Naval Historical Education as a Future Strategy

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The Naval War College holds the unique mission of educating service professionals about concepts of sea power and the military policy of the United States. In his lectures, Rear Admiral Stephen B. Luce warned Naval War College students to study history for their own professional good. He worried that the "examples of history which inculcate these lessons are being disregarded every day by nearly all maritime powers, and by none more than our own." Luce also argued that "all naval operations are strategic." He might warn against the contemporary doctrinal focus on operations in the absence of a clearly achievable strategy, which could be sustainable over the longer term and would be worthy of the effort in terms of resources and personnel.

Navies traditionally required personnel with technical expertise in the sciences, rather than in the humanities, for the practical purposes of operating and maintaining ships. Drawing from the ideas of British historians like Sir John Knox Laughton and Spenser Wilkinson, Luce encouraged other historians affiliated with the Naval War College to look beyond problems of technology and engineering. Recalling the character of naval education in the late nineteenth century, a future five-star admiral recalled that the "average midshipman, reluctant to admit his ignorance, would stand at the blackboard chewing chalk rather than ask a question."

The service placed higher value upon following rules and personal reputation, often suppressing creativity within the ranks. War required decisiveness, providing no time for reflection. Luce challenged such assertions by suggesting "naval strategy is more comprehensive than military [land] strategy." "Military strategy is called into play only during war," he argued in 1896 that "[n]aval strategy adopts some of its most important measures during peace." Luce stood out among his contemporaries, challenging the norms of the service by recruiting younger officers to join in a professional revolution within the ranks of the U.S. Navy.

Army lieutenant colonel Emory Upton largely inspired Luce to recognize the strategic role of education in military affairs. Having studied the Prussian model, Upton and Luce also drew heavily from the teachings of Dennis Hart Mahan at the Military Academy at West Point. Sensing an opportunity to recruit a protégé, Luce recruited Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan to assist in developing historical case studies for the purpose of educating American naval and military professionals to understand the nexus between peace and war. Rather than the sciences, Luce and Mahan relied primarily upon historical studies to place the military policy of the United States into a global context under the new American concept of "sea power."

The approach favored by Luce and Mahan sparked debate about the functional value of history for U.S. Naval professional education. Engineers within the ranks favored clearly framed processes and solutions, for which historians frequently failed to offer in their writings. Indeed, Mahan lamented in 1890 that many U.S. Naval officers suffered from a "vague feeling of contempt for the past, supposed to be obsolete, combines with natural indolence to blind men even to those permanent strategic lessons which lie close to the surface of naval history."

Mahan attained an international reputation as a historian, although his readers failed to fully understand the underlying argument within the historical narrative. His emphasis upon attaining concentration of force and decisive battle have proven to be widely misunderstood among readers of Mahan's work. As John Tetsuro Sumida warns in, *Inventing Grand Strategy and Teaching Command: The Classic Works of Alfred Thayer Mahan Reconsidered,* contemporary readers of Mahan must take care in avoiding such oversimplified interpretations of the underlying ideas found in the collected works of Mahan.

Maritime historians recognize the practical importance of understanding history within the context of the past, although frequently fail to understand the more immediate needs of naval practitioners. To this point, Andrew Lambert highlighted the strategic role of historians in naval affairs in, *Foundations of Naval History: John Knox Laughton, The Royal Navy and The Historical Profession*. As Lambert demonstrates, Luce and Mahan relied very heavily upon the teachings of Professor Laughton at the University of London, King's College. Building from Laughton's work, Luce and Mahan in framed an American maritime vision for the twentieth century.

History enabled the Americans to prove the value of sea power, not as means to conduct war but as a means to preserve peace and stability on the global commons. Thus, professional education in history provided means by which naval practitioners recognized the maritime arena as a global stage, unrestricted by the inherent constraints on military operations ashore. The ideas of Laughton, Wilkinson, Luce, and Mahan remained important in the era preceding the First World War. The deaths of Mahan in 1914 and Luce in 1917 also marked a period of transition, which continued at the Naval War College. Among the new generation of rising naval professionals, Royal Navy Captain Sir John R. Jellicoe and U.S. Navy Captain William S. Sims maintained a close correspondence – trading ideas on the future of naval strategy and, ultimately, recognizing the existence of a transatlantic alliance between the British Empire and the United States.

