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The Navy, Newport and Stephen B. Luce

Anthony S. Nicolosi

The annals of Newport for the last half of the 19th century until the First World War deal chiefly, if not exclusively, with the brilliance of the summer society. While a preoccupation with the antics of the richest of the rich is understandable, it has nonetheless helped to perpetuate a false impression of the character of the community, one which overlooks other, albeit less conspicuous, elements. Indeed a close investigation might very well reveal that Newport was a microcosm of the class strata of much of the country at the time. In any event, beyond the glitter and the dash of the lords and ladies of Bellevue Avenue, there existed certain distinct groups, institutional and otherwise, which were flourishing and which exerted considerable influence on the growth and development of the community. One of these was the Navy.

A naval presence occurred in Narragansett Bay during the Revolution, giving credence for the arguments of those who represent it as the birthplace of the service.¹ Apart from the relationship to the genesis of a national navy, however, the event was isolated in time and unconnected to the events of the second half of the nineteenth century when a continuous presence had its beginnings.² In this connection, the significant date is 1869, the year that the Naval Torpedo Station, the first naval laboratory, was established on Goat Island in Newport's inner harbor. The founding of the station followed the transfer of the Naval Academy to the city during the Civil War. Newport came close to being a continuing home for the academy but fate and a bit of political chicanery, if some contemporary commentators are to be believed, conspired to cause the school to leave the region when the war ended.³

Starting on Goat Island the naval expansion took place rather quickly, with the founding of the Naval Training Station and the first shore-based recruit training facility on Coasters Harbor Island in 1883, and the founding of the Naval War College—the first such institution in the world—also on Coasters Harbor Island in 1884. Thereafter, expansion proceeded at a more gradual pace with the establishment of the Bradford Coaling Station at the

Melville site on Aquidneck Island at the turn of the century, and the organization of the region as the principal anchorage for the new North Atlantic Fleet just before the First World War.⁴

With the advent of the First World War Newport took on the character of a sailor's town as nearly 100,000 recruits passed through the station, which had expanded to include an area adjacent to Coasters Harbor Island on Coddington Point. It would continue as such during the Second World War and well into the postwar years. Recruit training ended in 1952 but Officer Candidate Training soon took its place. A large naval base structure embracing several activities located on both sides of the bay had been established in 1941 and continued in operation until 1973. Further, a large ship complement, the Cruiser-Destroyer Force of the Atlantic Fleet made Newport its home port, remaining, also, until 1973.⁵

Most historians of the region believe that the Golden Age of Newport society ended with the First World War.⁶ Higher paying jobs at the Torpedo and Training Stations depleted the ranks of the servants of the great houses. The higher salaries and aspirations for more independence and better standards of living continued after the war. Without a cheap labor force the Gilded Age set could not endure in the grand style to which it was accustomed. Consequently, the postwar life style of the rich was, by comparison, subdued and their prominence on the Newport scene greatly diminished.

By contrast, the First World War was the period when the Navy came into its own. The patriotic fervor of the populace in combination with the service's role as principal employer constituted the chief ingredients for a new found stature. At a time when signs reading "sailors keep off the grass" had not yet surfaced, nothing better demonstrated the community-Navy rapport than the gala reception in 1919 accorded Rear Admiral William S. Sims, commander of American naval forces in Europe and newly designated president of the Naval War College.⁷ The town had prepared a hero's return well in advance. Sims' arrival at Government Landing on the waterfront was the occasion for a "spontaneous outburst of prolonged acclaim" by the entire population. The official greeting by the mayor and the singing of the national anthem was followed by a long procession of open carriages, in the first of which was the admiral and his family, through the city and to the Sims residence on Kay Street. There followed a parade consisting of elements of every community organization which filed past the admiral and his family as they occupied a specially constructed reviewing stand. The Newport holiday, the likes of which the average citizen had never experienced before, lasted the entire day and left its participants exhausted, but happy.⁸

Significant movements and events in history are generally the result of a combination of interacting forces and circumstances. Less frequently, they are brought about by the force of character and the peculiar talents of a single

individual. To a notable extent the Navy's coming to Newport is attributable to one such person. That person was Rear Admiral Stephen B. Luce, the acknowledged intellectual leader in the Navy during his age and a man of extraordinary vision and indefatigable energy. Indeed, while it is true that Narragansett Bay as a resource for naval use was in a class by itself, it appeared unlikely that full advantage would have been taken of it had it not been for the intercession of Stephen B. Luce.⁹

Luce was born in Albany, New York in 1827 but spent his early years in Washington, DC where his father worked as a civil servant. On his father's side he was descendant from early settlers of Martha's Vineyard. On his mother's side his forebears were Hudson River Valley Dutch. He began his naval career in 1841 at the age of 14, as a midshipman aboard the Receiving ship *North Carolina* commanded by Rhode Islander Matthew C. Perry. Indirectly, his association with Narragansett Bay may be seen as occurring at the very beginning. For the next twenty years he served in a variety of chiefly shipboard assignments, conscientiously applying himself to perfecting his professional skills and to improving his intellectual ability. He was a voracious reader, indulging mostly in history, the classics, philosophy and religion. It was during this formative period that he cultivated a keen interest in naval professionalism and the need for its advancement chiefly through formal education and training.¹⁰ He heartily endorsed the founding of a Naval Academy in 1845, attending himself briefly in 1848-1849, and lamented the demise of the first recruit training system inaugurated by Matthew C. Perry in the late 1830s. His zeal in these matters and his reputation as an excellent sailor attracted the attention of the Department, and at the advent of the Civil War he was on the staff of the Naval Academy.

