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ALFRED THAYER MAHAN SPEAKS FOR HIMSELF

Mention of the term "seapower" is certain to evoke a reference, spoken or otherwise, to Capt. Alfred Thayer Mahan. His thoughts, ideas, and concepts have been discussed, repeated, and enshrined, particularly and appropriately in naval circles, ever since the publication in 1890 of his seminal book The Influence of Sea Power Upon History which was followed by nearly a quarter of a century of prolific writing until his death in 1914. Only recently with the publication of his letters and papers has the man behind the myth been illuminated. Professor Field's discussion of this monumental and important work makes a significant contribution to our knowledge of Mahan as a person.

by

James A. Field, Jr.

Americans, a French wit once observed, converse with their Founding Fathers as if they were still alive. The observation seems especially apt in this bicentennial year, given the activities of the tourist trade, the souvenir industry, the Naval War College, and the population at large. Indeed, the traditional dialog with such notables as Franklin, Washington, and Jefferson has recently been broadened by President Ford's invocation of Tom Paine, for whom Theodore Roosevelt could find no better description than "filthy little atheist." One pardon leads to another.

Along with these enduring national ancestors, the Navy also has its own. In operational terms they go back to John Paul Jones, Edward Preble, and Stephen Decatur. But for conversational purposes, none comes close to Alfred Thayer Mahan. Like the apothegms of the Revolutionary generation, his also endure: the 1975 CNO "Strategic Concept for the U.S. Navy" makes obeisance to the continuing importance of his formulations and carefully exculpates him from accusations of lack of foresight as, for example, his failure to anticipate the development of sea-based projection of power against land and the coming of the SSBN. Still, it may be said that over the years the liveliness of this conversation has tended to diminish. Having attained the status of prophet, Mahan is more praised and quoted than read. As a guest at the party he has, like so many great men, become something of a drag. The great virtue of this extensive collection of the letters and papers of the inventor of seapower is that it gives him, after many

years of hagiography, the chance to speak for himself.*

Like so many of his contemporaries, Mahan was a prolific correspondent: the three volumes of the *Letters and Papers,* which span the years from 1847 to 1914, contain some 2,200 pages of his writing. Nevertheless, as the editors point out, the collection is far from complete, and in fact it seems unlikely that more than a quarter of his output has survived. There are, for example, only three letters to his father, Professor Dennis H. Mahan of the Military Academy, and barely a dozen to his mother; for the Civil War period nothing remains; the yield from the "lost period" of Navy Department correspondence in the 1890's is limited; the files of many of his correspondents are lost or unavailable. So there are major gaps. We know, for example (to return to present concerns), that Mahan described the 1876 Centennial Exhibition at Philadelphia as "very fine indeed." But we are not told whether or not he went there to observe the monster Corliss steam engine or to listen to Mr. Bell's talking invention which so startled the Emperor of Brazil. Incomplete though it is, the collection is still of great interest. It begins with two letters written before the age of 8 which concern—appropriately, in view of Mahan's later career—the omnipresence of God and the need for Fourth of July fireworks. It ends 10 days before his death, in the fall of 1914. If there are gaps, there are also riches.

The childhood record is, predictably, very slight. The body of the work begins with Mahan's Annapolis years, for which the surviving material indicates an attractive, spirited, principled, and highly intelligent adolescent. When he bestirred himself, Mahan found he could lead the class. Some of the personal costs of strict adherence to military ethics appeared when he chose to be guided by the book rather than by bonds of friendship and put some classmates on report. On his midshipman's cruise to the Azores, life at sea appeared to be "the most happy careless and entrancing life there is," and a stiff breeze with the ship heeling well over produced "a wild sort of delight that I never experienced before." But the preaching in chapel was hard to suffer; the efforts to "bully you into religion" were exasperating; religious young men seemed but "milksops"; and efforts to introduce a Bible Society led him to contemplate the organization of an opposition group.

At the Academy he had a healthy and appropriate interest in the opposite sex, the "infernal women," as he once referred to them, who on occasion made him overstay his liberty. Indeed, the charms of the daughter of the Commandant of Midshipmen were responsible for his first recorded venture into strategic planning: "I have laid out my plans on paper so as to have them clearly before me, as Napoleon did on his campaigns and I am going to follow them out consistently...." Regrettably, neither operation plan nor action report survives.

After graduation from the Academy, Mahan was ordered to a tour with the Brazil Squadron. The outbreak of the Civil War found him writing to the Secretary of the Navy to suggest a mystery ship operation against Confederate raiders and volunteering to command this hazardous operation. No response to this proposal has been found, and there follows a gap in the record which extends from October 1861 to June 1865. When the letters resume we find Mahan on leave recuperating from "West Indies fever." In the intervening years he had served at the capture of Port Royal, on blockade

Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan, edited by Robert Seager II and Doris D. Maguire, 3 Vols., pp. xvii, 718; xiii, 745; xi, 873. Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, Maryland, 1975.

duty, at the Naval Academy during its wartime removal to Newport, on the 1863 midshipman's cruise under Lt. Comdr. Stephen B. Luce, with the South Atlantic Squadron, and finally with Dahlgren before Charleston at the time that Sherman arrived at the sea. After recovering from the aftereffects of his fever, he spent the better part of a year on duty in the gulf, observing the activities of the French in Mexico. In January 1867, a lieutenant commander at the age of 27, he reported aboard the U.S.S. *Iroquois,* and in the next month sailed for a 2½ year tour in the Far East.

