

**‘The Admiralty War Staff  
and its influence on the conduct of the naval war  
between  
1914 and 1918.’**

**Nicholas Duncan Black  
University College  
University of London.**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the structure and role of the Admiralty War Staff (Naval Staff from May 1917) between 1914-18. It analyses the means by which people were recruited to the Staff and challenges the accepted view that it was the depository of the 'nondescript' and the 'maimed and hurt'. It will also challenge the traditional view as to both the nature of that structure and work of the Staff during the war, and look at the relationship that the War Staff had with other principal agents in the conduct of the war at sea: the First Lord of the Admiralty, the First Sea Lord and the Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet. It will analyse how that relationship changed during the war, as a result of changing personalities as well as changing bureaucratic structures and strategic realities. In particular it will chart the development of the staff particularly while Jellicoe was First Sea Lord and show that, far from continuing a system of bureaucratic centralisation, this period brought about a decentralisation of Staff work that was not simply the result of the changes that took place in May 1917. It was also the result of a system that was maturing as growing manpower on the staff made decentralisation possible.

The thesis will look at a number of key strategic issues and analyse the opinions that the Staff gave on these topics. It will look at: their opposition to Churchill's 1914 advanced base theories; their role in the inception of the Dardanelles operation in 1915; their handling of the Grand Fleet, particularly the events surrounding the battle of Jutland; the development of the economic blockade of Germany; their opinions on the question of trade defence against submarines; and their quest for new offensive possibilities in 1918.

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Finally, I would like to thank Alex and Lotty for their patience and understanding during my long course of study.

**Abbreviations:**

1SG	First Scouting Group
ASD	Anti-Submarine Division
AWS	Admiralty War Staff
BCS	Battle Cruiser Squadron
BCF	Battle Cruiser Fleet/Force
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
BIR	Board of Invention and Research
BL	British Library
BS	Battle Squadron
CCC	Churchill College, Cambridge
C-in-C	Commander-in-Chief
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
Commodore 'S'	Officer Commanding Submarine Flotillas
Commodore 'T'	Officer Commanding Torpedo (Boat) Flotillas
Commodore 'D'	Officer Commanding Destroyer Flotillas
COS	Chief of the (War/Naval) Staff
CS	Cruiser Squadron
D1SL	Deputy First Sea Lord
(A)DASD	(Assistant) Director of the Anti-Submarine Division
DID	Director of the Intelligence Division
DOD	Director of the Operations Division
DMD	Director of the Mobilisation Division
DNO	Director of Naval Ordnance
DTD	Director of the Trade Division
FCT	French Coal Trade
FO	Foreign Office
HMS	Her/His Majesty's Ship
HSF	High Sea Fleet
ITP	Inspector of Target Practice
ID	Intelligence Division
IWM	Imperial War Museum

JMH	<i>Journal of Military History</i>
JRUSI	<i>Journal of the Royal United Services Institute</i>
MMD	Mercantile Movements Division
NOT	Netherlands Oversea Trust
OD	Operations Division
OIC	Order in Council
OMC	Organising Manager of Convoys
NA	National Archives
TD	Trade Division
NLMD	Naval Library, Ministry of Defence
NMM	National Maritime Museum
NRS	Navy Records Society
RM	Royal Marine
RMA	Royal Marine Artillery
RMLI	Royal Marine Light Infantry
RN	Royal Navy
RNAS	Royal Naval Air Service
RNR	Royal Naval Reserve
RNVR	Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve
Soton	Hartley Library, University of Southampton Library.
WO	War Office
VACEMS	Vice-Admiral Commanding Eastern Mediterranean Squadron
VACECE	Vice-Admiral Commanding East Coast of England
VACO&S	Vice-Admiral Commanding Orkneys and Shetlands
SNO	Senior Naval Officer
RA	Rear-Admiral
VA	Vice-Admiral
W/T	Wireless/Telegraphy
<i>FGDN, vol</i>	Marder, A. J. (ed.), <i>Fear God and Dread Nought, The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone</i> , 3 volumes. London 1952-59
<i>DNSF, vol</i>	Marder, A. J., <i>From Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era 1904-1919</i> . Oxford. <i>Volume i, The Road to War 1904-1914</i> , 1961; <i>volume ii, The War Years to the Eve of Jutland, 1914-</i>

*1916, 1965; volume iii, Jutland an After, May 1916 – December  
1916, 1966; volume iv, 1917 – Year of Crisis, 1969; volume v, 1918 –  
1919: Victory and Aftermath, 1970.*

*Churchill, vol 3 comp 1. Gilbert, M., (ed.), Winston S. Churchill, volume 3, companion  
volume 1, London 1972.*

## Introduction.

The Royal Navy ended the First World War with a sense of dissatisfaction at its performance.<sup>1</sup> As the senior service and the backbone of a 'blue-water' strategy, the Royal Navy expected to play a dominant role in the strategic policy of Britain and her Empire.<sup>2</sup> But the War was won on the Western Front. Some soon argued whether it had been won at all, such was the cost.<sup>3</sup> The Admiralty put out its own version of events, but even here the emphasis still lay with the army: if the Navy was, by its own metaphor, the 'spearshaft' of victory, it was not the spear's point itself.<sup>4</sup> Added to this were the acrimonious issues of the battle of Jutland and the introduction of convoy.<sup>5</sup> In neither case was the Navy in general nor the Admiralty in particular judged to have excelled. These disputes, particularly over Jutland, soon became personalised, with Beatty and Jellicoe, to take the naval commanders, or Roskill and Marder, to take the historians, forming the focus around which interpretations circled.<sup>6</sup>

At least there was one thing on which most historians were able to agree, and that was that one of the weaknesses in the planning structure was in the inadequate nature of naval staff work during the war.<sup>7</sup> Lacking in executive authority, lacking in numbers, lacking in brains, and lacking in training: these were the stark realities of life on the Admiralty War Staff. Created by Churchill, but almost immediately orphaned, the Staff was left to be manipulated or ignored. Few had a good word for it. Even its own Technical History, written by Commander Alfred Dewar, said of the

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<sup>1</sup> Marder, *DNSF*, vol. v., 299-300.

<sup>2</sup> Baugh, D., 'Great Britain's "Blue Water" Policy, 1689-1815', *The International History Review* X, 1988, 33-58.

<sup>3</sup> Howard M., *The Continental Commitment: the dilemma of British defence policy in two world wars*, London 1972, 74-5.

<sup>4</sup> Admiralty Memorandum, 'The Command of the Sea, 1914-18', 24<sup>th</sup> December 1918, in, Hattendorf, J. B., Knight, R. J. B., Pearsall, A. W. H., Rodger, N. A. M., Till, G., (eds.), *British Naval Documents 1204-1960*, NRS, 1993, 766-769.

<sup>5</sup> Marder, *DNSF*, vol. iii (Jutland) and vol. iv (Convoy); Halpern, P., *A Naval History of World War One*, London 1994; Lord Jellicoe, *The Grand Fleet, 1914 - 16: Its Creation, Development and Work*, London 1919; Lord Jellicoe, *The Crisis of the Naval War*, London 1920; Bacon, R. H., *The Life of John Rushworth, Earl Jellicoe*, London, 1936; Roskill, S. W., *Admiral of the Fleet Earl Beatty, the Last Naval Hero: An Intimate Biography*, London 1980; Harper, J., *The Record of the Battle of Jutland*, HMSO 1927; Harper, J., *The Truth about Jutland*, London 1927; Corbett, Sir Julian S., and Newbolt, Sir Henry, *History of the Great War: Naval Operations*. 5 vols. London, 1920 - 1931, vol. iii (Jutland) and vol. iv (Convoy); Gordon, A., *The Rules of the Game. Jutland and British Naval Command*, London 1996.

<sup>6</sup> Roskill, S., *Churchill and the Admirals*, New York, 1977; Ranft, B., 'Naval Historians at War', *JRUSI*, 120, March 1975, 79-80.

<sup>7</sup> Marder, *DNSF*, vol. v, 314-315; Dewar, Vice-Admiral K. G. B., *The Navy From Within*. London, 1939; Kenworthy, J. M., *Sailors and Statesmen - and others: an autobiography*. London, 1933; Marder, A. J., (ed). *Portrait of an Admiral: The Life and Papers of Sir Herbert Richmond*. London, 1952; Hunt, Barry D., *Sailor Scholar Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond 1871 - 1946*, Ontario, 1982.

Staff's formation that, 'the new staff hardly constituted a staff system in the army sense of the word.'<sup>8</sup> And once war began it fared little better. The same Staff history said of its work in 1915, 'It was apparently not a system in which it was easy to mature carefully considered plans or to oppose any particular policy.'<sup>9</sup> The aim of this thesis is to challenge some of these assumptions about the War Staff.

Of all the Divisions in the Staff the one that has generated most interest was that of Intelligence.<sup>10</sup> There were good reasons for this. It was the largest Division on the Staff. It employed some of the Staff's most flamboyant and unorthodox characters. And it was involved with some important, even spectacular, work. Few can resist being drawn into the world of Room 40 where not only were the movements of the HSF monitored, but also the explosive discoveries of the Zimmerman Telegram were first revealed. There was, of course, more to ID than Room 40, and this thesis will aim to redress the balance in the assessment of ID's work, as well as looking at the other, often neglected, divisions of the Staff.

One of the features of the historical debate about the Staff has been the belief that 'no material change took place in the constitution of the War Staff between November 1914 and December 1916.'<sup>11</sup> A diagram was created to prove it.<sup>12</sup> To believe that this was the case was to see the Staff in purely structural terms, and a structure defined in the *Navy List* and the official Technical History of the Staff. As will be shown later, the Staff was a more complex body than the one suggested in these two publications.

In addition, one of the biggest problems that affected the Staff was the lack of personnel. Between November 1914 and December 1916 this grew from 59 personnel to 129, although as will be shown later, it is very difficult to be precise about any Staff figures.<sup>13</sup> Although it was true that these changes accelerated after Jellicoe arrived as First Sea Lord, to argue that nothing happened before then is incorrect. Historians have also tended to emphasise key moments, or turning points when the

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<sup>8</sup> Admiralty, Naval Staff Monograph, *The Naval Staff of the Admiralty: Its Work and Development*, 1929, NLMD BR1875, 54.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>10</sup> James, Admiral Sir William, *The Eyes of the Navy. A Biographical Study of Admiral Sir William Hall*, London 1955; Beesly, P., *Room 40. British Naval Intelligence 1914-18*, London 1982; Andrew, C., *Secret Service: The Making of the British Intelligence Community*. London 1986.

<sup>11</sup> *Naval Staff*, 72; Dewar, A., Memorandum, 'Notes on the Admiralty War Staff and Naval Staff 1914 - 1919', n.d. [July 1919]. NMM, Dewar Papers, DEW 4.

<sup>12</sup> See Appendix D.

<sup>13</sup> See Appendix B Graph 1.1



Staff changed, creating a history of revolutions rather than of evolution. These critical moments were December 1916 when Jellicoe arrived in London and created the ASD; May 1917 when with a change of name from 'Admiralty War Staff' to 'Naval Staff' the First Sea Lord became *de facto* COS and the Staff at last gained executive authority; and in 1918 when, under the Geddes-Wemyss Administration, specialist Divisions were created including a Division devoted to Staff Training. It is one of the features of the study of bureaucracies that, by their very nature, historians like to see institutional or structural change as the measure of development. The result is that historians tend to focus on such critical moments, and ignore more gradual processes at work. This thesis will show that the Staff was in fact a far subtler and evolving creature than has thus far been acknowledged.

Historians have also identified the 'Monsters' of the staff, with first prize going to Capt. Thomas Jackson for his alleged mishandling of intelligence during the Jutland engagement.<sup>14</sup> But others lurk not far beneath the surface: Sir Henry Oliver, COS for much of the war, and a bureaucratic bottleneck whom Geddes finally axed in January 1918; and RA Alexander Duff, Jellicoe's DASD who resisted the introduction of convoy until it was almost too late in the summer of 1917. And of course there were the 'Heroes': Capt. Herbert Richmond, a naval Cassandra to whom no one would listen; Capt. Kenneth Dewar and the other *Young Turks* who found bureaucratic frustration at every turn; Commander Reginald Henderson who collected the 'real' shipping figures in early 1917 and fed them to Lloyd George; and of course Sir David Beatty. Beatty was not a member of the Staff, although in 1918 he tried to become one. Instead he was, like Richmond, a visionary: optimistic and bellicose, Beatty wanted convoys and did not let detail dominate his life in the way that it did for Jellicoe. The title of Professor Roskill's biography alone was enough to show Beatty's heroic status.<sup>15</sup>

The majority of the Staff, however, came in for no singular mention. 'nondescript' was one of the milder descriptions.<sup>16</sup> Many were worse.<sup>17</sup> Too old or lame or stupid to go to sea, these officers were a pale comparison to the inhabitants of

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<sup>14</sup> Beesly, *Room 40*, 301-315.

<sup>15</sup> Roskill, *Beatty*.

<sup>16</sup> Marder, *DNSF*, vol. v, 314-315.

<sup>17</sup> Dewar, *Navy From Within*, 229; Kenworthy, *Sailors*, 62; Marder, *Portrait*, 10<sup>th</sup> May 1917, 252; Rodger, N. A. M., *The Admiralty*, Lavenham 1979, 128; Grimes, S. T., *War Planning and Strategic Development in the Royal Navy, 1887-1918*, unpublished University of London Ph.D. Thesis 2003, 208-9.

Room 40 whom they allegedly despised.<sup>18</sup> With little or no staff training these officers bungled their way through the First World War, sending garbled signals, wrongly positioning ships, and trying to train sealions to attack enemy submarines.<sup>19</sup> It would have been comic if it had not been so tragic. One of the aims of this thesis is to identify these Staff Officers and, by examining their careers, show that far from being inadequate officers, they were, by and large, men of more than above average ability and broad naval experience. ‘Nondescript’ could not be further from the truth.

My aim then is to investigate the impact that the Staff had on the Royal Navy’s decision-making processes between 1914 and 1918. To do this it is necessary to place the Staff in the context of the principal foci of power which all attempted, at different points, to exert influence on the direction of naval policy. They were:

- a) The First Lord of the Admiralty. This post was held by a senior politician with a seat in the Cabinet. Given the size of the Navy’s budget, the central role of the Navy in the defence policy of the state, and depending on his character, this man could be one of the most important members of the government, and have a decisive impact on the direction of naval policy. During the war there were four First Lords: Winston Churchill; Arthur Balfour; Sir Edward Carson and Sir Eric Geddes (see Appendix A for dates in office).
- b) The Sea Lords. These were the senior serving naval officers. Each Sea Lord was responsible for a different aspect of naval policy. Collectively, with the First Lord, Civil Lords and the Secretary to the Board, they made up the Board of Admiralty. In theory, at least, all the Navy’s actions were carried out in their name. The dominant figure of the group was the First Sea Lord. Again, depending on his character, he could effectively by-pass many of the other Sea Lords and attempt to direct their actions by himself. During the First World War the First Sea Lords were: Prince Louis of Battenberg; Lord Fisher; Sir Henry Jackson; Sir John Jellicoe and Sir Rosslyn Wemyss (see Appendix A for dates in office).
- c) The Commanders-in-Chief. Given that the Royal Navy maintained a global deployment, there were numerous station and fleet commanders.

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<sup>18</sup> Beesly, *Room 40*, 39

<sup>19</sup> Marder, *DNSF*, vol. i., 78

The most important of these in the First World War was the C-in-C of the Grand Fleet. In him was vested tactical command of the greatest concentration of naval force in British history, and on his shoulders were borne the expectations of a nation awaiting a second Trafalgar. He was, famously, the only man who could lose the war in an afternoon.<sup>20</sup> Beyond the Grand Fleet there were the other commanders, of the Harwich Force, the Channel Fleet, the Eastern Mediterranean Squadron, and so on, who all exercised local command (although this was increasingly circumscribed, as will be shown later), and at times might influence naval policy. In such a structure lay ambiguities. The most important of these was the semi-autonomous existence of the BCF and its relationship with the Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow. During the First World War the Grand Fleet was commanded by Sir John Jellicoe (August 1914 - November 1916) and Sir David Beatty (November 1916 - April 1919).

- d) The Admiralty War Staff. Set up in 1912, the War Staff was supposed to provide the Staff structure which so many felt that the Navy needed. Much more will be said about this structure later. In overall control of the Staff's divisions was the COS. Although central to many decisions, until May 1917 he had no independent power of his own. It was only when the War Staff changed its name to the Naval Staff and the positions of COS and First Sea Lord were merged that the Staff gained any sort of real power. During the First World War the COS were: VA Sir Doveton Sturdee; VA Sir Henry Oliver; Admiral Sir John Jellicoe and VA Sir Rosslyn Wemyss (see Appendix A for dates in office).
- e) The final focus of power lay outside the Royal Navy: the Cabinet and its various sub-committees. The RN did not operate in a vacuum. It was administered by a government ministry (the Admiralty) which itself was controlled by the collective decisions of the Cabinet. Other departments were also represented in the Cabinet, such as the Foreign Office or the Board of Trade, and they too could influence the decisions of this body, and thus circumscribe the freedom of the Admiralty.

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<sup>20</sup> Churchill, *World Crisis*, vol. iii, 112.

The aim of this thesis, therefore, is to identify the policies that the War Staff advocated in regard to certain key questions during the war, and to ascertain the extent to which the Staff was able to influence the direction of these policies. It was not possible to investigate every aspect of the Navy's activities during the war, as the range of what it did was too vast to be adequately addressed. Instead, I have chosen some of the more important questions and looked at how the Staff handled them between 1914 and 1918. These issues include: the handling of the Grand Fleet; the economic blockade of Germany; the defence of British trade; proposals for a 'forward' base against Germany and operations in the Baltic in 1914-1915; the inception of the Dardanelles operation in 1915; and the search for the offensive in 1918.

In each of these issues there was the question of the 'dominant voice', and this thesis will look at the relationship between the Staff and that voice. In particular, it will assess the quality of the Staff's advice. This was especially important in the period before May 1917 when that was all that the Staff could give. In such a situation the personalities of those concerned became important. The degree to which anyone was able to influence or work round the likes of Lord Fisher or Winston Churchill remains an area of considerable interest. Here, the War Staff met with mixed success. Each chapter will determine the influence that each of these 'five foci' was able to exert, and in particular explain the extent to which the War Staff was able to determine which policies were pursued. Chapter 1 analyses the personnel on the Staff, mostly through service records, and challenges many traditional views of these men. Chapter 2 then looks at the work of the War Staff in the period prior to the outbreak of war. Chapter 3 focuses on the period of the war when Battenberg was First Sea Lord, while Chapter 4 relates to the Staff during the stormy period of Fisher's return to the Admiralty and the inception of the Dardanelles campaign. Chapter 5 challenges some of the traditional views of the Balfour-Jackson era, and Chapter 6 looks at the role of the Staff during Jellicoe's time at as First Sea Lord. Finally Chapter 7 investigates the work of the Plans Division in particular in the final year of the war when Geddes and Wemyss ran the Admiralty.

Behind all of these actions, however, was that 'other part' of the Staff which has been largely ignored in the historiography. The Staff in some respects was like an iceberg, with the structure as outlined in the *Navy List* being the part that can be seen above water. There was, however, another aspect of the Staff which has been less

thoroughly recorded, although recent work has suggested that there is much more than can be said here.<sup>21</sup> It will be suggested in this thesis that to see the Staff in terms simply of its notional structure as outlined in Appendix D is misleading. The staff was bigger, more specialist and more important than traditional accounts would suggest. In this respect, the Staff structure as outlined in the *Admiralty Telephone Directories* of 1914-18 is significantly more important in helping the historian to understand what was going on.<sup>22</sup>

Before doing this it is important to clarify what is meant by certain terms. For example, many critics of the Royal Navy turned on 'the Admiralty' as the body most to blame when things went wrong.<sup>23</sup> As such it became an umbrella term for criticism. In many respects, however, it was an unwieldy term because the Admiralty was not a single cohesive body, despite what superficial appearances might have suggested. In theory decisions were taken by the Board of Admiralty. Membership of the Board was not static, and by 1917 some thirteen individuals had the right to sit on the Board. Collectively they carried out the duties of the Lord High Admiral, and the Admiralty initiated action in their name. They were 'Their Lordships' in the parlance of naval correspondence, and 'T.L.' in the favoured world of military abbreviations.<sup>24</sup> This singular term gave a false impression for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the Board's role was being pulled in two directions. As will be discussed later, developments in signals technology made possible for the first time the operation of a centrally controlled war by the Board. At the same time, however, the personalities of the likes of Churchill and Fisher made such collective decisions less likely. Consequently, there was a danger that such greater power would be exercised by just a couple of people. In addition, as the war progressed, the Board also lost control of traditional responsibilities to new forces, such as the Ministries of Munitions or Shipping as well as the Naval Staff itself. To see how decisions were made, therefore, it is important to look beyond the Board. It is important to note that although the Board may have become less important, the First Sea Lord *could* become

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<sup>21</sup> Lambert, N., 'Strategic Command and Control for Manoeuvre Warfare: The Naval Intelligence Department and the Creation of the Royal Navy's "War Room" Plot, 1905 – 1915', forthcoming article, *JMH*, 2005. I am grateful to Dr. Lambert for a preview of this article.

<sup>22</sup> *Admiralty Telephone Directories, 1914-1918*. MDNL.

<sup>23</sup> Dewar, *Navy From Within*, passim; Kenworthy, *Sailors*, passim; Marder, *Portrait*, passim.

<sup>24</sup> Gardiner, L., *The British Admiralty*, Edinburgh 1968, 340-345.

more important. The reason such a qualification was that some First Sea Lords, albeit for different reasons, did not exercise quite the power that they could have done. This potentially made for a greater Staff role, although it could, and in the case of Churchill did, allow the First Lord a dominant voice.

When hostilities commenced in 1914, however, there was a further factor to complicate matters. Both out of a sense of national duty, and to support an organisation which was rapidly overburdened with paperwork, the Admiralty attracted the services of a series of retired Admirals. Some of these were labelled the 'charity admirals' by the septuagenarian Lord Fisher.<sup>25</sup> The most famous of these officers was Sir Arthur Wilson. Fisher's own view of Wilson fluctuated. He had been Fisher's choice to succeed him as First Sea Lord in 1910, a position in which he had managed to damage both the prestige of the Navy and its war planning prior to his retirement in 1911. But once war began Wilson was back, and was drawn into the inner circle of Churchill's War Group. Churchill used officers like Wilson extensively, probably because, lacking institutional positions of their own, they were easier to manipulate or ignore. Churchill used these individuals as sounding boards for his new ideas, or even the means by which he felt he could circumvent the existing planning system. This made the work of others much harder, as it was not always clear who was involved in any one project. It was, therefore, with caution, that we must use the term 'Admiralty'. It was not synonymous with the War Staff, although much of what the Staff wrote or drafted was then sent out under the name of this ruling body. Letters that Jellicoe addressed to the Admiralty, or replies to those letters from the Admiralty, were in fact sent round a consistent group of individuals, such as the First Lord, First Sea Lord and the COS. Often, depending on their topic, they would also be 'referred' to the relevant Staff Divisional Director

This thesis will seek to show that when war broke out in 1914 the Royal Navy did have a coherent plan as to how that war was going to be conducted. One of the key elements of this was in the development of an economic blockade against Germany. This plan was undermined in the early days of the war, not by the Navy, but by the government. Ignoring Fisher's famous dictum that 'moderation in warfare is imbecility' the government believed that the war might instead be won by avoiding a

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<sup>25</sup> Fisher to Jellicoe, 29<sup>th</sup> November 1914. BL, Jellicoe Papers, Add. Mss. 49006.

wholesale dislocation of the economy.<sup>26</sup> Under pressure from the FO and the Boards of Trade and Agriculture, and with the notion of 'Business as Usual' underpinning its views on the degree to which the British economy should be forced to adapt to the demands of war, the British Government hoped that an immediate blockade would not be necessary.

The result of this decision was that, despite the enthusiasm of the Navy for greater aggression, both at sea and on shore, the blockade took hold slowly. The other central part of the Navy's strategy was the creation of the Grand Fleet. The essentials of this in terms of its composition and strategy were in place when the war commenced. Ever hopeful that a decisive engagement would happen with the HSF, some, such as Fisher or Richmond, were also realistic that it might never take place. Despite this latter possibility they still recognised that the Grand Fleet would be the decisive weapon of the naval war. More importantly, it was a weapon which would be controlled from London.

The Admiralty had also been developing its own plans for a global war in which it would use 'information advantage' to deliver victory. These ideas had developed in the first years of the century. In short it would allow a financially stretched Great Britain to fight a defensive war in European waters while prosecuting an economic war overseas. The only way that this could be done effectively and with limited resources would be for the British to be able to target, or vector, their limited naval forces to points where they knew that the enemy's warships or merchant vessels would be. This meant monitoring coal stocks, ship movements and harbour facilities, but for the theory to be reality, it needed reliable ship-shore communications and a centrally run war. It was only with the development of W/T technology in the years immediately before the war that such a plan was possible.<sup>27</sup>

The famous breaking of the German codes was therefore just one tool in the Intelligence war against Germany. As will be shown later, the Staff played a vital role in accumulating and analysing such intelligence. It goes a long way in explaining what the Staff 'did' during the war. The code decrypts would prove crucial in enabling the Grand Fleet to make some use of the scant opportunities for battle with the Germans. Without this information it is hard to believe that the alternative policy of 'sweeps' would have led to an engagement. That though, was a risk that the British

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<sup>26</sup> Fisher to Unknown, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1905, in Marder, *FGDN*, vol. ii, 52.

<sup>27</sup> Lambert, 'Strategic Command', between footnotes 58-80; pagination uncertain.

took when they adopted the strategy of the distant blockade and the battle fleet in the North Sea. One reason why such risks were taken was because the Admiralty believed that through refining its battle strategy they could safely take capital ships into the North Sea and decisively engage the HSF.<sup>28</sup>

In these decisions the early War Staff were in full agreement, and they had an important role in drawing up the Grand Fleet's War Plans in 1912-13.<sup>29</sup> Once war began, however, the Navy came in for criticism, particularly amongst a press that was hungry for victory. In place of victory came muddle. The escape of the *Breslau* and the *Goeben* was seen as particularly inept. Churchill wanted and needed action. He believed that a forward base at, for example, Borkum would either prompt the HSF out of harbour or at least allow the British to take the war to the German coast. The War Staff viewed the prospect with alarm.

Stopping Churchill became almost a habit at the Admiralty in the autumn and winter of 1914-15. The arrival of Lord Fisher in reality made little difference, and relationship came unstuck on the issue of the Dardanelles. Churchill saw in this campaign the prospect of a cheap victory.<sup>30</sup> Others viewed it in even more decisive terms. Despite their being sceptical about the ability of the Navy to force the Dardanelles by itself, Churchill overrode the views of his service advisors, and convinced both the commander at sea and the War Council that they were much more enthusiastic. The campaign went wrong, and when confronted by the Dardanelles Commission with evidence of service hostility to the plan, he lied.<sup>31</sup>

The May Crisis brought down both Fisher and Churchill. What followed has been seen as a period of sterility.<sup>32</sup> In one important respect, however, the Balfour-Jackson regime was prepared to challenge the supremacy of 'concentration of force' in regard to the Grand Fleet. By early 1916 it had become apparent that the HSF was not going, if at all possible, to engage the main British battle fleet. Such was the British preponderance of capital ships by then that Jackson and Oliver decided that

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<sup>28</sup> Sumida, J. T., 'A Matter of Timing: The Royal Navy and the Tactics of the Decisive Battle, 1912-16', *JMH* 67, 2003, 85-136.

<sup>29</sup> 'War Plans and War Orders, No. 1', 16<sup>th</sup> December 1912 (No. 20) and 18<sup>th</sup> February 1913 (No. 25), Additional corrections by DOD. ADM 137/818.

<sup>30</sup> Churchill to Oliver, 19<sup>th</sup> October 1916, 'Point 11'. NMM, Oliver Papers, OLV/5.

<sup>31</sup> Churchill Minute, January 6<sup>th</sup> 1915. ADM 13/1089; *Proceedings of the Dardanelles Commission*, questions 1391 and 1479. ADM 116/1437B. He repeated these views in *The World Crisis*, vol. ii, 100.

<sup>32</sup> Murfett, M, 'Admiral Sir Henry Bradwardine Jackson (1915-1916)', in Murfett, (ed.), *The First Sea Lords. From Fisher to Mountbatten*, Westpoint 1995, 91-92; Marder, *FDSF*, vol. ii, 298-299.



the moment had come to adopt their own 'risk policy'. Despite misgivings Jellicoe gave his consent. In short the plan was to increase the strength of the BCF by giving it the 5BS of 'fast' *Queen Elizabeth* battleships. They would be based further south, thus making an engagement more likely given the time constraints. Their aim was to engage the 1SG of German battle cruisers, which they would outgun, and draw them north in a long-range engagement. The greater speed of the BCF and 5BS would mean that they would remain out of range of the main body of the HSF. By drawing the 1SG north, it was hoped that the BCF would lead it into the trap laid by the Grand Fleet moving south. The destruction of the 1SG would then give the British such an overwhelming strength in capital ships that other more daring plans might be adopted, even into the Baltic. As such, the battle of Jutland was a War Staff battle.

The events of 31<sup>st</sup> May 1916 did not turn out as the British had hoped. The reasons were numerous and complex. The handling of Intelligence in London was poor, although not as bad as has normally been suggested.<sup>33</sup> The principal failures were in the lack of co-ordination between the 5BS and the BCF, the suicidal handling of propellant on board the battle cruisers themselves, and the failure to attack German warships or even report their positions by the destroyers during the night 'action'. The faults lay principally with Beatty. Inquiries and reforms were instituted so that should another encounter happen, the British would not allow the Germans to escape again. By the end of 1916, however, the increasing worry was not the fate of the HSF, but that of the British merchant marine.

Jellicoe was brought home to sort out the problem. It was not his finest hour. He was well aware of the issues, but along with almost all the senior officers of the Staff he did not see convoy as the solution to the problem. The decision, in April 1916, to experiment with it has been seen as almost too little and too late. Both Lloyd George and Beatty took the credit for forcing the Admiralty into making a humiliating about turn in the face of mounting losses and criticism.<sup>34</sup> In both claims there was some truth, but added to this had to be seen the success of smaller experimental 'protected sailings'. Several Staff Officers, not simply Commander Henderson, had a hand in both realising the scale of the problem, and recognising that it was also possible to create a solution. Their planning indicated to the likes of Duff, the DASD,

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<sup>33</sup> Beesly, *Room 40*, 155.

<sup>34</sup> Lloyd George, D., *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George*, 6 vols, London, 1933-1936, vol. iii, 1162; Roskill, *Beatty*, 219-220.

that it was possible to introduce a partial convoy system which was not simply an 'all or nothing' policy.

Thus instituted convoy indicated its ability to contain the submarine threat. It did not necessarily show that the threat could be destroyed. The submarine crisis also led to changes for the Staff in terms of its structure and its name in May 1917. There were, however, other more creeping changes where the role of Jellicoe, and not Geddes or Wemyss was crucial. The most decisive change to the Staff in 1917 was not in its structure, but in its numbers. At the upper level, whether the officer was COS or ACNS did not really make very much difference. While it was true that a certain degree of specialisation was introduced so that the ACNS only saw some papers while his twin the DCNS saw others (see Appendix F), in actual fact the axis of First Sea Lord and COS was little changed. Dockets still did the rounds of the relevant Divisional Directors, as well as the First Sea Lord, ACNS *and* DCNS. In that sense May 1917 changed very little. What did change, however, was the degree of centralised control of the Staff. Jellicoe possesses a reputation as a centraliser.<sup>35</sup> But during his period in office quite the opposite took place: delegation. This went hand in hand with the increase in numbers which began the moment Jellicoe arrived in London, and before Geddes or Lloyd George could be given the credit.

By late 1917 Lloyd George and Geddes had had enough of Jellicoe. The lack of enthusiasm with which convoy was adopted and Jellicoe's own rather pessimistic attitude when presenting naval issues at the War Cabinet was enough for Lloyd George to believe that changes were necessary. Carson was removed as First Lord and Sir Eric Geddes was brought in firstly as Controller, and then First Lord. Later Wemyss was appointed to the new post of Deputy First Sea Lord, and on Jellicoe's dismissal on Christmas Eve, was promoted to First Sea Lord. Oliver lasted a few weeks longer before he too left. By then, however, the Staff had laid out the structure of a North Atlantic Convoy system, considered the needs of a global convoy system, and begun to develop new approaches to ASW. Most famously this involved the development of the Northern and Dover Barrages. These, particularly the Northern Barrage, have often been seen as a waste of time, money and mines.<sup>36</sup> But what the

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<sup>35</sup> Gordon, *Rules*, 18; Goldrick, J., 'John R. Jellicoe. Technology's Victim (1859-1935)', in Sweetman, J., (ed.), *The Great Admirals. Command at Sea, 1587-1945*, Annapolis, 1997, 365; Temple Patterson, A., *Jellicoe: A Biography*, London, 1969, p. 59; Winton, J., *Jellicoe*, London, 1981, 124, 248.

<sup>36</sup> Halpern, *Naval History*, 440-441.

Staff was keen to impress upon others was that the Barrages by themselves were not a solution. Indeed, one Staff Officer spoke of them as much as a 'bluff' as anything else.<sup>37</sup> The Barrages were to be part of a much more complex structure of anti-submarine defences *which together* would constitute an effective barrier against the U-Boat.

Such a policy would have required a partial demobilisation of the Grand Fleet to release destroyers for Hunting Flotillas. Had Jellicoe stayed on as First Sea Lord this may well have come about, but once Wemyss was appointed, and under considerable pressure from Beatty not to alter the standing of the Grand Fleet, the full policy was not implemented. Instead the Barrages were constructed somewhat as half-measures, and the results were disappointing. This plan has been overlooked and more interest has been taken in the other projects of the Plans Division. Particular interest has been devoted to what were considered to be more offensive plans against the HSF. These ideas have been used as evidence that it was only in 1918 that the Staff came of age under the guidance of Geddes and Wemyss.<sup>38</sup> In believing this to be the case, the work of Jellicoe and his predecessors has been undervalued.

The Staff suffered from a bad press in the First World War partly because there were at times glaring examples of errors, but also because historians have relied heavily on the work and attitudes of both Beatty and the '*Young Turks*' – Richmond, Dewar and Kenworthy in particular. The latter three all served on the Staff, albeit often only briefly. They were themselves close to Beatty and some helped to mould the writing of the Navy's own Staff Technical Histories in the 1920s when Beatty was First Sea Lord. Evidence of the degree to which this involved twisting events has recently been shown in the case of the Battle of Jutland.<sup>39</sup> In many respects the Staff suffered a similar fate, particularly at the hands of the '*Young Turks*' who were much involved in moulding the way that the later historians would view the events of the First World War. In particular the Dewars and others focused on their view of what a staff should do, with an emphasis on 'staff duties' and 'staff training', but they ignored a vital aspect of what the staff was really doing (information gathering and

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<sup>37</sup> PD Memorandum, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1918, in 'History of the Northern Barrage, from its inception to 28<sup>th</sup> July 1918'. ADM 137/2711.

<sup>38</sup> Marder, *DNSF*, vol. v, 4-5, 9; Roskill, *Beatty*, 249; Beesly, *Room 40*, 272; Lady Wester Wemyss, *The Life and letters of Lord Wester Wemyss GCB, CMG, MVO. Admiral of the Fleet*, London, 1935, 367-70.

<sup>39</sup> Gordon, *Rules*, particularly chapter 23.

analysis).<sup>40</sup> One of the true heirs of the First World War Naval Staff was not just the Staff of the 1920s, but the Government Code and Cipher School, yet this side of the staff's work gets little attention.

What this thesis will attempt to show is that in most areas of naval strategy, the Naval Staff gave sound advice. Their knowledge of both the wider picture of the war and the limitations that both technology and competing demands placed on the viability of alternative strategies meant that for the most part what they offered was common sense and not wishful thinking. That they made mistakes will also be shown, but these should not blind the reader to the other substantial contributions that they made to victory in 1918.

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<sup>40</sup> *Naval Staff*, 82-89.

## Chapter 1. The Admiralty War Staff, 1912-1918. An analysis of the personnel.

*'Historians spend much time trying to divine patterns in the behaviour of historical figures and groups of whom their understanding is incomplete.'*<sup>1</sup>

The officers of the Admiralty War Staff (Naval Staff from May 1917) have received a bad press, despite some praise for their work at the end of the war.<sup>2</sup> In particular, the Naval Staff has been the victim of an unholy trinity of critics.<sup>3</sup> Kenworthy quoted, and approved, of the following view of those who served at the Admiralty (including those on the Staff): 'The Admiralty breeds mediocre men and the mediocre man surrounds himself with mediocre men. Like calls to like with penguin gravity.'<sup>4</sup> Dewar wrote, in what was the theme of his memoirs, 'our system of training had not produced the right type of man and that we lacked the intellectual capital to float an efficient staff.'<sup>5</sup> For Richmond, the Admiralty was full of 'cabbage-headed people' and 'nonentities', in which he included Jellicoe.<sup>6</sup> Most secondary sources take a similar view.<sup>7</sup> Of two books directly on the Admiralty itself, one commented, 'Most of the Staff Officers had been selected as too sick or incompetent to be sent to sea' and the second makes little reference to the Staff at all, except in broadly negative terms.<sup>8</sup> Generally Richmond, Dewar and their friends had very little positive to say about their time at the Admiralty.<sup>9</sup> The following could be said to be a fair summation of the view found in most secondary works, 'The Staff was ... merely a nondescript collection of officers. Many of them were retired officers who had been recalled in the war and who were as ignorant of the principles of staff work as they were of strategy and operations.'<sup>10</sup> Other chapters in this thesis will look at the Staff's opinions of various operations and strategic questions. The purpose of this chapter is to give some assessment as to the personal qualities, qualifications and experience of those that made up the War Staff, and the paths that led them to Whitehall. The evidence does not support a number of the allegations made about the Staff.

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon, *Rules*, 325.

<sup>2</sup> Marder, *DNSF*, vol. iv, 213-230 & vol. v, 3-11, 314-319; Grievess K., *Sir Eric Geddes. Business and government in war and peace*, Manchester 1989, 40-48; Rodger, *Admiralty*, 133-136.

<sup>3</sup> Dewar, *Navy From Within*; Kenworthy, *Sailors*; Marder, *Portrait*; Hunt, B., *Sailor Scholar*.

<sup>4</sup> Anonymous letter, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1917, cited in Kenworthy, *Sailors*, 63.

<sup>5</sup> Dewar, *Navy From Within*, 229.

<sup>6</sup> Marder, *Portrait*, May 10<sup>th</sup> 1917, 252.

<sup>7</sup> d'Ombraim, N., *War Machinery and High Policy*, Oxford 1973, 163; Grimes, *War Planning*, 208-9. Grimes cited Dewar as proof of this point.

<sup>8</sup> Rodger, *Admiralty*, 128; Gardiner, *British Admiralty*.

<sup>9</sup> Dewar, A. C., 'Winston Churchill at the Admiralty', *Naval Review* vol. XI, 1921, 501-525.

<sup>10</sup> Marder, *DNSF*, vol. v, 314-315.

Between its creation in January 1912 and the end of the First World War some 930 individuals served on the Admiralty War Staff. 792 are listed in the quarterly returns of the *Navy List*.<sup>11</sup> This latter figure is, however, misleading. It ignored the names of many officers who served but briefly on the Staff, such as the engraver Eric Gill or Capt. Henry Thursfield.<sup>12</sup> More importantly, the *Navy List* suggested a Staff structure which was not an accurate reflection of how the Staff worked. This is only revealed by looking at other documents, in particular, the Admiralty's own wartime telephone directories.<sup>13</sup> Thus, trying to compile an authoritative list of Staff Officers is far from easy, as the various sources for membership are often somewhat contradictory, and one is almost left asking 'Will the real Admiralty War Staff please step forward?' For example, the *Navy List* contains two lists for the War Staff. One is found under the 'Board of Admiralty' section, with divisional headings under which Staff Officers' names appear. This list, however, is often at odds with the names listed elsewhere in the same publication for staff appointed to HMS *President*. This was the ship to which all those who had Admiralty postings were attached. This too has some (but not all) divisional listings which usually contain a shorter list of officers.<sup>14</sup> There is, however, a further list (or lists) of officers appointed to 'miscellaneous' postings. Most, but not all, officers can be found here, but they are mixed up with other officers who had nothing to do with the War Staff, but who worked elsewhere in the Admiralty structure. Added to this, neither of these two possible lists ties in with names listed as War Staff Officers in the contemporary Admiralty Telephone Directories. But then these Directories have gaps in the sequence, do not contain dates of appointments, and rarely fit chronologically with the issue dates of the *Navy List* and so direct comparison is far from easy. Some officers came and went quite quickly, and so could be picked up in one and missed by the other. Finally there are the Admiralty *Indexes* and *Digests*. These are the Admiralty's own contemporary catalogues used by clerks to make their way round the department's archives and

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<sup>11</sup> *Navy List*, April, July, October 1912; January, April, July, October 1913; January, April, July, October 1914; January, April, July, October 1915; January, April, July, October 1916; January, April, July, October 1917; January, April, July, October 1918. Each *Navy List* was correct to one of the following four dates each year: March 18<sup>th</sup>; June 18<sup>th</sup>; September 18<sup>th</sup> and December 18<sup>th</sup>. ADM 177

<sup>12</sup> Gill to DASD, August 1918. ADM 137/2715.

<sup>13</sup> *Admiralty Telephone Directory*, March 1914; December 1914; April 1915; July 1915; February 1916; February 1917; May 1917; February 1918; May 1918; August 1918. NLMD.

<sup>14</sup> Not all Divisions appear here. For example the 1917-1918 *Navy Lists* make no mention of the Mercantile Movements Division under the HMS *President* list.

registries. The *Indexes* list Admiralty documents by the recipient's name.<sup>15</sup> The *Digests*, however, organised subjects not by name but by topic.<sup>16</sup> War Staff business is found under Section 5 part IV. But neither the *Index* nor the *Digest* necessarily coincides with any of the other lists, and appointments, which are known to have been made from other sources, sometimes do not appear to be mentioned in these records.<sup>17</sup> The total of 930 is therefore the result of conflating all these sources, and then checking them against service records.

These records differ by category of officer being studied, but those of executive officers, for example, record the dates of appointments, promotions and abbreviated reports on conduct as well as bouts of illness and injury. Obviously it is only possible to look for the records of officers known to have been on the staff, thus these records are an end point rather than a beginning, but even here the dates of appointments to the War Staff do not always tally with those mentioned elsewhere. All of this creates a problem in that the 930 names almost certainly constitute an underestimate of the true numbers, but with so many conflicting or incomplete sources it may not ever be possible to reconstruct a full list.

When analysing the War Staff, these 930 people can be described as falling into several distinct categories. 309 could be termed non-Naval or civilian appointments (75 of them were women). 48 held army commissions (mostly wounded officers who performed mundane tasks such as dealing with the pneumatic tubes which sent messages around the building).<sup>18</sup> 621 others held positions in the Royal Navy. Of these, 281 were officers of executive rank (midshipman to admiral). Another 10 were from the Engineering Branch; 34 were Supply Officers, such as Paymasters; 12 were from the RNAS; 44 were Royal Marines; 28 were from the RNR; 201 were from the RNVR and 11 came from other miscellaneous branches of the Royal Navy.<sup>19</sup> 2 were from the Royal Flying Corps. These figures are displayed in Appendix C table 1.1.

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<sup>15</sup> By 1916 2 ledgers were used for each letter of the alphabet, e.g. ADM 12/1558a & ADM 12/1558b cover the letter 'S' for 1916.

<sup>16</sup> Admiralty Digests: 1914, ADM 12/1525; 1915, ADM 12/1539a & ADM 12/1539b; 1916, ADM 12/1561a & ADM 12/1561b; 1917, ADM 12/1582a & ADM 12/1582b; 1918, ADM 12/1603a & ADM 12/1603b.

<sup>17</sup> Admiralty War Personnel Index, 1921. NLMD; Life Histories of ID 25, n.d. [c. 1919], ADM 223/769.

<sup>18</sup> Beesly, *Room 40*. 128.

<sup>19</sup> Such as Naval Instructors, Surgeons, and Signaller Boatswains.

Professor Marder's claim that 'many of them were retired' is debatable.<sup>20</sup> Of course 'many' is imprecise. The reader might be left with the impression that 'many' meant 'most', but the picture from the service records of those who served on the staff paints a different picture. During the period 1912-1918 only 61 Staff Officers who had previously been retired served on the War Staff. These were distributed across the divisions of the Staff as shown in Appendix A table 1.2.

The figures in this table were calculated having taken out civilian members of each division. They also exclude those who do not neatly fit into a divisional category, for example the COS and his immediate Assistants (during the period 1912-1918 there were twelve people in this group, and none were retired). With just 9.8% of Staff Officers being formerly retired, it is simply not true to claim that 'many' were. It is also not surprising that it was in the Trade and Mercantile Movements Divisions where the most retired naval officers were found, as these were the divisions which, for most of the time, were most closely associated with committee work connected with the blockade of Germany, or liaison work with ports and shipping companies.

The word 'retired' also conjures up images of the old and infirm. Marder also asserted that it was the 'hurt and the maimed' which filled the gaps created by the rush to the sea in 1914, and that it was only in 1917 that 'there were now fewer retired officers who had been hunting or keeping chickens for years'.<sup>21</sup> These points are simply not true. It is possible to calculate the average age of retired officers when they arrived on the Staff. This was 43 years and 9 months, which hardly constitutes any entry into the third age of man, even in the early twentieth century.<sup>22</sup> It is also clear that most of them had not been long retired when war broke out in 1914. Of the 52 for whom precise details are known, only 11 retired before 1905, whereas 32 retired between 1910 and 1914. If they diversified into chicken farming, they could not have had much practice at it before they returned to the service in which most had nearly twenty years experience. Indeed it is interesting to note that one of the Staff's greatest critics, Capt. Kenneth Dewar, noted the healthy influence that a period away from the Navy could bring to the naval mind.<sup>23</sup> This might seem curious to the reader, as he

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<sup>20</sup> Marder, *DNSF*, vol. v, 314-315.

<sup>21</sup> Marder, *DNSF*, vol. iv., 60.

<sup>22</sup> This is based on the service details of 52 of the 61 retired officers where it was possible to find out both their date of birth and the exact date of their arrival on the Staff.

<sup>23</sup> Dewar, *Navy From Within*, 266.



had also elsewhere implicitly criticized the use of retired officers on the staff.<sup>24</sup> But the former comment was directed at his brother (Alfred Dewar) who had gone to study History at Oxford after leaving the Navy, while the latter view referred to everyone else.

It was, however, correct to suggest that the employment of these retired officers was principally a feature of the early years of the war (See Appendix C table 1.3). While it was the case that the outbreak of war did cause an influx of retired officers (most of whom, it should be repeated, had only just retired), the decline in employment of retired officers was acute as Marder suggested (this is if the service records are accepted as more accurate than the *Navy List* for recording dates of entry onto the Staff). Of the pre-1917 intake the majority (21 or 44%) joined the TD. Again, this was not surprising. This was a new division. It had been abolished in 1909 and had no pool of existing officers from which to draw when the Division was hastily recreated in August 1914 and much of its role was involved with processing mercantile paperwork. It should also be noted that senior Staff Officers were keen to avoid employing too many retired officers, unless they had significant other qualities.<sup>25</sup>

As to whether these retired officers proved their worth, conclusions inevitably have to be tentative. Two areas of evidence which might point to some conclusions are the reports that these officers received on their work, both on the Staff and in other appointments, and the award of decorations that they received for their war work. In terms of the latter, some 22 of the retired officers (32%) were decorated.<sup>26</sup> While the two DSOs were for gallantry at sea, most of the other awards were for services on the Staff.<sup>27</sup> As to others comments on their worth, any statistical assessment is difficult. Nonetheless it is possible to draw some conclusions. Generally the fragments of reports, which survive in abbreviated form on an officer's service record, can be somewhat unsystematic. Not all work was reported on, and by its very nature abbreviation can lead to problems of selectivity. Nonetheless, only four officers of

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>25</sup> Leveson Minute, 7<sup>th</sup> March 1914. ADM 1/8369/52.

<sup>26</sup> 2 DSO; 6 CBE; 8 OBE; 3 CMG; 3 CB.

<sup>27</sup> Capt. Henry Cayley, DSO (for services in the Auxiliary Patrol, 1916), ADM 196/43, 353; Retired 1904, and joined the Mines Division in October 1916; Capt. Morris Cochrane, DSO (for services with the Adriatic Drifters, 1917), ADM 196/44, 539. Retired in 1910 and joined the ID in November 1916.

sixty-three received adverse comments on their staff work or general manner.<sup>28</sup> Nine others, however, were specifically praised for work done while on the Staff.<sup>29</sup> A similar pattern emerged whether one looks at reports these officers received while on active service during the First World War, or indeed reports that dated back to their time in the Navy before their retirement; the good heavily outweighed the conditional or the bad.<sup>30</sup>

Analysing Staff Officers as a whole is a much larger task. They were a disparate group ranging in age and experience from Admiral Sir John Jellicoe at one end to Midshipman George Carbutt at the other. What binds the staff together is that they have been collectively termed as 'nondescript'.<sup>31</sup> Such a word is essentially subjective. However, by looking at Staff Officers' career profiles it is possible to build up a detailed picture which suggests that this term should be discarded. Firstly, it is possible to see how well those officers on the Staff were rated by their seniors. This in itself creates problems. Some historians would be dubious of using the views of other officers as a reliable yardstick. The late-nineteenth, early-twentieth century Royal Navy has been criticized for having considerable flaws in its structure and approach to promotion.<sup>32</sup> However, such a view is itself open to criticism. Dr. Gordon tried to set the Navy apart from what he identifies as the 'progressive' elements of Victorian society, by for example, condemning the educational standards of HMS *Britannia* when compared with the 'modernist' standards of the English public schools.<sup>33</sup> While it may be hard to see HMS *Britannia* in anything other than critical terms, such a

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<sup>28</sup> Commander Sir Charles Cust, Bt. TD. ADM 196/42, 239; Commander Maxwell Anderson, TD, ADM 196/45, 81; Capt. Herbert Grant, OD, ADM 196/43, 254; Lieut.-Commander Julian Ogilvie, TD, ADM 196/48, 491.

<sup>29</sup> For example: Commander Lionel Hordern, ASD, ADM 196/42, 33. Capt. Fisher (DASD) commented (1918) that Hordern had 'Exceptional ability; has active & original brain.' Another example could be Commander (rtd) John Kiddle, TD and MMD, ADM 196/44, 36. Capt. Whitehead (DMMD) noted of him (1919) 'Exceptionally zealous. Has a gift for systematic & careful organisation in which he has been invaluable.'

<sup>30</sup> Capt. Guy Gaunt, ADM 196/49, 161, British Naval Attaché in Washington from 1914-1918, and then attached to the ID; 'Capt Gaunt is the right man in the right place & has done invaluable work, especially in countering the machinations of German agents.' Admiral Patay in 1916; or Capt. Edward Winthrop, ADM 196/42, 196, who in 1916 was attached to HMS *Eagle* to assist the SNO Liverpool and received the following comment from him; 'Services have been invaluable. Tact & Courtesy, & zealous, hardworking & loyal.'

<sup>31</sup> Marder, *DNSF*, vol. v., 314.

<sup>32</sup> Gordon, *Rules*, passim.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

comparison is far too favourable on the academic credentials of all but a few Victorian public schools.<sup>34</sup> As the contemporary memoirs and later biographies often showed, these schools, like HMS *Britannia* were not necessarily the place to be creative, scholarly or compassionate.<sup>35</sup> In addition, recent work on the Army in the First World War has also revealed that most maligned of creatures, the British general, to be far more responsive and flexible than had traditionally been believed.<sup>36</sup> To suggest, therefore, that Victorian society was as strait-laced as its corsets is overly simplistic. The same was true of the late-Victorian Royal Navy which has recently been called ‘closely knit and interbred.’<sup>37</sup> This phrase was used pejoratively. But the Navy was at that time no more interconnected or close-knit than any other major institution in Britain, such as the Foreign Office.<sup>38</sup> The fact that even in the 1960s, a book could be published which showed the close connections of family, school and university that existed in the governance of Britain, suggested that it should come as no surprise to see such patterns existing half a century earlier.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, before the First World War such connections were closer still.<sup>40</sup> These connections should not necessarily be seen critically. As will be shown below, the Naval Staff was made up of people of considerable abilities and skills.

One index of ability was that of promotion. The rate at which an officer was promoted depended on a number of factors. Experience; time at sea; examination success; and patronage of senior officers all played a part. Certainly the first three of these characteristics would embrace a broad definition of ‘ability’, however difficult it is to be precise about this term. The fourth category, patronage, needs greater consideration. Patronage conjures up images of deals struck behind closed doors or of

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<sup>34</sup> Ballard, G., *Personal Reminiscences, 1875-c.1886*, 6-13. NMM, Ballard Papers, MRF/107.

<sup>35</sup> Ridley, J., *Edwin Lutyens. His Life, His Wife, His Work*, Pimlico Edition, 2003, 27-28. This might stand as one example. He hated his school and came to terms with society’s rules and inflexibilities by mastering them in terms of his architecture.

<sup>36</sup> The traditional view is well exemplified by: Clark, A., *The Donkeys*, London 1961; Wolff, L., *In Flanders Fields*, London 1959. More recent works which question these assumptions are: Bourne, J. M., *Britain and the Great War 1914 – 1918*, London 1989; Sheffield, G., *Forgotten Victory. The First World War, Myths and Realities*. London 2001; Simpson, A., *The Operational Role of British Corps Command on the Western Front, 1914-18*, unpublished University of London Ph.D. Thesis, 2001.

<sup>37</sup> Gordon, *Rules*, 40.

<sup>38</sup> Otte, T. G., “‘Alien Diplomatist’: Antisemitism and Anti-Germanism in the Diplomatic Career of Sir Francis Oppenheimer’, *History* 89, 2004, 234.

<sup>39</sup> Sampson, A., *The Anatomy of Britain*, London, 1962.

<sup>40</sup> A visit to Mells Churchyard is a tragic visual reminder of this world. The memorials to Raymond Asquith (k. 1916), his brother-in-law, and son of the local squire, Charles Horner (k. 1917) lie inside the church, while various Bonham-Carters, Reginald McKenna and Seigfried Sassoon lie in the surrounding churchyard.

nepotism. At times this did happen, but senior officers did not recommend junior officers without reason. While Sir John Fisher collected together his 'fishpond' of bright and ambitious young officers, other networks also existed, and often overlapped. Fleet commanders advanced those that they considered to be worthy of such advancement, although it did not always mean that those recommendations were followed. A good report from the likes of Prince Louis of Battenberg or Sir Francis Bridgeman could help to bring an officer to the attention of those who finally decided on promotions. It should, however, be added at this point that it made little sense for a senior officer to recommend another who was evidently not up to scratch, because in the end such misplaced faith would rebound on the general view of the senior officer (as happened with Sir John Jellicoe's 'protection' of the likes of Cecil Burney and George Warrender).<sup>41</sup>

That time at sea was a consideration when it came to promotion was a hindrance to the development of shore postings into positions of importance. The service record of Capt. Herbert Hope reflected this problem. An Admiralty Board Minute on his record dated 19<sup>th</sup> February 1917 stated, 'this officer's retention at the Admiralty during the war is necessary in the interests of the Naval Service but that such retention should not be allowed to prejudice his future career.'<sup>42</sup> Most officers did not join the Navy to sit behind a desk in Chatham dockyard or Whitehall, and for most the main aim in their careers was to command a warship. Even here the type of ship that many wanted to join could vary over time. While the great capital ships might be seen as the ambition of most, there were also many who wished to get onto destroyers (particularly in 1917-1918 when being in the Grand Fleet was seen as a recipe for inertia) or into submarines. That said, despite this hindrance, service on the Staff did attract people of high calibre. One measure that illustrates this, as well as emphasizing the diversity of the Staff in terms of its experience at sea, and which certainly challenges the assumption that they were a nondescript group, is in the number that were awarded the DSO. There was, of course, something political in the award of medals or orders for gallantry, but the range of examples from, or just after, the First World War was indicative of the breadth of their collective experience. This included five from the Battle of Jutland; four from Dardanelles operations; three from operations in German East Africa; at least eight for operations against German

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<sup>41</sup> Marder, *DNSF*, vol. ii, 10-11.

<sup>42</sup> ADM 196/ 44, 417.

submarines; two for operations in German minefields; one for the Cuxhaven Raid and one for the remarkable operation of HMS *Doris* on the Syrian Coast in 1914. Others received DSOs for actions in Egypt; Mesopotamia; the Caspian Sea; the Adriatic; the Heligoland Bight and the Black Sea. This was a testament not simply to the huge range of operations undertaken by the Royal Navy in that War, but of the men who also spent part of that war on the Staff.<sup>43</sup> To this could be added those who also through their ingenuity materially aided the winning of the naval war. Mention is often made of the alleged attempt by the ASD to train sealions to detect U-Boats.<sup>44</sup> With hindsight it was comical, but it was also atypical, and distorted the record of what was in fact achieved. Against this should be balanced the work of Capt. Frederic Dreyer with his controversial range finder, or Commander John Carrington and his chart for plotting U-Boat movements (itself a development of the Staff's War Room Plot). There were also a number of other innovations by Staff Officers or future Staff Officers which have not made such an impression on historians, but which were important: the Paravane was developed by Commander Charles Burney ASD; the convoy Zig-Zag clock by Commander George Lewis, ASD; the depth charge partly developed by Commander Edward Russell, ASD; Shore W/T Stations developed by

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<sup>43</sup> Commander Hugh England, OD, ADM 196/49, 36; Commander Kenneth Brounger, MD, ADM 196/46, 136; Lt-Col Charles Edmonds, Air Division ADM 196/53, 27; Commander Charles Dix, OD, ADM 196/46, 187; Capt. Cecil Pilcher, OD, ADM 196/44, 368; Lt-Col John Rose RM, ACWS, ADM 196/62, 79; Commander Henry King RNVR, MMD, ADM 337/128, 243; Brig-Gen Francis Scarlett RNAS, DAD, ADM 196/44, 146; Capt. Thomas Wardle, ID, ADM 196/44, 245; Capt. Fawcett Wray, ID ADM 196/43, 400; Commander John McClintock, ADM, ADM 196/43, 459; Capt. George Swabey, OD, ADM 196/46, 6; Commander Cyril Fuller, ADPD, ADM 196/43, 460; Leveson Campbell, ASD, ADM 196/46, 101; RA Roger Keyes, DPD, ADM 196/43, 277; Major Edward Gillespie, RM, SD, ADM 196/63, 194; Capt. Hugh Montgomery RM, OD, ADM 196/63, 26; Commander Raymond Fitzmaurice, OD, ADM 196/45, 20; Commander Bernard Buxton, ID, ADM 196/47, 253; Capt. Humphrey Walwyn, ASD, ADM 196/45, 24; Commander Sidney Bailey, Gunnery, ADM 196/47, 218; Commander William Mellor, OD, ADM 196/43, 447; Capt. Herbert Hope, ID, ADM 196/44, 417; Commander Francis Wrottesley, TD, ADM 196/44, 386; Staff Paymaster John Hodge, MMD, ADM 196/171, 251; Commander Basil Reinold, SD, ADM 196/48, 410; Commander Francis Belt RNVR, ID, ADM 337/118, 103; Commander Geoffrey Spicer-Simpson, ID, ADM 196/44, 221; Commander Robert Wilson, TD, ADM 196/47, 266; Commander Henry Dorling, PD, ADM 196/48, 452; Commander Malcolm MacDonald, ID, ADM 196/45, 77; Capt. William Tripp RM, ID, ADM 196/63, 48; Major Trant Luard RM, ID, ADM 196/62, 292, 378; Commander Bernard Collard, ID, ADM 196/44, 277; Commander Basil Washington, MD, ADM 196/44, 517; Major Richard Marriott RM, ID, ADM 196/61, 183; Commander Charles Coode, OD, ADM 196/43, 105; Commander Morris Cochrane, ID, ADM 196/44, 539; Commander Vincent Cooper, ID, ADM 196/49, 56; Lt-Commander Graham Glen, Mines Div, ADM 196/49, 138; Capt. Claude Seymour, OD & ADASD, ADM 196/44, 198; Commander Richard Nicholson, DSD, ADM 196/48, 475; Commander Frederick Sommerville, OD, ADM 196/48, 413; Commander Geoffrey Nash, ID, ADM 196/48, 547; Commander Alan Yeats-Brown, ASD, ADM 196/44, 300; Brig-Gen Robert Groves RNAS, DAD, ADM 196/45, 129; Commander John Carrington, ASD, ADM 196/44, 489; Commander John Middleton, ASD, ADM 196/45, 25; Commander Arthur Vyvyan, ACNS, ADM 196/44, 91; Capt. Richard Horne, OD, ADM 196/44, 391.

<sup>44</sup> Marder, *DNSF*, vol. i., 78

Capt. John Slee, SD; and Ballooning partly developed by Major William Minchie, Air Division.<sup>45</sup> Particular mention should also be made of Capt. Herbert Edwards who, during his time with the FCT in early 1917 played as vital a role in the development of convoys as that traditionally given to Commander Reginald Henderson.<sup>46</sup> It should be noted that many of these developments did not take place while the relevant officer was on the Staff, but that having come up with a good idea, an officer's talents were brought to bear on the Staff.

A further measure of 'worth' might be the speed at which an officer passed up through the ranks in the Navy. This was affected by a number of things, and it is impossible to make generalizations about promotions across the different types of officer who served on the Staff during the period 1912-1918 because the nature of the promotion system and career structure differed from branch to branch. If, however, we look at Executive Officers there are some 119 Staff Officers who reached the rank of Captain before they retired. The average age at which an officer reached this rank at the turn of the century was 42.<sup>47</sup> The average for those on the Staff was 37 years and 2 months. On this index, at least, Staff Officers despite shore service often at critical moments reached this important rank on average four years and ten months ahead of their naval peers.

The means by which people came to find themselves on the Staff was also important. By studying officers' service records it is possible to reconstruct their career paths in many cases. As has already been acknowledged this was a very closely-knit service, and certain career patterns emerge. One area of interest is that of patronage. As has already been stated, Sir John Fisher was famous for the creation of a close group of followers, the 'fishpond'. One of those, Sir John Jellicoe, also brought many officers to the Admiralty with him when he became First Sea Lord in December 1916. Between his arrival and his dismissal almost exactly a year later some thirty naval officers arrived from the Grand Fleet to serve at the Admiralty on the Staff or as Sea Lords and their Assistants. Three of these were appointed significantly to act as either Second Sea Lord or as Additional Naval Assistant to the Second Sea Lord. These posts were important to the Staff because the Second Sea

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<sup>45</sup> ADM 196/52, 369; 196/47, 279; 196/47, 228; 196/44, 423; 273/6, 71.

<sup>46</sup> ADM 196/44, 120.

<sup>47</sup> Walker Memorandum, 'The Executive Lists of the Royal Navy', April 1912. ADM 1/8272.

Lord was responsible for questions of personnel within the Navy.<sup>48</sup> Many of the remaining officers were appointed to senior posts on the Staff, such as DASD or DPD.<sup>49</sup> This suggests that Jellicoe used the Grand Fleet extensively; significantly only one officer came from the BCF, and that was in 1918.<sup>50</sup> The fact that he appointed Grand Fleet people to positions such as Second Sea Lord can only have reinforced this pattern. This raises an important question of who was actually doing the appointing for the Staff. This is not necessarily a simple one to answer.

In part, appointments to the Staff lay with a number of people depending on the tier at which one is looking. The First Lord had a significant say in who sat on the Board of Admiralty itself. Churchill initially got through two First Sea Lords in quick succession (Sir Arthur Wilson and Sir Francis Bridgeman) before getting the man he really wanted for the post, Prince Louis of Battenberg. When Battenberg was himself forced out of office, Churchill recalled his old friend and mentor, Lord Fisher. These First Sea Lords themselves had a significant say in who was to fill the top layers of the War Staff, such as the COS and the Directors of each division. The action of Fisher in getting rid of Sturdee as COS in 1914, and the wave of new appointments made by Jellicoe in December 1916 are sufficient evidence for that. Below the level of Director the pattern becomes more complex. The Directors themselves had a large say in who served in their own division, as did the Second Sea Lord and his Assistants. A comment by Capt. Henry Buller (Naval Assistant to the Admiral Sir Herbert Heath) about his own deputy, Capt. Thomas James, captured the way in which the small group in the Second Sea Lord's office could influence appointments. In 1918 Buller wrote of James that he 'has held appt in 2nd Sea Lord's Office since August 1917 and has discharged duties with the greatest zeal & tact. His knowledge of the Grand Fleet acquired during a long spell as 2<sup>nd</sup> in cd of [a] Battleship has been

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<sup>48</sup> Hamilton, C., 'Expanding Naval Powers: Admiralty Private Secretaries and Private Offices, 1800-1945', *War in History* 10/2, 2003, 138. The two Second Sea Lords that Jellicoe employed were Admiral Sir Cecil Burney and VA Sir Herbert Heath.

<sup>49</sup> These are officers who filled to role of Assistant Director of a Division up to and including the Chief of the Staff, as well as Sea Lords and their Assistants: Capt. Edward Phillpotts, Naval Assistant to the First Sea Lord, ADM 196/43, 170, 172; Fleet Paymaster Hamnet Share, Additional Naval Assistant to the First Sea Lord, ADM 196/12, 482, 601; Admiral Sir Cecil Burney, Second Sea Lord, ADM 196/40, 180, 181; VA Sir Herbert Heath Second Sea Lord, ADM 196/118, 200; Capt. Thomas James, Additional Naval Assistant to the Second Sea Lord. ADM 196/45, 32; Capt. William Fisher, DASD, ADM 196/44, 45; Capt. Humphrey Walwyn, ADASD, ADM 196/45, 24; Capt. Frederic Dreyer, ADASD, ADM 196/44, 353; Staff Paymaster Marcus Blake, Sec. to DASD, ADM 196/171, 524; Fleet Paymaster John Cavanagh, Sec. to DCNS, ADM 196/171, 274; Commander Alfred Dudley Pound, Operations (Planning), ADM 196/44, 294; Capt. Alan Hotham, DTD, ADM 196/44, 184; RA James Ley, Director of Training, ADM 196/43, 74.

<sup>50</sup> Commander Sidney Bailey, HMS *Lion* in 1916; ADM 196/47, 218.

of the greatest assistance to me in dealing with personnel questions.’<sup>51</sup> Obviously personal contacts and knowledge were important in questions of appointments, although it is not always possible to prove that a particular contact was the reason that an individual gained employment on the Staff, merely that a pattern appears to exist which suggests that such influences were at work.

One area where the pattern was strong was in the employment of ‘supply officers’. They did not follow the normal promotional pattern of executive officers. Instead, they began their careers as clerks and aimed for the ranks of paymaster. It was clear that once a senior officer found a secretary that he liked he took him with him as his own career progressed. This led several officers to the War Staff. Two detailed examples are sufficient to show how this pattern worked. The first is the career of Staff Paymaster John Cavanagh.<sup>52</sup> Having joined the service in 1899 at the age of eighteen, in 1900 he got a post as clerk in the RA’s office of HMS *Ramillies*. In 1902 he became secretary’s clerk to Sir Compton Domville on board HMS *Bulwark* where Domville recommended him for promotion. Then followed a shore posting as secretary’s clerk to the Admiral Commanding Coast Guards and Reserves (ACR) between 1905 and 1910. Between 1910 and 1914 he was either secretary’s clerk or Assistant Paymaster on HMS *Revenge*, *Bulwark*, *King Edward VII*, *Queen*, *Lord Nelson* and *Euryalus*. Here he served under, and was recommended by Prince Louis of Battenberg having been his secretary’s clerk in 1911. In 1914 he became secretary to RA Duff who took him from HMS *Emperor of India* to the Admiralty, finally acting as Duff’s secretary when he was DCNS (1917-1919). Duff said of him in 1916 that he was a ‘most excellent secretary, able zealous, hard-working & a very pleasant messmate. Has conducted Admiral's office very ably.’<sup>53</sup> Jellicoe commended him for his action during the battle of Jutland when he carried out the functions of a Flag Lieutenant.<sup>54</sup> It is therefore not surprising that Cavanagh arrived on the War Staff in December 1916, just as Duff and Jellicoe did. His work (and closeness to Duff) earned him a CMG in 1919 for ‘Convoy Services’.

The second example was the career of Paymaster Cunningham Prior. Like Cavanagh he joined the Navy in 1899.<sup>55</sup> Again, like Cavanagh he served in the

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<sup>51</sup> ADM 196/45, 32.

<sup>52</sup> ADM 196/171, 274.

<sup>53</sup> Duff Minute, 30<sup>th</sup> November 1916. ADM 196/171, 274.

<sup>54</sup> Jellicoe Minute, November 1916. ADM 196/171, 274.

<sup>55</sup> ADM 196/171, 259.



Admiral's office of HMS *Crescent* and was recommended by the ship's captain. A further series of short appointments followed until in 1906 he was appointed secretary's clerk to Admiral Pearson on HMS *Wildfire*, part of the Sheerness Gunnery School. There he was recorded as a 'very capable, zealous & reliable officer.'<sup>56</sup> Between 1909 and 1912 he acted as secretary to Admiral Edmond Slade on HMS *Highflyer* before serving for two years with the 7<sup>th</sup> Destroyer Flotilla and on HMS *Fantome* as Paymaster. In December 1912 he was appointed as secretary to RA Charles Madden, Jellicoe's COS on HMS *Iron Duke*. Madden thought his work 'excellent', and Prior, like Cavanagh, joined the War Staff in December 1916 in the TD. Webb, the DTD, had previously come across Prior in 1903 on board HMS *Ariadne* on the West Indies North America station.

Not all the supply officers had careers which showed such close connections to Jellicoe, but certainly the patterns replicated themselves elsewhere: Staff Paymaster Eyre Duggan, for example, served on HMS *Marlborough* under Capt. Percy Grant between 1914 and 1916. He then joined Grant on the East Coast Bases Committee for six months before transferring to the TD. HMS *Marlborough* was also flagship to Admiral Sir Cecil Burney, who, in December 1916, went with his lifelong friend Jellicoe to the Admiralty as Second Sea Lord. Other crew members of the *Marlborough* gradually followed, two joining the same month as Duggan (May 1917). They were Commander Hartley Moore and Lieutenant Francis Bridgeman.<sup>57</sup> The former joined the TD having served Burney for several years on W/T duties, the latter having been described by Madden as a 'reliable & efficient signal officer & Flag Lt' went to the Signal School for a course in early 1917 and then joined the SD. The importance of this interest in signals will be discussed later. Bridgeman, related to the former First Sea Lord of the same name, had also served on Burney's Staff while with the 1BS. In fact some twenty-one officers of the 1BS from Jutland joined the War Staff. It must be noted that most joined after Burney had ceased to be Second Sea Lord, although one of his Naval Assistants, Paymaster-in-Chief John Chapple remained at his post until March 1919.<sup>58</sup> Capt. Argentine Alington had served on board HMS *Marlborough* (1914) and *Collingwood* (1914-16) before a brief spell in command of HMS *Roberts* before becoming Naval Assistant to Sir Henry Jackson.

