Naval War College Review

Volume 26
Number 5 *November-December*

Article 2

1973

Education Versus Training at the NWC

Philip A. Crowl

In 1884, despite the opposition of Congressmen, the Secretary of the Navy, and many of the first students involved, Commodore Stephen B. Luce founded an institution to offer "an advanced course of professional study for naval officers." Much of this early antagonism, indeed much of the controversy that has plagued the Naval War College over the years, centered on the issue of what constitutes the proper "advanced course." Of the two schools of thought, one emphasized technological "nuts and bolts" training, while the other saw a need for broad strategic level education based on history. The dispute remains unsettled, and recently Vice Adm. Stansfield Turner has rejoined the battle with a return to the principles of Luce and Mahan, to the historical perspective that these men felt was the proper vehicle for "advanced education."

EDUCATION VERSUS TRAINING

AT THE NAVAL WAR COLLEGE: 1884-1972

A lecture delivered at the Naval War College

by

Professor Philip A. Crowl

It has been, roughly, 89 years since Commodore Stephen B. Luce left the Atlantic Fleet off Newport, R.I., and had himself rowed over to Coasters Harbor Island, the site of the newly authorized U.S. Naval War College. There existed only one building on the island, which now stands behind the flagpole and houses the headquarters of the Naval Base Command. This modest structure was to be the site of the Navy's new college "for an advanced course of professional study for naval officers,"—the first such institution to be established in this country.[1]

Contrary to rumors that have since circulated at West Point and Carlisle Barracks, the building in which the Naval War College was inaugurated had not been a lunatic asylum. In truth, it had been an almshouse for the poor of Newport County, including the indigent deaf and dumb. Whatever it had been, it was a sorry looking, ramshackle structure, and as Commodore Luce, followed by his mess boy, climbed the rickety stairs to enter the building, he paused just long enough to say: "Poor little house, I christen thee the United States Naval War College." Rumor had it that he added: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," hence the cynical Washington nickname, "Trinity College."[2]

Detractors notwithstanding, Luce was well advised to invoke as much divine assistance as was available. During its first two decades the mere existence of a War College seemed to provoke only two reactions among most naval officers and Washington politicians: one, indifference; two, outright hostility. And of these, the second was predominant.

Naval officers objected first because of the inclusion of an Army officer on the original staff. He was a young first lieutenant named Tasker Bliss, later first President of the Army War College and Army Chief of Staff. The presence of Bliss and other Army officers who came later to Newport induced one high-ranking naval officer to tell Luce that "he would rather see the whole project abandoned" than have such an anomaly continued.[3]

Secondly, there were the officers associated with the Naval Training Station aboard the ship *New Hampshire* in Narragansett Bay who coveted the building and grounds of the college as more permanent and no doubt more comfortable headquarters. There was also Secretary of the Navy Whitney who had an intense personal dislike of Luce and who moved the War College to Goat Island to be consolidated with the Torpedo Station. The consolidation which took place in 1889 almost killed the college, which, of course, was Whitney's intention. Nevertheless, the institution survived and was moved back to Coasters Harbor Island in 1892 to be housed in a new $83,000 building later named Luce Hall.

Further criticism came from Congressman McAdoo who felt that the idle rich in their sumptuous mansions on Bellevue Avenue would surely corrupt the young naval officers sent to Newport for study and professional training. It was "a great misfortune," he said, "that our military schools should be established in connection with watering places characterized in certain seasons of the year as scenes of social display and dissipation." The Congressman had "no doubt" that the student officers would "find some time to devote to the festive dance and to the giddy maidens who disport themselves on the rocks in sunbonnets."[4]

Shortly thereafter, President Cleveland's second term Secretary of the Navy Hilary A. Herbert decided to abolish the Naval War College altogether as an economy measure. In the summer of 1893 he set sail for Newport on the U.S.S. *Dolphin* to accomplish that purpose. But on the way up, *Dolphin's* skipper loaned the Secretary a copy of Mahan's *The Influence of Seapower on the French Revolution and Empire.* Herbert was converted forthwith into a lifelong friend of the Naval War College—a dramatic demonstration of the practical utility of the study of history.

