1969

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The Man, His Writings and Philosophy

A lecture delivered at the Naval War College

by

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I am told that a few years ago—at the National War College—a speaker commenced by telling his audience: We are starting on the same foot, because you haven't heard this lecture and I haven't read it. I assure you that is not the case today. For I have found this to be a very fascinating subject over the last couple of years.

A number of years ago, a secretary of war wrote of "The peculiar psychology of the Navy Department which frequently seemed to retire from the realms of logic into a dim religious world in which Neptune was God, Mahan His prophet, and the United States Navy the only true church." He also spoke of "The Gospel according to St. Mahan."

At the opening of this Naval War College in 1884, its first president, Commodore Stephen B. Luce, said: "We must find one who will do for naval science what Jomini did for military science." A few years later he said of a member of the founding faculty, "He is here—his name is Mahan." As we shall see, Mahan did become—and still remains—the foremost philosopher of sea-power.

Last year our King Chair of Maritime History was occupied by Professor Ray O'Connor from Temple University, and you'll be privileged to hear more from him later this year.

I have to recognize him at this time because I've plagiarized a couple of items from a speech he gave here last year on naval strategy in the 20th century. To illustrate that historians and statesmen for many centuries have recognized that seapower is an essential element of national greatness, Professor O'Connor used a number of quotes,
some as follows: From Pericles in the 5th century B.C.—“A great thing in truth is control of the sea”—and Themistocles, “He who commands the sea has command of everything.” Much later then, Sir Walter Raleigh said: “Whosoever commands the sea, commands the trade; whoever commands the trade of the world, commands the riches of the world, and consequently the world itself.” Fleet Adm. Chester W. Nimitz on his retirement, said of Sir Walter Raleigh’s quote:—“This principle is as true today as when uttered, and its effect will continue as long as ships traverse the seas.”

I have used these quotes partially to whet your appetite for a closer look at Mahan’s doctrines.

It is important early in your study here to gain an understanding of the historical basis of the principles of war. Some feel that the classical principles of warfare have become outmoded as a result of the technological revolution. One of my aims is to show the great extent to which Mahan’s lessons from history are still valid.

It is not my purpose to preach Mahan’s gospel; rather it is to introduce you to the man, his writings and his philosophy of seapower—hopefully to stir your interest in studying him further this year. Perhaps someone in this audience will grasp the opportunity to transform Mahan’s penetrating theories and update them to fit today’s situation. Mahan himself would be elated with the possibilities. He was primarily an analytical historian, and only secondarily a propagandist for his views. In studying him you should discover a cause and effect relationship between seapower and national greatness. From Mahan’s evaluation of these relationships, he developed and propounded his theories of seapower as an instrument—perhaps an indispensable one—for projecting and expanding U.S. power and influence throughout the world.

Mahan was an advocate of increased strength and readiness during the time of hiatus in the Navy—indeed, in the entire military and diplomatic posture of the United States. His writings bear the imprint of his times and must be considered in historical context. Perhaps a fascinating sequel to Mahan’s writings could be entitled the “influence of Mahan upon seapower.”

At this point we should briefly examine the high points in Mahan’s life and career.

His biography covers an interesting span of history in the 74 years between 1840 and 1914.

He was brought up in a scholarly as well as military background. His father, Dennis Mahan, graduated from West Point, and after 4 years’ study in Europe, served on the faculty of the Military Academy for the rest of his life.

Dennis Mahan was keenly interested in military strategy and tactics. By coincidence the “... fascination that the career of Napoleon exercised over Professor Dennis Mahan was much like that which the career of Nelson was to exercise over Alfred Thayer Mahan.”

The son developed an early interest in the Navy by reading sea stories from the Academy library. Against the advice of his father, who considered him ill-suited for any kind of military career, he entered the Naval Academy, and graduated in 3 years. His junior officer cruise in the frigate, Congress took him down the east coast of South America. His various tours of sea duty during the Civil War were mostly involved in the maritime blockade of the Confederacy.

During a brief interlude on the Naval Academy faculty he became acquainted with Stephen B. Luce, and he went back to sea in the U.S.S. Macedonian under Luce’s command. This began a lifelong association which eventually turned Mahan to his literary career.

His cruise to the Asiatic station as second in command of Iroquois provided his only firsthand acquaintance
with the Western Pacific, but aroused an
interest that persisted all his life. On this
cruise he first became greatly impressed
with British seapower, which he wit-
nessed everywhere he went.