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<sup>56</sup> Minute by Secretary Parker, December 1908. ADM 196/171, 274.

<sup>57</sup> ADM 196/46, 110 and ADM 196/40, 167 respectively.

<sup>58</sup> ADM 196/12, 363, 367.

When Jackson was replaced by Jellicoe, the latter appointed his own man as Naval Assistant, and Alington joined the ID.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, Assistant Paymaster Valentine Goldsmith was VA Gough-Calthorpe's Secretary while he was Second Sea Lord, before he joined the Mobilisation Division.<sup>60</sup>

Close links can also be seen in the PD as table 1.4 in Appendix C indicates. Fuller and Colvin, both ADPD's had served together on the Staff of the Inspector of Target Practice in 1913. Dewar and Orde were both on HMS *Prince of Wales* for almost two years (January 1914 to October 1915) and both overlapped at HMS *Excellent*. Others were connected by work with submarines in 1912-1913 (Keyes and Meynell); service on HMS *St Vincent* in 1914-1915 (Pound and Richie) or HMS *Astraea* in 1915 (Fuller and Colles). Colles later acted as Fuller's secretary in the PD. Those that do not appear to have a direct connect with any of the others, such as Wing-Commander L'Estrange-Malone could be said to have particular expertise which was thought would be useful on the staff of the PD.

One officer, Commander Joseph Kenworthy, recorded his time in the PD.<sup>61</sup> In his memoirs he commented on the people with whom he worked and the circumstances of their appointment. He claimed, for example, that when he, Orde, Dewar and Carpenter were appointed they were told that they would only be there for a few weeks until some injured officers could take their posts.<sup>62</sup> In fact this was only true of Kenworthy himself. For if we look at the table 1.5 in Appendix C the notion that they would only be there for a few weeks could not be further from the truth. Instead the table shows that the division was generally very stable in its staffing. The inclusion of Halliday in this table was not merely ornamental. Kenworthy cited him amongst the PD's brightest officers.<sup>63</sup> The reason for this was that Halliday had been both awarded a Victoria Cross for his gallantry during the Boxer Rebellion in Peking in 1900, and written articles for the *Naval Review*.<sup>64</sup> Clearly in Kenworthy's eyes he had both brains and brawn. It is what Kenworthy did not say about Halliday which is interesting.

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<sup>59</sup> ADM 196/44, 336.

<sup>60</sup> ADM 196/171, 415.

<sup>61</sup> Kenworthy, *Sailors*, 104-134.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>64</sup> Commander J. Goldrick, 'The Irresistible Force and the Immovable Object. *The Naval Review*, the Young Turks, and the Royal Navy, 1911-1931', in Goldrick and Hattendorf (eds.), *Mahan is not enough. The proceedings of a Conference on the Works of Sir Julian Corbett and Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond*, Naval War College Press, 1993, 91.

Kenworthy was clearly annoyed that he was himself replaced by two officers, 'one with a weak heart and the other subject to fits.'<sup>65</sup> By implication, these were lesser men by virtue of their incapacity. One of the officers referred to was Lieut. Meynell, but no other officer arrived in the PD after Kenworthy left who could fit the other description. Meynell's bad heart had caused him to retire from the Navy in 1913, but he returned to the Navy on the outbreak of war (thus becoming one of Marder's chicken farmers).<sup>66</sup> Meynell encapsulated one of the problems we have when it comes to assessing the ability of those who were on the War Staff. It is undeniable that he was unfit for sea service, but is it also clear that he had ability. He passed his submarine courses at HMS *Dolphin* and when he rejoined the service in 1914 he served on board two submarine depot ships: HMS *Maidstone* (1914-1917) and HMS *Thames* which he commanded prior to arriving on the Staff. Meynell was implicitly criticised by Kenworthy for being one of the 'hurt and maimed', but he was in this respect no different from Halliday whom Kenworthy also praised! In addition, only one Staff Officer was recorded as having had fits: Lieut.-Commander Thomas MacGill.<sup>67</sup> He was never in PD, but was attached to the Minesweeping Division and arrived on the Staff at about the same time as Kenworthy, from the Staff of the Superintendent of Mine Sweeping.<sup>68</sup> Kenworthy's decision to cite MacGill was no coincidence. They had known each other for years having both entered HMS *Britannia* on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1901 and thus trained together.

That Kenworthy stayed for only five months was probably the result of factors beyond the need to employ invalid staff! A reading of his service record and his memoirs suggested that he was a man who was neither easy to work with nor necessarily very competent. His memoirs were unreliable. Of the 244 executive officers for whom it has been possible to find their Sub-Lieutenant exam results, 23 failed an exam (9%). Kenworthy was one. From his service record it is possible also to see that: in 1907 he was refused permission to qualify for a Navigation course; in 1911 he failed the signals course for command of a Torpedo boat; in 1913 HMS *Bullfinch*, of which he was in command, ~~stuck~~ HMS *Leopard*, and Kenworthy was 'cautioned to be more careful'; in 1915 he was sacked from HMS *Bullfinch* 'on account of unsatisfactory conduct'. The ACO&S concluded that Kenworthy was 'not

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<sup>65</sup> Kenworthy, *Sailors*, 105.

<sup>66</sup> ADM 196/96, 27.

<sup>67</sup> ADM 196/50, 286.

<sup>68</sup> ADM 196/50, 286.

a fit person to be in command of a destroyer'.<sup>69</sup> It should be added in mitigation that collision between ships was not that uncommon. In any case, it was not any one of these events which was telling, but the combination. Kenworthy's memoirs made no reference to his departure from HMS *Bullfinch*.<sup>70</sup> He merely wrote that when he left the ship the crew cheered. His entry in the new *Dictionary of National Biography* also failed to address these inconsistencies.<sup>71</sup>

Similar patterns to the PD can be detected in other divisions too, although not all. When Capt. William Fisher, from HMS *St Vincent* became DASD in May 1917, only one of his former colleagues from that ship, or indeed any of his previous five postings joined him in the ASD.<sup>72</sup> While his arrival did mark the start of a dramatic increase in staff numbers on the ASD, other influences were at work in terms of appointments. At the time, Jellicoe's Naval Assistant was Capt. Edward Phillpotts (December 1916 to October 1917).<sup>73</sup> He had previously also been Jellicoe's Naval Assistant when he was Second Sea Lord. Between February 1915 and December 1916 he commanded HMS *Warspite* of the 5BS. Having arrived Phillpotts appeared to have had considerable influence over several appointments. Most obvious of all was the appointment of Staff Paymaster Marcus Blake as Fisher's Secretary at ASD.<sup>74</sup> Blake had previously served on HMS *Warspite*, and in fact his career had exactly followed that of Phillpotts' between February 1909 to July 1912, and then again from 1915 February to early 1917.<sup>75</sup> In 1912 they only went their separate ways when Phillpotts went to the Admiralty as Naval Assistant to Jellicoe.<sup>76</sup> Fisher's ADASD was also from the *Warspite*, Capt. Humphrey Walwyn.<sup>77</sup> An excellent officer, he had made a

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<sup>69</sup> ADM 196/50, 311.

<sup>70</sup> Kenworthy, *Sailors*, 53.

<sup>71</sup> Grove, E., 'Kenworthy, Joseph Montague' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford, 2004, vol. 31, 337-8.

<sup>72</sup> HMS *St Vincent*, *Albemarle*, *Indomitable*, *Dreadnought* and *King Edward VII*.

<sup>73</sup> ADM 196/43, 170, 172.

<sup>74</sup> ADM 196/171, 524.

<sup>75</sup> HMS *Prince of Wales* (February 1909 – October 1910); Signal School (January 1911 – July 1912); HMS *Thunderer* (July 1912) where Blake was Phillpotts' Secretary when the latter was COS to Battenberg. Sir Henry Oliver was also a member of *Thunderer*'s crew at the time.

<sup>76</sup> Phillpotts said of Blake in 1916, 'An ideal capt's clerk ... strongly recommend for secretary.' ADM 196/171, 524.

<sup>77</sup> ADM 196/45, 24.

name for himself during *Warspite*'s turbulent hours at Jutland, and had earlier been described as the 'Best G [Gunnery] Lieut I have ever met'.<sup>78</sup>

When analysing the other ASD officers the picture is more complex (See table 1.6, Appendix C). The link between the division and the capital ships was present (particularly in the first few months of the division's existence when five of the first twelve officers came from battleships), but this soon disappeared. Unlike the higher levels of the Staff, or the more general divisions, where appointments could more easily be made from officers with general experience, the ASD, like Signals, needed officers with more specialist knowledge, such as of submarine warfare. This excluded many officers of the Grand Fleet, but included many from the less glamorous commands, such as the Dover Patrol or the Auxiliary Patrols, and above all those who had had some training in submarines themselves.

The large number of Grand Fleet officers was partly explained by the fact that their number included the DASD and his ADASDs all of whom came from capital ships, as well as officers who found themselves in the Charting Section of the ASD where general knowledge of the sea was sufficient. Table 1.6 in Appendix C, however, ignores the possibility that some of these officers were practised at several skills, or had served in several arenas of the naval war. In the cases of those where there was no information on prior backgrounds, most were young RNVR officers whose posting on the ASD was their first naval work. These figures also underestimate the number of technical people involved in the ASD as it excludes the 36 civilian staff employed at the ASD research establishment at Parkeston Quay in Harwich. In addition it should be added that amongst the 77 ASD officers there were only 10 who were formerly unfit for sea service (13%) and a mere 4 who were retired (5.2%).

A similar picture emerges when we look at the Signals Division (SD). There was again a small core of Grand Fleet executive officers, such Capt. Richard Nicholson, the DSD whom Jellicoe appointed from HMS *Iron Duke*.<sup>79</sup> All officers appointed to this section had signalling experience, whether they were RNVR officers (18 of the 41 officers in this section) or regular naval officers. In particular there was a close link between Nicholson and the Chatham Signal School, from where 15 of the

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<sup>78</sup> Comment by Capt William Kerr, 1907. ADM 196/45, 24.

<sup>79</sup> Three other members of the Signal Division had also served at some point or other on HMS *Iron Duke*: Asst. Paymaster Edward Travis, ADM 196/171, 518; Commander Everard Hardman-Jones, ADM 196/46, 152; Lt. Frederick Boswell, ADM 196/129, 117.

RNVR officers came. These officers were not, however, recruited raw into the division. Given the complexities and subtleties of W/T communication, it made sense to recruit only those with some active W/T experience. It should be added that this was also a time when there was increasing demand for W/T operators, as merchant vessels now needed W/T staff if they were to take part in the developing convoy system. Most of the RNVR officers had spent at least a year at sea, often with the 10CS.<sup>80</sup> The close link between the SD and the 10CS is best explained by a number of factors. Firstly with the USA's entry into the war the role of the Squadron as an enforcer of the blockade was reduced, and therefore it was possible to release officers for tasks elsewhere, and secondly, it was also dangerous work. While two RNVR signallers came from ships sunk while at work with the Squadron, five others made such lucky escapes not once, but twice.<sup>81</sup> In their cases an appointment at the Admiralty was brought about by these losses and their unfitness for further sea service.

The largest division of the War Staff was the Intelligence Division. Much has been said of its work in code breaking, and the eclectic but vital group of civilians who filled Room 40.<sup>82</sup> But there was more to the ID than just Room 40, and more Staff working for it. It absorbed most of the civilians who worked on the Staff (and where there was a dramatic increase in their numbers in 1918 as shown in Appendix B, graph 1.3), and was run for most of the war by the extraordinary and indefatigable Capt. Reginald Hall. There is nothing really new to say about the work of Room 40. That it was vitally important is undeniable, and that insufficient use was made of its discoveries before 1917 is also true, although the paranoia about spying (which Lord Fisher himself fuelled in the early months of the war) helped to explain why this

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<sup>80</sup> Between then the RNVR officers managed to serve on 16 of the 10CS's ships (six of which were sunk): HMS *Almanzora*, *Alcantara* (sunk), *Avenger* (sunk), *Armada Castle*, *Arlanza*, *Alsatian*, *Champagne* (sunk), *Hildebrand*, *Hilary* (sunk), *Moldavia* (sunk), *Orvieto*, *Otway* (sunk), *Patuca*, *Teutonic* and *Virginian*. Further details as to the careers of these ships, and the circumstances of their loss can be found in, Grainger, J., (ed.), *The Maritime Blockade of Germany in the Great War: The Northern Patrol, 1914-1918*, NRS, 2003.

<sup>81</sup> Lt Frederick Atterbury, RNVR, ADM 337/121, 16, HMS *Alcantara* and *Avenger*; Sub-Lt John Lambe RNVR, ADM 337/121, 133, HMS *Otway* and *Moldavia*; Sub-Lieut. Laurence Robinson RNVR, ADM 337/121, 13, HMS *Avenger* and *Moldavia*; Sub-Lieut. Harold Parnell RNVR, ADM 337/121, 15, HMS *Otway* and *Champagne*; Asst. Paymaster James Huggan RNVR, ADM 337/121, 14, HMS *Otway* and *Champagne*.

<sup>82</sup> Beesly, *Room 40*; James, *Eyes of the Navy*.

secret was so closely, indeed too closely, guarded.<sup>83</sup> There is little more to add about the backgrounds of the civilians who served in ID, and it is not even easy to establish exactly when many of them joined the Staff.

But there is more that can be said about the naval officers who joined ID. Firstly, there was a significant link with the former NID, which suggested that if there was continuity in personnel, it was likely that that was also continuity of quality and ideas. In that sense the creation of the War Staff in 1912 was not such a break from the naval intelligence structures of the period 1902-1912.<sup>84</sup> Beyond that the links with the Directors or Assistant Directors of the Division and other ID officers' appointments are not as clear as in some of the other Staff Divisions. There were some close links between Hall and several of his staff. For example, he served with Capt. William 'Bubbles' James both on board HMS *Natal* in 1909-1911 and then again on HMS *Queen Mary* in 1913-1914. James became one of Hall's ADIDs in 1918. Hall's most interesting connection, however, appears to be with the HMS *Cornwall*. One of the patterns that emerges when looking at the career paths of any of the officers who held the post of DID or ADID between 1912 and 1918 is that in most cases there does not appear to be a close linkage between the careers of various officers, except in the cases of a couple of ships: HMS *Cornwall* and HMS *Glory*.<sup>85</sup> HMS *Glory* was the Flagship, China Station, at the time of the Russo-Japanese war. On board were twelve officers who would later serve on the War Staff, six of them in ID. The case of the *Glory* might also suggest that employment on a station or fleet flagship was one way to get noticed, and therefore recommended for promotion above

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<sup>83</sup> French, D., 'Spy Fever in Britain 1900-1915', *Historical Journal* 21, 1978, 355-370.

<sup>84</sup> 15 Intelligence Officers had formerly been in NID at some point or other: Capt. Raymond Nugent, ADM 196/43, 116; back in ID September 1916; Capt. Percy Heycock RM, ADM 196/63, 1; back April 1912; Capt. Walter Sinclair RM, ADM 196/63, 44; back April 1912; Capt. Montagu Consett, ADM 196/43, 191; back May 1912; Capt. Aubrey Smith, ADM 196/43, 261; back March 1915; Capt. Edward Heaton-Ellis, ADM 196/43, 38; back January 1914; Capt. Cyrus Regnart RM, ADM 196/62, 479; back April 1912; Capt. George Woodcock RM, ADM 196/62, 507; back April 1912; Capt. Hugh Montgomery, ADM 196/63, 26; back April 1912; Lt-Col. Walter Jones RM, ADM 196/62, 293; back April 1912; Fleet Paymaster Charles Rotter, [Service Record Missing]; back 1912; Major William Dixon, ADM 196/62, 150; back January 1912; Commander Frank Larken, ADM 196/44, 157; back January 1912; Capt. Maurice Fitzmaurice, ADM 196/43, 148, back January 1912; Capt. Frank Temple RM, ADM 196/62, 475 back April 1912; Maj.-Gen. John Daniell RM, ADM 196/61, 239; back January 1918; Commander Geoffrey Spicer-Simpson, ADM 196/44, 221; back December 1914.

<sup>85</sup> There are twelve people who filled the role of DID or ADID: DID - Admiral Sir Henry Oliver, Capt. Thomas Jackson, Capt. Reginald Hall; ADID - Capt. Thomas Wardle; Capt. Henry Kitson; Capt. Humphrey Walwyn; Capt. Edward Heaton-Ellis; Capt. Raymond Nugent; Capt. Aubrey Smith; Capt. William James; Capt. Maurice Fitzmaurice; Capt. Vivian Brandon.

others.<sup>86</sup> The example of HMS *Cornwall* is more interesting still as she was not simply used as a Training Ship for Cadets, but also as a spy ship.<sup>87</sup> We know this because two of their intelligence officers, Lieut. Vivian Brandon RM and Lieut. Bernard Trench RM, were arrested by the Germans for espionage, and spent two years in a German prison.<sup>88</sup> Their task was to compile reports on the Belts and Kattegat seaways, possibly prior to the Royal Navy making an attack on Germany in this region. Before their arrest they managed to complete some of their task, and Lieut. Trench's service record stated that he produced a 'Useful report on Coast Defences at Kiel.' Although Hall was not on board the *Cornwall* when the two were arrested (he had moved onto HMS *Natal* by then), he knew of their activities and stated on Lt Brandon's service record that he was a 'Singularly able officer of high merit'.<sup>89</sup> Four other Staff Officers served on the *Cornwall* at the same time, including two future ID officers: Assistant Paymasters John Fletcher and William Eves.<sup>90</sup> Eves later served on the *Queen Mary* with Hall also. The Navigating Officer on the *Cornwall* on that fateful trip in 1910 was also later a Staff Officer, Commander Frederic Peile.<sup>91</sup>

Three factors in particular seem to explain how naval officers, as opposed to the civilian staff, landed up in ID, one of which at least went to the heart of the Staff's activities in the war. The first was that ID was looking for qualified interpreters.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Other flagships contained concentrations of later Staff officers, although not usually Intelligence officers. Three examples would be HMS *Bulwark* (Battenberg's Flagship between 1909-1911) – 8 future staff officers; HMS *Thunderer* (Jellicoe's Flagship for the 1913 manoeuvres) – 7 officers; HMS *Ariadne* (Flagship NAWI Station, 1903-1905) – 9 future staff officers. It was Capt. Richard Webb's ship. A disproportionate number of the 9 later found themselves with Webb in TD.

<sup>87</sup> James, *Eyes of the Navy*, 7-9.

<sup>88</sup> ADM 196/47, 209; ADM 196/63, 57; Bittner, D., and Coleby J., *Royal Marine Spies of World War One Era*, Portsmouth, 1993.

<sup>89</sup> Hall Minute, 1909. ADM 196/47, 209.

<sup>90</sup> ADM 196/171, 127; ADM 196/171, 296.

<sup>91</sup> ADM 196/46, 20. He served in OD from March 1916.

<sup>92</sup> Between 1912 and 1918, at least 47 Interpreters served on the Staff, 34 of them ID. 10 Intelligence officers from ships also served, some of whom were also interpreters. The Interpreters were (Language indicated where known): Lt. Frank Birch RNVR, ADM 337/117, 192; ID May 1916 (Interpreter); Capt. Cuthbert Binns RM, ADM 196/97, 365; ID May 1916 (Interpreter); Lt. Hyde Kennard RNVR, ADM 337/117, 189; ID February 1917 (Interpreter); Lt. Alexander Smith RNVR, ADM 337/117, 191; ID June 1918 (Interpreter); Commander Geoffrey Nash, ADM 196/48, 547; ID September 1918 (Interpreter); Staff Paymaster Ernest Thring, ADM 196/171, 68; ID January 1912 (German Interpreter); Staff Paymaster. Roberts, Charles ADM 196/171, 126; ID February 1912 (German Interpreter); Lt. Charles Ennals, ADM 196/45, 127; ID January 1913 (German and French Interpreter); Lt. Commander Walter Bagot, ADM 196/49, 168; ID July 1914 (German Interpreter); Commander Vivian Brandon, ADM 196/47, 209; ID December 1914 (German Interpreter); Capt. Bernard Trench RM, ADM 196/63, 57; ID August 1915. (German Interpreter); Lt. Henry Howard RNVR, ADM 337/117, 222; ID October 1915 (German Interpreter); Lt. Burton Cope RNVR, ADM 337/123, 121; ID September 1917 (French & German Interpreter); Lt. Darrell Wilson RNVR, ADM



This had been a stated aim for recruitment from 1912 onwards.<sup>93</sup> The second was that it needed experienced Intelligence Officers, and had perforce to take them from a wide range of ships and stations.<sup>94</sup> Thirdly, there were close links between ID (and SD) and three of the most secret ships in the Royal Navy: HMS *Defence*, *Europa* and *Vindictive*.<sup>95</sup> These were W/T cruisers, or mobile communications centres. They were developed in 1907-08 and refitted in 1912 with Poulsen W/T equipment. In the cases of *Vindictive* and *Europa* they were gutted, stripped of their main armament and packed with W/T equipment and Staff. HMS *Defence* was only partially rebuilt and retained her main armament and so could still operate as a full warship. These ships allowed the Admiralty to remain in constant communication with a fleet which might

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337/122, 201; ID January 1918 (French & German Interpreter); Commander Bernard Collard, ADM 196/44, 277; ID May 1912 (French Interpreter); Commander Gerald Dickens, ADM 196/45, 138; ID March 1916 (French Interpreter); Commander Morris Cochrane, ADM 196/44, 539; ID November 1916 (French Interpreter); Commander Arthur Bedford, ADM 196/46, 17; ID August 1917 (French Interpreter); Fleet Paymaster William Eves, ADM 196/171, 127; ID September 1917 (French Interpreter); Lt. Roger de Halpert, ADM 196/50, 217; ID December 1914 (Interpreter in Russian & French); Capt. Cyrus Regnart RM, ADM 196/62, 479; ID April 1912 (Russian Interpreter); Lt. Norman Archer, ADM 196/54, 60; ID January 1918 (Russian Interpreter); Major John Seigne RM, ADM 196/63, 199; ID June 1918 (Chinese Interpreter); Lt-Col. Walter Jones RM, ADM 196/62, 293; ID April 1912 (Japanese Interpreter); Capt. Percy Heycock RM, ADM 196/63, 1; ID April 1912 (Italian Interpreter); Lt. Charles Pullen RNVR, ADM 337/119, 143; ID March 1918 (Portuguese Interpreter); Assistant Paymaster Lloyd Hirst, ADM 196/171, 452; ID April 1915 (Spanish Interpreter); Commander George Swabey, ADM 196/46, 6; ID January 1918 (Spanish Interpreter); Sub-Lt. Sam Williamson RNVR, ADM 337/120, 216; ID December 1917 (Dutch Interpreter); Lt. Commander Ernest Gardner RNVR, ADM 337/120, 102; ID July 1917 (Greek Interpreter); Lt. John Blake-Reed RNVR, ADM 337/122, 195; ID July 1918; (Danish Interpreter); Capt. Cecil Wright RM, ADM 196/63, 73; ID January 1912 (Interpreter in: Russian, French, German, Spanish, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish & Italian); Capt. Walter Sinclair RM, ADM 196/63, 44; ID April 1912 (Interpreter in: Italian, Russian, French, Spanish); Capt. Frank Temple RM, ADM 196/62, 475; ID April 1912 (Interpreter in French, German & Spanish); Paymaster Charles Rotter; ID April 1912 (Interpreter in German); Eng. Commander Percy Wheeler; ID January 1913 (Interpreter in French).

<sup>93</sup> Jackson to Troubridge, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1911; Oliver to Jackson, n.d. [February 1913], ADM 1/8272.

<sup>94</sup> Capt. Arthur Peel RM, ADM 196/63, 136, ID September 1917; HMS *Suffolk* (Jamaica Intelligence Officer) February 1914- September 1917; Lt-Col. John Rose RM, ADM 196/62, 79; ID August 1914; October 1903-January 1907 HMS *Bulwark* (Intelligence Officer); April 1907 – March 1908 HMS *Dreadnought* (Intelligence Officer); Commander George Swabey, ADM 196/46, 6; ID January 1918; July 1913 HMS *Euryalus* (Intelligence Officer); January 1916 – January 1918 HMS *Lord Nelson* (Probably Intelligence Officer); Commander Walter Bagot, ADM 196/49, 168; ID July 1914; 1909 HMS *Albemarle* (Intelligence Officer); Lt-Col. Walter Jones RM, ADM 196/62, 293; ID April 1912; October 1905 – April 1906 HMS *Diadem* (Intelligence Officer, China Station), April – November 1906 HMS *King Alfred* (Intelligence Officer), November 1906 – July 1908 HMS *Tamar* (Senior Intelligence Officer, Hong Kong); Lt. Hyde Kennard RNVR, ADM 337/117, 189; ID February 1917; February 1915 HMS *Egmont* (Intelligence Officer); Capt. Charles Mullins RM, ADM 196/63, 115, ID June 1916; 1912-1916 Intelligence Officer, Singapore; Major Harry Farquharson RM, ADM 196/62, 204, 404; ID October 1914; March 1909 – September 1909 HMS *St Vincent* (Intelligence Officer); Commander Henry Dorling, ADM 196/48, 452; ID August 1918; January – November 1914 HMS *Victory* (Intelligence Duties on Staff of VA Patrols); Capt. John Farmer RM, ADM 196/63, 201; ID October 1915; August 1912 – August 1914 HMS *Tamar* (Assistant Intelligence Officer).

<sup>95</sup> I am grateful to Dr. Nicholas Lambert for bringing the work of these ships to my attention.

otherwise be out of range of normal W/T communications (there was a scramble to get the RN's W/T network finished in late 1914).<sup>96</sup> They are a good example of the new communications-led way that the Admiralty planned to conduct wars.<sup>97</sup> Their importance in the First World War can be seen in the fact that HMS *Defence* accompanied *Invincible* and *Indomitable* to the Falklands in 1914 and HMS *Europa* was stationed off the Dardanelles in 1915. At least twenty-three Staff Officers served on these three ships at some point during their time as W/T cruisers.<sup>98</sup>

The picture that emerges, therefore, if we take the Staff as a whole, was one where patronage systems were at work when dealing with the higher levels of the staff, more general divisions particularly when there was a change of senior staff, and in certain groups, such as supply officers. In other more specialist fields, such as in Signals or Anti-Submarine Warfare factors such as directly relevant experience were at work producing a more complex picture.

A further allegation was that the Naval Staff was filled with the 'hurt and maimed'. There are 557 service records for officers who served on the War Staff.<sup>99</sup> These tend to indicate whether or not an officer was suspended or invalided from a post prior to his gaining a shore posting. In most cases it also stated the length of time that the officer spent at a Naval hospital, such as at Haslar. In some cases it also stated the reason for the injury or illness. It was more common for these details to be recorded on the service records of executive officers than for Royal Marines, supply officers or RNVR or RNR officers where the records are patchier in this respect. In addition to this there are sometimes tell-tale gaps in the officer's record that suggest that there

<sup>96</sup> Dumas Diary, 10<sup>th</sup> November and 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1914, IWM, Dumas Papers, PP/MCR/96 Reel 4.

<sup>97</sup> Lambert, 'Strategic Command', *passim*.

<sup>98</sup> HMS *Europa*: Admiral Sir Rosslyn Wemyss, D1SL, ADM 196/42, 223; Capt. Maurice Fitzmaurice, ADID, ADM 196/43, 148; Capt. Cecil Staveley, OD, ADM 196/43, 475; Commander Gilbert Stephenson, ID, ADM 196/44, 501; Commander Charles Dix, OD, ADM 196/46, 187; Paym. Charles Horsley, RNR, Mobilisation, ADM 240/75, 165; Asst Paym. Harry Foster, RNR, ID, ADM 240/76, 81; Lt. Frank Birch, RNVR, ID, ADM 337/117, 192; Lt. Thomas Eve, RNVR, ASD, ADM 337/118, 129; Lt. John Parsons, RNVR, ID, ADM 337/120, 53; Lt.-Com. Ernest Gardner, RNVR, ID, ADM 337/120, 102. HMS *Defence*: Capt. Fawcett Wray, ID, ADM 196/43, 400; Lt. Francis Bridgeman, SD, ADM 196/52, 340; Lt. Edward Williams, ID, ADM 196/54, 84; Lt. Andrew Haggard, ID, ADM 196/56, 74; Capt. Arthur Mellor, RMLI, SD, ADM 196/63, 216; Lt. Kenneth Collier, ID, ADM 196/118, 120; Asst. Paym. George Russell, SD, ADM 196/171, 546; HMS *Vindictive*: Capt. Christopher Payne, Head of Signals Section, ADM 196/43, 502; Lt. Geoffrey Burton, ASD, ADM 196/52, 371; Capt. Herbert Richmond, ADOD, ADM 196/43, 205; Capt. Alister Beal, OD, ADM 196/44, 62; Lt.-Com. Melville Hawes, OD, ADM 196/50, 298.

<sup>99</sup> Executive Officers, Supply Officers, Royal Marines, and officers of the RNAS, RNR and RNVR.

was not a smooth progression from one post to another. This *might* suggest that the officer had a period away from active service, for example ill, although it cannot necessarily be confirmed always to be the case. In broad terms the figures are illustrated in table 1.7 of Appendix C, and show that between 75% and 80% of Staff Officers joined the staff in a healthy and active capacity.

However, these figures may underestimate the number of unfit officers on the Staff for a number of reasons. Firstly, it may be the case that an officer was unfit, but for some reason no reference was made to it in his service record. Also, there are some records missing which might change the picture somewhat, and as has been said earlier there were some brief appointments for unfit officers which did not get a mention in the *Navy List* or elsewhere. Nonetheless, the overall picture was clear. Although the Naval Staff did employ unfit officers, they made up only about one fifth of the intake. To claim, therefore that the Naval Staff was full of the 'hurt and maimed' is untrue.

It is interesting to speculate how such an impression could have arisen. Mention has already been made of Kenworthy's memoirs which stated that he, able bodied and opinionated, was replaced by two other officers, both of whom were infirm. One of the reasons why Kenworthy chose to dwell on his replacements was that they stayed on the Staff while he left in December 1917 and with a critical letter from the Board.<sup>100</sup> It would therefore fit his purpose to see the institution that had spurned him as being associated with the sick and disabled. Also, it was true that as the war progressed, and casualties of various sorts built up, so people with wounds to their bodies but not their minds could be used to fill jobs that would otherwise go to people who could usefully go to sea. The naval bureaucracy was expanding at a dramatic pace, and ships were also being produced ever more urgently. A shortage of experienced crews and officers was a major issue here and the naval authorities were under pressure to deploy officers to the new destroyers or capital ships. But despite all these pressures the Naval Staff did not find itself a convalescent home. It is also important to differentiate between those on the staff who were merely doing filing or mundane tasks, such as the 'tubists', many of whom were injured, and the rest of the staff where people tended to be able-bodied. One contemporary account of ID

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<sup>100</sup> Admiralty to Kenworthy, December 1917. ADM 196/50, 311.

certainly seems to have mixed these groups up.<sup>101</sup> That is not to say that invalid officers did not get posted to other Admiralty departments, such as the Victualling Board or the Government Pigeon Service, or mundane jobs in provincial dockyards, and it may be here that the a confusion arises: a shore posting might easily be seen by some as an Admiralty posting (many were); and an Admiralty posting might be seen as a Staff appointment (some were); but the three were not synonymous.

The rejection of Marder's assertion is based on mixing different branches of the Navy together. If, however, we look at each branch in turn, it is possible to see important variations. This is shown in Appendix C table 1.8. Taking the RNVR first, the general figures here are similar to the ones in table 1.7, but the RNVR Staff Officers included a broad range of people, such as the academics in Room 40, (who received RNVR ranks in 1917), as well as others drawn from the Motor Boat Reserve in the Auxiliary Patrols, or the 10CS. The figures which stand out in table 1.8 are those from the Royal Naval Division. This was Churchill's army of sailors, raised at the outbreak of war and used by him in the defence of Antwerp as well as at Gallipoli and later in France. It is striking that all but one of these who found themselves on the Staff came to it via a military hospital. If Marder's refrain it true of any group, it is certainly true of these.

Paradoxically the Royal Marines who served on the Staff appear to have been relatively unscathed. There again may be reasons for this. Firstly, there was a sizable group of Marine Intelligence officers who joined the Staff at the outset, some coming directly from the former NID.<sup>102</sup> Five came from capital ships of the Grand Fleet, and thus were unlikely to have suffered serious injury, but the rest came from both from the Royal Marines Light Infantry and the Royal Marines Artillery, and saw a wide range of active military service, often in France.

Supply Officers were the least likely to be transferred to the Admiralty unfit. The reasons for this were most likely to be that many came from the often inactive capital ships. On these ships they acted in clerical positions which perhaps shielded them from the intellectual strain of command or the physical exertions of hard labour,

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<sup>101</sup> Clarke, W., and Birch, F., *A Contribution to the History of German Naval Warfare 1914-1918*, 3 volumes, typescript, 1919-22. vol. i, 47. MDNL Ca 1982.

<sup>102</sup> All the following joined the Staff from the former NID: Capt. Walter Sinclair, ADM 196/63, 44; Capt. Cyrus Regnart, ADM 196/62, 479; Capt. Percy Heycock, ADM 196/63, 1; Major William Dixon ADM 196/62, 150 (OD); Capt. Hugh Montgomery, ADM 196/63, 26 (OD); Lt-Col. Walter Jones, ADM 196/62, 293 (OD); Capt. Frank Temple, ADM 196/62, 475; Capt. George Woodcock, ADM 196/62, 507.

both likely causes of war time injury. Also given the way that the patronage system worked particularly closely with this group, they were most likely to be brought ashore by their patron in one piece.

Of the executive officers, who did have the strain of command and were the largest officer group on the Staff, the picture is reasonably close to the pattern for the Staff as a whole. There was, however, a dramatic increase in the employment of invalid executive officers from 1916 onwards, but given the fact that the size of the staff continued to increase during 1917 and 1918, it can be argued that although the Staff became more likely to employ invalid staff in the last two years of the war, they constituted a smaller proportion of the whole.<sup>103</sup> Nonetheless, the overall picture remains the same; the Naval Staff was not a dumping ground for broken sailors.

If it was the case that a German in the early 1930s was more likely to vote Nazi if he was Protestant, rather than a Catholic, from a small town, rather than from a city, being male rather than female, young, rather than old and bourgeois rather than proletarian, then the 'ideal type', as identified by the sociologist Max Weber, of Nazi voters would be a protestant, small town, young and middle class man.<sup>104</sup> The problem with such a stereotype was that as each characteristic was added into the equation, so the number fitting this ever more precise definition was not representative of the phenomenon that was being studied. This presents a problem for the historian who wants to study any sort of group. To assert, for example, that middle class (or *mittelstand* to use the better German term) voters were more likely to succumb to the charms of the Nazi party in the elections of 1932 was true, but to see the Nazis as a middle class party was to forget that at least 1 in 3 Nazi members were working class.<sup>105</sup> This constituted a significant qualification on the view that the NSDAP was a middle class party at a time when the nearest national census in Germany to 1932 recorded that the working class made up some 46% of the population. This indicated that they were a significant, but under-represented group. A similar problem arises when an analysis is attempted of those who made up the Staff between 1912 and 1918. Generalities have their uses, but it is important to realise that

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<sup>103</sup> Figures: Pre-war, 0; 1914, 3; 1915, 6; 1916, 19; 1917, 32; 1918, 24.

<sup>104</sup> Noakes, J., 'Nazi Voters', *History Today* 30, issue 8, August 1980, 44-48.

<sup>105</sup> Noakes, J & Pridham, G., *Nazism 1919-1945, 4 vols*, Exeter, 1983-1998, vol. i, 86-7.

those uses are nonetheless limited. But, since other historians have spoken of typical Staff Officers, it would be fair to look at the careers of several and see if they measured up (or, in view of what has been said about these people, measured down) to the stereotype.

Few officers really fit the 'ideal type' perfectly, and the first officer certainly had one characteristic which did not fit the Naval Staff type; he became an alcoholic. But in almost all other respects Commander Frederic Peile was typical.<sup>106</sup> He was 35 years and 3 months which was about the average age at which officers joined the Staff. He had also done many stereotypical things before joining OD in April 1916. His Sub-Lieutenant scores were a little below the average for the Staff (2, 3, 1, 2, 2), but he had a qualification in one of the four specialist branches which executive officers went into, Navigation (the others being Gunnery, Torpedoes and Signals).<sup>107</sup> He had also passed the War Staff examination in 1913. Less than half of those who sat this exam in 1912-14 subsequently joined the Staff. This might be seen as an indication that the system was failing to pick out the best and pass them on to the Staff. But this would also be to miss an important aspect of the War Staff course. For many of those who did sit the exam, but did not join the staff, such as Capt. Reginald Plunkett, became Staff Officers on Fleet flagships. This was no co-incidence. One of the ideas behind the establishment of the War Staff was that it should create links between the Admiralty and the Flagship.<sup>108</sup> The common War Staff course was a way of doing this.

Peile's career path was also typical of many in the War Staff. Having passed out of HMS *Britannia* in 1897, he served in the Channel Squadron, and the China and Australia stations in his first ten years in the Navy. Also like many others it was in the years round about 1904-8 that he began to specialize (1906 in his case) and he became a navigator. Apart from his 1<sup>st</sup> class result in this exam he was obviously good at it because he was Capt. Reginald Hall's navigator on both HMS *Cornwall* (1907-1910) and HMS *Natal* (1910-12). He also passed his interpreter's exam in German in 1910. This ultimately led him, via some intelligence work to be the Navigating officer on HMS *Emperor of India* and *Royal Oak* (1914-1916). From here he joined the Staff. It

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<sup>106</sup> ADM 196/46, 20.

<sup>107</sup> Sub-Lieutenant's exams (graded 1-3, or fail) in Seamanship, College Exam, Pilotage, Gunnery and Torpedo).

<sup>108</sup> Troubridge Memorandum, 'Suggestions for the Employment of Staff Officers', 10<sup>th</sup> December 1912. ADM 1/8272.

was, according to his Service Record, some time in the latter part of the war that his drinking problem led to his retirement from the Navy in September 1918. Despite this, he was an able officer who was particularly thanked for his help with the reports compiled on the German coastline in 1910.

A second officer who again has many typical features, and was also clearly a man of initiative and daring, was Commander Kenneth Brounger, DSO.<sup>109</sup> Brounger was again about 36 when he joined the Mobilisation Division in August 1917. He too, had passed out of HMS *Britannia* in the mid-1890s and although he served on both the Cape Station and in the Channel Squadron, like many others his main postings were in the Mediterranean.<sup>110</sup> He qualified as a Torpedo officer in 1905, and having spent a year teaching at HMS *Defiance*, he joined HMS *Niobe* as the Torpedo Officer. He then served on HMS *Suffolk* (1906-1908) *Magnificent* (1909-1910) and *London* (1910-1912) in the same position.<sup>111</sup> The fact that three key figures for the War Staff in 1912 were all on this ship again indicated the way in which a posting to a flagship could help an officer's career. He then served on HMS *Roxburgh* until the outbreak of war. So far there was nothing very remarkable in Brounger's career, indeed, some historians might point to factors beyond ability, such as connections with a flagship, which helped his career, but Brounger's actions in 1914 point to a man of real flair. He was appointed to HMS *Doris*, then under the command of Capt. Frank Larken.<sup>112</sup> In December 1914 Larken led an expedition against the Turkish railway not far from Alexandretta at Bab-I-Yunus (Jonah's Pillar to Lord Fisher).<sup>113</sup> Brounger led the landing party which blew up the railway aided uniquely by its Turkish guard. The operation may have had its comical aspects, but it was also fraught with danger. It was one reason why Churchill believed that the Dardanelles would be forced without too much difficulty.<sup>114</sup> It was for this that Brounger gained his DSO. After three years with HMS *Doris*, Brounger came home, possibly unfit with sciatica and joined the

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<sup>109</sup> ADM 196/46, 136.

<sup>110</sup> His Sub-Lieutenant scores were 2, 1, 1, 1, 1. This was a good set of results.

<sup>111</sup> His commanding officer on the *Suffolk* was Capt. Rosslyn Wemyss, who described him as an 'exceptionally clever & able officer'. On HMS *London* he served with four other staff officers, two from the Mobilisation Division (Capt. Hugh Sinclair, DMD from 1914-1916, who presumably had a hand in appointing Commander Geoffrey Hopwood to MD in 1915), and two others, who like Brounger joined the staff in 1917: Lieut. Edward Williams (ID) and Lieut. James Sloan (ASD). On the *Magnificent*, flagship to the Home Fleet, Brounger served with Capt. John McClintock (ADMD in 1912); Commander Barry Domville (ID, 1912) and Capt. George Hope (ADOD also in 1912).

<sup>112</sup> ADM 196/44, 157 (ID 1912-1913)

<sup>113</sup> Corbett, *Naval Operations*. vol. ii, 75-76

<sup>114</sup> Marder, *DNSF*, vol. i, 217

Mobilisation Division. Like many other naval officers he retired in the years immediately after the war. He offered his services again in 1939.

Such brief descriptions of two naval careers indicate that it was wrong to see the Staff as the home of the second-rate officer. These two officers had accumulated a wide range of experience in terms of their global postings, specialist training and wartime service. In other words it was their abilities rather than failings which brought them to the Staff.

To add to the sense of amateurish-ness that features in most histories of the Naval Staff is the assertion that the Staff was housed in rambling and chaotic accommodation that seemed by itself to add to the inefficiencies and bungling that took place. Dewar stated that Section 16 (OD), the forerunner of the PD 'was banished to a room at the top of the old Admiralty building and invisible barriers seemed to arise in the winding corridors of that ancient edifice.'<sup>115</sup> Similarly, an anonymous wag in the Intelligence Division also wrote '... Alice started to look for Room 48. Room 49 was quite close, but none of the other numbers appeared to have anything to do with one another.'<sup>116</sup> Neither of these gibes was really correct. While it was possible that Section 16 was initially housed in one room, this did not last, and it soon gained a suite of rooms when it became a separate Plans Division.<sup>117</sup> It was located on the first floor of the North Block (previously called Block II) in rooms 24, 25, 27, 29 & 30.<sup>118</sup> The American Planning Section Staff was located in Room 26. Far from having all being crushed into one room, they had a suite of consecutive rooms, with Dewar having a room of his own.

The allegation made by the wits of ID 25 (formerly 'Room 40') was almost true, but also misleading. At its core the Admiralty was housed in five linked blocks. One was Admiralty House (the former residence of the First Lord), another was Admiralty Old Building (OB), both of which overlooked Whitehall, and the other three buildings were Blocks I, II & III (renamed North, South and West at some point in 1917) and

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<sup>115</sup> Dewar, *The Navy From Within*, 239

<sup>116</sup> Anon., *Alice in I. D.* 25, December 1918, 9. IWM Thring Papers, 71/30/1.

<sup>117</sup> *Admiralty Telephone Directory*, February 1918, MDNL.

<sup>118</sup> There were five floors to the main Admiralty buildings. Other Naval Staff officers occupied 18 others rooms on this floor. This suggests that they were hardly cut off as Dewar suggested.



were then only some 20 years old when war broke out.<sup>119</sup> The South block (Block III) overlooked Horse Guards Parade, while the North (Block II) faced the Mall and the West (Block I) looked onto St James's Park. There was a large courtyard at the centre of the building. Where Alice's confusion could be said to originate was through the fact that each building numbered its rooms from 1. Thus there were, in fact, at least three Room 40s. The famous one was in Room 40 (OB) whereas Room 40 (Block I) housed another branch of ID and Room 40 (Block III) housed part of TD. If the block was not identified, a visitor could land up at the wrong room. Within each block, however, the room numbering was coherent and sequential. The only time that Alice's confusion over room numbers could happen was at the point where one block met another. It was obviously the case that as a Staff Officer spent more time at the Admiralty so he would quickly learn his way round. It was only the novice who had to be wary.

It should also be added that accommodation was a problem which affected all government departments as the demands of the war increased and the scope of government intervention increased. Everyone was scrambling around looking for space. Offices famously filled the gardens of 10 Downing Street (the 'Garden Suburb') and tin huts sprawled across Horse Guards. In fact, the Naval Staff came out of this very well. As they expanded the Staff moved from occupying some 28 named rooms in December 1914 to at least 133 rooms by August 1918.<sup>120</sup> Most Staff divisions were housed within the main Admiralty Buildings. As they took over more rooms, so other Naval offices moved out. Most divisions, in fact, occupied rooms which were in reasonably close proximity to each other. The evidence suggests that housing the War Staff was a priority. At the same time it is important to note that some 'staff' accommodation lay outside the main Admiralty buildings. Using the *Telephone Directories* as the best 'pattern' for the true Staff structure, it is clear that the Staff housed some of its W/T functions at 47, Victoria Street (renamed 'Annex B' in 1914). The 1914 Directory also lists this address as the home of the Naval Reserve Department which included Commander John Slee. In 1914, however, Slee was

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<sup>119</sup> Pevsner, N., (ed.), *London. Volume 1. The Cities of London and Westminster*, Revised edition (Cherry, B.), London 1973, 536.

<sup>120</sup> *Admiralty Telephone Directories*, December 1914 and August 1918.

actively involved in W/T shore station development.<sup>121</sup> The use of the same building for these two highly secret activities cannot have been a co-incidence.

There is another point to emphasise about the Staff, and that relates to the ‘hidden staff’, which included those in ‘Annex B’. These were the officers who are not included in the official War Staff list in the *Navy List*. It is clear from the *Telephone Directories* that there was more movement between formal Staff divisions than the *Navy List* suggested (particularly between ID and OD), and that the information gathering nature of the Staff was more complex than most have suspected. It is also important to stress that the Staff, like the Navy itself, was a global phenomenon, with intelligence officers stationed in Halifax, Ascension Island, the Seychelles, Malta, Kingston, Gibraltar and beyond. Even in London the Staff had close links with both the Post Office and Lloyds of London (see below). This network, which most historians have largely ignored, was of vital importance in giving the Admiralty the information it needed not simply to direct fleets in home waters, but to control the whole global naval war against the Central Powers.

One generalization about a War Staff Officer’s career in the First World War which can be made with certainty was that he was unlikely to be killed. Of the 930 on the Staff, only two died in action.<sup>122</sup> Both were young recuperating officers whose time on the Staff reflected the Marder mantra of the ‘hurt and the maimed’. Midshipman Denis Goddard was just eighteen when an injury to his knee led to a posting in ID for a couple of months before he returned to his ship, HMS *Queen Mary*, where he and 1,265 others died when she blew up at Jutland.<sup>123</sup> Lieut. James Wheatley was 22 when he was also in ID following a hernia operation before returning to the Submarine Service in which he had been for just one year. He died when the L10 sank in October 1918 with its crew of 35 officers and men.<sup>124</sup> Its loss, however, followed a dramatic confrontation between the L10 and a group of two German Destroyers and two torpedo boats near Terschelling. One of the destroyers hit a mine and sank, and the

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<sup>121</sup> ADM 196/44, 423.

<sup>122</sup> Three others died unnaturally, one drowned while out shooting, another from wounds received in Dublin in 1918 and a third committed suicide.

<sup>123</sup> ADM 196/120, 142.

<sup>124</sup> ADM 196/118, 103.

L10 managed to get a torpedo into the other (S34) before it too was hit by German gunfire and sank.

Finally, the structure of the War Staff was more dynamic than traditional histories of the Staff have suggested. As graph 1.1 in Appendix B shows, the biggest change in the Staff was not in its structure but in the number of its personnel. It was only with this increase in numbers that delegation and specialisation became possible, and the moment which this began in earnest was not in the Geddes era, but earlier when Jellicoe arrived as First Sea Lord. The area where it might be argued from this perspective that Geddes did have an impact was in the numbers of civilians on the Staff (graph 1.3), but as graphs 1.1 and 1.2 indicate, in terms of numbers of naval officers or RNVR officers, the decisive moment came earlier. These more gradual changes in 1917 have been obscured by the other great naval questions of 1917: the introduction of convoy and the crisis of the U-Boat challenge; the May 1917 reforms and their genesis; and the manner of Jellicoe's dismissal in December. Underneath all this a silent revolution took place in which finally the Staff was able to act in the manner in which its adherents would have wanted. This began to emerge in 1918 not just because Wemyss and Geddes allowed it to, but also because Jellicoe had equipped it with the manpower with which to do it. The Staff's work in 1918 also showed that specific staff training was not necessarily as important as a lively and enquiring mind. If the Royal Navy had been stuck in the 'Long Calm Lee of Trafalgar' for a hundred years, so it might also be true to say that the Prussian shibboleth of staff infallibility, which had been propagated ever since the abnormally decisive campaigns of 1866-1871, was shown to be less than solid by the failures of the Schlieffen Plan in 1914, the programme of Unrestricted Submarine warfare in 1917 and the gamble of the Spring Offensive in 1918.

This chapter has demonstrated that the Staff was a more experienced, vibrant (and youthful) organisation than has hitherto been understood. It was also more extensive and diverse in its function and structure. The Staff was more involved in information gathering and synthesis than is normally supposed, and therefore sought out officers with skills useful to these activities. In particular, they had need of both Interpreters and officers with W/T training. Those that served on the staff were, in the overwhelming number of cases, men of ability. That they have not been recognised as

such is largely down to their mistreatment in the inter-war period, and the uncritical use that later historians have made of these assessments. Having examined the personnel of the staff, the remainder of this thesis will look at their work.

## Chapter 2. The establishment of the War Staff, and its work before the outbreak of war in August 1914.

Capt. Herbert Richmond produced a damning indictment of pre-War naval planning when he wrote, 'the brain of Jupiter had indeed produced an Athene fully armed, it was no one's business to be sure that the poor lady could use her spear.'<sup>1</sup> Richmond believed that the Navy, obsessed with matériel questions, had overlooked the need for a suitable planning organisation. The War Staff as created in January 1912 failed to provide such a role, and was simply 'the repository of inferior minds and supine wills.'<sup>2</sup> Although Professor Marder was not quite so critical, he still noted Capt. Alfred Dewar's view that 'We had the opportunity but not the intellectual capital to float a staff.'<sup>3</sup> As will be shown below, such an opinion under-estimated the significant work that the War Staff did in the two years before the War broke out. Recent work has also under-played the degree to which both in strategic concepts and in quality of personnel, the War Staff represented continuity with the previous NID.<sup>4</sup> The Edwardian Admiralty was, in fact, far more in control of events than traditional accounts have thus far suggested.

It is equally important to identify the function that the Staff was expected to perform in the period 1912-14. One of the reasons that it has come in for such criticism is that officers, such as Dewar or Richmond, foresaw a different role from the one it initially fulfilled. And although it would be true to say that most Staff Officers lacked formal training in Staff work, it would be quite wrong to suggest that they were inexperienced or stupid. Indeed, as will be shown later the Staff included a number of experienced and able naval planners.

In creating a Staff the Admiralty appeared to be lagging considerably behind its Whitehall neighbour, the War Office. They had created a General Staff in 1904, a consequence of the problems revealed by the Boer War. Sir John Fisher had made

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<sup>1</sup> Richmond, H., 'The Tragedy of Lord Fisher of Kilverstone. How he Failed and Why', *Naval Review*, 1930, 168.

<sup>2</sup> d'Ombraïn, N., *War Machinery and High Policy*, Oxford, 1973, 167; Similar views can be found in: Gretton, P., *Former Naval Person: Winston Churchill and the Royal Navy*, London 1968, 162; Rodger, *Admiralty*, 128.

<sup>3</sup> Marder, *FDSF*, vol. i, 266.

<sup>4</sup> Grimes, *War Planning*, 208, 279.

some supporting noises about the need for a Naval Staff, and in 1902 even sent a paper on it to the then First Lord.<sup>5</sup> Nothing had come of this, partly because the issue got bound up in the criticisms later made of Fisher by the 'Circle of Discontent'.<sup>6</sup> This was the name given to a group of senior naval officers, centred around Lord Charles Beresford, who were critical both privately, and at times publicly, of some of Fisher's reforms, such as his changes to the composition of the Fleets in British Home Waters, and the policy of scrapping many British ships in distant stations and therefore effectively reducing, as they saw it, British influence around the world. Fisher's last years in office were thus surrounded by the spectre of criticism. He had attempted to contain such complaints by the creation of the Ballard Committee in 1906 and the Naval War Council. These actions had not, however, helped to assuage the critics.

Two other factors, however, help to explain what Fisher was up to. Fisher was planning nothing less than a revolution in naval affairs.<sup>7</sup> This involved not simply the redistribution of ships and new designs. He was planning a new type of naval war.<sup>8</sup> This involved great secrecy at a time of naval leaks. Fisher liked people who he could trust.<sup>9</sup> He preferred informal, personal structures rather than bureaucracies. Furthermore, Fisher's claims that he had taken steps to develop a Naval Staff were not really true in the sense that later naval officers would have used the term 'Staff'.<sup>10</sup> It was in the Ballard Committee that it was possible to see the real way that Fisher's mind worked. For him a Staff was not so much a bureaucracy but more a 'brains trust'. He would create the ideas and leave a trusted small group of able officers to work them out. He claimed that a Staff was 'an exceedingly useful body to be kicked and to deal with d---d rot! and to make out schemes for the German Emperor to have next morning at breakfast!'<sup>11</sup> But at the time the leaks that Fisher feared the most were largely domestic, and in place of a reference to Kaiser Wilhelm II the reader should more properly substitute the name of Lord Charles Beresford. It was significant that one of the reasons why Fisher abolished the Trade Division of the NID

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<sup>5</sup> Fisher Memorandum, 'A General Staff for the Navy', 1902. CCC Fisher Papers, FISR 1/3.

<sup>6</sup> Mackay, R., *Fisher of Kilverstone*, Oxford, 1973, 255.

<sup>7</sup> Lambert, N., *Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution*, Columbia South Carolina, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Lambert, 'Strategic Command', between footnotes 58-80; pagination uncertain.

<sup>9</sup> Lord Fisher, 'Naval Staff and Admiralty Clerks', *Memories*. London 1919, 102-112.

<sup>10</sup> 'Report and proceedings of a Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence appointed to inquire into certain questions of naval policy raised by Lord Charles Beresford', August 12th 1909. CAB 16/9.

<sup>11</sup> Fisher to Esher, 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1912, *FGDN*, vol. ii, 425.

in 1909 was because he suspected that it was 'pro-Beresford', particularly in the form of one of its officers, Capt. Henry Campbell.

The limitations of running such an informal system were starkly revealed during the period of Fisher's successor as First Sea Lord, Sir Arthur Wilson, when the relationship between the First Sea Lord and any 'brains trust' broke down. It also resulted in a more fragmented system for planning than might otherwise have been achieved. Unapproachable and autocratic, Wilson had not been appointed on meritocratic grounds. Fisher and others knew of Wilson's weaknesses, but they hoped that other actions would ameliorate these, in particular they ensured that the existing DNI, RA Sir Alexander Bethell, would stay on beyond his expected time so as to give the continuity in strategic planning that it was believed that Wilson would not necessarily provide.<sup>12</sup> To suggest consequently that Wilson's failings were not widely known in what was a small pool of senior officers is wrong.<sup>13</sup> They were aware of them, and Wilson was appointed First Sea Lord because they believed that, despite them, he would protect the main attributes of the 'Fisher legacy', with Bethell in place to give a steering hand should Wilson get into choppy waters.<sup>14</sup> What Fisher underestimated, however, was the degree to which Wilson could still inflict damage on the Royal Navy despite this.

Discontent with Wilson's leadership came to a head at the famous 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1911 meeting of the CID during the Agadir Crisis while Bethell was away on holiday. His faltering performance jarred against the slicker and apparently stronger case put by his namesake and DMO at the War Office, Sir Henry Wilson. After the meeting Asquith sadly described Admiral Wilson's plans as 'puerile'.<sup>15</sup> What finally sealed Wilson's fate was a letter that Richard Haldane, the Secretary of State for War, wrote to Asquith soon afterwards in which he observed, 'The fact is that the Admirals live in a world of their own. The Fisher method, which Wilson appears to follow, that war plans should be locked up in the brain of the First Sea Lord, is out of date and impractical ... unless it is tackled resolutely I cannot remain in office.'<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Lambert, 'Strategic Command', between footnotes 112-114.

<sup>13</sup> Grimes, *War Planning*, 191.

<sup>14</sup> Lambert, N., 'Admiral Sir Arthur Knyvett-Wilson, VC (1910-1911)' in Murfett, *First Sea Lords*, 35-36.

<sup>15</sup> Asquith to Haldane, 31st August 1911, in Williamson, S. R., *The Politics of Grand Strategy. Britain and France Prepare for War, 1904-14*, London, 1969, 193.

<sup>16</sup> Maurice, Sir Frederick, *Haldane, 1856 - 1915, The life of Viscount Haldane of Cloan, KT, OM.*, London, 1937, 283-4.

Haldane put himself forward as the man to correct these faults and carry out a full reform of the Admiralty's administration. It was probably a great pity that this offer was not taken up, as Haldane would have been less likely to play the amateur sailor and strategist than Churchill did. Asquith, however, wanted an effective speaker to defend naval spending in the Commons, and for this reason he chose Churchill over Haldane. The latter was, however, acutely aware of Churchill's failings, telling Sir Edward Grey that Churchill was 'too apt to act first and think afterwards.'<sup>17</sup> A similar sentiment was made by one of Churchill's early Staff Officers, Capt. Osmond Brock: 'The new Lord is a young man in a hurry ... his schemes ... bear traces of great haste and little thought.'<sup>18</sup> The situation had not changed by 1914, and one reason why Capt. Reginald Hall initially viewed Fisher's return as First Sea Lord in October 1914 with some enthusiasm, was because he would be able to wrest the naval initiative from the Churchill.<sup>19</sup> Churchill was, therefore, appointed with the direct political purpose of creating a Staff.

There was, however, another force at work which was significant in the creation of the War Staff. Since about 1905 the Admiralty had been developing a War Room plot. The plot allowed the Admiralty to control British warships while at sea. Through the plot the British would know not only the location of their own warships, but also that of enemy warships, merchant vessels and coal stocks. It allowed for predictions to be made as to the likely course of an enemy force so that British ships could intercept and destroy them. This was made possible through the development of W/T technology and would enable the Admiralty to wage a global economic war using more limited resources than would have been needed in previous decades. Bethell took an active part in this development.<sup>20</sup> Although Wilson himself was little interested in the whole concept of economic warfare, he appreciated the War Room's possibilities in the control of fleet manoeuvres.<sup>21</sup> It was also the implications of this development which had so infuriated Beresford.<sup>22</sup> In short the War Room plot performed the function that radar did for Fighter Command in the Battle of Britain. It allowed for the more efficient use of limited resources by *centrally directing and controlling* these forces. For such a plan to work, people were needed to collect,

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

<sup>18</sup> Brock to Slade, 29<sup>th</sup> December 1911. NMM, Slade Papers, Reel 1.

<sup>19</sup> Draft C of Strauss's biography, chapter 7, 'Lord Fisher and Mr Churchill', 2, CCC, Hall Papers 3/5,

<sup>20</sup> Lambert, 'Strategic Command', between footnotes 112-114.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, between footnotes 107-108.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, between footnotes 96-103.



analyse and present quantities of information, as well as initiating action once a decision had been taken. For this to happen a new Admiralty structure was needed.

The creation of the Admiralty War Staff was thus the result of the convergence of two factors: the development of the War Room plot, and the need for a public display of reform. It was not just a response to external forces. One of Churchill's first actions was therefore to issue a memorandum for a new Staff.<sup>23</sup> His plans met with resistance from Wilson. Some of his reasons were valid, such as the inadvisability of dividing the posts of COS and First Sea Lord. But Wilson went further and saw no need for a Staff at all.<sup>24</sup> He was out of office by the end of the year and the Admiralty War Staff was finally born on 8<sup>th</sup> January 1912.

The structure of the War Staff as created was heavily influenced by Prince Louis of Battenberg in particular, as well as Capt. George Ballard and Capt. Herbert Richmond.<sup>25</sup> The Staff was not there to supplant the Board of Admiralty, but supplement it. For this reason its powers were only advisory.<sup>26</sup> As Battenberg pointed out, this structure was very similar to the one in which he had operated as DNI.<sup>27</sup> Recent work, however, which praised the men and work of the former NID has also criticised the post-1912 Staff.<sup>28</sup> This both missed the point as well as being inaccurate. Others have merely said of the new War Staff that most Staff Officers were 'wholly unfit for their duties' without ever really considering what their duties were.<sup>29</sup> To argue that the Staff was 'the repository of inferior minds and supine wills' was also to show little knowledge of the officers involved.<sup>30</sup>

The Staff's structure as outlined by Churchill in January 1912 was simple, being composed of three Divisions: Mobilisation, Intelligence and Operations. They

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<sup>23</sup> Churchill Memorandum, 28<sup>th</sup> October 1911 in Churchill, R., (ed.), *Churchill, companion vol. 2, part 2*, 1303-12.

<sup>24</sup> Wilson Memorandum, 30<sup>th</sup> October 1911, in Bradford, E., *Life of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Arthur Knyvett Wilson*, London 1923, 229-235.

<sup>25</sup> Battenburg to Churchill, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1911, in Kerr, M., *Prince Louis of Battenberg Admiral of the Fleet*, London 1934, 235-8; Ballard Memorandum, October 1911, 'Naval War Staff', CAB 17/8; Richmond to Troubridge, 'Considerations affecting a Staff', n.d. [October 1911?], NMM, Richmond Papers, RIC/12/4.

<sup>26</sup> Churchill Memorandum, 'Memorandum by the First Lord on a Naval War Staff', *Naval Annual*, 1912, 385-391.

<sup>27</sup> Kerr, *Battenberg*, 235.

<sup>28</sup> Grimes, *War Planning*, 207-209.

<sup>29</sup> Gretton, *Former Naval Person*, 162.

<sup>30</sup> d'Ombraïn, *War Machinery*, 167.

had three principal functions. Firstly, he said that there should be a branch to collect information (ID).<sup>31</sup> Secondly, there was a branch to 'deliberate' and 'report' on the schemes being proposed (OD). Finally, the Staff would 'enable' the decisions of its superiors to be put into effect (OD/MD). Thus the Staff's name and structure *in 1912* defined its function. The Admiralty War Staff was there to gather and analyse information, so that the Board of Admiralty, particularly the First Sea Lord, was in a position to control the movements of British warships in wartime. Much of their work would thus be focused on the War Room plot, and thus constituted a development of existing practices. At the same time they would work with the First Sea Lord on developing war plans which would be tested in fleet manoeuvres. This was important as the years immediately before the outbreak of war saw considerable changes in the way in which it was believed that any future wars would be fought. The personality and interests of the First Lord also had a large impact on the development of the Navy in these crucial years.

Such a Staff was also small (See Appendix B graph 1.1). The Mobilisation Division was the smallest, with a mere three Staff Officers (and five clerks). Indeed, by 1914 there was even talk of abolishing the division, and merging its function of preparing the fleet for war into another division. The OD had just six Staff Officers (and four clerks), and the ID was the largest of the sections in the War Staff, with sixteen officers (and nine clerks). A senior layer was then placed on top of these three sections in the form of the COS and his deputy. They would operate as the link between the Staff and the Board of Admiralty.

In total there were twenty-seven naval officers in the War Staff.<sup>32</sup> Of the sixteen in the Intelligence Division eleven were drafted in from the former NID.<sup>33</sup> A handful were even there in 1918, although by then the Staff had over 500 personnel, both naval and civilian (see Appendix B graph 1.1). But between 1912 and 1918 not only did the Staff grow in numbers; it also increased in divisions, experience, and finally, authority. Significantly, its function also evolved.

Although the structure of the Staff seemed easy to understand it obscured problems, which were particularly acute during the Churchill era (October 1911 -

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<sup>31</sup> Record of Meeting, 1<sup>st</sup> December 1911, 'Notes of a Discussion, held at the RN College, Portsmouth, on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1911, on "Naval War Staff", ashore and afloat – Composition – Duties and Training', ADM 1/8272.

<sup>32</sup> *Navy List*, April 1912, 532.

<sup>33</sup> *Navy List*, January 1912, 532.

May 1915). In particular, it was unclear how far the Staff was there to 'oppose' what they considered unwise plans. It was also not yet clear through the development of the War Room how much authority had slipped from the C-in-C to the Board of Admiralty. In 1912-13 there was a tussle between Sir George Callaghan as C-in-C and Ballard and Jackson for the War Staff as to who would really be in control of the Home Fleet.<sup>34</sup> The fleet manoeuvres of 1912-13 did not settle the issue, and the picture remained unresolved on the outbreak of war. It was only in December 1914 that the Admiralty began once again a concerted effort to regain control (rather than just direction) of the naval war.

By the summer of 1914 Churchill was in the process of reviewing the role and structure of the War Staff when international events overtook him. His actions were prompted by a feeling that there were insufficient links between the various divisions of the Staff. The COS recommended a reform of the structure.<sup>35</sup> By May 1914 proposals were in place, which included not only provision for a Training Division, but also for a restructuring of the OD to include a section devoted to Trade Defence.<sup>36</sup> One of the keenest advocates of reform was Major Alfred Ollivant.<sup>37</sup> He was a Royal Artillery officer, who had served on the army's General Staff, and during 1913-14 was seconded to the War Staff as part of interchange of officers, an interesting example of inter-service co-operation.<sup>38</sup> The COS certainly initially found the experience very positive.<sup>39</sup> Ollivant was particularly concerned that the structure of the War Staff created administrative bottlenecks which would create inefficiency.<sup>40</sup> The wartime experiences of the likes of Sir Henry Oliver (COS & DCNS 1914-18) were to prove this observation correct. But the need for financial economy and a shortage of officers was already putting a brake on some of these ideas even before early August 1914 when war broke out, and apart from the hasty (and belated) creation of the TD, structural reform stopped.

Discussions about the need for a new TD had, by then, been going on for well over a year. Such a division had existed before as part of the old NID, but had been

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<sup>34</sup> Lambert, 'Strategic Command', between footnotes 132-133.

<sup>35</sup> Churchill Minute, 8<sup>th</sup> August 1913; Reply by Jackson, 12<sup>th</sup> August 1913. Soton, Battenberg Papers, MB1/T26/235.

<sup>36</sup> Churchill, *World Crisis*, vol. i, 507 - 511, 'Memorandum by the First Lord on the Naval Staff Training and Development'. The papers in response to this can be found in ADM 1/8377.

<sup>37</sup> Richmond Diary 21<sup>st</sup> October 1914. NMM RIC/1/11.

<sup>38</sup> Admiralty to War Office, 24<sup>th</sup> October 1912. Soton, MB1/21/151.

<sup>39</sup> Jackson Minute, 5<sup>th</sup> June 1913. Soton, MB1/21/151.

<sup>40</sup> Ollivant to Churchill, 29<sup>th</sup> April 1914. ADM 1/8377/118.

abolished in 1909. This had been a mistake, as its continued existence might have helped to reduce the damage done by Wilson when he became First Sea Lord, as he was sceptical about economic warfare.<sup>41</sup> By 1913, however, plans were drawn up to recreate the Division.<sup>42</sup> Jackson was aware that time had been lost in preparing the way for an economic war with Germany, and told Churchill that 'there remains much to be done in this direction.'<sup>43</sup> By the end of October 1913 the War Staff had drawn up a memorandum on 'Admiralty Responsibilities Regarding National Commerce in War', but inexplicably it took a further three months for Churchill to see it.<sup>44</sup> Despite the fact that a Director of the Division had already been chosen, nothing happened until the outbreak of war, when Capt. Richard Webb, who incidentally had been Jackson's Flag Captain in 1912-13, was finally appointed. This delay was largely the result of the fact that the recreation of the TD got caught up in the wider questions of staff reform which by May 1914 still remained unresolved.

One of the central issues concerning the early Staff was in its relationship with the Board of Admiralty, in particular the First Lord and First Sea Lord. It remained the case that the Staff could only advise the First Sea Lord. Churchill was also particularly keen to ensure that no encroachment was made on his own unorthodox lines of communication with senior naval officers. This was no accident, as it meant that Churchill maximised his own area of influence. In doing so, Churchill often exceeded the very managerial structure that he himself had so carefully outlined, in his original January 1912 Naval War Staff memorandum.<sup>45</sup> Churchill, however, regularly created his own more informal networks within the Admiralty. A good example of this was to be found in his choice of RA Ernest Troubridge as the first COS. The First Sea Lord, Bridgeman, was not consulted.<sup>46</sup> Instead Churchill appointed Troubridge because he was 'my man'.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Offer, A., *The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation*, London 1989, 296.

<sup>42</sup> Jackson to Ballard, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1913. ADM 137/2864.

<sup>43</sup> Jackson to Churchill and Battenberg, 16<sup>th</sup> October 1913. ADM 137/2864.

<sup>44</sup> War Staff Memorandum, 'Admiralty Responsibilities Regarding National Commerce in War', 30<sup>th</sup> October 1913. ADM 137/2864.

<sup>45</sup> Churchill, 'Memorandum ... on a Naval War Staff', *Naval Annual*, 1912.

<sup>46</sup> Lambert, N., 'Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman Bridgeman (1911-1912)' in Murfett, *First Sea Lords*. 56-7; Ross, S., *Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman. The Life and Times of an Officer and a Gentleman*, Cambridge, 1998, 180.

<sup>47</sup> Churchill to Battenberg, 19<sup>th</sup> November 1911. Soton, MB1/T9/43.

Churchill also saw the Staff as a potentially useful tool in his political management of the Navy. For example, between 1912 and 1914 the Admiralty was much pre-occupied with the question of whether or not, or at least how far, warships should convert from the strategically safe supply of cheap coal to the more efficient, but also more expensive and potentially insecure use of imported oil.<sup>48</sup> It was not simply a question of technology, but one of cost, foreign policy and even national security. Originally Churchill had asked a fan of oil, Lord Fisher, to investigate the question, but having failed to get the exact answer that he wanted from Fisher's Royal Commission on Fuel and Engines, Churchill turned to the War Staff to prepare a paper on the question of the Navy's oil needs.<sup>49</sup> Mindful that he needed to get the 'right' answer which he could then present to a financially conscious Cabinet, Churchill carefully limited the Staff's terms of reference.<sup>50</sup> Even then, the report he got back did not quite fit his requirements.<sup>51</sup> Churchill therefore changed the figures and presented an altered report to the Cabinet.<sup>52</sup>

Despite events like this, the Staff made a significant contribution to the development of the Navy's wartime strategy. The first area that it tackled was that relating to the concept of the 'close blockade'. Traditionally the strategy of the Royal Navy was to impose such a blockade on her enemy's naval bases and ports. Developments in mine, torpedo and gun technologies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries meant that this strategy was no longer seen by most as feasible. The remnants of this former approach can be found in some of the underlying assumptions of Churchill's 'Borkum' plan which will be discussed later. The question of the 'close blockade' was of vital importance because it underpinned the entire naval strategy that the British would adopt in the event of war. Each year the naval manoeuvres played out various scenarios which tested these plans. By 1911 both Sir Francis Bridgeman (C-in-C Home Fleet) and his second in command, Sir George Callaghan, condemned the

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<sup>48</sup> Brown, W. M., *The Royal Navy: Fuel Supplies, 1898-1939; The Transition from Coal to Oil*, unpublished University of London Ph.D. Thesis, 2003.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 107-14.