The closeness of the war to Annapolis and, in particular, the pro-south sentiment in much of Maryland, persuaded the Navy Department to move the academy. The place selected was Newport, and the move was made in April 1861. At first the school was located in Fort Adams, but by the summer the principal site was the Atlantic House, a commodious four-story hotel situated on the corner of Bellevue Avenue and Pelham Street. In addition to leasing the hotel, the academy tied up its three training ships—the *Constitution*, *Santee*, and *Macedonian*—at Goat Island and made use of a few small buildings of the island.¹¹

The academy staff, faculty and upper classmen occupied the leased hotel for the duration of the war. Plebes lived and studied on board the training ships, in conditions which reportedly were trying and devoid of any comforts.¹²

For a time Luce, now a lieutenant, married and with two small children, lived in the Atlantic House.¹³ However, the charms of the "City by the Sea" captivated the young couple, and they decided to become more a part of its life. An attractive house was secured not far from the academy, and for over three years it served as home.¹⁴

While the idyllic conditions of Newport impacted greatly on the family as a whole, Lt. Luce fell victim to Narragansett Bay's naval attributes. The specifics of his conversion are described by Luce himself in a lecture delivered before the Naval War College many years later. He recalled: "In 1863 . . . Commodore Blake, the superintendent of the Naval Academy, at that time in the Atlantic Hotel, Touro Park, Newport, R.I. invited me to accompany him on a drive to look at a site on Coasters Harbor Island for a new building for the Naval Academy. Mr. George Mason an architect of Newport, made one of the party. Mr. Mason was then engaged in preparing plans under the Commodore's direction for the building; for there were good reasons then for thinking that the Naval Academy would remain in Newport permanently. The proposed site was on Coasters Harbor Island. As we stood on the highest point of the Island . . . and looked upon the broad expanse of the waters of Narragansett Bay, the Commodore grew very eloquent upon the many advantages of the harbor and bay as a naval station, and the perfect adaptability of the site where we stood for a Naval Academy. The very favorable impression made upon my mind at that time was never effaced."¹⁵

The project to keep the academy in Newport was not farfetched by any means. The precedent of Annapolis was only of 16 years duration, Maryland was divided in its sympathies on the war and the Republican Congress and President were bound to be receptive if suitable pressures were applied. Not one to drag his feet, Luce appealed the case of Newport to his superiors in Washington. In a lengthy letter to Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Gustavus Vasa Fox in March of 1864 he wrote: "So long as the Academy was at Annapolis it was naval only in name. It has only been since its location in a seaport [Newport], that it has begun to assume its true character, and it will much further improve when the waters of the Narragansett become one of the great Naval centers [which sooner or later it must become] supposing of course the Academy does not return to Annapolis, a consummation every friend to the Navy should struggle against."¹⁶

In the following months he appealed in the same manner to Senator James Wilson Grimes, Chairman of the Navy Committee,¹⁷ but as fate would have it, the course was already set. Luce later recounted in the above quoted speech: "The Academy in all probability would have remained here but for political reasons. Maryland wanted the Naval Academy once more to be within her borders. An agreement was entered into between Senator Reverdy Johnson of Maryland, and Senator Grimes, Chairman of the Senate Naval Committee, by which the Academy was to be restored to Annapolis, and that it should not be moved without the consent of Congress, the act of May 21, 1864, was passed which established it at Annapolis by law."¹⁸

The political decision notwithstanding, Luce protested vehemently to Senator Grimes and, likewise, to the Newport City fathers, urging them to resist the move of the academy south.¹⁹ The virtues of perseverance which he

had in abundance was for naught, for the academy left Newport never to return soon after Lee's surrender in April 1865.

Perhaps the outcome might have been different had Luce actually been on the scene, but from the latter part of 1863 until the end of the war he was serving on the blockading squadron off the southern coast. This is more than mere speculation, as subsequent events in his very eventful life would demonstrate. At the very least, however, the incident stood as an instructive lesson on the importance of addressing the political factors of a problem. Never again would Luce overlook this basic element. On the contrary, he honed his skills with precision and care, and earned a reputation for political sagacity which placed him in a class by himself within the service. A testimony to his high level of sophistication is the fact that in controversial matters even the most opposite-minded accorded him both friendship and respect.