For the next 14 years Mahan rotated
between sea and shore duty on routine
assignments. He was promoted from
lieutenant commander to commander in
1872, and to captain in 1884.

It was while in command of a small
ship off the west coast of South Amer-
ica that he received the call from Com-
modore Luce to teach Naval History
and Tactics at the War College. He
couldn’t be relieved immediately, so he
commenced research in preparation for
his forthcoming lectures. He had always
been an avid reader of history, and now
he tackled this study in earnest.

By the time he reached his new
assignment he had begun writing. His
early lectures became the substance of
his first book: *The Influence of Sea
Power Upon History: 1660-1783* which
was published in 1890 while President
of the Naval War College. There were
favorable reviews abroad almost im-
mediately, especially in Britain, and this
is understandable because it was so
flattering of that country’s maritime
history. A Major Moll of the U.S. Air
Force analyzed this phenomenon with
considerable accuracy in an article in
*Military Affairs* when he said: “The
British found that an American had
articulated the naval and maritime poli-
cies which the British, by accident or
unconscious genius, had blundered
through in their centuries’ long rise to
world supremacy.”

Recognition in the United States was
slower in coming and especially within
the Navy. In 1893 he was ordered to
command the U.S.S. *Chicago* flagship of
the European squadron. By this time he
was a celebrity on the other side of the
Atlantic, especially in Britain, and was
wined and dined by royalty, and others
high in government. He was awarded
honorary degrees by both Oxford and
Cambridge. His net effect of all this was
to widen the world interest in his books.

Mahan’s triumphant reception in
every port didn’t go down too well with
his admiral, who found himself playing
social second fiddle to his celebrated
flag-captain, and there was continual
friction between them. After this cruise,
Mahan wrote with bitter humor, “Great
believer as I am in concentration of
force, I am disposed to question the
advisability of concentrating and Ad-
miral’s command in a single ship.”

He retired in 1896 as a captain after
40 years of creditable but undistin-
guished naval service. We know him now
as Rear Admiral Mahan, but his final
promotion was the result of general
legislation that affected all retired offi-
cers who had served during the Civil War
and was in no way intended as a
distinction.

So much for the man himself. What
about the world he lived in and the
Navy he was a part of? These also
influenced his writing.

From pictures of two of Mahan’s
ships—the frigate *Congress* in which he
served his first sea duty and the pro-
ected cruiser *Chicago* Mahan’s major
combatant command—it’s very evident
that the transition from sail to steam
was still in progress over this 40-year
period.

Our country’s merchant marine de-
clined during and after the Civil War.
The ensuing decades of peace and west-
ward development of the United States
stimulated little or no popular interest
in a Navy. The Navy went back to
canvas. A general order in 1869 directed
that all naval vessels should have “full
sail power” and that the captain had to
make an entry in his logbook in red ink
whenever he used steam.

However, by 1881 there was a be-
ginning of our expansion of foreign
trade and some recognition of the need
for a stronger Navy. Between 1885 and
1899, 30 new ships were authorized. I
bring this out to make clear that at the
time Mahan started his lecturing and writing, we had already begun a modest naval building program. But not much thought was devoted to the proper employment of naval forces. The commonly held theory was that the function of the Navy was commerce, raiding, and coastal protection. Naval thinking needed direction and the Navy needed a mission.

In the somewhat confused world of technological change and burgeoning imperialism of the turn of the century, Mahan’s new interpretation of the meaning of seapower and its proper application in maritime strategy had real meaning.

Many of the first books were compilations of his lectures on Naval History which he delivered at the Naval War College. During the period of his presidency here he published the first two: \textit{The Influence of Sea Power on History}, and \textit{The Influence of Sea Power Upon the French Revolution and Empire}. Once he got started, he was a highly prolific writer, averaging about a book a year for the rest of his life-20 books in all, plus more than 100 essays and articles. It is striking to look in Room N-22 outside our library at the volumes he produced. His books were mainly histories, biographies, or writings on naval subjects. The wide range of his intellectual curiosity is revealed by a sampling of titles of his many articles.

- “Hawaii and Our Future Sea Power”
- “Possibilities of an Anglo-American Reunion”
- “The Isthmus and Sea Power”
- “Strategic Features of the Caribbean Sea & Gulf of Mexico”
- “Lessons of the War with Spain”
- “The Bocor Republic and the Monroe Doctrine”
- “The Problem of Asia”
- “The Apparent Declension of the Church’s Influence”
- “Principles of Naval Administration”

Note that his interests were worldwide and covered the spectrum from naval affairs to international relations and included excursions into religion. To illustrate that he exerted widespread influence in his time, Admiral Hayward had discovered an article written by Mahan setting forth the reasons why women should not be given the right to vote.