<sup>50</sup> Churchill to Battenberg, 8<sup>th</sup> January 1913. ADM 116/1209.

<sup>51</sup> Jackson Memorandum, 'Outline Scheme of Supply of Fuel Oil', 25<sup>th</sup> April 1913. ADM 116/1219.

<sup>52</sup> Churchill to Battenberg, 8<sup>th</sup> May 1913. ADM 116/1219.

policy of close blockade and demanded something new.<sup>53</sup> By April 1912 the principle of the close blockade of Germany was cancelled.<sup>54</sup> In its place an intermediate blockade proposal was created by the War Staff. This had considerable flaws, as was revealed by the July 1912 Manoeuvres.<sup>55</sup> Troubridge's plan has subsequently been described as 'abysmal' and 'more flawed' than the previous 'close blockade' strategy.<sup>56</sup> Yet Ballard, the DOD, saw the intermediate strategy differently. While acknowledging its weaknesses (such as the vulnerability of the patrolling ships), by comparison, he saw the close blockade strategy as 'virtually impossible'.<sup>57</sup> What Ballard suggested to strengthen the 'intermediate blockade' was an extensive mining policy for the southern North Sea. This was finally adopted in 1918, although on a far greater scale than Ballard had originally envisaged.

After the failure of Troubridge's 'intermediate blockade' proposals, Churchill had Troubridge replaced by Sir Henry Jackson in January 1913. Jackson would not naturally have been Churchill's choice, but his profound knowledge of W/T was at that time of great use to the First Lord, as will be discussed later.<sup>58</sup> By then Ballard and OD had drawn up the plans for the strategy which was to be adopted in 1914, that of the 'distant blockade'.<sup>59</sup> While justifying this strategy in historical terms by comparing it with the approach adopted by the English in the seventeenth century Anglo-Dutch Wars, the plans also borrowed heavily from those that Ballard had helped to draw up in 1907.<sup>60</sup> It would see a cordon being created across the Dover Straits and the Orkney-Norway gap which would also allow for an economic war against Germany to be pursued. This was confirmed by Jackson in a 1913 Memorandum, when he wrote, '... Our War Plans lay down definitely that one of our objects in war is to bring economic pressure on Germany by stopping her overseas trade' thereby creating great social unrest.<sup>61</sup> The northern screen would be upheld by

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<sup>53</sup> Callaghan to Admiralty, 9<sup>th</sup> January 1912, 'War Plans. Remarks on Certain Points In. Section VII, War Stations. Watch on German Rivers', 12. ADM 116/3096.

<sup>54</sup> Admiralty to Callaghan, 9<sup>th</sup> April 1912. ADM 116/3096.

<sup>55</sup> May Memorandum, 'Naval Manoeuvres 1912, Remarks by Umpire-in-Chief', 5<sup>th</sup> August 1912, NMM, May Papers, May/10

<sup>56</sup> Grimes, *War Planning*, 211, 210.

<sup>57</sup> Ballard Memorandum, 'Observation Force in North Sea. Remarks on War Orders for, in connection with lessons of the 1912 Manoeuvres.' 16<sup>th</sup> September 1912. ADM 116/866B.

<sup>58</sup> Churchill to Battenberg, 19<sup>th</sup> November 1911. Soton, MB1/T9/48.

<sup>59</sup> OD Memorandum, 'War Plans and War Orders, No. 1, Home Fleets No. 20, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1912, and No. 25, 18<sup>th</sup> February 1913'. ADM 137/818.

<sup>60</sup> Ballard Memorandum, 'War Plans, General Instructions', 16<sup>th</sup> December 1912. ADM 116/3412; 'Admiralty War Plans Against Germany – 1907'. ADM 116/1043B.

<sup>61</sup> Jackson Memorandum, untitled, 16<sup>th</sup> October 1913. ADM 137/2864.

the presence of the main British fleet in a Scottish base. The overall strategic situation would be controlled from the Admiralty.

It would, therefore be wrong to suppose that it was only in July 1914 that the British hastily adopted the distant blockade or that they went into the First World War without a coherently thought out plan of action.<sup>62</sup> For connected to the concept of the distant blockade, were those of an economic war against Germany and the creation of a concentrated battle fleet that would be stationed in northern waters. It was greatly hoped that such economic pressure would be sufficient to bring the HSF out of harbour in a desperate attempt to challenge the strangling blockade, and thereby meet its doom.

The concept of the economic blockade was not new to either Britain or her enemies. Napoléon had most famously attempted it firstly in his ill-fated plan to break Britain's trade links with the east during the Egyptian Campaign in 1798, and again with the 'Continental System'. These both failed, and through the astute use of alliances, money and the moral authority given to Britain by its victory in the Peninsular War, it was Napoléon who was finally defeated, and deposited in the South Atlantic, so as to make Europe once more safe for gentlemen. Naval operations during the misnamed 'Crimean War' in both the Sea of Azov and more importantly the Baltic, also showed that the naval power could have a decisive impact, even on what was a predominantly land power.<sup>63</sup>

By the beginning of the twentieth century there were some who felt that economic developments had given Britain an even greater hold over most continental rivals because by 1900 Europe (excluding Russia) was not self sufficient in food. A key figure in these calculations was the head of the Trade Division of the NID, Capt. Henry Campbell, who took over the Division in August 1906.<sup>64</sup> In July 1908 he presented a report in which he argued that the growth of German global market penetration, and its increasing reliance on imported food made it highly vulnerable to British sea power.<sup>65</sup> A blockade would result in 'financial embarrassment' for the

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<sup>62</sup> Williamson *Politics of Grand Strategy*, 318; Mackay, *Fisher*, 443.

<sup>63</sup> Lambert, A., 'Preparing for the Russian War: British Strategic Planning, March 1853 – March 1854', *War and Society* 7/2, 1989, 15-39.

<sup>64</sup> Offer, *First World War*, 230. An account of the origins of the Division can be found in the following letter, Englefield to Campbell, 14<sup>th</sup> November 1907. ADM 137/2864.

<sup>65</sup> Campbell Memorandum, 'German Trade in Time of War – Effect on Industrial Output of the Country due to a call to the Colours, and due to a Scarcity of Raw Materials', n.d. [July 1908?]. ADM 137/2872.

German labourer. He concluded that 'no nation can continue to struggle for long' in such a situation. Campbell believed that Germany was particularly dependent on grain imports either from overseas or from Russia.<sup>66</sup> Rapid industrialisation, and the huge growth in populations meant that Europe's working classes ate bread made from rye and wheat grown in the far corners of the globe. More recently historians have pointed out that Germany's vulnerability to sea blockade varied very much from commodity to commodity. For example it has been calculated that while some 60% of Germany's trade was carried by sea, only 19% of her calories and 42% of her fats came that way.<sup>67</sup> Thus, it may not have been possible to talk of starving Germany into submission, but rather of causing sufficient discomfort with the loss of the traditional staples that the Government would fear unrest through the impact of price inflation. Starvation would have been relative rather than absolute.<sup>68</sup>

The key policy makers at the Admiralty accepted Campbell's opinions, and the DNI's presentation to the CID sub-committee on the 'Military Needs of the Empire' on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1908 reflected these views.<sup>69</sup> This strategy was accepted by the CID, but so as to lend a helping hand to the French while the economic pressure was applied, a limited Expeditionary Force would also be sent across the Channel.<sup>70</sup> Fisher supported this policy. He believed that a number of factors, including European dependence on imports, the size of the merchant marine, and the power the Royal Navy meant that Britain was, if anything, in a stronger position at the beginning of the twentieth century than she had been fifty years earlier, despite her own relative economic decline. Indeed as Germany industrialised, and overtook Britain, so, ironically, she became even more vulnerable to a British commercial blockade. It should, however, be added that not everyone believed this to be the case, and a counter-view was put by the FO in a report compiled by Sir Francis Oppenheimer stating that with the use of neutral markets in particular, the British would find it very hard to impose a successful blockade.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Campbell Memorandum, 'Trade of the United Kingdom and Germany 1897 – 1904/5 (Exports and Imports) A Comparison', n.d. [c. 1905]. ADM 137/2872.

<sup>67</sup> Siney, M. C., *The Allied Blockade of Germany 1914-16*, University of Michigan, 1957, 20.

<sup>68</sup> Offer, *The First World War*, 25.

<sup>69</sup> Slade Memorandum 'The Economic Effect of War on German Trade', CID paper E-4, 12<sup>th</sup> December 1908; Appendix V, 'Report of the Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence to Consider the Military Needs of the Empire'. CAB 16/5.

<sup>70</sup> Offer, *First World War*, 242-3.

<sup>71</sup> Otte, 'Alien Diplomatist', 243-44.



The Admiralty, however, was confident that Britain could use German vulnerability to her advantage. Such a policy was a radical one in that it intended to use the suffering of the civilian population to counter the projected might of the German army. An unrestricted commercial war was also at odds with British Government policy in the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War. This conflict had seemed to suggest that Britain would have much to gain by strengthening the commercial rights of neutrals in any future war, as Britain might well be one of the neutrals. It was for this reason that the British Government sponsored the international conference which led to the Declaration of London in 1909. While this banned the transportation of 'absolute contraband' to a belligerent power, it also allowed that power to import 'non contraband' directly, and 'conditional contraband' indirectly through a neutral port. This appeared to undermine fatally the Admiralty's position that it would use economic warfare to bring an enemy power either to its knees, or at least hobbling to the negotiating table.

In Fisher's mind the two positions were not mutually contradictory, in that he believed Britain could seek to increase neutral rights with the expectation that she would benefit from such rights if she kept out of a future war, while she could simply ignore them, as the world's greatest naval power, if she was involved in that war. As an anonymous Admiralty memorandum of about 1908 stated, 'When Great Britain is [a] belligerent, she can be safely trusted to look after her own interests, but the dangerous time for her is when she is neutral ... At such a time, the existence of a well reasoned-out classification of goods will be of enormous advantage.'<sup>72</sup> This certainly agreed with a later diary entry in which a future Staff Officer reported that Fisher had the 'deliberate intention' of tearing up the Declaration when war began.<sup>73</sup> In these terms, the 'Declaration of London' could be seen as a 'win/win' formula even within the Admiralty.

Such a policy was clever, but it was also open to danger. By sponsoring the Declaration, even if it was never ratified by parliament, the British gave the impression of weakness. This was at odds with the often highly successful policy of bellicose deterrents which the likes of Fisher had adopted during, for example, the

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<sup>72</sup> Anon, n.d. [c. 1908], 'Notes on Contraband', ADM 116/1073.

<sup>73</sup> Grant-Duff, A., Diary. 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1911. CCC, Grant-Duff Papers, 2/1.

First Moroccan Crisis.<sup>74</sup> Countries, such as Germany, could have felt that the British were losing their will for direct action or intervention. Secondly, by publicly distancing themselves from the policy of outright economic warfare, the Admiralty weakened their hand in relation to the 'appeasement' policy of the FO towards the neutrals once the war had begun. Thirdly, it undermined the centrality of economic warfare within the Admiralty at a time when the new First Sea Lord (Wilson) stated that he did not believe in such policy. Despite the best endeavours of others behind the scenes such as Bethell in NID or Hankey at the CID, the Admiralty never quite regained its former position, although within the Admiralty economic warfare was back at the forefront of their strategy almost as soon as Wilson was gone.<sup>75</sup>

By then, however, other government departments had influenced the development of policy, particularly the FO and the Board of Trade. In fact, the first two years of the war saw the British Government drift between the strategies of a limited naval war against Germany; the creation of a nation in arms; and finally the principle of a 'Total War'.<sup>76</sup> The attempts by the Admiralty to impose an economic blockade on Germany and her Allies have thus to be seen in the context of a shifting balance of power and argument within these Whitehall ministries. When war came, therefore, policy found itself caught between the interests of those who wanted to take a hard line against Germany, such as the WO and the Admiralty and those who wanted a significantly diluted policy, which included the FO and the Board of Trade. Indeed, there were many in industry and commerce that initially saw the war as no concern of British business, and did not want to lose vital contracts in Germany, or even in the neutral states.<sup>77</sup>

The power behind the economic blockade of Germany was to be an overwhelming concentration of capital ships. The Grand Fleet was thus to act not only as the

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<sup>74</sup> Lambert, A., "'This Is All We Want.' Great Britain and the Baltic Approaches, 1815-1914" in Jørgen Sevaldsen, (ed.), *Britain and Denmark: Political Economic and Cultural Relations in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Copenhagen, 2003, 147-169; Lambert, A., 'Great Britain and the Baltic 1890-1914' in Salmon, P., and Barrow, T., (ed.), *Britain and the Baltic. Studies in Commercial, Political and Cultural Relations 1500-2000*, Sunderland, 2003, 215-230.

<sup>75</sup> Jackson Memorandum, untitled, 16<sup>th</sup> October 1913. ADM 137/2864.

<sup>76</sup> French, D., *British Economic and Strategic Planning, 1905-15*, London 1982, 1.

<sup>77</sup> Report of the Sub Committee ... to consider questions ... raised by the war Trade Department', 12<sup>th</sup> April 1915. Appendix. Minute by Lord Emmott, Director of the War Trade Department, 27<sup>th</sup> March 1915. CAB 42/2/18.

backbone of the blockade, but also as the instrument of decisive victory. The component parts of the Grand Fleet had been painstakingly created, at enormous expense, in the decade before war broke out. Even while the ships were being built, however, there were arguments as to how exactly they should be used, or even what sort of ships should be built. While Fisher and his followers favoured the battle cruiser and later flotilla defence, most members of the Board (and later the War Staff) favoured the battleship. The result was a conservative compromise that would not rely on Fisher's experimental forms of warfare, but on a dreadnought battle fleet, and between mid 1912 and early 1913 'an integrated combined force of capital ships, cruisers and destroyers', was created with preliminary plans as to how this 'Grand Fleet' would be used and housed.<sup>78</sup> This work was done by Ballard and his fellow officers at OD.<sup>79</sup>

As to how the Grand Fleet was to be used, recent research has suggested that traditional interpretations need to be re-evaluated.<sup>80</sup> Professor Sumida has suggested that for various reasons (secrecy during the War, and the need to cover their tracks after it) senior officers ensured that little or no record remained of their plans.<sup>81</sup> These involved fighting the decisive battle against the Germans at medium range using a short, sharp engagement with heavy guns to shatter the German line before any German torpedoes had a chance to reach the British ships. This plan was based on intelligence about Germany's pre-war battle and gunnery practice. This suggested that as the Germans believed that accurate long range firing was still impossible, they would seek a medium range gunnery and torpedo engagement.<sup>82</sup> The British plans failed because the Germans did not attack in the way that the British expected, and consequently the medium range decisive battle never happened. But because it was first kept secret before the war, and then went wrong during it, there was little record of such plans in the Admiralty files.

Such plans, however, required a coherent policy from the centre in relation to gunnery, ship design, ship construction and resource allocation. Given this, it was inconceivable that the War Staff would have been unaware of such proposals. Indeed,

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<sup>78</sup> Sumida, J. T., 'A Matter of Timing: The Royal Navy and the Tactics of the Decisive Battle, 1912-16', *JMH* 67, 2003, 92. Lambert, *Naval Revolution*, 216.

<sup>79</sup> 'War Plans and War Orders, No. 1', 16<sup>th</sup> December 1912 (No. 20) and 18<sup>th</sup> February 1913 (No. 25), Additional corrections by DOD. ADM 137/818.

<sup>80</sup> Sumida, 'A Matter of Timing'.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 105-107; 114-5; 127-129.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

the decision to create the Grand Fleet in place of a reliance on Flotilla Defence was based on the belief that these new tactics would make the safe use of capital ships in torpedo-infested waters possible. Medium range battle, however, would only be possible if the Germans did not attempt to use their guns at maximum range. Professor Sumida also made the important point that such a policy was introduced not in a period of 'intellectual lethargy' or 'cultural conservatism' as has often been supposed but rather by a body of men who understood the 'complex and difficult technical and tactical issues involved' and acted accordingly.<sup>83</sup>

Thus, significantly, in the four years before the war began, not only was the principle of the 'close blockade' abandoned, so was that of 'flotilla defence'.<sup>84</sup> Churchill was himself keen to keep estimates down, as well as show that the Navy was capable of meeting the threat from Germany. This meant concentrating British capital ships against German ones, and dismantling elements of the Admiralty's global war plan. There is also evidence that at least part of these changes met with War Staff support. Ballard, at least, appears to have been less keen on Flotilla Defence than some of his superiors.

That was not to say that Ballard and other officers were not aware of the potential of new weapons, and after the 1912 manoeuvres Ballard was enthusiastic about the 'D' class submarine arguing that they had 'amply proved their ability to undertake independent offensive operations.'<sup>85</sup> Budgetary limitations and the need for further development of the submarine meant that Ballard was still unsure that the time was yet ripe for the capital ship to be replaced by the submarine or the torpedo boat, arguing that 'they cannot be regarded as fair substitutes for battleships or cruisers in a general review of our position.'<sup>86</sup> Nonetheless Ballard saw the submarine in conjunction with the 'distant blockade' and the 'Grand Fleet' as a way to get the best of both worlds in that British submarines, if effectively developed, could have brought the war back to the German littoral, while the distant blockade continued to bite and

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>84</sup> Lambert, *Naval Revolution*; Lambert, N., 'Admiral Sir John Fisher and the Concept of Flotilla Defence', *JMH* 59, 1995, 639-660.

<sup>85</sup> Ballard Memorandum, 'Observation Force in North Sea. Remarks on War Orders for, in connection with lessons of the 1912 Manoeuvres.' 16<sup>th</sup> September 1912. ADM 116/866B.

<sup>86</sup> Ballard Memorandum, 'General Policy of Submarine Development', 14<sup>th</sup> July 1913. ADM 1/8331, in Lambert, N., *The Submarine Service 1900-1918*, NRS 2001, 200; A similar view was taken in Ballard Memorandum, 'Considerations as to the Best Composition of the Mediterranean Fleet in 1915', 20<sup>th</sup> November 1912. ADM 116/3099, in *Ibid.*, 210-2.

the battle fleet awaited the emergence of the HSF from its lair.<sup>87</sup> Importantly, he believed that fresh submarines should be paid for from money taken from the destroyer budget rather than the capital ship one.<sup>88</sup> Ballard also wrote that the War Staff supported his view.

Sadly for Ballard, Wilson had appointed Capt. Roger Keyes as Commodore 'S' in 1910. He favoured a 'Fleet Submarine' rather than a blockade or long-range submarine. It was only in 1913 when Keyes told the Admiralty that the 'Fleet Submarine' was unsuitable for blockading operations that the Admiralty decided to scrap the programme and revert back to blockading or 'E' type submarines.<sup>89</sup> Two years of development time was thus wasted. One of the principal reasons for this was that Churchill used Keyes to create a secret Submarine Committee which did not talk to other branches of the Admiralty; indeed when Capt. Sydney Hall took over Keyes' position in 1915 he was surprised to discover that such a committee existed. The failure to develop a coherent submarine policy in the years immediately prior to the First World War lay less with any weaknesses in the War Staff itself, than with the manner in which Churchill ran his department, and the strength of the Fleet Submarine lobby which included Bridgeman, May and Bethell.<sup>90</sup>

Any decisions concerning submarines were also muddled by the need to keep down the Naval Estimates. Treasury hostility to further increases in naval spending also meant that at a time when the Admiralty Board was pressing for increases in dreadnought construction to maintain capital ship supremacy over the Germans there was insufficient money for a large submarine programme, the development of a substantial northern base for the battle fleet or an effective mine development policy.<sup>91</sup> In these areas the Admiralty and the Staff could be said to have failed to prepare the Navy adequately for war, but in his *post facto* record of Staff actions before the War, Ballard claimed that the Staff had attempted to address all of these issues, but largely through questions of cost, they were ignored.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Ballard Memorandum, n.d. [March 1913?], BL, Keyes Mss 4/5.

<sup>88</sup> Ballard Memorandum, 'General Policy of Submarine Development' in Lambert, *Submarine Service*, 200-203.

<sup>89</sup> Admiralty Minute 'Record of Conference held in the First Lord's Room on December 9<sup>th</sup> [1913]', BL, Keyes Papers 4/5, *Ibid.*, 232-236.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiv.

<sup>91</sup> Halvorsen, P., 'The Royal Navy and Mine Warfare, 1868-1914', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 27, 2004, 685-707.

<sup>92</sup> Anonymous Article [Ballard], 'Naval War Staff', *Naval Review*, 1924, 454-458.

Ballard also claimed that some action was taken to prepare the British Merchant Marine for war, with limited success. In the context of the period, it was easy to see why. The intellectual framework for the defence of British merchant shipping had been created at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>93</sup> The long shadow of Trafalgar meant that the battle fleet and Nelson dominated the aims of all commanders. The dull but vital role of the Georgian Royal Navy to convoy and support the British Merchant Marine was usually overlooked. Indeed, technological changes were such that by 1888 the First Naval Lord said to a House of Commons Select Committee that, 'the days of convoy were past'.<sup>94</sup> Developments in the range and speed of shipping, not forgetting the sheer quantity of those ships, meant that the Royal Navy saw no possibility for the defence of their nation's merchant ships by convoy. It should also be added that in an age before the submarine proved its competence, the principal threat came from surface raiders, and it should be stressed that the Navy did prepare, both before, and during, the First World War to deal with these. This was one reason why the Admiralty built up the number of cruisers at the end of the nineteenth century when the main threat to the British merchant marine still came from the French. Ballard was keen to point out that, again through questions of cost, the recommendation by the Staff that twelve trade protection cruisers be laid down in the 1914 programme was reduced by Churchill to four.<sup>95</sup>

Contact between the Admiralty and the Merchant Navy was limited (although Lloyds of London had one of the few external telephone numbers listed in the Admiralty Telephone Directory), so much so that in 1913 the COS wrote to Churchill saying, 'The work of the Trade Branch in the War Staff would consist principally of bringing the Naval and Mercantile Marines into closer touch with each other, for their mutual benefit in war.'<sup>96</sup> It was clear that this contact did not include the prospect of the use of convoy. Jackson received a memorandum on the question of commerce protection in October 1913 from the newly nominated Director of the proposed Trade Branch.<sup>97</sup> In this document Webb listed convoy as the fourth of five possible means of

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<sup>93</sup> Ranft, B., 'The Protection of British Seaborne Trade and the Development of Systematic Planning for War, 1860 – 1906', in Ranft, B., (ed.), *Technical Change and British Naval Policy, 1860 – 1939*. London, 1977.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>95</sup> Ballard, 'Naval War Staff', *Naval Review*, 455.

<sup>96</sup> Jackson to Churchill, 16<sup>th</sup> October 1913. ADM 137/2864.

<sup>97</sup> Webb Memorandum, 'Proposed Scheme of Commerce Protection and Work of Trade Branch of War Staff, 11<sup>th</sup> October 1913, ADM 137/2864.

trade protection. He stated that his favoured proposal was the dispersal of merchant shipping away from the normal North Atlantic trade routes, which were the supposed targets of Germany's commerce raiders. This reflected the expected role of the War Room plot in co-ordinating such moves, and was made possible by improvements in W/T. Of convoy, although he stated that there were 'many strong arguments for and against' it, he listed only its disadvantages. These were to become common points over the next three and a half years. They included: the problem of regulating all the independent shipping lines; the inevitable reduction of ship speeds to that of the slowest ship in the convoy; the impossibility of forming large convoys, and thus the insurmountable demand for escorts which such small convoys would need; the congestion at ports caused by the bunching of shipping by their arrival in escorted groups; and the removal of cruisers from their more offensive role of hunting down enemy raiders.

In theory all these problems were real enough, but they became set in stone, and believed without any real critical analysis before the question of the introduction of convoy came to a head at the end of 1916. It was a point of real criticism that the Staff was not even prepared to put some of these attitudes to the test, despite many suggestions to do so, before their sudden change of opinion in 1917. Their attitudes were clearly formed in the age before the advent of the submarine. The mental block that this was to produce would remain substantially intact well into the war even when the submarine had become Germany's deadliest weapon at sea. Consequently, the principal effort was to be put into the defensive arming of merchant ships, although again, little had been done towards his goal by the outbreak of war.

Finally, steps were taken to improve communications between the Admiralty and the Home Fleet. During the 1913 manoeuvres the War Room system had all but broken down. This was largely due to the fact that the existing W/T system could not cope with the level of signals made. As a result OD produced a memorandum which planned to reform and co-ordinate the North Sea's command structure.<sup>98</sup> The close connection between the work of OD and W/T coverage of the North Sea suggests that Ballard's move from DOD to ACR was an example of a co-ordinated approach to Admiralty appointments. It should also be noted that one of Ballard's new officers was Commander Slee.

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<sup>98</sup> OD Memorandum, 'Districts, Areas and Groups on the East Coast of Scotland and England', 6<sup>th</sup> June 1913. Soton, MB1/T25/227.

For the War Staff as important as promoting the right policies was blocking the wrong ones. As their role was only advisory this was not always easy. What made their role harder was that one of the principal sources of ideas, both good and bad, was the First Lord himself. One of Churchill's singular traits was his inability to work through existing channels of authority. At times this might be beneficial in terms of getting things done, but it also meant that ideas were not always fully scrutinised or adequately considered.

In the aftermath of the decision to adopt the distant blockade some could be forgiven for believing that the Admiralty had abandoned the concept of the offensive. Hiding in Scottish waters was a very long way from the Nelsonic injunction to 'engage the enemy more closely.' Churchill was one such thinker, and his period as First Lord, particularly after 1913, saw many attempts by him to find new avenues for offensive actions. The Staff were unhappy with many of these plans, and did their utmost to block them as best they could. In particular, Churchill sought to take the war back to the German coastline, by seizing a Frisian island and using it as a forward base.

Typically Churchill did not initially approach the Staff for their views; instead he asked Sir Lewis Bayly. This was no accident. Bayly was, in Churchill's own words, one who belonged to the "yes" school'.<sup>99</sup> He did not mean that Bayly was weak-willed, but rather that he was more gung-ho about attacking the enemy than other more cautious commanders. Churchill believed that Bayly would be enthusiastic about such a plan. The timing of Churchill's request to Bayly was no coincidence.<sup>100</sup> On 13<sup>th</sup> January Asquith announced that the CID would once again look at the possibility of invasion.<sup>101</sup> Churchill wanted to review the Navy's war plans in the light of this announcement. A further spur to Churchill may well have come from a letter he received at about the same time from RA David Beatty who attacked the lack of 'offensive spirit' in the Admiralty's plans for a blockade of Germany.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Comment by Churchill, reported by Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 24<sup>th</sup> December 1914 in *Churchill, vol. 3 comp. i*, 333.

<sup>100</sup> Murray to Bayly, 31<sup>st</sup> January 1913. ADM 137/452.

<sup>101</sup> Marder, *FDSF vol. i*, 354-57; Lambert, *Naval Revolution*, 268-9.

<sup>102</sup> Beatty, notes, n/d [1913], ADM 116/3412, in Lambert, *Naval Revolution*, 267. N.B., Beatty was succeeded as Naval Secretary on 8<sup>th</sup> January 1913.



Bayly sent an interim report to the COS in March 1913, in which deemed the operation 'well worth it.'<sup>103</sup> Bayly also alluded to the Invasion Inquiry asking, 'why are we to fear a German raid or invasion, if we, with a superior Navy, are afraid to do the same?' With such words he probably hoped to encourage his Admiralty readership for when the final report arrived. This was duly completed in June, and Bayly was aided in his work by both Major-General Sir George Aston, and Capt. Arthur Leveson, the latter of whom in late 1914 was no other than the DOD. Aston was seconded from the War Office at the time and joined the group mid-way through their deliberations in April.<sup>104</sup>

The report detailed possible attacks on three places in particular: Borkum, a German island off the Dutch coast; Lister Deep, by Sylt which was at the northern end of the Frisian Islands, and Esbjerg, a town on the west coast of Denmark. Bayly prefaced his comments by saying that it was an 'axiom' of the report that the Royal Navy was not required to defend the island once it was captured, beyond keeping the sea lanes to it open. Bayly did so because the terms of the report did not request him to do so (a typical Churchillian touch), but as will be shown later, the difficulty in supplying such a forward base was one of the principal reasons why it was consistently rejected. Bayly also looked at historical lessons of amphibious operations. This included the attack on Belleisle in 1761. Such an approach was much advocated in certain quarters.<sup>105</sup> But Bayly's examples were not necessarily the best. Belleisle was not a significant military victory and the Belleisle action did not lead to a sortie by the French Fleet, and did not shorten the Seven Years' War: a point made by Corbett.<sup>106</sup>

Bayly listed the ships he believed were needed for an attack. This included 5 *Royal Sovereign* battleships, as well as 5 further pre-dreadnoughts. This was hopelessly unrealistic given the slim margin of numerical superiority that the British had over the German capital ships at the time. The report ended with a rejection of any possibility of an attack on Heligoland; its cliff-top defences were too high off the water to make spotting possible, and would involve huge losses of men and ships.

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<sup>103</sup> Bayly to Jackson, 17<sup>th</sup> March 1913, ADM 137/452.

<sup>104</sup> Aston Diary, Entries for April 1913, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College London. Aston Papers, 1/6.

<sup>105</sup> Lambert, A., *The Foundations of Naval History*. John Knox Laughton, *the Royal Navy and the Historical Profession*. London, 1998.

<sup>106</sup> Corbett, J., *England in the Seven Years' War: A Study in Combined Strategy*, 2 volumes, London 1907, vol. ii, 167-170.

The way was then open for the Staff to respond to these proposals. The COS already made some comments on Bayly's interim report.<sup>107</sup> He did 'not consider it a good step for the opening phase of the war, though it may be a necessary one later.' He also added that 'it seems as if the losses we should incur in such an undertaking would probably be greater than the losses which occur in an attempt to carry out a close blockade without the base.' Ballard was even less enthusiastic than Jackson.<sup>108</sup> He compared it with a similar report that had been compiled by his own division which does not appear to have survived. Both reports, however, were 'based on guess work as to the degree of opposition to be encountered'. Bayly's plan suggested that 12,000 troops would be needed for the Borkum attack and 48,000 for the Esbjerg operation. This would seriously upset other WO plans. This again undermined the likelihood that they would become Admiralty policy. Referring to the attack on Sylt, Ballard wrote that the passage of any ships through the Lister Deep would be a 'somewhat desperate undertaking' and that the beach selected by Bayly was too 'unstable' for the landing he suggested.

Overall, Ballard concluded that 'Heavy losses in ships and men are anticipated', and that the projects were a 'gamble at best.' And he was doubtful whether the campaign would achieve anything significant. Sylt was within range of German heavy guns, and Borkum prey to German small craft originating from Emden. He proposed that Bayly's report be shelved 'not necessarily as a guide for a plan of operations, but as a report embodying much useful information.' Churchill was not easily dissuaded, however, and as will be discussed later, he attempted to revive the plan in July 1914.

By July 1914, however, the main elements of the Navy's wartime strategy were in place. The War Staff, despite the limitations of time and numbers, had played an important role in these deliberations. The creation of the Staff was more than simply a response to political pressure resulting from the shaky leadership of Sir Arthur Wilson, it was part of a longer term development. The period 1912-14 had also shown the way in which Churchill saw that he could use either the Staff or individuals to circumvent normal patterns of command and thereby forge his own naval policy. In

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<sup>107</sup> Jackson to Battenberg and Churchill, 17<sup>th</sup> March 1913. ADM 137/452.

<sup>108</sup> Ballard to Jackson, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1913. ADM 137/452.

doing so he had only had limited success. The Staff had shown itself to be more than a group of second-rate amateurs and they had begun to come to grips with the concept of a centrally controlled war, although as both the manoeuvres in 1912 and 1913, as well as the real war experiences of August-November 1914 were to show, the application of such concepts was considerably more difficult than the theory.

### Chapter 3. The Churchill-Battenberg Regime, August-October 1914.

‘Now we have our war. The next thing is to decide how we are going to carry it on.’<sup>1</sup> Not surprisingly this statement by Churchill warranted one of Richmond’s characteristic denunciations in his diary, ‘The Duke of Newcastle himself could not have made a more damning confession of inadequate preparation for war.’ For Richmond, the ADOD, it typified what he saw as proof of the poor state of war readiness that affected not only the First Lord, but also the Admiralty as a whole. As he wrote later in the same diary entry, ‘all this should have been thought of before.’ As has been shown in the previous chapter, much of it had been.

Churchill had done both himself and his department a disservice by this statement. Thus, when on August 4<sup>th</sup> war broke out between Britain and Germany the Admiralty had a coherent plan of how this war was going to be conducted and won. The War Staff, in particular, had been involved in these plans in the period after 1912. In addition it was to be a centrally conducted war as has only recently begun to be understood.<sup>2</sup> These plans involved the implementation of a blockade against Germany which it was foreseen would deliver a massive economic shock to the body of the German economy and cause chaos. But should the Germans weather this, they would instead be slowly choked by a longer-term blockade which might take years to bring about a social collapse within Germany. At the same time an overwhelming concentration of naval force, the Grand Fleet, would be the platform on which the blockade would rest by preventing the Germans from escaping this strangle-hold, and would provide the battle fleet which would destroy the German HSF should it come out of harbour.

All that was left was for these plans to be implemented. As will be seen, this turned out to be far from easy. This chapter looks at the early stages of the war, when Churchill was First Lord and Prince Louis of Battenburg was First Sea Lord, a period that showed that despite the fact that coherent strategies were in place, it was very hard to make them work.

An important factor here was the lack of experience that both the new COS (Sturdee) and the new DOD (Leveson) had of the workings of the War Room

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<sup>1</sup> Marder, *Portrait*, 5<sup>th</sup> August 1914, 92.

<sup>2</sup> Lambert, ‘Strategic Command’, *passim*.

concept.<sup>3</sup> Instead of employing experienced Admiralty clerks to do much of the work (as had been originally intended), Sturdee chose to use naval officers, many of whom were new to the War Room system.<sup>4</sup> In fact, as will be shown later the War Room plot did not work as originally intended, and by 1915 the role of the War Staff had moved on beyond this initial function to something broader and more significant. Initial plans to have the ID and OD working in the same room also proved to be unworkable.<sup>5</sup> Though these failings seem obvious, it should be noted that such an approach to the conduct of a war had never been attempted before, and at the same time staff officers from ID were attached to MO 5E at the War Office to help with the Army's interception and evaluation of German Field Wireless messages.<sup>6</sup>

It was undeniably the case that during this period from August to October 1914 Churchill was the dominant voice in Admiralty decision-making and politics. This inevitably created problems with which others, including members of the War Staff, had to grapple. They did so with mixed success. In particular, this chapter will look at the handling of the Grand Fleet, the implementation of the blockade, questions of trade protection, and the issue of more offensive use of the North Sea, particularly with reference to the capture of a forward overseas base. This early stage of the War has been seen as a particularly bad one for the Admiralty in general and the Staff in particular.<sup>7</sup> Richmond was especially, and regularly, damning in his diary of all he found in London.

This diary, as has already been suggested was highly unreliable in places and its contents have sometimes been given too much credence. To take just one more example, admittedly from the Pacific and in November: Richmond criticised the handling of HMS *Australia*, saying that she was on 'puerile duties' involved with the defence of trade around Fiji.<sup>8</sup> This was simply not true. HMS *Australia* had been used really in the way that Fisher had intended battle cruisers to be used, as a physical embodiment of British global power. Her role was not simply to protect trade, but more importantly, and successfully, to deter von Spee's squadron from attacking

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<sup>3</sup> Lambert, N., 'Strategic Command', text between footnotes 160-162.

<sup>4</sup> OD Memorandum, 'War Organisation of Admiralty Staff', 24<sup>th</sup> April 1912. ADM 1/8272.

<sup>5</sup> Dewar, 'Notes on the Admiralty War Staff', NMM, DEW 4.

<sup>6</sup> Room 40 OB War Diary and Logbook MO5E, Summary of History, n.d. [c. March 1915]. ADM 223/767.

<sup>7</sup> Marder, *DNSF*, vol. ii, chapters 1-6, 3-129; Halpern, *Naval War*, chapter 2, 21-50; Hattendorf, J., 'Admiral Prince Louis of Battenberg (1912-1914)' in Murfett, *First Sea Lords*, 83-86; Strachan, H., *The First World War. Vol. 1: To Arms*, London, 2001, 414-440.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 4<sup>th</sup> November 1914, 125.

Australia or New Zealand.<sup>9</sup> This was necessary because the Pacific was the one ocean not covered by the War Room plot (there was insufficient trans-Pacific trade or local coaling stations to make such a huge development necessary). *Australia* was, therefore, positioned on the edge of a 'Signals-Intelligence' black hole ready to defend the southern dominions should von Spee head that way.

When considering the handling of the Grand Fleet, several issues needed to be resolved. There was, firstly, the question of the degree of autonomy that the C-in-C would enjoy in conducting operations with the Fleet. Related to this was the question of how the Grand Fleet would be employed once in the North Sea. By 1914 the situation was far from clear as the following instructions from July 1914 indicate. 'It is Their Lordships' intention to give ... [the C-in-C] general command as soon as active operations of war begin, at the same time they will retain ultimate control of the strategic situation.'<sup>10</sup> 'General command' was, however, a vague term, and the relationship between the C-in-C and the Admiralty remained a complex (and changing) one throughout the war. In an accompanying letter to these instructions, from Sir William Graham Greene, the Permanent Secretary to the Board, Callaghan was promised that he could use 'any dispositions' that he thought fit to achieve the objective of destroying Germany's battle fleet and choking her trade.<sup>11</sup> But in reality his freedom, and that of his successors, was heavily circumscribed. This was markedly implied in the wording of those instructions where there would inevitably be tension between the Admiral's 'general command' of the fleet, and the Admiralty's 'ultimate control'.

Churchill misleadingly later wrote, 'We place the pieces on the board in a preparatory formation. Then we pass all the information to C-in-C and leave him to do the rest.'<sup>12</sup> This was not true, and once the British had got hold of the German codes and developed directional finding (DF) apparatus, Jellicoe's movements would become heavily dependent on intelligence from London. Further information was gleaned from other sources. In particular the Admiralty formed close links with the

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<sup>9</sup> Brownrigg, Sir Douglas, *Indiscretions of the Naval Censor*, London, 1920, 25.

<sup>10</sup> Admiralty Memorandum, 'War Plans (War with Germany) Part I General Instructions' to Sir George Callaghan, Commander-in-Chief Home Fleets, 11th July 1914. ADM 137/1936.

<sup>11</sup> Greene to Callaghan, 11<sup>th</sup> July 1914. ADM 137/1936.

<sup>12</sup> Minute by Churchill, 25<sup>th</sup> April 1915. ADM 137/1937.

Post Office who passed over telegrams for inspection.<sup>13</sup> The officer in charge of this was Commander William Kettlewell of OD. The Post Office also gave great assistance in the development of the DF stations.<sup>14</sup> The information coming in from all these sources caused a further shift in the balance of the relationship towards Whitehall and away from Scapa Flow. But even before Jellicoe reached his command, his strategy and tactics were not entirely his own.

Churchill's 1915 statement, quoted above, was a half-truth. Furthermore, any consideration of the work of the Grand Fleet cannot be done without some consideration being given to the arena in which the Fleet was intended to operate. If, for example, the North Sea was to be left for the Grand Fleet to carry out its sweeps, by the same token it could not be used as a significant minefield. In many respects these two weapons were incompatible. It is this incompatibility which therefore made the mines relevant to the question of the Grand Fleet, and the significance of mines as a weapon rose and fell in relation to the central importance of the great battle that was expected between the British and German fleets. Added to this was the role that the Grand Fleet or subsidiary fleets might play in any more 'offensive' operations in the North Sea. In all of these questions the War Staff developed coherent views which in some cases concurred with those of Churchill. In others they disagreed, and they did their best to block what they saw as dangerous or reckless actions within the bureaucratic constraints of their positions. In this the First Sea Lord played only a minor role.<sup>15</sup>

The cost of creating the Grand Fleet, and the value of each piece, was a factor of immense importance when it came to planning how this force might be used. Compared with the cost and number of battleships in the age of Nelson, dreadnoughts were ruinously expensive, and consequently rare. To lose one, such as HMS *Audacious*, which hit a mine and sank in October 1914, might be considered careless, but to lose an entire division could spell the end of Britain as a Great Power. Jellicoe was determined that this would not happen, and his success in achieving this meant that for Germany the chance of victory came not through action at sea, but through

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<sup>13</sup> Clerk in Waiting, GPO, to Admiralty, 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1914. ADM137/987.

<sup>14</sup> Ewing Minute, 21<sup>st</sup> October 1914. ADM 116/1301.

<sup>15</sup> Hattendorf, 'Battenberg', *First Sea Lords*, 75-90.

battle on land. It should be added, however, that once the gamble of the Schlieffen Plan had failed in 1914 and Germany had become bogged down with a war on two fronts, she gambled in trying to win the war through naval action. Rather than defeating Britain, however, unrestricted submarine warfare helped to bring the USA into the war against Germany. Their aim, at least in respect of the battle fleets was simple: were they to gain anything approaching dreadnought parity, the ability of Britain to keep an army in France, or simply to supply herself, would be gravely imperilled. This undeniable fact was understood by many; as an Admiralty memorandum succinctly put it, 'The British Fleet is vital to the success of the Allied Cause. The German Fleet is of secondary importance; its loss would not vitally affect the cause of the Central Powers, and it can therefore be risked to a much greater extent than the British Fleet.'<sup>16</sup>

Consequently no other British commander exercised a position as vital as that wielded by the man who commanded the Grand Fleet. As Churchill famously observed, Jellicoe was the only man who could lose the war in an afternoon.<sup>17</sup> With this power, therefore came responsibility. This was understood both by Jellicoe, who commanded the Grand Fleet between August 1914 and November 1916, and by those in the Admiralty who advised and directed his operations. Those who have criticised Jellicoe and the Whitehall officials have underplayed this singular level of responsibility, and overplayed the degree to which it was possible to deploy such a concentration of force in a more flexible and even aggressive manner.<sup>18</sup> To compare Jellicoe's position at Jutland with that of Nelson at Trafalgar is no fairer than to contrast Henry V's behaviour at Agincourt with Haig's on the Somme. They simply do not compare, and to do so is unhistorical. Nelson was, after all, dealing with an enemy which Britain had been fighting off and on for the previous hundred years and known in terms of seamanship to be inferior to his own. He was also using a weapons system which would not only have been largely familiar to Drake, but in which the enemy were known to be less proficient than the British. Nelson and his contemporaries were, therefore, the culmination of a known weapons system against a known enemy. None of this held true for Jellicoe. Jellicoe was in a unique position of responsibility at a time of immense technological change. He understood this, as did

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<sup>16</sup> Admiralty to Jellicoe, 'Considerations as to the Employment of the *Grand Fleet* in the North Sea', 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1916. ADM 137/1937.

<sup>17</sup> Churchill, *World Crisis*, vol. iii, 112.

<sup>18</sup> Gordon, *Rules*; Roskill, *Beatty*.



the War Staff. The barrage of criticism that this position has since attracted was as much a reflection of wishful thinking and post-war retrospection as it was of the presentation of realistic alternatives. That was not to say that mistakes were not made, or that opportunities were not missed; they were. And Jellicoe, unlike perhaps Beatty, was usually prepared to accept his own responsibility for errors being made and to tackle them when the problems lay within his own area of competence.<sup>19</sup>

This responsibility, tied with analysis of his about fleet handling generally and at Jutland in particular, have all given Jellicoe the reputation of a cautious commander. As has already been suggested, however, his pre-war planning for decisive action at medium range was far from cautious. Jellicoe's problem was that in August 1914 there were not yet enough dreadnought pieces in the Grand Fleet to make such tactics work.<sup>20</sup> Although there is some evidence that Jellicoe planned to begin firing at greater distances, most evidence suggests that until late 1915 Jellicoe's tactics were for action at medium range, with a heightened awareness of the danger of torpedoes because the battle would take longer to develop than he had initially hoped.<sup>21</sup> Boldness with gunnery would be tempered by caution towards torpedoes and mines. In this view he was supported by Battenberg, Sturdee and Churchill.<sup>22</sup> It was also supported by Fisher and Jackson when they were both First Sea Lord.<sup>23</sup>

It should also be noted that caution was the hallmark of German naval tactics too. Despite the claim that the German fleet's aim was 'Annihilation of the enemy's forces, *cost what it may*', there were numerous instances to suggest that this was simply not the case.<sup>24</sup> At every single major engagement, or mere threat of one, between British and German capital forces, the Germans ran away. This happened at the Heligoland Bight action on 28<sup>th</sup> August 1914, Dogger Bank on 24<sup>th</sup> January 1915, Jutland on 31<sup>st</sup> May 1916, and when the HSF turned home at the merest suggestion of an engagement with the Grand Fleet on 18<sup>th</sup> August 1916. 'Cost what it may' therefore needs to be taken with a large dose of sea salt.

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<sup>19</sup> Goldrick, 'John R. Jellicoe', 381. An important corrective to this is shown in Lambert, N., "'Our Bloody Ships" or "Our Bloody System"? Jutland and the Loss of the Battle Cruisers', *JMH* 62, 1998, 31-2.

<sup>20</sup> Sumida, 'Decisive Battle', 109-115.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 115-119.

<sup>22</sup> Jellicoe Memorandum, 'German Tactics thus Far', 30<sup>th</sup> October 1914; Sturdee Minute, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1914; Churchill Minute, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1914. ADM 137/995.

<sup>23</sup> Fisher Minute, 1<sup>st</sup> November 1914. ADM 137/995. Jackson to Oliver, 18<sup>th</sup> September 1916. ADM 137/995.

<sup>24</sup> *Taktische Befehle der Hochseeflotte* (1914). ADM 137/4326, cited in, Gordon, *Rules*, 396. My italics.

It seems strange, however, that whereas British caution was criticised as showing a lack of initiative, German fear has come in for no such criticism. Jellicoe has also come in for criticism of his caution as demonstrated in his October 1914 Memorandum.<sup>25</sup> For example, he believed that the Germans might try to lay a mine or torpedo trap during a battle, or have laid one in preparation for battle in the expectation that it would be fought on a pre-selected site. But as British warships had the capacity to lay mine, it was not unreasonable that Jellicoe expected that the Germans might try to do the same. That said, he did over-estimate the ease with which this could be done and by which German commanders would be able to communicate with their submarines. The failure of the U-Boats to achieve anything during the Jutland engagement was an example of this difficulty.

Almost all senior naval officers in August 1914 therefore accepted the strategic basis on which the Grand Fleet would exist and operate. It would act as a 'fleet in being' and concentrate British naval forces 'to ensure the destruction of the enemy naval forces and obtain command of the North Sea'.<sup>26</sup> This would be achieved, it was hoped and expected, by a clash of battle fleets in which the numerically superior Grand Fleet would sink the HSF in a decisive engagement.

In terms of the first of these two fundamentals, the creation of the Grand Fleet, almost all senior officers agreed. There was less certainty about the second, that the Germans would actively seek an engagement. The principal exceptions to the first fundamental were Richmond, and the now retired, but still active, Lord Fisher. Richmond became convinced that the Germans realised that were they to meet the full Grand Fleet at sea they would be annihilated. Being unwilling to allow this, the likelihood of battle was very small.<sup>27</sup> But even here Richmond was inconsistent. In the days after war was declared he too expected a great battle to take place, it was only as the weeks passed and in particular that the Germans began laying mines in the North Sea, that he came to believe that an engagement was unlikely.<sup>28</sup>

Increasingly, Richmond favoured basing the Grand Fleet in the English Channel to protect the cross-Channel traffic which he expected the Germans to attack.<sup>29</sup> They did not. In late August 1914 Richmond went further and suggested that

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<sup>25</sup> Gordon, *Rules*, 21

<sup>26</sup> William Graham Greene to Callaghan, 11<sup>th</sup> July 1914. ADM 137/1936.

<sup>27</sup> Richmond Diary, 15<sup>th</sup> November 1914. NMM, RIC 1/11.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914. RIC 1/9.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914 & 9<sup>th</sup> August 1914. RIC 1/9.

the Grand Fleet should be broken into detached striking forces that could be used for more offensive operations. This too was rejected by his senior Staff Officers, causing Richmond to become increasingly critical of them.<sup>30</sup> But aspects of what Richmond was suggesting were adopted in 1916, and by the same people who rejected them in 1914. Seemingly this would suggest that Richmond was right, and the admirals left a brilliant idea neglected for two years. This was not so.

The reason for the change of strategy was that in 1914 it was not feasible, whereas by 1916 it was, because more battleships had finally been completed. Consequently a greater risk could be taken with them. At the same time it should be borne in mind that in 1914 a detached fragment of the Grand Fleet was exactly what the Germans hoped to find so that their policy of naval attrition might have some chance of success. They knew that they could not win against a concentrated force, and that the only way that the 'Risk Theory' could erode British naval power would be through engagements of a concentrated German force against an isolated British detachment. The nearly disastrous fates of either the 5BS or the BCF at Jutland were good examples, as will be discussed later. It was only through luck and the heavy armour of the *Queen Elizabeths* that the 5BS was able to make its escape (while at the same time inflicting severe punishment on the German ships). The principle of concentration, which all the senior naval officers afloat and at the Admiralty supported, was seen as the only way to avoid such an outcome.<sup>31</sup> Although Beatty himself advocated it, he failed to follow it at Jutland.<sup>32</sup>

Fisher simply believed that it was wrong to operate the capital ships in the narrow seas around Britain.<sup>33</sup> Given that there were a few who believed that the Grand Fleet should not be used in the North Sea, alternative proposals were suggested as to how and when the collection of battleships should be used. Richmond, and again Fisher largely agreed, believed that the best place for them was in the English Channel where they could protect the cross-Channel traffic from attack. The North

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 28<sup>th</sup> September 1914. RIC 1/9.

<sup>31</sup> Richmond was, as ever, a voice that challenged this principle. He believed that the Light Cruisers should be much more offensively through supporting actions in the Bight. Richmond Diary, 29<sup>th</sup> August 1914. RIC 1/9.

<sup>32</sup> Beatty to Jellicoe, n.d. [about 27<sup>th</sup> January 1915], Temple Patterson, A., (ed.), *The Jellicoe Papers*, vol. i, NRS, London, 1966, 130-131. In the letter Beatty stressed the importance not only of concentration, but of having ships which could keep together.

<sup>33</sup> Fisher Memorandum, untitled, January 1914. BL, Add. Mss. 48993; Lambert, 'Flotilla Defence', 639-660.

Sea should be left to minefields and small craft.<sup>34</sup> A problem with Richmond's plan was that the Germans themselves had a formidable battle fleet. While it may have remained for much of the war in harbour, nonetheless it existed. It was, as yet, an unproved theory that battleships would be so vulnerable to small craft that the Germans would not risk their big ships against British smaller craft. In fact, there are a number of instances to suggest that *en masse* capital ships were less vulnerable to such attack than Richmond or Fisher believed. Given that battleships and their destroyer screens could move around the North Sea at about 20 knots, and given that submarines would be required to attack such concentrations of ships from underwater, when their ability to get into position to attack such fast moving vessels would be limited, it was unlikely that U-Boats would have much success against such protected formations of capital ships. This was, partially, proved by the totally ineffectual contribution of the German U-Boats to the attack on the Grand Fleet during the Jutland engagement.

Consequently, it still remained the case in the second decade of the twentieth century that to meet the challenge of one battle fleet another was needed. Similarly, if it was believed that the British could destroy the HSF in a rapid short range engagement, before German torpedo craft could deliver a decisive attack, then the relative reversal also had to be the case, that British torpedo craft would not necessarily have the time to deliver their blow against the HSF.<sup>35</sup> In the First World War the Grand Fleet was still necessary, and had it not existed the British would have had to invent it. This was firmly the view of all senior Staff Officers (except Richmond) in 1914. It was only when the British began to have an overwhelming dreadnought superiority by 1916 that the War Staff began to think again about a new strategy for the Grand Fleet. In 1914, there was no alternative.

Connected to the role of the Grand Fleet was the proposed blockade of Germany. In the two substantial histories on the Blockade little attention is given to the War Staff in general and the TD, or indeed individual officers, in particular.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the latest

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<sup>34</sup> Fisher to Jellicoe, 28<sup>th</sup> October 1914. BL, Add. Mss. 49006; Richmond Diary, 9<sup>th</sup> August 1914. NMM, RIC 1/9.

<sup>35</sup> Sumida, 'A Matter of Timing', *passim*.

<sup>36</sup> Bell, A. C., *A History of the Blockade of Germany and the countries associated with her in the Great War, Austria Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey. 1914-1918*. London 1931; Siney, M. C., *The Allied*

book on the blockade not only makes no reference to the TD, but despite claiming that it looks at the blockade from a 'balanced perspective', makes almost no reference to any Admiralty or TD papers at all.<sup>37</sup> As will be shown later this work considerably underplayed the degree of hostility between the FO and the Admiralty over blockade policy.<sup>38</sup> In fact, the War Staff, who are hardly mentioned in the book (the DTD not at all!) played a central role in the implementation of the Blockade. Their opinions and work, consequently, were of the utmost importance.

The background to the creation of the Blockade of Germany was, as has been shown, of long duration. Connections with the City of London, particularly Lloyds of London, merely confirmed the Admiralty in the belief that were the British to disrupt German trade, the impact could be decisive.<sup>39</sup> Much preparatory work had already been done, particularly in 1913, although a Trade Division of the War Staff had still not been created when war did finally come in August 1914.<sup>40</sup> Action then, however, was swift. A Trade Division was rapidly created, with Webb as DTD, and it began to co-ordinate some of these actions.

The structure of the early TD indicated where Webb and others initially saw the focus of their role.<sup>41</sup> As table 1.09 in Appendix C indicates, this was to protect British trade against German surface raiders by monitoring British merchant ship movements, arming some of them, and liaising with the War Risks Clubs. Other sections would attempt to detect any movements of contraband to Germany. The table also indicates how central the accumulation of trade information was to the work of the TD (Sections T8, T10 and T11). The assumption was, as Fisher himself had previously indicated, that the moment that war broke out the British would abandon any international agreements concerning the free passage of trade, and impose a blockade. The very suddenness of this would, it was hoped, induce the financial crisis which would, itself, bring the Germans to their senses.

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*Blockade of Germany 1914-16*, University of Michigan Press, 1957. Offer, *Agrarian Interpretation*; Hardach, G., *The First World War, 1914-1918*. University of California Press, 1981, especially chapters 2, 3, 5.

<sup>37</sup> Osborne, *Britain's Economic Blockade of Germany 1914-1919*, London 2004, 3.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 58, 64.

<sup>39</sup> Jackson to Troubridge, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1912. ADM 1/8272. Lloyds was also the only external number listed in the wartime *Admiralty Telephone Directories*.

<sup>40</sup> Memorandum, 'Proposals for Initiating Work in the Trade Branch', n.d. [1914]. ADM 137/2864.

<sup>41</sup> Webb Memorandum, 'Organisation of the Trade Division, Admiralty War Staff, 11<sup>th</sup> August 1914. ADM 137/2862.

To this end, Churchill established a 'Restriction of Enemy Supplies Committee', and an Examination Service was instituted in 'skeleton form' with the intention of imposing an initial form of blockade.<sup>42</sup> Things, however, did not turn out as foreseen. This was for a number of reasons. Firstly, as the TD was being set up only as war broke out, it had little time to establish itself and work through any early teething problems. As a result, they were often simply reacting to events rather than mastering them. An example of this was the instructions issued to ship owners about proposed journeys to the Baltic. This was done in response to an enquiry from the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, rather than as a result of an initiative of their own.<sup>43</sup> Secondly, the Staff's chronic understaffing did not help, although it also used Staff Officers from other divisions for some of its intelligence gathering work; an important qualification on the accepted view that the War Staff was overly compartmentalised.<sup>44</sup> Also, it was not easy for less than a dozen naval officers in the TD to have kept an eye on the 48% of the world's merchant shipping which belonged to the British Empire.

Significantly also in terms of indicating how decisions were taken in the early part of the war, the papers were passed to Sir Edmond Slade who drafted many of the final papers in consultation with officials at the Board of Trade. Indeed Slade played an important part in the development of the blockade against Germany. He negotiated several of the contraband deals at the start of the war, as well as attending, for example the Anglo-French-Italian Conference in Paris in early June 1915 which was the 'first attempt of the western allies to consider jointly the details of their economic policy.'<sup>45</sup> Slade also regularly chaired the Contraband sub-committee of the War Trade Advisory Committee.<sup>46</sup> The *Navy List* did not record that Slade was a member of the War Staff, but again from the *Admiralty Telephone Directories*, it is clear that he was, and that he continued in this role throughout the war. He formed one of the links between the Admiralty and the other arms of the Government.

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<sup>42</sup> Staff Technical History, 'The Economic Blockade, 1914-1919', 1920, 1.

<sup>43</sup> TD Memorandum, 'Directed Cargo. Proposals for Dealing With', 5<sup>th</sup> August 1914. ADM 137/982.

<sup>44</sup> List of ID and OD officers attached to the Trade Division, untitled, n.d. [1914]. ADM 137/2864.

<sup>45</sup> Siney, *Allied Blockade*, 80. Details of some of the Contraband Deals that Slade negotiated can be found in, 'List of Agreements referring to Contraband.' n.d. ADM 137/2806.

<sup>46</sup> Minutes of Meetings in CAB 39/69. He was also, by March 1915, a member of Restriction of Enemy Supplies Committee, The Board of Trade Committee on Sales and Releases of Diverted Cargoes, Ships etc., The Prize Claims Committee, the Oversea Prize Disposal Committee, the Admiralty Advisory Committee on the Diversion of Shipping and the Board of Trade Advisory Committee on the National Insurance of British Shipping. Hankey, M., 'List of Committees appointed to consider Questions arising from the present War', 1<sup>st</sup> March 1915. CAB 42/2/2.

A reflection of the somewhat chaotic nature of such negotiations, and indeed, the degree to which some companies tried to get round the restrictions was recorded by the TD. A firm called Macfadden's claimed that they had permission from the Admiralty for their cotton trade to avoid being classified as contraband, but a report recorded that, 'FO know nothing of this. They regard Messrs Macfadden and particularly their Italian House with suspicion. No one in the Admiralty knows anything of this.'<sup>47</sup> This letter was indicative of a much wider problem. Whereas the blockade had the full agreement of all those in the Admiralty, it did not necessarily have the same support from all within the government or wider financial and industrial circles.<sup>48</sup> In a sense those that had argued that the pre-war economic interdependence of all states made future wars impossible had a point. The outbreak of war was not universally welcomed in all areas of Britain, as there were many companies that stood to lose out heavily in any such conflict. They did their utmost to put pressure on the Government to limit the blockade's impact, exactly the opposite of what the Admiralty wanted. Their view was very much taken by the Board of Trade. The FO, however, were conscious of the hostility that the blockade would cause amongst the neutrals.<sup>49</sup> The result of this was rather than have a sudden overwhelming blockade, it was only implemented gradually, thus negating much of its proposed impact. The location of the Contraband Committee in the FO, rather than the Admiralty, in particular helped to blunt the Navy's purpose. Foreign ships impounded by the Royal Navy, with the connivance of the Admiralty, were usually then released by the FO dominated Contraband Committee!

On 20<sup>th</sup> August 1914 an Order in Council made an adjustment to the Declaration of London of 1909, and listed fresh areas of contraband which were to be denied to the Germans, including those categories included in the 'Conditional Contraband' grouping. Any ships which were discovered to be carrying contraband would be detained on their inward journey, and those ship owners whom it was discovered had lied about the intended destination of their cargo would have their ships impounded on their return voyage from the enemy.<sup>50</sup> The Order was issued to all SNOs and Flag

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<sup>47</sup> Anonymous Minute, n.d., 'List of Agreements referring to Contraband.' ADM 137/2807.

<sup>48</sup> McDermott, J., 'Total War and the Merchant State: Aspects of British Economic Warfare against Germany, 1914-16', *Canadian Journal of History* 21, 1986, 62; French, *Strategic Planning*, 51-66.

<sup>49</sup> Lord Grey of Fallodon, *Twenty-Five Years 1892-1916*, 2 vols, London 1925, vol. ii, 103-113; Osborne, *Blockade*, 62.

<sup>50</sup> Order in Council, 20<sup>th</sup> August 1914. ADM 137/982.

Officers on 26<sup>th</sup> August.<sup>51</sup> Additional goods, such as copper, lead and rubber, were added to the list of 'Conditional Contraband' by an Order in Council of 21<sup>st</sup> September. They were redefined as 'Absolute Contraband' by a further Order on 29<sup>th</sup> October. Pressure was also put on the neutral powers to prevent the re-export of goods to Germany. Gradually action was taken to improve the global W/T net which would aid the maritime movement and control. It should have been finished earlier but was yet another victim of the need to keep the pre-war naval estimates down.<sup>52</sup>

These actions initially had little impact so the British took an increasingly firm line with neutral governments. This was in itself potentially dangerous, as Britain did not want to lose the goodwill of those neutrals from whom she herself purchased goods, especially the United States.<sup>53</sup> A similar blockade had contributed to the war with the USA in 1812. The American Government had already written in August 1914 expressing the hope that the British would observe the Hague Convention and not lay mines which might sink merchant ships, despite the fact that the Germans were doing this already.<sup>54</sup> Slade reflected the ambiguity of the British position when he observed, 'It is necessary to adopt such an organisation as will allow the necessary restrictions to be put on the enemy's trade with as little friction as possible to the neutrals ... The essence of the doctrine of contraband is the destination of the goods, and it is just this point which it is most difficult to prove, and the endeavour to seize all contraband goods which are suspected of going to the enemy lands us in interminable difficulties with the neutral powers. *Both countries want some of these goods*, and if we try to stop them all we ruin the neutral and force him into the war against us.'<sup>55</sup>

The political dimension of the blockade was central to this failure. It was not simply a naval or military matter, the British government was slow to grapple with it, which made the immediate and effective implementation of the blockade almost impossible. The British Consul in Frankfurt, Sir Francis Oppenheimer, had stated before the war that the blockade against Germany could only be made effective if it

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<sup>51</sup> War Order, 26<sup>th</sup> August 1914. ADM 137/2733.

<sup>52</sup> Dumas Diary, November 10<sup>th</sup> and December 22<sup>nd</sup> 1914. IWM PP/MCR/96 Reel 4.

<sup>53</sup> Marsden, A., 'The Blockade', in Hinsley, F. H. (ed.), *British Foreign Policy under Sir Edward Grey*, Cambridge 1977, 488-515.

<sup>54</sup> Telegram from State Department in Washington, via the British Foreign Office, to the Admiralty, 29<sup>th</sup> August 1914. ADM 137/1002.

<sup>55</sup> Slade Memorandum, 'Contraband – Neutral Countries', n.d. [c. October 28<sup>th</sup> 1914]. ADM 137/2804.



included the neutrals.<sup>56</sup> Setting aside the important example of the United States for a moment, even in the case of the European states, this was no easy task. For example, the British could have acted ruthlessly against Sweden and the Netherlands. But in each case there were good reasons why a more careful approach had to be adopted. Sweden was considered to be one of the most pro-German of the neutrals, a situation which was not surprising considering Sweden's traditional rivalry with Russia. But, Sweden was also one of the few European countries from which the Russians could gain access to goods and raw materials. It was vital that this lifeline be kept open, which meant that any action against Sweden would be moderated against such important political and strategic considerations.

Similarly, the Netherlands was an important source of food for both the British as well as the Germans, and her ports, through which in theory neutral goods from America could pass, were accessible to the industrial regions of the Rhine. Yet the British would gain little from antagonising the Dutch, and at its worst, a German invasion of the Netherlands would have greatly altered the strategic balance in the southern half of the North Sea, with no benefit to Britain. In addition, there were those who saw that Britain had little to gain from the destruction of her own trade, by which after all the war was going to be funded, through such heavy handed actions against the neutrals, even if in consequence some goods did get through to Germany. Consequently, the blockade was slow in its development, and resulted from the compromises achieved between the Admiralty, FO and Board of Trade. Not surprisingly there were some at the Admiralty who were greatly annoyed by this.

The TD processed statistics which tried to assess the effectiveness of the blockade, and later fixed the ration levels for neutral states. It had to work within a framework which included other Government departments (such as the Board of Trade), the commanders on the spot (such as the Admiral of Patrols, Sir George Ballard), and the executive decision-makers within the Admiralty itself. It also made recommendations to the Contraband Committee as to which extra items should be included on the banned list, such as vanadium.<sup>57</sup>

The TD also monitored the trade that Germany was carrying out with the United States. For example, in October 1914 Leverton Harris linked the ships of the

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<sup>56</sup> Offer, *First World War*, 288-90; McDermott, J., 'Sir Francis Oppenheimer: "Stranger Within" the Foreign Office', *History* 66, 1981, 199-207; Otte, T. G., "'Alien Diplomatist", 243-44.

<sup>57</sup> Webb to Board of Trade, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1914. ADM 137/2804.

Holland-America line to blockade breaking.<sup>58</sup> They were intercepted, and their cargoes confiscated. In contrast with the attitude of the Board of Trade, the TD was also keen to see that no British goods made their way to Germany, as the following comment shows, 'It is of the utmost importance that no goods of any description from the United Kingdom should be allowed to reach any enemy destination, however indirectly, and it is consequently assumed that sellers and shippers in this country are doing their utmost to take every precaution in this direction.'<sup>59</sup> It is significant that this view was taken before the March 1915 alterations in the Orders in Council regarding the Blockade. Inevitably, however, such a task proved almost impossible to fulfil adequately, for despite the fact that the TD grew considerably from its initial number, Lieut-Commander William Ginman, RNVR, wrote to Webb on 17<sup>th</sup> April 1915 that, 'The suggestion to collect reports from all U. S. ports and combine in one weekly return, at Washington is excellent, and it is to be regretted the work entailed is too heavy to be undertaken.'<sup>60</sup>

Dealing with the neutrals was a delicate task in itself. An example of this can be found in September 1914 over the comments made concerning probable Swedish trading with the Germans. Oliver, as well as Sturdee and Richmond all commented that little could be done. Oliver stated that the 'Swedish nation is known to be very pro-German', and all they could recommend was that the authorities in local ports be extra vigilant when Swedish ships called.<sup>61</sup> Files of newspaper clippings were collected which reported not only the impact of the blockade on the neutrals, but also of reported shortages in Germany itself.

The War Staff played a central role in co-ordinating the resources which were needed to carry out this task. Thus, at the behest of Ballard, they instructed ships leaving the Port of London to be checked before they set sail, with the information regarding such ships being sent on to the Dover Patrol so that they could concentrate on other shipping.<sup>62</sup> But as an increasingly tough line was taken with shipping, and more searches took place, so members of the TD became concerned by the possible build-up of congestion in ports, and the consequent demands for

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<sup>58</sup> Harris Minute, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1914. ADM 137/2805.

<sup>59</sup> Webb to the Directors of the Cork Steam Ship (SS) Company, Bristol SS Company, Great Eastern Railway and others, 1<sup>st</sup> February 1915. ADM 137/2805.

<sup>60</sup> Ginman to Webb, 17<sup>th</sup> April 1915. ADM 137/2806.

<sup>61</sup> Oliver Minute, 20<sup>th</sup> September 1914. ADM 137/982.

<sup>62</sup> Ballard to Admiralty, 26<sup>th</sup> September 1914. ADM 137/1006.

compensation by shippers who lost profits, or whose cargoes spoiled.<sup>63</sup> Gradually, however, it became clear to many in the government that their policy of 'Business as Usual' was not working. By then, however, the war had been underway for over six months, and Germany had not had an economic coronary.

If 'Business as Usual' dominated approaches to the question of the blockade, the same was true of Trade Protection.<sup>64</sup> In a liberal state it was not the government's business to control such an important issue as the management of shipping lines. Again as time went by this position became untenable, and in one field in particular the Government took swift action to initiate state intervention, and that was in the area of shipping insurance. On the whole, however, the Admiralty was unwilling to grasp the principle of state control of the nation's merchant shipping, and saw their role principally in two areas; the defensive arming of merchant shipping and the broadcast of advice to shipping as to what were safe and unsafe areas of the sea. Sections T1, T3 and T6 of the TD carried out these roles as table 1.09 indicated.

But, while the main threat came from surface raiders, further action was also felt to be unnecessary. The Navy's main role was to be offensive; to hunt down the enemy's warships and by destroying them protect Britain's seaborne trade. In this they were remarkably successful. In the entire First World War enemy surface raiders sank 442,702 tons of British merchant shipping, while submarines sank 6,635,059 tons.<sup>65</sup> The figures for 1914, however, show that the Navy was right, at least in the first months of war, to see the surface raider as a greater threat as they sank 203,139 tons (almost half their entire wartime total) as opposed to 2,950 tons by submarines. The effectiveness of British actions is revealed by the fact that the 1915 total lost to surface raiders was only 29,685 tons. As the balance of the threat shifted away from warships to submarines, it would take an imaginative leap to abandon policies which were geared towards dealing with the former and redeploy the resources to tackle the latter, particularly when submarines were so elusive.

Having dismissed Convoy in 1913, the question of a more general use of the system to protect trade did not disappear from the considerations of the War Staff, although convoy was not discussed again until 1916.<sup>66</sup> Most concern was directed

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<sup>63</sup> McCormick-Goodhart, L., to Webb, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1915. ADM 137/2809.

<sup>64</sup> French, *Strategic Planning*, 22-36.

<sup>65</sup> Fayle, C. E., *History of the Great War. Seaborne Trade*, vol. .iii, London 1924. Table 1 (b), 466.

<sup>66</sup> Webb Memorandum, 'Proposed Scheme of Commerce Protection and work of Trade Branch of War Staff', 11<sup>th</sup> October 1913. ADM 137/2864.

towards the dangers of surface raiders. But there were also some, who even before the war broke out, were certain of attack on merchant shipping by submarines. In a letter to Lord Fisher in April 1914, one such naval officer outlined his views on the topic of submarine attack after a lecture at the War College. When told by a visiting lawyer that, 'the civilised world would hold up its hands in horror at such acts of barbarism,' Capt. Sydney Hall noted, '*But he did not convince anybody* (nor would he convince Tirpitz). It was not clear to us who listened why an enemy could lay mines (*as he can*) without outraging propriety and yet be prohibited from using submarines which after all exercise *some* discretion.'<sup>67</sup> Hall later became Commodore 'S' and Fisher's Naval Assistant when the latter returned as First Sea Lord in October 1914.