Despite the fact that Luce was unsuccessful in his attempts to keep the academy in Newport, the period was very productive personally and professionally. As head of the academy's Department of Seamanship, he prepared the first text on Seamanship in America. Essentially a compilation, the volume was published in Newport in 1862 and went through several editions, remaining in use at the academy until after the turn of the century.²⁰ In 1863 he received his first independent command, the USS *Macedonian*, and the same year headed the Midshipman's cruise to Europe. The voyage provided the occasion to investigate recruit training systems in France and England. The information gathered was published in a series of articles in professional journals, the purpose being to encourage the US Navy to inaugurate a system of its own.²¹ The writings were the first of many which Luce would publish during the remainder of his life. He was a firm believer in the power and influence of the press and cultivated some of his closest associations with journalists. Most of the publications were articles which appeared in professional journals and newspapers. Generally, contributions to newspapers appeared without by-lines, as letters to the editor and from anonymous or fictitious persons. Making the point was what counted and if cutting the corners on form was required, so be it.

Not least important, Luce spent a great deal of time with the midshipmen on training ships in the bay learning in detail about the body of water and strengthening his views regarding its merits for the Navy.²² Incidentally, one of the vessels which he may have used on these occasions was the *America*. The former racing yacht had been sold on the continent after its famous victory off the Isle of Wight in 1851. In 1861 it turned up in Charleston, South Carolina and during the first part of the war served in the Confederate Navy as a dispatch boat and blockade runner. Captured in 1862, it saw brief service with the Union blockade and then was sent to the Naval Academy in Newport. Thus, the first connection of the vessel with the region which has become renown for America's Cup races, was as a Navy vessel.²³

Important to the future development of Narragansett Bay as a naval site were the associations that Luce made at the academy in Newport. These included Alfred Thayer Mahan, William McCarty Little, Caspar Goodrich and Charles H. Stockton. Mahan graduated from the academy in 1859, served on the faculty during Luce's tenure, was his executive officer on the *Macedonian* during the voyage to Europe, and next to Luce himself, became the most outspoken proponent of the Naval War College, where he served as president on two separate occasions. McCarty Little was in the class of 1866. He subsequently became Luce's closest friend and principal assistant in the evolution of the Naval War College. Historians of the college would refer to him as the "Attendant Spirit of the College" and agreed that he was responsible for the development of the naval war game and its introduction into the study program.²⁴ Caspar Goodrich, class of 1865, was another of Luce's early supporters in the movement for a Naval War College. He is credited with keeping the college alive in its darkest hour. He also served as college president. Charles Stockton, class of 1867, played a vital role in the survival of the Naval War College in the 1890s when it was most seriously threatened, and served as college president at the turn of the century.²⁵

Luce and his family returned to Annapolis with the academy in 1866. This time he was Commandant of Midshipmen, and the superintendent was his old friend and the Civil War hero, Admiral David Dixon Porter.²⁶ During the three years that Luce remained in Annapolis, Porter was engaged in a project to get the Navy Department to establish a station for the development of torpedos.²⁷ His faith in the weapon and its potential for the future grew out of his experiences in the war. Unquestionably, the most impressionable was the sinking of the Confederate ram *Albatross* in North Carolina waters by the young and daring Lt. William Cushing. Cushing was under Porter's command at the time, and he successfully accomplished his mission by using a small launch armed with a spar-torpedo. Conceivably, developments provided a stimulus as well. The English had developed a successful propeller-driven torpedo in the 1860s, the Whitehead, and offered it for sale to foreign navies, including the US Navy. Purchasing an English torpedo at the time was unthinkable. No, the Navy had to build its own. But first a station had to be established.

Porter's prestige guaranteed approval of the project, and it remained only to select a suitable site. The place chosen was Goat Island in Newport's inner harbor, the location of a small fortification and several rather dilapidated buildings formerly used by the academy.²⁸ The reason why Goat Island was chosen has never been adequately explained, but the evidence, admittedly strongly circumstantial, indicates that politics, the machinations of Porter and the influence of Stephen B. Luce were involved. The War Department relinquished the island to the Navy in July 1869 just four months after Ulysses S. Grant took over the Presidency. Porter was very close to the new President,

and he made no secret about his strong bias for the Newport site, a bias which conceivably was fueled or at least strengthened by Commandant of Midshipmen Luce. In any event, the selling could not have been difficult, for the project promised to salve the hard feelings of many in Newport over the departure of the academy.

Luce was not around to see the beginnings of the first permanent naval installation in the region. In 1868 he left the academy for sea duty. It would be more than a decade before he would return to Narragansett Bay, but when he did, it would be with his family and to stay. Meanwhile, the intervening years were a time of growth in stature among his peers as a sterling practitioner of naval art and science, and as a leader for naval reform and modernization.