Finally, the students themselves were hostile. Most of the first class of eight officers, who had been sent from the Torpedo School at Goat Island, felt that they had been shanghaied. To almost all the early students, the curriculum at the War College seemed irrelevant to the point of absurdity. "We did not see," wrote Bradley Fiske years later, "what the campaigns of the Archduke Charles had to do with the profession of naval officers."[5]

Even as late as 1911 William S. Sims, later to become President of the War College, was most reluctant to be assigned as a student. "It may even be," he wrote his wife, "that things will blow over to such an extent that I may get some duty I would like better—something in closer touch with practice and less on the theoretical side."[6] Sims would later change his mind, but there is no doubt that these feelings mirrored exactly the attitudes of most naval officers of his day.

Only a few years before, Capt. Alfred Thayer Mahan had been interrogated by two fellow officers in Washington: "Do you expect a session of the War College this year?" Mahan ansered that he did. "Well," said one of the officers, "are you going to do anything practical?"

"What do you mean by practical?" asked Mahan.

"Well," was the answer, "torpedo boats and launches and that sort of thing."[7]

This dialog, as well as Sims' remark to his wife, cuts right to the heart of the

matter, right to the issue that has been the center of almost all controversy over the War College and its educational program from 1884 to the present. Reduced to its essence, it is the Archduke Charles versus "torpedo boats and launches and that sort of thing"—it is broad-gauged, liberal education versus training in technical skills—it is strategic level education versus basic professional training—it is the preparation of officers for the remote contingencies of naval and military leadership versus preparing them for the immediate responsibilities of their next tour of duty. The history of the Naval War College from the days of Luce to Admiral Turner has been one of oscillation between these two poles, however defined, with an occasional conscious effort on the part of some presidents to strike a happy medium between them.

Certainly there was no doubt where Luce stood. As early as 1877, when still a captain, Luce had recommended to the Secretary of the Navy that a war college be established whose curriculum would cover the art of war and would rise above the tactics of mere fleet handling. Along with Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman and Col. Emory Upton in the Army, and Navy Capt. Alfred Thayer Mahan, Luce was in the forefront of the intellectual revolution of the 1880's and 1890's that was to propel the armed services of the United States out of what has rightly been called their "dark ages." He was a leader in the fight against technicism. He argued constantly that the naval officer must cease to be exclusively a navigator, a seaman, a gunner, or an engineer and become a professional in the art and science of war. "We make ample provision for specialization," he once wrote, "but none for centralization. There is no provision for an educated directorate." The new Naval War College, he hoped would be "a place of original research on all questions relating to war and to statesmanship connected with war." The most important field of study for an officer, Luce maintained, was naval strategy and the only way to study strategy was through history. Therefore, to insure that naval history would be taught at his new War College, Luce brought to Newport Capt. Alfred Thayer Mahan, the only naval officer who, by virtue of his published work *The Gulf and Inland Waters*, could qualify as a *bona fide* historian.

Mahan's contribution to the study of naval history and strategy is too well known to warrant review here. Like Luce, and like most so-called scientific historians of the 19th century, Mahan firmly believed that a study of history would permit the discovery of certain immutable principles in the field of human affairs comparable to the laws of science governing the physical universe. Specifically he believed that from the study of naval history would emerge certain principles of maritime strategy, certain permanent truths as equally applicable today as yesterday and tomorrow as today. And in exploring history and demonstrating these truths at the Naval War College, Mahan hoped and expected that the institution would become a true nursery of maritime strategists and naval statesmen.

But the dream shared by Mahan and Luce was not soon to be fulfilled. It was all but extinguished by "practical" men, by "technicists," by present-minded men who, for the life of them, could see no value in studying the campaigns of the Archduke Charles or even the maritime strategy of Great Britain in the wars with France.