The Asiatic Squadron in those days was far out at the end of the line. Outward bound by way of the Cape of Good Hope, *Iroquois* took 6 months en route to Aden and 3 more to reach Hong Kong. Mail transit time was measured in weeks or months: the news of the great earthquake of 1868 in Chile, and of the accompanying tidal wave which destroyed two Navy ships, took over 3 months to reach Shanghai. If this distance in space and time effectively cut one off from home, it might still have been expected that the chance to observe the great traditional cultures of the East responding to the new pressures of the West would have been of great interest to a bright young officer. But somewhere in the years since 1861 a change in personality had taken place. The lively agnostic young midshipman and the thrusting young officer who had volunteered to entrap Confederate raiders have disappeared. The Mahan of the Eastern cruise is a new person: he is troubled by doubts; a new religiosity has developed; introspection, hypochondria, and depression are apparent. The diary which he kept from 1868 to 1869 shows us what appears to be a sorely troubled young man.

Repeatedly, in his journal, Mahan set down rules of conduct against which he assessed, usually unhappily, his daily performance of duty, the nature of his conversation, and the course of his relationships with his fellows. Repeatedly he chastised himself for his smoking and drinking, perhaps sensibly in the latter case, since some 20 percent of his classmates appear ultimately to have destroyed themselves by the bottle. Like all young sailors since the dawn of history, he found himself on occasion "assaulted by very gross thoughts," or at least by "soft and sensual" ones. Unlike sailors of any generation but his own, he meticulously recorded in his diary the occasions when these assaults occurred (and sometimes, indeed, the occasions when they did not).

This period on the Asiatic station was marked by a close personal friendship with the Assistant Surgeon of *Monocacy,* an attachment centering on the problem of salvation. Happily, the doctor had been converted; regrettably, he showed signs of backsliding; and for over a year the almost daily diary entries describe their meetings ashore, the loan of books and sermons, exhortations and worries, and discussions of religious truth, while continuously demonstrating an extreme sensitivity to imagined slights, missed appointments, and the like. Ultimately, though, the association ended as suddenly as it began. In the summer of 1869, the doctor was ordered back to the United States, yet although he continued in the service for another 22 years, the only indication of further contact is a brief mention by Mahan of the receipt of a letter in 1894. Such a break comes in startling contrast to the enduring relationship that Mahan maintained with his ex-classmate Samuel Ashe, which gave rise to a correspondence that lasted all their lives. In general, it seems clear, Mahan held himself aloof from close associations; although godfather to the son of the officer who served for 3 years as his executive on the South Atlantic station, he appears never subsequently to have corresponded or otherwise kept

in touch; and his daughter, after his death, described him as "The Cat That Walked By Himself" and said she had never heard him speak of any friends but two.

By the time of his Far Eastern cruise, Mahan had also developed problems in his relations with his superiors. While at the Academy he had held somewhat romantic views on the virtues of subordination and discipline. An argument with a female friend about Napoleon, he supporting and she opposed, led him to praise great men "of unrelenting heart" who overcome all obstacles: "every great man that ever lived had the nature of a despot." The outburst appears to have frightened the lady, and indeed it seems likely that Mahan expressed himself strongly, for this was the period when he was suffering the hostility of his classmates for having set obedience to regulations above comfortable custom. A few days later these feelings surfaced again, a discussion of the importance of moral courage, of the unfitness of America's republican institutions for war, and of the corruptions brought about by political influence: "our God damned American independence forbids us to cultivate the virtue that alone will save us . . . passive unresisting obedience."

One should not, of course, place too much emphasis on these emotional comments by the young midshipman. But there is a remarkable contrast between his early aspiration to turn himself into "an unresisting, obedient officer" and his later response to authority while serving first as executive officer of *Iroquois* in 1867-69 and much later as flag captain of *Chicago* in 1893-94. During the tour on *Iroquois*, the diary is full of tension with Capt. Earl English. "My mind was harassed by angry thoughts of the Captain and his interference." "This forenoon the Captain has been more than unusually trying." "The Captain was provoking as usual in great ways and small ways." The quotations could be multiplied. And while in fairness it should be noted that his views softened when he himself took over command—"I appreciated better than before the annoyance that Captain English must have felt when things went wrong"—a similar response developed a quarter of a century later during his cruise as commanding officer of *Chicago* with Rear Adm. Henry Erben, Commander North Atlantic Squadron, embarked. The admiral was characterized by "sour surliness"; " . . . when annoyed by the merest trifle, he is intolerable . . .. He is loudmouthed, blustering and profane."