Yet when war did break out in August 1914, no action was taken to institute convoy with the exceptions of troop or bullion ships. The reason for this exception was that it was argued that the Declarations of Paris and London did not protect these ships. It was an interesting counterfoil to the gradual erosion of these Declarations on the part of the British to impose their own blockade on Germany that no consideration was given to the likely knock-on effects to their own shipping of such changes. In addition, the First Lord himself saw convoy as 'cumbrous and inconvenient.'<sup>68</sup>

With no great battle, and no sudden decisive economic impact, and with examples of major errors, such as the loss of three cruisers on 22<sup>nd</sup> September, the pressure was on Churchill to show that the Navy could do something. This was a dangerous moment, and Richmond was worried that Sturdee and other members of the War Group might be bounced into sudden and disastrous action by the dominating presence of the First Lord. He went to see Sturdee and recorded his opinion, 'He realises to the full that we may have to go through this war without a battle & yet the Fleet may have been the dominating factor all the time.'<sup>69</sup>

This was not the rhetoric that the First Lord wanted to hear. If the idea of the 'Offensive' was strongly held on land, then equally, it was to be pursued at sea. The British should aim to take the war to the Germans, and do everything that they could either to tempt the HSF out of harbour, or use any domination of Germany's home

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<sup>67</sup> Hall to Fisher, 26<sup>th</sup> April 1914. FISR 1/15.

<sup>68</sup> Churchill Minute, 21<sup>st</sup> August 1913. ADM 1/8272.

<sup>69</sup> Richmond Diary, 19<sup>th</sup> September 1914. RIC 1/9.

waters they enjoyed to assault the German mainland. What was not clear, however, was how this was to be done. It was not that these issues had never been considered, as the Admiralty had looked at these possibilities before 1914. But even before War was declared, Churchill was interested in reviving them, despite unenthusiastic service assessment.<sup>70</sup> In particular, he returned to Bayly's 1913 report on the possibility of capturing of an advanced base for naval operations in the Bight.<sup>71</sup> In Churchill's mind the capture of these islands would lead to the great confrontation between the two battle fleets that would win the war at sea.

Jellicoe wrote to Jackson on this matter.<sup>72</sup> He discounted the possibility of seizing Borkum or Sylt as it was unlikely that the Army could spare the men, or that indeed such operations would be worth the loss of ships and ratings that would surely be involved. He did, however advocate the use of Borns Deep, off the coast of Holland. This would have involved the violation of Dutch neutrality, and Jellicoe suggested that if Holland joined the war against Britain as a result, the islands of Ameland or Terschelling would have to be seized to give protection to the anchorage. Borns Deep also featured as the preferred objective in Churchill's 31<sup>st</sup> July letter to Asquith. In reply presumably to both these proposals, Jackson wrote to Battenberg, on 1<sup>st</sup> August.<sup>73</sup> He again raised serious doubts as to the feasibility of even the modified plan. The anchorage suggested could only hold, at best, a flotilla of small cruisers, and then only at high water. Also, 'it would tie up a stronger force to protect it than it would assist for operations at a distance.' He also added that alienating Holland was not a policy Britain should pursue, since Holland had good local defence vessels, and the strategic loss of a pro-German Holland would far outweigh any 'slight gain' by stationing ships off Ameland. He finally added that such a victory would have little moral effect on the allied cause.

Despite all the criticisms made of earlier schemes, on 9<sup>th</sup> August Churchill wrote to Sturdee and Battenberg, with the desire that the Navy should go on the offensive. He suggested the target be Ameland and that Burney's Channel Fleet should be used to tackle any older ships which might try to oppose this operation. Quite how Churchill thought that the Channel Fleet could select its foe and only

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<sup>70</sup> Churchill to Asquith, 31<sup>st</sup> July 1914. ADM 137/452.

<sup>71</sup> Bayly Memorandum, 'Report on establishing forward bases against Germany', 30<sup>th</sup> June 1913. ADM 137/452.

<sup>72</sup> Jellicoe to Jackson, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1914. ADM 137/995.

<sup>73</sup> Jackson to Battenberg, 1<sup>st</sup> August 1914. ADM 137/452.

tackle weaker opponents was not clear, although Churchill added that the Grand Fleet would also have to be present to deal with the HSF should it arrive.<sup>74</sup> He still did not explain how the Channel Fleet would detect the difference between old German ships and new ones. But if the Grand Fleet were there, the Channel Fleet would not have been needed. It was another occasion of partial, reactive planning. One person concerned by the over-reliance on the Channel Fleet was Richmond. He met Churchill in the Chart Room on the following day, said that Burney's force would be annihilated.<sup>75</sup> Churchill replied that the Channel would be infested with small craft which would protect the other ships, an as yet untested theory.

In response Richmond recorded, 'I did not argue. He was vehement in his desire to adopt an offensive attitude. I saw no words to check his vivid imagination & that it was quite impossible to persuade him both of the strategical & tactical futility of such an operation. So I busied myself today in such rare moments as I could snatch to argue it out.' Many of the points he made echoed those of Jackson a week earlier, but he also added that an action against Holland would upset the Cape Dutch at a time when Boers were being asked to take up arms against Germany, their one time friend, in favour of Britain, their one time enemy.

Churchill also wrote to Sir Henry Wilson at the WO, and Sir Charles Callwell (recently returned as DMO), himself an expert on combined operations, offered to talk about the issue with the First Lord.<sup>76</sup> Although too busy to write a report himself, Wilson did ask Major Hereward Wake to prepare some comments that could then be sent across to the Admiralty. Wake's conclusion, which he admitted was based upon little real information, was unenthusiastic and critical.<sup>77</sup> He found Bayly's use of historical examples largely unhelpful due to the dramatic change in technology that had rendered most similarities redundant. At about the same time Jackson also produced a memorandum on a possible Borkum expedition. He was no longer COS, as his tenure there had ended at the end of July, but as his next posting was cancelled he was kept on as an extra member of the Staff.<sup>78</sup> Initially he was involved with planning attacks on Germany's colonies, but as an undated minute showed, he was

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<sup>74</sup> Churchill to Sturdee and Battenberg, August 9<sup>th</sup> 1914. ADM 137/452.

<sup>75</sup> Marder, *Portrait*, 9<sup>th</sup> August 1914, 95-97.

<sup>76</sup> Wilson to Callwell, August 11<sup>th</sup> 1914. ADM 137/452.

<sup>77</sup> Wake Memorandum, untitled, n.d. [August 1914]. ADM 137/452.

<sup>78</sup> *Admiralty Telephone Directory*, December 1914.

interested in the broader questions of the offensive against Germany.<sup>79</sup> In essence, he repeated the point that he had made in 1913 that such an attack was not worth the loss of ships it would involve. It would also tie down a considerable number of further ships for the defence and supply of the island. None of this would be possible before a major engagement between the two fleets.

Churchill's search for the offensive included other schemes, such as one involving a raid by destroyers and submarines into the Bight.<sup>80</sup> As Richmond commented, 'I'm unable to see what object this operation serves.' This plan was then cancelled as, 'apparently some other brilliant conception has entered into the mind of our War Lord, & the servile Sea Lords & C.O.S. will agree and let it through.'<sup>81</sup> This last comment was unfair. The COS and others did their best to block what they perceived as unwise policies. Churchill then produced a memorandum of August 19<sup>th</sup> in which he outlined what could be achieved by the British being able to operate in the Baltic.<sup>82</sup> He wrote that the British could only operate in the Baltic under one of two conditions: either when the Kiel Canal was closed through British naval action, or when the HSF had been dealt with. Neither of these had come to pass, but as Churchill observed, 'it is important that plans should be prepared now to make best use of our getting command of the Baltic' should either eventually occur. He added that the passage of the Belts into the Baltic was 'feasible' by the Royal Navy. Later the War Staff would challenge this view.<sup>83</sup>

Infected with an enthusiasm for this new scheme, Churchill then proceeded to write to both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary about it.<sup>84</sup> In his letter to Grey, Churchill claimed that were Italy to join the war, British ships could be released from the Mediterranean allowing 'two Fleets each superior to Germany to be maintained, and one of these could be placed in the Baltic.' The assertion was of dubious accuracy.

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<sup>79</sup> Jackson, 'Points of Attack on German Possessions', n.d. [August 1914]. ADM 137/995.

<sup>80</sup> Marder, *Portrait*, 12<sup>th</sup> August 1914, 98-9.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 14<sup>th</sup> August 1914, 99-100.

<sup>82</sup> Churchill Memorandum, 19<sup>th</sup> August 1914, *Churchill*, vol. 3 comp. i, 45 – 6.

<sup>83</sup> Oliver Minute, 28<sup>th</sup> November 1915, and unsigned (Jackson) Minute 29<sup>th</sup> November 1915, following 'Reports of Officers commanding British S/Ms in the Baltic. E8, E9, E18, E19', ADM 137/1247; Oliver to Balfour via Jackson, 'Question of getting more British Submarines into the Baltic', 26<sup>th</sup> February 1916. ADM 137/1247.

<sup>84</sup> Churchill to Grey, 21<sup>st</sup> August 1914, *Churchill*, vol. 3, comp. i, 48, and Churchill to Asquith, 25<sup>th</sup> August 1914, *Ibid.*, 46 - 7.

While Churchill's ink flowed, further sweeps or raids were made into the German side of the North Sea. Such plans were not new. The principle of them had been established in the 1907 War Plans as a way of trying to locate the enemy fleet. By their very nature they were unlikely to meet with success, reliant as they were on the two fleets being in the same place at the same time. One such sweep was, however, successful on 28<sup>th</sup> August, and led to the Heligoland Bight engagement, although as Richmond noted the orders for it were bungled.<sup>85</sup> Despite the limited successes of this action, which were largely achieved despite the planning that had gone into it, Richmond was critical of the whole policy, and felt that mining the Bight would be a much more useful activity.<sup>86</sup> Indeed he felt that it was 'jejune' even to believe that such sweeps would tempt the Germans into such a naïve action as to send the HSF to be sunk by the Grand Fleet.<sup>87</sup> Although one might rightly point out the futility of such a strategy, it was worth considering the counter-factual of what might have been achieved without the knowledge of German plans through the fortuitous breaking of German codes or the development of other information gathering apparatus such as DF, neither of which were yet fully available. If the Navy had been forced to operate in the North Sea blind, the system of sweeps might well have been considered as one of the few ways of detecting German fleet movements.

Despite Churchill's memorandum to Asquith on the 25<sup>th</sup> August, he continued to raise the issue of a forward base from which to make more offensive actions against the Germans. At every turn, where records have survived, the War Staff took a hostile view of the prospects of such a raid. We know of Sturdee's views largely from the comments recorded in Richmond's diary.<sup>88</sup> Leveson left very little in the way of written comment on anything, a characteristic which tied in with Richmond's own comments about the DOD in his diary.<sup>89</sup> Generally Richmond was extremely critical of Sturdee, but on 13<sup>th</sup> September 1914 he recorded, 'I have just had a most reassuring talk with Sturdee. He gave me a paper he had prepared on the subject of secondary & advanced bases, Winston has again been hammering at the subject, wanting us to get a base on the German coast, and Sturdee, I am thankful to say, has strenuously &

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<sup>85</sup> Marder, *Portrait*, 30<sup>th</sup> August 1914, 104.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1914, 104-5.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 10<sup>th</sup> September 1914, 106-7.

<sup>88</sup> Very little survives in Sturdee's own papers, save for a defence of himself against Fisher.

<sup>89</sup> Marder, *Portrait*, 8<sup>th</sup> August 1914, 92-3.



successfully opposed it. His paper summed up the arguments against such things very well.<sup>90</sup> The paper appears not to have survived.

The view of the Staff was reiterated at the Loch Ewe Conference, held on board HMS *Iron Duke*, on 17<sup>th</sup> September. Those present included Churchill, Jellicoe, Sturdee and Oliver. The Conference looked at many issues, but regarding the possibility of a raid into the Baltic, it concluded that 'it is not now advisable to risk any reduction in Naval Force by eccentric movements such as an attack on Kiel by Light Cruisers and Destroyers' although Bayly advocated this course.<sup>91</sup> This, in part, reflected Jellicoe's own preoccupation with ship numbers, and the superiority of the Grand Fleet relative to that of the enemy. The only glimmer of hope for Churchill was that the prospect of an operation in the Baltic once Britain had a two Fleet advantage over Germany should be 'thoroughly investigated'. Additionally, an attack on Heligoland was also condemned in a 'unanimous' manner. Thus there was almost complete unanimity between the C-in-C afloat, and the War Staff in London.

While a forward base policy was under consideration, it also prevented the possibilities of any action which might block up the very waters in which Churchill hoped to operate. A counter argument, which was a recurrent theme throughout the war, stated that since the HSF seemed unwilling to come out of harbour and be sunk, it would be best to bottle it up in harbour through an extensive mining operation in the southern North Sea, especially in the Heligoland Bight and its approaches. Richmond was particularly keen on this idea while those who wanted space left for Grand Fleet operations generally opposed it. This policy would have had a two-fold consequence for the Grand Fleet. Firstly, it was argued, that it would free up the resources of the Grand Fleet, particularly cruisers and destroyers, for deployment elsewhere, and secondly, as opponents of this mining policy said, it would greatly restrict the possible movement of the Grand Fleet; in effect the Narrow Waters would become yet narrower. Mining only really became a popular policy with the War Staff once the balance of needs of the Grand Fleet and the threat posed by the Submarine began to shift later in the war (and a better mine became available). The problem in the meantime was to develop a suitable base for the Grand Fleet while it waited for action. This was not really satisfactorily settled until 1917.

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 13<sup>th</sup> September 1914, 107–8.

<sup>91</sup> Minutes, Loch Ewe Conference, 17<sup>th</sup> September 1914. ADM 137/995.

When dealing with the question of a base there was a great deal of agreement between Jellicoe and the Admiralty. Scapa Flow not only allowed all the capital ships of the Grand Fleet to be kept together, it also avoided the problems of tide or limited access that hampered bases further south such as Rosyth or the Humber. However, it was barely started as a base in 1914, with no submarine defences, and its isolated location posed considerable logistical problems for the Navy.<sup>92</sup>

But few were interested in mines, and as will be shown later, senior Staff Officers did not know the full extent of the problems with British mines.<sup>93</sup> Mines became a key part to the war in the North Sea. They are inextricably linked to the story of the Grand Fleet, and how the role of that force was perceived. To a significant extent they later filled the gap in the North Sea which the Grand Fleet vacated. There were a number of reasons why this happened, which are discussed below but increasingly it limited the actions of the Grand Fleet, which might have proved a particular problem had the war dragged on in 1919 when it was expected that once more the British battle fleet would support actions close to the German coast. The War Staff played an important role in the later development of mine warfare. They also indicated the complex nature of the Admiralty administration, and the importance of the Jellicoe era as First Sea Lord in the decentralisation and delegation of Staff work in this field, as will be discussed later. They are, therefore, indicative of far more than simply the weapons that they represented.

Initially the prevailing view amongst many both at sea, and at the Admiralty, was that extensive mining operations would not be a policy which would favour the British, who hoped to use the North Sea for more 'offensive' plans. The senior members of the War Staff, such as Sturdee and Oliver, as well as Sir Arthur Wilson, shared this view. Battenberg and Churchill also agreed.

Two things gradually changed attitudes towards the mine: the submarine menace, and the failure of the HSF to come out of harbour. The way in which mines could be used to tackle these two problems was somewhat different, and should be considered in that way. Firstly there was the submarine menace. This had become apparent quite quickly, with the sinking of three cruisers, the *Aboukir*, *Cressy* and *Hogue* in rapid and tragic succession on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1914. Destroying submarines in the First World War proved to be very difficult, and came to be the dominant

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<sup>92</sup> Sumida, J. T., 'British Naval Operational Logistics, 1914-1918' in *JMH* 57, July 1993, 447-480.

<sup>93</sup> Halpern, *Naval History*, 344-5; Marder, *DNSF*, vol. ii, 369-70; Marder, *DNSF*, vol. iv, 87-88.

consideration in the last two years of the war. In 1914, however, their true menace was yet to be fully appreciated.

Where to lay the mines was also a question that needed resolving. In an action that reflected so much else of what went on at the Admiralty in the early months of the war, Churchill himself told Sturdee and Oliver where he wanted the mines laid.<sup>94</sup> A similarly cavalier attitude can be found whether looking at the raising and deployment of the Royal Naval Division, or indeed in the inception of the Dardanelles expedition. Churchill also recognised that mines could be laid once it was known that the enemy was at sea.<sup>95</sup> This was difficult, but not impossible, and Jellicoe referred to the possibility in his famous Grand Fleet strategy memorandum that he sent to the Admiralty in October 1914.<sup>96</sup> For the likes of Oliver, who drew up all the minelaying orders until 1917, the main function of mines in 1914 was as an aid to coastal defence. Thus the few mines that the British had were laid from their few minelayers in inadequate lines along the east coast of England.<sup>97</sup> Even here there was concern that British fishing vessels or merchant ships would get caught in the minefields, particularly as even in 1916 minelayers found it difficult to lay mines accurately. It is a good example of the British trying to fight the war while keeping the basic shipping lanes open, a problem that did not really face the Germans. In addition, small largely linear minefields were created along some of the routes believed to be used by German ships or submarines.<sup>98</sup> Keyes also suggested that mines be laid in the Heligoland Bight along a German submarine route acting 'in accordance with the First Lord's verbal directions', another example of Churchill's informal manner of working. But due to lack of minelaying capacity all of these fields were small. It would be several years before an effective mining policy would be adopted, and as will be shown in the next chapter, Lord Fisher did little to help the situation.

In late October 1914 the Navy suffered another disaster, this time in the black hole of the Pacific, at Coronel. For the British press it was the last straw. In the best traditions of their profession, they looked for a scapegoat, and found one in First Sea Lord. He was hounded from office. Looking back at those first three months of war, he must have been disappointed. Although much had been achieved, there had also

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<sup>94</sup> Churchill to Sturdee, 1<sup>st</sup> October 1914. ADM 137/843.

<sup>95</sup> Churchill to Battenburg, 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1914. ADM 137/965.

<sup>96</sup> Jellicoe Memorandum, 'German tactics thus far', 30<sup>th</sup> October 1914. ADM 137/995.

<sup>97</sup> Jackson Minute 29<sup>th</sup> August 1916. ADM 137/844.

<sup>98</sup> Keyes to Sturdee, 1<sup>st</sup> November 1914. FISR 1/15.

been bungling and missed opportunities. It was a sad end to his career. For the Staff the first few months of war had also been difficult. The timing of the outbreak of war had unfortunately coincided with the arrival of Sturdee and Leveson who were both inexperienced with the demands of the War Room plot. Overwhelmed by paperwork, they had drawn on the help of extra officers both drafted in and volunteers. Some were better than others. While the new TD lacked the personnel to monitor trade as effectively as they might have done, other Staff Officers were quickly involved in collecting information from both the post and cables. The 'world scheme of intelligence' as envisaged by pre-war officers was, however, still under construction.<sup>99</sup> The blockade had not been implemented as they would have hoped, but the losses of the likes of the three cruisers had shown that the policy of the distant blockade was the right one. The British Expeditionary Force had been successfully dispatched to France, and the Grand Fleet had been created. Also, Churchill's desire for a thrust against Borkum had been blocked for three months, and time would tell whether the new First Sea Lord would prove more effective in regaining a service hand on the tiller.

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<sup>99</sup> Webb Memorandum, 'Proposed Duties of the Staff of the Trade Branch', 10<sup>th</sup> November 1913. ADM 1/8272.

#### Chapter 4. The Churchill-Fisher Regime, October 1914 – May 1915.

Sensing that there was little that he could do to save Battenberg, Churchill let him go. It was a sad moment, but many felt that the Admiralty needed a more vigorous service chief than Battenberg had been. Few were necessarily keen, however, to see Fisher back as First Sea Lord, particularly Sturdee who was quickly removed as COS, and replaced by Oliver. Fisher's reputation in the Service was mixed. While clearly a man of vision, action and guile, he had also divided the Navy and brought the Service into the public eye through his dispute with Beresford. It was also to be seen how far Fisher would either rein in his erstwhile pupil, Churchill, or change Admiralty policy more along the lines he preferred. In essence he did neither. The dominant voice in the Admiralty remained with Churchill, and it was left to others, including the War Staff to do their best to divert some of Churchill's wilder schemes while leaving the main strategy intact. At the same time, Churchill, as a sop to his former mentor promised favoured plans to which the Staff were equally hostile.

Many accounts of this period have failed to understand fully the role that the Staff played in the conduct of the war, and the problems that they faced.<sup>1</sup> This period of the war was also critical in securing greater Admiralty control over the fleets afloat.<sup>2</sup> This had implications not only for Jellicoe, but as will be shown, for the likes of subordinate fleet commanders such as Sir Sackville Carden in the Aegean. The combination of greater central control and the personality of Churchill was, however, a potent combination, and as will be demonstrated in the case of the Dardanelles operation, Churchill not only exceeded his brief, but also lied about it later. The impact of Fisher was also not as beneficial as has sometimes been supposed. While it is often acknowledged that he was not as effective as he had been in the period 1904-10, the degree to which his inconsistency played a part in affecting naval policy needs to be emphasised. The main questions, therefore which arose during the period October 1914 to May 1915 related to the Dardanelles, the Baltic, the use of mines and the further tightening of the blockade.

One of the fears that the British had about operations in the Baltic, particularly using capital ships was that the Germans could use the Kiel Canal to take HSF warships from the North Sea to the Baltic, or *vice versa*, very quickly. This meant that

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<sup>1</sup> Marder, *DNSF*, vol. ii, 205; Rodger, *Admiralty*, 130.

<sup>2</sup> Lambert, 'Strategic Command', between footnotes 178-200.

the British would have to have a force ready to take on the HSF in both waters to remain confident of victory. In 1914-1915 such superiority in numbers simply did not exist, although by 1918, as will be discussed later, such plans were considered feasible. One solution to this problem lay in the use of mines. If sufficient could be laid in the Heligoland Bight, again as increasingly happened in the last stages of the war, the Germans could be penned into their harbours which would leave the British in a much freer position to operate elsewhere. Of course, this was countered by the view that to bottle the Germans in their harbours would mean that the HSF would be unlikely ever to meet the Grand Fleet, itself an objective. Mines were thus essential to one strategy, but a hindrance to another. This contradictory position partly explained the ambivalent attitude that the British had towards mine warfare in the early years of the war in general, in which Lord Fisher too had inconsistent opinions.

In late November 1914 Fisher was arguing that the British had enough mines of adequate quality, and that no more than 23,500 would be needed.<sup>3</sup> By early January 1915, however, he said 'There is now no option but to adopt an offensive mine laying policy', adding that they now needed as many mines as could be manufactured.<sup>4</sup> This had implications for the Grand Fleet, as Fisher argued that 'I think the whole North Sea ought to be cleared of everything and a mine blockade of the German ports established beginning with A. K. Wilson's excellent mining plan for the Amrum Light Channel which is just first rate ... Alas, we only have 4,500 mines at present so we are forced to go slowly!'<sup>5</sup> Such a slow rate of production was mainly the result of the lack of importance placed on the production of such weapons early in the war, and reflected Fisher's own views of only a few months before. Minelaying capacity was also limited to old and inadequate ships as Oliver observed, 'The danger involved in carrying out mining operations on the enemy's coast, in vessels over 20 years old with a full speed of only 15 knots, is very considerable' ... 'As the fast minelayers become available it is suggested that these old vessels be paid off & the officers and men transferred to the new vessels. The "Princess Irene" will lay the same number of mines with one quarter the personnel, one quarter of the risk of detection and with 1½ times the chance of escape if detected.'<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Fisher Minute, 28<sup>th</sup> November 1914. FISR 1/1/42.

<sup>4</sup> Fisher to Churchill, 4<sup>th</sup> January 1915, in Marder, *FGDN*, vol. iii, 121-3.

<sup>5</sup> Fisher to Churchill, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1915, *Churchill*, vol. 3 comp. i, 362.

<sup>6</sup> Oliver Minute 11<sup>th</sup> January 1915. ADM 137/837.

Others agreed that more could be done, particularly in light of the fact that the great clash of the HSF and the Grand Fleet seemed to have receded. The Assistant Director of Torpedoes, Capt. Philip Dumas, had already advocated in January 1915 that 'we might go further and occasionally lay a few mines off the exits of the enemy's harbours'.<sup>7</sup> This view met with resistance from Wilson and support from the Third Sea Lord (Admiral Sir Frederick Hamilton), with the first commenting that 'the mining policy of the power that aims at keeping the sea open must necessarily be quite different from and much more difficult than the policy of the power whose main object is practically to close it to all comers'.<sup>8</sup> Hamilton, however, saw greater benefit in mining and wrote:

The question of laying mines off the enemy's ports can only be properly considered in connection with the whole strategy of the war ... In favour of so mining is the chance of destroying some of their ships and submarines; of making it difficult for their fleet to come out either for raids or for the main engagements; and at the least it keeps them very busy & inflicts *minor losses* instead of the last being confined to ourselves.

Against mining is the interference with the observation by our submarines etc., *the obstacles to their fleet coming out to meet our own; and to our own ships going into their areas if & when we wish to.*

Personally, I should prefer to see them worried in the same way we are, & the Heligoland Bight well mined on a carefully considered scheme & with ample supporting force.'<sup>9</sup>

Mining, therefore was contextual, not absolute as a policy. It was of less significance before the menace of the submarines came to dominate much naval thinking. Any criticism of British mining policy must, therefore be considered within this context.

Oliver also broadly agreed with these considerations although his own minute on the issue skirted around the issue of mining off the German coast.<sup>10</sup> It was certainly the case that Oliver was initially more concerned with the problems of minesweeping

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<sup>7</sup> Dumas Minute, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1915. ADM 137/843.

<sup>8</sup> Wilson Minute, 8<sup>th</sup> January 1915. ADM 137/843.

<sup>9</sup> Hamilton Minute, 11<sup>th</sup> January 1915. ADM 137/843. My italics.

<sup>10</sup> Minute by Oliver, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1916. ADM 137/843.

than minelaying.<sup>11</sup> This tied in with the perception that mines were the weapon of the under-dog as Wilson suggested. This mindset explained why the British were keen to keep the North Sea as open as possible for their ships, and had insufficient minelaying and mine-producing capacity at the outbreak of war. Consequently, in the Churchill-Fisher era British minelaying remained marginal in its resources and impact.

There was also some awareness that British mines were of poorer quality than the German ones. As Churchill himself commented 'In view of the unsatisfactory states of our mines we cannot rely much on them.'<sup>12</sup> But the awareness of quite how inadequate British mines were was lacking. One factor at play here in explaining this was the failings of the Committee of Mines established by Fisher. President of this Committee was Admiral Robert Ommanney. He was highly rated by Lord Fisher who said of him after his arrival, 'We have struck oil in Admiral Ommanney.'<sup>13</sup> Sadly, this confidence was misplaced. For as will be seen later, Ommanney ignored concerns raised by some of his junior officers about the efficiency of British mines, thereby delaying the changes that were necessary to remedy their defects. In this respect, whatever Fisher's own views on the use of mines might have been, his impact was significantly damaging.

A successful mining policy might also have helped to protect British Trade against German assault. The threat from German surface raiders had been successfully contained in 1914 but by 1915 the main threat increasingly came from U-Boats. In March 1915 in particular, British merchant ship losses from all forms of attack leapt from 36,372 to 71,479 tons per month.<sup>14</sup> This was the result of the decision by the Germans on February 4<sup>th</sup> to declare the waters around the British Isles to be a war zone. This came into effect on February 28<sup>th</sup>. British counter-measures did little to stop these attacks, and therefore mining was increasingly seen as possible way to combat the U-Boats. British mining also threatened to alienate yet further the European neutrals whose overseas trade passed through these increasingly dangerous waters. The British were the recipients of much of this trade, and as will be shown below, the purchase of these goods was seen as yet another way of cutting off Germany from the rest of the world. It was in this context that the work done by the TD in monitoring trade patterns should be seen as particularly important.

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<sup>11</sup> Marder, *Portrait*, 24<sup>th</sup> September 1914, 110-11.

<sup>12</sup> Churchill to Battenburg, 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1914. ADM 137/965.

<sup>13</sup> Fisher to Churchill, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1915. *Churchill*, vol. 3 comp. i, 442.

<sup>14</sup> Fayle, *Seaborne Trade*, vol. iii, 465.



The British were forced to tread a fine line between taking actions which would hit Germany harder and faster while not alienating the neutrals. This naval/diplomatic balancing act partly explained why the blockade was imposed on an incremental basis. It also explained why the British appeared merely to be responding to German actions and thus appear to lay the blame for any such changes on the Germans. It also suggested that the balance of influence over blockade policy was gradually shifting from the FO to the Admiralty. For example, the Germans began their first phase of unrestricted submarine warfare at the end of February 1915. The announcement of the Reprisals OIC of 11<sup>th</sup> March 1915 was a 'reply to the German submarine campaign.'<sup>15</sup> Although this may have been the public explanation, it is clear from internal TD minutes that few of the neutrals were convinced by this argument. Commander Thomas Fisher of T.3 Section told Webb, 'unbiased neutrals will undoubtedly hold that it was England rather than Germany which first broke away from the artificial and mistaken rules with which International Lawyers have endeavoured to hamper the action of sea power. This is as it should be since sea power is our weapon but to pretend the contrary is to make us appear a nation of hypocrites.'<sup>16</sup> Webb added to these comments, 'The remarkable manner in which Shipping Lines of neutral countries and insurance systems are recognising our ability to carry out an intention as evinced by their anxiety to come to terms with us, only emphasises this.'<sup>17</sup> To meet the demands of the March OIC the TD grew by a further eight officers to meet the increased workload, and there was some redistribution of each Section's work to meet the division's developing role as table 1.10 in Appendix C indicates. Contraband questions become a key part of the TD's work (Section T.1) with five naval officers allocated to this one section (some of whom had formerly been detailed to work on Trade Routes), the newly re-ordered T.8 and T.11 Sections also indicated the increased importance of intelligence gathering.

German actions also enabled those who wanted a tighter blockade to get round the objections of the FO and Board of Trade to such a policy. Such was their obstructive ability that the DTD wrote to Fisher in December 1914 complaining that the attitude of the FO towards trading with Denmark meant that, 'German troops must be fed rather than that the British population should go without luxuries such as

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<sup>15</sup> Carless Davis and Layard, '*A History of the Blockade*', 12<sup>th</sup> December 1916. ADM 137/2737.

<sup>16</sup> Fisher Minute, 13<sup>th</sup> March 1915. ADM 137/2734.

<sup>17</sup> Webb Minute, 14<sup>th</sup> March 1915. ADM 137/2734.

bacon, butter, etc.’<sup>18</sup> But it was also very clear that by October 1914 the Blockade had not achieved its aims. The failure to grasp the nettle of continuous voyage through neutral states meant that the Blockade was highly porous. Early Admiralty ambitions had been thwarted, and what economic dislocation that there was in Germany was largely self-inflicted. It was only with a more aggressive approach on the part of the British, and a failure by the Germans to adopt anything approaching a coherent economic war policy that, over time, the German economy and people would be gravely weakened.

In addition, by October 1914 the HSF had yet to show itself in force in the North Sea. Jellicoe was keen to ensure that he had the full support of the Admiralty when battle was finally joined. His careful, methodical manner was in many respects quite at odds with the fiery and mercurial minds of both Churchill and, apparently, Fisher. But Fisher’s words should never necessarily be taken at face value, and he at least saw the propaganda and deterrent value in apocalyptic utterances.<sup>19</sup> Behind that, however, he was far more careful, as indeed at times was Churchill, and both endorsed Jellicoe’s famously careful Grand Fleet tactical memorandum.<sup>20</sup> This was not because they lacked initiative, but rather that they saw the importance of husbanding naval resources.

In response to the sinking of the three cruisers *Aboukir*, *Cressy* and *Hogue* on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1914 Churchill issued a Confidential Interim Order with the following instructions, ‘In war the *preservation of important & irreplaceable units with their crews*, for the duty of fighting the enemy, must be the primary consideration and the proper precaution & disposition of war must not be neglected in any circumstances.’<sup>21</sup> In this Sturdee wrote ‘fully concur’, as did Battenburg. Typically this Order was issued with alterations by Churchill which were not then sent back to Staff Officers, or even the First Sea Lord, for consent.<sup>22</sup>

Fisher, too, believed that crews were virtually sacrosanct, and more important than ships. Following the loss of the *Audacious* he wrote to Jellicoe, ‘Still war is war

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<sup>18</sup> Webb to Fisher, 25<sup>th</sup> December 1914. ADM 137/2806.

<sup>19</sup> Lambert, ‘This Is All We Want’, 147-169.

<sup>20</sup> Jellicoe Memorandum, ‘German Tactics Thus Far’ 30<sup>th</sup> October 1914. ADM 137/995.

<sup>21</sup> Admiralty Confidential Interim Order [CIO], ‘Employment of Large Ships for Rescue work.’ 25<sup>th</sup> September 1914. ADM 137/47. My italics.

<sup>22</sup> Churchill Minute, 25<sup>th</sup> September 1914. ADM 137/47.

and we are bound to have big disasters and must steel our hearts and minds – *for if only we can save the crews* (which are irreplaceable) we can afford great losses in vessels of war of all natures. I think myself the time has arrived for you to get into Portland & Portsmouth & Devonport'.<sup>23</sup> This latter statement must have arrived on Jellicoe's desk just as he was finalising his 'German Tactics Thus Far' memorandum in October 1914, and must have influenced his thinking, particularly as the *Audacious* had sunk three days before. Indeed manning the huge expansion of the navy in general and the Grand Fleet in particular created one of the many sources of friction between Jellicoe and the Admiralty. This became an acute problem once the huge Fisher building programme began to come on stream in the latter part of 1915. The manning of ships was important because it was through its very ordinariness that significant issues were revealed. One of these was the degree to which fleet commanders inevitably saw the manning issue in isolation. Too often they wanted the ships, but disliked the dislocation that went with trying to man them. Blame was inevitably turned on the likes of the Mobilisation Division Staff Officers, but in reality there was little that they could do to avoid mixing crews; it was a natural result of the accelerated shipbuilding programme meeting the limits of the existing pool of reserve and emergency crews.

Such issues, though important, were not considered by many to be central. With no prospect of a fleet engagement, Churchill was still busy pursuing his advanced base scheme. Few were keen on the Scheme, least of all Fisher, but Sir Arthur Wilson was one of its advocates. He had returned to the Admiralty as another extra Staff member and produced a 100-page report on the possibility of an attack against Heligoland. All those who saw it quickly rejected it. Churchill sent it in on to Admiral Sir Cecil Burney, who commanded the Channel Fleet. He was not impressed, and described it as an 'unsound strategy' and outlined its many problems.<sup>24</sup> He added, endorsing Richmond's comments of 13<sup>th</sup> September, that 'the policy of our battle fleet must be a waiting one.' Similarly, Richmond, who was asked by Oliver, the new COS, on the 7<sup>th</sup> November to work with Wilson on his scheme recorded that it was 'impractical'.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Fisher to Jellicoe, 28<sup>th</sup> October 1914. BL, Add. Mss. 49009.

<sup>24</sup> Burney to Fisher, 8<sup>th</sup> November 1914. FISR 1/16/3-4.

<sup>25</sup> Diary, 8<sup>th</sup> November 1914. RIC/1/11.

That Richmond was given such a job was surely no coincidence. If anyone were going to tell 'Ard 'Art that he was wrong it would be Richmond.

This clearly did not stop Wilson, as a week later Fisher wrote to Jellicoe that 'he works like a horse all day at all sorts of plans for the Belgian and German coast attack.'<sup>26</sup> Fisher's view of Wilson soon changed. In January 1915 Fisher had complimented Wilson on an 'excellent mining plan', but by May 1915 he had become a 'REAL danger' in Fisher's eyes.<sup>27</sup> Fisher also stated that one of his conditions for returning to the Admiralty after his resignation was that Wilson should go, 'as my time will [otherwise] be occupied in resisting the Heligoland and other wild projects'.<sup>28</sup> Although care must be taken in not ascribing views which may be coloured by hindsight, this appreciation of Wilson's worth is supported by the recollections of Oliver, who recounted that one of the reasons why none of these schemes came off was that during War Staff Group meetings none of the three key figures could quite agree on a common strategy. Consequently, Churchill's Borkum plan, Wilson's Heligoland Plan and Fisher's Baltic plan each cancelled out the others. Oliver noted, 'I hated all these projects but had to be careful what I said.'<sup>29</sup> Although written a long time after the war, this comment tied in with the views he expressed in 1916 concerning a possible Baltic operation.<sup>30</sup>

The possibility of an operation against the islands off the German coast re-emerged, after a brief gap, at the start of December. It was discussed at a meeting of the War Council on 1<sup>st</sup> December, with both Churchill and Balfour speaking in favour. Fisher merely reported that the offensive was important and that the Admiralty would report back with more definite views.<sup>31</sup> This comment may well have been a way of stalling Churchill. The following day Churchill issued a memorandum for a proposed attack on the island of Sylt, which lay at the northern end of the Frisian islands, and was the one nearest to the Danish frontier.<sup>32</sup> He believed that the initial attack would be 'easily discharged', and the occupation of the whole island affected 'as convenient.' Finally, in an echo of a comment he would

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<sup>26</sup> Fisher to Jellicoe, 17<sup>th</sup> November 1914. *FGDN vol. iii*, 73-4.

<sup>27</sup> Fisher to Churchill, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1915, in *Churchill, vol. 3, comp. i*, 362; Fisher to Jellicoe, 31<sup>st</sup> May 1915, *Jellicoe Papers, vol. i*, 164-5.

<sup>28</sup> Fisher to Asquith, 19<sup>th</sup> May 1915. *Churchill, vol. 3, comp. i*, 241-3.

<sup>29</sup> Admiral Sir William James, *A Great Seaman. The Life of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Henry F. Oliver*. London 1956, 137-8.

<sup>30</sup> Oliver to Jackson, 26<sup>th</sup> February 1916. ADM 137/1247.

<sup>31</sup> Minutes of Meeting of the War Council, 1<sup>st</sup> December 1914. CAB 22/1.

<sup>32</sup> Churchill Memorandum, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1914. ADM 137/452.

make later about the prospects of his Dardanelles operation, should things go wrong there, he wrote that 'the force cd be withdrawn at any moment without difficulty.' This idea met with the predictable lack of enthusiasm, an undated minute from the Naval Secretary, Charles de Bartolomé, recording that German use of machine guns would make the landing difficult; the water supply was in the centre of the island and not at the end where the landing were projected; the mainland railway was out of range of naval guns, and the enemy would find reinforcing the island by barge quite easy.<sup>33</sup>

Fisher's own response was to suggest that the papers from both Bayly's 1913 report and the proposed Schleswig-Holstein Campaign should be handed over to Bartolomé and Capt. Mairis of ID as soon as possible.<sup>34</sup> He must have known that Bartolomé at least would have been hostile to Bayly's plan. We also know Oliver's opinion, as he wrote a reply to a similar plan which Balfour had for an attack on Sylt.<sup>35</sup> He rejected it because Sylt was so close to the German mainland. If pressed he favoured an attack on Borkum, although he believed it would be very hard to capture, and any recent intelligence on the island was also missing.

Yet Churchill persevered. He wrote to Fisher on 21<sup>st</sup> December saying that 'the key to the naval situation is an oversea base, taken by force and held by force.'<sup>36</sup> He also lamented that 'I cannot find anyone to make such a plan alive and dominant.' Churchill tried to win Fisher over by merging his Borkum plan with Fisher's own Baltic one, and wrote to Fisher on 22<sup>nd</sup> December saying, 'I am wholly with you about the Baltic. But you must close up this side first. You must take an island & block them in *a la* Wilson; or you must break the locks on the canal or you must cripple their fleets in a general action. The Baltic is the only theatre in the naval action which can appreciably shorten the war.'<sup>37</sup>

On Christmas Day, 1914 Bayly wrote to Churchill requesting the possibility that the Channel Fleet might become more active by leading an attack against Borkum.<sup>38</sup> He felt that the Fleet needed some action to avoid the crews losing their fighting edge. His suggestion was quickly rejected.<sup>39</sup> One reason given was that the

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<sup>33</sup> Bartolomé to Churchill, n.d. [December 1914]. ADM 137/452.

<sup>34</sup> Fisher to Churchill, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1914. FISR 1/16/51

<sup>35</sup> Oliver to Churchill, 15<sup>th</sup> December 1914, ADM 137/452.

<sup>36</sup> Churchill to Fisher, 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1914, *Churchill, vol. 3, comp. i*, 325.

<sup>37</sup> Churchill to Fisher, 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1914. FISR 1/17/43.

<sup>38</sup> Bayly to Churchill, 25<sup>th</sup> December 1914. ADM 137/452 and ADM 137/995.

<sup>39</sup> Oliver to Bayly, 26<sup>th</sup> December 1914. ADM 137/995.

ships would need greater protection against mines and torpedoes, whereas Burney had rejected the use of nets. This refusal was to look rather foolish when, on New Years' Eve, a German U-Boat torpedoed one of his pre-Dreadnought battleships, HMS *Formidable*. Although nets might have made no difference, their absence certainly suggested a cavalier attitude to the torpedo threat. He was recalled

Despite these set-backs, Churchill continued to write about his policies in encouraging tones, and began a second phase of trying to persuade Asquith of his oversea base plan with a letter on 29<sup>th</sup> December.<sup>40</sup> The letter involved a variation on the theme he had been playing for several months as he now planned to invade Schleswig-Holstein between capturing an island (Borkum) and dominating the Baltic. He hoped that such an invasion would bring Denmark into the war on the Allied side, which would end the problem over the danger of the Belts route into the Baltic. Two days later Churchill issued a Memorandum to this effect.<sup>41</sup> Asquith responded by saying that the issue would be discussed at a War Council.<sup>42</sup> Encouraged by this Churchill wrote to Fisher and Oliver asking them to prepare plans to capture Borkum using Sylt as a cover name.<sup>43</sup> Capt. Roger Keyes, then Commodore 'S', and always one keen for a fight, wrote to Churchill stating that he believed that small craft, such as submarines and destroyers, could defend Borkum once captured, if it could be guaranteed that the exits from the Elbe could be blocked (which it could not).<sup>44</sup>

Churchill wrote a further letter to Fisher on 4<sup>th</sup> January, in which he stated that 'Borkum is the key to all Northern possibilities.'<sup>45</sup> He said much the same thing to Jellicoe.<sup>46</sup> In reply, Fisher agreed, but added cautiously, 'but it's a purely military question whether it can be held.'<sup>47</sup> He also attached his 'Baltic Paper' which he had received from Corbett a couple of weeks before. As Asquith had promised, the proposal to attack an island was raised at the War Council meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> January, and unlike a plan for an advance on Zeebrugge, which was rejected, the Council authorised the Admiralty to draw up plans for an attack against an island off the

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<sup>40</sup> Churchill to Asquith, 29<sup>th</sup> December 1914, *Churchill*, vol. 3, comp. i, 343 – 5.

<sup>41</sup> Memorandum by Churchill, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1914, *ibid.*, 347 – 9.

<sup>42</sup> Asquith to Fisher, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1915, *ibid.*, 353.

<sup>43</sup> Churchill to Fisher and Oliver, 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1915. ADM 137/452; Churchill to Sir John French, 11<sup>th</sup> January 1915, *Churchill*, vol. 3, comp. i, 401-2.

<sup>44</sup> Keyes to Churchill, 4<sup>th</sup> January 1915. ADM 137/452.

<sup>45</sup> Churchill to Fisher, 4<sup>th</sup> January 1915, *FGDN*, vol. iii, 121.

<sup>46</sup> Churchill to Jellicoe, 4<sup>th</sup> January 1915, *Churchill*, vol. 3, comp. i, 368.

<sup>47</sup> Fisher to Churchill, 4<sup>th</sup> January 1915, *ibid.*, 122.

German coast.<sup>48</sup> This decision reflected not only the vigour with which Churchill promoted the plan, but also the Council's despondency at the human cost of the war thus far, and the earnest desire of all to find less bloody and more effective operations elsewhere. By 7<sup>th</sup> January, however, Churchill's mercurial mind had already shifted to another plane. If Fisher had been stalling for time, his plan worked. The problem was that it had led to a new situation that Fisher did not want either.

Churchill had lost interest in turning the Northern Flank of the naval war, and had instead turned his mind to what appeared to be an easier victory against Turkey, particularly when that victory might presage a transformation of the Allied position not simply in the Balkans, but in Eastern Europe as a whole. Such an interpretation would tie in with Oliver's comment that 'when the Dardanelles project came along ... it took the old battleships out of the North Sea picture.'<sup>49</sup> The pace of interest by Churchill in the capture of a North Sea base certainly abated from mid-January 1915 onwards, but Oliver was not quite right in suggesting that it was swept away entirely. At the War Council meeting of 28<sup>th</sup> January 1915, Churchill said that new monitors would be available from May onwards which would be used firstly for the attack on a forward base and secondly for a further action in the Baltic.<sup>50</sup> This was possibly a means by which he hoped to retain the support of Fisher who was himself increasingly concerned with the emerging Dardanelles operation. Fisher likewise agreed to let Wilson look over the plans (perhaps in the knowledge that Wilson was both obstinate and opposed to the operation), adding that any such operation had to wait until May.<sup>51</sup>

Churchill's mind had clearly not abandoned the Baltic or Borkum, but he now saw them as subsequent operations to plans he was formulating for the assault on the Dardanelles. He did, for instance, instruct Oliver, who passed the work over to Richmond, to look into the use of HMS *Queen Elizabeth* and other fast capital ships in the Baltic once they were free from the Mediterranean. Richmond condemned the idea.<sup>52</sup> This episode suggests, however, that it was the lure of the Dardanelles that caused Churchill to lose interest in his northern operations, rather than the hostile attitude of the War Staff, although it cannot be measured how far this was the case, or

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<sup>48</sup> Minutes of War Council, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1915, *Ibid.*, 391-96.

<sup>49</sup> James, *Great Seaman*, 138.

<sup>50</sup> War Council Minutes, 28<sup>th</sup> January 1915, *Churchill*, vol. 3, comp. i, 463 – 70.

<sup>51</sup> Fisher to Churchill, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1915, *FGDN*, vol. iii, 162.

<sup>52</sup> Marder, *Portrait*, 6<sup>th</sup> March 1915, 145.

indeed whether he saw the Dardanelles as an easy operation which would get him out of the impasse that his Borkum and Baltic plans had by then reached. It was certainly the case that he returned to the Borkum strategy once his initial Dardanelles policy had gone awry.

On 18<sup>th</sup> March 1915 the attempt to reduce the Turkish forts at the Dardanelles by naval gunfire alone went disastrously wrong, with the loss of several old capital ships.<sup>53</sup> The operation as planned was abandoned and preparations for a combined operation were begun whereby the Army was to be landed on the Gallipoli Peninsula on 25<sup>th</sup> April. It was during this interlude, perhaps as a way of creating a new momentum, that Churchill outlined fresh plans for the occupation of Borkum after 25<sup>th</sup> May, when the new monitors would be ready.<sup>54</sup> Churchill was clearly running ahead of himself in planning his next operation, particularly when his last one on 18<sup>th</sup> March had gone so badly wrong. There may, however, be a further reason why Borkum reappeared so sharply at that particular moment. On 22<sup>nd</sup> March Lieut. Erskine Childers, RNVR, of HMS *Ben-my-Crae* wrote to the Admiralty.<sup>55</sup> Childers, the author of the 1903 invasion novel, *The Riddle of the Sands*, wrote to his friend Eddie Marsh, who also happened to be one of Churchill's secretaries.<sup>56</sup> In the letter he outlined the possibilities which would follow from the seizure of Borkum and Juist, and its use as a forward base for an invasion of northern Germany. This would be connected with a 'general advance' of the Allied armies from Flanders. Using his own knowledge of the area, he analysed the problems of such a campaign, but dismissed the system of coastal dykes which would slow up any British military movement inland. It was again surprising how often naval schemes took on a momentum of their own, and how judgements about them became clouded by the expectation of easy success. It was even more surprising as it was Childers' very own local knowledge of the Frisian coastline which his commander on the *Ben-my-Crae* commented upon in his covering letter.<sup>57</sup> Conversely only a couple of months earlier Lloyd George had considered that an invasion of northern Germany would be very difficult for reasons that Churchill dismissed.<sup>58</sup> It was, however, appropriate that one of Churchill's final

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<sup>53</sup> Erikson, E., 'One More Push: Forcing the Dardanelles in March 1915', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 24:3, 2001, 158-176.

<sup>54</sup> Churchill Memorandum, 24<sup>th</sup> March 1915, *Churchill, vol. 3, comp vol. i*, 732 – 8.

<sup>55</sup> Childers to Marsh, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1915. ADM 137/2712.

<sup>56</sup> Childers, E., *The Riddle of the Sands*, London, 1903.

<sup>57</sup> Cecil L'Estrange-Malone to Marsh, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1915. ADM 137/2712.

<sup>58</sup> Lloyd George to Asquith, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1914, *Churchill, vol. 3, comp. i*, 350 – 56.



flourishes as First Lord was to attempt to enact a scheme promoted by the author of an Edwardian bestseller.

Churchill's 24<sup>th</sup> March 1915 memorandum was a remarkable document, and like so many of those associated with the Dardanelles or Borkum, filled with assertions as to what the enemy would do in response to an attack or, in this case, whether Denmark would join the Allies. The response of the War Staff and Fisher came a few days later. Jackson noted that the plan involved an attack 'far removed from that of the main armies on the continent' and that an attack on Borkum should not be 'lightly attempted unless its success will materially assist the main plan of campaign, as it must ensure considerable losses'.<sup>59</sup> If the attack led to a sortie by the HSF and its destruction, then the attempt would be worth it. But if the attack was only a diversion, 'I do not consider it justifiable'. He added that the strategic situation would be made a lot worse if any action brought Holland into the war against Britain. It would also need the co-operation of the military (of which so far there had been none), and that the proposal could be considered to be worth it if the destruction of Wilhelmshaven was effected. The overall tone was negative.

This did not stop Churchill, who pencilled in the operation for May 1915. The decision to attack in May had one unforeseen consequence in that ensured that it would never be implemented. For by then the Admiralty had found itself bogged down in the combined operations at Gallipoli, and the chief propagator of the scheme, Winston Churchill, had resigned, along with Fisher. The new First Lord, Arthur Balfour, was an altogether more cautious individual, and Borkum was quietly shelved. Overall the War Staff had acted consistently in attempting to block Churchill's plans for Borkum and Sylt. As has been said before, their function was only advisory, but the fact that this operation was avoided for 6 months until Churchill was out of office, was at least in part a result of their regular doses of cold reality. If nothing else, they played the role of 'night watchman' with considerable skill.

Conspicuous by its absence in the Admiralty files of the National Archives was mention of Lord Fisher's famous Baltic plan. Mackay argued that much of this was retrospectively invented as part of Fisher's own defence before the Dardanelles

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<sup>59</sup> Jackson to Fisher, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1915. ADM 137/452.

Inquiry in 1916.<sup>60</sup> Mackay suggested that the Baltic Plan, which Fisher published in his *Records*, was written by Sir Julian Corbett and sent to Fisher in mid-December 1914.<sup>61</sup> The huge order for 600 ships which Fisher was supposed to have placed after a meeting on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, similarly disappeared when it became apparent that these orders were in fact placed over a period of about five months.<sup>62</sup> The diary of Capt. Philip Dumas, however, contradicted this, and stated that Fisher did initiate one initial huge building programme.<sup>63</sup> Mackay suggested that most of these ships were intended for the Grand Fleet, although Dumas again recorded a conversation with Fisher about a Baltic operation, which again suggests that Fisher took the plan seriously.<sup>64</sup> As to the intentions for the ship programme that was commissioned, it is true that one of the constants of Jellicoe's correspondence throughout the period was his repeated demand for more ships. Oliver also claimed that Churchill often authorised these building programmes simply to keep his First Sea Lord happy.<sup>65</sup> But the evidence suggests that there was more to Fisher's actions than simply doing the same for Jellicoe. For example, if the ships were intended merely for the North Sea, it made no sense that Fisher should want shallow draught ships, but he repeatedly made much of this feature of their design.<sup>66</sup>

To understand the reason why, it is necessary to look at the personality of the First Sea Lord himself. Fisher believed that Plans should be kept in the First Sea Lord's head.<sup>67</sup> There were no formal Baltic Plans in the Admiralty papers because Fisher did not ask anyone to draw them up. Like his 'wise old owl', Fisher kept his mouth (largely) shut.<sup>68</sup> It would only have been necessary to draw up detailed plans when his great armada was finally ready, and that never happened because he was out of office by then. It is clear from the correspondence that passed between Fisher and Churchill that a Baltic Operation had been discussed, and that Churchill was in favour of such an operation.<sup>69</sup> For Fisher, a Borkum operation was not necessary, despite the

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<sup>60</sup> Mackay, *Fisher*, 459 – 76.

<sup>61</sup> Lord Fisher of Kilverstone, *Records*, London 1919, 217 – 222.

<sup>62</sup> Mackay, *Fisher*, 467.

<sup>63</sup> Dumas diary, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1914. IWM, PP/MCR/96 Reel 4.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 17<sup>th</sup> November 1914. IWM, PP/MCR/96 Reel 4.

<sup>65</sup> James, *Great Seaman*, 140.

<sup>66</sup> Fisher to Jellicoe, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1915, *FGDN*, vol. iii, 145; Fisher to Churchill, 25<sup>th</sup> January 1915, *ibid.*, 145.

<sup>67</sup> Fisher, *Memories*, 102 – 112.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>69</sup> Churchill to Fisher, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1914, *Churchill*, vol. 3, comp. i, 325 – 6.

occasional positive sounds he made about it.<sup>70</sup> Silence was his creed. He kept it over the Dardanelles Campaign, saying nothing at meetings of the War Council, and he kept it over the Baltic. He did not even discuss it with the Admiralty Board itself. The evidence for this is contained in a letter signed by all the Sea Lords to Fisher on 8<sup>th</sup> April 1915. Here they expressed their concerns about the direction of naval strategy, adding, 'we are postponing battleship completion for the sake of arming a number of small craft whose actual proposed use we are not familiar with, though obviously it must be for something totally unconnected with the bedrock policy of maintaining the crushing superiority of the Grand Fleet.'<sup>71</sup> They were also concerned by the construction of 15" monitors, again for a use that had not been specified. This is significant evidence for the assertion that while the war had amplified the power of the First Sea Lord, it had reduced that of the Board as a whole.<sup>72</sup> In his reply Fisher made no reference to these points.<sup>73</sup> Further evidence for the existence of these plans lay in the fact that the Baltic also figured as a recurring motif throughout Fisher's own career, and he believed that action there could have a decisive effect.<sup>74</sup>

As has been said elsewhere, 'Fisher rarely explained his strategic views in writing.'<sup>75</sup> He only divulged his opinions to those whom he trusted and respected, such as Corbett, and that did not include the War Staff. Indeed, it might also be said that the opposite was true of Fisher's recorded utterances; he should be treated with more suspicion when he was writing something, than when he was keeping silent. Borkum for him was of little interest, and in any case he suggested that mines should be used to 'bottle up' the Germans on several occasions.<sup>76</sup> He thought the war could be won in the Baltic.

Inevitably the evidence for such a plan is fragmentary, but the pieces do appear to make a comprehensible picture. Firstly Fisher sent a squadron into the Baltic in 1905 during the Moroccan Crisis, telling Corbett, 'Our drill ground should be our battle ground'.<sup>77</sup> Secondly, in his Memorandum, 'On the possibility of Using our Command of the Sea to Influence More Drastically the Military Situation on the

<sup>70</sup> Fisher to Churchill, 4<sup>th</sup> January 1915, *FGDN*, vol. iii. 122.

<sup>71</sup> Admiralty to Fisher, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1915. FISR 1/19/971.

<sup>72</sup> Murray, O., 'The Admiralty, X. The Naval Staff', *Mariner's Mirror* 25/3, 1939, 334-5.

<sup>73</sup> Fisher to Admiralty, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1915, *FGDN*, vol. iii. 190-1.

<sup>74</sup> Lambert, "'This Is All We Want', *Passim*.

<sup>75</sup> Lambert, 'Flotilla Defence', *JMH* 59, 639.

<sup>76</sup> Fisher to John Leyland, 15<sup>th</sup> October 1914, *FGDN*, vol. iii. 63; Fisher to Churchill, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1915 *Churchill*, vol. 3, comp. i, 261-2.

<sup>77</sup> Fisher to Corbett, 28<sup>th</sup> July 1905, *FGDN*, vol. ii, 63.

Continent', he used historical comparisons with the Seven Years' War, on which his good friend Julian Corbett had written.<sup>78</sup> He made much of the 'fatal stroke of 1761' which was delivered against Prussia on her coast. He also drew comparisons with naval actions against Denmark in 1806 and Russia in 1854. He believed that the Royal Navy could deliver a *coup de main* against Germany in the Baltic. This would not necessarily involve landing troops on the coast. For by 1914 he believed that a blow would be delivered not necessarily against the German military, but against her civilians. He had been won over to the 'economist' view that Germany was now so dependent on imports of food and raw materials, that the breaking of those links both in the North Sea and the Baltic would be sufficient to bring Germany to her knees, or at least cause the economic crisis which a full blockade in 1914 had been intended to create.<sup>79</sup> What he needed were fast, heavily armed ships with shallow drafts which could operate in the sheltered waters of the Baltic. And that was what he built.<sup>80</sup> He also asked for details as to tidal changes in the Baltic.<sup>81</sup> At no point did he discuss this with the War Staff. As will be shown later, when Balfour eventually asked them their views, they were unenthusiastic.

The reason why Fisher was not around to pursue this policy in late 1915 or 1916 was that he had resigned following the unsuccessful attempt to force the Dardanelles and the political turmoil that had followed this. Given that this episode also led to Churchill's resignation, it was one of the decisive moments of the war. The inception of the Dardanelles operation was also the culmination of Churchill's unorthodox managerial methods, and revealed many flaws in naval administration. One of these was the degree to which Churchill only used people when he wanted a particular reply. If they came up with the 'wrong' answer he simply ignored them.

In respect of the Dardanelles operation this meant he used, and then largely ignored, Jackson, as his principal advisor. As such Jackson represented the 'War Staff

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<sup>78</sup> Fisher Memorandum, 'On the possibility of Using our Command of the Sea to Influence More Drastically the Military Situation on the Continent', January 1915, FISR 5/24. Fisher claimed he wrote it on Trafalgar Day 1914, although he only gave it to Asquith on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1915, FISR 5/25.

<sup>79</sup> Offer, *First World War*, in particular Part 3 (chapters 15-21).

<sup>80</sup> Fisher to Churchill, 25<sup>th</sup> January 1915. FISR 1/18/918; D'Eynecourt to Fisher, 25<sup>th</sup> January 1915. FISR 1/18/919.

<sup>81</sup> Anon., n.d. [Fisher Papers inventory dates it to December 1914; Mackay to 1916], 'The Rise and Fall of Water in the Baltic'. FISR 5/22.

view' on the proposed attack on the Dardanelles. According to his testimony to the Dardanelles Commission, Jackson was approached by Sturdee, the COS, and asked to look over, even brush down, several ideas which were current for action against outer forts of the Dardanelles.<sup>82</sup> This was not particularly unusual as Jackson had no formal duties on the Staff and had previously worked on operations against outlying German colonial possessions in 1914. Jackson could not remember the exact date when this informal meeting occurred, but it cannot have been later than early November, as this was when Sturdee was removed from office by Fisher after the disaster at Coronel and when Turkey joined the war.<sup>83</sup> The first sign of Jackson's involvement with the Dardanelles planning was a telegram which bore his name in late November 1914.<sup>84</sup> This chance request, however, resulted in Jackson and not the COS taking the primary seat in the consultations which occurred in early 1915 about the prospects of a naval attack on the Dardanelles. It was thus Jackson who became one of the chief naval officers cited by Churchill when he telegraphed to VA Sir Sackville Carden, the VACEMS, that 'high authorities' concurred in Carden's initial plan. This was a gross distortion of the facts, as Jackson tried to make clear when he testified before the Dardanelles Commission.

Jackson claimed that he dropped the issue of an attack against the Dardanelles until approached by Churchill probably in very early January 1915, and asked to look again at the issue more fully. As a result he produced a Memorandum on 5<sup>th</sup> January.<sup>85</sup> Gilbert cited only part of the document, claiming that the rest of it could not be found in the National Archives, or Jackson Papers, but two copies exist in the former and have been referred to in later works on the Dardanelles.<sup>86</sup> Jackson circulated the Memorandum to Oliver and Churchill. It appears that no third copy was sent to the First Sea Lord, although on the cover of one of the copies Churchill recorded that Fisher had seen it.<sup>87</sup> There was, however, no minute on it from Fisher.

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<sup>82</sup> Proceedings of the Dardanelles Commission, question 2046. ADM 116/1437B.

<sup>83</sup> Richmond Diary, 4th November 1914. RIC/1/11.

<sup>84</sup> Jackson to FO, 25<sup>th</sup> November 1914, 'Question of Blockade of Dardanelles and Turkish Ports'. ADM 137/881.

<sup>85</sup> Jackson Memorandum, 5th January 1915, 'Note on forcing the passage of the Dardanelles and Bosphorus by the Allied Fleets, in order to destroy the Turko-German Squadron, and threaten Constantinople without military co-operation'. ADM 137/1089 & 137/96.

<sup>86</sup> Churchill, *vol. 3 comp i*, 376-7; Halpern, *Naval War*, 60; Miller, G., *Straits. British policy towards the Ottoman Empire and the origins of the Dardanelles Campaign*, Hull, 1997, 366-67. Interestingly enough each author cites the two different locations for the Memorandum: Halpern, ADM 137/1089 and Miller, ADM 137/96.

<sup>87</sup> Jackson Memorandum, 'Note on forcing...'. ADM 137/1089.

In it Jackson stressed that the naval force sent would need to be big so that, should it reach Constantinople and engage the Turko-German Fleet, it would still possess a sufficient strength not only to destroy the enemy fleet, but also dominate Constantinople. This would be despite the prospect of considerable losses he expected in forcing the Dardanelles. Throughout Jackson struck a very cautious, even negative, tone:

Assuming the enemy squadron [is] destroyed & the batteries rushed, they [the Allied ships] would be open to the fire of the field artillery and infantry, and to torpedo attack at night, with no store ships with ammunition, and no retreat without re-engaging the shore batteries, unless these had been destroyed when forcing the passage.

Though they might dominate the city and inflict enormous damage, their position would not be an enviable one, *unless there was a large military force to occupy the town.*

In paragraph three he continued in the same cautious vein:

Strategically, such a diversion would only be carried out when the object to be gained was commensurate with the loss the Fleet would sustain in forcing the passage.

The actual capture of Constantinople would be worth a considerable loss but *its bombardment alone would not greatly affect the distant military operations; and even if it surrendered, it could not be occupied and held without troops*, and would probably result in indiscriminate massacres.<sup>88</sup>

These last comments are significant, and go to the heart of the whole operation, because they dealt with what the British hoped to achieve by such an operation. Reading either the minutes of the meetings of the War Council, or many of the Memoranda which were circulating at the start of 1915, it is hard not to conclude that many of the opinions lacked a sense of reality.<sup>89</sup> It was believed by many that the Turks were a weak and half-hearted enemy. The exploits of the likes of the cruiser HMS *Doris* in November 1914 and the feeble showing by Turkey in the recent Balkan Wars both suggested that this was an empire that was incapable of defending itself.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> My Italics.

<sup>89</sup> Minutes of War Council, 13th January 1915. CAB 22/1; See also Hankey Memorandum, 28th December, 1914 in *Churchill, vol. 3, comp. 1*, 339 - 343; and Lloyd George Memorandum, 31st December, 1914 in *ibid.*, 350 - 356; Erikson, 'One More Push', 159.

<sup>90</sup> Corbett, *Naval Operations. vol. ii*, 75-76.

But from this starting point vast, increasingly speculative, prospects emerged, which seemed so bright and alluring in comparison to the dreadful and unending slogging match which was devouring British Divisions on the Western Front. Central to the operation were two issues: firstly whether a Fleet alone could capture Constantinople. Jackson suggested that this was unlikely. And secondly whether there would be a significant 'domino effect' in the Balkans and beyond from this event. Again, Jackson suggested that this too was unlikely. It was not necessarily the case that the fall of a capital would lead to a sudden military breakthrough, particularly a capital where the attackers were not sure that they would be able to stay close-by for long.

The message of the first half of the memorandum was clear. But the latter part was also inconsistent, a probable result of the tight brief that the politically minded Churchill had given Jackson in the first place, as he outlined a possible method of attack, despite his earlier considerable reservations. This inconsistency is open to criticism, in that it could be argued that Jackson should have been more explicit in his words of warning. It should be remembered that he was not a fresh-faced individual, or new to the Admiralty and to Churchill's methods. He had been COS in the period immediately before war broke out, and was an experienced Admiralty man. The second half of his paper was really what Churchill would have been looking for, an outline as to how the Royal Navy could attempt to force the passage of the Dardanelles. The tone was hardly enthusiastic, and Jackson wrote that 'several ships must sustain severe injuries from gun fire alone' and 'the minesweepers will probably all be sunk'. His conclusions were hardly cheering either. In terms of losses he expected 6 of the 8 battleships to be '*hors de combat*' and the other two to be severely damaged. He finally warned against the prospect of arriving in the Sea of Marmora with depleted magazines and damaged armour.

This Memorandum was written on January 5th. On the following day Churchill telegraphed to Admiral Carden in the Aegean that 'high authorities' concurred in his plan. This plan had been broadly similar to the second section of Jackson's memorandum, but Churchill remained vague as to the identities of his 'high authorities'.<sup>91</sup> Carden was not told, and must have presumed that it included all the key members of the War Group. Carden would also have been aware that the Admiralty was seeking to take a more central role in controlling fleet actions, and so

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<sup>91</sup> Churchill to Carden, 6th January 1915. ADM 137/96.

would have expected them to have a fuller picture of the situation than he had. Churchill explained the composition and role of this Group in his Dardanelles Commission evidence.<sup>92</sup> It originally included Churchill, the First and Second Sea Lords, the COS and the Secretary to the Board, but when Fisher became First Sea Lord, the Second Sea Lord ceased to attend and his position was taken by Wilson.

Carden's belief, however, that the 'high authorities' to which Churchill had alluded in his January 6th telegram included both the First Sea Lord and the Senior Staff Officer attached to the Dardanelles question was incorrect. The War Staff Group had not been formally consulted and Jackson had not been keen. He said so at some length to the Dardanelles Commission in 1916.<sup>93</sup> Although by then it was clear that the Dardanelles operation had turned into an expensive fiasco, and he may have been tempted to rewrite aspects of his own involvement in the scheme, particularly as the nature of record keeping at the Admiralty was often informal and incomplete.

Jackson, for example, stressed that he had not favoured the Dardanelles operation, and preferred to support a campaign either against Alexandretta or in the Persian Gulf.<sup>94</sup> If we took the 5th January Memorandum as the basis of his opinions he was right to say that he favoured a 'Combined Operation' in that area if a campaign was to be launched, but some might question whether his claim to have written 'quite plainly' that a Fleet only action would not work was quite true.<sup>95</sup> It was, however, in looking at Churchill's testimony in relation to Jackson's Memorandum that serious problems arose. The principal weakness in Churchill's defence when related to the 5th January Memorandum was that it had not supported in a clear and unambiguous way the proposed attack on the Dardanelles, as Churchill's subsequent telegram suggested. Later Churchill claimed that he sent his 'high authorities concur' telegram of January 6th based merely on a verbal conversation with Jackson before the latter wrote his Memorandum. He claimed that he did not read Jackson's Memorandum for several days. He could thus claim that the decidedly slanted telegram of the 6th was not a distortion of the Staff view, as it was based on a verbal, and therefore unrecorded, assessment. But Jackson could not recall this conversation when asked about it by the Commission.

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<sup>92</sup> Proceedings of the Dardanelles Commission, question 1048. ADM 116/1437B.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, questions 2049 to 2056.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, questions 2049 & 2050.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, questions 2051 & 2075.



Miller argued that it 'beggars belief that Churchill waited some days before reading Jackson's document'.<sup>96</sup> This was quite correct. It not only beggared belief, it was not true. Miller quoted the copy of the Jackson Memorandum found in ADM 137/96, but there is a second copy in file ADM 137/1089 which he did not cite. This file contained the docket which had Churchill's minute on it. Not only that, but it was dated January 6th. In other words, Churchill, intentionally or not, lied to the Commission when he said that he had not seen the memorandum until several days later.<sup>97</sup> On it he wrote, 'Sir Arthur Wilson, This is a very interesting paper. The First Sea Lord has seen it. WSC 6.1' Wilson added, 'Seen. Concur with Sir H. Jackson. AW 7.1.15'. It is, of course, possible that Churchill sent his Telegram before the Memorandum arrived that day, but to have done so when he knew that Jackson was preparing an important paper, should be considered as at best reckless. Also, if Fisher had seen the document on the 6<sup>th</sup> and Churchill knew he had, it almost certainly meant that Churchill had read it before he sent his afternoon telegram; Fisher started and finished work notoriously early!

It is hardly surprising that one of the principal areas of questioning put by the Dardanelles Commission was about the nature and structure of Admiralty administration. Fisher's voice in the whole Dardanelles expedition was quiet. He hardly spoke at meetings of the War Council, and rarely appeared to say much about the scheme back at the Admiralty, although he claimed later that he was the only naval officer who was consistently against the campaign.<sup>98</sup> In general, what the Dardanelles Commission discovered about this expedition in particular could be expanded into describing the Admiralty under Churchill in general. Churchill was ultimately responsible for all actions of his department. Fisher, however, was the serving officer in charge of the actions of the ships. As First Sea Lord he had a responsibility to block ideas that he saw as dangerous or unprofitable. From the outset in 1911, however, Churchill did not always use the correct channels for his voluminous out-pouring of paper.<sup>99</sup> This habit did not change over time, and the result was that the decision-making process was diffuse.

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<sup>96</sup> Miller, *Straits*, 367.

<sup>97</sup> *Dardanelles Commission*, questions 1391 and 1479. ADM 116/1437B. He repeated these views in *The World Crisis*, vol. ii, 100.

<sup>98</sup> Fisher, *Memories*, 67.

<sup>99</sup> Bridgeman Minute, 8th March 1912. ADM 116/3096; Richmond diary 8th November 1914. RIC/1/11.

Churchill himself, however, implicitly accepted the convention that he should operate through the First Sea Lord. When asked if the War Staff was aware of Fisher's views on the Dardanelles, that the expedition posed to the strength of the Grand Fleet, the First Lord replied; 'You must ask Lord Fisher that; they were working under him.' He therefore considered that there was a correct chain of command from Fisher through the COS to ordinary Staff Officers, yet he was himself quite happy to communicate directly to Staff Officers and effectively by-pass Fisher.