In May 1893, very much against his wishes, Mahan was ordered to sea to command the new cruiser *Chicago*. Both he and Luce pulled every political string available in an effort to extend the former's tour of duty at the War College—all to no avail. The Chief of the Bureau of Navigation, no friend to the college, turned down Mahan's request with the blunt observation, "It is not

the business of naval officers to write books." Not for 60 years would the Chair of Naval History again be filled. Instead, Mahan's lectures were read and reread to the subsequent classes until his words acquired the aura of religious dogma. It was a clear case of the letter killing the spirit. Significant work in history and strategy all but disappeared, having been replaced by a heavy concentration on hardware and tactics. In 1912 the three part "applicatory system" was borrowed from the German General Staff and adapted to the tactical training needs of the War College. Part one of this system was "the estimate of the situation"; part two, the writing of orders; and part three, the evaluation of the plan in a "map maneuver." The use of the order form introduced "doctrine" to the Navy, gave clarity to tactical orders, and added a new degree of regularity to fleet evolutions. But the price of these benefits was the loss of originality and flexible thought which attended an almost total eclipse of strategic studies.

The trend toward technicism was reinforced by the introduction of war games to the War College curriculum.[8] The modern war game had been invented by a Lieutenant von Reisswitz of the Prussian Guard artillery in 1824, and by the time of Bismarck and von Moltke it was in general use throughout the Prussian Army. The Naval War game had been developed in 1878 by Capt. Philip H. Colomb of the Royal Navy, and in 1887 William McCarty Little, a retired naval lieutenant, delivered six lectures on war gaming at the Naval War College. Seven years later, war games were first scheduled for the students at the college, and from that time since games have been an annually scheduled event. Little himself remained on the staff of the college until his death in 1915, and it was largely through his effort that war gaming was fixed into the War College curriculum.

There were three kinds of game: the duel, the tactical game, and the strategic game. The duel was a simulated battle between two individual ships. The tactical game—a simulated maneuver involving two opposing fleets of battleships and cruisers—was first conducted on a large sheet of paper marked out like a checkerboard. Later, large wooden checkerboards were placed on low sawhorses. The refinement process culminated near the end of World War I, with squares being painted on one of the decks of Pringle Hall. The strategic game differed from the tactical largely in the ocean distances presumed to exist between the opposing fleets at the outset and in the level of command assigned to the players. Early in its development the strategy game was played on charts by teams in separate rooms, with a control group plotting the tracks of opposing fleets and a director transmitting intelligence to the players. When the opposing fleets closed for battle, the game ended or was transferred to the game board for continuation as a tactical game. After the First World War, a number of refinements were introduced, but the basic principles of war gaming remained the same.

So did the emphasis on tactical studies in the curriculum of the college. In 1916 Admiral Sims had publicly defended the value of theoretical knowledge when applied to the practice of the naval profession and excoriated criticism of theoretical studies at the War College as an "exhibition of wholly discreditable ignorance."[9] When Sims assumed the presidency of the college in 1919, however, he made few substantial changes in its course of study. The applicatory system, based upon the use of the game board, continued as the basic method of instruction.[10]

Naval thinking had, to a large extent, been captivated by the fleet actions of Tsushima and Jutland, especially the latter. Few at the War College questioned Churchill's dictum that "Jellicoe was the only man who could have lost

the war in an afternoon." No doubt, part of the fascination with Jutland stemmed from the wealth of records the battle had produced. Reports on the action had been kept in every one of the 250 ships involved, covering almost every change of course, every gun fired or torpedo launched, and every hit scored or casualty suffered. Approximately 10,000 messages were sent during the battle, and 300 action reports were prepared after it. In the words of Rear Adm. John Hayes, this "wealth of material resulted in the battle's receiving an emphasis in naval circles far greater than it deserved. The myth of the battle-line engagement was preserved for another 25 years, after the airplane and the submarine had changed the whole nature of naval warfare."[11]

Here then was a classic example of the misuse of history--the refighting of the last war instead of preparing for the next; the "Maginot line" syndrome. Such restricted perspective and limited scope would have shocked Mahan, whose own imagination ranged from the Battle of Salamis in 480 B.C. to the Russo-Japanese War of 1904. It was *not* what he and Luce had in mind in introducing the study of history at the Naval War College.