Worst of all of the new symptoms, for one who had chosen a naval career, was the fact that life at sea had lost its charm. As early as the spring of 1867, while outward bound for the Orient, Mahan wrote that "the rocking of the ship, which I once liked," had become "excessively tiresome." In the next year, following a spell of bad weather, he described his resulting anxieties: "my mind seems half broken down by the strain. If only I could get out of the service, how glad I would be to go."

But all tours of duty come to an end, and in September 1869 he was ordered home. He had thought briefly of returning by way of the Pacific, but in fact went back westward, spending some time in India, passing through the newly opened Suez Canal, and visiting France on his way. This return in the direction whence he had come reflected the contemporary pattern of naval deployment, for the Asiatic Squadron in the late 19th century was an eastward projection of American presence. Despite his tour in the Far East and later service in the Pacific Squadron on the west coast of the Americas, Mahan never crossed the Pacific or visited the Hawaiian Islands and appears not to have seen a map of Guam until 1911.

Reaching home in May 1870, Mahan shortly embarked upon a somewhat deliberate courtship. In August 1871 he

became engaged, and late in the next year he was married. In December 1872 he was promoted to commander and sailed with his wife for Montevideo, where he assumed command of the decrepit sidewheeler *Wasp* of the South Atlantic Squadron.

With the end of Mahan's Far Eastern tour, the diary also ends, and as the collection returns to correspondence with family and friends the tone changes. No longer is the reader presented with so transparent a window into Mahan's emotional world. Yet some of the traits evidenced in the diary were to remain with him, in one form or another, throughout his life. The tension with higher authority reappeared as something of a persecution complex during the early years of the War College, most notably when the prospect of detachment to sea duty arose. But it also had its more constructive manifestations, as in his efforts to stimulate congressional reform of the corruption and decay that beset the post-Civil War Navy, and in his lobbying in defense of the War College against skepticism and hostility on the part of Secretaries of the Navy, bureau chiefs, and members of Congress.

Equally, the deep religious concern continued throughout his life, evidenced in letters of spiritual guidance to his daughters and, in his later years, in addresses and articles almost as numerous as those on naval matters. By the 1890's he is urging the Church Missionary Society to do more for seamen in port. In the next decade come frequent addresses and papers to Episcopal Church groups on such matters as the purpose of a life's work, the Words of St. Peter, problems of foreign missions, and the doctrine of the Trinity. On this last subject, Mahan took high ground: while approving of foreign missions as conducive to ecumenicism and the diminution of sectarian "corporate separateness," he refused adamantly to accept Unitarians as fellow-workers in the vineyard. Yet, howevermuch his faith permeated his life, he was very clear as to the different realms confided to Caesar and to God, and an organized effort of the clergy in support of international arbitration provoked an outraged and denunciatory letter to *The New York Times*. God and Caesar, we may say, advanced on parallel lines throughout Mahan's life, and it seems appropriate that his last books should have dealt with these two abiding concerns: *The Harvest Within: Thoughts on the Life of a Christian* (1909), and *Naval Strategy* (1911).

The concern with religion followed naturally enough from the diary record of the Far Eastern tour. But that Mahan should have become the world's most famous naval historian, given the tensions of this cruise and his strongly stated distaste for naval life, is more surprising. This distaste continued to find expression, and in no moderate terms: in 1884 he was writing his young son to explain the drawbacks of the sailor's life; a decade later, in a letter to his wife, he hoped the boy "would not be such a fool to take up this absurd profession . . .." This outcry, presumably, was stimulated by his distress at being ordered away from the War College to the command of *Chicago*, an occasion which elicited the further comment: "I always prefer port to sea . . . I had forgotten what a beastly thing a ship is, and what a fool a man is who frequents one." The joys of the midshipman's cruise were far behind him.

One can perhaps see these outcries as deriving first from a frustration at being denied a career he had not yet discovered, and later at having that career interrupted. Problems of personality aside, however, such continuing complaints inevitably raise the question of the truth of the persistent rumor that Mahan was a poor shiphandler. Resort to the index of this collection as the short way to an answer would tend to confirm this view: there are 17

references to "*Seamanship:* failures in," as against 10 to "*Seamanship:* successes in." But such rudimentary cliometric procedure does not seem conclusive. The failures noted are mostly small matters and the fact of notation suggests a self-critical perfectionism. What does seem clear is that there existed a sensitivity in this area which lasted to the end: bringing *Chicago* home at the end of his last cruise, Mahan ostentatiously took her first into a North River pier and then moved her to the Navy Yard without employing a pilot.

So far as these records go, then, there seems no conclusive support, at least in the shiphandling line, for the dictum that "it is not the business of a naval officer to write books." But a malicious reader could, if he wished, find impressionistic support for an argument that naval officers should not read them. Adm. Sir George Tryon, RN, perhaps the most spectacularly incompetent shiphandler of the century, who managed by ordering an impossible maneuver to crash together his flagship H.M.S. *Victoria* and H.M.S. *Camperdown,* sinking both flagship and himself in the process, was so great an admirer of Mahan that he was said to have slept with his books.

