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## "One Who Was Known to Become Irascible"

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by

Anthony S. Nicolosi

**T**o Rear Admiral Stephen B. Luce (1827-1917) belongs the credit for the concept of a Naval War College and for its establishment on Coasters Harbor Island, Newport, in 1884. Luce was also largely responsible for the nurturing of the fledgling experiment in professional officer education and for its successful defense against a host of powerful enemies. He was admirably assisted by, among others, members of a coterie of so-called "naval reformers" which included Alfred Thayer Mahan, William McCarty Little, Henry Taylor and Charles H. Stockton. All played active roles in the struggle for survival. All added significantly to administrative and curriculum development. A recent acquisition of papers of Rear Admiral Charles H. Stockton provides many of the particulars of his performance in this regard. The papers and associated memorabilia were presented as a gift to the College through the Naval War College Foundation by Mrs. Pauline Stockton Hoff of Washington, D.C., a granddaughter.

Stockton's naval career spanned forty-six years, beginning in 1861 as a midshipman at the Naval Academy which was located in Newport for the duration of the Civil War. It was here that he first came in contact with Luce, who was a member of the faculty for a while and had already launched his reputation as an avant-garde thinker in matters of education and training. Alfred Thayer Mahan and William McCarty Little were also present, the former for a time on the staff, the latter as a member of the class of 1866. Just how meaningful the Mahan and Little associations were is not known for certain, but Stockton's papers leave absolutely no doubt about Luce's influence on his thinking and future career.

The connection with Narragansett Bay was renewed briefly in 1880 when Stockton attended the Torpedo School at the Naval Torpedo Station on Goat Island in Newport's inner harbor. He returned again in 1887, this time at the new Naval War College to present a series of lectures on the political and military effects of an isthmian canal in Central America. Both Mahan, serving as President and lecturer in naval history, and the ubiquitous Luce were impressed with this first effort, and Stockton was back at the podium the following year. His principal interest was international law, an area in which he would subsequently develop an expertise and considerable reputation both in the service and academe. The much harried and somewhat pessimistic Mahan welcomed his services, which apparently were given with enthusiasm for both subject and philosophy of education of the College. When the enemies of the College succeeded in pushing it out of its building and onto Goat

Island in 1889, Stockton accompanied a frustrated Mahan to Puget Sound as a member of a commission to locate a site for a West Coast Navy Yard. With a shared passion, they would have much to discuss and plan for.

Stockton served in the USS *Thetis*, 1889-1891, chiefly in Alaskan waters, and then spent four more years in Newport and at the College. He supervised construction of the first academic building (which since 1934 has been designated Luce Hall), assisted Mahan to prepare and carry out the course of 1892, and served briefly as President in 1893 upon Mahan's much publicized and reluctant departure for duty in command of the protected cruiser USS *Chicago* in European waters.

The next two years found him actively assisting the new President, Captain Henry Taylor to begin a new study program and to parry another serious attempt by the Naval Training Station Command, also located on Coasters Harbor Island but under a different bureau, to undo the struggling College once and for all. His last assignment in the region was as College President, 1899-1900, during which time he placed great stress on international law studies and inaugurated the *International Law Situations* series ("Blue Books"), the first number of which appeared in print in 1901.

Altogether, Stockton spent twelve years in the Narragansett Bay region, half of which time was at the Naval War College. A stalwart reformer, he worked with energy and consummate skill to advance the interests of the College, come what may. In consort with his two renowned mentors, Luce and Mahan, and the indomitable McCarty Little, the so-called "attendant spirit" and war gaming expert, he helped the College to weather the various assaults from powerful enemies, while at the same time, making notable contributions to its body of knowledge on naval warfare and the regimen.

Copies of official letters, 1898-1900, in the Stockton papers tell of one such threat, that from Assistant Secretary of the Navy George Allen, who wanted to move the school to Annapolis, the site of the Naval Academy. Like the founding father, President Stockton believed that its departure from Newport meant almost certain death. Annapolis was especially to be avoided. In long, carefully written letters to the seemingly inflexible Allen, he gave his reasons. The letters are classic rationales for a College in Newport, as well as demonstrations of masterful control by one who was known to become irascible when challenged on deeply held beliefs.

