem to feel that people in general

would be interested in what he wrote, but my mother had a decidedly opposite opinion.

My mother's willingness to do anything to lighten my father's burden is shown by the fact that when he was on the *Wachusett*, the rest of us lived with my Grandmother Evans and my aunt in order to save expense. Later on, when my father had returned, we spent a winter with his mother and sister in Elizabeth, New Jersey. This, I know, was a great trial to my mother although I was only six years old at the time, but I am very sure that she never complained about it.

In January, 1894, when I was at boarding school, my father was abroad in the *Chicago*. I was taken very seriously ill with measles and pneumonia. My mother came up and spent about six weeks at the school, leaving my sisters alone in New York. It was a tremendous ordeal for her as it was a very cold winter and she had to live in a boarding house outside of the school grounds. She came over every day, of course, and spent most of the time with me. I can remember one time when the doctors had small hope of my getting well that she fainted on a couch in the room. I was sufficiently conscious to be worried by it, but did not know just what had happened, and they told me that she had fallen. I was so much worried that the headmaster gave her a room in the school building, but in spite of all the anxiety and strain, she did not let my father know that I was ill as she did not want to worry him. The first he knew of it was when he got back to New York in April.

The family's fortunes were considerably augmented about this time because my Grandmother Mahan²⁹ died in 1893 leaving my father a small amount of money, and my Grandmother Evans, in 1894, leaving my mother a considerably larger amount. Nevertheless, while we were more comfortable, the strain was not entirely eased, as my education was quite a drain. However, about the time I entered college in 1898, an uncle of my mother's died and left her a very considerable amount of money so that after that there was little financial worry. The first house in Quogue was built with my father's inheritance in 1894, and in 1898 a house was purchased in New York.

I presume it may have been largely a reaction from this strain that affected my mother's health. She had always had a certain amount of rheumatism. She was then over forty-five years old. From that time on, she was constantly going to the doctor and had lost a great deal of her alertness. Her will, however, remained as strong as before, although her body was weakened very considerably. I do not think she ever got over the habits of economy which had taken such a strong hold of her during her early married life, as she always seemed to feel that she was hard up, although there was little ground for that feeling. She never would spend any money on herself and always dressed in the simplest possible clothes. She was extremely warm-blooded and would frequently go out in a skirt and blouse when other women were wearing heavy

coats. This is a characteristic which I have inherited from her. In hot weather, she suffered very considerably.

You have asked me to give you a description of my mother. I believe that her eyes were gray and she had fairly regular features with a rather prominent though straight nose. Her hair was quite dark when she was young, although ever since I have any clear recollection it was gray, being white when she died. Her face and forehead were always very wrinkled since I can remember, which seems to be a family characteristic. Her hair was naturally wavy though not curly.

There is no picture of my mother in existence so far as I know. She had an unconquerable aversion to being photographed, an aversion shared by my father although he had to submit to it occasionally; she never did. I cannot remember ever having seen even a snapshot of her.³⁰ She did have a tintype taken of her when she was a girl, but I do not know even the whereabouts of that.

Notes

1. Lyle Evans Mahan was born on 12 February 1881 in a house which the Mahans had rented on 11th Street, just off of Fifth Avenue, in New York City. At that time, the forty-year old Commander Mahan was serving as navigation officer at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. In August 1883, when Lyle was two years old, Mahan left New York to take command of USS *Wachusett*, based at Callao, Peru. When Mahan arrived on the South Pacific station, it was the fifth and final year of the War of the Pacific. In March 1885 Mahan and *Wachusett* were at Panama City when the Panamanians revolted against Colombia. The following month he cruised off El Salvador at the time when Guatemala was attempting to annex Nicaragua, Costa Rica and El Salvador. He rejoined his family in September 1885 enroute to assignment at the Naval War College.

2. A.T. Mahan, *From Sail to Steam: Recollections of Naval Life* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1907), see pages 239-300.

3. Built in 1820 by the city of Newport as an alms house, it is now Founder's Hall at the Naval War College. Today it houses the Naval War College Museum. Kennedy, then a lieutenant, was on the administrative staff at the Naval War College in 1887.

4. Alfred Thayer Mahan, II (1905-1989).

5. Groton School.

6. Mahan and his family moved to this address on 1 October 1890, after having spent July through September at Hall Cottage, Merton Road, Newport, RI.

7. *The Harvest Within: Thoughts on the Life of a Christian* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1909).