If the correspondence offers no very clear answer as to Mahan's seamanship, the same cannot be said about his ability in administration. A command in the South Atlantic was followed by a tour at the Academy, and then in the years 1880-83 by assignment as head of the navigation department at the New York Navy Yard. For this period a fairly extensive body of correspondence with the Department remains, covering a wide variety of subjects: tests of new model lanterns and navigational instruments, the problems that accompanied the coming of electricity, the administration of civil service workers, the provision of stores for the Asiatic Squadron. The impression they leave is of a clear and businesslike mind doing an orderly, systematic, and meticulous job. If, in his private moments, he continued to regret his choice of career, there is small evidence that he took his regrets to the office.

One could no doubt attribute this efficient performance at the Navy Yard to a mixture of natural ability and Victorian sense of duty or to a lack of obvious alternative employment. More surprising, given the reiterated statements of distaste for naval life, is Mahan's demonstrated concern for the reform of the Naval Establishment. Following his return from the South Atlantic in 1875, the general decay of the Navy led him into an extensive correspondence with politicians in which he emphasized the responsibility of the Secretary for the prevalent bribery and corruption and urged a congressional investigation to clean up the navy yards. By March 1876 these concerns had produced a very long letter to the chairman of the House Committee on Naval Affairs covering such perennial problems as the decline of command authority, the need for better examinations and fitness reports and for accelerated retirements to open the way to promotion, the defects of the bureau system, and the need for improved ship design.

In all this correspondence, Mahan measured performance against the crucial question which the Civil War had illuminated and the postwar years had obscured: "What is necessary for a state of war?" By the summer of 1876 the "excited interest" he had taken and the effort he had expended in the controversy had left him "a good deal run down." But the interest did not die: 5 years later, despite the improvements accomplished by a change in administration, he is writing to the new Secretary on many of the same subjects. This political activity no doubt provided good practice for his later lobbying on behalf of the Naval War College. For the moment, however, it led him to a

change in political allegiance, no easy step in those days. Despite the improvements in the Navy that came with the Arthur administration, the continued sad state of the service and worries about the "imperial policy" of James M. Blaine led Mahan in 1884 to place his hopes in the victory of Grover Cleveland.

It was in these years of shore duty that Mahan first turned his hand to writing for publication. Here success came slowly. In 1876 an article on the quarrels between staff and line was rejected by the *Army and Navy Journal*. A visit with his in-laws at Pau, where they had retired owing to financial reverses, gave rise to a small book on southern France which was rejected by two publishers. There followed an essay on the more likely subject of "Naval Education," which won third prize in a Naval Institute contest and was printed in 1879. Four years later he published his first book, *The Gulf and Inland Waters*. Since it is as a writer that he made his reputation and since he had prided himself from his Academy days on his mental capabilities, it is of some interest to consider what the papers reveal about his intellectual habits over the years between the Civil War and the summons to join the infant War College at Newport.

Over the course of these two decades, Mahan's mind had not been idle. If, as he later wrote, he had been "drifting on lines of simple respectability" when Luce's letter reached him, he had not let his brain atrophy. While at sea he had put some effort into improving his foreign language skills and had read widely. Curiously, however, the letters contain hardly any references to the subject which was to become his life work. Other than professionally oriented material on navigation, electricity, and the like, his principal literary diet consisted of the popular literature of the day (Bulwer-Lytton, Irving, Longfellow, Scott, Tennyson, Thackeray); of religious and devotional works (Butler, Renan, Swedenborg, Taylor); and of general history (Guizot, Motley, Ranke). No doubt the references are incomplete—at a later date he claimed to have read Napier's *Peninsular War* during this period—but the apparent lack of interest in military or naval history is nonetheless striking. Nor is there any mention, in the extensive references that do remain, of the American "imperialist" writers with whom latter-day historians love to associate him, or of the contemporary European literature of imperialism, or of Charles Darwin.

What is abundantly clear, however, by the 1880's, is that his mind had been prepared for something, even if the direction it was to take was still uncertain, and that it was capable of very powerful concentration and effort. When he was asked, for reasons which remain obscure, to write a book on the Navy in the Civil War, he was on duty at the New York Navy Yard. Accepting "with great misgivings" because he "wanted the money," he began work in late December 1882. Despite the requirements of his job and the handicap of an hour-long commute each way to work, he had completed six chapters by 12 April 1883 and the entire work by 19 May, a truly extraordinary accomplishment. The impressive abilities that Mahan demonstrated in the writing of *The Gulf and Inland Waters* were again to be set aside with his return to sea in command of *Wachusett* of the Pacific Squadron. But in late summer 1884 there came the fateful letter from Admiral Luce, offering a teaching position at the newly established Naval War College, and the great period began.