The post-Civil War years have been called the “dark ages” of the Navy. The force of men and ships was drastically reduced, pay was poor, promotions impossibly slow and the public interest almost nil. The traditional American antimilitarism came into full bloom as the nation looked to the western frontiers and the exploitation of vast resources. The plight of the service was compounded by a new brand of science called social Darwinism. This concept was preached chiefly by the leaders of industry, and claimed that war was obsolete and armed forces anachronistic and wasteful. The classic problem of the masses was jobs, which the economic magnets were prepared to solve and, in so doing, end world conflict.²⁹

In this climate of decaying ships and equipment, low morale and open hostility, it is surprising that a naval service managed to survive at all. But adversity often brings out the best in men, stimulating energies and sacrifices which might otherwise would not have taken place. Undaunted by the peculiar circumstances, and with an unshakable faith in God and country, Luce and others like him remained committed to the naval service and, furthermore, resolved to improve it as best they could.

For Luce, the objective became an enhanced professionalism, principally through formal education and training. In many respects a traditionalist, he nevertheless enthusiastically embraced the “new science” of the late nineteenth century and undertook to adapt its methods. He realized only too well that modern warfare would no longer permit the luxury of preparation before the mast. Professional expertise must be acquired, in the first instance, before the fight.³⁰

Acting on his strong convictions, Luce became a leader in the establishment of a naval professional association in 1873, the US Naval Institute, and he wrote the first article for the association’s journal, *The Proceedings* in 1874. His efforts then turned to the plight of America’s merchant marine, undoubtedly because it represented an obvious pool for the Navy to draw upon in time of war. In 1874 he assisted in redrafting the Morrill Land Grant College Act of

1862, making it apply to young men interested in maritime careers. The measure was enacted, giving birth to State Maritime Schools, the first at Ft. Schuyler, New York acknowledges Luce as its founder.

Luce's work for naval seamen was no less fruitful, for in 1875 his plan for the training of naval apprentices afloat was adopted by the Navy Department. The plan was a reflection, though with significant improvements, of that inaugurated by Matthew C. Perry nearly four decades earlier.³¹ Initially it involved one training vessel, the USS *Minnesota*. Luce, himself, took command in December 1877, and by the end of the decade, the system involved several training ships.

The next step was to establish a locus of operations for the squadron. The site ultimately settled on was Coasters Harbor Island, just north of central Newport in Narragansett Bay. The selection was no accident, Luce had remained true to his pledge to the region, and his intentions became obvious soon after he took command of the *Minnesota* in 1877. However, publicly he denied playing a part in the matter. In the speech before the Naval War College he remarked: "I do not mean to convey the idea that I had anything whatever to do with bringing this about. But by a singular train of events over which I had no control whatever, it was decided by an impartial Board of Officers that Coasters Harbor Island was the best place for the headquarters of the training system."³²

False modesty, tongue-in-cheek, and an acute sense of the political, the facts tell a far different story—they portray Luce as a very active catalyst. The suspect nature of his remarks is borne out by references in the same place to his role in the founding of the Naval War College. In this connection he stated "In pretty much the same way it came to pass that a Board of Officers, after mature consideration, reported that Coasters Harbor Island was the best place for the War College."³³ Substantial documentary evidence makes this casual, broad-brush treatment a classic piece of understatement. Getting the Navy to approve the novel concept of a naval war college and having it located in Newport entailed planning and action of the highest order, and it is unlikely that anyone but the past-master himself could have carried it off.

Shortly after Luce's ascendance to the head of the training system, Rhode Island invited the Navy to consider Narragansett Bay for a "Naval Training School," very likely at Luce's behind the scene prodding.³⁴ All might have proceeded smoothly from this point had not New London, Connecticut expressed a similar desire. As though to keep the issue from becoming politically volatile, in which case Rhode Island would probably lose, Luce responded quickly and took the *Minnesota* to New London.³⁵ There it remained through the winter of 1879.

The time spent at the Connecticut port, while not unpleasant for the recruits, convinced Luce that the accommodations were not exactly what were required. Newport was still very much on his mind but since the issue

was politically sensitive, he was obliged to bide his time and wait for the proper circumstances. This occurred shortly, as he himself noted: "The summer of 1880 found the *Minnesota* at Hampton Roads. There was a great gathering there, including the President, Mr. Rutherford B. Hayes; Secretary of the Navy, Mr. Richard Thompson; Commodore English, Chief of the Bureau of Equipment and Recruiting (under whom came the training ships) and others of more or less note. For some reason not known to me, there was a disagreement between Secretary Thompson and Commodore English which disposed the latter to listen to any suggestion regarding the *Minnesota*. That suggestion was that the *Minnesota* should have an abiding place—a locus of her own. As a consequence a Board, of which Commodore English was President, was ordered to examine and report upon a suitable place for a Naval Training Station. That Board on the date of December 4, 1880, reported in favor of Coasters Harbor Island."³⁶

Luce was a member of the Board. Meanwhile the Newport city fathers had offered Coasters Harbor Island to the Navy. Since Luce made the city his official residence at that time, the action might have been predicted. The town made good its offer with presentation of a deed to the State in 1881, and the State in turn presented the deed to the Federal Government in 1882. The acceptance was followed in the next year by Navy Department action putting the Training Station on a permanent footing.³⁷ The sequence of events at first moved along rapidly, but protracted negotiations incidental to renewed pressure from New London slowed things perceptibly.³⁸

Immediately following the Board action of 4 December 1880, Luce took the *Minnesota* into Narragansett Bay and anchored in the current off Coasters Harbor Island. It was followed shortly by the other training ships which were officially designated a squadron and placed under Luce's command.³⁹ Three years later, when Luce relinquished his control of recruit training to assume command of the North Atlantic Squadron, a squadron of seven training ships was in the bay. The flagship, the USS *New Hampshire*, which served as headquarters and recruit quarters was tied up at South Point, and a drill hall-gymnasium was constructed nearby on the island.

