

LT THEODORUS BAILEY MYERS MASON, USN

Theodorus Bailey Myers Mason (May 8, 1848-1899) was the founder and first head of the Office of Naval Intelligence, with the post of Chief Intelligence Officer (prior to it being designated as Director of Naval Intelligence). A graduate of the United States Naval Academy in 1868, Mason was a distinguished linguist with an inquisitive mind, qualities that earned him respect and recognition in the Navy. After a stint in the Hydrographic Office, he traveled extensively in Europe and South America as a naval observer collecting ideas on naval intelligence systems; he knew what information was available and how to obtain it. He recognized that in order for the Navy to compete with its European counterparts, research in naval science and technology should be encouraged. As part of this objective, a unified intelligence agency was needed to gather information on foreign developments for proper dissemination and coordination with the different Bureaus. He made these recommendations upon the request of Secretary of the Navy William H. Hunt. Hunt read and agreed with most of Lt. Mason's recommendations, and consequently issued General Order No. 292 on March 23, 1882, establishing the Office of Naval Intelligence as part of the Bureau of Navigation, with Mason himself as its first "Chief Intelligence Officer." He assumed this post in June 1882. Despite initial difficulties, the different Bureaus recognized its value and used it to share information amongst them and used this information in justifying funds needed for Navy expansion and modernization. Mason clearly guided the ONI well from its first years until April 1885.