Asked to provide a course of lectures on naval history, Mahan began by considering the importance of the sea and of "Sea Power," a term he coined himself, in the affairs of nations. Faced with the problem of how to "make the experience of wooden sailing ships, with

their pop-guns useful in the naval present," he proceeded to seek out naval analogies to the land campaigns described by Jomini, which would show "that the leading principals of war received illustration in the old naval experience," and would demonstrate "the tremendous influence Naval Power, under whatever form, has exerted upon the Course of History." In this effort he displayed the same formidably concentrated energy that had produced the earlier book: setting to work in an area he had never studied, he completed his research in a mere 8 months and his writing in only 4 more. Having begun his reading in October 1885, he had his lecture series completed by the following September, at which time he found himself president of the War College, presiding over its second session.

There followed a considerable effort at stylistic revision, together with some slight amplification of content, and in 1890 *The Influence of Sea Power upon History 1660-1783* was published. With the appearance of this analysis of the course and consequences of the imperial wars of the late 17th and 18th centuries, end-of-the-century imperialists suddenly found their own world comprehensible. If the impact on Mahan's own service and country was for the moment small, in England, at least, he could have said with Byron that he awoke one morning to find himself famous.

The event was hardly predestined. For both author and book there had been narrow escapes. On leaving the Academy, the young Mahan had sought duty on the U.S.S. *Levant;* his hopes had been disappointed and *Levant* had sailed without him, only to be lost without trace. Since that time he had survived the hazards of the Civil War and of the sea, drink, illness, and depression, and his repeatedly expressed desire to quit the service. The chance of assignment at the War College came only after Luce's first choice, Caspar Goodrich, had declined the offer. When orders to Newport had been delayed, Mahan had irritably attempted to decline the post for lack of time to prepare. Nor did the completed work have totally plain sailing. The first two publishers to whom he offered the manuscript turned it down. An attempt to extract $2,500 in subsidies from "wealthy men" netted only a conditional offer of $200 from J.P. Morgan. But at last a third publisher, Little, Brown, succumbed to the promise of guaranteed purchases by the War and Navy Departments, and fame was assured. Over such obstacles do great works reach the world.

Although lecturing and publishing no doubt had their place, Mahan's primary job at Newport was to preside over the infant and ailing War College. Here he earned his keep. Scrimping and saving and cutting corners to keep the institution afloat; lobbying to prevent the College's submergence within the Torpedo Station; installing a telephone and arranging the stabling of the horses; laying on the civilian help, which in 1892 totaled one janitor-clerk, one stableman, and one laborer; supervising the curriculum—the successful accomplishment of these manifold tasks make it clear that Luce's choice of a successor was far more fortunate than could ever have been anticipated. And not least of the accomplishments for which Mahan deserves the gratitude of posterity was his contribution to the siting and design of the attractive new building, now known as Luce Hall, which he managed to complete on an appropriation of $100,000.

The central issue in the first years of struggle for the survival of the War College was a philosophical one which has recurred from time to time ever since. Should the postgraduate education of naval officers focus on the study of war or on the study of gear? Was the heart of the matter men or materiel? It was this question, in which the partisans

of the study of war were at first in the minority, that made the threat of union with the Torpedo Station so dangerous. Even in the minds of Luce and Mahan, it seems, the answer was not at first wholly clear. Luce had hoped for a symbiotic relationship with the North Atlantic Squadron, his new command, in which the War College would work out tactical plans and evolutions which would then be tested in squadron maneuvers. The scheme never came to fruition, but a similar concern with the problems of the new age appeared in Mahan's own interest in the development of doctrine for the then interesting procedure of ramming. Here his tactical concerns led to unsuccessful efforts to extort, from a parsimonious Department, funds for the procurement of padded launches in which the students at the College would, on pleasant afternoons, endeavor to ram each other on the waters of Narragansett Bay.

But the success of *The Influence of Sea Power* and of the early articles was such as to set the War College permanently on course. Ramming was forgotten; methods of coaling at sea never raised their ugly heads; torpedoes stayed in the Torpedo Station. Commendably, and presumably owing to Civil War memories of cooperation on the inland waters, a gifted young Army officer, Tasker Bliss, was kept on the staff. But the emphasis was where Mahan wanted it: on the Navy as a fighting machine. The study of the College became the study of war, not of weapons, and of the strategic situation of the United States in the new age of the battleship.

For the discoverer of seapower, all now began to fall into place. Although detached as member of a board appointed to select a site for a new navy yard on Puget Sound, Mahan was subsequently returned to Newport and to his studies. Ordered to sea in 1893, over his vigorous protests, to command *Chicago*, he found that his enemies had done him an unwitting favor. His reception in England, where he received degrees from both Oxford and Cambridge, met everybody of importance including the Queen and her grandson the German Emperor, and was hailed by *The Times* as the new Copernicus—"the first to show that sea power is the centre around which other events move"—made such a splash that his future was assured.