The role of the War Staff in the Dardanelles operation was varied. January 1915 was not the first time that the Staff had considered the whole issue of an attack on the Dardanelles. Records exist of a series of meetings that took place at the Admiralty on 1-3<sup>rd</sup> September 1914 at which War Office officials, including Sir Charles Callwell, the DMO, discussed the possibilities of operations in the Dardanelles.<sup>100</sup> Richmond was present at all three meetings, and at the second two so were Battenburg and Churchill. Callwell's Memorandum stressed the difficulty of a combined operation and Churchill cannot have been under any illusions as to this.<sup>101</sup> Marder stated that the War Staff did not seem to have been involved in the planning of the campaign.<sup>102</sup> But this was to take the structure of the War Staff, as outlined in the *Navy List* at face value. This is incorrect. It is clear from the *Admiralty Telephone Directories* that Jackson was a Staff member, and listed as one. From Jackson we have two Memoranda: the first on January 5th, and the second on January 15th. In the latter he continued to stress that the loss of vessels was to be expected and that at least 3,000 rounds from the primary armament would have to be expended, but the tone was less pessimistic.<sup>103</sup> A definitive reason for this change in emphasis cannot be given, but two factors were probably decisive in changing attitudes. Firstly, on January 13th the War Council had met. Those present included Churchill, Fisher and Wilson. The Dardanelles operation was discussed, and it was concluded that 'the Admiralty should also prepare for a naval expedition in February to bombard and take the Gallipoli Peninsula as its objective.'<sup>104</sup> In other words, by 15<sup>th</sup> January Jackson was following Government policy. Secondly the War Council meeting was followed

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<sup>100</sup> 'Question of Passage of the Straits'. Record of Meetings on September 1st, 2nd and 3rd 1914 by Colonel Talbot. WO 106/1463.

<sup>101</sup> Callwell Memorandum, 3rd September 1914. WO 106/1463 and ADM 137/96.

<sup>102</sup> Marder, *DNSF*, vol. ii, 205.

<sup>103</sup> Jackson Memorandum, 15<sup>th</sup> January 1915, 'Remarks on Vice Admiral Carden's proposals as to operations in the Dardanelles'. ADM 137/1089.

<sup>104</sup> War Council Minutes, 13th January 1915. CAB. 22/1.

by a minute from Churchill, which Fisher had also signed, asking Oliver to get a Staff Officer to develop Carden's general proposals.<sup>105</sup> Further evidence that Jackson and Oliver were in close agreement on the Dardanelles operation was that when, on 13<sup>th</sup> January, Jackson was briefly unwell Churchill asked Oliver to take over the drafting of orders.

Looking closer at the individual divisions of the War Staff, the TD had little immediately to do with the expedition. It had, however, through the DTD produced a paper relating to the nature of the blockade to be imposed on Turkey, and the likely impact on both neutral shipping and Turkish domestic politics, a paper typical of their information gathering function.<sup>106</sup> Webb believed that the blockade would be a useful weapon to turn the civilian Turkish population against the war, as it was believed that the Turkish military was requisitioning civilian food stocks. There were obvious parallels with the intended blockade against Germany, where the civilian population was also the target. Significantly, Webb was conscious that it was important not to antagonise the neutrals, particularly the Americans, another example of political considerations affecting naval strategy.

The ID's role in the Dardanelles operation was at two levels, one official, and the other quite irregular. Firstly, they were responsible for collating reports about the nature and development of Turkish defences within the Dardanelles. Using reports from a variety of sources, the Admiralty had a fairly accurate picture of the situation concerning the number and position of the mines, the speed of flow of the current through the channel, and the nature of some of the artillery defences on the shoreline. What they did not know in full was the extent of German improvements to these defences. They received several reports on the movement by train of German submarines through the, as yet, neutral states of Rumania and Bulgaria. They did not, correctly as it turned out, give much credence to these reports. ID also suggested operations that the Fleet could carry out once they had passed through the Narrows and got into the Sea of Marmora, although non were directed towards Constantinople itself.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Churchill to Oliver, 13th January 1915. CCC, Chartwell Papers, Char 3/74/42 – 44. Carden's plan of January 11th, 1915 in *Churchill, vol. 3 comp. i*, 405.

<sup>106</sup> Webb Memorandum 'As to Granting free passage for certain foodstuffs for civil population of Smyrna and Constantinople', 14th January 1915. ADM 137/1089.

<sup>107</sup> Hall to Oliver, 2nd March 1915, 'Suggestion for cutting the Ismid Railway, east of Constantinople'. ADM 137/1089, 211.

What have left no record in the official papers were the efforts made by Hall to buy the Turks out of the war. Without consulting any of his superiors, Hall opened up tentative negotiations with the Turks with the idea that he might be able to buy agreement to reopen the Dardanelles passage to Russia.<sup>108</sup> He gave his negotiators, George Eady, Edwin Whittall and Gerald Fitzmaurice, permission to offer as much as £4 million. It was only on 13<sup>th</sup> March, that Hall told Churchill and Fisher what he had been up to. Both were initially angry at Hall's unauthorised behaviour, and Hall was told that he could only offer £300,000. This was unlikely to be enough. What probably encouraged Churchill and Fisher to be less than enthusiastic about this plan were the contents of the telegram which they had just received. It suggested that the Turks were very low on ammunition, a view which finally encouraged Fisher to put his faith in the naval assault, and put the financial policy on one side.<sup>109</sup> After March 18th, however, with the failure of the Naval attack, the Turks became less amenable to British financial pressure. It is not likely that Hall's actions would have met with success: after all by the time that his informal contacts with Turkey began, the Turks were already bound by secret Treaty to Germany, and by then Britain and France had also made commitments to Russia concerning the fate of Constantinople.

It should, however, be added that most of the ID's work in relation to the Dardanelles operation was of a much more mundane nature. Putting the work of Room 40 on one side for a moment, the principal function of the Division was the synthesis of incoming intelligence reports on the readiness and extent of the Turkish defences.<sup>110</sup> There was no evidence that any one at ID was asked for an analysis of what they expected to happen in the city once the Fleet managed to get through to Constantinople. The impression was, however, that their expectations were much the same as those in the War Council. For example, Hall produced a memorandum recommending the cutting of the Ismid railway. One reason for this, apart from cutting off troop reinforcements, was the 'moral effect on the state of affairs in

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<sup>108</sup> Draft C of Strauss's biography of Hall, Chapter 7, 'Lord Fisher and Mr Churchill', 5 – 12. Hall Papers 3/5; James, *Eyes of the Navy*, 59-65; Beesly, *Room 40*, 79-83; Miller, *Straits*, 470 - 473

<sup>109</sup> Miller, *Straits*, 472.

<sup>110</sup> Col. Cunliffe Owen to FO, 'Recent Turkish Naval and Military Preparations', forwarded to Admiralty, 15th October 1914. Initialled by Hall 21st December 1914. ADM 137/881; Telegram from A. S. Malta to Admiralty, 21st December 1914, ADM 137/96; Information on Dardanelles gained from SS *Wallace*, 25th October 1914, ADM 137/881; Charts of this voyage are in ADM 137/901; Mr. Palmer, late Vice-Consul at Dardanelles, to Admiralty, 22nd of November 1914. ADM 137/881; 'Defences of the Dardanelles', Russian Report sent via British Minister in Athens to Admiralty, received 22nd February 1915. ADM 137/1089.

Constantinople'.<sup>111</sup> It was interesting to note that at the end of the memorandum Hall wrote, 'Attached are some plans which might be of assistance to a fleet bombarding Constantinople'. Underneath it Oliver wrote 'Admiral Carden has already been given orders about destroying the railway & road. It is not intended to bombard Constantinople.'

It is pertinent to ask, at this point, how the Navy thought that it was going to get the Turkish capital to surrender given that in early March they had no troops ready to occupy the city and no plans to shell it either. It was not clear what in fact was going to induce the Turks to throw the towel into the Golden Horn beyond the 'moral' effect occasioned by the arrival of some old damaged British battleships. Again, the only explanation can be that afforded by the example of HMS *Doris*, that the mere presence of British battleships would be sufficient to get Turkish compliance with their wishes.

One of the central lines of enquiry of the Dardanelles Commission was to understand the decision-making system that existed at the Admiralty during the Churchill-Fisher era. It became increasingly clear to the Commissioners that, despite Churchill's protestations to the contrary, 'correct channels' were not used. In effect what really happened was that a triangle of communication was created between Churchill, Jackson and Carden. Fisher was largely ignored. The events of January 5-6th illustrated this well. Having spoken to Jackson on the 5th, and apparently got a verbal statement from him about the scheme, Churchill telegraphed Carden the following day. This telegram was highly misleading. What in effect Churchill was doing was selectively quoting from the opinions of his Staff Officers and others to give Carden a highly coloured version of events. Carden could not have known what was going on in London, and so was encouraged to present ideas that many senior officers did not really support. The fact that Churchill was in effect 'shorting the system' greatly increased his power, and diminished that of others, such as Fisher, who was not convinced. Added to this Churchill was able to present to the War Council a distorted view of the prospects for success. It should, however, be noted that Fisher here seriously failed in his responsibility to create a service 'counter-balance' to the First

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<sup>111</sup> Jackson to Oliver, 2nd March 1915. ADM 137/1089.

Lord's enthusiasm. But the Dardanelles Operation also revealed serious weaknesses in the control that the War Council exercised over military and naval operations.

Hankey's records of the 13<sup>th</sup> January War Council meeting, however, show that most of its members were only too happy to go along with the scheme, particularly when there seemed such a strong prospect of success, as set against the gloomy prognostications for events on either the Eastern or Western Fronts. But here again there was another problem. At no point did either the War Council or the Admiralty consider the question of what would happen after the Navy got through to the Sea of Marmora. A reply by Jackson to Churchill in early March 1915 was telling.<sup>112</sup> In it Jackson made the following concluding remarks: 'It may be remarked that the Bosphorus is the third stage of the proceedings, the first is now in operation; the second, and perhaps most important (if the first is successful) is the action to be taken by the Allied forces at Constantinople, *the policy of which, it is suggested, should be outlined without delay*, so that detailed instructions may be prepared for issue to those conducting operations.'<sup>113</sup> It was not.

This was a major failing, but one in which a number of key players were involved. No one seriously questioned the belief that Constantinople would fall, and that this would knock Turkey out of the War. Kitchener, sitting round the table at the War Council, after all, only had to cast his own mind back to 1900 to find an answer. In that year Pretoria fell to the British, thus apparently signalling the end of the Second Boer War. But the fighting dragged on for another two years, with ever more bitter tactics being used to subdue the few remaining irregular Boer forces. Going back to 1805 the casual historian might have cast a glance beyond Trafalgar and noted that Napoleon arrived in Vienna before he fought Austerlitz in December. The Austrians continued to fight after their own capital had fallen. The Moscow Campaign of 1812 was in some respects the best analogy, although Moscow was not the capital. It was a campaign in which the Russian policy of playing for time met with considerable success. The weakened British squadron which would find itself off Constantinople might well have met the same fate as the *Grande Armée*: the 'Retreat from Constantinople' through the Narrows could well have been a disaster, especially for any poorly armoured and unarmed supply ships.

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<sup>112</sup> Jackson to Churchill, 2nd March 1915. ADM 137/1089.

<sup>113</sup> My italics.

Against these, there was a more favourable comparison from 1806: Jena, Berlin and Peace! It was true that people rarely learnt from history, or used the wrong examples, but at least it might have encouraged greater critical thinking, and given some at the War Staff the strength to challenge Churchill more openly that what he was proposing, as it stood, was not necessarily a good idea. Incidentally, this should also have been the function of the War Council.

There was therefore a rather more complex situation than might at first have been suspected. The War Staff did have a role to play in the planning of the Dardanelles Campaign, but was hampered in its deliberations not by the weakness of the officers involved, but through a failure of the structure which the First Lord had himself created. In giving the Staff no executive authority, and then in acting in his own unorthodox manner, Churchill pushed through a decision which did not have the support of the Staff or the First Sea Lord. He then used the lack of contact that Carden had with events back in London to put pressure on him to accept what he, Churchill, wanted, remembering that many station commanders now believed that it was only in London that the full picture of the naval war was fully understood. Added to this the War Council failed adequately to consider the issues at stake. For this Asquith himself must bear a majority of the blame, although Fisher also failed to mention his own doubts, particularly during the critical meeting of 13<sup>th</sup> January 1915. The result was that a half-baked enterprise was commenced which really had little in the way of Admiralty backing. Churchill then attempted to hide his own actions by rewriting the events of 5-6<sup>th</sup> January when several key decisions were taken. Such a situation was, ultimately, the result not simply of weak Staff Officers but of a flawed administrative system, and the failure of the naval assault on the Dardanelles was an accurate reflection of Jackson's bleak assessment. The War Staff may have been ineffectual in failing to prevent Churchill from embarking on this campaign, but its advice was hardly foolish. They failed because they had no executive authority to say no, and because Churchill was sufficiently unscrupulous to alter what he had heard. As Lord Selborne succinctly put it, 'Clever, but quite devoid of judgement' ... 'I don't think he has any principles'.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> 'Memorandum by Lord Selborne', 1916, in Boyce, G., (ed.), *The Crisis of British Unionism, Lord Selborne's Domestic Political Papers, 1885-1922*, London 1987, 187.

## Chapter 5. The Balfour-Jackson Regime, May 1915 - November 1916.

The May Crisis of 1915 led not only to the removal of Fisher and Churchill from the Admiralty, but the formation of a Coalition Government. With Churchill and Fisher gone the leadership of the Royal Navy took on a completely different complexion which has, traditionally, come in for a lot of criticism. While Balfour had 'more than a hint of laziness' about him, Jackson was a 'dour and somewhat pessimistic Yorkshireman' with 'not much dash and verve or reforming zeal'.<sup>1</sup> Professor Marder saw Balfour as 'lethargic' while Jackson lacked the 'three aces' of 'leadership capacity, fertile imagination (except in scientific matters), and talent for using the brains and ideas of juniors'.<sup>2</sup> This combination has led others to describe the Admiralty in this period as being 'comatose'.<sup>3</sup> Fisher thought that in Jackson's appointment all they could do was 'hope for the best'.<sup>4</sup> Yet while Balfour and Jackson could not have been more unlike their predecessors, it would be wrong to see this period as one of sterility. In fact, in one crucial area, the handling of the Grand Fleet, there were significant changes. Had these changes been handled better on the day, they would have led to a far more significant victory on 31<sup>st</sup> May 1916. Before then, however, there were other equally thorny and pressing problems, not the least of which was what was to be done at Gallipoli and how the blockade might be tightened further against Germany.

It is not necessary here to recount the main events of the Gallipoli campaign after Churchill's removal. The combined operations which aimed at securing the western bank of the Narrows, so that naval operations could safely resume, became hopelessly bogged down. No fleet got through to Constantinople. The question arose as to what the War Staff advised the First Sea Lord and First Lord to do in the light of this stalemate. On 10<sup>th</sup> May 1915 de Robeck repeated Hamilton's opinion that the army had been checked.<sup>5</sup> He added that 'from the vigour of the enemy's resistance it is improbable that the passage of the Fleet in the Marmora will be decisive & therefore it

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<sup>1</sup> Murfett, 'Jackson', *First Sea Lords*, 91-92.

<sup>2</sup> Marder, *FDSF*, vol. ii, 298-299.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon, *Rules*, 519; Roskill, *Beatty*, 140; Roskill, S., (ed.), *Royal Naval Air Service, 1908-18*, NRS, 1969, xiii.

<sup>4</sup> Fisher to Hankey, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1915. FISR 1/20/1037.

<sup>5</sup> de Robeck to Admiralty, 10<sup>th</sup> May 1915. FISR 1/19/989 & ADM 137/1146.



is equally probable that the Straits will be closed behind the Fleet.’ He also suggested that the arrival of the Fleet off Constantinople would not, in itself, prove decisive; a point, it should be remembered which had been made in January by Jackson. During the summer of 1915, however, both the Army and Navy seemed to be committed to a continuation of the campaign. A note by the WO in Walter Long’s papers dated 28<sup>th</sup> May 1915 considered both sides of the argument as to whether or not to carry on, and came to the conclusion that they should ‘push on and made as much progress as possible’.<sup>6</sup> Sir Arthur Wilson came to a similar conclusion in a paper dated 1<sup>st</sup> June 1915.<sup>7</sup> He opposed evacuation of the Peninsula on the grounds that to do so would prove to be a very difficult operation, and ‘withdrawal would cause more harm than to continue.’ He added that it would also be very damaging to British prestige, a reversal of the attitude adopted in January when the fact that the operation could be called off without undue propaganda losses was one of the beliefs that promoted the plan in the eyes of the War Council.<sup>8</sup>

Ten days later the Prime Minister received a set of questions about the Dardanelles operation from Lord Selborne. He passed them to Balfour who asked Oliver, Wilson and Jackson for their replies. The third question asked whether the Army was needed to support the Navy in its assault on Constantinople.<sup>9</sup> Oliver stated that the ‘the Fleet alone could not attack this undefended city.’<sup>10</sup> Wilson agreed, as did Jackson.<sup>11</sup> Overall, however, the tone was still optimistic, and the general belief was that the army would break through, and thus allow the Navy to operate in the Narrows. At this time the intelligence that the Admiralty was receiving about the condition of the Turks was mixed. On the one hand it seemed clear that a considerable amount of munitions was arriving in Constantinople from Germany, yet at the same time it was believed that the morale of the Turkish civilian population was falling as shortages of staples such as bread began to affect food prices. The large number of Turkish wounded, often only poorly treated, was also believed to be affecting

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<sup>6</sup> WO Minute, 28<sup>th</sup> May 1915. ADM 116/3623.

<sup>7</sup> Wilson Memorandum, ‘Dardanelles Operation. Review of position from Naval aspect’, 1<sup>st</sup> June 1915. ADM 137/1090.

<sup>8</sup> French, D., ‘The Dardanelles, Mecca and Kut: Prestige as a Factor in British Eastern Strategy, 1914-1916’, *War and Society* 5/1, 1987, 54.

<sup>9</sup> Selborne to Asquith, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1915. ADM 137/1090.

<sup>10</sup> Oliver Minute, 13<sup>th</sup> June 1915. ADM 137/1090.

<sup>11</sup> Wilson Minute, 14<sup>th</sup> June 1915; Jackson Minute 16<sup>th</sup> June 1915. ADM 137/1090.

morale.<sup>12</sup> It was also hoped that British submarine activity in the Narrows would cut off the flow of munitions to the Turkish forces on the Peninsula.<sup>13</sup>

By mid-August reconsideration was being given to the possibility of another naval assault on the Narrows.<sup>14</sup> Although Commodore Roger Keyes had always tended to be one of the more enthusiastic members of de Robeck's staff, his views were generally supported by another of his staff, RA Rosslyn Wemyss, who wrote of Keyes' paper, 'personally I am of the opinion that the results would be in favour of a shove.'<sup>15</sup> Back in London, however, the preferred option was for a combined operation. Evidence for this lies in a paper produced by the VA Sir Douglas Gamble, who had been brought onto the Admiralty Staff for 'special duties', one of which was commenting on Dardanelles papers.<sup>16</sup> Richmond clearly had no time for him.<sup>17</sup> In his paper, however, Gamble suggested that the Navy could get through to the Sea of Marmora, but that the Army might be necessary should the Turks decide not to surrender. In this Oliver concurred, as did Jackson and Balfour. Nothing, however, came of this. The principal reason was not hard to see; the army failed to capture the Peninsula. During October the international situation began to deteriorate. It was obvious that Serbia would not hold out much longer, and that Bulgaria was in the process of mobilising on the side of the Central Powers. The consequence of this was simple. A direct route to Constantinople from Berlin would be opened up, with the result that munitions would flow freely from one to the other. This would make the task of the British forces on Gallipoli that much harder. It was not clear what the next move should be.

Jackson dismissed the prospect of sending an army to Serbia via Greece as 'madness'.<sup>18</sup> He equally opposed the possibility of operation on the coasts of Asia Minor or Syria. This left only Gallipoli. He wrote, 'until quite recently this was considered as an object of primary importance – second only to the success of our forces on the Western Front. This opinion seems to have weakened with the action of Bulgaria. Why! I cannot conceive. It is of greater, not less importance than before.'

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<sup>12</sup> Richmond to Rear Admiral Commanding British Adriatic Squadron. 6<sup>th</sup> July 1915. ADM 137/1144.

<sup>13</sup> de Robeck to Balfour, 9<sup>th</sup> July 1915. ADM 137/1144.

<sup>14</sup> Keyes Memorandum, 'The Position in the Gallipoli Peninsula', 17<sup>th</sup> August 1915. ADM 137/1146.

<sup>15</sup> Wemyss Minute, n.d. [about 20<sup>th</sup> August 1915]. ADM 137/1146.

<sup>16</sup> Gamble Memorandum, 'Gallipoli - and After.' 17<sup>th</sup> August 1915. ADM 137/1144.

<sup>17</sup> Marder, *Portrait*, 11<sup>th</sup> October 1915, 195.

<sup>18</sup> Jackson Memorandum, 'Note on the Military Situation in the Eastern Mediterranean', 7<sup>th</sup> October 1915. ADM 137/1145.

The reasons for this view were that the policy was offensive, it was in an area where the British were established, with their forces concentrated against the enemy. He urged that there was no time to lose, and that the utmost effort had to be made to secure the Peninsula so that the Navy could then move into the Narrows. Oliver saw the manuscript, and added some pencil comments. Some were in the form of questions, which were then answered, in an unsigned minute which followed an internal Admiralty meeting.<sup>19</sup> This was presumably a preparatory one to the combined Admiralty-War Office conference that took place on 9<sup>th</sup> October. The answers stressed that the army must take the ridge of the Peninsula if the Navy was to have a chance of operating in the Narrows, and that it was believed that by October most of the ammunition reaching the Turkish forces came by rail and road, rather than by water. This latter point undermined one of the principal arguments for action being made by Churchill who at that time demanded greater submarine action in the Narrows and the Sea of Marmora.<sup>20</sup> One significance about these internal Admiralty memoranda was that, irrespective of what they said, they indicated that the Staff was working in a more cohesive manner than would have been possible in the Churchill-Fisher era.

The combined conference took place on 9<sup>th</sup> October 1915.<sup>21</sup> Both the WO and Admiralty were agreed that, 'the possibility of gaining more ground to make our position more tenable is attractive, and, *if the forces that might be used for it are not urgently required, or could not be used to better purpose elsewhere*, the Admiralty War Staff and the General Staff are agreed (subject, however, to further careful discussion with the Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Force) that this operation is more worthy of consideration than any of the other plans discussed in the preceding pages.' Attached to the memorandum were both the papers produced by Jackson on 7<sup>th</sup> October, and another produced by the CIGS on 5<sup>th</sup> October. Thus in early October both the War Office and the Admiralty were united in their desire to see the campaign continue. It is clear from Oliver's pencil jottings on the draft of Jackson's 7<sup>th</sup> October Memorandum that he agreed, and had been central to the pre-conference discussions.

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<sup>19</sup> Unsigned, 'Questions Raised at Meeting of War Office Committee', 7<sup>th</sup> October 1915. ADM 137/1145.

<sup>20</sup> Churchill Memorandum, 7<sup>th</sup> October 1915. WO 106/1539.

<sup>21</sup> Joint ADM-WO Memorandum, 'An appreciation of the Existing Situation in the Balkans and Dardanelles, with remarks as to the Relative Importance of this Situation in Regard to the General Conduct of the War', 9<sup>th</sup> October 1915. ADM 137/1145 & WO 106/708.

In the final months of 1915, however, the Admiralty lost its ability to influence events. Significantly within days of the joint WO-Admiralty conference, Sir Charles Monro replaced Sir Ian Hamilton as the C-in-C at Gallipoli. He was asked to review the situation. He was clearly under pressure from Kitchener to recommend evacuation, and after consultations at Gallipoli and a brief visit to the beaches there, this is what he did.

The response within the Navy was immediate, but varied. Both Keyes and Wemyss were keen for the Navy to 'have another go' at the Narrows, although it was clear from comments discussed above, that the War Staff did not favour such an action, particularly as the Army did not control the Gallipoli ridge. Instead, the War Staff wanted only a partial evacuation. In a memorandum of 18<sup>th</sup> November, Oliver pressed for the retention of Cape Helles.<sup>22</sup> The principal reason for this, as he explained, was that the loss of the tip of the Peninsula would make the blocking of the sea-lane from Constantinople to enemy submarines all but impossible. This would have a knock-on effect elsewhere and make the attempted closure of the Adriatic pointless, as the enemy would transfer their submarines to Turkey. If Cape Helles was held the enemy would be blocked in, and British submarines would still have the opportunity to pass through to operate in the Sea of Marmora.

The WO, however, marshalled its counter-arguments. Sir Archibald Murray, the CIGS, argued that to keep the whole Peninsula would involve the loss of some 140,000 men in 1916.<sup>23</sup> Since it was now believed that it would not be possible for the fleet to get through to Constantinople such a loss of life could not be justified. To keep Cape Helles alone was also rejected. Sir William Robertson, Murray's successor as CIGS, developed this argument further.<sup>24</sup> He said that to maintain a force at Cape Helles alone would place considerable strain not simply on the army, but on the Navy as well. He added that it might well not prove possible for the army to hold Helles alone. Therefore complete evacuation was the only action possible.

In the face of a united front by the General Staff, and with the recognition that the Navy alone would not be able to conduct the operation against the Turks successfully, and despite Keyes' protestations, the Admiralty Board was left with no

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<sup>22</sup> Oliver Memorandum, 'Naval Considerations as Regards the Evacuation or Retention of Cape Helles', 18<sup>th</sup> November 1915. ADM 116/1437B.

<sup>23</sup> Murray Memorandum, 'Summary of Arguments For and Against the Complete or Partial Evacuation of Gallipoli', 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1915. ADM 116/1437B.

<sup>24</sup> Robertson Memorandum, 'Memorandum by the Chief of the General Staff regarding the Question of the Remaining in occupation of Helles', 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1915. ADM 116/1437B.

alternative but to ignore Oliver's proposal and to concur with the full evacuation of the Peninsula. It is unnecessary to repeat the story of those events; save to say that it was probably one of the most successful operations of the entire war.

Applying some of the lessons of the Dardanelles operation led to ever more fixed views on what might be achieved by an operation into the Baltic. The prospects for starting greater offensive operations in the Baltic were considered at least twice in late 1915 and early 1916. The first assessment followed a submarine raid into the Baltic, and a submission by one of the submarine commanders.<sup>25</sup> In it Commander Laurence suggested that a force of light cruisers and destroyers should attack German mine-laying ships found in the southern end of the Belts. Balfour asked Jackson for his opinion. He in turn asked Oliver, who replied, 'The question of a raid on the Baltic has often been considered and it always necessitates the use of Destroyers, this brings in the fuel question and the endurance of destroyers is not sufficient for a raid through the Sound.' He concluded, 'a successful raid depends on surprise and the conditions are all against it, without surprise a raid can still be made but a bag will be missing. Neutral waters also provide a refuge for any vessels attacked to retreat into.'<sup>26</sup> Jackson agreed, 'The Baltic question has been frequently considered and always condemned. ... I think the Baltic is a trap to be best avoided.'<sup>27</sup>

There was, however, a problem with this analysis. One of the main reasons given by Oliver for the rejection of the scheme was that destroyers did not have the range to pass through the Belts and then move on from there (Rosyth to the Russian naval base of Reval was about 1,700 miles on a direct route). Yet the range of destroyers had increased considerably in the years before 1914.<sup>28</sup> But range also varied with speed. For example, an *Acasta* class destroyer produced in 1912-13 had a range of 2,750 miles at 15 knots, but this fell to only 600 miles at 29 knots.<sup>29</sup> The range of even a single class of destroyer could vary enormously with, for example,

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<sup>25</sup> Commander N. Laurence to Jackson, 18<sup>th</sup> September 1915, 'Reports of Officers commanding British S/M's in Baltic. E8, E9, E18, E19.' ADM 137/1247.

<sup>26</sup> Oliver to Jackson, 28<sup>th</sup> November 1915. ADM 137/1247.

<sup>27</sup> Jackson Minute, 29<sup>th</sup> November 1915. ADM 137/1247.

<sup>28</sup> Brown, D. K., *The Grand Fleet. Warship Design and Development 1906-1922*, Chatham Publishing, London, 1999; Le Fleming, H. M., *Warships of World War 1, 3. Destroyers (British and German)*, Ian Allan, London, [n.d.].

<sup>29</sup> Brown, *The Grand Fleet*. 109.

those of the M Class ranging from 2,100 miles for HMS *Mastiff* (Thorneycroft M Type) to 3,710 for HMS *Milne* (built by John Brown of Clydebank).<sup>30</sup> The M Class was a useful group to consider as they were mostly completed between 1914 and 1916 and would have been the type of ship that Fisher was ordering in his 'Great Programme'. Therefore, it would have been possible for such ships to get to Reval to refuel, although this would have meant that they could not travel at anything approaching full speed. This would have involved arriving with very low fuel stocks which captains were keen to avoid (they usually wanted to go no lower than half full).<sup>31</sup> Oliver did not go into the other principal objection to sending a subsidiary fleet into the Baltic, that it would have meant removing long-range destroyers from the Grand Fleet.

The 'ocean-going' destroyers could (just) have carried out the operation as suggested by Commander Laurence. It would not have been easy, but the claim made by Oliver that it was impossible was not quite true. He used it as an excuse because he did not like the plan. Once in the Baltic, Royal Navy ships could have operated out of the Russian base at Reval. Indeed the increased range of the smaller ships of the Royal Navy made unnecessary one of the principal reasons for Churchill's whole Borkum plan, which was that short-range ships would need a forward base to allow them to operate in the waters off the German coast.

The issue of operations in the Baltic again appeared in early 1916, in preparation for the melting of the ice there in the following months. Oliver observed that, 'Any serious attempt to force the Belts must be in the nature of a combined operation, for the reason that large forces whether naval or military cannot attack through narrow defiles, the flanks must be protected and the communications assured. This is one of the oldest elementary principles of war and when it has been neglected the result has usually been a disaster.'<sup>32</sup> The belief that this trenchant statement was, at least in part, influenced by the attempt to force the Dardanelles is supported by Oliver's final comment, 'At the very commencement the expedition will require to start in the greatest possible force, instead of commencing on the dribble system, because if the Germans suspect an expedition they will lose no time in invading Jutland and being first in the field.' Jackson 'fully concurred' in this view. The danger

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 110; Le Fleming, 28-34. 114 M Class destroyers, in their various Marks, were completed between 1914 and 1917.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>32</sup> Oliver to Jackson, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1916. ADM 137/1247.

of a 'stop-go' approach akin to that adopted at the Dardanelles just over a year before appeared to have been learned, albeit too late. Jellicoe was similarly unenthusiastic, describing any division of the Grand Fleet as 'suicidal'.<sup>33</sup> Balfour accepted these views, and the Baltic dropped from the naval agenda until 1918.

One of the factors influencing the decision not to enter the Baltic was the fear that the Germans would use such an operation as an excuse to invade Denmark. The neutrals played an important part in Staff deliberations, relating to the attempts to enforce the blockade of Germany. Such a slow policy met with frustration and anger at the Admiralty, particular as the FO and Boards of Trade and Agriculture did their best to minimise the impact the war would have on the movement of goods. Evidence for this antagonism and frustration can be found in a letter that Webb sent to Hankey in May 1915 when he asserted that, 'This is a war of extermination not one of platitudes about Business as Usual. The best way of protecting our trade is by beating the enemy. If we don't do that there won't be any trade to protect.'<sup>34</sup> The sense that not all departments were equally committed to the war can be found in a War Staff minute which attacked the attitude of one of the key men in defining the limits of the blockade, Lord Emmott, the Chairman of the War Trade Department,

It is unfortunate, that in the twelfth month of the War, the Chairman of the War Trade Department fails so entirely to grasp the fact that this country is fighting for its existence. Nothing could be more discouraging to those who are endeavouring to cut off Germany's Supplies and to hurt Germany industrially, than the proposals so gently and timidly submitted in the attached paper.

It would be waste of time to deal at any length with each of the individual cases mentioned in Lord Emmott's memorandum; one alone, the first in his memorandum – i.e. Lubricating Oil – will suffice to show how unfortunate his mental attitude is towards these important questions.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Jellicoe to Balfour, 19<sup>th</sup> January and 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1916. BL, Balfour Papers, Add. Mss. 49714.

<sup>34</sup> Webb to Hankey, 28<sup>th</sup> May 1915. ADM 137/2735.

<sup>35</sup> Emmott Memorandum, 7<sup>th</sup> July 1915; War Staff Minute, 12<sup>th</sup> July 1915. Both ADM 137/2872.

Webb saw an opportunity for greater pressure on the neutrals in the aftermath of the battle of Jutland.<sup>36</sup> In particular he wanted to target Holland and Denmark, and ration the likes of cattle feed and fertilizers, to prevent their re-export to Germany. The reply from Jellicoe's secretary at the Grand Fleet was enthusiastic, while that of the FO was hostile. Lord Robert Cecil, the Minister of Blockade at the FO, said that the statements by the Danish and Dutch governments which rejected British accusations of collusion with the Germans should be believed.<sup>37</sup>

One way of trying to iron out such disagreements was to have closer contact between government departments. But this was easier said than done. The war created a plethora of new committees and bureaucratic structures within which the Admiralty had to operate. Hankey had tried to make some sense of these when in March 1915 he produced a memorandum which listed some 30 new committees of which about ten had Admiralty representation.<sup>38</sup> To those both on the inside as well as on the outside, trying to follow the correct path through the system was not easy. For example, Jellicoe's secretary wrote to Webb in December 1914 asking,

We cannot quite make out the scope & powers of the unofficial coal committee. It seems to deal with oil as well as coal, & oil is dealt with by the Contraband Committee. Is the former in any way under the latter?

... Is any list of trade Committees published, I wonder, which states their functions?<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, one of the aspects of the war from the bureaucratic point of view was the degree to which these new structures encroached upon the traditional functions of the older ministries. These changes were then magnified by the gradual creation of Inter-Allied Committees towards the end of the War.

Early on, though, many of these committees were informal in their operations, with overlapping jurisdictions and unclear aims. Sir Edmond Slade acted as one of the key Admiralty officials, but there were several other important officials involved in negotiations, either with other departments, or more importantly with the neutral

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<sup>36</sup> Webb Memorandum, 'The Strengthening of the Blockade', 8<sup>th</sup> June 1916. ADM 137/2737.

<sup>37</sup> Weekes, V. to Webb, 24<sup>th</sup> June 1916; Cecil to Webb, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1916. ADM 137/2737.

<sup>38</sup> Hankey Memorandum, 'List of Committees appointed to consider Questions arising during the present War', March 1915. CAB 42/2/2.

<sup>39</sup> Weekes to Webb, 9<sup>th</sup> December 1914. ADM 137/2804.



governments themselves. One was Capt. Horace Longden, Webb's right hand man, who sat on the Contraband Committee at the FO. This met daily and was a central organ in the decisions as to what would be allowed through the blockade to the neutrals. It was significant that this body met at the FO rather than the Admiralty, and thus hindered a more vigorous prosecution of the economic war. The other key figure in the TD, certainly up to June 1916 when he left to join the Restriction of Enemy Supplies Department and become Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Blockade, was Commander Leverton Harris, RNVR MP. He chaired the Enemy Exports Committee from March 1915 until June 1916. It is not entirely clear when Harris joined the staff. The *Admiralty Digest*, and his service record claimed this happened in March 1915 but there is also evidence that he was already heavily involved, if not actively a part of it by October 1914.<sup>40</sup> This Committee sought any means possible to cut off Germany's exports. It was a job which was clearly suited to a man who had opposed the proposed Declaration of London in 1909, and was now not only heavily involved in this part of the blockade, but also took a central role in negotiating various rationing and purchasing agreements with the neutrals. Described as a man of 'insight and imaginative drive', as well as 'gentle, resolute and quiet', he was clearly greatly respected by all those who met him.<sup>41</sup> In addition, his connections with various important bodies, including Parliament, meant that when he met representatives of Lloyds he was able to do so 'in an entirely private capacity, and not as a representative of the Admiralty.'<sup>42</sup>

Clearly the hope with Admiralty representation on these Committees was that this would encourage the other members to take the tougher line with the neutrals and Germany than the FO wanted. This was not, however, always the case. The Admiralty sent Admiral Dudley de Chair to the FO to work with Lord Robert Cecil. de Chair had started the war organising the 10CS which had carried out the difficult task of inspecting neutral ships as they passed through the route to the North Sea around the north of Scotland. This was a command which de Chair had found taxing, but rewarding, and he did not want to give it up for an Admiralty posting.<sup>43</sup> The suspicion soon arose, however, that de Chair had 'gone native' once at the FO, and picked up

<sup>40</sup> Harris Minute, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1914. ADM 137/2805. Service record: ADM 337/117, 32.

<sup>41</sup> Ede, H., (updated by Brodie, M.), 'Sir Frederick Leverton Harris', *Oxford DNB*, vol. 25, 455-6.

<sup>42</sup> 'Record of a meeting between the Lloyds Committee and Mr Leverton Harris', 11<sup>th</sup> December 1914. ADM 137/2804.

<sup>43</sup> de Chair, D., *The Sea is Strong*, London, 1961, 218-220.

the habit of agreeing with the their view, although it should perhaps be added in de Chair's defence that in his autobiography he attacked the 'imbecile Foreign Office method of carrying on the War'.<sup>44</sup> These worries were expressed at the Admiralty in the closing days of 1916.<sup>45</sup> Although de Chair was expected to improve relations between the FO and the TD, as well as defending Admiralty interests, Webb suggested that de Chair was not a reliable figure for this role.<sup>46</sup> Criticisms were more explicitly made by Oswyn Murray, the Assistant Secretary to the Board of Admiralty, who wrote that, 'I think there is a general feeling that not so much advantage as was hoped for is being derived from Admiral de Chair's presence at the Foreign Office. ... Admiral de Chair was not put at the Foreign Office to acquaint the Admiralty with the Foreign Office point of view, but to give additional weight to the Admiralty point of view.'<sup>47</sup> Clearly de Chair had got caught up in the inter-ministerial rivalries that affected the development of the blockade against Germany, although once at the FO Balfour was keen to emphasise the FO's support for the Blockade policy.<sup>48</sup> Nonetheless, in April 1917 de Chair left the FO and joined the British War Mission to the United States.

Gradually, through various Orders in Council, the British tightened the pressure on Germany. Since almost any import could be construed as being of use to the German armed forces, it was entirely reasonable to stop such trade. This included materials which were being re-exported through the neutrals to Germany and the TD tried to measure the impact of the Blockade on Germany, an important part of its role. This was not easy, but tentative conclusions were already being drawn by mid-1915.<sup>49</sup> Leverton Harris believed that Germany's exports were about 10% of their 1913 levels, and as the OICs tightened, so they had had a significant effect on Germany's trade. In August 1914, he calculated, Germany exported \$34m worth of goods to the USA. This fell to \$12m in September as the war caused initial dislocation to trade, but rose to \$26m as Germany found ways around the restrictions. By April 1915, however, this had fallen to \$2m. This was largely done by trying to close down Germany's trade

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>45</sup> Jellicoe to Greene, 12<sup>th</sup> December 1916. ADM 137/2737.

<sup>46</sup> Greene to Jellicoe, 13<sup>th</sup> December 1916. ADM 137/2737; Webb to Jellicoe, [n.d. – December 1916]. ADM 137/2737.

<sup>47</sup> Murray to Greene, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1917. ADM 137/2737.

<sup>48</sup> Balfour to Carson, 27<sup>th</sup> March 1917. BL, Add. Mss. 49709.

<sup>49</sup> Harris Memorandum, 'Memorandum re German Trade in connection with British Order in Council of 11<sup>th</sup> March 1915', n.d. [July 1915]. ADM 137/2734.

routes through the neutrals through negotiating trade agreements. The prototype of many of these agreements was the Netherlands Oversea Trust (NOT).

Goods consigned to the Trust were guaranteed not to be on their way to Germany. It was very much in the interests of the Dutch to have an organisation like this as they were, largely, dependent upon the British keeping their sea-lanes open. The TD had little to do with the original creation of the NOT.<sup>50</sup> It was also evident that news of the Trust's existence was slow in getting around. In mid-January 1915, Webb received a letter from a shipper which included the following, 'In regard to consigning goods to the Netherlands Oversea Trust, we have never heard of this body and have no knowledge of its *modus operandi*, and shall be glad if you will be good enough to put us in the way of obtaining the necessary information.'<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, it became the basis of agreements with other neutrals, such as Denmark.<sup>52</sup>

Britain's blockade policy towards Germany was, however, more complicated than a simple ban on trade. It became increasingly clear that Britain could also use her own commercial muscle to influence policy in the neutrals so that there would be an indirect impact on Germany. For example, in deals brokered by the TD in June 1916, the British bought up supplies of Danish and Dutch food so that it could not be exported to Germany. They also tried to increase sales of British exports so as to supplant German goods in these markets. Both were seen as ways of breaking down the German economy by limiting her exports, and increasing her shortage of foreign currency. Thus, for example the TD was keen to block Germany out of the coal trade to Sweden, and by mid-1915 they believed that they had largely been successful.<sup>53</sup> The significance of these deliberations about Sweden was noted by Commander Fisher, 'This appears to be more than a mere trade question. It seriously affects policy.' The regulation of the coal trade with Sweden was seen as a way of keeping the pro-German parties in Sweden in check. Webb strongly supported the use of the 'coal lever', and wanted to expand its use across the whole of Scandinavia.<sup>54</sup> Fisher wanted a slightly different strategy, and suggested that the British might have even more success if pressure was put on one neutral in particular. His belief was that if the British banned their own coal trade with Holland, the Germans would be obliged to

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<sup>50</sup> Webb Minute, 21<sup>st</sup> December 1914. ADM 137/2806.

<sup>51</sup> Secretary, Cork Steam Ship Company to Webb, 18<sup>th</sup> January 1915. ADM 137/2805.

<sup>52</sup> Siney, *Allied Blockade*, 34-56.

<sup>53</sup> Fisher to Webb, n.d. [c. 13<sup>th</sup> August 1915]. ADM 137/2824

<sup>54</sup> Webb Minute, 24<sup>th</sup> December 1915. ADM 137/2824.

fill the gap. As Germany had insufficient coal reserves to supply Holland as well as fulfilling her commitments to the other neutrals, these would be left to be dominated by the British.<sup>55</sup>

Another aspect of the 'coal lever' was the use of 'Bunker Control'. The British dominated the market for the high quality coal that powered merchant ships. Other coal was of a lesser calorific rate, which meant that ships would need more of it to cover the same journey. What the British therefore did was to regulate which shipping lines would be given access to British coal. It proved highly effective in persuading more companies to avoid carrying goods which they believed could be taken to Germany.

In addition, various purchasing agreements were signed, particularly in 1916, which meant that the British tried to buy up as many neutral goods as possible, and thereby deny them to the enemy. Inevitably, however, it was impossible for the British to buy up all the surplus goods that the neutrals were producing, but Lieut. Frederick McCormick-Goodhart RNVR, at T.1 Section suggested that brief blockades while negotiations were going on could be an effective way to persuade the neutral governments to take a more hostile line against the Germans.<sup>56</sup> A good example of this was the action taken after the battle of Jutland when as a way of forcing the Dutch to sell their fish catches only to the British, the Navy rounded up all Dutch fishing boats found operating in restricted waters. The Dutch soon capitulated, as Leverton Harris foretold, and a monopoly agreement was signed in August 1916.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, by 1916, Webb was of the opinion that the time had arrived for a clearer statement to be made about British policy towards Germany. He felt that the various Orders in Council were hypocritical, couching as they did a blockade in legal terms. He argued that it would be more honest, and therefore less 'obnoxious' to the Americans if Britain simply abandoned the various Orders, and replaced them with a declaration of economic siege against Germany. This would end the distinction between various types of contraband, and thus make the lives of the inspecting crews that much easier. The onus, he felt, would be on all shippers to prove that their cargoes to the neutrals were innocent.<sup>58</sup> This suggestion was not taken up, and it was not until the USA

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<sup>55</sup> Fisher to Manisty, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1915. ADM 137/2824.

<sup>56</sup> F. McCormick-Goodhart Memorandum, 4<sup>th</sup> January 1916. ADM 137/2736.

<sup>57</sup> Siney, *Blockade of Germany*, 202-4.

<sup>58</sup> Webb Minute, 4<sup>th</sup> February 1916. ADM 137/2734. These comments were based on a report drawn up by Commander Francis Alexander.

joined the war in April 1917 that a fully effective blockade could be implemented. Despite the fact that the USA was not yet in the War, the Blockade was still having a significant effect on Germany by early 1916. Trade from the USA to the neutrals fell from £40,400,000 (July 1915-July 1916) to £12,600,000 (July 1916-July 1917).<sup>59</sup> Much of this trade was subsequently bound for Germany. Greater shortages also developed of important rare commodities such as copper and machine oil. To increase production in the face of such shortages, the German authorities increased work rates. Strikes doubled in 1916 from their 1915 levels.<sup>60</sup> German agriculture was also suffering. Fertilizer production in 1916 was 40% of its 1913 level.<sup>61</sup> From mid-1916 onwards there was insufficient food in Germany to maintain people's necessary calorific intake.<sup>62</sup> The situation was not yet critical, but was inexorably deteriorating.

In the same way that issues relating to the Blockade were perennial problems, so were the insatiable demands of the Grand Fleet compared to the necessary demands of other stations, particularly as the Germans continued to show a marked unwillingness to meet in battle. Inevitably procurement bottlenecks appeared. One was in the allocation of destroyer escorts, and the other, equally important, was in the provision of crews.

Concern about the provision of sufficient destroyer escorts for the Grand Fleet was a constant feature of Grand Fleet-Admiralty correspondence. It was simply that the fleet commanders wanted more ships, but even when this was possible, they were usually not prepared for the inevitable manning dislocation that went with such increases.<sup>63</sup> For example, the introduction of 'M' Class destroyers caused disruption, as the new class of ship also needed experienced crews to iron out the initial teething troubles with the ships before they could be transferred to fleet commands with the usual ratio at that time of 80% active service and 20% reserve crews. As the Navy expanded, however, the shortages of experienced sailors got worse, and such problems multiplied.

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<sup>59</sup> Figures for the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. Guichard, L., *The Naval Blockade*, London, 1930, 83.

<sup>60</sup> Grebler, L. and Winkler, W., *The Cost of the World War to Germany and Austria-Hungary*, Yale, 1940, 104-5.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>62</sup> Offer, *Agrarian Interpretation*, 30.

<sup>63</sup> Jellicoe to Sinclair, 30<sup>th</sup> March 1915. ADM 137/1073.

The manning of ships at this level was formally organised by the Second Sea Lord, but in actual fact most of the work was done by Capt. Hugh Sinclair as Director of the Mobilisation Division, an example of the way in which work was nominally conducted by the Board of Admiralty, but was passed to others to do the paperwork. In October 1915 Jellicoe wrote to complain about the manning policy then being employed by Sinclair.<sup>64</sup> It involved diluting the crews of existing ships with new men so that some experienced sailors could be sent to the new ships as they were commissioned. Jellicoe complained that as the new men lacked the 'sea habit' it was affecting the efficiency of the fleet. Sinclair accepted that it was a problem, and that the paying off of old ships could not fill the gaps created by the increased production of shipping. But he added, 'It is only by this means that it has been possible to man ships of new construction.'<sup>65</sup> Jellicoe simply wanted to have the best of both worlds. He even stated in November 1915 that, 'It is infinitely better to have eight ships which are really efficient than nine which are of a much lower standard'.<sup>66</sup>

To this Sinclair responded that transfers of crews had been undertaken on a systematic basis so that no ship was affected more than any other, although by the end of 1915, some 50% of crews had been affected by some sort of system of transfer.<sup>67</sup> In addition, important sailors such as warrant officers were only affected after 'considerable understudy' by another. Above all, he made it clear that there was little alternative. Even Oliver pointed out that it was not possible to get crews from ships in other parts of the world, as he said that most of these ships, particularly in the Mediterranean, were already manned with Reserve crews.<sup>68</sup> There was simply nowhere left where the Navy could find these men. If Jellicoe wanted more ships, he would have to accept the knock-on effect that this would have at least in the short term, on his ships' efficiency. Delays in ship production by 1916, however, brought a temporary alleviation of the crew problem, although Jellicoe then complained that new construction was then only 'dribbling in'.<sup>69</sup>

An interesting minor aspect of this manning problem was also that, at least when the war began, crews were made up with supernumerary naval officers. The fact that it was the ships that were receiving such officers is an important qualification to

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<sup>64</sup> Jellicoe to Sinclair and Second Sea Lord, 21<sup>st</sup> October 1915. ADM 137/1103.

<sup>65</sup> Sinclair Minute, 28<sup>th</sup> October 1915. ADM 137/1103.

<sup>66</sup> Jellicoe to Admiralty, 30<sup>th</sup> November 1915. ADM 137/1103.

<sup>67</sup> Sinclair Minute, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1915. ADM 137/1103.

<sup>68</sup> Oliver Minute, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1915. ADM 137/1103.

<sup>69</sup> Jellicoe to Balfour, 19<sup>th</sup> January 1916. BL, Add. Mss. 49714

Marder's claim that supernumeraries only drifted towards the Admiralty on the outbreak of war, when those in London made a headlong dash towards the sea.<sup>70</sup> It was an unsurprising conclusion that the mobilisation of the fleet caused the same strain on fleet manpower as was found elsewhere in the system. It was not simply a feature at the Admiralty. As will be shown later, a new Commander-in-Chief made no difference to this problem.

Another source of tension was the dispute concerning the strategy of aggressive mining in the North Sea. During the Jackson-Balfour period, problems with British mines finally began to be considered seriously. One reason why this issue had not been tackled sooner was the role of Admiral Robert Ommanney whose influence in mine development was far from constructive. In June 1915 the new Commander of the Minelaying Squadron, Capt. Frederick Litchfield-Speer, and Ommanney's immediate subordinate, compiled his first report on the state of the Squadron and its work. His post was important as he was the officer, or rather his predecessor Capt. Mervyn Cobbe was, who had been reporting back to the Admiralty on the success of British minelaying operations up to that point. Oliver, who drew up most of the minelaying schemes, was therefore highly dependent upon the information that he received from Cobbe and Ommanney. Cobbe, however, did not impress Litchfield-Speer. He reported that he found an 'unsatisfactory state of affairs ... as regards the efficiency of the mine, which is the principal and practically only *raison d'être* of the Squadron', and that the depth taking mechanism of the British Elia Mine was defective.<sup>71</sup>

Dumas, for the DNO, admitted that the mines had been produced in a hurry due to the 'urgency of war', but said that improvements had been made.<sup>72</sup> Ommanney's response was extraordinary. He said that Litchfield-Speer was 'premature in finding fault in such a wholesale manner with the present efficiency of our mines; he has not yet sufficient experience to be in a position to substantiate such sweeping statements' saying that there were 'no known defects' in the Elia Mine, which he considered 'as efficient as those of other nations.'<sup>73</sup> This was simply not true.

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<sup>70</sup> Marder, *FDSF*, vol. iv, 60.

<sup>71</sup> Litchfield-Speer to Jackson, 20<sup>th</sup> June 1915. ADM 137/843.

<sup>72</sup> Dumas Minute, 24<sup>th</sup> June 1915. ADM 137/843.

<sup>73</sup> Ommanney Minute, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1915. ADM 137/843.

This weakness at the top of the minelaying department of the Admiralty must have had a considerable effect in influencing both Jackson and Oliver, and consequently delaying the more rapid deployment of better mines. It was highly unfortunate that Fisher rated Ommanney so highly, and suggested that his assessment of people's worth was sometimes faulty. It would also suggest that less credence should also be given to Fisher's attacks on other Admiralty figures, which even steady figures like Oliver found increasingly disturbing.<sup>74</sup>

One reason why Oliver was not keener on mining was that he fully understood the difficulty of laying mines accurately and in sufficient numbers. Minelayers had a problem with 'dead reckoning'. This was not uncommon. It was hard to navigate, particularly at night and be absolutely sure of your exact location. This was even a problem with the battle fleet, as the difficulties of drawing up accurate charts of the Jutland engagement later displayed. Oliver wrote a succinct synopsis of the problems in reply to a proposal by Jellicoe for mining the Bight:<sup>75</sup>

To lay mines in the German Bight entails a very long run by dead reckoning after dark...

The Germans can sweep the inner part of the mine field and our small craft can only prevent sweeping on the outer fringe of the mine field and cannot approach that closely as the same navigation conditions apply to them as to our minelayers.

We should put down as many mines as we can and they will doubtless embarrass and trouble the Germans a good deal but they will not be a safe barrier which can be guaranteed to prevent a minelayer slipping out.

This would require renewing every 3 months and as the mines would have to be laid on fresh ground each time, the mine barrier would be continually increasing in length and more explosives will be necessary on each occasion.<sup>76</sup>

Oliver believed, and Jackson agreed, that it was not really possible for minelayers to travel accurately by night into the Bight. Minelayers would drop the mines in the wrong place, becoming a danger to British warships, or they would mistakenly sail

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<sup>74</sup> Oliver to William Oliver (brother), 10<sup>th</sup> February 1916. NMM, OLV/7.

<sup>75</sup> Jellicoe to Admiralty, 14<sup>th</sup> August 1915. ADM 137/1937.

<sup>76</sup> Oliver Minute, 17<sup>th</sup> August 1915. ADM 137/843



onto their own older minefields. Either way the 'extensive scale' of mining that Jellicoe demanded would not be an easy proposition. In addition, problems with sinkers meant that mines were prone to movement, itself a further problem.<sup>77</sup>

Aware that any mining of the Bight would be far from easy, but also wishing to placate Jellicoe, Jackson noted, 'a critical reply would probably commence an unseemly series of argumentative correspondence & I propose informing the CinC that his proposal to increase the extent of the minefield in the German Bight which was attempted recently will be resumed when conditions of moonlight are again satisfactory...'<sup>78</sup> Jellicoe accepted these arguments, but still felt that the Admiralty could do more.<sup>79</sup> In particular he advocated the development of deep minefields. These he believed could help to square the circle of creating minefields but leaving the sea open to surface craft. The principle of the deep minefield was that they would have to be located close to surface patrols. These would force the enemy submarine to dive and, it was hoped, destroy itself amongst the deep mines. This argument, put forward by Jellicoe in 1915, became a central plank of the British (rather than American) approach to the Northern Barrage which was created in 1918.

Against an extensive mining programme was the aim of keeping an area of the North Sea open for Grand Fleet operations. It was by now clear that the war would not begin with a decisive fleet action. The evidence of the engagements of 1914 and early 1915 was that engagements would take place at greater ranges than British pre-war planning had expected.<sup>80</sup> British pre-war intelligence on German gunnery plans had been wrong.<sup>81</sup> Jellicoe decided that the Grand Fleet would respond to the HSF's elusive behaviour by increasing its rate of fire at long range. Quantity rather than quality of shot would tell. This would be a fatal decision for many on 31<sup>st</sup> May 1916. It would also make a battle of annihilation unlikely. But in the battle of the guns, the British had a developing advantage. During 1914-16 many of the battleships of the pre-war construction boom began to fill the ranks of the ships stationed at Scapa. Of these, none was more eagerly awaited than the arrival of the *Queen Elizabeth* class.

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<sup>77</sup> Oliver Minute, 27<sup>th</sup> December 1915. ADM 137/844.

<sup>78</sup> Jackson Minute, 20<sup>th</sup> August 1915. ADM 137/843.

<sup>79</sup> Jellicoe to Beatty, 4<sup>th</sup> June 1915. *Jellicoe Papers*, vol. i, 165-6.

<sup>80</sup> Sumida, 'Decisive Battle', 119.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

They were perhaps the finest battleships ever built.<sup>82</sup> Armed with 15” guns, their larger oil fired boilers gave them a speed of 24 knots, yet they also retained 13” of armour on the belt and turrets. They were thus only a little slower than the ‘super Invincible’ class of battle cruisers (e.g. *New Zealand*) and had 6” more armour. They were, however, some 4 knots slower than the ‘Cat’ class battle cruisers (e.g. *Tiger* and *Lion*) and this speed difference was of vital importance, both in the horse trading about their location that took place before May 31<sup>st</sup> 1916 and in the handling of these ships during the battle of Jutland itself.

The speed of these ships was, however, initially a matter of debate. Jellicoe understood that they might be able to make 28 knots.<sup>83</sup> On this basis he promised them to Beatty and his BCF. The prospect of such a glittering prize must surely have whetted Beatty’s appetite, and he must have been gravely disappointed to be told both that *Warspite* would only make 23½ knots and that Jellicoe would not be giving them to the BCF.<sup>84</sup> Beatty, however, did not give up hope and when the class of ships was almost complete in early 1916, began a concerted plan to persuade Jellicoe release them to him.<sup>85</sup> Some of Beatty’s own senior officers took part, presenting apparently neutral opinions that supported Beatty’s case.<sup>86</sup> Jellicoe forwarded these letters to Jackson at the Admiralty.<sup>87</sup> Pakenham backed up his claims with a series of comparisons between the strengths of the rival battle fleets. His tables emphasised the strength of the British ‘slow fleet’, (the dreadnoughts), and the relative weakness of the British ‘fast fleet’ (the battle cruisers). For example, the British dreadnoughts would have forty 15” guns to the Germans’ sixteen; ten 14” guns to the Germans’ none and one hundred and sixty 13.5” guns again to the Germans’ none. It was only when looking at the number of 12” guns that the Germans would have even a small advantage. Pakenham also stated that the Germans had one *Hindenburg* battle cruiser with 15” guns with two more building. Jellicoe had already told Beatty that he was under a ‘misapprehension’ as to the speed of the *Queen Elizabeths*, and that even if the Germans did have 15” battle cruisers, Beatty’s force could still cumulatively

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<sup>82</sup> Grove, E., *Big Fleet Actions. Tsushima. Jutland. Philippine Sea*, London, 1991, 62. They were: HMS *Queen Elizabeth*, *Barham*, *Valiant*, *Warspite* and *Malaya*.

<sup>83</sup> Jellicoe to Beatty 19<sup>th</sup> January 1915, *Jellicoe Papers*, vol. i, 126.

<sup>84</sup> Jellicoe to Beatty 26<sup>th</sup> April 1915. *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>85</sup> Gordon, *Rules*, 43.

<sup>86</sup> Brock to Beatty, 18<sup>th</sup> February 1916; Pakenham to Beatty, ‘Reinforcement of the Battle-Cruiser Fleet’, 19 February 1916, in Ranft, B. M., (ed.), *The Beatty Papers, 1902 - 18*, vol. i, NRS, 1989, 286-93.

<sup>87</sup> Jellicoe to Jackson, 24<sup>th</sup> February 1916. ADM 137/1165 and ADM 137/1898.

deliver a heavier punch than the Germans could, even if one of his battle cruisers was missing.<sup>88</sup>

These papers were then circulated, as normal, round the Admiralty, including Jackson and Oliver. Oliver punctured one of Pakenham's claims with the simple observation that it was impossible for the Germans to have completed battle cruisers which were faster, more heavily armed and more heavily armoured than the most modern British battle cruisers.<sup>89</sup> To gain battle cruiser speeds the Germans would have to sacrifice either protection or firepower. There would not be enough space inside the ships for both the number of boilers required to get speeds of about 27 knots and have the internal structures required to mount 15" guns on the ship.

For different reasons, however, Oliver did feel that it was worth letting Beatty have the *Queen Elizabeths*. This was to do with the distance that the Grand Fleet was from the likely location of any German coastal raids. He did, however, recognise that *at full speed* and after 10 hours sailing the 5BS would be 40 miles behind the battle cruisers. If the battle cruisers got into trouble (by meeting more than the 1SG) then they could use their greater speed and bigger guns to protect themselves and fall back on the 5BS within an hour. More importantly, as will be shown below, it was at this moment that a potentially bold new strategic approach was being considered.

As Oliver pointed out, if the battleships were kept at Scapa they would stand little chance of getting to Beatty in time for a decisive action. In addition, Oliver was only considering the case where the Germans would use their battle cruisers and not the HSF as a whole. This was what had happened in the two major engagements which had happened so far (Heligoland Bight and Dogger Bank), and was what would be expected if the Germans were simply carrying out a raid against an English town where speed was of the essence. Nonetheless it did contain the two principles: that there would be time for such an engagement to develop (help would arrive in less than an hour if Beatty's ships were falling back towards the 5BS) and secondly that the Germans would be happy to oblige and continue north into such a trap. This had so far not happened on any occasion. Yet Jackson agreed with Oliver's view, and said that when the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Battle Squadrons of the Grand Fleet reached twenty-four battleships, the question of the fate of the 5BS should be reconsidered.<sup>90</sup> VA Tudor

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<sup>88</sup> Jellicoe to Beatty, 24<sup>th</sup> February 1916. ADM 137/1165.

<sup>89</sup> Oliver Minute, 27<sup>th</sup> February 1916. ADM 137/1165.

<sup>90</sup> Jackson Minute, 27<sup>th</sup> February 1916. ADM 137/1165.

(4<sup>th</sup> Sea Lord) and Balfour agreed. Jackson also pointedly wrote, by way of criticism of Beatty's behaviour, 'This correspondence arose through letting the Flag Officers know what we are building & what we think the Germans are building and the possible 15" guns in the *Lutzow & Hindenburg* has had more effect than was anticipated. The spirit of asking for all one can get seems to have gone down *from the top*, & it is to be hoped it will not descend lower, as it might tend to affect the old spirit of our seamen to do their best with what they have got.'<sup>91</sup>

A key to unravelling this apparently convoluted analysis by Oliver and Jackson was to look at its context. For two years the Royal Navy had waited for 'Der Tag', and the opportunity to defeat the HSF. So far this had not been achieved. A couple of occasions had arisen when a part of that Fleet might have been defeated, such as at the Heligoland Bight and at Dogger Bank, but in both cases the opportunities had been squandered by mistakes both at sea and on land. Often, the Grand Fleet was simply too far north to have any impact. By the time that it arrived in the waters where the Germans were prepared to sail, the Germans were long gone. Consequently, by 1916 the view was becoming firmly entrenched that the decisive engagement would never happen. Oliver wrote, 'If we keep our Fleet in its present disposition we take no chances but it is extremely improbable that the Germans will ever come out with the deliberate intention of going far enough North to commit suicide.'<sup>92</sup> Jackson agreed.<sup>93</sup>

Jellicoe had made it quite clear that the 1SG would probably not come out without considerable support. An engagement between the BCF and the 1SG was therefore likely to develop into a battle between the BCF and the whole HSF. Such an engagement carried huge risks. As an unsigned letter to Jellicoe put it, 'The German Higher Command will never again risk the 1<sup>st</sup> Scouting Group near our shores unless adequately supported & the support is sure to be a more powerful force than the 5<sup>th</sup> BS. If this view is correct, its addition to BCF will be a source of weakness not strength. Without them the VA's force is fast & handy & sufficient to locate & keep touch of the Enemy Fleet, brushing aside Lt Crs & Cruisers, but either with or without the 5<sup>th</sup> BS, he is quite unable to attack the 1<sup>st</sup> Scouting Group in the presence of

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, My italics.

<sup>92</sup> Oliver Minute, 14<sup>th</sup> March 1916. ADM 137/1165.

<sup>93</sup> Jackson Minute, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1916. ADM 137/1165.

support of the HS Fleet.<sup>94</sup> This very much reflected Jellicoe's own view, who stressed that it was the function of the BCF to fall back onto the Grand Fleet rather than engage the Germans in battle as the HSF was likely to be following on after the 1SG.<sup>95</sup>

These were all risks which Jellicoe was not prepared to take. This was understandable. If disaster struck, the press and nation would not hound for the blood of a Whitehall bureaucrat, but for the head of Sir John Jellicoe. As he ruefully observed, 'Mistakes, however small, afloat are visited with instant shunting. Mistakes of immense importance at Head Quarters are entirely ignored.'<sup>96</sup> Sensing this Jackson minuted 'The responsibility for this division [of the Grand Fleet] rests with the Admiralty'.<sup>97</sup> Jellicoe continued to stress the importance of fleet concentration as the only way of making certain not necessarily of achieving victory, but at least of avoiding defeat.<sup>98</sup>

But that too was Oliver's point. The Germans also knew this, and thus an engagement was unlikely. Instead, Oliver proposed a calculated risk whereby the two portions of the fleet would go to sea, with the faster half hoping to catch the 1SG, and overwhelm it while falling back towards to main body of the Grand Fleet who would then deal with the other German capital ships which would not have the speed even to catch the *Queen Elizabeths*. This was a point that Beatty failed fully to absorb. Had he done so he might have handled the 5BS more carefully. The BCF and 5BS would thus be the bait for their trap. It must be supposed (neither Jackson nor Oliver mention it at this particular time) that a key part of this plan was to use the Germans' known zeppelin advantage to help activate the trap. The advanced warning that the airships might give of Beatty's movements would have encouraged the Germans into a fatally bold strike). The British would use their Signals Intelligence against this to bring the Grand Fleet into position. Rather than feebly putting out feelers for ideas that any old sea dog had for a way to attack the Germans, Jackson and Oliver had devised what was a risky and bold strategy.

This rearrangement, however, got tangled up with another debate that was going on at the same time, which concerned the question of the Grand Fleet's bases.

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<sup>94</sup> Anonymous Memorandum [possibly Halsey] to Jellicoe, n.d. [March 1916]. ADM 137/1898.

<sup>95</sup> Jellicoe to Admiralty, 10<sup>th</sup> March 1916., ADM 137/1898.

<sup>96</sup> Jellicoe to Hamilton, 26<sup>th</sup> April 1915, in *Jellicoe Papers*, vol. i, 158.

<sup>97</sup> Jackson Minute, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1916. ADM 137/1165.

<sup>98</sup> Jellicoe to Admiralty 10<sup>th</sup> March 1916. ADM 137/1165.

This latter issue has also tended to gain greater coverage by historians, who have ignored the bigger question of Grand Fleet warship allocation and strategy. While Temple Patterson acknowledged that 'a more active policy' was advocated by the Admiralty, he did so without saying what it was in any detail, although he did acknowledge Jellicoe's reservations.<sup>99</sup> Winton barely mentioned these discussions.<sup>100</sup> Marder stressed inactivity at the Admiralty and that what initiatives there were resulted from external pressures such as the April 1916 Lowestoft Raid.<sup>101</sup> It should, however, be noted that the principle of a redistribution of the fleet so as to encourage the Germans to come out was discussed and accepted in March, one month *before* the Lowestoft Raid. Beatty's criticism, which Marder cited, that the Admiralty therefore only had a 'Wait and See' policy at this time, was incorrect.<sup>102</sup> Marder's analysis of the redistribution of Fleets was focused principally on the issue of bases rather than on the concept of a calculated risk to bring the Germans out.<sup>103</sup>

This plan was risky, but if all the factors were taken together, we can see how it was proposed to work.<sup>104</sup> The 'concentration' of force at Scapa Flow would be abandoned, and the fleet more evenly split between the Humber and Rosyth (this was the part of the plan which has tended to gain greatest historical coverage). Eventually the whole Fleet might be moved to Rosyth, but in the meantime a redistribution would be effected whereby a significant minority of the capitals ships would be stationed in the southern bases. The possibility of a 'catastrophe' was not ruled out, and Jackson noted, 'some change is necessary which will probably involve risks not now taken with our capital ships'<sup>105</sup> This was, however, a calculated risk: Jackson and Oliver were hardly cavalier planners, and their decisions must have been founded, at least in part, on the basis that the British enjoyed 'information advantage' over the Germans not simply through signal decrypts, but through DF and other W/T means that ID had developed (and significantly partially manned by officers from OD, whose DOD was Capt. Thomas Jackson, of whom more later).

Such a division, it was hoped, would entice the Germans out, using the Germans' desire to see an engagement with a section of the Grand Fleet, and that the

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<sup>99</sup> Temple Patterson, *Jellicoe Papers*, vol. i, 100.

<sup>100</sup> Winton, *Jellicoe*, 172.

<sup>101</sup> Marder, *FDSF*, vol. ii, 424, 428-9, 430-35.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 429.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 430-35.

<sup>104</sup> Oliver Minute, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1916. ADM 137/1165; Jackson Minute, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1916. ADM 137/1165.

<sup>105</sup> Jackson Minute, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1916. ADM 137/1165.

more southerly force would be have the opportunity for help if it moved north as the Rosyth fleet came south. It was also envisaged that with a more southerly-based force it might be possible to use these ships in parts of the North Sea not normally considered 'acceptable' for capital ships. These ships might even be used to support other operations such as air assaults on the German coast. Thus the focus for the capital ships would come some 200 miles closer to the Germans. This would also allow time for a battle to develop. The pattern so far had been that the Germans had disappeared long before the Grand Fleet ever came on the scene. It was also important to remember that capital ships should not simply be counted in terms of numbers alone. In terms of firepower the British ships far out-gunned their German equivalents, because of the heavier calibre of their guns.

Oliver then drafted a letter to Jellicoe outlining some of these changes.<sup>106</sup> Jellicoe replied on 26<sup>th</sup> April 1916.<sup>107</sup> In contrast to Beatty, Jellicoe was in fact quite positive.<sup>108</sup> He quibbled, probably rightly over the exact locations of the various Battle Squadrons, but accepted the principle. He said that any changes should be carried out when the latest 'R' class battleships, *Royal Oak* and *Royal Sovereign* became efficient. He also clearly resented what he saw as an increasing encroachment of the Admiralty into what he considered his job, and demanded that he alone must decide the 'general principles of the Battle fleet.' This had, however, been going on since 1914, and as will be shown below, accelerated after Jutland.

These decisions constituted a significant break in strategy. As such, it was unfair to brand the Balfour-Jackson period as 'comatose'; or as another historian put it when comparing this era with the Churchill-Fisher one that went before, 'placidity replaced pyrotechnics'.<sup>109</sup> Rather than being a period of stagnation, these moves show a development in thinking and a determination to take risks, to achieve the eventuality that all wanted, the decisive victory over the Germans at sea. These proposals were discussed during a Conference at Rosyth on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1916. Present were Jellicoe, Jackson and Beatty. As Jellicoe had earlier pointed out (and Jackson would have accepted if we take his comments on 27<sup>th</sup> February as indicative of his general view), a long-term alteration in the distribution of the Grand Fleet could only take place when the latest dreadnoughts were ready and preparations at Rosyth and the Humber

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<sup>106</sup> Admiralty to Jellicoe, drafted by Oliver, 14<sup>th</sup> April 1916. ADM 137/1165.

<sup>107</sup> Jellicoe to Admiralty, 26<sup>th</sup> April 1916. ADM 137/1165.

<sup>108</sup> Beatty to Oliver, 14<sup>th</sup> May 1916. ADM 137/1165.