When his first book was published in 1890, he was gratified to receive promptly an assessment from a civil service commissioner in Washington named Theodore Roosevelt who said, “During the last two days I have spent half my time, busy as I am, in reading your book. I am greatly in error if it does not become a naval classic.” These kind words started a relationship which had a great impact on the naval and foreign affairs of the United States at the turn of the century.

Mahan did not actually inspire the world naval armament race at the turn of the century. It was already in progress when his first writings were published. But in short order he became the most quoted authority when navalists of the various competing nations argued their shipbuilding programs. After he became internationally famous, his own countrymen began to pay attention to him.

Mahan’s philosophy of seapower was translated into action by Theodore Roosevelt, first as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, and later as President. The views of these two were sponsored in Congress by Senator Henry Cabot Lodge. The collaboration among these three was reflected in the spectacular
growth of the Navy. There were only 9 armored ships when Roosevelt took office in 1901. Six years later, by 1907, the Atlantic Fleet had 16 battleships and the Pacific Fleet had eight armored and eight light cruisers.

In his last years Mahan was apprehensive that he had oversold his philosophy, and in the wrong quarter. Germany had no naval history, and therefore the German Kaiser swallowed Mahan complete, and started to build a navy to support his drive for a colonial empire. Mahan watched this growing threat to British seapower with the greatest concern. He repeatedly admonished the British to accelerate their naval arming, and with World War I imminent, he went so far as to recommend that Britain strike before it be too late. Our Government was trying to remain neutral, and Mahan's pronouncements were considered inflammatory. By Presidential direction a general order was issued forbidding the military to publicize views on the impending war.

At any rate there is no doubt his writing had tremendous influence at home and abroad.

Now it is time for us to examine some of the writing that caused all the turmoil.

It was not easy to categorize Mahan as a writer. There is no doubt about his credentials as an historian—he was elected President of the American Historical Association. But he was a very special kind of historian—one who put maritime interest in the foreground of world events. Repeatedly in his chronicles, he pauses to drive home one or another of his favorite principles of maritime strategy. He constantly sought, in his own words, "to wrest something out of the old woodensides and twenty-four pounders that will throw some light on the combinations to be used with ironclads, rifled guns and torpedoes."

At the outset of his research he turned to Jomini, the great philosopher on military strategy, for guidance as to general principles and became convinced there must be some of these principles that apply equally to land and sea warfare. The most evident heritage from Jomini is that war and diplomacy are inseparable. Mahan was not acquainted with the military philosophy of Clausewitz at the outset of his writing but, on later reading of his works, found himself in close agreement. Mahan double-checked and underlined Clausewitz' passage: "Wars are in reality only the expressions or manifestations of policy itself."

For purposes of this lecture I am not going to spend any time in description of his writings as history or biography, but I will mention in passing that they almost all deserve careful reading.

Also, from this point on I will dwell mainly upon Mahan's major theses. These fall into two main areas: a philosophy of seapower and principles of naval strategy.

First as regards to philosophy of seapower. The term itself was not invented by Mahan, but as one writer said, "It belongs to him." He gave the term a meaning significantly different from an exact parallel with "landpower" and "airpower." "Seapower" according to Mahan means, not just naval power, but rather the combination of a thriving merchant marine and the protection of a strong Navy.

He saw the prosperity of a country bordering on the sea as depending greatly upon the development of its internal productive capacity and support of foreign trade borne by its own merchant shipping—with colonies as sources of raw materials and markets. Britain was his model for proper exploitation of seapower.

In evaluating the commercial factor of seapower as expounded by Mahan, keep in mind that British seapower at its peak of influence owed much to the primitive state of land transportation. For example, goods sent from the northwest of Germany to southern Ger-
many could be transported more quickly by sea than by land: it went through the English Channel, the Mediterranean, the Dardanelles and all the way up the Danube.

Mahan measured a nation's potential for greatness according to how it stood with respect to each of these principal conditions affecting the seapower of nations:

- Geographical Position
- Physical Conformation
- Extent of Territory
- Number of Population
- Character of the People
- Character of the Government

These are fairly obvious factors and are cataloged and explained at some length in the first chapter of his first book, of the "influence" series.