The North Atlantic Squadron assignment lasted less than three months for on 20 September 1884, Luce was appointed president of the new Naval War College. The site of the novel experiment in professional officer education was the old Newport City Poorhouse, a handsome stone and masonry building situated on a southern prominence and the principal building on Coasters Harbor Island. The poorhouse was still occupied by some elderly tenants when the Navy took possession of the island the previous year, and it had not been used officially by the station.⁴⁰ Its condition was bad, but not so bad as to dissuade the indomitable Luce, recently promoted to rear admiral. The story is told of how he was rowed ashore from the North Atlantic Squadron flagship and solemnly took leave of his former staff. And how in the

twilight of the day he climbed the front steps of the building and placing his hand upon the doorknob remarked with humility, if not defiance, "Know all men by these present, and in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, I christen this building the War College of the American Navy."⁴¹

Luce's concept for a naval war college generated out of his experiences on blockade duty during the Civil War.⁴² He became intrigued with the notion of principles of warfare, and in his crusade for greater professionalism in the service, subscribed to the belief that formal education of career officers in the "art and science" of naval warfare was a prerequisite to preparedness. Persuading the Navy of this requirement would be a difficult task at best, but he took up the challenge once the Training Station was safely underway.⁴³

An important aspect of the project for a college was that it should be located in Narragansett Bay. No place else would do. The merits of the bay as enumerated earlier including the ability to conduct "all kinds of exercises afloat," the presence of the Torpedo Station, and Newport's closeness to the "great educational centers" in the region were the principal points of his argument.⁴⁴ The campaign began with a speech in 1883 before the Newport Chapter of the US Naval Institute which was later published in the *Naval Institute Proceedings* under the title "War Schools." In it Luce defined the need and concluded "as for the location of such a school or College, there can be no doubt that Coasters Harbor Island, where there is already a suitable building, affords the greatest advantage."⁴⁵

To make the project a success Luce sought support in high places and in the press. He called upon his friend William C. Church, editor of the *Army and Navy Journal*, to propagate the gospel of the college in the pages of the journal, something Church did willingly for the next ten years. For his offensive within the Navy, he marshaled the energies of a coterie of reformers, young and old alike of some reputation, including his old chief Admiral David Dixon Porter. Outside the service he appealed to the naval-minded in Congress and Newport, and to Rhode Island politicians. Among the latter was the unperturbable Senator Nelson W. Aldrich. In a letter to Aldrich in which was enclosed a copy of the "War Schools" address, Luce wrote persuasively that the school would "give an authoritatively different character to Coasters Harbor Island, elevate the tone of the [Naval] Station and give stature to the county and the state."⁴⁶ Fortunately, the Senator smiled on the project. Without his support the prospects for success were almost nil.

It was necessary for Luce to plan carefully, for ranged against the project were a host of powerful enemies. The Naval Academy headed the list, seeing itself threatened in a "realm" that it had exclusively held for almost 40 years. The department bureaus were almost overwhelmingly hostile and Congress was at best skeptical.

Apart from the small group of naval reformers, the reaction of the naval officer corps ranged from reluctant consent in deference to the highly

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thought of Luce, to incredulity and concomitant opposition. The corps was already embroiled in a dispute between line officers and engineers over who would command the technologically complex ships of the new Navy. The transformation from wooden ships and sails to steel ships and steam was truly a traumatic experience in the 1880s; neither faction was inclined to be sympathetic to a novel experiment in professional education which, in large part, dealt with intangibles.

By far the most serious threat to the school was offered by the Naval Training Station. The reason being that the station was under the Bureau of Equipment and Recruiting, which laid claim to the whole of Coasters Harbor Island, and the college was under the Bureau of Navigation. The seriousness of the situation would fluctuate with the changes in command in the bureaus and in the Training Station. Generally speaking, the hostility increased with each passing year, and was manifested by concerted efforts to reduce or undo the college. The situation appeared near hopeless in 1889 when the college was forced out of the former Almshouse and combined with a Torpedo School at the Torpedo Station on Goat Island. Despite the fact that the Torpedo Station was under the Bureau of Ordnance the reception there was cordial, for the Station commander was Commander Caspar Goodrich, one of Luce's close friends and a member of the committee headed by Luce, which recommended the establishment of the Naval War College in 1884.