On his return little time remained before the completion of 40 years of service would permit the long-desired retirement. Briefly delayed by the Venezuela crisis, this event took place in November 1896, and the captain (later to receive, as a veteran of the Civil War, promotion to rear admiral on the retired list) entered a congenial life as writer, War College lecturer, and naval elder statesman. "The pursuit of happiness," Mahan once wrote, "is a stern chase," but from this time on the winds were always fair. Coupled with his retirement pay, his literary earnings (of which he was so solicitous that he once managed the extraordinary feat of extracting payment from the *American Historical Review*) kept life comfortable for the household that included the admiral, his wife, his two unmarried daughters, his dog Jomini, and four servants.

From these snug moorings in the harbor of domestic felicity, Mahan peered out upon the competition of empires and civilizations and pondered the role of navies and of Christians. Since the assumptions of one age never quite fit the preconceptions of those who come later, his answers today may seem obscure. In any case, Mahan's "realism" in international matters seems to have contained much the same tension that the Christian experiences in attempting to reconcile predestination and free will. By a kind of inevitable and morally neutral process, the world appeared to be coalescing into large competing political units, destined, it seemed, unavoidably to clash. The aspirations of the militaristic German

Empire were natural and proper; by the same token it was necessary for the United States and Great Britain to be prepared to resist them by force of arms. Great praise was due the modernizing achievements of the Japanese, and the anti-Japanese ructions of Californians were to be condemned; at the same time it was essential for the United States to restrict Oriental immigration and for the Navy to perfect its ORANGE Plan. Arbitration was a delusion. The exemption of private property from capture at sea was undesirable as diminishing the impact of hostilities upon the population at large and so making war more tolerable. Growing demands for social services threatened the great armaments of the European powers. Yet these armaments were of the greatest value in ensuring the defense of Western civilization until such time as the Orient could be imbued with the ideals of Christianity; more immediately, they served the important purpose of keeping peace in Europe. And when, in the last summer of Mahan's life, this peace dissolved into the First World War, the arms still deserved praise for having three or four times in the century averted war and "insured peace." The cause of war was not to be found in arms, but in the human heart.

Within this framework, literary production continued on several stylistic levels, depending, it would seem, upon the intellectual uniform of the day. The Mahan in working uniform—the writer of letters, memoranda, and critiques of war plans—deployed a clear, straightforward style. The style of the retired storyteller, reminiscing in carpet slippers about his life in *From Sail to Steam,* is relaxed and charming, reflecting perhaps his early reading of such models as Washington Irving. But for the military philosopher or the Episcopal layman it was somewhat different: decked out in cocked hat, epaulets, and sword, the prose becomes heavy. As Mahan himself said, his concern for qualification and precision led to an "accumulation of clauses" which produced "diffuseness"; or as Admiral Castex observed, to a style "particulièrement abstraite et soporifique."

For present purposes the most interesting papers of the later years are those concerned with the Naval War College: discussions of curricular offerings, lists of subjects studied from year to year, war plans that Mahan himself developed, and his comments on plans worked out by others. Here a consideration of the work of Mahan the professional naval officer helps to distinguish him from Mahan the historian of British seapower in the age of the 74. Such an approach helps to clarify his thought, provides a new angle of vision from which to consider the published body of material, and permits his rescue from some of the conventional wisdom of the historical profession.

What must be emphasized at the outset is that the British experience in acquiring an empire, however admirable, was not set forth as a model for the United States. No doubt there was always a little nostalgia for the Age of Nelson. But the history of American naval planning, throughout the period of Mahan's involvement, was, one may say, wholly defensive, even though the war with Spain brought vast changes in what had to be defended. In 1890, at the request of the Secretary, Mahan drew up contingency plans for wars with Great Britain and Spain, of which only the former has survived. Given the disparity between the two navies and pending the completion of scheduled new construction, the plan called for an active naval defensive to cover the land campaign against Canada. Commerce raiders were to be sent forth against British shipping; an appreciation of recent advances in telecommunications led to a requirement for an immediate cutting of the Halifax-Bermuda cable; a sure sense for the importance of coal in

late 19th-century war elicited proposals for descents upon the mines of Nova Scotia and Vancouver Island. Five years later, with new construction becoming available, Mahan and the War College considered the problem of where best to concentrate the battleships in the event of war with Britain. On the assumption that the British would quickly establish operating bases at Casco Bay and Provincetown, the answer seemed to be Nantucket Sound.