With regard to geographical position: England had a great advantage over Holland and France, two of her greatest rivals, because she wasn't distracted by the necessity of defending—or extending—her land boundaries, nor the need to maintain a large army. Furthermore, her position athwart the principal trade routes was a great lever in wartime.

He saw advantages and disadvantages in the position of the United States. We were protected by distance from invasion. However, we were out of the mainstream of world trade, and this became one of Mahan's arguments for construction of the Panama Canal—to provide a principal trade route we could exploit and dominate. Later, with the canal under construction, he became a strong advocate of our acquiring bases in the Caribbean to control and defend the approaches to the canal. You might ponder some disadvantages of Russia's position today with regard to poor access to the sea.

Physical conformation has numerous facets. I was surprised to learn that Mahan considered a wealth of natural resources a somewhat negative factor in the development of seapower. He characterized Britain as being "driven to the sea." Mahan was impatient for America to awaken from her absorption with internal development and develop an interest in foreign trade, the building of a merchant marine and a Navy to protect it.

Other aspects of physical conformation are more obvious, such as: easy access between coastal areas and the interior, numerous harbors and degree of continuity of coastal area. In the latter regard, he considered the position of France, Spain, and the United States disadvantageous because of their separate coasts on two different seas. Such separation makes possession of key straits and control points like Gibraltar and the Panama Canal a strategic matter of greatest national interest.

The next two factors, extent of territory and number of population, go together. When both are large there is a potential for greatness, and vice versa, as in the case of Holland for example, whose maritime strength was limited by the small population and territory of her home base.

There is an element of weakness in large territory with a small population. This situation makes the territory difficult to defend with inadequate forces. On the other hand, overcrowded Britain provided a thrust toward the sea and colonization.

Under character of the people, Mahan mainly considers their enterprising energy, their inclination to trade and follow the sea, and to colonize. He held there can be no production, no foreign commerce, and no Navy without these qualities in a sufficient number of the people.

One character of the government that Mahan continually harped upon was the degree to which it supported a Navy. He said "popular governments are not generally favorable to military expenditures, however necessary . . . " and especially during peacetime. We who
witnessed the headlong demobilization of the United States after World War II can agree with Mahan as to this. He dedicated himself and much of his literary efforts to this particular problem for the remainder of his life after retirement. He wrote copiously in favor of American economic expansion, overseas trade, and the building of a U.S. Navy second to none—unless it were Great Britain’s.

A careful scrutiny of Mahan’s view of seapower reveals how closely it is based upon his research on the position of Britain relative to the continental European powers with whom she vied for dominance. He was an ardent anglophile. This somewhat biased view may have accounted for whatever there is of Mahan’s concept of seapower that has eroded with time.

Development and improvement of overland transportation systems have reduced reliance on sea transport for shorter hauls, improved the mobility of land-based forces, and increased the vulnerability of naval bases. Airpower has challenged naval dominance over coastal and narrow seas.

His thesis that national economic prosperity is based upon trade, a merchant marine, and colonies has also eroded with time. Trade certainly remains important. However, the world has gotten away from the practice of each country carrying its own goods only in its own bottoms. Mahan felt strongly that peacetime shipping should be commensurate with the nation’s needs in wartime so that the economy could be maintained and the wartime effort supported.

His accent on the need for colonies was based upon his admiration of the British Empire. He visualized a closed economic system between mother country and colonies. This theory, of course, is outmoded. Modern, relatively free international trade has demonstrated vastly greater economic potential.

His emphasis upon colonies as sites for vitally needed naval bases was a reflection of his lack of faith in alliances. However, even here he was somewhat inconsistent, for he always advocated that we maintain friendship with Great Britain and was willing to see us base the size of our Navy upon the presumption that in war we would not have the British Navy against us.

In his emphasis upon colonial expansionism, therefore, Mahan was more in tune with the imperialistic climate of his own day than he was accurately prophetic of the conditions of our own times. However, I suggest that if you substitute the phrase, “free trade, friends and allies” for Mahan’s “shipping and colonies” as objects for the protection of a strong Navy, his concept is still valid.

Mahan’s conception of seapower was based upon his observation of the struggle for dominance among the various maritime and continental powers of Europe. Francis Bacon identified two concepts or philosophies of warfare: The continental was typified by Napoleon and codified by Clausewitz. The maritime was typified by Nelson and codified by Mahan.