The college managed to get back on Coasters Harbor Island and in a specially constructed building, but a second assault by its enemies occurred in 1894.⁴⁷ This time the college was consolidated under a naval station command whose leaders minced no words about their aims to undo the college. The plot went awry a second time, thanks chiefly to the courage of Captain Henry Taylor, but it was not until after the turn of the century that a modicum of peace existed between the college and the station, and the college achieved a semblance of stability.

The successful launching and the defense of the college in its formative years required the constant attention of Luce who served as the first president. When in 1886 he left to assume duties as commander of the North Atlantic Squadron, his hand-picked successor, Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan actually gave the school little chance for survival for the enemies in Washington cut appropriations, neglected to send students and detached staff and students without regard for the duration of the course.⁴⁸ Depressed by the sorry state of affairs Mahan nevertheless persevered, receiving the company and the support of William McCarty Little, an original founder, and of Luce himself, who kept his squadron in the bay for the summer months, when the college was in session. Luce's presence became even more pronounced after 1889 when he retired at the statutory age of 62. The focus of his attention then and until his death in 1917, remained the college, and he actively pursued policies calculated to encourage its growth. He became the advisor and

confidant of presidents, performed as lecturer, published relevant articles and maintained a flourishing correspondence with fellow officers, politicians and social and economic leaders. The formula worked, for the college survived and prospered.

The crowning achievement of Luce's retirement years, however, was the establishment of Narragansett Bay as a major anchorage for the fleet. During the nineteenth century, apart from the Civil War, the American Navy consisted of a small number of ships of a wide variety of types and sizes. These were formed into squadrons and situated at sensitive places (stations) throughout the world. It was not until after the turn of the century that a large number of ships, including battleships, constituted the fleet. By then the sea power concepts of Alfred Thayer Mahan had taken hold, and the ships, for the most part, operated in concert as the Atlantic fleet.

Luce very early perceived the trend in capital ship construction and took the opportunity to become the apologist for Narragansett Bay as the most appropriate site for a fleet anchorage on the east coast. Of course, this was consistent with his long-term view of the significance of the region for naval purposes, but it now related as well to the new Naval War College. One aspect of the college involved the requirement for ships with which to test new tactical concepts developed at the school.⁴⁹ The Department never took this requirement very seriously, and the sea-trials dimension of education that the school afforded was hardly, if ever, met. In addition, Luce had envisioned a close association between the college and the fleet, whatever its composition. Since Narragansett Bay was a highly navigable body of water, it was a strong reason to locate the college there. In time the ships would be added. By the turn of the century, it appeared the time had come.

The campaign occurred in stages. The first stage concerned the establishment of the Bradford Coaling Station at the Melville site of Aquidneck Island about seven miles north of Coasters Harbor Island. The selection of the site was made in 1900 by a committee headed by Captain Henry Taylor, the college president, 1894-1897, and one of Luce's coterie of naval reformers.⁵⁰ While it is difficult to ascertain exactly the influence Luce may have had on the decision, the fact is that the result was in keeping with his objectives. Navy ships in need of coal now entered the bay routinely.

Stage two began in 1906, when the great naval review took place at Oyster Bay, and continued for several years. By this time the fleet included a significant number of battleships which operated together. Outwardly the campaign took the form of articles and letters in professional journals and newspapers. Behind the scenes there were letters to persons of influence both in the service and in the government.⁵¹

Luce's message was simple and direct. Narragansett Bay was the ideal location for a naval base on the east coast. Older ship yard sites were cramped, congested by commercial traffic and had "torturous approaches." Nar-

ragansett, on the other hand, had numerous sites on its shores for naval facilities, including dry docks, and adequate resources in terms of skilled labor and materials, and was accessible to the open sea quickly and with relative ease at all times of the year. On occasion, Luce bolstered his remarks on the uniqueness of the bay with historical evidence going as far back as colonial times. He referenced the famous survey report of 1764 done by one George Melville for the British Admiralty.⁵² Melville, then recently appointed governor of the island of Grenada had been instructed to visit Narragansett Bay on the way to his new charge, and determine its suitability as an anchorage for His Majesty's fleet in the New World. His detailed response was totally positive, and he urged the Admiralty to develop a base in the region. Luce also made reference to the strong endorsements of the first Secretary Benjamin Stoddard and of Joshua Humphreys, designer and builder of the *Constellation* class frigates in 1800; and of military commissions and committees in the years after the War of 1812.⁵³

All in all, Luce's efforts had the desired effect. The Atlantic Fleet continued in the bay for a good portion of each year. It would continue to do so until well into the interwar years. When Luce died in 1917 at the age of 90, his objectives for a permanent naval presence had been achieved. The Naval Training Station and the Naval War College were firmly ensconced on Coasters Harbor Island and the fleet was in residence yearly. Subsequent circumstances and events would impact one way or another on these activities, but Luce's assessment of the merits of the region would prove correct and the Navy would continue in residence.

Notes

1. For a survey of the early history of the Navy in the Narragansett Bay region see: "Foundations of the Naval Presence in Narragansett Bay, An Overview" by Anthony S. Nicolosi, *Newport History, Bulletin of the Newport Historical Society*, Summer 1979, pp. 61-82.