Combat experience in a dirty and widely ignored campaign in China first inspired the special relationship of Jellicoe and Sims. Having suffered severe wounds in battle, Jellicoe met Sims through mutual associations with American naval officers Joseph K. Taussig, Dudley W. Knox, and Bowman McCalla. As Jellicoe rose quickly within the ranks of the Royal Navy, Sims followed a very different path. He consistently bucked the system with such provocatively framed essays, which appeared in *Proceedings* under titles like, "Cheer Up!! There is No Naval War College." Sims challenged fellow naval professionals to recognize the limitations of training and experience at sea – pressing them to understand the strategic benefits derived from education at the Naval War College.

Sims remained a controversial figure within the ranks of the U.S. Navy, upon assuming the presidency of the Naval War College. On the first board for promotion by selection, he also held status as a rear admiral select in the spring of 1917. Sims remained the most senior captain in the U.S. Navy when, on 11 January, the British intercepted an encrypted wireless transmission between Arthur Zimmermann, the imperial German foreign minister, and Heinrich von Eckardt, the German representative in Mexico. British cryptographers within the Admiralty subdivision, "Room 40," partially solved the message five days later.

The deciphered text revealed an outlandish German plan to sponsor a Mexican insurgency against the United States. The Germans also discussed a prospective alliance with the Imperial Japanese to attack American interests in the Pacific. In February, the British shared the information with the United States shortly before passing the full contents of the "Zimmermann

Telegram" to American newspapers, leaving President Woodrow Wilson with few options. In April, the Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels preferred to send another naval officer, but settled upon sending Sims on a secret mission to organize U.S. naval efforts in Europe in the event of an American war declaration. Four days after Congress formally ratified a declaration of war on Germany, Sims held rank as the most junior two-star admiral in the U.S. Navy upon arriving in London on 10 April 1917.

Through the good offices of the First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir John R. Jellicoe, Sims became the preeminent American naval strategist of the First World War. Jellicoe first entrusted Sims with cybernetic intelligence, as obtained through the cryptographic methods employed within the Admiralty "Room 40." Drawing from methods employed by the Royal Navy, Sims then established the so-called "London Flagship" and pioneered contemporary strategic concepts of combined and joint organization. By June, Sims assumed the function of senior U.S. Naval commander with the American Expeditionary Force in Europe, coordinating joint operations at sea and ashore with his U.S. Army counterpart, General John J. Pershing. That same month, Sims became the first U.S. Naval officer to hold combined command over foreign naval forces.

At the invitation of Jellicoe, Sims served on the Allied Naval Council and established new precedents for future American naval practitioners to examine for use in framing future strategy. In essence, Sims pioneered contemporary concepts of the Combined / Joint Maritime Component Commander as the ranking U.S. Naval representative to the Allied Naval Committee and the American Expeditionary Force during the First World War. Having earned four-star rank by 1918, Sims requested demotion to his permanent rank of two-stars in order to return to the presidency of the Naval War College in 1919.

The First World War inspired reforms within the U.S. Navy, which originated on the campus of the Naval War College. In a second tenure as president of the Naval War College, Sims carried forward the visions of Luce and Mahan in efforts to educate future American naval professionals about the importance of understanding history. Among other radical initiatives, Sims drew inspiration from the Admiralty "Historical Section" of Sir Julian Corbett, which served as an adjunct to the Naval Intelligence Division at the Admiralty during the war. In 1919, Sims empowered his chief of staff, Captain Dudley W. Knox, to establish a "Historical Section" at the Naval War College for the specific purpose of supporting the departments of Strategy, Operations, and Intelligence in educating U.S. Naval professionals about the practical value of historical research.

Knox championed efforts to use historical studies as a strategic vehicle for fusing operations with intelligence. Drawing from the ideas of Luce and Mahan after experience in the First World War, Knox also observed that "navies provided unique means, "not to make war but to preserve peace, not to be predatory but to shield the free development of commerce, not to unsettle the world but to stabilize it through the promotion of law and order." In his classic study, *Naval Genius of George Washington*, Knox further explained that the "supreme test of the naval strategist is the depth of his comprehension of the intimate relation between sea power and land power, and of the truth that all effort afloat should be directed at an effect ashore."