<sup>109</sup> Gordon, *Rules*, 519; Temple Patterson, *Jellicoe*, 86.

had been completed. As neither was ready, an interim decision was taken that the 5BS would join Beatty briefly, particularly as this would allow the 3BCS to go north for gunnery practice. This would have pleased Beatty, who had never given up hope of getting the *Queen Elizabeths*.<sup>110</sup>

He had written to Jellicoe in March with the improbable claim that if these ships dropped 1,000 tons they would increase their speed to 25 knot through reducing the ship's draft. This would only leave them 4½ miles behind after a three-hour chase.<sup>111</sup> This was a highly dangerous suggestion, as a reduction of the ship's draft might well have lifted its side armour out of the water, thus significantly impairing its protection from torpedo attack or plunging shellfire.<sup>112</sup> It is interesting that in Beatty's mind the 5BS was always expected to be behind the main BCF. It is this mental outlook that perhaps helps to explain why Beatty was not more concerned that the 5BS was lagging only five miles behind HMS *Lion* at 3.45 pm when the battle of Jutland began. Oliver read Beatty's 3<sup>rd</sup> March letter, and said that he would wait to see what Jellicoe thought. Jellicoe still at this point believed that the principle of concentration should not be abandoned.<sup>113</sup> It will be noted that Jellicoe had changed, or at least qualified his view by the time he wrote his April 26<sup>th</sup> letter to the Admiralty referred to above. He believed that it was unlikely that the 1SG would come out of harbour without considerable support. If it did, the BCF could deal with it by itself; if it did not, then the BCF with the 5BS would not be enough to defeat the 1SG with the HSF in tow. The only protection of the BCF and 5BS would be their speed. There were claims on both sides as to which argument was the better, as Oliver observed.<sup>114</sup>

It is here that we can delve into the world of counter-factuals, comparing the various proposals with what in fact happened on 31<sup>st</sup> May to see who appeared to be the more correct. Beatty had the 5BS at Jutland, and handled them badly. Without them, but presuming that he would have had the 3BCS (HMS *Invincible*, *Inflexible* and *Indomitable* under Admiral Horace Hood) but without their period of gunnery practice at Scapa Flow, Beatty should have had a more concentrated force, but one

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<sup>110</sup> Admiralty Memorandum, 'Notes taken at a Meeting held at Rosyth on Friday 12<sup>th</sup> May, 1916 to discuss the Question of Moving the Main Fleet Bases to the Forth and Humber, instead of Forth and Scapa.' ADM 137/1165. Added to this was an Admiralty Memorandum, with 'strategical notes' by Oliver, 'Memorandum on Bases and Disposition of the Grand Fleet', 21<sup>st</sup> May 1916. ADM 137/1165.

<sup>111</sup> Beatty to Jellicoe, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1916. ADM 137/1898.

<sup>112</sup> I am grateful to Dr Warwick Brown for a discussion on this issue.

<sup>113</sup> Jellicoe to Admiralty, 10<sup>th</sup> March 1916. ADM 137/1165.

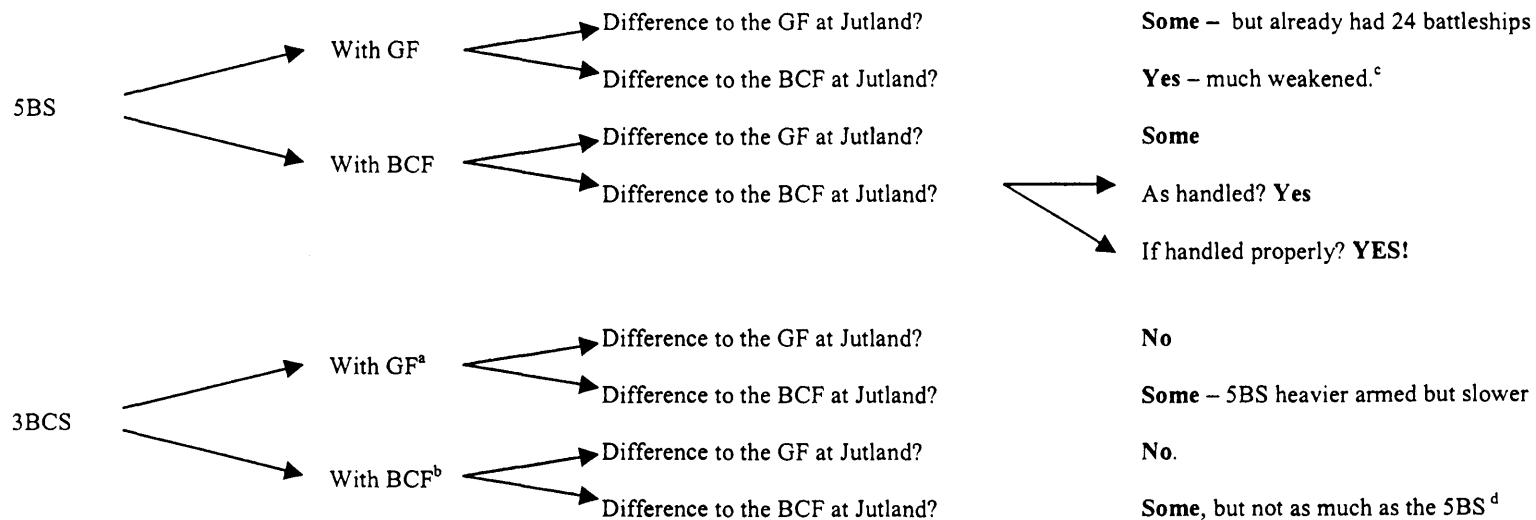
<sup>114</sup> Oliver Minute, 14<sup>th</sup> March 1916. ADM 137/1165.



that was more prone to explode and poorer at gunnery. It was therefore likely that he still would have lost several battle cruisers, and perhaps lost even more heavily because the remaining ships would not have been afforded any protection from the accurate and heavy, if delayed, fire of the 5BS. To adapt a diagram that Dr Gordon used we can consider the situation in table 5.1.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Gordon, *Rules*, 475



a) With gunnery practice at Scapa Flow in May 1916

b) Without gunnery practice at Scapa Flow in May 1916

c) The expectation has to be that Beatty's losses would have even heavier if the 5BS had not been there.

d) Without gunnery practice, and with the cordite handling behaviour in place, it is likely that losses would have been more than the one battle cruiser that the 3 BCS lost on 31<sup>st</sup> May.

Figure 5.1: Range of battle outcomes based on differing uses of the 5BS and 3BCS

Looking at this diagram we can see that far from being an unwise move, the disposition of ships that the British adopted was as good as it could possibly have been at Jutland in relation to the 5BS and 3BCS. Indeed, the initial engagement as it developed was in fact almost as good as Jellicoe or the Staff could have hoped. Jellicoe knew that that the distances from Scapa Flow were such that it was unlikely that the dreadnoughts would meet the HSF before the end of the first day of the battle, and therefore much rested on what Beatty could achieve. Had Beatty handled his ships better the outcome of the battle could have been very different. In particular his leadership of the BCF and 5BS during the race south, and during the turn to the north was particularly inept. Whether or not he had developed a fleet that was less signal dependent than in the initiative-stifled battleships was open to doubt. If the BCF was allegedly less reliant on signals, it was odd that so many of the of the BCF's problems were due to signalling errors.<sup>116</sup> By contrast, the Grand Fleet was not only handled with greater surety, it could also shoot better. This was particularly to be emphasised given the problems that any commander would have manoeuvring so many ships in such complex formations.

Much has been made of the more flexible way that the Harwich Force was used, or indeed how at times naval forces in the Second World War were used.<sup>117</sup> Of the Harwich force, Gordon writes that it was 'the only substantial British destroyer force whose war training had comprised offensive, independent operations, as opposed to the protective chivvying of capital ships.' One reason for this is that the Harwich force did not have any dreadnoughts! In the Second World War, Commanders such as Cunningham were dealing with much smaller forces (at Cape Matapan in March 1941 he had 3 battleships, all veterans of Jutland, where Jellicoe had twenty four) attacking smaller forces (the Italians had 1 battleship and a few cruisers and destroyers). Technology had also moved on in terms of W/T communications, air reconnaissance and air attack.<sup>118</sup> Given the disparities in size, and later technology, between these forces, it was unrealistic to expect that 24 battleships and dozens of attendant destroyers and cruisers could have been handled across such a wide expanse of sea in a more flexible way. Indeed the fate of the armoured cruisers commanded by Sir Robert Arbuthnot were a chilling reminder of

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 419.

<sup>118</sup> Grove, E., 'Andrew Browne Cunningham, The Best Man of the Lot (1883-1963)', in Sweetman, *Great Admirals*, 419, 433-437.

where independent action, albeit when it verged on stupidity, could lead. Arbuthnot independently chose to take the 1CS in front of Jellicoe's Battle Squadrons' line of fire, and in the process lost HMS *Warrior* and *Defence* with 974 lives. What gave the British fleet its strength was its ability to strike as a united force.

The War Staff, or at least its COS, and the First Sea Lord had therefore had an important role to play in creating the force that set to sea several hours before the Germans on May 30<sup>th</sup>. The structure of the battle of Jutland was largely their battle.

When the 'unpalatable truth' of what went wrong at Jutland came to be assessed, it seemed clear that in one respect the Admiralty and, in particular, the War Staff were found to be conspicuously wanting. This is in the area of the handling of Intelligence.<sup>119</sup> The cryptanalysts who worked in Room 40 OB at the Admiralty did so in isolation. This was largely because the Admiralty was obsessed by spies, and because the code breakers were civilians. The 'precious information' had to be kept secret for as long as possible. It seemed silly in retrospect that concern about the possibility of enemy espionage should have been so great. But the context within which Room 40 was created and operated should be considered. A world obsessed by War Plans was also a world obsessed by spies. The fact that the Germans had gained knowledge about British gunnery methods in 1912 from a British naval warrant officer was surely sufficient grounds on which to believe that there could well be spies within the Admiralty.<sup>120</sup> Fears that the security of the Admiralty building might have been breached were common, particularly at the outbreak of war, and therefore, it was understandable that when the German naval codes fell into the Navy's hands, there was a determined effort to keep all knowledge of such information secret.<sup>121</sup> Such a belief was exaggerated, but in a period when the First Sea Lord could be hounded out of office, quite unjustifiably, simply for having a German surname, it was understandable that people were keen to keep Room 40's existence secret.

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<sup>119</sup> Beesly, *Room 40*, London 1982.

<sup>120</sup> Sumida, 'A Matter of Timing', 105; Andrew, C., *Secret Service: The Making of the British Intelligence Community*, London 1985, 66-67.

<sup>121</sup> Richmond Diary, 10<sup>th</sup> September 1914, 'I feel gravely inclined to believe that there is a leakage somewhere, I fear it is in the Admiralty.' RIC 1/9; Fisher to Jellicoe, 10<sup>th</sup> December 1914, 'You had better burn this on receipt as I do all your letters – these are perilous times with spies in most wonderful places', BL, Add. Mss. 49006. A German ordnance handler was also suspected of causing the destruction of the *Vanguard*, when it blew up at Scapa Flow in July 1917. Madden to Jellicoe, 13<sup>th</sup> July 1917. BL, Add. Mss. 49009; It was rumoured that a German maid caused the loss of HMS *Hampshire*, Jellicoe to Balfour, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1916. BL, Add. Mss. 49714.

Nonetheless, it was a questionable decision, and the implication of this was that few understood fully the significance of the material that they were using. It is normally also said that naval officers had little time for these civilians.<sup>122</sup> This is usually based on the opinions of perhaps the most vilified Staff Officer of the First World War, Capt. Thomas Jackson, the DOD.<sup>123</sup> It is alleged that his failure to analyse correctly the information given to him by Room 40 about the location of the DK call sign of the German Flagship on the Jade on May 31<sup>st</sup> was the result of his inability to talk to civilians.

There are, however, a number of problems with these versions of events. The story of Jackson's behaviour is based on a post-war record by Lieut. William Clarke, RNVR, of Room 40.<sup>124</sup> Firstly, the simple division of serving officer and civilian did not exist. Sir Henry Jackson, for example, thought that the men of Room 40 were 'marvels' and Clarke himself wrote that the Room 40 staff were 'treated with consideration' by naval officers, and he mentioned Jackson by name in this context!<sup>125</sup> Secondly, the story of the handling of Room 40's information was not wholly consistent. Firstly, Room 40 did not deal with DF information, although that is supposedly what Jackson was asking about. Room 40 simply dealt with signal decrypts. Secondly, the description by Clarke of Jackson's behaviour and its implied criticism of Jackson's intelligence, is at odds with Jackson's own career.<sup>126</sup> He was fully versed in the demands of Signal Intelligence. He had taken the Signals Course in 1909; was ADID between December 1909 and January 1912; and briefly DID in 1914 before coming DOD in November that year. Consequently he would have known all about the pre-war War Room plot developments which relied heavily on W/T technology. In addition he was also Naval Attaché in Tokyo in 1906 while William Pakenham was on leave and, like Pakenham, was present at Tsushima in 1905 when the Japanese praised him for his 'cool & gallant bearing' during the engagement. This is curiously at odds with a recent description of him as a 'ridiculous angry blustering officer.'<sup>127</sup> It is also significant that when Churchill came to write *The World Crisis* he

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<sup>122</sup> Beesly, *Room 40*, 155; Marder *DNSF*, vol. iii, 41-2; Gordon, *Rules*, 72-3; Grove, *Big Fleet Action*, 80; Rodger, *Admiralty*, 131.

<sup>123</sup> I am grateful to Dr N. Lambert for a discussion of this issue.

<sup>124</sup> Clarke, 'An Admiralty Telegram', 10<sup>th</sup> August 1924. NMM Beatty Papers, BTY 9/9/11.

<sup>125</sup> Jackson to Jellicoe, 19<sup>th</sup> October 1916. BL, Add. Mss. 49009; Clarke, W., 'History of Room 40 O.B.', 1951, HW 3/3.

<sup>126</sup> ADM 196/42, 496.

<sup>127</sup> Gordon, *Rules*, 72.

used Jackson to check the accuracy of the technical details.<sup>128</sup> He would hardly have done this if Jackson were not a highly competent naval officer.

Professor Marder also found it inexplicable that when Oliver was away from his desk at one point in the battle Capt. Allan Everett (Naval Assistant to the First Sea Lord) took over. He says that Everett had 'no experience of German operational signals and naval procedure.'<sup>129</sup> Yet this again was not true. Everett had spent his entire naval career immersed in the world of signals.<sup>130</sup> In addition, his posting immediately prior to that at the Admiralty was on HMS *Iron Duke* and so was well versed in Jellicoe's methods and approach to battle. He took two courses at the Signal School, and was twice its commandant (June 1901 - January 1904; August 1906 - April 1908). The explanation of what went wrong in communications between the Admiralty and HMS *Iron Duke* was a more complex one than simply that of personalities. There is certainly some evidence that many signals were jammed due to the sheer volume of traffic taking place.<sup>131</sup>

Recently it has been argued that Jackson's 'error' had little direct consequence on the fighting at Jutland, although it certainly helped to discredit later Admiralty communications to Jellicoe in the course of the battle.<sup>132</sup> These would have indicated to Jellicoe that the Germans were making for the Horns Reef route back to safety. This incident showed the degree to which the use of the Grand Fleet had become intelligence led, although it should also be noted that Jellicoe's own ship commanders could have passed on sufficient evidence of the HSF movements on the night of May 31<sup>st</sup> to allow Jellicoe and his staff to know that Germans were slipping away behind them. Had the British neither broken the German codes, nor developed DF stations along the east coast of England, it is doubtful if the Grand Fleet would ever have come into contact with the HSF. As Jackson himself said, in what might be seen as a possible mitigating factor to the criticisms of Admiralty bungling that May, 'It is also to be noted that practically all large movements of the Fleet have to be initiated by the Admiralty.'<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Jackson to Churchill, 11<sup>th</sup> January 1923. CCC CHAR 8/179.

<sup>129</sup> Marder, *DNSF*, vol. iii, 154.

<sup>130</sup> ADM 196/43, 23.

<sup>131</sup> Bethell to Jackson, H., 31<sup>st</sup> July 1916. ADM 137/1645.

<sup>132</sup> Gordon, *Rules*, 415.

<sup>133</sup> Jackson Minute, 29th August 1916. ADM 137/1645.

The sense of disappointment at the outcome of Jutland led to a number of reforms. These have been described extensively elsewhere.<sup>134</sup> Jellicoe was instrumental in investigating what went wrong and further reports were commissioned at the Admiralty. Much of this involved tackling what were perceived to be defects in the ships and their armament, although the highly damaging conclusions of the Admiralty investigation into the explosions which destroyed three battle cruisers was suppressed by Jellicoe when he became First Sea Lord.<sup>135</sup> Though a wish to protect his men in the Grand Fleet from censure was typical of Jellicoe, his decision to falsify the evidence was inexcusable. Decisions were also taken which reined in the freedom of the BCF even beyond the limits outlined in December 1914. At a conference between Jellicoe, Jackson and Balfour it was decided that, 'in the event of a raid on our eastern or south-eastern coasts, when it is considered necessary that the battle-cruisers shall be pushed forwards without support, *their Lordships will decide the extent to which the battle-cruisers are to be pushed forwards in view of the circumstances which are at the time within their knowledge.*'<sup>136</sup> Oliver went further minuting, that 'the Battle-Cruiser Fleet when ordered south is not to seek engagement with the enemy main forces *without definite orders from the Admiralty.*'<sup>137</sup>

The Admiralty reply to Jellicoe was then drafted by Oliver, and approved by Jackson and Balfour. Jellicoe was clearly disappointed by the degree to which the intelligence analysis failures in London had contributed to the errors that were made at Jutland. This bitterness caused Jellicoe to suggest that the problems in London were not simply ones of personnel, but of Admiralty structure. His criticisms stung Jackson who replied to him, 'We shall be glad to help you to put our house in order as regards signalling, but shall certainly want a very much stronger case made out than is stated in your note, to convince us that all is wrong after nearly 2 years experience. Your proposed organisation of the Admiralty is almost the existing one & if it does not work to your satisfaction it must be the individuals who are to blame.'<sup>138</sup>

Beatty also resented what was in effect a two-sided attack on his independence, from both Jellicoe and the Admiralty. He wrote to Jellicoe asking 'It is to avoid any possibility of misconception that I ask whether I am to be allowed free

<sup>134</sup> Gordon, *Rules*, 505-8.

<sup>135</sup> Lambert, "Our Bloody Ships", 31-2.

<sup>136</sup> Jellicoe to Jackson, 'Conference at Admiralty with the Command-in-Chief, Home Fleets', 29<sup>th</sup> June 1916. ADM 137/1645. My italics.

<sup>137</sup> Oliver Minute 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1916. ADM 137/1645. My italics.

<sup>138</sup> Jackson to Jellicoe, 11<sup>th</sup> July 1916. BL, Add. Mss. 49009.

exercise of my judgement and discretion'.<sup>139</sup> Although both Jellicoe and Oliver played down Beatty's allegations, the fact remained that this was what they were attempting to do.<sup>140</sup> As for Jellicoe's own freedom of action, Balfour was clearly incorrect when he asserted, 'the Commander-in-Chief, who after being supplied with all the information at the disposal of the Admiralty, *must be left to determine the policy that should be pursued*.'<sup>141</sup> Ever since the war began, particularly after December 1914, policy, direction and control had been decided in London. In terms of ship allocation; manning; equipment; general strategy, and increasingly fleet movements, the decisions were beyond Jellicoe's control. That is why he complained about them so much.

After Jutland, despite improvements in gunnery, armour protection and intelligence handling, there also appeared to have been a loss of nerve. The near loss of the 5BS meant that the proposal to divide the fleet as a means by which the Germans might be lured out disappeared from the agenda. Concentration was back in, and the plans to mine the Bight were accelerated.<sup>142</sup> Rosyth was to be finished, and be the base for the Grand Fleet. But, as an Admiralty memorandum observed, 'unless the enemy desires to fight and seek action, the chances of bringing him to action are now lessened and seem problematical.'<sup>143</sup> Unless the mining in the Bight was going to bring the Germans out, the belief was increasingly that the Grand Fleet would simply have to remain in being, and the Blockade would be the means by which defeat would be inflicted on Germany. What challenged this view was the increase in the menace posed by enemy submarines. Such was the danger, and the inability of the British really to tackle the problem, that Jellicoe suggested another significant change in strategy, 'Pending the discovery of new methods, I am inclined to the opinion that it would be wise to face the fact that by temporarily demobilising portions of the Grand Fleet and risking something in that way, we could so increase our destroyer force in the Channel as to enable us to achieve some success against the submarines operating there, when they gather again in sufficient numbers to make it worth while. We

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<sup>139</sup> Beatty to Jellicoe, 31<sup>st</sup> July 1916. ADM 137/1645.

<sup>140</sup> Jellicoe to Admiralty, 31<sup>st</sup> July 1916; Oliver Minute 4<sup>th</sup> August 1916. ADM 137/1645.

<sup>141</sup> Balfour Minute, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1916. ADM 137/1645.

<sup>142</sup> Jellicoe Memorandum, 'Conference on Board HMS 'Iron Duke', between Commander-in-Chief, Grand Fleet, Chief of the Staff, Grand Fleet, and the Chief of the War Staff', 13<sup>th</sup> September 1916. ADM 137/1645.

<sup>143</sup> Admiralty Memorandum to Jellicoe, 'Considerations as to the Employment of the *Grand Fleet* in the North Sea.' 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1916. ADM 137/1937.



cannot be strong everywhere at once and it is sound strategy to concentrate our efforts in one direction at a time. An operation such as that indicated *must*, however, be directed by one head and very thoroughly organised. ...<sup>144</sup>

A reappraisal of the policy of mining the Bight on an extensive scale had also begun in late 1916. This can be seen as one of the consequences of Jutland and the 'almost' engagement with the HSF on August 18<sup>th</sup>. On both occasions the HSF turned home in the real or imagined face of the Grand Fleet. It became increasingly apparent that it was unlikely that the British would crush the Germans at sea in a single engagement. Added to this, Jellicoe (and, as Oliver noted, Beatty) were unwilling to operate the capital ships south of 55°30' N 4° E except 'under exceptional circumstances'.<sup>145</sup> The result was that the southern North Sea effectively became a banned area for the Grand Fleet for over a year.

By late 1916, however, the threat of the HSF was overshadowed by the increasingly menacing one posed by the U-Boat. Merchant losses had dropped during the 'Jutland period' of May and June 1916 when submarines had been withdrawn from the assault on shipping to work with the HSF (a similar drop in losses occurred in August as well when the HSF made its next foray). After August, however, the totals had increased sharply with October 1916 being the worst month for shipping losses since the war began, with 353,660 tons of British, Allied and Neutral shipping lost, of which the British made up 176,248 tons.<sup>146</sup> Over 1 million tons of shipping of all nations was lost in the last three months of 1916. The problem of what to do about these losses had been discussed on several occasions during 1916, with the first consideration of the possible introduction of convoy occurring in February 1916. This was not caused by existing shipping losses (losses in early 1916 were lower than those at the end of 1915),<sup>147</sup> but rather by the belief that 1916 was doing to be a decisive year in the war, and that out of desperation the Germans would launch an offensive

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<sup>144</sup> Jellicoe to Balfour, 29<sup>th</sup> October 1916. BL, Add. Mss. 49714.

<sup>145</sup> Jellicoe Memorandum, 'Conference on Board HMS 'Iron Duke', between Commander-in-Chief, Grand Fleet, Chief of the Staff, Grand Fleet, and the Chief of the War Staff', 13<sup>th</sup> September 1916. ADM 137/1645. Oliver's note on Beatty's attitude was penned on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1916. He added that, although he 'concurred' with the mining policy it would hinder any attempts to use air power to get at the Zeppelin bases.

<sup>146</sup> Fayle, *Seaborne Trade*, vol. iii. Table 1 (a), 465.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 465. Some 241,201 tons of British shipping had been lost in 1914; 855,721 in 1915; 1,237,634 in 1916; 3,729,985 in 1917 and 1,694,749 tons in 1918. Interestingly losses in 1918 (January to September) were in almost all cases higher than the corresponding figures for 1916. Table 1 (b), 466, reveals an even more startling fact, that a comparison of losses *by submarine* in 1916 and 1918 shows figures of 888,689 tons to 1,668,972 tons. The real success in 1918 was the elimination of the threat by mines with losses down from 244,623 tons in 1916 to 19,944 in 1918.

against British trade as a final gamble. Webb believed that the Germans would hope that the British would take destroyers away from the Grand Fleet to protect trade, and consequently the HSF would stand a better chance of striking at it. In February 1916, therefore, Webb issued a memorandum in which he considered the introduction of convoy.<sup>148</sup> This document was not simply Webb's work, as others in the TD also had a hand in crafting and commentating on it.<sup>149</sup> This in itself suggests that staff work in the TD was more decentralised than has traditionally been supposed.

In this paper Webb considered the likely nature of attack on British Merchant shipping. The paper still focused on the likelihood of surface attack by gunfire rather than torpedo attack, and that it was he believed that the Germans were unlikely to devote more energy to submarine torpedo attack on British shipping because 'these boats lock up numbers of very valuable personnel, the number available is presumably limited and the probabilities are that the enemy will prefer to employ them in areas where there is a direct military object.' This flew in the face of existing evidence, as in 1915 alone submarines had accounted for 87% of British merchant losses. Although this figure dropped to 71% for 1916 it still remained significant.<sup>150</sup> In terms of protecting merchant vessels, repeating his views of 1913, Webb stated that scattering was the best policy, adding that 'losses were not excessive.' Of convoy, he believed that it was 'inadvisable except as a last resort if all other means fail'. The principal reason for being so reluctant to be more positive was that he did not believe that convoy escorts would deter attack. This view was not based on any experimental evidence as Webb himself accepted, 'The extent of this danger is difficult to estimate as we have no experience to guide us. Probably, however, it is sufficiently great to make it undesirable to introduce convoy.' In addition, he believed that the torpedo would always get through, and consequently any concentration of shipping, which a convoy represented, would be liable to heavy losses. Indeed, a TD officer, Capt. Drury Lowe argued that the 'net gain ... will be nil' if convoys were introduced. Webb did, however, advocate trying convoys as an experiment. When Oliver came to read this paper *two months* later, he concurred in its sentiments. The trials, however, did not take place. The fact that there was such a delay is perhaps an indication of the

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<sup>148</sup> Webb Memorandum, 'The Protection of Sea Borne Trade', 24<sup>th</sup> February 1916. ADM 137/2771.

<sup>149</sup> Drury Lowe Memorandum, 'Disadvantages of Convoy', n.d. [but after Webb's 24<sup>th</sup> February Memorandum]. ADM 137/2771.

<sup>150</sup> Fayle, *Seaborne Trade*, vol. iii. Table 1 (b), 466.

lack of seriousness with which it was taken, although Oliver was also a notorious bottleneck in the bureaucratic system and was usually swamped with paperwork.

Oliver did, however, add the following comments in a minute dated 16<sup>th</sup> April 1916: 'Concur that when scattering fails, a form of convoy between England & Gibraltar & possibly in Med'n may be necessary, the means of providing it being to make unarmed ships keep company with defensively armed ships, the latter have a gun forward as well as aft. Necessary to have a considerable no. of armed ships.'<sup>151</sup> Jackson concurred in this summary and asked for ships to be armed as quickly as possible.<sup>152</sup> The significant emphasis here, however, has to be placed on those initial words, 'when scattering fails'. It took a long time for anyone to see that scattering simply gave the U-Boat so many more targets into which to bump, particularly when ships tended to following well-known routes. The prevailing belief here, though, was that the main threat to merchant ships came from surface attack, either by raiders, or by U-Boats using their gun rather than their torpedoes. What Oliver's statement did reveal was that the reversal of policy towards convoy in 1917 was not as intellectually sudden as might be believed. It was conditionally accepted, but required other factors to initiate it, and above all experience that would disprove some of convoy's negative connotations.

Despite the fact that by late 1916 the British were getting intelligence that the Germans were thinking of launching unrestricted submarine warfare, it was not until it happened that the balance of the argument tipped in favour of convoy. Until then, the idea of convoying ships in the sense of what was implemented gradually in 1917 was still hotly rejected, as two letters in October 1916 showed. The VAC 10CS, Reginald Tupper, wrote to Jackson on 23<sup>rd</sup> October suggesting that the escorting of merchant ships through the English Channel be given a trial. He also sent a copy of the letter to Beatty. Tupper's view was reinforcing a letter by Capt. Humphrey Smith of HMS *Alsatian*, which stated that while on duty with the 10CS he regularly found straggling ships that were travelling at the same speed, in the same direction, and from the same port. The sensible thing, he suggested, would be to convoy them.<sup>153</sup> The reply by the DOD was dismissive, 'Unfortunately we have to deal with existing vessels and with existing port and transit facilities and not with imaginary ones. ... Submit no action

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<sup>151</sup> Oliver Minute, 16<sup>th</sup> April 1916. ADM 137/2771.

<sup>152</sup> Jackson to Webb, 17<sup>th</sup> April 1916. ADM 137/2771.

<sup>153</sup> Tupper to Jackson, 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1916; Smith to Tupper, 21<sup>st</sup> October 1916. ADM 137/1322.

necessary.’<sup>154</sup> Even if Thomas Jackson was wrong, it does suggest a genuine level of concern that convoys would make the already chaotic situation in Britain’s ports even worse. But such chaos needed to be compared with the actual dislocation, induced by U-Boat warnings, to the Channel coal trade before the French Coal Trade (FCT) protected sailings were introduced in early 1917, and the inefficient use of shipping which was the result not of the use of convoy, but the lack of it. Oliver agreed that there were insufficient spare ships to do this escort work, and, ironically in the light of experiences in 1917 added, ‘the writer has a great deal to learn as regards commercial shipping, trade & labour conditions.’<sup>155</sup> Clearly Oliver too still had a great deal to learn, and it was the sense of unease with the Admiralty’s approach to the question of the submarine issue which led to Jackson and Balfour’s removal from the Admiralty at the end of 1916 and their replacement by Jellicoe and Sir Edward Carson respectively.

The Balfour-Jackson era thus ended in apparent failure. The HSF had not been destroyed, and the battle of Jutland had revealed significant weaknesses in British battle preparedness. The threat of the U-Boat had not been contained, and British mines did not work. The failure of the Dardanelles operation had also severely damaged the Navy’s prestige, as had their unwillingness to pursue major operations outside the North Sea. Against this, however, needs to be put the following: that Jackson and Oliver implemented a significant re-orientation of the Grand Fleet prior to Jutland which would have delivered a significant victory had it not been bungled by Beatty. The Navy organised a successful evacuation of the army from Gallipoli. The Staff was operating more smoothly than it had in the Churchill-Fisher era, and the liberal-dominated ethos of the economic blockade was finally being challenged and a more ruthless pursuit of German economic assets was being spear-headed by the TD. The failings of the OD and ID at Jutland were also less significant than has normally been supposed, and the traditional account of events in the Admiralty during those dramatic hours still needs further investigation. Certainly it appears that the Thomas Jackson was not the buffoon that later accounts have made him out to be.

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<sup>154</sup> Jackson Minute, 6<sup>th</sup> November 1916. ADM 137/1322.

<sup>155</sup> Minutes by Thomas Jackson and Oliver, 6<sup>th</sup> November 1916. ADM 137/1322.

## Chapter 6: The Jellicoe Era, November 1916 – December 1917.

Jellicoe's departure from the Grand Fleet caused shock amongst his sailors. Promotion to be First Sea Lord would, in other circumstances, have been seen as the culmination of a glittering career. In the context of the war, however, many saw it as a demotion. Balfour too was removed, to the safety of the FO, and replaced by the Unionist Sir Edward Carson. The Coalition of December 1916 had not simply brought about changes at the Admiralty, but throughout the Government. The most important of these changes was that Asquith left Downing Street to be replaced by the mercurial David Lloyd George as Prime Minister.

The prevailing view of the Admiralty in the Jellicoe era was that it 'could have done better' in the prosecution of the war against Germany. There was no shortage of those that felt that the naval war was being dictated from Berlin, and that despite its huge preponderance of ships, the Royal Navy had squandered this advantage, and, displaying an aversion to risk, was happy to let things drift.<sup>1</sup> Jellicoe seemed to give credence to this view when he asserted that, 'the war will not be won until the enemy's land forces are defeated'.<sup>2</sup> There were those, therefore, who believed that the war could be prosecuted more *offensively*. Many saw the source of the problem of the lack of the Navy's impact lying in London, with what was considered to be a lacklustre group of Staff Officers, a second division, where 'the situation righted itself only slowly' in 1917.<sup>3</sup> One of the principal reasons for this was the failure to grasp the possibility of convoy with anything approaching enthusiasm or insight; rather they adopted it out of desperation.

It was in these dire circumstances that some historians have claimed that the Admiralty were 'prepared to listen to any boy scout, old lady or crank inventor who claimed to have a sovereign remedy'.<sup>4</sup> Historians have quoted the cases of bizarre or fantastic schemes which not only had little or no chance of success, but were clearly doomed from the outset to have no impact on the war against Germany. A good example is that cited by Marder where the Admiralty went to some trouble and

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<sup>1</sup> Kenworthy, *Sailors*, 111; Roskill, *Beatty*, 210; Woodrow Wilson to Josephus Daniels, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1917, in Simpson, M., (ed.), *Anglo-American Naval Relations 1917-1919*. NRS, 1991, 78.

<sup>2</sup> Jellicoe to Beatty, 4<sup>th</sup> February 1917, in Marder, *DNSF*, vol. iv, 41. Jackson gave a similar view, Jackson Minute, n.d. [c. mid August 1917]. ADM 137/2712.

<sup>3</sup> Marder, *DNSF*, vol. iv, 60.

<sup>4</sup> Simpson, *Naval Relations*, 6.

expense to try and train sealions to attack German U-Boats.<sup>5</sup> Appealing to both an Englishman's sense of the absurd, as well as his famed love for animals, such a story cannot help but induce a sense of ridicule for those who could authorise such schemes. Such projects, however, were not typical. The sealion project originated in the BIR and was described by Duff as 'extraordinary'.<sup>6</sup> A similar plan to train seagulls to perch on German periscopes was equally derided by the Staff Officers who came across another BIR fantasy.<sup>7</sup> In fact the truth was far more mundane. Many schemes, never quite as colourful as the flotilla of self-destructing sealions, were proposed by a wide range of crank inventors (boy scouts being conspicuous by their absence in what appears to have been an almost wholly adult male correspondence), and were all politely rejected. Interestingly, many of them came from North America, and included schemes to land 5,000 infantry on the North German coast from giant submarine troop carriers; plans to build a barricade across the North Sea using tall trees; proposals to fill the North Sea near Germany with fuel and set fire to it; a plan to block German naval bases by dropping TNT on them; and a legion of ideas to get the British to Heligoland.<sup>8</sup>

Far from being evidence of desperation, the polite nature of the communications would be a model for many a modern multinational to emulate. That does not explain away the fact that in the end the Admiralty did authorise a pilot scheme to train sealions, but the scheme was fairly quickly abandoned, and compared with the \$40 million spent on the Northern Barrage in 1918, such other projects seem, in financial terms at least, to have been positively modest.<sup>9</sup> It should also be noted that the Admiralty was also required to defend itself from that most charismatic of boy scouts; Winston Churchill, who despite the debacle of the Dardanelles was still keen to see old ships used, this time in the Heligoland Bight.<sup>10</sup> Such ships would have been very vulnerable to attack by modern ships, as Jutland had already revealed. The Staff

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<sup>5</sup> Marder, *DNSF*, vol. iv, 78-9.

<sup>6</sup> Duff Memorandum, 'Anti-Submarine Measures', 5<sup>th</sup> February 1917. ADM 137/1927.

<sup>7</sup> Hall, S., to Ryan, C., 21<sup>st</sup> July 1917; Ryan, (Admiralty Research facility at Aberdour) to Beatty 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1917. ADM 137/1927.

<sup>8</sup> Lee, to Fuller, 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1918. ADM 137/2706; Mather to Wemyss, 10<sup>th</sup> November 1917. ADM 137/2706; Lee to Fuller, 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1917, 'Scheme for destroying Ostend and Zeebrugge by Fire etc.' ADM 137/2706; US Navy Dept. via de Chair to Admiralty, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1917 in Simpson, *Naval Relations*, 47- 51; Capt. W. Pibworth, Royal Engineers, to Admiralty, 29<sup>th</sup> October 1917. ADM 137/2706.

<sup>9</sup> Halpern, *Naval History*, 440.

<sup>10</sup> Churchill Memorandum, 'Naval War Policy', 7<sup>th</sup> July 1917. CAB 24/19/GT1397.

looked at a scheme to block the entrance to German ports using all pre *King Edward VII* battleships, but was not convinced that it would work.<sup>11</sup>

This in itself provided an interesting problem. The Admiralty was criticised for failing to adopt more aggressive plans, and was also attacked for giving time to, and rejecting, schemes which could not possibly work. At the same time, however, groups such as the *Young Turks* – Dewar, Richmond, Kenworthy and the like – were praised for putting similar plans forward.<sup>12</sup> Such praise was also heaped on American schemes but it was open to speculation as to whether any of these projects would have made any significant difference to the outcome of the war. Set against this was Jellicoe or other Staff Officers were seen as overly cautious, if not downright defeatist. Yet the *Young Turks*, and the Americans form an important basis of source material when considering the role of the Admiralty during the entire war, and especially in the period from 1917 when not only were the Americans (slowly) entering the war, but also a number of the *Young Turks* saw service on the Naval Staff.<sup>13</sup> Part of this chapter will therefore look at their input into staff work in the latter half of 1917. There was little evidence that they did any better; if anything, their plans often lacked realism.

In late 1916, the pressing problem was to find a solution to the submarine crisis. This was why Jellicoe was brought to London, and in this he largely failed, although it would be fair to say that by the end of 1917 it had been contained. In particular, he was criticised for the tardy fashion in which convoy was finally adopted, his failure to delegate, and his pessimism.<sup>14</sup> In at least one aspect of his work historians have done Jellicoe a great disservice. While First Sea Lord Jellicoe laid the foundations for the successful development of the Staff in late 1917 and 1918. This began before the famous May 1917 reforms and before the arrival of Sir Eric Geddes as First Lord in July or even as Controller in April. Carson's impact as First Lord was slight, with the principal exception that it was he who persuaded Jellicoe to create a Planning Section

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<sup>11</sup> 'Notes on a Conference held on board HMS *Queen Elizabeth*', 24<sup>th</sup> August 1917, in *Jellicoe Papers*, vol. ii, 200-1.

<sup>12</sup> Marder, *FDSF*, vol. iv, 254-5; vol. v, 307; Roskill, *Beatty*, 227; Halpern, *Naval History*, 133-4.

<sup>13</sup> Richmond as Director of Staff Training and Duties in 1918, and Dewar and Kenworthy at the Planning Section of Operations, and then in the Planning Division itself in 1917-18.

<sup>14</sup> Gordon, *Rules*, 18; Goldrick, 'John R. Jellicoe', 365; Roskill, *Beatty*, 249; Fremantle, S., *My Naval Career, 1880-1928*, London 1949, 237.

in OD. In terms of the 'dominant voice', however, at the Admiralty, this has to be Jellicoe in the first instance, and after July a combination of Jellicoe and Geddes.

The major question in December 1916 was therefore what was going to be done about the U-Boat. One of Jellicoe's first actions was to create an Anti-Submarine Division of the War Staff, most of the senior officers of which he brought with him from the Grand Fleet. It also inherited the duties and personnel of the former Submarine Committee and absorbed some of the work of the TD relating to Auxiliary Patrols.<sup>15</sup> Almost immediately, pressure built up to act with suggestions concerning the use of convoys coming from naval officers, shipping brokers and government departments.<sup>16</sup> Each met with no success. Webb's comment on the last of these enquiries was simply 'Dead. Put Away.' But it was over the issue contained in this last letter, coal, that the first cracks began to appear in the War Staff's hostility to the principle of convoy. In later histories, the reasoning and timing of a change of heart over this issue would be hotly debated.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, once convoys were seen to be a resounding success, with sinking rates being recorded as falling from 25% to 4% in many voyages, some were keen to see their own names more actively involved in the introduction of the convoy. It was clear, however, that few at the top of the War Staff were enthusiastic for change. An indication of this can be seen in Webb's reply to Jellicoe's request for views on the difficulties involved in introducing convoys.<sup>18</sup> All the standard arguments were produced: that there were not enough warships to escort merchant ships; that destinations were too diverse to allow for a coherent convoy system; that delays would inevitably build up in ports; and that timetabled ships, such as mail steamers, would be disrupted. All these would contribute to the creation of effective shipping 'losses' through a reduction in carrying capacity.

Central to this was the measurement of how many ships were actually crossing the Atlantic. The impression was given publicly that the submarine offensive was having little impact on the huge numbers of ships arriving in British ports each day. These figures were deliberately misleading. As each arrival in port was counted, ships, particularly coastal freighters, could notch up a misleading number of 'safe'

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<sup>15</sup> Admiralty Memorandum, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1916. ADM 137/2863 & ADM 137/2715.

<sup>16</sup> Donald MacLeod & Sons (Ship Brokers) to Admiralty, 6<sup>th</sup> November 1916; SNO, Malta to First Sea Lord, 15<sup>th</sup> November 1916; Conference Request of VACEMS, C-in-C East Indies and SNO, Malta to First Sea Lord, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1917; ADM 137/1322. W. F. Marwood, Board of Trade to Webb, 21<sup>st</sup> December 1916. ADM 137/1392.

<sup>17</sup> Marder, *FDSF*, vol. iv, chapter vi, especially 160-165; Halpern, *Naval History*, 352-364.

<sup>18</sup> Jellicoe to Webb, 24<sup>th</sup> December 1916; Reply 26<sup>th</sup> December 1916. ADM 137/1322 and 137/2771.



arrivals per journey. It has been suggested that the Admiralty were misled by their own misinformation which they hoped would make its way from Britain to Germany.<sup>19</sup> But from late 1916 at least this cannot be true and to say that the Admiralty was unaware of the true numbers of ships crossing the Atlantic was also wrong. Capt. Bertram Smith drew up a table using Transport Department and OD figures which showed that in January 1917 there were some 128 ships en route to Britain across the Atlantic.<sup>20</sup> A further 122 were in harbour in the United States. Smith calculated that an average monthly sailing figure would be about 304 ships, or about 10 a day leaving the USA. This table suggested that it was also wrong to ascribe the 'startling discovery' of the real situation simply to the work of Commander Reginald Henderson, as has often been the case.<sup>21</sup> Oliver read Smith's report and said that there would still not be enough cruisers of the right standard to convoy even with such a reduced number of ships.<sup>22</sup> The evidence that Smith himself, despite knowing the real figures agreed with Oliver's opinion was indicated by a minute he drafted for Webb later in January.<sup>23</sup> In it he said, 'In a few cases (*limited by means available*) convoy is being considered for *short voyages*.' It was the belief in the very limited sizes of convoys rather than the principle of convoy itself which was the problem. The significance of this table, therefore, was that the rejection of convoy was not simply based on the belief that trade was so vast that it could not be escorted.

Despite this, as 1916 turned dismally into 1917, Jellicoe became preoccupied with the issue of convoy, and in this light Jellicoe wrote to both Oliver and Webb asking them what they thought about instituting Atlantic convoys to protect ships from surface raiders.<sup>24</sup> This was not, as has been shown, the first time that Webb had been asked to state his views on the need and desirability for convoy. Until April 1917 he remained hostile to it, and for reasons that essentially did not change. Webb was supported not only by Oliver, but also by Jellicoe's new DASD, RA Alexander Duff. The roles of these officers in particular will be looked at later, for the decision to introduce convoy was largely a product of their change in attitude. This change was

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<sup>19</sup> Halpern, *Naval History*, 355.

<sup>20</sup> B. H. Smith, 'Table A – Estimated Volume of Traffic of British Vessels from North American Ports.' 4<sup>th</sup> January 1917. ADM 137/1322.

<sup>21</sup> Naval Staff Technical History, *Home Waters – Part VIII*, 377-378; Marder, *FDSF*, vol. iv, 150-152; Halpern, *Naval History*, 355; Hamilton, 'Expanding Naval Powers', 143-4.

<sup>22</sup> Oliver Minute, 6<sup>th</sup> January 1917. ADM 137/1322.

<sup>23</sup> Webb Minute, drafted by Smith, 20<sup>th</sup> January 1917. ADM 137/1322.

<sup>24</sup> Jellicoe to Oliver and Webb, 24<sup>th</sup> December 1916. ADM 137/1322.

also gradual. Rather than simply responding to an imminent visit by the Prime Minister to the Admiralty, they had seen a gradual erosion of their position in the months leading up to April 1917. Central to this change of view was the introduction of both the Scandinavian Convoys and the FCT sailings. In addition the Admiralty saw increasing pressure for change not simply from operational commanders at sea, but perhaps more importantly from other government departments at home and Britain's own allies abroad, especially the French.

For the French the big problem was simply that they needed more coal. They had lost many of their coalfields to the Germans in 1914, and consequently had become increasingly dependent on British exports. But enough coal was not getting through, and in an interesting twist on the concept of the 'coal lever', the French were able to use these shortages to bring about a change of policy on the part of the British Admiralty. By late 1916 the situation was becoming acute, and the Admiralty received a letter on 28<sup>th</sup> December 1916 from the Central Executive Committee for the supply of Coal to France and Italy.<sup>25</sup> It was the 'unanimous' opinion of the Committee that ships should be convoyed across to France as the only way to ensure greater consistency of supply. The delay in sailings which convoy might involve would more than be offset by the increased success in arrivals. Webb's initial comment was not enthusiastic, but he agreed to discuss the matter when he had a meeting with the French planned for 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1917.<sup>26</sup> It was significant that the papers were passed to Capt. Herbert Edwards in OD, as he was to play a central role not simply in the establishment of the FCT, but the whole convoy system.

The request from the French arrived on 30<sup>th</sup> December, and three War Staff Officers were detailed to be present at the meeting: Commander Thomas Fisher (TD), Commander William Henderson (ASD) and Capt. Henry Grant (OD).<sup>27</sup> The French said that such were the numerous suspensions in shipping movements brought about by the reported presence of German submarines that the notion that convoy would result in a reduced carrying capacity was simply not true. Indeed, since between 30-40% of days were affected by such reports, the Germans were, in effect, establishing an effective 'blockade' on the Allies themselves.<sup>28</sup> This directly countered the regular

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<sup>25</sup> Central Executive Committee for the supply of Coal to France and Italy to Admiralty, 28<sup>th</sup> December 1916. ADM 137/1392.

<sup>26</sup> Webb Minute, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1917. ADM 137/1392.

<sup>27</sup> War Staff Minute, 30<sup>th</sup> December 1916. ADM 137/1392.

<sup>28</sup> Henderson, 'Report of Conference with Commander Vandier', 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1917. ADM 137/1392.

Admiralty argument that convoy caused a greater disruption to trade than independent sailings. It was clear to all that this was no longer true. It was consequently agreed that 'controlled sailings' would be organised for coal ships, and Henderson was asked to co-ordinate with all the relevant War Staff Divisions and other departments to organise this. Jellicoe approved the plan on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1917.

The credit for much of these changes, including the organisation of the FCT, has gone to Commander Henderson.<sup>29</sup> But it would be wrong simply to single him out for mention. It is clear that much of the preparatory work was done by Captain Edwards, such as the Instructions to Senior Intelligence Officers that related to the FCT. It was he who produced the memorandum that outlined the basic principles of the FCT, and he worked closely with Henderson in the FCT Section of the War Staff.<sup>30</sup> Other War Staff officers were also involved. For example, Commander Basil Reinold of the Signals Section organised the codes that ships involved in the FCT were to use and Commander Henry Kenrick, RNVR, was the TD officer most closely associated with the FCT.

The success of the FCT was soon well known, and other merchant vessel masters were quick to try and join the safety that such escorts provided. No objection was made to them doing so as long as numbers in each 'controlled sailing' did not exceed the limited numbers fixed for such groups.<sup>31</sup> Many captains were simply voting with their rudders, and joining the protected passages where possible. Given this, the outcome of the meeting of 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1917 with a group of Master Mariners seemed most strange. The meeting had been organised by Jellicoe, who had told the War Cabinet on 19<sup>th</sup> February that he would discuss the possibility of convoy with members of the merchant navy, and then report back. The response Jellicoe got from these ten masters was important in delaying the introduction of Convoy, as the vast majority of them opposed its use. As the minutes record, 'the Masters who were assembled were firmly of the opinion that that they would prefer to sail alone rather than in company or under convoy.'<sup>32</sup> The reasons given were the standard ones, particularly that it was not possible for ships to keep station in a convoy especially if they normally travelled at different speeds. This was at odds, however, with the

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<sup>29</sup> Halpern, *Naval History*, 355; Marder, *FDSF*, vol. iv, 150-152, 154-155.

<sup>30</sup> Edwards Memorandum, "Controlled Sailings" for steam vessels employed on the French Coal Trade', 19<sup>th</sup> January 1917. ADM 137/1392.

<sup>31</sup> Edwards Minute, 28<sup>th</sup> March 1917. ADM 137/1392.

<sup>32</sup> 'Minutes of Meeting held at Admiralty on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1917, re possibility of Convoys.' ADM 137/2753.

actions of those who were busily joining the FCT. The contradiction was explained by Kenrick in a minute he wrote in 1919.

It may be said that the Meeting was not representative of the Merchant Marine in any way:

- 1) Five out of the Nine men were masters of Coasting Vessels - to whom the very idea of Convoy was anathema, even up to the summer of 1918.
- 2) Two of the remaining four were Masters of ocean-going vessels – both of which had only a few days previously been torpedoed – one the “Hadley”, while under Escort of a Destroyer, and the other an “Admiralty Collier”.
- 3) With the exception of one of the above and the Master of the “Minnesota”, none of the Masters present represented the better and most intelligent type of British Master Mariners.

The reason for this was the small amount of time left available for getting together a representative number of British ship-masters owing to instructions as to intended Conference only being received only a day or two before the time fixed for holding it.

Had more notice been given the attendance could have been secured of a fair number of Masters of large Ocean-going liners and cargo steamers – the vital ships at the time to the Country. ... Their opinion at that stage of the war would, in all probability, have been the means of saving to the Country many hundred thousand tons of shipping.<sup>33</sup>

The significance of the meeting in Kenrick’s eyes was clear. An opportunity for further external pressure to be put on the Staff had been lost. Whether Kenrick thought this in early 1917 was hard to tell, although he favoured allowing non-FCT ships to join the controlled sailings in March.<sup>34</sup> It was clear, however, that Jellicoe believed this group of master mariners to be representative of the profession as a whole, and this must have clouded his judgement, at least in the short term.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the masters merely confirmed the view that Jellicoe had expressed to the War Cabinet that, ‘to the present no complete or practicable cure for the submarine menace has

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<sup>33</sup> Kenrick to Manisty, 10<sup>th</sup> February 1919. ADM 137/2753.

<sup>34</sup> Kenrick Minute, 11<sup>th</sup> March 1917. ADM 137/1392.

<sup>35</sup> Jellicoe, *The Crisis of the Naval War*, London, 1920, 105-6.

been ... discovered'.<sup>36</sup> Jellicoe claimed that other masters were asked for their opinion, but no record of any such wider consultation appears to exist.

Yet the criticisms continued of the existing situation; the VA Queenstown suggested that it would be better to patrol a few routes more heavily, than to spread the Auxiliary Patrol ships too thinly.<sup>37</sup> There were those, as we shall see later, who thought that there was considerable merit in this plan, but Bayly undermined his arguments by extolling the virtue of the 'Q' ship, which by 1917 had lost almost all their effectiveness. The DASD also noted that 'patrolling a route is no effective deterrent to a submarine operating submerged'.<sup>38</sup> Given that he made this comment six weeks into the period of unrestricted submarine warfare, it might be fair to wonder what Duff did propose to do to deter such submerged attack.

At almost the same time Tyrwhitt wrote to Jellicoe with proposals for the escorting of trade across the southern North Sea to Holland.<sup>39</sup> Further pressure for change came from the FO. In late March, Sir Eyre Crowe, Assistant Under-Secretary at the FO, wrote saying that with the increasing losses in the trade with Norway ship owners were losing confidence in the ability of the British to protect ships in their passage across the North Sea.<sup>40</sup> The VACO&S, who argued that 'a system of escorts would be more efficacious than a patrol system', expressed similar sentiments.<sup>41</sup> It was as a result of these pressures that a Conference was organised at Longhope to decide on what to do. The War Staff was represented by Capt. Claude Seymour (TD), and Lieut. Lionel Cazalet (OD). Cazalet said that it would be possible to convoy 14 ships daily between Britain and Scandinavia in each direction.<sup>42</sup> Most of the local commanders agreed with the plans, although RA William Nicholson (RACECE) still favoured most ships sailing 'independently' with only the most valuable ships being escorted.<sup>43</sup> This view, however, was counter to the prevailing feeling, and significantly Beatty threw his weight behind a Scandinavian convoy system, adding

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<sup>36</sup> Jellicoe Memorandum, 'Naval Policy in Relation to Mercantile Shipping Losses from Submarine Warfare and the Effect on the Strategical Situation.' 21<sup>st</sup> February 1917. ADM 1/8480.

<sup>37</sup> Bayly to Jellicoe, 'Protection of Sea-Going Trade Leaving and Approaching the British Isles.' 15<sup>th</sup> March 1917. ADM 137/1322.

<sup>38</sup> Duff Minute, 25<sup>th</sup> March 1917. ADM 137/1322.

<sup>39</sup> Tyrwhitt to Jellicoe, 16<sup>th</sup> March 1917. ADM 137/2771.

<sup>40</sup> Crowe to Admiralty, 29<sup>th</sup> March 1917. ADM 137/1322.

<sup>41</sup> VA Commanding Orkneys and Shetlands to Beatty, 26<sup>th</sup> March 1917. ADM 137/2752.

<sup>42</sup> Minutes of Longhope Conference, 4<sup>th</sup> April 1917. ADM 137/1322.

<sup>43</sup> Nicholson Minute, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1917. ADM 137/1322.

that patrols had achieved little.<sup>44</sup> His input here would appear to have been decisive in changing minds in London, although he later attacked the use of convoys when it threatened the number of destroyers attached to the Grand Fleet.

Webb finally accepted the principle of convoys for the Scandinavia and Lerwick-Peterhead routes, although Duff still believed that Patrols had a value.<sup>45</sup> He claimed that 'When consideration is given to the immense number of vessels that have navigated round our coasts, and the relatively small number lost by submarine attack, it appears that considerable security has existed and it is thought that the patrols have contributed to this.' But he must have known from the work that Bertram Smith and others had done, such as the January 1917 shipping tables discussed above, that the figures publicly produced for shipping levels were untrue, and that, although the losses had not yet hit the 'black fortnight' at the end of April, losses in February and March, of British shipping alone were 150,000 to 200,000 tons above the figure for January.<sup>46</sup> The only other explanation is that these figures had been compiled by the TD, and although shown to Oliver, were not passed to Duff in ASD. He could have been, therefore, still using the incorrect former figures. If so, then this is evidence of the grave problems caused by unnecessary compartments within the Staff. Duff wrote that he felt that convoying would, if anything, result in an increase in shipping losses: 'The Convoy system is one on which very different opinions are held and a not uncommon opinion is that a very slender escort is sufficient to act as a deterrent against submarine attack. My opinion is diametrically opposed to this, and *I believe that an escort to be effective must number two escorting vessels to every ship in the convoy.*' ... 'an insufficiently guarded convoy passing daily *over the same area* must prove the easiest of preys to the submarine.'<sup>47</sup>

The belief, that patrols deter and work, and convoys attract and fail, was one reason why Duff was unable for so long to make the imaginative leap from patrol to convoy. There were insufficient ships to do both, but just enough for one or the other. A partial system of convoy, which he continued to oppose, was, for him, the worst of both worlds.<sup>48</sup> It meant removing the supposed protection of patrol without replacing

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<sup>44</sup> Beatty Minute, 9<sup>th</sup> April 1917. ADM 137/1322.

<sup>45</sup> Webb Minutes, 17<sup>th</sup> April 1917, ADM 137/1322 and 8<sup>th</sup> April 1917, ADM 137/2752. Duff Minute, 19<sup>th</sup> April 1917. ADM 137/1322.

<sup>46</sup> Fayle, *Seaborne Trade*, vol. iii, 465.

<sup>47</sup> Duff Minute, 19<sup>th</sup> April 1917. ADM 137/1322. My italics.

<sup>48</sup> Duff to Bethell, 17<sup>th</sup> May 1917. NMM. Duff Papers, DFF/3.

it with the putative benefit of convoy, as had been suggested by Hankey in February.<sup>49</sup> But these were not necessarily irreconcilable alternatives, and what was eventually created was something of a middle way between the two. Oliver was still in complete agreement with Duff, saying of the trial convoy, 'I am very doubtful of its success as convoys invite torpedo attack and the available escorts are too few for the number of ships proposed for a convoy.'<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, the experimental Scandinavian scheme was approved by Oliver, Duff and Grant who passed it to Jellicoe for final approval on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1917. The combination of Beatty's support with Oliver and Grant grudgingly changing their minds was decisive. It should be added that Oliver and Webb had spoken before about the possibilities of trial convoys, so this was not such a new idea, and the fact that it was a trial may well have persuaded Jellicoe that it was right to try it. Significantly Cazalet and Seymour, who had both been present in the Longhope Conference, continued to be involved in the preparation of paperwork for the trial convoys, and were joined by Edwards from OD who only months before had been central in setting up the FCT.<sup>51</sup>

As discussions about Scandinavian trade were being held, and a decision was being taken to experiment with convoys, so other requests came in for shipping to be convoyed, with the initiative coming from the FO.<sup>52</sup> In this case, the British had signed an agreement to increase imports from Spain, but this was being put in jeopardy by the increased risk of merchant sinkings. Webb minuted that only ore ships could travel in 'controlled sailings'.<sup>53</sup> It may be significant, however, that in their comments both Duff and Grant now struck a more positive note. 'What is possible will be done' wrote Duff, and 'convoying of vessels ... is being carried out to a certain extent.' said Grant. The tone here was different, and that the approach more flexible to convoys possibilities.<sup>54</sup> Duff's comment was made before the War Cabinet decision that Lloyd George would visit the Admiralty on the 30<sup>th</sup> April, and suggested that Duff's change of mind on 26<sup>th</sup> April was not simply brought about by this announcement. It did, however, constitute a formal and significant change of policy:

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<sup>49</sup> Hankey, M., 'Some Suggestions for Anti-Submarine Warfare', 13<sup>th</sup> February 1917, in Hattendorf, J., (ed.), *British Naval Documents 1204-1960*. NRS, 1993, 761-766. Also, *Naval Operations*, vol. v, 10-15.

<sup>50</sup> Oliver Minute, 20<sup>th</sup> April 1917. ADM 137/1322.

<sup>51</sup> Edwards' signature appears on 'Programme of Movements of Escorting Forces.' 8<sup>th</sup> May 1917. ADM 137/1322.

<sup>52</sup> FO to Jellicoe, 18<sup>th</sup> April 1917. ADM 137/1392.

<sup>53</sup> Webb Minute, 20<sup>th</sup> April 1917. ADM 137/1392.

<sup>54</sup> Duff Minute, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1917; Grant Minute, 25<sup>th</sup> April 1917. ADM 137/1392.

Submitted:-

It is evident to me that the time has arrived when we must be ready to introduce a comprehensive scheme of convoy at any moment.

The sudden and large increase in our daily losses of Merchant Ships, together with *the experience we have gained of the unexpected immunity from successful submarine attack in the case of the French Coal Trade*, afford sufficient reason for believing that we can accept the many disadvantages of large convoys with the certainty of a great reduction in our present losses.

Further, *the United States having come into the War eliminates some of the apparently insuperable difficulties to a comprehensive scheme of convoy.*

The number of vessels roughly estimated in the attached paper as the minimum necessary for escort work is large, but the necessity of further safeguarding our food supply is becoming vital.

The attached paper is merely an outline proposal giving certain figures to enable a decision to be given as to whether the scheme is to be proceeded with and worked out in detail.

The work will be heavy, and if approved I suggest the appointment of a Captain, for the special purpose, in the first place to work out the scheme and afterwards to superintend its practical application.<sup>55</sup>

Oliver concurred, also displaying a change of mind.<sup>56</sup> Duff gave two changed circumstances which help to explain his change of mind. Firstly, he cited the high increase in shipping losses (up 200,000 tons by the end of April on the March figure), and secondly he added that the arrival of the Americans increased the supply of escort vessels. Both of these may be true, although it should be added that shipping losses had been rising more or less constantly for six months, and American involvement in the war would place burdens on, as well as present opportunities to, the Admiralty. It was also believed that the use of American ports was a vital part of convoy's infrastructure and organisation. This was not necessarily true, however, as convoys could have assembled in Halifax or Bermuda prior to crossing the Atlantic, as the

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<sup>55</sup> Duff to Jellicoe, 26<sup>th</sup> April 1917. ADM 137/1322. My italics.

<sup>56</sup> Oliver Minute, 27<sup>th</sup> April 1917. ADM 137/1322.



main danger to shipping was in the waters around the UK.<sup>57</sup> In addition, the Americans were far from keen on the principle of convoy, as the British Naval Attaché in Washington later reported.<sup>58</sup>

Duff's Convoy Minute also represented a repudiation of many of the principles which had blocked its adoption earlier. In the memorandum attached to his 26<sup>th</sup> April minute he stated that, 'the larger the convoy passing through the danger zone, provided it is moderately protected, the less the loss to the merchant service.'<sup>59</sup> This was the opposite of what had been claimed only months before. Perhaps more importantly, and in line with the 'imaginative leap' mentioned above, Duff now believed that convoys were not simply the honey pot for submarines. The reasons for his change of view can only be a source of speculation. He was later vigorous in his denial that he was pushed into it, particularly by the timing of Lloyd George's visit.<sup>60</sup> The heavy losses in April were clearly very significant, as was the success of the smaller escorted crossings, such as the FCT. In addition, he cannot have been unaware that an increasing number of his own Staff Officers, such as Edwards or Henderson, had real experience of convoy working.

Jellicoe approved Duff's Memorandum on 27<sup>th</sup> April, along with proposed details for a Gibraltar to Britain Convoy and decided to constitute a committee to consider the question of the introduction of a general system of convoys, in line with the final paragraph of the Memorandum. This committee, drawn from the War Staff, reported on 6<sup>th</sup> June.<sup>61</sup> A representative of the Ministry of Shipping, Norman Leslie, also joined them. The Report advocated the use of convoys and outlined a structure for their operation.<sup>62</sup> The Committee gave public thanks to Commander Reginald Henderson, who had worked on the FCT and thought extensively about the question of convoy. Under the scheme the Committee proposed, the merchant marine would come under Admiralty control, an event which would have been unheard of in 1914 with its 'business as usual' approach to the war. Indeed, such breaks from past approaches to policy issues were to be found across Britain in 1917-18.<sup>63</sup> The convoys

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<sup>57</sup> Halpern, *Naval History*, 355.

<sup>58</sup> Gaunt to Oliver, 6<sup>th</sup> May 1917. ADM 137/1322.

<sup>59</sup> Duff Memorandum, 26<sup>th</sup> April 1917. ADM 137/1322.

<sup>60</sup> Duff to Jellicoe, n.d. [c. August 1928] & Jellicoe to Duff, 13<sup>th</sup> August 1928. NMM DFF/1.

<sup>61</sup> Fisher to Jellicoe, 'Organization for General System of Convoys', 16<sup>th</sup> May 1917. ADM 137/1322. The Staff officers were: Capt. Horace Longden, Fleet Paymaster Wilfred Manisty, Commander James Wilde and Lieut. Geoffrey Burton.

<sup>62</sup> Atlantic Trade Committee's Report, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1917. ADM 137/2750.

<sup>63</sup> Bourne, *Great War*, 186-198.

proposed worked on an average of 19.5 ships per convoy. This only, however, referred to Atlantic Homeward trade routes, although they also recommended that convoys be extended to the Mediterranean. Fisher and Duff concurred in the scheme, even though it was what Duff had earlier warned against, a 'partial scheme.'<sup>64</sup> Jellicoe approved the plan on 12<sup>th</sup> June, and a Convoy Section was soon created, with accommodation being found on the ground floor of Admiralty House.<sup>65</sup>

Duff later claimed that he had pushed for the creation of a single convoy section as a way of trying to break down the excessive 'watertight compartments' within the Admiralty.<sup>66</sup> Longden's committee had, however, already recommended such a change. The two principal officers in the Convoy Section were Fleet Paymaster Manisty, who was appointed 'Organising Manager of Convoys' with Lieut. Burton as his assistant. Both had served on the Atlantic Trade Convoy Report Committee. Other, as yet unnamed officers were to join the Committee. Duff's minute makes clear that certain members of the ASD connected with Commander Carrington's Map Room would remain with that division, but chart the progress of convoys across the Atlantic in relation to the presumed position of various enemy submarines, thus combining two aspects of what they had already been doing, with Lieut.-Commander Harold Morey being appointed to do this. Others joining the new Section included Commander Henry King, RNVR who later controlled the North Atlantic Sub-Section which included overseeing Troopships and Convoys. This development was not as radical as some might suppose; it was really little more than an improvement on the pre-1915 War Room plot, but with more officers, better technology and far greater levels of information than they had ever amassed three years before.<sup>67</sup>

Having taken the decision to introduce Convoys on an increasingly elaborate scale, the structure of the Naval Staff had to change to accommodate the extra work. It was no longer possible for the TD to balance its offensive (blockade) and defensive (convoy) duties, and consequently it made sense for these two duties to be split. As a result a new Division was created in September 1917 called the Mercantile Movements Division, whose duty was to oversee the operation of the convoys (see

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<sup>64</sup> Duff Minute, n.d. [11<sup>th</sup> June 1917]. ADM 137/1327.

<sup>65</sup> Duff to Jellicoe, 18<sup>th</sup> June 1917. ADM 137/1323.

<sup>66</sup> Duff to Bethell, 17<sup>th</sup> July 1917. DFF/3

<sup>67</sup> Halpern, *Naval History*, 361-2.

Appendix G).<sup>68</sup> It should, however, be noted that the new division did not land up employing as many retired staff as this diagram originally suggested (see Appendix C Table 1.2). Its creation also marked the departure from the Trade Division of Webb, who left to command HMS *New Zealand*, and he was replaced by Captain Alan Hotham as DTD. Captain Frederic Whitehead, who had himself led the first experimental Atlantic Convoy, became Director of Mercantile Movements. Perhaps most significant in the composition of the new division was the wholesale transfer of T.O section from the Trade Division. This was headed by Capt. Bertram Smith, and had been responsible for issuing route instructions to the masters of merchant ships, and other tasks relating to the operation of Atlantic Convoys. With him came seven other officers, five clerks and a French Liaison officer. Other transfers included Capt. Seymour from ASD, and Capt. Edwards, who had done so much to set up the FCT Convoys, from TD. They ran the Home Section of the MMD, which dealt with coastal and the cross Channel convoys. Commander Peile, again from the ASD, arranged the provision of Coastal Escorts. A second officer organised the Destroyers which escorted the convoys through the Danger Zones. Thus formed, the MMD almost formed a 'micro-staff'; indeed its membership was greater than that of the pre-war staff.

One benefit of the convoy system was that it enabled merchant shipping to respond more swiftly to intelligence concerning the location of an enemy submarine. A convoy was thus able to route around the supposed danger spot. This had not been possible before as few merchant ships had been equipped with W/T. Not only was there a shortage of W/T equipment, perhaps more importantly, there was a shortage of W/T operators. With the introduction of convoys, however, this problem was largely solved, as only one ship in the convoy now needed such equipment. Any information could easily be passed to other ships in the convoy. The Signals Section of the War Staff therefore became closely involved in the convoy issue. They instructed merchant ships not only what to do and how to do it, but equally vitally, what not to do. W/T silence would be more important than W/T chatter. The Head of the Signals Section was keen that master mariners should be aware of this as quickly as possible.<sup>69</sup> It was also important that all vessels used a single code system in the convoy system. The

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<sup>68</sup> Duff to Hotham, 15<sup>th</sup> September 1917. ADM 1/8518/74; Anon. Memorandum, 'Structure of Mercantile Movements', n.d. [September 1917]. ADM 1/8518/74.

<sup>69</sup> Payne to Webb, 1<sup>st</sup> May 1917. ADM 137/1329.

production of such a code took time, and only finally appeared in September 1917. This was not simply due to bureaucratic delay. The creation of a draft code structure took some two weeks, with the proposals being considered by the Signals Section and OD, TD and ID.<sup>70</sup> There were also delays in getting the 30,000 copies of the code out to ships and the need to train up the Reporting Officers in all the various ports concerned. Such was the increasing role of the Signals Section that proposals were put forward to develop the section further.<sup>71</sup> This was not to suggest that the Signals Section was not a part of the staff. The working structure of the staff, as revealed by the *Admiralty Telephone Directories*, shows that it already was, but the intention was that the rebranded Section would have better links with the WO, the Signals School, the RNAS and the Cable Section of the OD. This led to the creation of the enlarged Signals 'Division' in September 1917.

The need to find sufficient destroyers for convoy escort clearly had implications either for the existing number of destroyers which were allocated to the Grand Fleet, or at least any future provision of them. Jellicoe had almost conceded as much while still at Scapa in October 1916 when he had suggested that the readiness of the Grand Fleet could be scaled down so that resources could be devoted to the anti-submarine campaign.<sup>72</sup> When he left for London his place at the head of the Grand Fleet was taken by Beatty. In many ways this represented a backwards step. As will be discussed later he was unhappy for destroyers to be 'wasted' on convoy work, and was also unwilling to pursue the 'risk theory' that Jackson, Oliver and Jellicoe had adopted in April 1916. In particular, he emphasised that he wanted the whole fleet kept together at Rosyth.<sup>73</sup>

In other respects Beatty represented continuity with the Jellicoe regime, especially with his constant demands for more ships. A difference from Jellicoe, however, can be perceived in his manner towards the Admiralty. In the same way that Beatty had wanted the 5BS simply because it was there, so now having got the whole

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<sup>70</sup> Webb to Duff, 'Proposed system for Diverting Inward Bound Ships by W/T', 15<sup>th</sup> May 1917. ADM 137/1329.

<sup>71</sup> Nicholson Memorandum, 'Proposal to form a Communications Division of the Naval Staff and W/T Bureau', 15<sup>th</sup> August 1917. ADM 1/8495/181.

<sup>72</sup> Jellicoe to Balfour, 29<sup>th</sup> October 1916. BL, Add. Mss. 49714.

<sup>73</sup> Beatty Memorandum, 'Memorandum of conversations with the Commander-in-Chief on board the "Iron Duke" on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> February 1917.' ADM 137/1937.

Grand Fleet, he wanted to have the Admiralty as well. There were constant demands to be better informed about all aspects of the war. He also wanted to become a member of the War Staff in his own right, and have his own rival Staff in his flagship. He also resented the Admiralty looking for fresh Staff officers from within the Grand Fleet to serve in London. As Oliver noted after a conference with Beatty in June 1917,

He was adverse to sparing the number of selected officers required by the First Lord from the Fleet, and had proposed a Committee of three or four officers in the Grand Fleet to consider schemes. ... There should be one officer at the Admiralty specially to go through the plans forwarded....

He would ... welcome more frequent visits from War Staff officers to keep closer touch.

I gather his idea is to be a sort of Honorary Member of the War Staff. If it gives him satisfaction, there seems to be no objection to it that I can see, and it may be of use to the First Lord and First Sea Lord to be able to say that the Grand Fleet is in such close touch with the War Staff, when the War Cabinet criticises the Admiralty.<sup>74</sup>

It may have given him satisfaction, but it is an indication of how out of touch Beatty was with the reality of war planning that he believed that either three or four officers at Rosyth, or one representative in London could deal with the huge quantity of matters that the Naval Staff was dealing with by June 1917.