2. *Ibid.* See also unpublished study (untitled) on the history of the establishment and development of naval installations in Narragansett Bay done by Gerald Kennedy, 1983. Copy in "Newport-Navy," Naval Historical Subjects, Naval War College Naval Historical Collection, Newport, RI (Hereafter NWCNHC).

3. *Infra.*, p. 6.

4. The evolution of the fleet as a concentrated body of capital ships from a wide assortment of smaller vessels performing as squadrons or "on station" in various parts of the world during the 19th century is treated in Paul G. Halpern, *The Mediterranean Naval Situation, 1908-1914* (Cambridge; Harvard University Press, 1971). Of special interest also is "Fleet Organization, 1919-1941" an unpublished study by Richard W. Leapold, 1945. Copies in the Ships History Branch, Naval Historical Center, Washington, DC and in NWCNHC.

5. Kennedy, p. 82ff. Nicolosi, p. 48. For an excellent pictorial study of the events of this period see *Newport, A Pictorial History* by Judith A. Boss (Norfolk, Va.: The Donning Company, 1981).

6. This is the opinion of Mrs. Peter Bolhouse, Curator of Manuscripts and recognized authority on local social history at the Newport Historical Society (interview, 1983).

7. One long-time resident of the region recalls having seen similar signs on a Cliff Walk property during the years between the world wars. (See pencilled note of Radm. John R. Wadleigh, 1983, in "Newport-Navy," Naval Historical Subjects, NWCNHC.)

8. "Admiral Sims Returns," *Newport Recruit*, June 1919, pp. 5-9. (Naval Training Station newspapers, NWCNHC).

9. While the principal factor militating against the establishment of an official naval presence in the pre-Civil War years appears to have been politics (*Infra*, p. 35n), it was not the only factor. Quaker pacifism, the lucrative slave trade, textile manufacturing interests dependent on southern cotton, and southern summer residents colored state sentiment. While this thesis has nowhere been fully developed, the peculiar characteristics of the region are treated in *Rhode Island, The Independent State* by George H. Kellner and J. Stanley Lemons (Woodland, Calif.: Windsor Publications, 1982). The political aspect is considered in Nicolosi, pp. 64-66, 80.

10. A few years after entering the service, young Midshipman Luce wrote: "Our Navy is in a very imperfect state." (Luce letter, ca.1843, Scrapbook No. 40, Box 21, Stephen B. Luce Papers, Library of Congress (Hereafter L.C.))

11. Jack Sweetman, *The U.S. Naval Academy, An Illustrated History* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1979), pp. 63-74.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

13. Luce did not go directly to Newport with his family. He was assigned to the steam frigate *Wabash* until January 1862, and took part in the Battle of Port Royal. See Chap. XI, "Chronology of Life and Writings," *The Writings of Stephen B. Luce* by John D. Hayes and John B. Hattendorf (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press, 1975).

14. "Stephen Bleecker Luce, Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy, Family Reminiscences by his Grandson Stephen Bleecker Luce read before the Society, August 20, 1934," *Bulletin of the Newport Historical Society*, July 1934, p. 17.

15. Stephen B. Luce, "A Talk on the History of the War College," Lecture delivered at the Naval War College, 20 August 1906, RG 14, Faculty and Staff Presentations, 1892-1970, NWC Archives, NWCNHC.

16. Luce to Gustavus Fox, 15 March 1864, Copy in John D. Hayes collection of research materials on Stephen B. Luce, accessioned manuscripts, NWCNHC.

17. Luce to James Grimes, 2 April 1864, Manuscript no. 2, Manuscript Collection, United States Naval Academy (Hereafter USNA). Copy in *Ibid.*

18. Stephen B. Luce, "A Talk on the History of the War College."

19. Albert Gleaves, *Life and Letters of Rear Admiral Stephen B. Luce* (New York and London: Putnam, 1925), p. 94.

20. *Seamanship: Compiled from Various Authorities for the Use of the United States Naval Academy, Newport, R.I.* (Newport, R.I.: Atkinson, 1862).

21. See Chapters IX and X, annotated bibliographies of Luce's writings in Hayes and Hattendorf.

22. Charles H. Stockton "Reminiscences of Early Life and Career to 1871," Charles H. Stockton Papers, 1866-1936, Manuscript Collection 56, NWCNHC.

23. Charles Boswell, *The America, The Story of the World's Most Famous Yacht* (New York: McKay, 1967), p. 185.

24. If there was a triumvirate of Naval War College leaders, it was Stephen B. Luce for concept, establishment and nurturing, Alfred Thayer Mahan for lectures and published writings on seapower and William McCarty Little for internal development and continuity of purpose and for the inauguration and development of the naval war gaming technique. See Ronald Spector, *Professors of War, The Naval War College and the Development of the Naval Profession* (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press, 1977), pp. 74-82; Gleaves, pp. 168, 179; John B. Hattendorf "Technology and Strategy: A Study in the Professional Thought of the U.S. Navy, 1900-1916," *Naval War College Review*, November 1971, pp. 26-29, 32; Francis J. McHugh, *Fundamentals of War Gaming*, 3rd. ed. (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College, 1966), pp. 243-252; William D. Puleston and Austin M. Knight "History of the United States Naval War College," unpublished, Newport, R.I., 1916, page for year 1887.