The present world confrontation finds the principal powers arrayed against each other, to be principally maritime on one side and continental on the other—the free world maritime and peripheral, and the Communists in control of much of the great expanse of the Eurasian Continent. The power struggle between the continental and the maritime systems is by no means decided. Certainly the growing Soviet maritime strength, in all its manifestations, poses some new dimensions in this struggle, and we have not yet digested the implications of it.

And how does “seapower” figure in this struggle? Much as it did in the period of history chronicled by Mahan. His thesis may be criticized for its overemphasis upon economic im-
perialism. But look beyond his first chapter, where he provided this restrictive definition, to the bulk of his history. I am persuaded that he conceived of the same broad concept of seapower that we do: The vehicle for projection of national power in all its sea-trans- portable manifestation—military, economic, political, and psychological. So we do Mahan no disservice if we update his term, while giving him full credit for being the first to expound it.

But let’s turn now away from Mahan’s concept of seapower and examine his strategic principles. He didn’t provide a ready catalog, but those who have abstracted his most often repeated lessons from his abundant writings, generally agree the most important ones are these: CONCENTRATION, OBJECTIVE, OFFENSIVE, and COMMUNICATIONS. Let’s examine each of these.

First, CONCENTRATION. Mahan said, “The fundamental object in all military combinations is to gain local superiority by concentration.”

At the time Mahan began his writing on seapower and during most of the period covered by his “influence” series of history, there were two main theories on how best to exercise command of the sea. The British favored concentrated ships of the line employed against the main forces of the enemy; the French practiced “Guerre de Course,” or commerce destruction by wide-ranging cruisers. The French theory had been favored by Mahan before the call to lecture at the War College, but in the course of his research he became a convert to the principle of concentration.

In contrasting the relative effectiveness of these two strategies he said: “It is not the taking of individual ships or convoys, be they few or many, that strikes down the money power of a nation; it is the possession of that overbearing power on the sea which drives the enemy’s flag from it, or allows it to appear only as a fugitive, and overbearing power can only be exercised by great navies.”

Over and over he admonished “Never divide the fleet.” Upon the outbreak of the Spanish American War when the Spanish Fleet was known to have sailed for the western Atlantic there was a great clamor to disperse our Atlantic Fleet along the coast to protect individual seaports from bombardment. A lot of political pressure was applied in behalf of this scheme. Mahan, sitting as a member of the Naval Board of Strategy, advised the administration to keep the fleet in a position where it would be able to quickly concentrate when the destination of the Spanish Fleet became apparent. The result was the blockade before Santiago and the destruction of Cervera’s Fleet, when it was forced out to face the concentrated American Fleet.

The Spanish American War provided Mahan strong backing for his views on concentration. This principle was further strengthened by the Russo-Japanese War. The Japanese concentrated—first upon destruction of the Russian Navy at Port Arthur—and then upon the Russian Baltic Fleet as it entered the straits of Tsushima.

However, the issue of concentrated battle fleets vs. commerce raiding, or “Guerre de Course,” remains alive. Mahan did not foresee the employment of the submarine as a commerce raider. Twice in the 20th century have submarines come near severing the Atlantic lines of communication. In both world wars they were defeated by concentration of merchant shipping into convoys and the timely development of countermeasures by the Atlantic allies. In the Far East in World War II, Japanese air and surface domination of Far East waters did not prevent U.S. submarines from cutting the Japanese lines of communication—employing a method of warfare that Mahan disapproved.
And now once again we maritime powers face the threat of continental power preparing to dispute our control of the sea, by concentrating on a submarine fleet, while also effectively building an impressive capability in surface combatants and merchant marine with which power can be projected worldwide.

To counter this threat we must consider how best to employ our overarching domination of the surface and the air and periphery of the sea and bring to bear all the necessary ASW, and other countermeasures, that will preserve the essential truth of Mahan’s principle of concentration.

Regarding OBJECTIVE, according to Mahan “The proper objective is... the organised military force of the enemy.”

This principle of the physical objective possibly was best illustrated by Lord Nelson in his relentless pursuit of the French, even across the Atlantic Ocean and back, culminating in his great victory at Trafalgar. Nelson did not bother about the likely intentions of the French. He figured that if he could gain contact and bring the French to combat, the intentions would take care of themselves. He did not hesitate to abandon his assigned area command. He pursued his true objective: the enemy naval fleet. I’ll have more to say about this principle a little later.