Still, in the annual gaming of the Orange-Blue war, the simulated naval war between Japan and the United States for control of the Western Pacific, the War College *did* look ahead to the war that was to be. Largely as a result of this gaming, the refinements of the official Orange Plan for a war against Japan foresaw the possibility of surprise attack; anticipated the Japanese occupation of the Philippines; correctly calculated that the best route for an American counterattack would be across the Central Pacific; and presumed the need for the occupation of a string of advanced naval bases in that area. It was for these reasons that Admiral Nimitz, addressing the War College in 1960, could say that "the war with Japan had been reenacted in the game room here by so many people in so many different ways that nothing that happened during the war was a surprise --absolutely nothing except the Kamikaze tactics toward the end of the war."[12] What the admiral neglected to say, perhaps because the occasion was not appropriate, was that the concept for the employment of fast carrier striking forces had not been developed at the War College nor had the potential of submarine warfare been considered, in spite of the success enjoyed by German submarines in World War I; that the Battle of the Atlantic and the submarine war against Japanese commerce had never been played on a War College game board before World War II; that logistics had all but ceased to be taught at the War College after the departure of Adm. William Veazey Pratt from the presidency in 1927; and that after the same year, the study of amphibious warfare had almost completely been neglected and had fallen by default to the U.S. Marine Corps Schools in Quantico. Such was the somewhat opaque vision of those "practical men" who staffed the Naval War College in the twenties and thirties and of the students whose aspirations centered mainly on their next tours of duty, hopefully in a battleship but at the very least a cruiser.[13]

Despite the academic limitations to the program at the Naval War College, time there could be well spent. For one thing, life in Newport was pleasant. Comdr. Tom Buell described conditions in his article on the War College experience of Raymond Spruance, a student in 1926.

> The working hours were appealing, 0900-1530, with Wednesday and Saturday afternoons free. Civilian clothes were the uniform of the day, although rubber-heeled shoes had to be worn to keep the corridors quiet. The library would provide a place to

> study and a plentiful supply of books for professional and casual reading. The Navy medical officer would make house calls, groceries ordered from the commissary would be delivered at the doorstep, and the exchange laundry would make home pickups and deliveries.[14]

Nor should it be inferred from this that the students did no work or that the college was an intellectual desert. Certainly Spruance did not find it so. Years later, writing of his 6 years at the War College both as student and staff member between 1926 and 1938, he said, "I consider that what I learned during those years was of utmost value to me, in the opportunity it gave me to broaden my knowledge of international affairs and of naval history and strategy."[15] Since Admiral Spruance was not normally given to hyperbole or sentimentalism, his testimony must be believed. However, one can only conclude that he spent a lot of time in the library, for in his day the curriculum at the Naval War College offered little in the way of history and, but for the justly acclaimed courses in international law, even less regarding international relations.

This situation was radically altered after the close of World War II. Most of the changes instituted were aimed at broadening the curriculum of the War College to include many matters not strictly naval or even military and at raising the sights of the students from purely tactical or command and staff concerns to a much higher level of decisionmaking in the areas of strategy and national policy. In a broad sense, one could say that in 1947 the War College began a full 180 degree turn back to the original concepts of Luce and Mahan.[16]

In that year Admiral Spruance, as President of the War College, reintroduced the formal study of logistics into the curriculum, and during the following years logistical matters were integrated into both the study of tactics and of strategy. Also during Spruance's administration, the college began to invite professional historians and social scientists as lecturers as well as a number of representatives from the Department of State. Beginning in 1946 the student body included at least one Foreign Service officer, and shortly thereafter a Foreign Service officer was appointed to the staff. In 1953 Vice Adm. Richard Conolly, then President, succeeded in expanding the course to 2 years, the second year to include advanced study of the political and economic as well as the military aspects of national strategy, the formulation of national policies, foreign areas, and current international affairs. Five years later the 2-year senior course in the College of Naval Warfare was reduced to a single year at essentially the academic level of Conolly's second year course. The junior course taught by the College of Naval Command and Staff, which had been created in 1950, then assimilated some of the material contained in the first year of the former 2-year course.