Overall, however, and despite such responses to specific problems, the focus of Mahan's strategic thought was on the Central American isthmus and the Caribbean. Remarkably, the importance of this strategic question had become evident to him as early as 1880, 4 years before the summons to the War College and 2 years before the British occupation of Egypt had shown how canals could become attractive nuisances; writing to his former roommate he had observed that if the statesmen foresaw the canal bringing the United States and foreign nations into collision, a strong battleship navy was essential or "we may as well shut up about the Monroe Doctrine at once." This prescience was reflected in the War College curriculum. In 1887, leaving aside all analogizing from 18th-century wars, the College considered the strategic importance of Central American waters and the problems which would arise with the completion of an isthmian canal. In 1892 the course included, in addition to some consideration of the new technology, 14 lectures by Mahan and his colleagues on the Caribbean and the anticipated consequences of the canal and 3 on the strategic features of the eastern Pacific. This War College concentration on the isthmus as the crucial strategic problem facing the United States was reflected in Mahan's derivative public writings, both in the *Influence of Sea Power*, published in 1890, and in his article on "The United States Looking Outward" of the same year. And as the impending construction of the canal made defensive Caribbean bases desirable, an equally defensive concern informed Mahan's desire for Hawaiian annexation, on which he published an article in 1893.

How far all this somewhat abstract strategic thinking affected the policymakers, or even Mahan himself, is another question. The ships of the new Navy continued to issue from the yards, but little was done to provide base facilities. He himself seemed pessimistic as to the chances of a positive policy: in *The Influence of Seapower upon History* he saw small likelihood of imminent action, and he had wanted to give his article of 1890, "The United States Looking Outward," the more accurate title of "The United States Asleep." Throughout his life he thought his annexationist article of 1893 on "Hawaii and Our Future Sea Power" had been the reason for his transfer by the Cleveland administration from writing and lecturing to sea duty. The next election brought the Republicans back to power, but in 1898, as the Cuban crisis worsened, neither Mahan nor the Department showed interest in profiting from a confrontation with Spain. Six weeks after the publication of the DeLome letter and 5 weeks after the sinking of the *Maine*, Secretary Long appointed Mahan the American representative at a Florentine celebration of Vespucci and Toscanelli, and on 26 March, America's best-known strategist took ship for Naples. And although the outbreak of hostilities brought about his immediate recall to serve as member of the newly established Naval War Board, the best accommodation the Department could find for these strategic planners, faced with the problems of two-ocean war in the heat of the Washington summer, was a one-window room up under the eaves which had previously been used for library dead storage.

But 1898 made a difference. In his

earlier years Mahan had described himself as an anti-imperialist and an enemy of Blaine's activist attitude in foreign affairs. Late in life he decided that he was an imperialist after all, an opinion generally subscribed to by latter-day historians. But if the label is to be applied, it must be carefully qualified. Of economic reasons for expansion he knew, and said that he knew, nothing. Of a desire to expand for the sake of expanding and to rule for the sake of ruling there is no evidence: "America is our sphere." Until the Battle of Manila Bay, Mahan's very limited expansionism had derived from defensively oriented strategic analysis: acquisition of Caribbean bases, if it could be righteously managed, to serve in the defense of the isthmus and the Monroe Doctrine; the annexation of the Hawaiian Islands, not as a stepping-stone to Asia but as a defensive outpost of the underpopulated and underdeveloped West Coast. The idea of annexing the Philippines had never, as he said, risen above his "mental horizon," and as in the summer of 1898 he moved reluctantly first to a willingness to annex Luzon, and finally to acceptance of the entire archipelago, he did so not on grounds of national advantage but of national duty. Such were the consequences of Dewey's victory. Some might have seen in all this the workings of chance. It was characteristic of Mahan that he saw it as the manifestation of God's will.

However brought about, the new developments raised new problems. Hawaii fitted reasonably well into the American scheme of things, but the support of a presence in the Western Pacific was another matter. As early as August 1898 the Naval War Board, responding to a Senate request, reported on the need for coaling stations outside the continental United States, whether in support of operations in regions of likely conflict, such as North China or the Caribbean, or, with the lesson of Oregon's recent voyage in mind, to facilitate deployment to such regions. The report called for four bases in the Pacific: Pago Pago, Guam, Manila or Subic Bay (if all of Luzon was not to be acquired), and one of the Chusan Islands. Since stations on the Mediterranean or Good Hope routes to the East seemed inexpedient, given the political separation of Old and New Worlds, there followed an urgent obligation to dig the isthmian canal as an alternate route to the Orient and to acquire Caribbean bases to protect it.

Shortly the Philippines in their entirety were acquired by the United States, along with Guam and Samoa in the Pacific and Guantanamo and Porto Rico in the Caribbean. But the simple acquisition of title to distant base sites did little to solve the formidable strategic problems that the war had brought. In the new century, war with Great Britain could pretty well be written off and faith placed in the "silent cooperation" of the Anglo-Saxon nations. But the growth of the German Navy, the antics of the Kaiser, and Germany's apparent desire to annex the Netherlands and its overseas empire emphasized the menace of BLACK; while the new Western Pacific possessions, taken together with problems of Oriental immigration, raised the puzzle of how to deal with ORANGE. In 1905 the experience of Rozhdestvensky at Tsushima seemed to prove beyond peradventure the folly of dividing the fleet. Since the Atlantic seaboard was "obviously the most important," an east coast concentration was desirable. Given congressional parsimony, which limited the development of west coast navy yards and Pacific bases, the weakness in population and industry of the Pacific slope, and the limited capacity of the transcontinental railroads, such a concentration made a virtue of necessity. But it also made the development of a feasible ORANGE Plan an extremely difficult exercise.