Drawing from wartime experience, Sims and Knox enhanced the curriculum and placed the U.S. Navy on course to meet the challenges inherent with the steady demise of the British Empire after the First World War. Sims first organized a panel chaired by Knox and comprised of Captain Ernest J. King and Commander William S. Pye. With the endorsement of Sims, the Knox-King-Pye Board determined that the highest-ranking U.S. Navy officers suffered from being educated only to the "lowest commissioned grade." Given such assertions, the Knox-

King-Pye Report caused significant controversy within the Navy Department. Although the original Knox-King Pye Report supposedly disappeared, the text mysteriously appeared in the Naval Institute *Proceedings* in 1920.

As published, the report forced the Navy Department to enact reforms that ultimately fueled strategic thinking within the American military and naval services in the interwar period. Acting upon the Knox-King-Pye Board recommendations, Sims recruited his former intelligence officer in London, Tracy Barrett Kittredge, to serve as librarian and chief archivist. Knox also served in retired status as the Naval War College chief of staff. Together, Sims, Knox, and Kittredge expanded the library collection from roughly 7,000 to an estimated 45,000 books between 1919 and 1924. Among other works, he acquired the maritime writings of British theorists like Sir John Knox Laughton, Spenser Wilkinson, Sir Philip Columb, Sir Charles Callwell, Sir Julian Corbett, and Sir Herbert Richmond.

From wartime experience in London, Sims knew personally many prominent British strategic thinkers. Sims introduced their works into the Naval War College curriculum, using history as the foundation for fostering debate and innovation. Through this approach, Sims inspired U.S. Naval professionals to pursue a deeper understanding of maritime strategy. Seeking to broaden the perspectives of Naval War College students and faculty, Sims hosted a number of foreign naval professionals on the Naval War College campus. He invited Jellicoe and Corbett in 1920. The following year, Royal Navy Admiral Sir Lewis Bayly delivered a lecture on antisubmarine warfare and the future of Anglo-American naval collaboration. Other visitors to campus included German Vice-Admiral Paul Behnke and Japanese Vice-Admiral Funokoshi Kajishirō. In retirement, Sims returned to campus when an Imperial Japanese Navy delegation visited the Naval War College in the spring of 1924. Among these visitors, Vice-Admiral Ide Kenji and his aide, Captain Yamamoto Isoroku, gained a firsthand perspective on the Naval War College and its influence upon the U.S. Navy.

Given the strategic focus of the Naval War College, Sims expanded the curriculum on tactics to include focused historical case studies for use in war gaming and chart maneuver exercises. Before the First World War, students attending the Naval War College examined the 1805 Battle of Trafalgar, selected campaigns from the American Civil War, and the 1904 Battle of Tsushima. After 1919, Sims introduced the Battle of Jutland as a prominent feature in the menu of historical case studies delivered at the Naval War College. Sims used Jutland to examine questions of command and organization, issues of intelligence, the role of logistics, and the emergent influence of new technologies like wireless, submarines, and aviation.

Jutland remained obscure in the educational curriculum of the Royal Navy, as the results of the battle proved difficult and politically charged as portrayed in the British media. Unlike the British, the Americans relied very heavily upon critical studies of Jutland to examine the transcendent strategic problems of operational objective, command, communications, and intelligence. In their theses on tactics, Jutland loomed large in the postwar Naval War College educations of U.S. naval professionals like William D. Leahy, Ernest J. King, Harold R. Stark, Chester W. Nimitz, and William F. Halsey, Jr.

In classroom discussions of history and by reconstructing the decisions made in past battles on the war gaming floors of the Naval War College, the U.S. Navy arguably won the Battle of Jutland. Because of Sims, the Battle of Jutland influenced the perspectives of U.S. naval officers of the 1920s and 1930s. In compiling their "Thesis on Tactics," students like Captain Ernest J. King observed that Jutland provided an, "ideal illustration of how future commanders may use radio to increase the flexibility of strategy." Commander Chester W.

Nimitz mused that the Battle of Jutland had "no equal in history [and that] it is doubtful if the total forces engaged in the Battle of Jutland will be exceeded at any rate during our time." Nimitz recalled studying the battle in such detail that he "knew every commander intimately" and committed to memory every decision they made "by heart." Twenty years later, King commanded at the strategic levels Nimitz orchestrated the operations during battles that far exceeded the Battle of Jutland, such as at Coral Sea, Midway, Guadalcanal, and Leyte Gulf.