Another symptom of the change of emphasis was the creation at the college of special professorial chairs to be filled mostly by civilians. The first, established in 1951, was the Charles H. Stockton Chair of International Law. This was followed in 1953 by the Ernest J. King Chair of Maritime History and the Chester W. Nimitz Chair of National Security and Foreign Affairs; in 1954 by the Thomas Alva Edison Chair of Physical Science and the Theodore Roosevelt Chair of Economics; in 1956 by the Milton E. Miles Chair of International Relations and the James V. Forrestal Chair of Military Management; in 1966 by the Alfred Thayer Mahan Chair of Maritime Strategy; in 1969 by the Claude V. Ricketts Chair of Comparative Cultures; and in 1971 and 1972 by the Forrest Sherman Chair of Public Diplomacy and the William McCarty

Little Chair of Gaming and Research Techniques. Moreover, in 1969 a total of 13 special military chairs were founded in such subjects as air strike warfare, surface strike warfare, amphibious operations, et cetera.

With the presidency of Vice Adm. John T. Hayward, starting in 1966, came another turn in the half circle back to the theories of Luce. Admiral Hayward introduced to both colleges a new core curriculum, the first part of which was called the "Fundamentals of Strategy Study." It consisted of a set of interlocking subcourses in International Relations, International Law, Evolution of Strategic Theory, Military Management, Economics, and Comparative Cultures, all to be covered in 9 weeks. This was followed, for most of the students, by a Winter Term Research Seminar followed in turn by a Spring Term Elective.

Yet, in spite of, or perhaps in some measure because of, these two decades of rapid and fairly radical change, the curriculum at the War College came under increasing criticism in the fifties and sixties—some of it from within the Navy, some of it from friendly but often brutally frank civilian scholars and educators.[17] Along with the other War Colleges, the Navy's was faulted for its excessive attention to the Soviet Union at the expense of other portions of the globe; for the superficiality of its coverage of most of the material pertaining to international relations, economics, sociology, et cetera; for offering its students a mere intellectual smorgasbord of hastily prepared dishes even more hastily swallowed down; for its endless and rapid succession of visiting lecturers dropping their tiny capsules of knowledge and wisdom on the run between planes; for its overexposure of the student body to lectures which were at best a passive learning experience and at worst a crashing bore; and, most of all, for its overconcentration on the contemporary scene and its underemphasis of the historical and sociological context in which current events were transpiring.

In short, the War Colleges, including the one at Newport, were coming under attack for trying too hard to be all things to all men and for attempting to crowd so much into their curricula that military professionalism suffered without any compensation in terms of academic stature. The course of study had not been so much broadened, which was the intent of the postwar reformers, as it had been overstuffed.

It was against this background that Vice Adm. Stansfield Turner, who assumed the presidency of the War College on 30 June 1972, inaugurated a new course of study which, in his mind, represented "a return to our great traditions—to the strategic and historical contribution of men like Mahan. . . ."* The intent of the new curriculum was clearly set forth in Admiral Turner's first convocation address.[18] It was to

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY

Professor Philip A. Crowl earned undergraduate degrees from both Swarthmore College and Yale University, a master's degree from the University of Iowa, and a doctorate from Johns Hopkins University. He served as a Naval Reserve officer in World War II, in the office of the Chief of Military History for the U.S. Army, as an Intelligence Officer for the Department of State, and on the faculties of Princeton University, the U.S. Naval Academy, and the University of Nebraska; in this latter position he served as Professor and Chairman, Department of History. Professor Crowl is the Chairman of the Department of Strategy and Policy at the Naval War College.

