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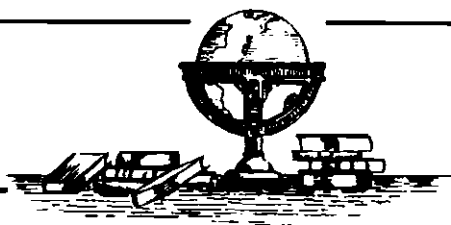
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RESEARCH IN THE MAHAN LIBRARY

A MARINE PLANS FOR THE WAR IN THE PACIFIC, 1913

by

Lieutenant Colonel Terence M. Allen, USMC

The Japanese attack on American Pacific bases in December 1941 shocked an ocean-isolated American public. Serious students of this dramatic period will very possibly be equally shocked to learn that in 1913 a Naval War College instructor predicted both the perpetrator and the form of those attacks. The clairvoyant individual was Capt. Earl Havelock Ellis, USMC, a brilliant, adventurous, and somewhat enigmatic figure in the annals of Marine Corps history.

Captain Ellis joined the War College in 1911 as one of four students of the college's first long course. If his classmates are any indication of his ability, then it was surely high, for they included Capt. William S. Sims, USN, Comdr. Yates Stirling, Jr., and Comdr. J.S. McKean—all of whom attained considerable prominence in the service. At 32 years old, Ellis brought with him 12 years of professional experience in infantry, intelligence, and the newly formed Marine Corps Advanced Base Unit Pacific. During a lengthy tour in the Orient, he learned Japanese and acquired a keen knowledge and appreciation for the political geography of the Pacific. These assets, plus an intuitive and logical mind, were to serve him well as both student and staff member at the Naval War College.

Unquestionably the most significant contribution of Ellis' War College period were his thoughts on America's position

in the Pacific. He believed that the conflict with Japan was inevitable and urged preparedness. The Japanese, "using secrecy," he declared, would initiate hostilities by an all-out attack on U.S. naval forces in the western Pacific. In later treatises on this subject he stressed the need for a well trained Navy-Marine amphibious team to defeat the Japanese, and he set forth some basic considerations concerning the offensive and defensive problems presented by airpower.

At the conclusion of his Naval War College tour, Ellis was assigned to Headquarters Marine Corps and later, in 1918, planned a combined Marine Corps-Army division attack on Blanc Mont in the Champagne district of France. The attack, considered outrageous by the French, broke the German line and gave impetus to the subsequent allied attacks which brought about the end of the war. After the war Ellis, now a lieutenant colonel, returned to Washington, D.C., and continued to delve into problems incidental to a war with Japan. In 1921 he prepared "Marine Corps Operation Plan 712: Advance Base Operations in Micronesia." The study became the basis of the joint Army-Navy Board's Plan Orange, 1924 (War with Japan), and Rainbow Plan 5 which detailed U.S. strategy in the Pacific during World War II.

With the acceptance of the plan by

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the Commandant, Major General John A. Lejeune, Ellis entered a new and strange period of his life in which he became a semirecluse and gave indications of retiring from the service. This was followed by a series of covert and highly romantic escapades and a leave of absence "for reasons of ill health." At this point he assumed the mien of a Yankee merchant and made several business trips to the Japanese mandated islands.

It was in 1923 on the obscure island of Koror in the Palaus that Captain Ellis died, and according to his Japanese hosts, a victim of anemia and alcoholism. His sickness is perhaps the physical manifestation of a long conjured plan, for the Navy requested permission from the Japanese to allow a naval task force to evacuate him. This was refused. There are those who see a connection, or parallel, between the Ellis episode and that relating to the famous aviatrix Amelia Earhart not too many years later. Here again the United States asked for permission to search for the lost flyer in the area of the mandates, and, once again Japan refused. Whatever speculations may be offered, the fact is that Ellis died on the island of Koror and the circumstances of his mission and his death are clouded by the intricacies of international espionage.

Although the life and career of Lieutenant Colonel Ellis are of great interest, of particular value to students of naval strategy are the papers which he authored while at the Naval War College. Happily, these are preserved in the college archives which form a large part of the holdings of the Naval Historical Collection Branch of the library and are readily accessible to scholarly research. In addition to the archival holdings, the branch also holds a number of recently acquired manuscript items relating to Ellis' life. Some of these are copies presented by Professor Dirk A. Ballendorf of Boston University, who is cur-

rently involved in research for a biography of Ellis.

The archival materials are important for several reasons. Firstly, they show that Ellis and his associates at the Naval War College were military strategists and theoreticians of the first rank. In this vein it is worth noting that turn-of-the-century officers did not deliver up strategy and military education to civilian think tanks. Many methods established in that period are today easily translatable into modern terms. Ellis himself contributed "avant garde" precepts on the vulnerability of major ships, air support, and mine warfare.

The Ellis materials also provide information on the thoroughly professional war game approach that the college staff took in examining the possible conflicts in which their Nation might engage—it was well that they did. Captain Ellis did, of course, participate in the games as both student and instructor, and the knowledge gleaned from this involvement is evidenced in his writings. Equally evident is the fact that the studies were devoid of mystical models and emphasized, instead, pragmatic question of geography, economics, and social sciences. The area study approach is unfortunately considered by many today as *passé*. It is, however, extremely relevant for the military.

Ellis' style of writing is generally erudite. He is both passionate and persuasive in argument, though at times repetitious. The War College documents include pithy comments on the machinations of politicians in matters of budget appropriations, base selection, material purchases, and roles and missions of the services. In addition, there are a few revealing comments concerning the isolationist-minded American public. These comments, plus maps, drawings, and copies of letters from President William McKinley, flavor an otherwise strictly military presentation.

It is worth noting further that the documents also include valuable information on U.S. Pacific and Atlantic naval strategy, the development of the Fleet Marine Force, the beginnings of aerial warfare, and naval strategy in general and relating to Japan in particu-

lar. Folios on "Naval Bases," "Advanced Base Operations in Micronesia, 1921," and the "Report of a Military Reconnaissance of the Island of Guam 1914-1915" are easily the most impressive items and well worth the serious student's close investigation.

GIFTS AND ACQUISITIONS

An extensive bound collection of clippings on various facets of war and warfare for the period 1940-1960 was presented to the Naval War College as part of a gift of books and other items by the late Marsden J. Perry of New York City. The clippings are chiefly from American newspapers and periodicals. Coverage of the World War II period is particularly representative and includes a run of daily press releases from both sides. The collection is arranged into subject categories and

chronologically therein. From Mrs. Gelinas of Middletown, R.I., the library has received various numbers of the magazine *The Mentor* for the years 1917, 1919, 1920, 1927-1929. *The Mentor*, a popular journal of history, science, and art was published in New York. In addition to its being of general and historical interest, it includes many fine illustrations (some military and naval) which can be used to good purpose in exhibiting and the like.

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Good libraries are as essential to an educated and informed people as the school system itself. The library is not only the custodian of our cultural heritage but the key to progress and the advancement of knowledge. With increasing leisure its resources can enrich the quality of American life.

*John F. Kennedy, Statement for National Library Week,
April 1963*