

[The American and the Snob?](#)

Blog Post published by John T Kuehn on Saturday, May 30, 2020
June Handgrenade 2020

By

John T. Kuehn

The American and the Snob?

A common canard I see in student papers on sea power theory is that A.T. Mahan and Sir Julian Corbett were “rivals.” My own view is that this is a post facto construct of later historians and their students, particularly those who disliked Mahan like Philip Crowl, Peter Karsten, and Robert Seager (until recently his most referenced biographer). In fact, Seager’s biography would be analogous to having Beelzebub write a biography of Christ. I digress (as I usually do).

The evidence is simply not there that Mahan regarded Corbett as a rival. Here is some prima facie evidence:

“...so far as they stand the test, my own lectures, form a desirable preparation for works such as those of Corbett...” A.T. Mahan 1911, from *Naval Strategy*

I’ve read Mahan’s letters to Corbett—in the volumes published by the Naval Institute Press and edited by Beezlebub...I mean Seager. Mahan was polite and solicitous. Not sure if Corbett reciprocated the feeling. In fact I suspect Corbett put Mahan off, the presumptuous American cad whose biography of Nelson caused the officers of the Royal Navy to have ALL the wrong ideas about naval leadership and operations. However this is a mere hypothesis, although I have emails to Mahan scholars outstanding, so who knows...? Two have responded and they have generally confirmed my hypothesis based on their own scholarship.

But let us put it in Downton Abby terms, shall we, Mahan was a mere tradesman, a technician, while Corbett was from the “better sort,” a better class, a gentleman.--as if leisure inferred insight.

Hopefully this will get more of a bang.

Posted in:

[Hand Grenade of the Week](#)