*The details of this new course of study may be found in "The Annual Report of the President, Naval War College," *Naval War College Review*, September-October 1973.

prepare these officers for decision-making in both command and management positions, especially decisions that must be made midst uncertainty. Lectures were to be deemphasized; "abundant free time" was to be guaranteed to the students; and they were expected to fill that time with "lots of individual effort in research, in reading, in writing, and in solving case problems." And, perhaps most significantly, Admiral Turner placed himself squarely in the tradition of Alfred Thayer Mahan by announcing:

> We will approach the study of strategy through historical cases rather than through international relations of political science. Our courses of instruction have hitherto concentrated too exclusively on the brief period of military strategy since the close of World War II . . . Studying historical examples should enable us to view current issues and trends through the broader perspective of the basic elements of strategy. . . .

The return to historical perspective was underscored by the first assignment, Thucydides' *The Peloponnesian War*—a subject even more remote in time and space than the campaigns of the Archduke Charles.

The purpose of these changes was clear. It was definitely *not*, Admiral Turner told the Class of 1973, "to make this a prep school for your next duty assignment. . . . " Instead, he said, "We want to educate you to be capable of doing well in a multitude of future duties." For the time being, at least, the pendulum has swung toward education and away from training at the Naval War College.

NOTES

1. Unless otherwise noted, this treatment of the early (before World War I) history of the Naval War College is derived mostly from the following: John D. Hayes, "Stephen B. Luce and the Beginnings of the U.S. Naval War College," *Naval War College Review*, January 1971, p. 51-59; Austin M. Knight and William D. Puleston, "History of the United States Naval War College," Ms. 1916, Naval War College Archives; Ronald H. Spector, "Professors of War: the Naval War College and the Modern American Navy," Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, Ms., Naval War College Library.

2. Hayes.

3. Spector, p. 56.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 102-103.

5. Bradley A. Fiske, *From Midshipman to Rear-Admiral* (New York: Century, 1919), p. 107.

6. Elting E. Morison, *Admiral Sims and the Modern American Navy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1942), p. 289.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 473.

8. Francis J. McHugh, "Gaming at the Naval War College," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, March 1964, p. 48-55.

9. Morison, p. 474.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 475.

11. John D. Hayes, "The War at Sea," in Vincent J. Esposito, *A Concise History of World War I* (New York: Praeger, 1964), p. 246.

12. Quoted in James A. Barber, Jr., "The School of Naval Warfare," *Naval War College Review*, April 1969, p. 92.

13. On the War College in the 1920's and 1930's, see S.M. Barnes, *et al.*, "The United States Naval War College: a Staff Study," Ms. 1954, Naval War College Library; Ruhl Bartlett and W.W. Whitson, "Naval War College Education for Foreign Policy Formulation in the Cold War," Ms. 1966, Naval War College Library; John W. Masland and Laurence I. Radway, *Soldiers and Scholars: Military Education and National Policy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957); "History of the United States Naval War College, 1884-1963 and Succeeding Annual Command Historical Report Supplements," Ms. 1966, Naval War College Library; Gerald A. Wheeler, "William Veazie Pratt, U.S. Navy: a Silhouette of an Admiral," *Naval War College*

Review, May 1969, p. 36-61; Thomas B. Buell, "Admiral Raymond A. Spruance and the Naval War College," *Naval War College Review*, March 1971, p. 31-51, April 1971, p. 29-53.

14. Buell, March 1971, p. 36.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

16. On the post-World War II changes at the Naval War College, see Barnes, *et al.*; Bartlett and Whitson; Masland and Radway; Frederick H. Hartmann, "Sailors as Scholars," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, September 1971, p. 40-46.

17. For criticisms of the curricula of the Naval and other U.S. War Colleges, see Masland and Radway, p. 359-382, 417-430; Edward H. Katzenbach, "The Demotion of Professionalism at the War Colleges," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, March 1965, p. 34-41.

18. Stansfield Turner, "Convocation Address," *Naval War College Review*, November-December 1972, p. 2-9.

Military history, accompanied by sound criticism, is indeed the true school of war.

Jomini: Précis sur l'Art de la Guerre, 1838