25. A. Nicolosi, "One Who Has Known to become Irascible," *Naval War College Review*, July-August 1982, pp. 87-88.

26. The friendship began on board the USS *Congress* in the 1840s (Hayes and Hattendorf, p. 3).

27. *Report of the Secretary of the Navy . . . for the Year 1869* (Washington: US Govt Print Off., 1869), pp. 14-15.

28. For the early history for the Naval Torpedo Station see *The Naval Torpedo Station, Newport, R.I., 1658 through 1925*, compiled by Martin F. Trench, et.al. (Newport: Training Station Press, 1920). See also: E.W. Jolic *A Brief History of U.S. Navy Torpedo Development* (Newport, R.I.: Naval Underwater Systems Center Document No. 5436, 1978), p. 9.

29. Spector, pp. 7-8.

30. Stephen B. Luce "On the Relations between the U.S. Naval War College and the Line Officers of the U.S. Navy," *US Naval Institute Proceedings*, September 1911, p. 797 (hereafter *Proceedings*).

31. "The Naval Apprentice System" in *U.S. Naval Training Station, Coasters Harbor Island, Newport, R.I.* (New York: E.H. Hart ca. 1889). See also Nathan Miller, *The U.S. Navy, An Illustrated History* (N.Y.: American Heritage, 1977), p. 194.

32. Luce, "A Talk on the History of the War College."

33. *Ibid.*

34. "March 8, 1878. Resolutions of tender to the United States of a location for a Naval Training School." Entry No. 5, Register of Documents relating to public real estate in charge of the Bureau of Yards and Docks, April 1766-March 1902, RG 125, Records of the Judge Advocate General (Navy), 1799-1943, National Archives, Washington, DC. Copy in "Newport-Navy" Naval Historical Subjects, NWCNHC.
35. Gleaves, pp. 155-156. Luce, "A Talk on the History of the War College." The thesis that the chief criteria for determining sites for naval installations was politics and that this accounted for Rhode Island not having a naval presence in the early 19th century is considered in Nicolosi, "Foundations of the Naval Presence."
36. Luce, "A Talk on the History of the War College."
37. The Naval Training Station was established by the Navy Department on a temporary basis in December 1880 and on a permanent basis in June 1883. (General Order No. 257, December 16, 1880 U.S. Naval Regulation Circular, No. 33, June 4, 1883 *General Orders and Circulars issued by the Navy Department from 1863 to 1887* (Washington: US Govt. Print. Off., 1887), pp. 190, 223.)
38. Gleaves, 159.
39. General Order, No. 271, May 11, 1881, *General Orders and Circulars*. . .
40. Thomas J. Williams, *Coasters Harbor Island and the U.S. Naval Training Station* (Newport, R.I.: Training Station Press 1937), p. 7. Copy in U.S. Naval Station, Newport, R.I. Records, 1895-1974, Manuscript Collection 39, NWCNHC. Williams served as Chief Clerk of the Training Station for many years.
41. *Army and Navy Journal*, 27 September 1884, p. 168. There are a number of versions of what occurred. (Spector, p. 26, 155n).
42. Spector, p. 17.
43. In 1883 Luce wrote: "My great hobby now—now that the Training Station is fairly established—is to erect a War School for officers—the prime object being to teach Officers the science of their own profession—the science of war. . ." (Luce to B. Noyes, 19 July 1883, cited in Gleaves, pp. 163-164.)
44. Luce, "Talk on the History of the War College."
45. Luce, "War Schools," *Proceedings*, 1883, p. 656.
46. Luce to Aldrich, 25 August 1883, Nelson Aldrich Papers, LC, cited in Spector, p. 20.
47. Caspar Goodrich later recorded that he persuaded his friend, Secretary of the Navy Whitney, to include \$100,000 for a new War College building in the Navy Department Appropriation bill of 1889 (Goodrich to Sperry, 6 March 1906, RG 1, Early Records, NWC Archives, NWCNHC).
48. Alfred Thayer Mahan, *From Sail to Steam, Recollections of Naval Life* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1907, pp. 292-294.
49. Spector, 34-35.
50. Board to select a site for a coaling station records in RG 1, Early Records, 1885-1910, NWC Archives, NWCNHC.
51. *The Newport Mercury*, 18 August, 3 November, 20 November, 1906; 23 November 1907, *Newport Daily News*, 31 October, 2 November, 19 November 1906. Luce to Captain Barnette, 13 November 1906, cited in Gleaves, pp. 293-294.
52. S. B. Luce, "The Navy and Its Needs," *North American Review*, April 1911, p. 494-507.
53. *Ibid.*