What Beatty did instead was to barrage the Admiralty with suggestions as to how they might use naval power to help win the war. When these schemes were often rejected, he attacked the Admiralty for its lack of offensive spirit. This correspondence has helped to colour how the Admiralty was viewed at this time, where emphasis has been given to Jellicoe's pessimism or other apparent failings in Staff work. This was unfair. As will be shown later, the Naval Staff continued to evolve and decentralise its work during the Jellicoe era, and in many ways it was Jellicoe's Admiralty that laid the foundations for the Navy's successes in 1918. This challenges Professor Roskill's assertion that it was only in 1918 with the Geddes-Wemyss era that 'for the first time since the outbreak of war decentralization was the

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<sup>74</sup> Oliver Memorandum, 'Questions not on Commander-in-Chief's Agenda.' 12<sup>th</sup> June 1917. ADM 137/1374.

order of the day.<sup>75</sup> Importantly these changes began before either Lloyd George or Geddes could have been the reasons for them. The reason that so many of Beatty's plans were rejected was because, in 1917 at least, they were impractical. Aircraft carriers did not yet exist and planes were yet to be developed which could carry out the operations that Beatty suggested. His suggestion that by putting 'light weight pilots' into planes to increase their range was as naïve as his earlier suggestion that the *Queen Elizabeths* would go faster if they cut the amount of fuel they carried.<sup>76</sup> His proposals were not rejected out of hand, indeed the Admiralty pointed out that many of his better projects were planned for 1918 or 1919 when the right equipment became available.

A recognition that the Germans were unlikely to come out, and that more had to be done to deal with the submarine threat led to renewed interest in the development of greater minefields. Deep Minefields were clearly of limited application in that they could only be placed in locations where British surface craft could patrol in concentrated numbers around a fairly small body of water. They would not work, for example, in the Heligoland Bight, but they were potentially ideally suited either to the Straits of Dover or focal points along the British coastline where it was believed that German U-Boats sailed close to the shore either to attack coastal shipping, as a means of shortening routes or gaining land sightings for navigation. Jellicoe was enthusiastic about them, but early trials in 1915 were disappointing when it was concluded that there was 'no evidence that that they have ever damaged the enemy', although they had sunk some British craft when the quickly laid mines dragged into shallower water and thus came into contact with surface craft.<sup>77</sup> Alterations to mine design, however, meant that Jackson was able to report to Jellicoe in early 1916 that, 'We will do all the mining possible now as I hear the alterations to the s/m mine has made it efficient.'<sup>78</sup> This though was a pre-emptive comment as mining reports which came in soon after recorded that mines had dragged by as much as 12 to 15 miles in the area north of

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<sup>75</sup> Roskill, *Beatty*, 249.

<sup>76</sup> Beatty to Admiralty, 'Consideration of an attack by torpedo planes on the High Sea Fleet', 11<sup>th</sup> September 1917. ADM 137/1938.

<sup>77</sup> Oliver Minute, 27<sup>th</sup> December 1915. ADM 137/844.

<sup>78</sup> Jackson to Jellicoe, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1916. BL, Add. Mss. 49009.

Terschelling.<sup>79</sup> Problems also still existed with premature explosions which Dumas found 'astounding'. Dumas commented 'there was thought to be no mines less liable to drag than the British Elia.'<sup>80</sup> Oliver found the reports 'very disquieting'.<sup>81</sup>

This helped to explain the delay in adopting another programme of deep minefields which only took place after an Admiralty conference on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1917. Here Oliver, Duff, Hope, and Fisher discussed the possibility of laying further mines off Portland and Beachy Head. Much of the paper work was produced by Captain Arthur May, who was Oliver's Naval Assistant and the key figure in the 1917 mining programme. It was decided to resume the policy, although as May observed, 'The efficiency of these deep minefields entirely depends on the ability of our patrol vessels to force enemy submarines to make a deep dive....' onto the mines. This proved difficult to achieve, particularly when the problem remained that it was still hard to detect the submarines by patrol. One person who was not in sympathy with this policy was the VAC Dover Patrol, Reginald Bacon. A couple of days after this meeting he wrote to the Admiralty complaining about the whole policy of trying to get submarines to dive onto mines.<sup>82</sup> Patrols, he believed simply gave away the location of the mines, except to 'thickheaded' fisherman who would simply stumble into the minefields. This attitude brought a stinging response from Fisher.<sup>83</sup> He found Bacon's comments 'incredible under present conditions' given the increasing rate of merchant losses. He noted that nothing naturally compelled a submarine to dive, as they tended to spend as much time as possible on the surface. Fisher added that minefields had to be concentrated to be effective. Hope believed that the new H4 mine, with its strengthened sinker would cope with the currents found in the Straits.<sup>84</sup> It was therefore decided to have a conference of all interested parties to discuss the issue of the Dover minefields. Duff, however, also noted that the urgency of the issue was 'now more imperative than ever'.<sup>85</sup>

Perhaps the most significant development here in terms of the Staff's role in mine warfare were the changes that took place in the planning of operations following Jellicoe's arrival at the Admiralty in December 1916. This was important as it

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<sup>79</sup> Waistell, A., 'Mining Report', 27<sup>th</sup> March 1916. ADM 137/838.

<sup>80</sup> Dumas Minute, 29<sup>th</sup> March 1916. ADM 137/838.

<sup>81</sup> Oliver Minute, 27<sup>th</sup> March 1917. ADM 137/838.

<sup>82</sup> Bacon to Admiralty, 11<sup>th</sup> June 1917. ADM 137/845.

<sup>83</sup> Fisher Minute, 16<sup>th</sup> June 1917. ADM 137/845.

<sup>84</sup> Hope Minute, 25<sup>th</sup> June 1917. ADM 137/845.

<sup>85</sup> Duff Minute, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1917. ADM 137/845.

challenged the view that Jellicoe was the arch-centraliser, incapable of delegating work, or of developing a delegated system.<sup>86</sup> Within weeks of his arrival in London there were significant changes in the daily operation of the War Staff that pre-empted the May 1917 reforms, and consequently had nothing to do with any pressure that came from outside the Admiralty, particularly from Lloyd George. Between the outbreak of war and December 1916 all minelaying operations were personally drafted by Oliver. The last one that he drafted was Operation ML3 on 29<sup>th</sup> December 1916.<sup>87</sup> The next operation was written by the new DOD, Capt. George Hope, whom Jellicoe had brought from the Grand Fleet.<sup>88</sup> Perhaps more significantly still by April 1917, and again before the major reforms of May, Minelaying operations were being drafted by an OD Staff Officer, with Hope and Oliver merely initialling their consent.<sup>89</sup> A fully-fledged staff system was developing where before such officers had often tended to be little more than secretaries. It was also less common for Oliver simply to be told on dockets to 'draft this' by the First Sea Lord as had tended to be the case in the early years of the war.<sup>90</sup> Not only did this suggest that historians have been unfair on Jellicoe, but also that the development of the War Staff was more gradual than has traditionally been supposed. It was an example of bureaucratic evolution rather than 'big bang'. One reason why this happened and why Jellicoe's behaviour was different at the Admiralty than it had been in the Grand Fleet was that the Grand Fleet needed central control, whereas the Naval Staff did not. In short, in different circumstances Jellicoe behaved differently.

The changes in the drafting of minelaying operations mirrored the development of a new mine and sinker which were already in production (the H4 mine and Mark XI sinker) and were being tested at this time. It was hoped that they would be far more successful than the British Elia since it had a horned contact arrangement that was copied from the German mine. Duff, while still DASD, stated 'I fully concur that in mining, on a large scale, lies the only ... prospect of successfully blocking the Straits to Submarines.'<sup>91</sup> Further delays, however, took place while the mines were tested. This decision has been much criticised, but given the unhappy history of British mining in the first half of the war, and the degree to which problems

<sup>86</sup> Gordon, *Rules*, 18; Goldrick, 'John R. Jellicoe', 365; Roskill, *Beatty*, 249.

<sup>87</sup> Oliver Minute, 'Operation ML3', 29<sup>th</sup> December 1916. ADM 137/838.

<sup>88</sup> Hope Minute, 'Operation W2', 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1917. ADM 137/838.

<sup>89</sup> Operations Division Minute, 'Operation A9', 11<sup>th</sup> April 1917. ADM 137/838.

<sup>90</sup> For example, Jackson Minute, 6<sup>th</sup> September 1916. ADM 137/1107.

<sup>91</sup> Duff Minute, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1917. ADM 137/845.



with mines were only discovered after considerable expense and time, it was understandable that greater certainty was needed to prevent more mistakes being made, particularly as Jellicoe was himself keen to order 20,000.<sup>92</sup>

Initial efforts to block-off the Bight proved to be largely unsuccessful as the minutes of an Admiralty Conference in July 1917 record:

The policy of mining in the Heligoland Bight which has hitherto been adopted by us appears to have resulted in forcing the enemy submarines to use inshore channels and Territorial Waters both for ingress and egress, ... both to the North and to the West, and that up to these positions they are always escorted by mine-sweeping craft...

Any mining that we undertake in these territorial waters, though it might result in hindering the movements of enemy submarines, would not stop them.

It is considered that territorial waters should not be mined unless there is a big chance of obtaining good results, and in view of the constant sweeping in these waters such results are not to be anticipated, unless some form of device to defeat the sweep is evolved.

...

The policy suggested is to lay minefields across the probable tracks of the submarine after leaving territorial waters, both at the Northern and Western extremities of the German Bight; and until the necessity arises, not to lay any more mines in the centre position.<sup>93</sup>

All the senior Staff Officers present agreed with this policy. Tying in with this assessment was the increasing evidence that the Germans found it easy to sweep those fields laid close to their coast. It was therefore suggested that it would be sensible to draw the minefield away from the German coast. This would be more difficult to sweep, and it was observed, on occasions German heavy ships came out to support the minesweepers. These would be ideal targets for the Grand Fleet, and thus the minefields might be a way of getting the war against the HSF going again.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Jellicoe Minute, 19<sup>th</sup> April 1917. ADM 137/845.

<sup>93</sup> Conference Minutes, untitled, 12-13<sup>th</sup> July 1917. ADM 137/850.

<sup>94</sup> PD Memorandum, 'Suggested method of using mines in the Heligoland Bight', 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1917. ADM 137/850.

The H4 mine was in time to prove the backbone of the British mining effort in the last eighteen months of the war, particularly in the Heligoland Bight. As an OD memorandum observed 'The enemy Submarine campaign now dominates and overshadows every other consideration.'<sup>95</sup> Contained in this memorandum were the various strands of many of the discussions which had taken place thus far: barrages; deep minefields; surface patrols and aircraft patrols. Combined with the use of hunting units, these made up many of the elements of anti-submarine warfare as it began again in 1939.

The question that lurked at the back of many a mind in 1917 and later in 1918 was whether it was prudent to bottle up so many resources in the Grand Fleet while the submarine menace remained serious (which it did right up until the last few weeks of the war). Jellicoe had already taken the view in October 1916 that it was probably worth demobilising portions of the Grand Fleet to free up resources to attack submarines. A year later Beatty was of the opinion that convoy was achieving little. When told in October 1917 that it was likely that he would lose more cruisers for convoy work, Beatty declared, 'I would urge that requirements for offensive purposes should have precedence over defensive requirements such as convoy. Sustained and determined air offensive on large scale against enemy bases should reduce menace to trade.'<sup>96</sup> This view was wrong, and these statements challenge the view that Beatty was the champion of convoy battling against Admiralty bone-headedness.<sup>97</sup> His further demand that merchant ships be converted to aircraft carriers was also rejected on the grounds that in October 1917 the shortage of merchant shipping took precedence over such projects. Captain Osmond Brock, Beatty's COS conceded that 'The Adty make out a strong case; the Torpedo Air Plane is not sufficiently developed to warrant the reconstruction of 8 large ships urgently required for other work.'<sup>98</sup>

The issue of manning had also not gone away. As shortages of skilled labour, not simply of experienced sailors, grew more acute, so did the complaints from the Fleet. This was as much true of Jellicoe's time with the Grand Fleet as of Beatty's.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> OD Memorandum, 'General Future Policy, Including Future Mining Policy', 17<sup>th</sup> September 1917. ADM 137/2711.

<sup>96</sup> Admiralty to Beatty, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1917; Beatty to Admiralty 5<sup>th</sup> October 1917. ADM 137/1938.

<sup>97</sup> Roskill, *Beatty*, 210, 217, 219.

<sup>98</sup> Beatty to Admiralty 7<sup>th</sup> October 1917; Admiralty to Beatty 20<sup>th</sup> October 1917. Minute by Brock, n.d. [October 1917], ADM 137/1938.

<sup>99</sup> Jellicoe to Admiralty, 6<sup>th</sup> August 1916. ADM 137/1107.

The reply was always the same from Sinclair and Oliver: the paying off of old ships did not create sufficient men to man the new construction.<sup>100</sup> A new C-in-C made no difference, the same demands for more cruisers or destroyers arrived, always with the insistence that disaster was around the corner if an action was not taken.

The policy of depleting Grand Fleet destroyer flotillas for escort work and manning ships with inexperienced crews came to a head in December 1917 following the attack on two British destroyers, HMS *Pellew* and *Partridge*, which were convoying a group of merchant ships across the North Sea to Scandinavia. Beatty felt that the British ships should have done better, since the attacking force was only 'slightly superior'.<sup>101</sup> This was incorrect. They were attacked by four German destroyers which constituted rather more than a 'slight' superiority.<sup>102</sup> The reason that he made this claim, however, was that Beatty wanted to stop *his* destroyers being used for trade escorts, which he saw as useless and defensive. His complaint in the case of the *Pellew* and *Partridge* was that they succumbed because their crews lacked training and experience, and spent too much time on mundane escort duties. These comments met with a number of rebuttals. The Naval Assistant to the Second Sea Lord said that as 218 new destroyers had been commissioned since 1914 inevitably most commanders of these vessels were young and of limited experience.<sup>103</sup> This situation was compounded by a decision (in which Beatty had presumably originally concurred) that gunnery officers would not be moved from capital ships to destroyers. Inevitably, therefore, the gunnery of the destroyers was likely to be weaker. Oliver added that the efficiency of such destroyers was affected by the fact that 'Our destroyers are the recognised dumping place for all the various modern war inventions which add weight and reduce speed & reduce the time for training in the primary essentials of gun & torpedo fighting.'<sup>104</sup> He agreed, however, with Beatty, and Hope (DOD) that destroyer crews needed more training. This view displeased the Second Sea Lord who commented tersely, 'It is easy to write of these things, but to accomplish them is quite another matter'.<sup>105</sup> Inevitably both sides had a point. Oliver, who by early 1918 knew that his time at the Admiralty would shortly be over, was

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<sup>100</sup> Sinclair Minute 11<sup>th</sup> August 1916; Oliver Minute 12<sup>th</sup> August 1916. ADM 137/1107.

<sup>101</sup> Beatty to Heath, 'Individual Training and Efficiency of Grand Fleet Destroyers', 19<sup>th</sup> December 1917. ADM 137/1374.

<sup>102</sup> Halpern, *Naval History*, 378.

<sup>103</sup> Buller Minute, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1918. ADM 137/1374.

<sup>104</sup> Oliver Minute, 9<sup>th</sup> January 1918. ADM 137/1374.

<sup>105</sup> Heath Minute, 8<sup>th</sup> January 1918. ADM 137/1374.

frustrated by the atmosphere in London and the constant demand for 'quick fix' new inventions that came his way, while the Second Sea Lord also recognised, as his Assistant had pointed out, that there was only so much that could be achieved with limited resources in a limited time. As Oliver had himself once put it, 'whoever is right or wrong there is nothing to be done except for everybody to do the best with what they have got. It is no use expecting the Admiralty to perform miracles.'<sup>106</sup>

One area where Carson had been influential was in persuading Jellicoe to create a Planning Section within OD (Section 16).<sup>107</sup> Jellicoe had initially not been that enthusiastic (he was wary of creating fresh compartments on the staff), but was eventually prepared to go along with it, as much to placate some of his critics as anything else. The Section was created on 16<sup>th</sup> July 1917. The new First Lord, Eric Geddes, then wanted a separate Plans Division. This too was opposed by Jellicoe for the reason that it would result in these officers losing touch with the work of the rest of OD. This was certainly believed to be the case once the changes had happened.<sup>108</sup> What, however, the Planning Section did do was to bring more officers onto the staff. As Geddes readily admitted in a memorandum dated 10<sup>th</sup> September 1917, 'the Naval Staff engaged in War plans have ... not expanded as they would have liked to do and should have done.'<sup>109</sup> In many ways this was the single most important change to the staff in 1917, it was allowed to expand. Only by doing so was it allowed to breathe. It was numbers, rather than structures, which were more significant. For example, Planning Section (OD 16) paperwork almost seamlessly transformed itself into Plans Division memoranda. Those papers which were produced still went to the same people. Whether Oliver was COS or ACNS made little difference to the process of docket movement around the Admiralty. The development of the Staff was a numbers game as much as anything else.

The Planning Section itself brought four or so more officers to the Staff. Some were clearly not happy with what they found. One of its officers, Commander Kenworthy later recorded, 'The British Admiralty appeared smitten with paralysis. There was no staff in the real sense of the word. The huge bureaucratic machine was

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<sup>106</sup> Oliver Minute, 27<sup>th</sup> February 1916. ADM 137/1165.

<sup>107</sup> Marder, *FDSF*, vol. iv, 196-197.

<sup>108</sup> Hope Minute, 5<sup>th</sup> May 1918. ADM 1/8524/135.

<sup>109</sup> Geddes, 'Memorandum on Admiralty Organisation', Marder, *FDSF*, vol. iv, 219.

designed only for day-to-day operations and administration. ... we [the *Young Turks*] were in *mental* revolt against the policy of the Admiralty.’<sup>110</sup> The arrival of the likes of Kenworthy in 1917 was one of the reasons why Marder felt that ‘there were now fewer retired officers who had been hunting or keeping chickens for years, and more men fresh from the sea, a number of them of excellent ability.’<sup>111</sup> Despite the grudging admission that the situation was not as bad as it had been, the impression remained that a posting to Whitehall was not something that many people would have wanted. The real brains, it was believed, had to be found elsewhere: with the *Young Turks*, and with Beatty’s Grand Fleet. Kenworthy himself, arriving in mid-1917, felt he was surrounded by ‘mediocre minds’.<sup>112</sup>

Kenworthy’s opinions, as will be shown below, were in some respects untypical of many naval officers. He admired what was happening in Russia in 1917 and opposed the policy of economic blockade of Germany. At another level, however, he captured the feeling that something more could be done in the prosecution of the war of a more *offensive* nature. In that sense he reflected the sense of frustration which was shared with Beatty, Dewar, Richmond or even Lloyd George. It was for this reason that his views are worth investigating. But many of them, as will be shown, were simply not valid.

Kenworthy made a number of claims about the apparently bizarre behaviour of various Admiralty officials. He claimed that ‘the joke used to be that it was a “jolly old war” and the longer that it went on the better.’<sup>113</sup> He similarly wrote that Jellicoe claimed, ‘that as long as the German fleet was in harbour it was doing no harm and might as well be left alone.’<sup>114</sup> By repeating this story to Lloyd George and Lord Northcliffe in mid-May 1917, he probably damaged Jellicoe’s position. But it was not credible that the former C-in-C of the Grand Fleet would have said such a thing, and RA Sydney Fremantle (DNCS in 1918) observed that Jellicoe laid the foundations of the successful anti-submarine policy for which the Geddes-Wemyss administration has taken much credit.<sup>115</sup> Similarly, there was no evidence that any Admiralty officials were enjoying the war, and looking forward to its long duration. Indeed, the fact that a rather old-fashioned sea captain like Richard Webb, who had once banned

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<sup>110</sup> Kenworthy, *Sailors*, 57-8.

<sup>111</sup> Marder, *FDSF*, vol. iv, 60.

<sup>112</sup> Kenworthy, *Sailors*, 62.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>115</sup> Fremantle, *Naval Career*, 237.

gin from his ships as an ungentlemanly drink, told Hankey that 'This is a war of extermination not one of platitudes about Business as Usual....' simply does not tie in with Kenworthy's observation.<sup>116</sup> Kenworthy's opinions were not typical of the general situation, although they seem at times to have been influential on the opinions of later historians.<sup>117</sup>

A similarly untypical view was taken by Kenworthy on the question of naval strategy in the War. Jellicoe has been praised for his 'firm view that the greatest menace to all prosecution of the War was the ongoing attempt to substitute for the strategy of weight, or blockade, an aspect of the persistent desire to use the Navy for other, more spectacular, purposes, such as that attempted by Churchill at the Dardanelles.'<sup>118</sup> Jellicoe, Webb and others on the Staff saw the blockade as the central plank of the naval war against Germany, which it was hoped would gradually wear the enemy's population and industries down so as to compel her to make peace.<sup>119</sup> Clearly, however this was a policy with which Kenworthy did not agree, for he noted that, 'The war blockade had reduced these two countries [Germany and Austria] to the greatest distress, the women, the children, the aged, and the invalids, dying like flies through lack of food. The sufferings of the civil population of the Central Powers had been hideous during the later stages of the war.'<sup>120</sup> Standing as an Asquithian Liberal in the 1918 general election – without the coupon – and opposed to the 'Hang the Kaiser' programme, it was clear to see that Kenworthy was at least consistent in his principles, and that his criticisms of the 'ridiculously unjust' Versailles settlement as made in his 1933 autobiography were not simply a rewriting of the record that some went in for in the post-war years.<sup>121</sup> He did not win his seat.

While he opposed the blockade, Kenworthy also proposed other ways that the Navy could strike at the Germans and his views are typical of many within the *Young Turk* camp. He was a keen supporter of various blocking operations, such as the 1918 Zeebrugge Raid, which he helped partly to plan, and which he described as 'fairly successful and helped towards getting the better of the submarine menace.'<sup>122</sup> Such a

<sup>116</sup> Webb to Hankey, 28<sup>th</sup> May, 1915. ADM 137/2735.

<sup>117</sup> Marder, *FDSF*, vol. iv, 170, 225; D. Baugh, 'Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond and the Objects of Sea Power', in Goldrick and Hattendorf, *Mahan is not enough*, 19.

<sup>118</sup> Shurman, D., 'Admiral Sir John Jellicoe (1916-1917)', in Murfett, *First Sea Lords*, 102

<sup>119</sup> PD Memorandum, 'Future Naval Policy', 17<sup>th</sup> November 1917. ADM 137/2706.

<sup>120</sup> Kenworthy, *Sailors*, 151.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 148-152.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 65; Karau, M., 'Twisting the Dragon's Tail: The Zeebrugge and Ostend Raids of 1918', *JMH* 67, April 2003 473-475.

claim was similar to others made in the immediate aftermath of the Raid – Duff (ACNS) and Wemyss (1SL), had said as much to the War Cabinet on 17<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1918 respectively.<sup>123</sup> But they all knew the truth within hours from intercepted signals that the blocking operation had failed.<sup>124</sup> Kenworthy also supported other proposals. One was a plan in October 1917 to send a naval expedition into the Baltic to help out the ailing Provisional Government in Russia. The fate of Russia was for Kenworthy as much a moral issue as a military one, indeed he seemed genuinely to have believed in the sense of a Grand Alliance against Germany, and spoke of Britain's 'dearly beloved allies' perhaps as an intellectual forerunner to his later support for the League of Nations.<sup>125</sup> Others, of course, were as suspicious of their allies as they were of their enemies, and believed wholeheartedly that they were fighting not simply to protect Britain's global position against the threat posed by the Central Powers, but also the threat posed by both her European allies as well as the possibly even greater presence of the United States.<sup>126</sup>

The fate of Russia exercised many minds in the summer and autumn of 1917. The reinvigoration which some had expected to follow the fall of the Romanovs failed to materialise, and increasingly the military presence of Russia faded. The British Government did respond in principle to Kerensky's pleas for help, but increasingly as the Naval Staff looked at the issues involved in getting the Grand Fleet into the Baltic all the usual problems reared their heads again: the danger of finding their forces split while the Germans were still able to use the Kiel Canal, and the threat of taking capital ships into the narrow and confined waters of the Baltic itself as well as the routes through Danish waters. Indeed Keyes, rather than saying, as Kenworthy claimed, 'The d-----d politicians have let us down ... They won't allow a finger to be raised to help the poor Russians,' actually cautioned, 'The risks attending an operation of this kind are so considerable that it should not be attempted unless the advantages to be gained are worth the losses which might be incurred'.<sup>127</sup> The PD (excluding Kenworthy presumably) agreed.<sup>128</sup> There was in fact little that the British could have done, and in any case the internal problems of the Provisional Government were such

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<sup>123</sup> Marder, *FDSF*, vol. iv, 59.

<sup>124</sup> Kenworthy, *Sailors*, 60.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>126</sup> This is the major theme in French, D., *The Strategy of the Lloyd George Coalition 1916-1919*, Oxford, 1995; Bourne, *Great War*, 135.

<sup>127</sup> Kenworthy, *Sailors*, 133; Keyes to Oliver, 25th October 1917. ADM 137/2706.

<sup>128</sup> PD Memo, 'Operations in the Baltic', 21<sup>st</sup> October 1917. ADM 137/2706.

by October 1917 that it is hard to believe that even a significant allied naval success in the Baltic would have either halted the German army's advance into Russia or provided the food and land which the domestic enemies of the Provisional Government were promising.

These examples indicate that both Kenworthy's opinions and memories need to be taken with a degree of circumspection. It was not always possible to do everything that was suggested. What the PD did turn its collective mind to was the means by which it might have been possible to curtail the power of the U-Boat. In this they were working along lines which found parallels with ideas being considered in other parts of the Naval Staff. The best example of this was the development of the Northern Barrage, and the associated use of Hunting Flotillas. This was constructed across the northern exit of the North Sea, and, in conjunction with the Dover Barrage, was intended to confine the U-Boats within the North Sea and thus prevent their ravages against Allied shipping in the Atlantic (particularly at a time when the British and Americans were increasingly concerned with the prospect of the Germans using larger cruiser U-Boats further out into the Atlantic).<sup>129</sup> If these barriers failed to prevent the outward movement of U-Boats, plans were also being developed for a global network of convoys, rather than just the more limited ones instituted in 1917 in the waters approaching the British Isles.<sup>130</sup>

The Northern Barrier was also particularly popular in the United States. Their entry into the war in April 1917 was a decisive moment, bringing with it potentially vast pools of manpower, huge economic and financial potential, and optimism undented by three years of war. President Wilson, with a sense of exasperation which was fortified by a heady mixture of naval naïvety and a pious lawyer's anger at the British blockade, wrote to his Secretary to the Navy, Josephus Daniels, 'the British Admiralty have done nothing constructive in the use of their navy and I think it is time we were making and insisting upon plans of our own, even if we render some of the more conservative of our own naval advisors uncomfortable'.<sup>131</sup> Quite what he had in mind was not clear, beyond airing a general grievance that 'something must be done.' Indeed, Wilson went further and demanded that the time had come for

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<sup>129</sup> PD produced a memorandum on Large Cruiser Submarines which was discussed at the Operations Committee Meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1918. It was further discussed at the meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> February as well as at the Allied Naval Council meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> January. ADM 116/1797.

<sup>130</sup> PD Memorandum, 'Proposals for the Extension of Ocean Convoy System', 27<sup>th</sup> December 1917. ADM 137/2706.

<sup>131</sup> Wilson to Daniels, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1917, in Simpson, *Naval Relations*, 78.



'boldness even at the cost of great losses.'<sup>132</sup> But the Americans seemed to have been keen on 'great losses' and 'boldness' as long as it did not involve any of their own resources.<sup>133</sup>

Nonetheless, despite an understandable unwillingness to dirty their own hands with any such offensive plans, the Americans remained keen on the prospects of the Northern Barrage with 'evangelical faith'.<sup>134</sup> The British, with their knowledge about the difficulty of mining shallower waters effectively, were doubtful that the Barrage, in the much deeper parts of the North Sea, would be worth the effort.<sup>135</sup> Franklin Roosevelt, for whom the Barrage was a 'pet hobby', remained enthusiastic throughout.<sup>136</sup> Perhaps this was a consequence of his belief, in mid-1917 that the British had managed to close the 22-mile Dover-Calais gap.<sup>137</sup> In fact the British knew that the Dover Barrage was porous, and some 30 German submarines a month were passing through it.<sup>138</sup> Despite their scepticism, Section 16 OD produced a memorandum in which they said that they believed that the Northern Barrage was at least feasible. The Staff Officer centrally involved in this was Capt. Alan Yeats-Brown, who had formerly worked in the ASD, where he had been in charge of the Apparatus Section as well as being a member of the BIR Section II sub-committee.<sup>139</sup> A further PD paper in September 1917 acknowledged that the U-Boat 'now dominates and overshadows every other consideration', and although it saw the Barrage as a key issue it also stated that the Norway gap would produce considerable problems, and that the 'radical cure' would be to try and block the U-Boats into their bases.<sup>140</sup> This was closer to the view of Jellicoe than that of the Americans, because Jellicoe was also promoting an aggressive mining policy against U-Boats, not in the more northerly reaches of the North Sea, but the Heligoland Bight.<sup>141</sup> It is worth noting that against the two U-Boats that the Northern barrage possibly sank in 1918, the Heligoland Bight Minefields sank 6 U-Boats in the last three months of 1917 alone,

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<sup>132</sup> Wilson to Sims, 4<sup>th</sup> July 1917, *ibid.*, 79.

<sup>133</sup> Mayo to Benson, 5<sup>th</sup> September 1917, *ibid.*, 98.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 369.

<sup>135</sup> Duff to de Chair, 14<sup>th</sup> May 1917 in Simpson, *Naval Relations*, 372; Fremantle, *Naval Career*, 246.

<sup>136</sup> Roosevelt to Daniels, 16<sup>th</sup> October 1918, in Simpson, *Naval Relations*, 179-180.

<sup>137</sup> Roosevelt Memorandum, 'Memorandum by Asst Secretary Roosevelt on Submarine Situation', 24<sup>th</sup> May 1917, *ibid.*, 375-7.

<sup>138</sup> Marder, *DNSF*, vol. iv, 316.

<sup>139</sup> Admiralty Memorandum, 'History of the Northern Barrage, from its inception to 28<sup>th</sup> July 1918.' 4<sup>th</sup> August 1918. ADM 137/2711 Yeats-Brown's memorandum was produced in August 1917.

<sup>140</sup> OD memorandum, 17<sup>th</sup> September 1917, 'General Future Policy, Including Future Mining Policy.' ADM 137/2711.

<sup>141</sup> Marder, *DNSF*, vol. iv, 226.

although, as will be shown later, the Northern Barrage was not constructed as it had originally been intended by the British. Jellicoe's Bight mining policy, however, was the basis for much success in 1918, where an ever increasing supply of British mines, and an increased provision of minelayers gradually meant that in the cat and mouse war of minelayer against minesweeper that was the conflict in the Bight, the Germans gradually lost out, so that by mid-1918 their minesweepers were having to come some 150 miles out into the North Sea to start sweeping. This, of course, made them particularly vulnerable to British attack with much more limited possibilities for German help.

One problem here, of course, was that at least while the Northern Barrage was being set up, there was a shortage of mines for other schemes, and it was consequently only later in 1918 that the Bight minefields became really dangerous for enemy submarines. Although even here the decision was taken for political reasons not to mine the Kattegat since it was believed that it might bring Sweden into the war against the Allies.<sup>142</sup> That said, both Capt. Dudley Pound (DOD –Home Section) and Fremantle (DCNS) were still doubtful that mining in the Bight would have quite the desired results, particularly given the ability of the Germans to sweep so many British mines.<sup>143</sup> If the supply was limited their views were right, but increasingly, as the Germans were overwhelmed by Allied minelaying, they were inaccurate in their assessment.

Despite his preference for the use of mines in the Bight, Jellicoe was also keenly aware that it was vital for the British to get the Americans involved more actively in the naval war against Germany.<sup>144</sup> This awareness perhaps explains why Jellicoe was less forceful about the demands of the Bight minefields, and supported the Barrage. It was, in other words, another example of political demands compromising military planning, and in late November 1917 he told the Americans that the British now supported the Northern Barrage plan. Roosevelt crowed, 'I told you so'.<sup>145</sup> In fact, much of the paper work for the Barrage had already been done by the PD or OD16. For example, PD papers had dealt with the number of mines needed for the barrage on 10<sup>th</sup> October; the rate at which the Americans would need to

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<sup>142</sup> PD Memorandum, 'Mining Policy in the Kattegat', 15<sup>th</sup> March 1918. ADM 137/2708.

<sup>143</sup> Pound Minute, 21<sup>st</sup> March 1918, and Fremantle Minute, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1918. ADM 137/2708.

<sup>144</sup> Simpson, *Naval Relations*, 63.

<sup>145</sup> Roosevelt to Daniels, 29<sup>th</sup> October 1917, 'Proposed measures to close English Channel and North Sea against submarines by mine barrage', in Simpson, *Naval Relations*, 382-3.

produce these mines in a paper on 13<sup>th</sup> October; and were in the process of producing papers suggesting alternative locations for the barrage.<sup>146</sup>

The PD were also well aware of the potential weaknesses of the Barrage, and the likelihood that the Barrage, by itself, would not stop the passage of U-Boats, and they were keen to point out that they saw the Barrage as part of a much wider anti-submarine offensive. As a PD memorandum in January 1918 stated, 'the stopping power of the mine barrage should not be overrated. It is the patrol craft armed with various anti-submarine devices, on which we must rely actually to kill the submarines.'<sup>147</sup> In other words, the Barrage itself was not intended to be the principal weapon of the war against the U-Boats; rather it was to be the means by which other weapons would destroy the enemy. Indeed, the same PD Memorandum went so far as to say that the barrage should be viewed as a 'bluff' until it had in fact proved itself.

The Barrage, therefore, had to be seen as part of a wider anti-submarine policy. Firstly, there was the belief that there had to be a policy which was more offensive against the U-Boat than the convoy system. This was to misread the potential for the convoy escorts which had proved themselves to be quite adept at spotting U-Boats, if not as yet at sinking them. Nonetheless, there were those who believed that better results could be achieved by a redistribution of resources. These resources could only come from two possible sources: either from the ships already designated to escort convoys, or from the Grand Fleet. Arguments raged over the possibilities of both of these lines of action. One such was proposed by Fleet Paymaster Ernest Thring. As head of the redesignated Section 25b of ID (formerly the Enemy Submarines Section – E.1), Thring had made a close study of the anti-submarine war. He challenged the notion that the adoption of convoy was a triumph. He came to the opinion that more kills would be achieved if anti-submarine vessels were concentrated in those places where the U-Boats were known to travel.<sup>148</sup>

In this paper dated October 1917 Thring outlined what he felt were the principal faults in the convoy system that was, at that point, only just under construction. He believed that convoy had failed to reduce losses, merely only succeeding in stopping those losses getting any higher. The shipping loss figures

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<sup>146</sup> Admiralty Memorandum, 'History of the Northern Barrage, from its inception to 28<sup>th</sup> July 1918.' 4<sup>th</sup> August 1918. ADM 137/2711.

<sup>147</sup> PD Memorandum, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1918, in 'History of the Northern Barrage, from its inception to 28<sup>th</sup> July 1918.' ADM 137/2711.

<sup>148</sup> Thring Memorandum, 'Failure of the Convoy System', October 1917. IWM Thring papers, 71/30/1.

would tend to bear out this point. Thring argued that April was an unusually bad month, and that consequently the underlying pattern of losses was less satisfactory than might be supposed. This was, in part, also true. In February 1917 some 353,478 tons of British shipping was sunk through all types of attack. It was only in August 1917 that losses fell below this, and losses remained higher than the January 1917 figure of 153,666 tons until August 1918.<sup>149</sup> Thring argued that convoys as constituted were not working because, firstly, ships were sunk once they left the convoy on their final journey to port, and that secondly, convoys did little to help sink submarines. This, of course did not mean that convoys in themselves did not work – rather that there remained problems in ensuring the safety of shipping outside the so called ‘danger zone’. In short, convoys had contained the U-Boats in some areas, merely for them to operate in others. No system, he believed, was yet in place either to destroy them or to stop them getting into the Atlantic. In place of convoys he advocated the use of massively concentrated efforts to sink submarines either as they passed through the Dover Straits or the route round the top of Scotland.

This was connected to the development of what was called the Hunting Flotilla. What Thring, and PD were in fact advocating was what could be seen as a system of defence in depth whereby no single aspect of the structure would of itself be decisive. It was the combination of mines, planes and hunting flotillas which it was hoped would be deadly. Thus the Channel or Northern Barrages should not be seen in isolation, but rather as part of a broader system of war. As such these barrages mirrored certain aspects of the trench system where inflexible and narrow structures were gradually replaced by deeper and more elastic systems. What Thring and the PD therefore needed was to persuade their superior Staff Officers and the Admiralty administration to adopt the whole package. This was one reason why they did not place as much faith in the Northern Barrage as the Americans did. It was only one part of the whole, and by itself they believed that it would not work.

This theory was offensive, dependent on new technology and devised by the Naval Staff. The new technology involved the use of aircraft to locate the enemy submarine. This did not sound as unlikely as it seemed, as there was plenty of evidence that finding the submarine was in fact the least of the British navy’s problems. Developments in W/T technology also made communication with larger

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<sup>149</sup> Fayle, *Seaborne Trade*, vol. iii, 465.

aircraft viable for the first time, although only via morse.<sup>150</sup> Smaller aircraft were given Aldis lamps for signalling.<sup>151</sup> The Northern Barrage was to be part of a co-ordinated strategy. The North Sea was divided into boxes each to be patrolled by one Destroyer with a Kite Balloon, and four trawlers. Each square would be worked systematically, with the squares getting smaller as the Northern Barrage itself was approached.<sup>152</sup> Both the hunting ships and the British submarines further south would be connected to the mainland via a W/T link centred on Lerwick which would allow them to respond quickly to any intelligence about the location of German submarines.<sup>153</sup>

Greater efforts were also made by ID to improve their knowledge of German naval movements so as to increase the likelihood of contacts.<sup>154</sup> This was yet another example of the fact that this was increasingly becoming an intelligence-led war. In fact the development the Northern Barrage suggested that the view that the Admiralty was 'obsessively defensive and disinclined to consider offensive measures' was not correct at the level of higher naval strategy or in the area of more localised tactics.<sup>155</sup> The idea of hunting flotillas was not in itself new, an attempt had been made in 1916 to co-ordinate air attacks against enemy submarines, but the results had been most disappointing. In fact no enemy submarines were destroyed in this manner.<sup>156</sup> The reasons lay mostly with the inadequacy of the technology, and the very limited ability of aeroplanes at that stage of the war. A further single attempt was made to catch U-Boats in June 1916. Half the destroyer force of the Grand Fleet was used to hunt submarines in the waters around the north coast of Scotland. Again, at one level the result was pleasing – some 61 U boats were sighted, and 12 of those were attacked. The difficulty was in destroying them, and here the exercise was a complete failure – no U-Boats were destroyed.

Perhaps taking a lead from this exercise in July 1917 an ASD officer produced a memorandum which recommended the creation of two 'Chaser Flotillas', a

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<sup>150</sup> Abbatiello, J., *British Maritime Air Power and the Anti-Submarine Campaign, 1917-1918*, unpublished University of London Ph.D. Thesis, 2004, 59-61.

<sup>151</sup> Fisher Minute, 26<sup>th</sup> October 1917. ADM 137/1541.

<sup>152</sup> OD Memorandum, 'Operations Against Enemy Submarines', 1<sup>st</sup> September 1917. ADM 137/1964; PD Memorandum, 'Patrol of the North Sea in Combination with the Aberdeen Norway Mine Barrage' 8<sup>th</sup> October 1917. ADM 137/847.

<sup>153</sup> Admiralty to Beatty, 19<sup>th</sup> January 1918. ADM 137/1964.

<sup>154</sup> Keyes Minute, 29<sup>th</sup> November 1917. ADM 137/847.

<sup>155</sup> Simpson, *Naval Relations*, 61.

<sup>156</sup> Marder, *DNSF*, vol. iv, 81.

Northern and a Southern one, to hunt U-Boats.<sup>157</sup> These flotillas would have been located in just the places that Thring recommended three months later for his own concentration of forces. Like Thring's proposal, Lewis's also initially met with little interest. No reason was given for this, but it seems likely that the prevailing belief at the time was still that there were insufficient craft for this plan on top of the needs of the Grand Fleet, the new convoy escorts, and the other tasks of the Navy in other theatres.

Gradually, however, a change of heart overcame some at the Admiralty to Staff Officers' proposals although it has to be said that the strategy of using hunting flotillas always remained more popular with junior Staff Officers rather than with their seniors. Perhaps the first new ingredient was the belief, which was misplaced, that the hydrophone was finally developing a level of competence whereby it might actually be useful in locating a submarine. As an OD memorandum observed in August 1917, 'The development of the Hydrophone appears to have reached a stage which permits for submarines being systematically hunted and the creation of a special force for this purpose appears justified.'<sup>158</sup> The key aspect of this memorandum was that it saw hunting submarines as a combined operation, and in this was identical to the role foreseen by the Naval Staff for the flotillas that were to be associated with the Northern Barrage. In it kite balloons were to be used to spot enemy submarines, and thus force them to dive. They would then be tracked by the hydrophone ships (mostly converted trawlers) until the exhaustion of the submarine's battery would force it to the surface at which point it could be finished off by a destroyer detached from the Grand Fleet. The limitations of U-Boat batteries were seen as a crucial aspect of the whole anti-submarine programme. Aerial assault and hunting flotillas would all force submarines underwater. They might then be caught in the minefields, or just as effectively, they might be subsequently found, exhausted, on the surface and unable to dive.

Peterhead was to be used as the base for these operations. It appeared that some experimental work was carried out along these lines, as a report was sent via the DASD to Lewis and Yeats-Brown who received it enthusiastically.<sup>159</sup> This report was from the commander of the first experimental Trawler Flotilla, who stated that it was

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<sup>157</sup> Lewis Memorandum, 'Hunting Forces and Home Command', 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1917. ADM 137/1546.

<sup>158</sup> OD Memorandum, 'Hydrophone measures against enemy submarines', 1<sup>st</sup> September 1917. ADM 137/2711.

<sup>159</sup> Lieut. E. Buchanan to Fisher, 'Notes on Submarine Hunting', 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1917. ADM 137/1541.

‘moderately common’ for a trawler to see a U-Boat, although unless the trawler was accompanied by a destroyer or an aeroplane it had little effect on the submarine itself. Nonetheless, it was encouraging that ‘close co-operation between hunting flotillas, fast surface craft and aircraft’ worked. This was also the very moment when Thring produced his own memorandum on the use of escorts for convoys.

Connected to the development of the hunting flotilla was the use of air power. This again was a new development, and Staff Officers saw the potential of this aspect of the naval war. Aircraft were seen as having two separate uses, as scouts and as bombers. In both these roles many of the same problems presented themselves: range, communications and payload. In other words, in 1917-18 aircraft were simply not really advanced enough for them to fulfil the tasks that were expected of them. Nonetheless, that did not mean that attempts were not made to use aircraft, and that plans were not drawn up as to how aircraft could be used in later years (it was not known, after all, that the war was going to end in November 1918).

Air patrols against enemy submarines had been instituted in 1916 – during the allegedly dormant years of the Balfour-Jackson administration – but so far they had proved to be conspicuously unsuccessful at sinking any enemy submarines.<sup>160</sup> But the creation of Section 16 OD gave the use of air power a new impetus. This included both balloons (as has been shown) and aeroplanes. For an effective strategy to be developed against the U-Boat, all branches involved in ASW (mines, ships, submarines, aircraft etc.) needed to be used ‘in combination’.<sup>161</sup> While this was being organised, Beatty impressed upon the Admiralty the importance of developing torpedo craft capable of attacking the German Fleet in harbour.<sup>162</sup> Jellicoe made the point that no such aircraft would be available until mid to late-1918 (even this was an optimistic assessment), but the redevelopment of the *Courageous* class of battle cruiser as aircraft carriers was discussed at the Operations Committee meeting of 27<sup>th</sup> September 1917.<sup>163</sup> Taking these ideas in hand Jellicoe commissioned the PD to report on the possibility of air attacks on German naval bases.<sup>164</sup> The problem again was that of theory against reality. Beatty again said that torpedo craft should be

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<sup>160</sup> Marder, *DNSF*, vol. iv, 81.

<sup>161</sup> OD Memorandum, ‘General Future Policy, including Future Mining Policy’, 17<sup>th</sup> September 1917. ADM 137/2711.

<sup>162</sup> French, *Strategy of the Lloyd George Coalition*, 150-1.

<sup>163</sup> Operations Committee Minutes, item 5, 27<sup>th</sup> September 1917. ADM 116/1797.

<sup>164</sup> Minute by Jellicoe, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1917. ADM 137/2706.

investigated, but became frustrated when told that it was not possible yet to use these machines.<sup>165</sup>

The PD reply was a clear statement of the present limitations of naval aviation, but also of the possibilities which appeared just around the corner.<sup>166</sup> The navy's aircraft carriers were either unsuitable for bombers (HMS *Engadine*, *Pegasus*, *Nairana*, *Vindex*) or not equipped with bombers and only possessed a very limited plane carrying capacity (HMS *Furious* and *Campania*). Secondly, the navy had no long distance bombing machines which could be flown from ships, and at present their land based Handley Page aircraft (based in Yarmouth) were due to be sent to support the army in France. These aircraft had, it was claimed, the range to reach Wilhelmshaven. There were too few lighters to use the 'America' seaplane craft to any effect, but PD noted that the Dutch Frisian Islands would make a useful '*pied à terre*' for any such attacks. The conclusion of the report was that many more large 'America' seaplane ships should be developed, along with special 58' lighters for 'systematic bombing operations' in 1918. The principal targets were to be the docks, shipyards and commercial areas of Hamburg and Wilhelmshaven. Other objectives were also listed which tended to be associated with submarine bases or mining operations. It estimated that 36 'America' planes would be available by April 1918. All the various senior Staff Officers who read the report doubted the potential of the Handley Page bomber because its range probably was not quite enough, and Hope wondered whether it was really feasible to attack such places at night.

But by June 1918 only 12 such 'America' planes had become available, and there were insufficient pilots even for these, so the project had to be abandoned for 1918.<sup>167</sup> However, both Pound and Fuller hoped that air attacks would not be abandoned altogether, although they acknowledged that the DH 10 bomber was still at an experimental stage.<sup>168</sup> It was clear both from the sentiment of these comments, and from the content of their deliberations, that they both agreed broadly with Beatty at his conference with Wemyss on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1917, but also saw that his demands had little chance of achieving reality. Certainly PD drew up a list of the requirements for torpedo aircraft as part of a broader Air Ministry conference in December.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Beatty to Admiralty, 7<sup>th</sup> October 1917, in Marder, *DNSF*, vol. iv, 237.

<sup>166</sup> PD Memorandum, 'Long Distance Bombing Operations', 9<sup>th</sup> October 1917. ADM 137/2706.

<sup>167</sup> Scarlett Minute, DAD, 20<sup>th</sup> June 1918, ADM 137/2706.

<sup>168</sup> Minutes by Pound and Fuller, 21<sup>st</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> June 1918 respectively. ADM 137/2706.

<sup>169</sup> Kenworthy Memorandum, 'Conference at Air Ministry, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1917'. ADM 137/2706.



The hope remained that greater action would be possible in 1919 when more planes and pilots would be ready.<sup>170</sup> Indeed, it would be fair to say that the Naval Staff not only looked into the possibilities of the use of aircraft, but also in many ways presaged the developments of twenty years later. For example, as the enemy's submarines began to operate ever deeper into the Atlantic, so the concern developed that there would in effect be an 'air gap' where large numbers of U-Boats would be operating, but beyond the reach of British air surveillance cover. In consequence the PD suggested that fast liners be given 'alighting decks' so that air cover would be possible in mid-Atlantic. They suggested converting the *Aquitania*, *Mauritania*, *Olympic* and *Vaterland*.<sup>171</sup> It was decided to carry out experiments to see if such a policy would be possible.<sup>172</sup>

Still the problem remained as to how to sink the submarine once it was detected. Greater efforts were thus being made to improve technology in terms of submarine detection and destruction. This led the DASD to demand that more be done to improve the effectiveness of the Research facilities of the Admiralty where much of this work was being conducted. In October the DASD wrote to Oliver suggesting that the BIR establishment at Parkeston Quay in Harwich be brought under Naval Staff control.<sup>173</sup> He wrote, 'At present matters are unsatisfactory owing to the sort of dual control exercised by BIR and DASD.' Better control should bring better results.

The complaint about Parkeston was not new. Dual control, parallel work, overlap, and unclear lines of administration had been a feature of the research side of anti-submarine work since before the war had begun.<sup>174</sup> Indeed, the story of such research had been one of many missed opportunities and misdirected experiments since the submarine had begun to show its potential at the start of the century. Looking back in 1919, Capt. Fisher observed, 'Had we, in 1901, when the French submarine menace first made itself felt, concentrated on solving and developing submarine detection, the true basis of successful anti-submarine work, and trained a

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<sup>170</sup> PD Memorandum, 'Re Establishment of Aeroplanes and Seaplanes for 1919', 7<sup>th</sup> December 1917. ADM 137/2710.

<sup>171</sup> PD Memorandum, 'Transatlantic Flights and Protection of Fast Convoys', 26<sup>th</sup> January 1918. ADM 137/2710.

<sup>172</sup> Meeting of ACNS, DOD (F), DOD (H) and DP, 26<sup>th</sup> January 1918. ADM 137/2707.

<sup>173</sup> Fisher to Oliver, 11<sup>th</sup> October 1917. ADM 137/2715.

<sup>174</sup> Wignall, M. B., *Scientists and the Admiralty: Conflict and Collaboration in Anti-Submarine Warfare, 1914-21*, unpublished University of London Ph.D. Thesis. 1987; MacLeod, R., and Andrews E. K., 'Scientific Advice in the War at Sea, 1915-1917: The Board of Invention and Research', *Journal of Contemporary History* 6, 1971, 3-40.

skilled personnel in its use, the desired result could certainly have been attained by 1914, and it is not too much to say that the whole course of the war would have been changed to our advantage and the length of the war shortened.'<sup>175</sup> Despite the fact that there is a great deal of hindsight in these comments, it remained the case that opportunities were missed, and at times the Admiralty appeared to show little interest in the technology that could have been used to locate enemy submarines. In a way this is strange, since the entire basis of the Lord Fisher's dreadnought revolution was that it was technology which would allow Britain to square the circle of maintaining naval supremacy within manageable costs.<sup>176</sup> Yet following the loss of the submarine *A1* with all her crew in 1904, Fleet manoeuvres never used submarines in any sort of realistic way. Even during the war itself, there were endless squabbles over the allocation of resources and lines of management. An example of this can be found in the argument between Capt. C. Ryan and the scientists of Section II of the BIR, over the control and use of the submarine *B3* which was allocated to the research station at Hawkcraig.<sup>177</sup>

Attempts to gain control over the work of Parkeston Quay, though initiated in the Jellicoe era, only came to fruition once he had left the Admiralty and been replaced by his deputy, Sir Rosslyn Wemyss. Jellicoe's period as First Sea Lord had been one of real achievement. The one major blot was the tardiness with which he and his staff eventually grasped the potential of convoy. This was a major error. Against that, 1917 had seen considerable and continuous development of the staff. Their work on the Northern Barrage and submarine hunting showed the degree to which they absorbed new ideas yet avoided flights of fantasy, and made as much use as they could of the resources then available. One reason that they were able to do this was that the increasing size of the staff, and the continuing recruitment of experienced and able officers, allowed the staff to escape from some of the demands of routine paperwork and analyse new ideas. The period also saw greater decentralisation of work and co-operation between Staff divisions, as again exemplified by the work done on the Northern Barrage 'system'. This was not simply the result of the likes of Geddes, but of Jellicoe himself, and his senior staff appointments. In the case of the TD, delegation of staff work had in fact been going on since 1916. Jellicoe breathed

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<sup>175</sup> Anon [Fisher] Memorandum, 'Policy proposed for Naval Listening Personnel for Submarine Detection', n.d. [c. March 1919]. ADM 1/8516/67.

<sup>176</sup> Sumida, *Defence of Naval Supremacy*, passim.

<sup>177</sup> Wignall *Scientists and the Admiralty*, 152.

new life into the staff, although Wemyss was to be the chief beneficiary of this. The fact that there is no easy division between the work done by the staff under Jellicoe and that done under Wemyss is an indication of both its independent working and the continuity of ideas and approach that had largely been achieved by December 1917.

## Chapter 7. The Geddes-Wemyss Regime, December 1917 – November 1918

The Geddes-Wemyss era has been seen as the culmination of Staff development in the First World War. Stripped of Jellicoe's over-centralisation and pessimism, and with the winning combination of the Wemyss' 'hands off' approach and Geddes' systematic mentality, the Naval Staff finally approached the ideal of which Richmond and others clamoured.<sup>1</sup> Richmond even managed to join the Staff again, although not for long, and add his own incisive comments to the steady round of departmental memoranda. As has been suggested earlier in many respects Wemyss was the beneficiary of Jellicoe's work. Richmond, in the spirit of a true Jacobin, may have written of Jellicoe after his dismissal, 'one obstacle to a successful war is now out of the way',<sup>2</sup> but in fact the Navy owed Jellicoe a lot. In some respects Wemyss represented a more conservative approach to strategy than that of Jellicoe, particularly in terms of any potential changes to the structure of the Grand Fleet. Geddes and Wemyss were also the beneficiaries of the gradual mobilisation of the United States, which finally came to share some part, albeit a small one, in the burden of the naval war. As with previous years it was not easy to put resources into neat categories. Competing strategies inevitably involved reallocation of resources; there simply were not enough ships to go round for everything. Therefore, as in 1917, the question of Hunting Flotillas clashed with destroyer allocation to the Grand Fleet. Other issues that the Naval Staff tackled were the possible need for a global convoy system, the Channel and Northern Barrages, the threatened loss of the Channel ports in the face of the German Spring Offensive, the possibilities of attack on the HSF in harbour, Baltic operations and increasingly, the post-war world.

The Northern and Dover Barrages were intended to confine the U-Boats within the North Sea and prevent attacks on Allied shipping in the Atlantic (particularly at a time when the British and Americans were increasingly concerned with the prospect of the Germans using larger cruiser U-Boats further out into the Atlantic).<sup>3</sup> Its outline and structure had been extensively discussed while Jellicoe was First Sea Lord, but it was only in 1918 that the Americans began to produce the mines needed for it in any great

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<sup>1</sup> Marder, *DNSF*, vol. v, 4-5, 9; Roskill, *Beatty*, 249; Beesly, *Room 40*, 272; Wester Wemyss, *Wester Wemyss*, 367-70; A more balanced assessment can be found in, Goldrick, J., 'Admiral Sir Rosslyn Wemyss (1917-1919)', in Murfett, *First Sea Lords*, 113-115.

<sup>2</sup> Marder, *Portrait*, 28<sup>th</sup> December 1917, 290.

<sup>3</sup> Operations Committee Minutes, 2<sup>nd</sup> January and 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1918. ADM 116/1797.

numbers. As was stated in the previous chapter, these Barrages were only supposed to form a part of a much wider anti-submarine programme. It would only be when the whole system was in place that the Staff felt that a successful submarine containment and destruction programme would be in place.

There were, however, problems even with the existing plan. The Staff were acutely aware of one weakness in the Barrage scheme; it would not go into Norwegian territorial waters, whereas German U-Boats did, and that there was no Allied naval base on the eastern side of the North Sea.<sup>4</sup> Initially the PD suggested laying mines in Norwegian waters and simply claiming that they had got there by mistake.<sup>5</sup> This was not seen as acceptable, and instead as the Barrage took shape later in 1918, plans were drawn up for the Allied occupation of a base near Stavanger should the politicians decide to risk the threat of bringing Norway into the War.<sup>6</sup> The DPD, Capt. Cyril Fuller supported this move, as well as plugging the Orkney gap on the other side which had been left open for British naval and convoy movements.<sup>7</sup> He described the Barrage without a Norwegian base as being like 'some great girder supported only at one end'; Wemyss pointed out the importance of the Norway gap to the War Cabinet in July 1918, with the hope that Norway could be induced to take action for herself.<sup>8</sup> Fortunately the Norwegians bowed to British pressure, and closed the gap themselves. Nonetheless, it was still clear that the Barrage was far from perfect, and it never gained the wholehearted support of Beatty who had a 'dislike of the whole thing'.<sup>9</sup>

One area of dispute remained the need to provide enhanced numbers of destroyers and other craft to form the Hunting Flotillas that would work the approaches to the Barrage, as well as other areas of intensive submarine activity. These could only come from one of three places: convoys; the Grand Fleet; or overseas naval commitments. Some tweaking of the existing system was still possible if any schemes were going to

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<sup>4</sup> PD memorandum, 'Support of Patrol Vessels working on Eastern End of Northern Barrage.' 28<sup>th</sup> November 1917. ADM 137/2706.

<sup>5</sup> PD memorandum, 'Northern Barrage. Points for Decision', 7<sup>th</sup> January 1918. ADM 137/847.

<sup>6</sup> PD memorandum, 'Establishment of a Base in the vicinity of Stavanger for a Detached Squadron', 10<sup>th</sup> June 1918. ADM 137/2708.

<sup>7</sup> PD memorandum, n.d. [c. 7<sup>th</sup> August 1918], 'Suggested Extension of Declared Area in Northern Barrage'. ADM 137/2709.

<sup>8</sup> Fuller Memorandum, 11<sup>th</sup> February 1918, 'The Anti-Submarine Campaign in 1918. ADM 137/2707; Wemyss Memorandum to War Cabinet, 31<sup>st</sup> July 1918. ADM 116/1771.

<sup>9</sup> Balfour to Lord Robert Cecil, 'Norway and the Mine Barrage', 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1918. BL, Add. Mss. 49714.

be small or involve few ships. One such example was a letter which was sent to Wemyss on New Year's Eve 1917 suggesting the creation of an 'Offensive Destroyer Force' to be used in the South West Approaches to England.<sup>10</sup> This was exactly what various people in the Naval Staff had been proposing for sometime, and arrived at just the moment that this topic was being discussed at a meeting between the new First Sea Lord and Beatty.<sup>11</sup> Capt. Wood, of the 4<sup>th</sup> Destroyer Flotilla, suggested that such hunting forces could be created by a small reduction in convoy escorts. This could be covered by a reduction in 'zig-zagging' whilst in convoy which would in turn speed up each convoy and consequently reduce the total number of destroyers needed for this task. Fisher agreed, and authorised three such groups to be constituted of three destroyers each. Two groups would always be at sea at any one time and be based in Devonport.<sup>12</sup> The DMM added that this scheme would help to cover the coastal waters which were particularly dangerous once the convoy had broken up for ships to proceed to their final destinations.<sup>13</sup> As such, it represented another variant of the 'concentration' scheme suggested earlier by Thring. Whitehead also noted that any reduction in convoy escorts should only be temporary. These hunting groups were created by February. This was an easy decision for Wemyss to take because it did not touch the thorny problem of Grand Fleet Destroyer provision.

Beatty met Wemyss in conference on 2-3<sup>rd</sup> January 1918. Present with Wemyss were Duff, Oliver, Fisher and Hope, as well as, for certain items, Henderson and Fuller. Beatty was clearly unhappy that the Grand Fleet was not receiving all the destroyers he wanted, but Wemyss said that they were needed for other operations. Fisher said at the meeting that more naval officers were being trained in the use of hydrophones, and that the PD was devising the organisation of a Channel Hydrophone force.

Given their clear enthusiasm for hydrophones, the American view that the British exhibited 'lukewarmness' towards this invention, and needed an injection of American enthusiasm, was unjustified.<sup>14</sup> The conference also decided that if the Northern Barrage managed to prove itself, escorts would be withdrawn from some

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<sup>10</sup> Capt. A. Wood to DASD, 'Anti-Submarine Operations', 31<sup>st</sup> December 1917. ADM 137/1541

<sup>11</sup> Admiralty Memorandum, 'Memorandum: Discussions at Admiralty on occasion of visit of Commander-in-Chief, Grand Fleet', 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1918. Copies in ADM 137/2711; 137/1541; 116/1806. Copy of Notes from Conference in ADM 137/1541.

<sup>12</sup> Fisher Minute, 13<sup>th</sup> January 1918. ADM 137/1541.

<sup>13</sup> Whitehead Minute, 16<sup>th</sup> January 1918. ADM 137/1541.

<sup>14</sup> Sims to Oponav, 9<sup>th</sup> January 1918, in Simpson, *Naval Relations*, 261-3.

convoys, and converted into North Sea hunting forces. This tied in with Wemyss' own view that, 'we must hunt the enemy submarines instead of they hunting us.'<sup>15</sup> Certainly there was a considerable awareness that the Royal Navy needed to increase its 'kill rate' considerably, as they knew that they were only just keeping abreast of the enemy's construction rate.<sup>16</sup> The proposal to form these hunting groups was then discussed at the meeting of the Allied Naval Council in late January.<sup>17</sup> Fremantle produced a Memorandum for Wemyss on the issue in March which picked up the theme that Thring had made six months earlier, that Britain's anti-submarine forces were too widely dispersed, and that they needed to be concentrated at those points which the Admiralty knew that submarines tended to pass, i.e. Dover and the North of Scotland.<sup>18</sup> There was only one major source of destroyers, however, and that was the Grand Fleet.

The size and structure of the Grand Fleet thus became embroiled once more in the question of what was to be done with the U-Boats. Between late 1917 and early 1918 it is possible to detect a division appearing between those who believed that the HSF was not going to come out, and so a risk could be taken in reducing the state of readiness of the Grand Fleet by transferring destroyers to trade protection, and those who opposed this policy. In the group of the risk takers were Jellicoe, Oliver, Duff and many younger Staff Officers (particularly in the embryonic PD). Opposed to this policy were Beatty and Wemyss.<sup>19</sup> It was a matter of conjecture as to which side could claim to be the more aggressive, those who wanted to use resources to tackle the submarines, or those who wanted to wait for the chance of the HSF coming out of harbour and annihilate it. Certainly, had Jellicoe stayed on as First Sea Lord, it is likely that the Grand Fleet would have been reduced in size and readiness. The fact that Lloyd George replaced him with Wemyss meant that the Grand Fleet continued to wait in a state of constant readiness. The claim that Beatty rather than the Naval Staff

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<sup>15</sup> Wester Wemyss, *Wester Wemyss*, 370.

<sup>16</sup> Hall to Fisher, 8<sup>th</sup> January 1918. ADM 137/1541.

<sup>17</sup> 'Allied Naval Council: First meeting Report of Sub-Committee on Ocean Convoys and Escorts', 22-23<sup>rd</sup> January 1918, in Simpson, *Naval Relations*, 266-71.

<sup>18</sup> Fremantle Memorandum, 'Anti-Submarine Operations in Home Waters', 1<sup>st</sup> March 1918. ADM 137/2711.

<sup>19</sup> Jellicoe Minute, 14<sup>th</sup> December 1917; Oliver Minute, 1<sup>st</sup> December 1917; Duff Minute 28<sup>th</sup> November 1917; Wemyss Memorandum, 'Shortage of Destroyers & Questions connected therewith', 18<sup>th</sup> December 1917 ADM 137/1374; 'Agenda' and 'Notes' on Conference with Commander-in-Chief in First Lord's Room, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1918, ADM 137/2711 (Agenda), ADM 137/1541 (notes); PD, 'Draft Reply with Regard to Notes by Commander-in-Chief, Grand Fleet, on the Conference Held at the Admiralty, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1918.' 20<sup>th</sup> January 1918. ADM 137/1541.

was the driving force in producing a 'fundamental change' in the strategic purposes of the Grand Fleet cannot therefore be supported.<sup>20</sup> The ideas that Beatty suggested had already mostly been discussed by the Staff who were by then proposing more radical actions than Beatty was prepared to accept. Wemyss believed that the HSF would come out as Germany collapsed, and this view hampered all those who proposed any wholesale alteration of British naval strategy.<sup>21</sup> Thus the Grand Fleet was still waiting when in November 1918 the HSF did finally come out, not to fight, but to surrender. These events also suggest that Wemyss was wrong to say that it was the Staff who was overly 'defensive' in its thinking.<sup>22</sup>

Beatty made his unhappiness clear enough, but despite this the PD produced a paper in February 1918 which attempted to redefine the Grand Fleet's role in the North Sea.<sup>23</sup> Far from being aimed principally against the enemy's battle fleet, 'It is suggested that the primary function of the Grand Fleet should be defined as the support of the barrage and the prevention of submarines passing out of the Northern exit....' The paper went on, 'Attempts to defeat the submarine campaign mainly on a basis of local trade protection have been a failure, in the sense that if sinkings are not permanently reduced during 1918 the war will probably have an unsatisfactory ending.' In late March they went further in challenging the traditional role of the Grand Fleet.<sup>24</sup> They wrote, '*...The functions of the Grand Fleet, is the crucial question.* The idea of inveigling the High Sea Fleet into a fleet action should be abandoned in favour of an anti-submarine blockade of the Northern exit. ... The ocean escort destroyers and the coastal trawler patrols reduced by 30 and 50 per cent respectively to obtain the remainder of the required forces... consolidation of the coastal commands.' They even went further and said that the Grand Fleet 'should stand aside and leave the real battle to the militia of the sea – the trawlers.' To help out the trawlers destroyers should be taken from the Grand Fleet and used to create hunting forces. A supplementary report, prepared by the PD alone added significantly to the role envisaged for these craft.<sup>25</sup> The use of the destroyers was emphatically

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<sup>20</sup> Roskill, *Beatty*, 250.

<sup>21</sup> Wemyss Memorandum, 'Shortage of Destroyers & Questions connected therewith', 18<sup>th</sup> December 1917. ADM 137/1374.

<sup>22</sup> Wester Wemyss, *Wester Wemyss*, 370.

<sup>23</sup> PD Memorandum, 'The Anti-Submarine Campaign in 1918', 11<sup>th</sup> February 1918. ADM 137/2707.

<sup>24</sup> PD Memorandum, 'Anti-Submarine Policy in the Immediate Future. Joint Appreciation by the British and American Planning Divisions.', 28<sup>th</sup> March 1918. ADM 137/2708.

<sup>25</sup> PD Memorandum, 'Suggested Plans for Offensive Anti-Submarine Operations in Northern Waters', [n.d., c. March 1918]. ADM 137/2708.



linked to the Northern Barrage and a continuation of their 1917 thinking. It was known that German U-Boats traversed the North Sea mostly on the surface. As has been said earlier, the British saw the Northern Barrage as part of a much wider anti-submarine scheme. The destroyers were to form hunting packs in the North Sea, where 'the efficiency of the suggested forms of patrol will be very greatly increased by the co-operation of a large air force.' This policy statement met with broad, but not complete, support from the senior Staff Officers.<sup>26</sup>

This might in turn have led to a more active HSF which would have needed U-boats to be withdrawn from the war on trade to support any capital ship movements (as in May 1916). It is interesting to speculate what might have happened if the return of the U-Boats to support the enemy battle fleet had taken place not in October 1918 when the Fleet was no longer capable of taking to sea, but much earlier in 1918 when crews might have been keener for action. But the concentration of forces as outlined in the proposals did not happen.<sup>27</sup> The reason for this was that, in the end, the senior members of the Staff chose not to reduce the readiness of the Grand Fleet for action, particularly as the decision coincided with the launch of the German Spring offensive. Despite not achieving their ends, the PD did not give up, and in June 1918 again questioned the need for the Grand Fleet to have so many destroyers.<sup>28</sup> They recognised that June 1918 was not necessarily the right moment for such a risk to be taken, given the situation in France, but stated that preliminary plans should still be considered for any future redeployment. The proposal, however, came to nothing, as Duff (ACNS) and Fremantle (DCNS) as well as Pound (DOD (H)) opposed the idea.

The PD tried responding to their criticisms, but Wemyss finally, and politely ended speculation by saying, 'An interesting paper containing many truths, the policies proposed however cannot be carried out now. No further action required.'<sup>29</sup> The policy of 'all or nothing' with the allocation of destroyers to the Grand Fleet appeared to have riled many of the junior Staff Officers who clearly believed that the risk was worth taking, particularly as it was pointed out that the British had only managed to sink two enemy submarines in the North Sea in the first three weeks of

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<sup>26</sup> Fremantle Minute, 30<sup>th</sup> March 1918; Hope Minute, 30<sup>th</sup> March 1918. ADM 137/2708.

<sup>27</sup> Marder, *DNSF*, vol. v, 98.

<sup>28</sup> Joint Memorandum by the British and American Planning Sections, 13<sup>th</sup> June 1918, 'The Occasional Use of Grand Fleet Destroyers on the Northern Patrol. ADM 137/2709.

<sup>29</sup> Minute by Wemyss, 21<sup>st</sup> June 1918. ADM 137/2709.

July 1918.<sup>30</sup> In particular they urged that something needed to be done before the U-Boats learned how to counter the convoy system – by hunting in packs.<sup>31</sup> This memorandum said that a new and grave danger would be posed should the submarines begin ‘acting in pairs or even in squadrons’. While the Germans were still technologically some way off being able to co-ordinate such attacks, such thinking shows that the British were hardly negligent in their tactical deliberations. Again, however, the senior members of the Naval Staff dampened any prospect for major change in the use of the Grand Fleet destroyers. Pound claimed that the destroyers’ ‘usefulness for this purpose is doubtful’ and Fremantle simply turned the idea down.<sup>32</sup> Plans did, however, produce a rejoinder in which they said, ‘The question raised is whether some compromise is not preferable to keeping a large number of TBD’s locked up in an attitude of pure expectancy.’<sup>33</sup>

The situation by mid-1918 was thus far from clear or consistent. For although all levels of the Naval Staff accepted the principle of Hunting Flotillas, which were supposed to form a central part of the Northern Barrage system, the force was never developed in the way that the PD had hoped. The principal reason for this was that the senior Staff Officers and the First Sea Lord were not prepared to risk the centrality of the Grand Fleet. Indeed, there was considerable evidence that the entire *raison d’être* of the Northern Barrage, at least as the British conceived it, was under attack while negotiations and discussions were still underway to complete it. In August Fremantle protested to Wemyss about the decision to withdraw ships from the Barrage patrol for use in anti-U-Boat operations in the North West Approaches to the Irish Sea.<sup>34</sup> He stated that the ‘Patrol had not been long enough in operation to enable a final judgement to be given.’ especially as the Fish Hydrophone was still considered a ‘novelty’. He added, ‘I should fail in my duty if I did not formulate and place on record the very serious view I take of the recent decision to withdraw the Northern Patrol Force from the duty upon which they have been employed since 1<sup>st</sup> May, viz the attack on enemy submarines passing north about.’ He pointed out that 58

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<sup>30</sup> PD Memorandum, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1918, ‘Memorandum on Anti-Submarine Operation in the North Sea’. ADM 137/2709.

<sup>31</sup> PD Memorandum, 11<sup>th</sup> July 1918, ‘Memorandum on Enemy Submarine Cruisers: Suggested Measures for Protection Against’. ADM 137/2709; Bayly to Sims, 6<sup>th</sup> July 1917, in Simpson, *Naval Relations*, 240

<sup>32</sup> Minute by Pound, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1918; Minute by Fremantle, 5<sup>th</sup> August 1918. ADM 137/2709.