Nor was Allen's proposal the only serious threat during Stockton's presidency. But Stockton parried the others skillfully, invariably with the advice and the collaboration of the founding father. Truly, his was an important role in the struggle for survival. Admitting this, however, one should not lose sight of the fact that his concentrated work in international law helped immeasurably to enhance the institution's stature. Its reputation as a seat of higher learning in law and especially in the law of the sea, was to a large degree a consequence of his persistent efforts for emphasis in the curriculum and for publication of research findings. His own publication efforts on the subject began in 1895 with the edited *International Law: A Manual Based upon Lectures delivered at the Naval War College by Freeman Snow*. Subsequently, and for several years after his retirement in 1907, he would publish several books and numerous articles. The *International Law Situations* series at the College, meanwhile, prospered after 1901 and continues today.

The Naval War College materials in the Stockton Papers and those relating to him located in the College Archives, depict a man of strong convictions and equally

strong commitments. Dogged application and courage blended with a perennial optimism, which is to say that he was very much like Stephen B. Luce and others of the reform persuasion who were determined upon the professionalization of the officer corps and the modernization of the service. In American naval history there are few examples of a more talented, dynamic and foresighted group coming together to achieve goals of such great importance to the future. Stockton deserves to be remembered most in this context.

Stockton had a long and varied career, and there is more than Naval War College-related items in his papers. The following is an abbreviated listing:

Naval War College President's Correspondence (letter-book of copies of letters sent), 1898-1900.

Official orders and associated personal documents, 1866-1907.

Journal of cruise of the USS *Thetis* in Alaskan waters, 1889.

Journal of the cruise of the USS *Kentucky* on the Asiatic Station, with journal of trip to take command of the ship, 1895-1896.

Reminiscences of early life and career to 1871 (good treatment of the United States Naval Academy in Newport, 1861-1865).

Notes, clippings, etc., on international law subjects.

Imprints: books, etc., relating to the US Navy, the Naval War College and international law.

Miscellaneous photos and certificates of membership.

Stockton materials in the Naval War College Archives in the Naval Historical Collection include the following:

Combined Maritime Expeditions, lecture, 1894.

Commerce Destroying, lecture, 1894.

The Formation of Maps of Charts for War or Coast Defense Purposes, lecture, 1894.

The Interoceanic Canal, lecture, 1894.

Naval and Combined Operations in the Chesapeake Bay and Adjacent Waters during the War of 1812, lecture, 1894.

Preparation for War, lecture, 1894.

Sea Blockade and Naval Investments, lecture, 1894.

The Sea Power and Position of France at the Present Day, lecture, 1894.

The Sea Power and Position of Great Britain at the Present Day, lecture, 1894.

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International Law, a series of lectures, 1895.

An Account of some past Military Operations directed against Puerto Rico and Cuba, lecture, 1899.

Notes on the Action Off Beachy Head in 1690, lecture, 1899.

Submarine Telegraph Cables in Time of War, lecture, 1899.

History of the Naval War College, 1884-1899, unpublished article, ca. 1899.

Memorandum of the Subject for proposed lectures on International Law at the Naval War College drawn up as suggestions to Professor Freeman Snow, 1894.

Memorandum on the Barrundia Case, n.d.

Letter from T. Stone, 9 May 1894.

Letter to SECNAV with enclosed draft of proposed Naval War Code for the United States Navy, 19 May (1900).

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Mr. Nicolosi is Director, Naval War College Museum and Naval Historical Collection.



### Research in the Naval Historical Collection and Museum

The Naval War College Museum and Naval Historical Collection located respectively in Founders Hall and Mahan Hall, have the history of naval warfare as studied at the College and the history of the Navy in the Narragansett Bay region as collection and exhibit themes. The Historical Collection is the depository for College Archives, manuscripts and other special source materials and is open to scholars engaged in legitimate research projects. Persons not connected with the College and the Navy are requested to write (President, Naval War College, Newport, RI 02840) or telephone ((401) 841-4052) in advance.