The problem had had several years'

attention, stimulated by immigration troubles in California and war scares in the Philippines, when in 1911 Mahan responded in detail to queries from the General Board and War College concerning the problem of ORANGE. His comments are of great interest. Base development, and especially the fortification and garrisoning of Pearl Harbor, still cried out for action; even better, in the admiral's view, would be to make Guam "a kind of Gibraltar," if only the government could be depended upon to keep it adequately garrisoned. If not, Japanese strength and preparedness assured them conquest of the Philippines, Guam, and Hawaii in the 3 months it would take the BLUE battle fleet to reach the Pacific. Since ORANGE would assuredly not "make formal proclamation before striking," the Asiatic Fleet's cruisers should be withdrawn eastward "betimes." Japanese landings on the west coast were possible but unlikely: indeed, since the ultimate outcome depended upon the determination and endurance shown by the population of richer and stronger BLUE, it seemed to Mahan that ORANGE would be politically wiser to limit her conquests to Guam and the Philippines.

So the first months of war looked unpromising. But once BLUE reached the Pacific in force, seapower would take over. The battle fleet would control the seas within its steaming radius; an advance to Kiska, riskier but more decisive than the slower northward climb via Samoa and the Philippines, would maneuver the enemy fleet back from Hawaii to Guam or the home islands; a descent upon Guam or seizure of a lodgement in the Ryukyus would force it out to fight the decisive action. If in all this the problems of the assault from the sea and the establishment of advanced bases seem to have been passed over lightly, it was nevertheless evident that an ORANGE confrontation with BLUE provided by far the best promise of a 20th-century war conducted (as we say at the War College) "in accordance with the principles of Mahan."

No war with Germany or Japan was to come in the philosopher's lifetime. The battle fleet remained concentrated in the Atlantic. But in the summer of 1914 there broke out in Europe a struggle in which, as it at first seemed, "the British Fleet still holds the decision in its hands, as in the days of Napoleon." In early August, in an article on "Sea Power in the Present European War," Mahan described the strategic features of the theaters of action, emphasized the "fundamental principles of warfare," stressed the importance of the blockade, anticipated that the British would have the advantage in an "encounter of the main fleets," and looked forward to tests of the actual value of submarines and aircraft. It was his last piece of professional writing. Within a week the Wilson administration ordered all officers, active or retired, to "refrain from public comment" on the war, and protests to the Secretary were of no avail. Beset by requests for articles he could not provide, Mahan's health suffered. In September he had a heart attack, and by November he was finding it difficult to work. He died on 1 December 1914, as the armies were settling down to stalemate on the Western Front and before the U-boat had shown what *guerre de course* in the third dimension could do to that command of the seas so long exercised by the greatest of maritime powers.

In conclusion, note should be taken of the high quality of this edition of Mahan's papers. The editors have been extremely diligent in searching through a large number of collections in pursuit of the admiral's literary remains. Each item is identified as to the collection from which it comes. An unusual consideration for later workers in the field is shown by the inclusion of a list of libraries and collections searched with

negative results. Annotation provides a brief identification of each correspondent on the occasion of his first appearance, together with other useful information. The book designers have done well on the typography, producing a set that is attractive to the eye and easy to read. Proofreader's errors are few and far between: if, indeed, like later students at his War College, Mahan occasionally wrote "Britian" for Britain, the text is very nearly perfect. Finally, it should be said that the indexing is almost beyond praise. Four usefully redundant indexes provide: a general listing of incidental references to people, places, and events; a list of all ships' names; a bibliographical index of all books and articles written, read, or cited by Mahan or the editors; and finally, an analytical index of Mahan's judgments or opinions which will guide the reader instantly to his comments on drink, tobacco, sex, sin, his own appearance, his temper, his vanity, his finances, his health, the all-big-gun battleship, the French, the Germans, the Trinity, the Monroe Doctrine, and much more beside. Having served for more than three-quarters of a century as the prophet to be invoked on behalf of seapower, the concentrated battle fleet, and the necessity for naval appropriations, Mahan has attained an even wider utility. For those who avail themselves of this edition and this index, he can now serve as all-weather, all-purpose prophet.

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY

Following his graduation from Harvard College, James A. Field, Jr., received his A.M. and Ph.D. from Harvard University. Following service with the Navy during World War II, he joined the faculty of the History Department at Swarthmore College in 1947, where he was appointed Isaac C. Clothier Professor of History in 1963. At the Naval War College he held the King Chair of Maritime History, 1954-1955, and more recently was Professor of Strategy 1975-1976. He is the author of *Japanese at Leyte Gulf* (1947), *History of U.S. Naval Operations: Korea* (1962), and *America and the Mediterranean World* (1969).