8. The new building, now named Luce Hall, is mentioned only in passing in *From Sail to Steam*, p. 313. Mahan took charge of the new building on 22 July 1892. The College re-opened for classes on 6 September of that year, having been closed since 1889.

9. Mahan began to look for a publisher in September 1888, offering it first to Charles Scribner's Sons, who had published his first book, *The Gulf and Inland Waters* (1883). Finally, in October 1889, through James R. Soley, Little Brown and Co. agreed to publish it. The finished book appeared in the first week of May 1890.

10. Ellen Lyle Evans Mahan (1851-1927).

11. Soley, onetime Naval Academy instructor and international lawyer, became Librarian of the Navy Department Library in 1882. In 1885 he became the first civilian instructor at the Naval War College, lecturing on international law through 1889. In July 1890 he became Assistant Secretary of the Navy, becoming the foremost spokesman in Washington for the work of the War College.

12. The family remained in the rented apartment on East 54th Street from 1890 until June 1895. They moved into the newly purchased house at 160 West 86th Street in February 1896. They lived there during the winters until September 1905.

13. Helen Evans Mahan (1873-1963).

14. "Slumberside," the house at Quogue, was completed in the late spring of 1894.
15. "Marshmere," built in 1909.
16. Mahan and his family left New York on a six month's leave of absence on 26 March 1898. He received the order to return to Washington at Rome on 25 April, departing Rome on 27 April and arriving in Washington on 9 May, for duty on the Naval War Board.
17. Mahan's "The Work of the Naval War Board of 1898: A Report to the General Board October 29, 1906," is printed in Seager and Maguire, *Letters and Papers*, vol. 3, pp. 627-643.
18. George Frederick William Holls, New York lawyer, non-voting secretary and legal counsel.
19. Andrew D. White, historian, diplomat and former president of Cornell University.
20. This incident involved Article 27, which as originally written would have required *all* nations to become involved in the disputes of any two nations. While others in the American delegation approved the wording, Mahan alone saw that it was a violation of the intent of the Monroe Doctrine, and quickly persuaded his colleagues to introduce a clause exempting the United States and the Monroe Doctrine.
 21. On 6 August 1914.
 22. Omitted here is a reference to an attached genealogical chart.
 23. Manlius Glendower Evans, a Philadelphia businessman.
 24. They met in July 1870. Mahan proposed to her 14 August 1871.
 25. This may refer to a draft chapter of Captain William D. Puleston, *Mahan: The Life and Work of Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, USN* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939).
 26. Mahan took command of *Wasp* on 17 February 1873.
 27. Mahan passed on command of *Wasp* at Montevideo on 2 January 1875.
28. In order to reduce living costs following his financial losses in the Panic of 1873, Glendower Evans moved his family to Pau, in the department of Basse-Pyrennes in the south of France. Between duty stations, Mahan and his wife took a six-month leave of absence to visit her family there. They returned to the United States in May 1875 and Mahan later took up an assignment at the Boston Navy Yard. In December 1876, following the disputed election of Rutherford B. Hayes, outgoing Secretary of the Navy Robeson punished Mahan for his outspoken views, and forced him into taking a leave of absence. On half-pay, he could only afford to live with his in-laws in France, so he returned to Pau in January 1877 with his wife, then three months' pregnant. They remained there only until September 1877, when the new administration recalled Mahan to be head of the Department of Ordnance and Gunnery at the Naval Academy. He remained there until July 1880, when he received orders to the Brooklyn Navy Yard.
29. Mary Okill Mahan (1815-1893), widow of Dennis Hart Mahan (1802-1871). There is a brief recollection of her by Lyle Mahan in this same collection, not printed here.
30. A photograph of her, with her daughter, may be found in Robert Seager II, *Alfred Thayer Mahan: The Man and His Letters* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1977), p. 313.



Alfred Thayer Mahan did not always win full praise from his critics. For example, a reviewer from the *Manchester Guardian*, while conceding Mahan's "wonderful power of exposition," also declared that he had "no skill in story telling, no power of color or of humor, no liveliness, none of that delight in detail which makes a memoir great and damns a history." As for his style, it was less attractive "than the style of any man of similar eminence. It is cold, it is heavy, it is unrhythmical; it is without any quality of beauty. But as a historian he compels admiration—he has such a grasp upon his subject; his cold, clumsy, telling phrases go home so deeply. His 'nuts of knowledge' are heavy round-shot."