Sims presided as the first graduates of his revised curriculum entered new phases in their careers following studies at the Naval War College. Among many others, these included U.S. Marine Lieutenant Colonel Holland M. Smith in 1922. The following year, the Naval War College produced U.S. Navy Captain Thomas Hart with commanders Harold R. Stark and Chester W. Nimitz. Ernest J. King completed the Naval War College correspondence course in 1924, having qualified in submarines and designed the distinctive submarine insignia that remains an important symbol of the American "silent service." After he qualified as a naval aviator in 1927, King completed the senior course of the Naval War College. As a Sims protégé, King arguably stood among the best graduates of the Naval War College as the U.S. Navy sailed into uncertain waters in executing an American neutrality strategy after 1937.

First World War experience inspired an educational revolution within the U.S. Navy, which centered upon the Naval War College campus. Following the Sims curriculum of the 1920s and 1930s, U.S. Naval professionals sought a strategic advantage with detailed studies of naval history. War gaming historical battles inspired innovative solutions for application in war planning, as exemplified in such theoretical studies as those produced under the War Department caveats ORANGE, RED, and BLACK. These plans later informed the development of the RAINBOW series before 1941. Given this rich First World War history, the Naval War College arguably provided the critical foundations, which enabled the U.S. Navy to secure decisive victory in the Second World War and beyond.

History remains a foreign country for many naval thinkers, as the problems of the past appear to be remote and unconnected to the challenges of the present. In his ironically titled 1992 treatise, *The Lessons of History*, Sir Michael Howard argued that there are no applicable "lessons of history." That same year, Peter Paret suggested in his anthology, *Understanding War*, that "the greatest threat to historical scholarship remains where it always has been: in the coercive intent and power of orthodoxy, whether old or new." Given these assertions, contemporary practitioners and strategic policymakers should be reminded about the problem of war. Doctrinal solutions and variables of technology frequently fail to measure against the fundamental fact that war is essentially a human invention. In reconsidering the longer historiography of strategy, Luce, Mahan, Sims and their associates clearly recognized the fact that war is *not* a "desired end state" in considering the role of "sea power" and the military policy of the United States.

As the U.S. Navy and its global partners sail into the hazy uncharted waters of the future, history remains clearly visible in the phosphorescent wake. Reconsidering the influence of the first "great" war upon the second "good" war in relation to the "cold" war of the twentieth century, contemporary strategic thinkers must recognize the underlying historical continuities that have fueled recent conflicts in the greater Middle East and in the Asiatic. Given our connections with the past, 2017 marks the centennial of formal American involvement in the First World War. The educational opportunities found in the future historical study of the First World War also resonate within the vision articulated within *A Cooperative Strategy for Twenty-First Century Sea Power,* which proposes the development of a "global network of navies that

brings together the contributions of like-minded nations and organizations around the world to address mutual maritime security challenges and respond to natural disasters."

A century ago in London, Jellicoe and Sims pioneered the Anglo-American special relationship in global naval affairs. For our present discussion almost exactly to the day 100 years later, we have the privilege of witnessing the first meeting of their grandsons, Nick Jellicoe and Dr. Nathaniel Sims. Both offer very unique perspectives on their grandfathers. Both have also produced their own historical studies of Jellicoe and Sims, which highlight their importance within the context of contemporary discussions of future naval strategy. From the Laughton Naval Unit at King's College London, doctoral candidate James Smith offers a fresh historical perspective on the First World War as a means to examine the current state of naval professional education and coalition warfare. Commander Benjamin J. Armstrong, PhD, of the U.S. Naval Academy similarly builds upon his past books on Mahan and Sims to offer an important contemporary perspective on future strategic opportunities in the grander maritime arena.

Reflecting upon the riches of the past, contemporary naval strategic thinkers should strive to draw new perspectives from the solid foundations of history. The centenary of the First World War provides contemporary context for this discussion. Just 100 years ago, the U.S. Navy stood in the shadows of the European navies as American forces learned how to operate within the context of modern coalition warfare. After the First World War, the Naval War College helped fuel the educational vision that inspired the development of a "navy second to none" before the Second World War. Given the riches of history, the Naval War College remains a fundamental contributor in shaping a future course for global maritime strategy into the twenty-first century and beyond.