About the principle of the offensive, Mahan said, “War, once declared, must be waged offensively, aggressively. The enemy must not be fended off, but smitten down.” He recognized the usefulness of a “fleet in being” as a strategy for inferior naval powers, with some usefulness in tying down substantial forces of a superior maritime power. But to Mahan a defensive strategy could never be decisive. He repeatedly showed how aggressive forcing of engagement and acceptance of risk favored victory. His admiration was reserved for aggressive types like Nelson and Rodney—and the exceptional Frenchman, Admiral Suffren. These commanders accepted numerical inferiority in combat and achieved brilliant victories by the ferocity of their attack and the superiority of their preparations and tactics.

With regard to COMMUNICATIONS, Mahan said, “As an element of strategy they devour all other elements.” This is in large part the essence of the term “command of the sea.” Communications means the flow of supplies between bases and home territory and forces, the maintenance of contact between elements of the forces, and the ability to move, and reinforce. It means the ability to land and support armies. Interruption of communications can be disastrous.

Napoleon’s campaign in Egypt was a bold effort to sever England’s communications and trade with her East India Empire. It failed because Napoleon overestimated the security of his own lines of communication through the Mediterranean and underestimated the ingenuity and aggressiveness of Nelson, who ambushed and decisively defeated the French Fleet in the Nile. This also was a classic example of pursuit of the proper objective. In this one brilliant stroke Napoleon’s communications were

**BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY**

Capt. Jack E. Godfrey, U.S. Navy, is a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, did advance work in Aviator Safety at the University of Southern California and holds an M.S. from The George Washington University in international affairs. As a naval aviator he has had a variety of assignments in fighter squadrons and has served as ship’s company on several aircraft carriers, the last being the U.S.S. *Hornet* where he acted as Navigator and later as Operations Officer. Captain Godfrey is a graduate of the Naval War College, School of Naval Warfare, and is currently assigned to the faculty as Head of the Sea Power and National Strategy Study.
severed, his campaign petered out, and he had to ignominiously steal home, leaving his army behind him.

The British thoroughly understood the importance of interior lines and central positions which supported them. Throughout history they have sought to dominate the English Channel, exits from the North Sea, and strategic points on access routes like Gibraltar and Malta.

Mahan’s prescription for America regarding communications included: Hasten the construction of the Panama Canal; acquire central positions to dominate communications in the Caribbean and the approaches to the canal; develop bases in Hawaii, Samoa, and Guam.

We can find fault with Mahan in one detail or another. He laid himself open to this kind of criticism by a tendency to be dogmatic.

There is still a lot of mileage in Mahan’s philosophy of seapower and his principles of strategy. Their careful study provides a rich background of our better understanding of modern maritime strategy.

Any of his strategic principles might still be employed in much the same manner as Nelson or Rodney did upon one occasion or another. And also they might not. So don’t apply Mahan’s—or anyone else’s—principles of war blindly or by rote but in the light of the circumstances that confront you and your own good common sense. Our consultant in the Chair of Maritime History year before last has some comment regarding Mahan’s philosophies. He spoke of charges leveled at Mahan over the years that he failed to appreciate the impact of technological change. He went on to say, however, that the anti-Mahan school of naval strategy exaggerates the extent to which technological change undermines his basic principles and that much evidence exists in Mahan’s writings that he was aware of the necessity to constantly revise seapower theories to take account of this factor. He likens the situation to our country’s government and politics based upon our constitution, the original meaning of which has been vastly expanded. Still we feel a debt today to the original framers and follow their basic philosophies. Likewise we should study Mahan not because he set down holy writ needing no extension or amplification, but because he established solid foundations upon which future generations could build with assurance. Mahan said, in fact, “The conduct of war is an art, having its spring in the mind of man, dealing with very various circumstances, admitting certain principles; but, beyond that, manifold in its manifestations, according to the genius of the artist and the temper of the materials with which he is dealing. To such an effort, dogmatic prescription is unsuited; the best of rules, when applied to it, cannot be rigid, but must have that free play which distinguishes a principle from a mere rule.”

It has also been suggested that Mahan’s philosophy of seapower, and his outlook on war and peace, have significant application today in the limited war climate. Maybe Mahan’s “imperialistic” application of seapower tends to settle international problems on a limited basis rather than by global conflict. In conclusion, I could suggest that it might be an intriguing project to trace the idea of limited war from Mahan to the present.