<sup>33</sup> Reply by PD to Fremantle, 8<sup>th</sup> August 1918. ADM 137/2709.

<sup>34</sup> Fremantle Memorandum ‘Northern Patrol Force’, 6<sup>th</sup> August 1918. ADM 137/2711.

submarines had taken the northern route in the time of the experiment, and that 30 of them had been attacked. He added that this had been achieved by only 90 of the 2,600 ships involved in Auxiliary Patrol work about the British coastline, and should in consequence be seen as a considerable achievement.

By November 1918 there was disappointment that the Northern Barrage had not come up to expectations. Poor American mines were partly blamed, as well as the limitations that inadequate technology placed on the use of aircraft and the hydrophone. But more than that, the policy as foreseen in 1917 was never fully implemented. Instead what happened was a compromise which contained many of the costs of the whole project without all its attendant benefits. As a PD Memorandum noted, 'The fall in the rate of enemy submarine destruction means that we are almost entirely dependent on the convoy system for the protection of trade.'<sup>35</sup> But importantly it also said, 'submarine hunting flotillas should have one of the first calls on officers and men.' It also recognised the implications for the Grand Fleet by recommending 'a reduction of battleship strength would be fully justified in order to furnish them.' The able DOD (H), Capt Humphrey Walwyn agreed with this sentiment.<sup>36</sup> It is interesting to note that in 1939, the first U-Boat to be sunk by the Royal Navy was in fact caught by one such hunting patrol.<sup>37</sup> But by then there had been not only twenty years of air and detection development, but much of the 'doctrine' of submarine hunting had already been put in place by the Royal Navy's experiences in the 1914-1918 war.

Part of the sense of disappointment at the lack of success of the Anti-Submarine war was connected with the realisation that ASW inventions had not come up to scratch. One of Wemyss' first actions as First Sea Lord in December 1917 was to attempt to address what were seen as inefficiencies in the research work carried out by the BIR. These problems were raised in late 1917, but nothing was done until

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<sup>35</sup> PD Memorandum, 1<sup>st</sup> November 1918, 'Future Anti-Submarine Policy With Special Reference to Hunting Flotillas'. ADM 137/2709.

<sup>36</sup> Walwyn Minute, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1918. ADM 137/1964.

<sup>37</sup> U39 was sunk on the 14<sup>th</sup> September 1939 by an escort of a U-Boat hunting group led by HMS *Ark Royal*. Kemp, P., *U-Boats Destroyed. German Submarine losses in the World Wars*. London 1997, 60. I am grateful for Commander Malcolm Llewellyn-Jones for drawing my attention to this.

1918.<sup>38</sup> Wemyss certainly agreed that the BIR's usefulness 'had attained its height', and supported reform.<sup>39</sup> With Geddes support by late January 1918 these changes were in place. Charles Merz was appointed as Director of Experiments and Research, and was given accommodation at the Admiralty. He was to be the link between the Research staff at Parkeston and the Naval Staff. A member of the ASD, Major Arthur Eve, was brought in as Deputy Resident Director of Research. He had formally fought with the Canadian Infantry until his transfer to Parkeston, but before the outbreak of war had been a mathematician at McGill University in Canada.<sup>40</sup> Merz was, in many senses, the lynch-pin of all operations. He sat on the Central Committee of the BIR, which continued to function but he filtered all ideas, and allocated funds to projects. Within the Naval Staff, Merz reported to Fisher as DASD, while collecting reports on all the experimental stations, such as Hawkcraig and Parkeston (see Appendix E).

Concern about events at Parkeston was borne out when the ADASD (2), Commander Edward Russell, visited and reported to Fisher that, 'the station has suffered much from the want of close touch with the Admiralty, and want of a clear lead of what to concentrate on and what to do.'<sup>41</sup> Indeed, he felt that with its shallow water and other problems, the entire establishment should be closed and sent to Portland. Fisher explained the relationship of the Experimental Stations and the ASD in a March 1918 memorandum.<sup>42</sup> It is questionable, however, whether these changes, had they been effected earlier, would have had a dramatic impact on the war against the U-Boats. Even at the start of World War Two, submarine detection devices still possessed only a very limited range – of some two miles – which in the context of the Atlantic is a measure of the problem which still faced the Royal Navy some twenty years later. Claims, therefore, that an earlier start would have solved the problem appear fanciful. In short, there were only two ways to proceed in 1918: to protect merchant shipping by the use of convoy, and by destroying the U-Boats in their lairs. It was this latter aspect of the naval war with which the PD tried to grapple in 1918, and which will be analysed later. In the area of convoy, however, the principal

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<sup>38</sup> Fisher Memorandum to Oliver, 11<sup>th</sup> October 1917, 'Formation of Research and Experimental Section in the Anti-Submarine Division'. ADM 137/2715.

<sup>39</sup> Fisher to Wemyss, 27<sup>th</sup> December 1917. Wemyss Minute, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1917. ADM 137/2715.

<sup>40</sup> Merz to Fisher, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1918. ADM 137/2715.

<sup>41</sup> Russell to Fisher, 7<sup>th</sup> February 1918. ADM 137/2715.

<sup>42</sup> Fisher Memorandum, 'The Structure of the Anti-Submarine Division', 20<sup>th</sup> March 1918. ADM 137/2715.

decisions in 1918 were not whether convoy worked, but how far it should be extended across the world.<sup>43</sup>

In the previous chapter evidence was shown of the interest that the Naval Staff took in the role of air power. This was enhanced in March 1918 by the creation of an Air Division of the Staff. Although small, its officers had considerable air experience, with officers being drawn from seaplane operations in the North Sea, as well as Kite Balloon group in the Middle East and anti-submarine actions in the Adriatic. With greater expertise also went greater realism as to the capabilities of aircraft, but again here the important thing is to emphasise the degree of continuity with the air evaluations which other Staff Officers were carrying out in 1917. The Wemyss-Geddes administration merely constituted a further development of existing practices. In the same way that the ASD had drawn on officers and work of the Submarine Committee and its members, so the Air Division brought in members of the former Air Department of the Admiralty. The same happened, incidentally, when the Mines Division was created in May 1917. Jellicoe brought in his own Director (Capt. Lionel Preston), but at least some of the Staff came from the former department of the CMS, while others were collected from active service in the North Sea. With all three divisions the pattern was the same, the creation of a new division with the mixing of existing Admiralty personnel and experienced practitioners from active appointments. Given this, it is not surprising that there was a high degree of continuity with what had gone before. In terms, therefore, of the use of air power in 1918, it was necessary to look back at some of the work done in 1917 to see continuities. Plans had been proposed then to try and destroy the U-Boat building yards in Hamburg, but they had stalled through the inability of aircraft to deliver the necessary payload to the port. Similar plans were considered in 1918, this time to use the RNAS bases in Northern France to attack the U-Boat bases at Zeebrugge and Ostend.

A report was compiled by Captain Lambe who commanded the RNAS station at Dunkirk in compliance with a request from the Operations Committee.<sup>44</sup> In it

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<sup>43</sup> Keyes to Wemyss, 'Questions for [Allied Naval] Council to Consider', 7<sup>th</sup> January 1918, ADM 137/2707. Item 1 on the list was 'Extension of Convoys to the World.' The Allied Naval Council agreed at its meeting to extend Convoy, and the PD was asked to prepare for the introduction of such a scheme. PD Memorandum, 'Summary of Plan for Extending the Ocean Convoy System', 14<sup>th</sup> February 1918. ADM 137/2706.

<sup>44</sup> Lambe Memorandum, 'Aerial Operations Against Ships and Bases', 12<sup>th</sup> February 1918. ADM 137/2707 & 137/2710. Operations Committee Minutes, Section 36 paragraph 5, 16<sup>th</sup> January 1918. ADM 116/1797.

Lambe considered the effect that bombing would have on a civilian population. He considered that bombing was useful because of the 'moral effect' it had. He did this by both comparing what could be achieved by bombing, e.g. Bruges Harbour, with what was known to have happened when both London and Dunkirk were bombed. With the latter he noted that 'the civilian population has all but left.' He even added that 'with regard to the moral effect of air raids: it is probable that the cumulative effect of war weariness, shortage of food, etc. on the masses of the people will end the war. If this is the case, the general morale and confidence of the people will be the decisive factor.' Fremantle accepted the findings of the report, but said that bombing would not be effective unless raids could be maintained around the clock, as yet an impossibility.<sup>45</sup>

In the light of these considerations, it is wrong to say that the Staff in general and the PD in particular were 'cool' about Beatty's enthusiasm for air attacks against German naval bases.<sup>46</sup> They fully accepted the principles of air power – and were keen on it – but by March 1918 they were also fully aware that it was not a realistic proposition that anything could be achieved that year. Indeed, they went further, and were interested in the possibilities of aircraft guided demolition ships.<sup>47</sup> In any case, by then the situation had changed, and further reason for the failure to use air power more in 1918 was the fact that the Navy lost control of their RNAS aircraft to the newly created RAF. Some Naval Staff Officers had expressed concern about the likelihood of a clash of interests in late 1917, particularly when there was such a shortage of pilots, but this did not alter the final decision to amalgamate the two air services, against the wishes of most at the Admiralty.<sup>48</sup>

Despite the fact that the Staff gave the appearance of greater confidence and smooth working in late 1917-18, that did not stop there being moments of panic during periods when the Entente looked as if it was about to collapse. Not the least of these moments came in the spring and early summer of 1918 when the Germans launched their major offensive against the western allies in the hope of winning the war before the Americans were able to make a decisive impact in France. With the collapse of Russia, and the Bolshevik seizure of power, the Allies had been expecting

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<sup>45</sup> Fremantle Minute, 14<sup>th</sup> February 1918. ADM 137/2707.

<sup>46</sup> Marder, *DNSF*, vol. v, 141.

<sup>47</sup> PD Memorandum, 'Operations with DCB's controlled from aircraft.' 6<sup>th</sup> April 1918. ADM 137/2712

<sup>48</sup> Fisher to Duff, 15<sup>th</sup> November 1917. ADM 137/2706; Jellicoe to Geddes, 14<sup>th</sup> August 1917 'Remarks on a Scheme of an Imperial Air Policy', in Roskill, *RNAS*, 497-9.

a new German offensive as Germany was able to shift troops from the Eastern to the Western Fronts. As Fremantle observed, 'we should be prepared for the eventuality of the prospective advance of the enemy.'<sup>49</sup> The PD outlined the means by which the major channel ports could be blocked, much in the manner of the attempt made on Zeebrugge in April 1918, by the means of blockships, but concluded, 'It is unlikely that the Allies will ever be forced to evacuate the French Channel Ports.'<sup>50</sup>

When the attack came, however, on 21<sup>st</sup> March, both the military and the politicians were caught unprepared for its scale and direction. With the Army reeling in the Somme Sector, discussions took place as to whether the British Army, if forced to, should retreat in unison with its French allies, or fall back on the Channel ports and possibly allow the Germans to drive a wedge between the two Allied armies. Initially Haig determined to protect the ports which were so crucial to the supply and support of his armies.<sup>51</sup> This was a move in which Wemyss was in full agreement as allied control of these ports was central to the Dover Barrage and other anti-submarine measures, and German control would enable Calais or Boulogne to be used for U-Boats. Under the pressure of the German attack, however, the informal agreements that Haig had made with Foch were no longer tenable, and on 26<sup>th</sup> March an agreement was signed at Doullens to keep the retreating Anglo-French Armies together, thus leaving the Channel ports gravely exposed.

The question now was one of minimising the damage that this could do to Britain's anti-submarine system in the English Channel, and plans were drawn up for what the British would do next. Had these actions come to pass, they would have been quickly added to the long catalogue of Albion's crimes against France. On 28<sup>th</sup> March the Second Sea Lord instructed the Civil Engineer in Chief to 'work out a scheme for rendering the following French ports useless to the enemy' beginning at Dunkirk and going as far south as le Havre.<sup>52</sup> 50 demolition squads were created for this purpose. Despite this, Wemyss was still confident, having told Sir Henry Wilson (CIGS) that the 'chances of the enemy getting to any of the ports on the Northern Coast of France would not be very great.'<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, Hope had discussions with Wilson's Deputy, Sir Robert Wigham on 1<sup>st</sup> April. He was less certain, and reported that the

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<sup>49</sup> Fremantle Minute, 14<sup>th</sup> February 1918. ADM 137/710.

<sup>50</sup> PD Memorandum, 'Blocking of the French Channel Ports', 10<sup>th</sup> February 1918. ADM 137/710.

<sup>51</sup> French, *Lloyd George Coalition*, 225.

<sup>52</sup> Second Sea Lord to Civil Engineer in Chief, 28<sup>th</sup> March 1918. ADM 137/710.

<sup>53</sup> Wemyss to Hope (D1SL), 30<sup>th</sup> March 1918. ADM 137/710.

WO expected a further German attack, and that plans should be drawn up to destroy the ports between the Somme and Cherbourg. He still believed that the northern ports, such as Calais would be safe for the moment, and suggested that the Admiralty should restrict discussion of this 'special purpose' to as small a group as possible.<sup>54</sup>

Wigham's confidence in the safety of the northern ports was, however, misplaced, as four days later the Germans launched a second offensive towards Ypres. The ports of Dunkirk and Calais were thus far from secure, and on 12<sup>th</sup> April the PD produced a paper on what should happen in the case of the fall of Dunkirk and Calais.<sup>55</sup> This involved the need to move the Dover Barrage, the need for more aircraft to destroy any long-range guns that the Germans might bring forward, and the preparation of blockships for the ports. By April the Admiralty accepted that the Army would retreat southwards with the French, and Wemyss therefore wanted to know if it was possible for the army to be supplied via the southern ports only, if the Dover Barrage could be moved to the line Dieppe-Newhaven, and whether it would still be safe for merchant ships to get into the port of London.<sup>56</sup> As the situation deteriorated, Fremantle instructed OD to prepare mining operations in the Channel to begin on 30<sup>th</sup> April, and the Air Division drew up plans to withdraw the 61<sup>st</sup> Wing to Dover.<sup>57</sup> The PD said that all lost ports must be 'rendered useless.' The CIGS, however, reported Foch's view that only the British and French governments acting *together* could give any instruction to destroy any ports.<sup>58</sup> It was only finally at this point that the Operations Committee discussed the situation in France. This was despite the fact that there had been a meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> April as well – an indication of how misleading its name really was. The Naval Staff had already done all the preliminary work.<sup>59</sup> Significantly, its meeting was based on a memorandum that had been written over a month before, on 23<sup>rd</sup> March, since when the situation had changed dramatically.

With the final decision in early May that the British armies would stick with their French allies should the Germans threaten to get to the coast, the Admiralty put

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<sup>54</sup> Hope Minute on meeting with DCIGS, 1<sup>st</sup> April 1918. ADM 137/710.

<sup>55</sup> PD Memorandum, 'Suggested Naval Policy in Event of British Army's Retirement', 12<sup>th</sup> April 1918. ADM 137/710.

<sup>56</sup> Wemyss to Transport Department, Fremantle and Duff, 18<sup>th</sup> April 1918. Replies on 19<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> April respectively. ADM 137/710.

<sup>57</sup> Fremantle and Scarlett Minutes, 20<sup>th</sup> April 1918. ADM 137/710.

<sup>58</sup> PD Memorandum, 'The Naval Situation Relatively to the Offensive on the Western Front', 20<sup>th</sup> April 1918; Wilson to Hankey, 21<sup>st</sup> April 1918. ADM 137/710.

<sup>59</sup> Operations Committee Minutes, Item 75, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1918. ADM 116/1798.



in place its plans to destroy the French ports, having decided that mining would only have a limited effect off ports such as Dunkirk.<sup>60</sup> Faced with the prospect of blowing up the French ports, there was unsurprisingly a sense of unease with what was going to happen. The new DCIGS, Charles Harrington, suggested that all should be done to 'avoid friction' with the French during the demolition.<sup>61</sup> Keyes, VA Dover Command agreed that 'the situations is, at best, a delicate one', but similarly hoped that French goodwill might be maintained.<sup>62</sup> Pound found little sympathy with this attitude, and told Keyes that 'for various reasons it has not been considered desirable to inform the French Authorities of the arrangements which have been made for demolishing the various ports'.<sup>63</sup>

By late July, however, the situation had steadied and on 28<sup>th</sup> August Harrington told the Admiralty that the 'French Ports Scheme' could be shelved. The Scheme had revealed the degree to which the Admiralty were prepared to put their interests before those of an ally, but also the fact that in the wider scope of the war, the British government saw the central importance of maintaining the alliance with the French. How far this would have withstood the destruction of every French port between Dunkirk and Cherbourg is hard to say, but it certainly would have placed an unprecedented strain on the Anglo-French alliance.

The developmental nature of staff planning in the last year and a half of the war suggested that the arrival of Wemyss as First Sea Lord was not as significant as has previously been supposed. There was a clear progression from the work that the Naval Staff was doing under Jellicoe and that which was done under Wemyss. To that extent, the events of Christmas Eve 1917, when Jellicoe was summarily sacked, made little real difference. Indeed, the muddle over the use of Hunting Flotillas as discussed above suggested that there were still considerable weaknesses in decision making at the highest level of the Admiralty right up to the end of the war. The creation of the PD, out of Section 16 OD, simply helped to streamline what was already a developing

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<sup>60</sup> Minute by Fremantle, 6<sup>th</sup> May 1918. ADM 137/710.

<sup>61</sup> Harrington to Hope, 13<sup>th</sup> June 1918. ADM 137/710.

<sup>62</sup> Keyes to Admiralty, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1918. ADM 137/710.

<sup>63</sup> Pound to Keyes, 9<sup>th</sup> July 1917. ADM 137/710.

system.<sup>64</sup> Clearly more important than Wemyss was the arrival of Eric Geddes as First Lord in place of Carson. He did instil a greater rationale into Admiralty administration, but, the creation of the Operations Committee, to which the Plans Division did provide considerable numbers of papers, did not make any real difference to the running of the Naval Staff. The time the Committee took to get round to discussing the FPS was an indication that its impact was marginal to the real work that was going on below it.

The key developments were at the next tier down. The main point has to be that the development of the Naval Staff in 1917-18 was part of a longer continuum. If it is true of the government and its policies as a whole to say, 'It preferred to follow a policy of incremental rather than revolutionary change' then this is also true of the Admiralty in general and the Naval Staff in particular.<sup>65</sup> Increasing numbers of Staff Officers and increasing specialisation of function had been a feature of the Naval Staff almost from the moment that the war began. Much has been said about the work of the Plans Division in this respect, but as Appendix H indicates, such developments were also central to the work of the Operations Division as well (and from this document it is clear to see why Jellicoe saw the separation of Section 16 from the rest of OD in 1917 as unnecessary). The key feature of the PD was not the creation of a new body *per se*, or the appointment of necessarily brilliant minds, but more importantly that there was a body of people who had the time to devote themselves to a specific function. The difference that Geddes made was that he encouraged such specialisation and created the numbers which allowed the Naval Staff to function properly (See Appendix B graph 1.1). In terms of numbers, however, Geddes real impact was in terms of the increased employment of civilians rather than naval officers, either of the executive branch or the RNVR. The enormous rise in RNVR numbers had already taken place under Jellicoe before Geddes arrived.

In that respect the move from Jellicoe to Wemyss was more one of style than of substance. Charm and more positive thinking may have engendered a better atmosphere in the Admiralty, but increased staff numbers simply allowed people the space to breathe and think. One danger of such compartmentalisation was that various bodies could begin to take on a life of their own, and work independently of the other

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<sup>64</sup> Jellicoe Memorandum, 'List of Instructions which govern the work of the Plans Division.' ADM 1/8524/135.

<sup>65</sup> French, *Lloyd George Coalition*, 68.

bodies that they were supposed to work with. There was some evidence that this did happen in 1918 (perhaps a result of Wemyss's policy of simply letting people get on with things). On several occasions senior Staff Officers criticised PD for producing papers without consultation with the relevant Naval Staff divisions.<sup>66</sup> Such was the concern that Fremantle suggested that the Division be disbanded.<sup>67</sup> Hope agreed, but both Duff, although critical, and Richmond disagreed. Richmond had arrived back at the Admiralty in April 1918 as Director of Staff Training, and therefore any proposals for changes to the structure of the staff were passed to him. Richmond correctly observed that 'The value of a division which, *unhampered by routine work or the details of daily operations*, can prepare plans of naval action and deal in advance with naval policy cannot be exaggerated.'<sup>68</sup> He added that if the Operations and Plans Divisions were not working well together, 'it should not lead to the condemnation of the system, but of its administration.' With such attitudes it was perhaps not surprising that Richmond's stay on the Staff was relatively brief. In January 1919 he was posted to command of HMS *Erin*.

Despite its bluntness, Richmond's views were vital. Wemyss threw his weight behind the division, and criticism of it stopped. There is, however, a difficulty when using Richmond's opinions as an arbitrator of validity when looking at the Naval Staff. He was a man with a fertile mind and considerable ability. He was also strong minded and convinced of his own rightness. Few doubts come across in his work. Given the regularity with which he was cited by Professor Marder, in particular, he might easily be seen as a wholly reliable source. There was, however, a danger that too many of Richmond's views were accepted in their entirety. For much of the war he was highly critical of almost all aspects of Admiralty administration. Indeed, he appeared rarely to have had a good word to say for anybody. He criticised, for example, Duff for lacking the 'hideous rudeness' to get anything tangible done at the Admiralty, but rarely in any system does 'hideous rudeness' get a person anywhere.<sup>69</sup> It certainly would not help create an efficiently working bureaucratic machine. In addition he was critical that the Admiralty failed to consider areas outside the North Sea where the action of sea power might have had an actual effect on the outcome of the war. He was, for instance, particularly keen on the possibility of naval operations

<sup>66</sup> Hope Minute, 30<sup>th</sup> March 1918. ADM 1/8524/135, Duff Minute, 4<sup>th</sup> May 1918. ADM 137/2708.

<sup>67</sup> Fremantle Memorandum, 'Work of the Plans Division', 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1918. ADM 1/8524/135

<sup>68</sup> Richmond Minute, 8<sup>th</sup> May 1918. ADM 1/8524/135. My Italics.

<sup>69</sup> Marder, *Portrait*, 4<sup>th</sup> May 1917, 247.

off the coast of the Near East.<sup>70</sup> But as an experienced PD officer noted, 'mere feints would in no way affect the German Command, and would therefore be of little or no value.'<sup>71</sup> Both the DPD and DID agreed.<sup>72</sup> Neither of these were men of little ability. The problem, however, was that Richmond has been very influential on historians, particularly Professor Marder who edited his diaries, and the result was to allow Richmond too much influence in evaluating the views of those that worked on the Naval Staff in London.

The entry of the USA into the War in April 1917 had helped finally to turn the blockade of Germany into a stranglehold. For not only had the most powerful of the neutrals joined the war, but the imposition of the blockade became so much easier. The need for the 10CS and the Dover Patrol to check shipping was reduced, and the Allies could now effectively operate a 'paper' blockade against the Central Powers. By 1918 this was telling, not simply in terms of food shortages, but in the ability of Germany to continue sufficient levels of war production.<sup>73</sup> For example, by October 1918, a quarter of Krupps machine tools were at a standstill for want of specialist steel parts.<sup>74</sup> It was the impact of these industrial forces which helped to decide the fate of the German army.<sup>75</sup> The inability of the Germans to produce any tanks was a reflection of their inability to expand production any further. Similarly, the appearance of field W/T on the German battlefield was less the result of technical innovation than a shortage of copper for the existing field telephone network.<sup>76</sup> The Allies were also able to listen in on such W/T messages. On the food front, the fodder shortage affected some 100,000 horses on the Western Front, which severely restricted the ability of the German army to move its artillery and shells around; civilian rations fell short of a person's average daily need in every month from July

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 9<sup>th</sup> February 1915, 140.

<sup>71</sup> Halliday Memorandum, 'The Syrian Coast', 11<sup>th</sup> November 1917. ADM 137/2706.

<sup>72</sup> Fuller Minute, 30<sup>th</sup> January 1918; Hall Minute, 11<sup>th</sup> February 1918. ADM 137/1417. Both in reply to Fremantle (Rear Admiral Commanding Aegean Squadron) Memorandum, 'Desirability of effecting raids on the coast of Anatolia during forthcoming spring and summer', 30<sup>th</sup> December 1917. ADM 137/1417.

<sup>73</sup> Deist, W., 'The Military Collapse of the German Empire: The Reality Behind the Stab-in-the-Back Myth', *War in History* 3/2, 1996, 188-191.

<sup>74</sup> Offer, *First World War*, 72.

<sup>75</sup> Wilson, T., and Prior, R., 'Conflict, Technology, and the Impact of Industrialization: The Great War 1914-1918', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 24/3, 2001, 128-157.

<sup>76</sup> I am grateful to Major Jim Beach for a discussion on this issue.

1916 to the end of the war.<sup>77</sup> The German government itself did not help matters by the inefficient manner in which it tried to manage the home economy. Bitterness spread.

With this bitterness came disillusionment at the conduct of the war. Victory against Russia did not bring the immediate benefits that many had hoped, particularly in terms of food. The initial massive advances during the 1918 Spring Offensive also petered out, and with them the sense that victory was still possible evaporated. The casualties continued to mount up, and the influenza epidemic at home carried off the sick and the weak. In 1918, an aristocratic observer watched the 'death-throes' of the German empire.<sup>78</sup> She was clear who was to blame. It was the 'class of "supermen"' who had taken Germany into the war. The exhaustion of the German people that she, and others, recorded was 'pivotal' in ending the war.<sup>79</sup>

For the TD the entry of the USA made one aspect of their job much easier. The main question for them, setting aside the threat of the submarine which continued right up until the last month or so of the war, was not simply to ensure the destruction of Germany in wartime, but also to try to make certain that Britain won the peace. This was easier said than done. Britain had sold off many of her overseas assets to pay for the war. Markets had been lost, especially to the new economic power of the United States. It was the TD's role to make sure that when peace returned Britain rather than the USA or indeed Germany would benefit the most. In particular, they hoped to ensure that Britain would be able to keep the markets that she had blocked off from Germany in the preceding four years. For example, in May 1918 a Coal Committee was formed in Buenos Ayres to promote Allied interests there, and Commander Gilbert Nugent noted that, 'It is hoped that the Committee will pay special attention to the extinction of their German competitor, the Deutsche Kohlen Depot, before the war ends.'<sup>80</sup> That said, it is also clear that the creation of an Allied Blockade Committee, and the Allied Naval Armistice Council, which included the Americans, meant that the British also had to listen to what their Allies had to say, particularly the United States, to whom they owed so much money. Thus, although the blockade was continued against Germany right up to the signing of the Treaty of

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<sup>77</sup> Offer, *First World War*, 60, 30.

<sup>78</sup> Blücher, Princess Evelyn, *An English Wife in Berlin*, London, 1921, 253.

<sup>79</sup> Chickering, R., *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918*, Cambridge 1998, 200; Offer, *First World War*, 72; Denholm, D., (ed.), *Behind the Lines. One Woman's War 1914-1918*, Sydney 1982, 282-286.

<sup>80</sup> Nugent to Holtham, 19<sup>th</sup> June 1918. ADM 137/2824.

Versailles, there was already pressure to moderate it as the situation in the Baltic deteriorated following the Bolshevik 'Revolution' in Russia, and the collapse of the Eastern European Empires.<sup>81</sup> Further pressure came from the FO which was keen to see better relations between the Allies and the Neutrals.<sup>82</sup> The feeling that throughout the war the FO had represented the views of foreign powers in Britain, rather than of explaining Britain's views to the foreign powers was best summarised by a TD briefing given by the First Lord to the navalist MP, Gibson Bowler, in January 1919.

... while the ships of the Navy were intercepting and stopping Neutrals' ships with cargoes destined apparently for neutral countries, but really for our enemies, the Foreign Office released these ships and their cargoes, and allowed them to proceed.

Until we abandoned the Declaration of London which enabled us to adopt the doctrine of continuous voyage, and to add considerably to our declared list of absolute contraband, this state of affairs continued to exist with the result that the Blockade could not be made fully effective. ... If we were now entered on a war instead of just finishing it, the Admiralty would take up a very much stronger position than it did, or was able to do.<sup>83</sup>

In 1918 the Naval Staff reached its largest extent, as graph 1.1 in Appendix B indicates. It remains hard to know exactly the numbers that were on the Staff at the end of the war, but in terms of RN officers, the total is certainly more than the 129 stated in the Staff technical history.<sup>84</sup> With greater numbers and increased specialisation went smoother administration, particularly as everyone gained in experience as the war progressed. Added to this was greater integration of staff divisions. The diverse needs of the anti-submarine war made this happen. By 1918 almost all divisions were working on this, and as the integrated plans for the Northern Barrage and Hunting Flotillas indicated, there was confidence, particularly amongst the more junior staff that the German threat could be not simply contained, but beaten.

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<sup>81</sup> TD Memoranda, 14<sup>th</sup> April 1919, 'Trade between Germany and Scandinavia and Holland' and 'Trade between Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland'. ADM 137/2741.

<sup>82</sup> HM Representatives in Norway, Sweden Denmark and the Netherlands to FO, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1918. Copy forwarded to Admiralty. ADM 137/2741.

<sup>83</sup> Hotham to Geddes, 18<sup>th</sup> January 1919. ADM 137/2737.

<sup>84</sup> *Naval Staff*, 95.

It had also been demonstrated that W/T and other intelligence was to be a central part of that campaign. As the ID's own informal history of the war stated, 'interception became more and more thorough as the war progressed. From very meagre beginnings in August, 1914, it developed rapidly.'<sup>85</sup> By 1918 ID was providing not simply decryptions, but interpretations as well.<sup>86</sup> Added to this must go the work of the DF stations and ID's work on intercepted telegrams and post. All of this created a wealth of information which the Staff were able to sift. It contributed to the success of the convoy system at one end, and allowed for the blockade to be enforced and monitored at the other. It affected the work of all the other divisions. Almost all the civilians that joined the Staff in 1918 went on to work in ID sifting through such information. That much of this work was also successfully done by officers who may have lacked formal staff training was an indication of their ability and experience. Wemyss contributed to this, largely through letting his subordinates get on with things, although as has been shown, in some respects he held back the likelihood of a more radical use of the Grand Fleet's resources. Like Beatty he must have been disappointed that he was denied a great sea victory, but the Navy in 1918 had played a vital role in sustaining the war for the Allies. It would, however, be left to Beatty as the next First Sea Lord to oversee not simply to transfer of the Navy, and its Staff to peacetime conditions, but to begin the tortuous process by which the Navy would assess its own achievements in the war through the Staff Technical Histories and the Official History. It would not be a happy process.

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<sup>85</sup> Clarke and Birch, *German Naval Warfare*, vol. i, 6.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 55.

## **Conclusion.**

This thesis has demonstrated that a number of traditionally held assumptions about the Admiralty War Staff in the First World War are not true. It was not the depository of second-rate, retired or maimed officers, unfit for sea, who passed the war in desk jobs. As has been demonstrated, largely from an analysis of service records, those who worked on the Staff did so not as a result of any perceived inadequacy, but because of their ability. Staff Officers were promoted faster than the average RN officer, and many had a wide range of specialist skills which were of great use during the prosecution of what became the world's most complex conflict. They all had extensive experience of service at sea, and their records demonstrate that they were generally highly regarded by the Navy's most senior pre-war officers, such as Callaghan or Battenberg.

In terms of their work, they did not pass the war simply issuing ill-judged communications to the fleets, and shuffling pointless paperwork. The Staff did not stifle considered initiatives, such as the use of air power, while devoting much time to pursuing daft schemes such as training seagulls as weapons of war. While it is undeniably the case that mistakes were made, particularly in the early months of the war in 1914 or at Jutland, to use these as the sole criteria of success or failure would be quite incorrect. Operating until 1917 as a body whose principal task was to provide information to the Board of Admiralty, chiefly the First Sea Lord, the Staff was in no position to dictate the conduct of the war. They must, therefore, be judged on the work that they did, and the advice that they gave.

In these terms, they must be judged to have been largely successful. They created the outline plans for war which were implemented as far as they could have been in August 1914. A Grand Fleet was created and a distant blockade was imposed. The latter would have been more successful more quickly had the Admiralty's policy of ruthlessness not been significantly diminished not by the action of the enemy, but instead by that of the British Government. Under pressure from the FO and the Board of Trade, as well as the Liberal Government's own sense of the limited role that they should play in the state's life, the Cabinet balked at the Admiralty's proposals, and it was consequently only slowly that the Blockade took hold. While the TD monitored the leaks in the blockade, and pushed for more action, and the blockade warships



detained merchant vessels bound either for Germany or the neutrals, the Contraband Committee released their ships and resisted more pressure being put on the Neutrals.

This meant that the blockade took much longer to bring pressure to bear on the German Government through civil unrest and industrial dislocation, but by 1917, with the realisation on the part of the British Government that half measures would no longer work, and the intervention of the United States, the blockade was finally a decisive weapon. Although not literally starving in 1918, the German people, formerly prosperous and well-fed, were hungry and cold. German industry, stripped of manpower and resources, struggled to meet the demands of the military. Realising this, the military sought through the 1918 Spring Offensive to use mobility and innovation to make up for the lack of resources. It did not work, and having failed, the German army no longer had the ability to hold the Allies back.

Central to the conduct of the naval war was the use of 'information advantage'. This informed almost all actions of the war. Most famously this involved the use of German decoded messages from Room 40. But Room 40 only made up a minority of ID Staff. German decrypts were only one, albeit important, source of intelligence. The Admiralty had an extensive pre-war global network of Intelligence officers, some of whom also worked on the Staff (both in ID *and* OD) during the war itself. In addition to this the Staff used information gleaned from its DF stations, links with shipping lines and Lloyds, intercepted post and telegrams from the Post Office, intercepted messages on the global cable system which Britain dominated, and their global W/T stations which were hurriedly completed after the war began.

All these sources of information needed to be digested somehow. Before the age of computers it had to be done by hand. This explained why there was such a dramatic increase in staff not just in ID but in other divisions as well. For although ID might have been the main source of information processing, it was not the only one. There were roles also for TD and OD and later MMD and SD as well as most other divisions to a lesser extent. The importance of ID and the DID was recognised in Geddes's January 1918 Memorandum (Appendix E) as the DID was the only divisional commander who did not fall under the supervision of one of the First Sea Lord's deputies.

The mention of SD also raises an important point about the Staff itself. Most analysis of the Staff has focused on its structural developments. This resulted in the central importance that was usually given to the May 1917 reforms, by which, it is commonly asserted the Staff 'came of age'. This thesis has shown that this is a simplistic and largely incorrect view. To see the Staff in such rigid bureaucratic terms is to misunderstand its function and manner of operation. In many respects May 1917 changed nothing significantly. A gradual process of decentralisation of staff work had been underway before May, linked by the increase in manpower as much as anything else (evidence for this can be seen in the work of ASD, OD and TD *all* before May 1917). In addition, at the upper end the circulation of staff dockets remained the same, despite the readjustment of staff nomenclature. Whether Oliver was ACNS or COS did not matter. The final word, as before, rested with the First Sea Lord who now also called himself COS.

Perhaps more importantly, those who have analysed the Staff in this rigidly bureaucratic manner have spent too much time considering that bit of the iceberg which it was possible to see above the water. The Admiralty did not operate like that, and neither did the Staff. It is this that brings us back to SD. A Signals Section had existed before the creation of the Signals Division in September 1917. Given that it has been shown that the Staff was able to get priority consideration to the allocation of accommodation in the Admiralty buildings, it seemed odd that significant parts of the Staff such as SD and parts of ID were located elsewhere. The most obvious logical explanation why SD stayed at 47 Victoria Street (renamed 'Annex B' in early 1915) throughout the war was because its work was secret. The creation of the SD simply increased the number of officers it had. The addition of the Section to the Staff to form a Division merely formally recognised a relationship which had already existed. The same was true of the Minesweeping Division. This is one reason why the dockets are so important as evidence, because they record the actual way that the system worked rather than the way that a structural diagram (such as in Appendix D) might suggest that it worked. In other words, it is important to look below the waterline, where there is much more to be seen.

There were consequences for the Staff caused by the influx of information, which affected the conduct of the war. It meant that it was only the Staff, or rather its leadership, which saw the whole picture. This picture can be seen in two dimensions, by time and by subject. By being in place for a long period of time Oliver, Hall or

even Webb saw not only the gradual development of a particular issue but were also aware of its relationship to other related questions in the naval war. This singular position revealed itself a number of times when complaints or suggestions arrived on their desks as to why a particular line of action should be taken to solve a problem. Invariably, however, the correspondent had given insufficient consideration to the knock-on effects that, for example, a decision to mine the Bight or operate in the Baltic would have on other strategies then being pursued.

More importantly, however, it gave the Admiralty an unrivalled ability not only to advise fleet commanders as to what they might do to prosecute the war, but in fact issue direct orders to them. As only the Admiralty, through the information collected by the Staff, could have the complete picture, only they could lead the commander to victory. This loss of independence of command, which had begun before the war, was one reason why so many senior commanders did not like the Admiralty. It took their job away, and made them merely the enforcers of another's will rather than the implementers of independent action.

Once the British intelligence picture was in place, and again it should be stressed that Room 40 was just one aspect of this, the Admiralty could dispense with the pointless Grand Fleet sweeps of the North Sea and instead adopt a safer harbour-based strategy. It may have been boring, but it meant that more ships were available (because fewer would need repairs and refits) should the decisive engagement ever take place. Indeed, it is to be remembered that many believed that such a battle might either never take place, or only as a final desperate gamble by the Germans once the blockade had taken its toll, so long as the allied armies had not lost the war already. This they should not have done as they had numerical advantage on every front (although the Russians had few other advantages).

Instead, the Grand Fleet could wait, and the Admiralty knew that they were likely to get at least some foreknowledge of the enemy's plans from several sources. Firstly, the British recognised the relationship between the attack on trade by German submarines, and their need to support the HSF. Both in May 1916 (correctly) and October 1918 (optimistically), the British believed that the removal of U-Boats from the economic warfare heralded a large movement by the HSF. Secondly, through decrypts and DF the British would get more immediate news of any German fleet movements. This foreknowledge led some Staff Officers to suggest that the British

make greater use of the Grand Fleet escorts, particularly in 1917-18, as they could be fairly sure that they would not all be needed.

Connected to this were the various discussions as to how the Grand Fleet's resources should be used. Following the flawed engagements between Beatty and the Germans in 1914-15, the Admiralty placed ever greater restrictions on the independence of the commander afloat, which met its climax in the reforms instituted after Jutland. At the same time the Staff put forward further proposals regarding the North Sea strategy. The results of these were the decision just prior to Jutland to restructure the Grand Fleet as a means of enticing the HSF from its harbour, and the even more radical proposals to 'demobilise' the Grand Fleet in late 1917-1918 so as to provide resources for the anti-submarine war. With the support of the First Sea Lord and the C-in-C in 1916 changes were effected, but the 1918 plans came to nothing because of the hostility of, amongst others, Wemyss and Beatty.

The engagement that took place on 31<sup>st</sup> May 1916 was thus a War Staff battle in terms of the disposition of the British Squadrons, although the flawed manner in which Beatty in particular handled his ships was his own. Mistakes were also made ashore, and these contributed to the failure of the British to destroy the badly mauled HSF on 1<sup>st</sup> June. By the end of 1916 deliberations as to the needs of the Grand Fleet were being challenged by the far more pressing problem of what to do with the U-Boat threat to Allied merchant shipping. Having resisted centralised control of the merchant marine and the institution of convoyed sailing, the Staff finally changed its collective mind in the face of increasing criticism and compelling evidence that something more could be done. The success of the FCT and the Scandinavian convoys as well as the increasing reluctance of both neutral and British merchant shipping to sail independently finally persuaded the senior members of the Staff that convoy was feasible. Above all, there was the recognition that convoys could be run without completely abandoning either the Grand Fleet's escorts or many of the anti-submarine patrols which were already in place.

In terms of ASW, this thesis has shown that the Naval Staff never gave up the search for more successful methods of destroying the U-Boat. That is not to say that these officers were anti-convoy, they were not. They saw its benefits to the safety of the merchant marine, although it is also true that they underestimated the degree to which convoy escorts could be the most effective killers of submarines which were attracted to the convoys. Instead the Staff looked to other methods of submarine

detection and destruction in 1917 and 1918. The development of the Northern, Dover and Otranto Barrages were one part of this search. These 'barrages' were not simply minefields. The Staff saw them as part of a much wider strategy for anti-submarine warfare which included airpower, hunting flotillas, and new technology as well as W/T and hydrophones.

The perceived failure of the barrages, particularly the hugely expensive Northern Barrage should not simply be measured against the number of U-Boats that it was believed were destroyed in it. One of the principal reasons for its failure was that the Admiralty (and the Americans) failed to implement the other aspects of the strategy. They were not willing to take the necessary action to demobilise the Grand Fleet thereby releasing the resources which would have made such a co-ordinated strategy possible. Had Jellicoe remained as First Sea Lord it is possible that he would have countenanced such a move. Beatty, however, was implacably opposed to such a policy, as indeed he opposed convoy once it too made demands on his escorts.

Interest in new technology was not isolated to the question of the Barrages. The Staff looked at a number of innovations, and senior Staff Officers were instrumental in bringing the Navy's research facilities at Parkeston into closer contact with Admiralty activity in the early months of 1918. They considered many new schemes, most of which were not harebrained, even if, as often turned out to be the case, such schemes were not possible because the technology was not quite ready. The best example of this is in the use of air power. The Staff looked at many plans to use airpower in the hunt for U-boats, and in plans to bomb U-Boat pens, U-Boat construction sites, the HSF's harbour facilities, Zeppelin sheds, even the Krupp factory itself. They considered the possibility of using liners to create mid-Atlantic carriers to protect trade and numerous methods of U-Boat detection and destruction.

Some of these developments, such as that of the hydrophone, were flawed from the outset (although it is interesting to note that the Germans still believed that the British were using hydrophones in the Second World War. It was one reason why U-Boats adopted the strategy of sitting on the seabed when under attack. This merely made ASDIC detection easier).<sup>1</sup> But the point remains that the Staff were open to new ideas.

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Dr M. Llewellyn-Jones for bring this point to my attention.

By 1918, however, Germany was losing the war. Although she had beaten Russia in 1917, the arrival of the United States and the complete mobilisation of Britain, France (and Italy) were more than the Central Powers could resist. In part this was because of the weakening condition of the German Empire and its people. War casualties, illness, hunger and fuel shortages all added to the woes of the German civilian population. Brest-Litovsk and the initial spectacular victories of the Spring Offensive gave a last hope of victory. But during the summer these aspirations dissolved, and after August the German army itself began its slow retreat. German defeat was the result of a long war in which the Allies had simply had too many resources with which to purchase victory. Added to this the Germans had mobilised themselves for war inadequately. The efficient use of resources might have made the contest more balanced, but this did not take place. Initial efforts to gain more resources through neutral states were gradually choked off, so that by 1918 there was nowhere left for them to go shopping. Even the occupation of the Ukraine proved unprofitable. Indeed, it absorbed thousands of German troops which the High Command really needed for the Western Front. On that Front the German army lacked the resources which would have given their Spring attack more teeth. In particular, they lacked the heavy artillery which the Allies would use so effectively during the 'Hundred Days' at the end of the war. Assembly lines in the Krupp's armaments factory stood idle, more effectively immobilised than if they had been bombed. They had simply run out of resources. This was due to the blockade.

It had taken a long time to get the blockade effectively in place. This was not principally the Navy's fault. All senior naval officers in 1914 recognised that this was a vital part of British strategy. It was hoped that the initial shock of war might be sufficient. This was an optimistic belief, but it was certainly believed that in the longer term the blockade would prove decisive. It would wreck the German economy and probably bring the HSF fleet out in a desperate attempt to avert national defeat, and thereby bring about its naval oblivion. It took longer than anticipated for a number of reasons. Firstly, significant members of the British Government, and their departments, were opposed to such a policy. Recognising that it would be damaging to British trade and British relations with the neutrals, both the Foreign Office and the Board of Trade recommended that a milder policy be pursued. Given that the FO had control of the Contraband Committee, their voice proved decisive. Even when the Royal Navy intercepted ships with cargoes bound directly or indirectly for Germany,

the Contraband Committee ordered the ships to be released. Secondly, the Admiralty, through the rapidly established TD, took time to create the immense bureaucracy that a tight blockade would require. If the neutrals were to be coerced into following British demands, the British would need to know where the goods entering these countries were going. The Navy also lacked the resources to equip the blockading forces adequately, as shown by the many problems that the 10CS faced in 1914. Thirdly, the Navy recognised, albeit slowly, that the blockade needed the consent of the neutrals, even it was only grudging, if it was going to work. This included the United States. The increase in economic pressure on Germany therefore took far longer than anyone had expected. This created a real sense of frustration among those Staff Officers whose job it was to enforce this policy. Hostility towards the FO in particular was acute. Once the United States was in the war, however, the blockade became a very significant element in Allied victory.

Many of the significant and positive contributions of the Staff towards the successful conclusion of the naval war have been subsequently overlooked by historians. This began in the 1920s with the Admiralty's own assessment of its actions between 1914 and 1918. Rather than try to look as objectively as possible on events which were in any case only recent, many saw their task in producing Staff or Official Histories as merely another way of re-fighting the Great War. Much has been said as to how this affected the analysis of Jutland, but the same was true, on a more modest scale, of the history of the Staff itself. Many Staff Officers left the Admiralty soon after the war was over, often before the peace was officially signed. Some retired, and others such as Oliver, gained sea commands. For them this must have been a great reward after many years of toil in the Admiralty. But it meant that others were left to write the histories. For the likes of Dewar and Richmond in particular, the war gave them many examples which they could use to press for their own Staff agenda. Both had been frustrated during their time on the staff, especially Richmond, and much of the history written in the 1920s reflected this in the same way that Beatty tried to get his version of Jutland out while Jellicoe was safely in New Zealand.

But in using the war for their own ends, they also wrote bad history. This was done by the simple expedient of amplifying failure and ignoring success. The damage done by this assessment was further compounded by the work of later historians. In

particular, Professor Marder believed too much of what he read in, for example Richmond's diary or gleaned from his tea-time visits to the homes of naval widows in the 1950s and 1960s. All historians like a good story, particularly when it might enthrall a lecture hall or an Oxford high-table dinner.<sup>2</sup> But in choosing to pick one story over another to illustrate a point, it was all too easy to create a distorted picture. It is through these twin-prisms that many have viewed the work of the Naval Staff in the First World War. Since some Staff Officers were old, maimed or inadequate, so many were. Once a view has been established it is hard to challenge it, particularly when so many significant historians all claim the same opinion. The generally malign view of the Naval Staff also demonstrated the danger of relying too heavily on anecdotal evidence or memoirs, such as those of Commander Kenworthy. The reliability of such *post-facto* evidence in historical evaluation has been succinctly summarised elsewhere, but its validity is no less important in the issue of naval history.<sup>3</sup>

This thesis has demonstrated that by analysing Staff Officers' service records it can be shown that the traditional view of the Staff is wrong. Rather than being a dumping ground, the Staff was a forcing house. Its officers were promoted faster than the average, and many had careers that were singular in their achievements. By analysis of the minute sheets and administrative dockets which survive largely in the ADM 137 files at the National Archive it is possible to see how their thoughts developed and how the structure of the Staff both worked and evolved. While credit must go to Geddes and Wemyss for the final creation, this should not be done without acknowledging the singular importance of Jellicoe in these changes. Furthermore it would also be wrong to underestimate the contributions of either Jackson or Oliver to the successful prosecution of the war. While neither had flair, both had more ability than either has normally been given credit for.

In the same way that historians have re-evaluated the ability and success of British generals and their staffs in the First World War, so this thesis has demonstrated that such a review is necessary for those naval officers who served on the Admiralty War Staff and its successor in the same conflict. Although coincidental, it is not without significance or effect, that on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1918 when

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<sup>2</sup> Cobb, R., 'Arthur Marder' in, *People and Places*, Oxford 1985, 13-4.

<sup>3</sup> Simpson, *Corps Command*, 11-16.



the HSF was led into captivity in the Firth of Forth, the captain of the leading warship, HMS *Cardiff*, was Capt. Claud Sinclair, a former Staff Officer from OD.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> ADM 196/44, 361.

## **Appendix A. Senior Admiralty and Staff Officials.**

### **First Lord of the Admiralty.**

Winston Churchill	October 1911 – June 1915
Arthur Balfour	June 1915 – December 1916
Sir Edward Carson	December 1916 – July 1917
Sir Eric Geddes	July 1917 – January 1919

### **First Sea Lord**

Admiral Sir Arthur Wilson	January 1910 – December 1911
Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman	December 1911 – December 1912
Admiral Prince Louis of Battenberg	December 1912 – October 1914
Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher	October 1914 – May 1915
Admiral Sir Henry Jackson	May 1915 – December 1916
Admiral Sir John Jellicoe	December 1916 – December 1917
Admiral Sir Rosslyn Wemyss	December 1917 – November 1919

### **Deputy First Sea Lord**

VA Sir Rosslyn Wemyss	September 1917 – December 1917
RA George Hope	January 1918 – August 1919

### **The Admiralty War Staff, 1912-17**

#### **a) Chief of the Staff**

RA Ernest Troubridge	January 1912 – January 1913
Admiral Sir Henry Jackson	January 1913 – July 1914
VA Sir Doveton Sturdee	July 1914 – November 1914
VA Sir Henry Oliver	November 1914 – May 1917

#### **b) Assistant Chief of the Staff**

Commander Tufton Beamish	January 1912 – April 1913
Capt. Arthur Vyvyan	January 1913 – October 1914
Lt-Col John Rose, RMLI	September 1914 – October 1914
Capt. Sydney Fremantle	September 1914 – July 1915
Lt-Col Harry Farquharson, RM	October 1914 – March 1915
Capt. Arthur May	May 1915 – January 1918
Capt. Henry W. Grant	May 1915 – July 1918

#### **c) Special Service, War Staff.**

VA Sir Edmond Slade	April 1915 – November 1918
VA Sir Douglas Gamble	July 1915 – May 1917
VA Sir Robert Ommanney	August 1915 – November 1918
Capt. the Hon. Charles Dormer	July 1915 – November 1918
Capt. Egerton Scrivener	June 1915 – November 1918

#### **d) Director of the Operations Division**

Capt. George Ballard	January 1912 – May 1914
RA Arthur Leveson	May 1914 – January 1915
Capt. Thomas Jackson	January 1915 – June 1917

- e) Director of the Intelligence Division

Capt. Thomas Jackson	January 1912 – November 1913
RA Henry Oliver	November 1913 – October 1914
Capt. Reginald Hall	October 1914 – January 1919
- f) Director of the Mobilisation Division

RA Alexander Duff	January 1912 – October 1914
Capt. Hugh Sinclair	October 1914 – August 1916
Capt. Michael Culme-Seymour	August 1916 – September 1918
- g) Director of the Trade Division

Capt. Richard Webb	August 1914 – October 1917
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- h) Director of the Anti-Submarine Division

RA Alexander Duff	December 1916 – May 1917
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**The Naval Staff, 1917-18**

- a) Chief of Staff

	Post Combined with First Sea Lord.
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- b) Deputy Chief of the Staff

RA Sir Henry Oliver	May 1917 – January 1918
RA Sydney Fremantle	January 1918 – April 1919
- c) Assistant Chief of the Staff

RA Alexander Duff	May 1917 – July 1919
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- d) Director of the Operations Division

Capt. George Hope	June 1917 – January 1918
Capt. Alfred Pound (DOD H)	January 1918 – June 1919
Capt. Charles Coode (DOD F)	January 1918 – July 1919
- e) Director of the Intelligence Division

Capt. Reginald Hall	October 1914 – January 1919
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- f) Director of the Mobilisation Division

Capt. Michael Culme-Seymour	October 1916 – September 1918
Capt. Edmond Hyde	September 1918 – July 1919
- g) Director of the Trade Division

Capt. Alan Hotham	October 1917 – May 1920
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- h) Director of the Anti-Submarine Division

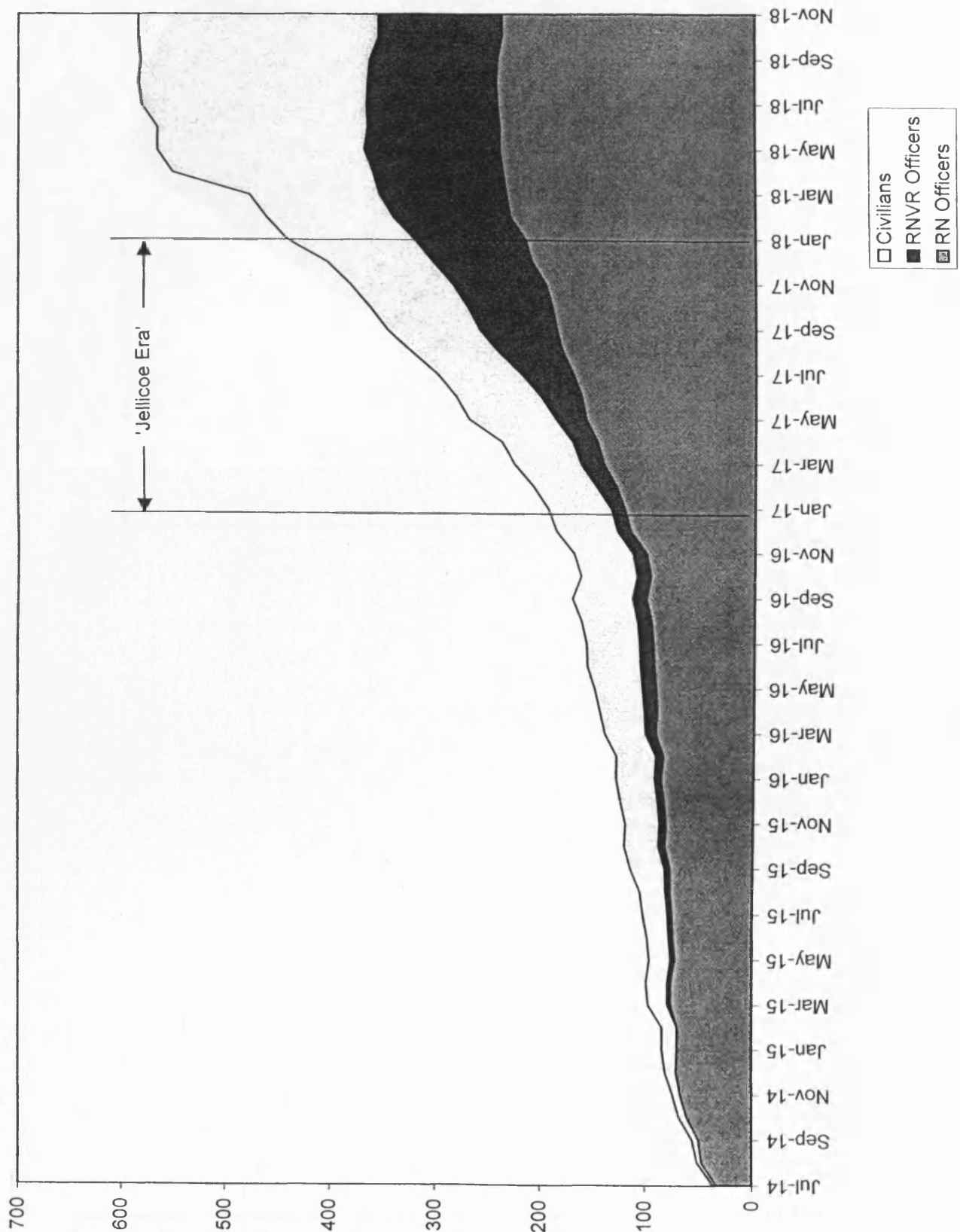
Capt. William Fisher	May 1917 – January 1919
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- i) Director of Mines Division

Capt. Lionel Preston	May 1917 – October 1919
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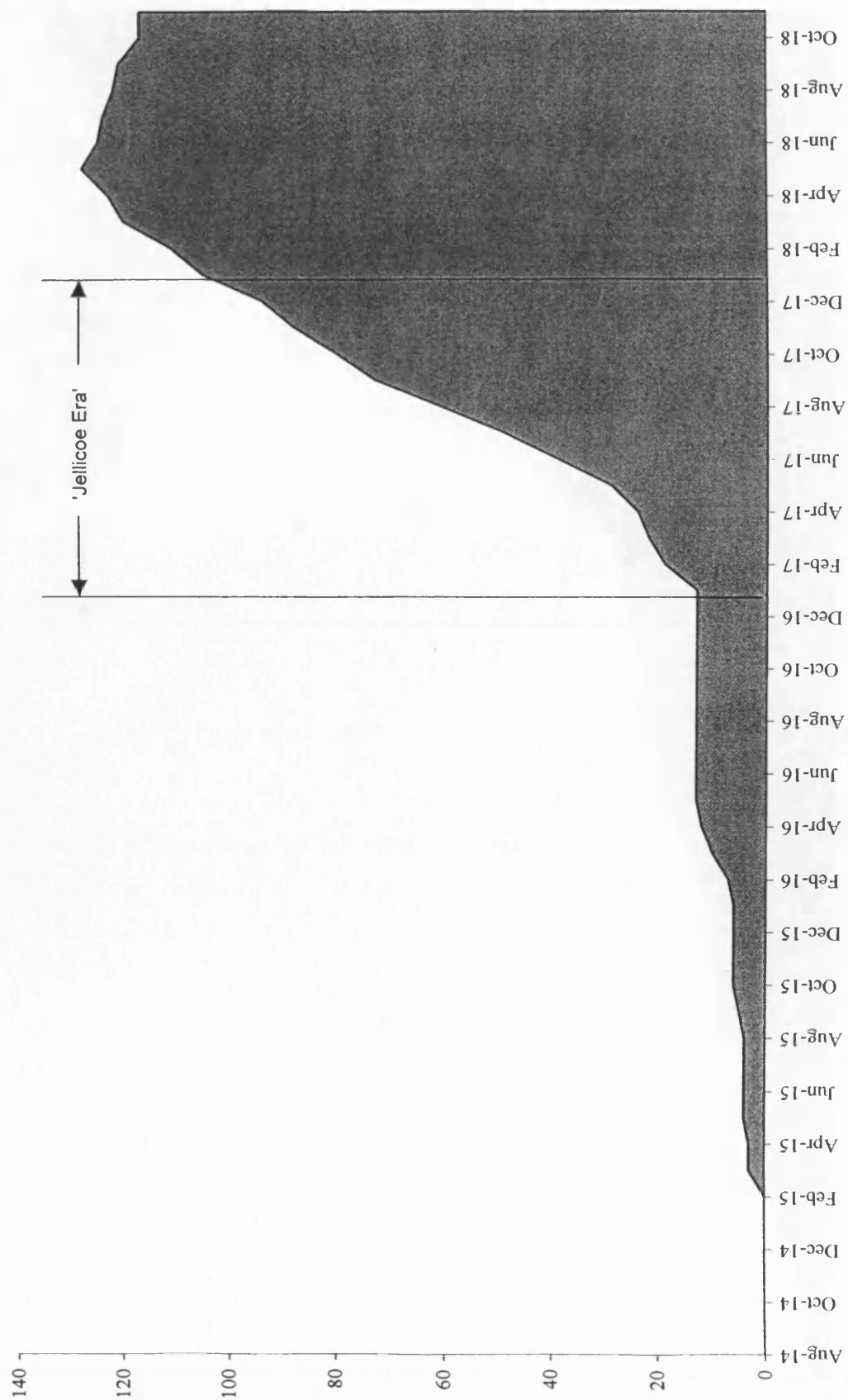
- j) Director of the Plans Division  
     Capt Roger Keyes                      September 1917 – January 1918  
     Capt Cyril Fuller                      January 1918 – May 1920
- k) Director of the Mercantile Movements Division  
     Capt Frederic Whitehead              October 1917 – October 1919
- l) Director of the Training Division  
     Capt James Ley                      December 1917 – July 1918  
     Capt Herbert Richmond              May 1918 – January 1919
- m) Director of the Gunnery & Torpedo Division  
     Capt Frederic Dreyer                  June 1918 – February 1919
- n) Director of the Air Division  
     Capt. Francis Scarlett              January 1918 – October 1918  
     Capt. Robert Groves                  October 1918 – August 1919

Appendix B: Graphs showing Membership of the Admiralty War Staff, 1914 – 1918.

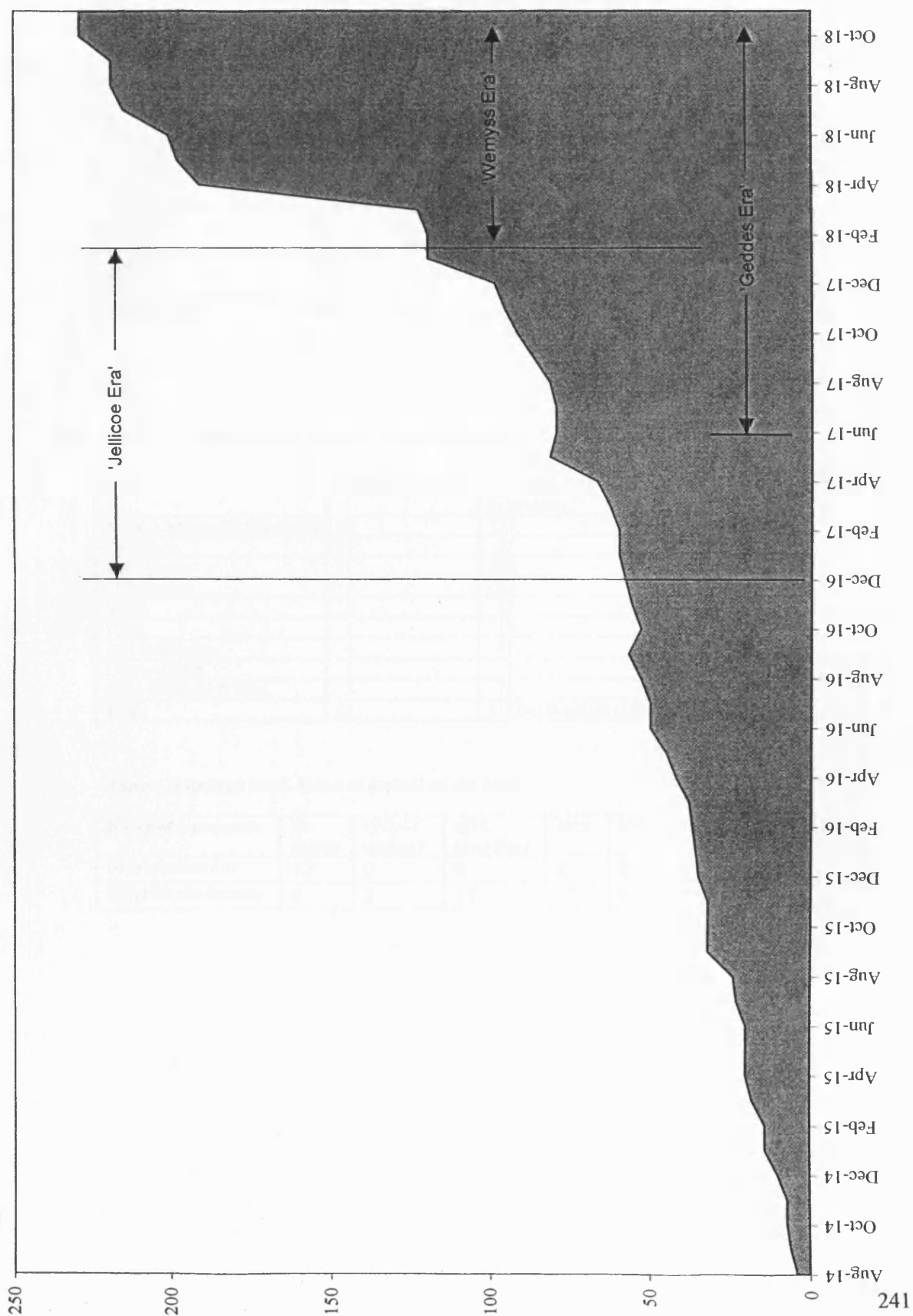
Graph 1.1: Cumulative total of all members of the Admiralty War and Naval Staffs, 1914-1918



**Graph 1.2: Cumulative total of RNVR Officers on the Admiralty War and Naval Staffs, 1914-1918.**



Graph 1.3: Cumulative total of all civilians on the Admiralty War and Naval Staffs, 1914-1918.



## Appendix C.

**Table 1.1: Naval Staff, 1912-1918. Type of Employee to be found on the staff.**

Type	Number	% of Total	% of RN Total
Royal Navy (Total)	621	67	100
- <i>Executive officers</i>	281	30	46
- <i>Supply Officers</i>	34	4	5
- <i>Engineering Officers</i>	10	1	1.5
- <i>Royal Marines</i>	44	5	7
- <i>Royal Navy (Others)</i>	11	1	1.5
- <i>RNAS</i>	12	1	1.5
- <i>RNR</i>	28	3	4.5
- <i>RNVR</i>	201	22	33
Civilian	259	28	
Army	48	5	
RFC	2	0.2	
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>930</b>	<b>100</b>	

**Table 1.2: Retired Staff. Employment by Division**

Division	Number retired.	Total Number of Officers in Division.	% of Division who were retired.
Trade & Mercantile Movements	26	135	19.3%
Operations	11	75	14.6%
Intelligence	11	206	5.3%
Mobilisation	1	22	5.4%
Mines	2	13	15.4%
Plans	1	13	7.6%
Anti-Submarine	4	77	5.2%
Censor's Dept.	3	5	60%
Other Divisions & Misc.	2	73	2.7%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>619 (all Divisions of Staff)</b>	<b>9.8%</b>

**Table 1.3 Retired Staff. Dates of arrival on the Staff**

Period of assessment:	No details	1912-14 (to Aug)	1914 (Aug-Dec)	1915	1916	1917	1918 (to Nov)
Based on <i>Navy List</i>	12	0	0	2	23	12	10
Based Service Records	4	2	17	15	9	12	3



Table 1.4: OD 16 and Plans Division. Membership showing selected appointments.

Name	Rank	Unfit?	Service Record (ADM)	Date of appointment	Position	Past Appointments (with dates)			
Colvin, Ragnar	Capt		196/ 47 p. 224	Jan 1918	ADPD	December 1915 - January 1918 HMS Revenge	August 1913 - December 1915 HMS Hibernia	June 1913 - August 1913 Staff of ITP	March 1904 - January 1905 HMS Excellent
Orde, Godfrey	Major, RMLI		196/ 63 p. 182	Nov 1917	ADPD	November 1915 - April 1917 HMS Hindustan	January 1914 - November 1915 HMS Prince of Wales		
Fuller, Cyril	Capt.		196/ 43 p. 460	Sept 1917	ADPD	August 1916 - September 1917 HMS Repulse	March 1915 - May 1916 HMS Astraea.	August 1911- August 1913 Staff of ITP	1902- January 1904 HMS Excellent (Staff)
Keyes, Roger	Capt		196/ 43 p. 277	Sept 1917	DPD	June 1916 - September 1917 HMS Centurion & Colossus	February 1915- June 1916 CoS E. Med (HMS Inflexible & Lord Nelson)	August 1912 - February 1915 HMS Dolphin as Commodore 'S'	August 1903 - January 1905 NID
Kenworthy, Joseph	Lt- Comm.		196/ 50 p. 311	July 1917	OD 16/ Plans	Nov 1915 - July 1917 HMS Commonwealth	Jan 1913 - Oct 1915 HMS Bulfinch in cd. (sacked)	May 1911 Failed sigs for cd of T craft	1906 RN Coll- failed gunnery.
Dewar, Kenneth	Commander		196/ 45 p. 59	July 1917	OD 16/ Plans	August 1916- May 1917 HMS Roberts in cd.	November 1913 - October 1915 HMS Prince of Wales	September 1907- January 1910 service with ITP	September 1902- March 1906 HMS Excellent;
Pound, Alfred Dudley	Capt.		196/ 44 p. 294	July 1917	OD 16/ Plans	October 1915 - July 1917 HMS Colossus (Flag Capt)	April 1914 - January 1915 HMS St Vincent	January 1909 - May 1911 Asst to DNO.	July 1901.- January 1902 HMS Vernon (staff)
Halliday, Lewis	Lt-Col. RMLI	Yes	196/ 62 p. 221	July 1917	OD 16/ Plans		July 1915 - July 1916 HQ 39 Div;	January 1912 - May 1914 Lecturer RN War Coll	January 1908 - January 1912 Lecturer at Sandhurst
Ritchie, James	Commander	Yes	196/ 49 p. 069	Nov 1917	Plans	January 1917 - July 1917 HMS Iron Duke (G) - unfit	February 1913 - January 1917 HMS St Vincent (G)	April 1910 - December 1912 HMS Newcastle (G)	August 1907 - April 1910 HMS Excellent (G) & lent Greenwich
Carpenter, Alfred	Capt.		196/ 46 p. 162	Dec 1917	Plans	November 1915 - November 1917 HMS Emperor of India (N)	April 1914- November 1915 HMS Iron Duke Jellicoe's Staff	'1910 - 1911 HMS Dryad for Instructional duties	1907 1st Class Ships Course
Taylor, Alfred	Commander		196/ 50 p. 261	March 1918	Plans	July 1917 - March 1918 HMS Vesuvius in cd.	April 1915 - July 1917 HMS Vernon (T) Duties	July 1909 - June 1912 HMS Vernon (Staff from October 1911)	November 1907 - March 1909 HMS Dreadnought,
Meynell, Charles	Lt	Yes	196/ 96 p. 027	Dec 1917	Plans	1917 HMS Thames in cd.	1914-1917 HMS Maidstone	1913 Retired unfit (heart disease)	1912 - 1913 HMS Dolphin for S/Ms
Dorling, Henry	Commander		196/ 48 p. 452	August 1918	Plans	May 1917 - August 1918 HMS Telemarchus in cd	November 1914 - May 1917 HMS Murray in cd;	February 1913 - January 1914 War Staff Course	October 1911 - February 1913 HMS Agamemnon
Colles, Ernest	Staff Paymaster		196/ 171 p. 541	May 1918	Plans	July 1917 - May 1918 HMS President (Secretary to RA V Stanley)	May 1917 - July 1917 HMS Crescent (Secretary to Ad Hamilton);	May 1915 - June 1916 HMS Astraea (duty with SNO)	August 1914 - October 1914 HMS King Alfred.
L'Estrange-Malone, Cecil	Wing Commander		196/ 52 p. 667	Dec 1917	Plans	17.03-17.12 HMS Lion.	March 1915 - December 1916 HMS Ben-my-Crae in cd	August 1914 - March 1915 HMS Engadine in cd	January 1907 - January 1909 HMS Dreadnought
Micklem, Hugh	Lt. RNVR		337/ 126 p. 13	January 1918	Plans	January 1918 - December 1919 Plans Div			
MacMahon, Brian	Commander		196/ 48 p. 487	May 1918	Plans	June 1916 - May 1918 HMS Hercules	December 1914- June 1916 HMS Benbow	February 1914 War Staff course;	March 1909 - March 1911 HMS Dreadnought

**Table 1.5: Plans Division. Length of Service of various officers**

Name	Date of Arrival	Date of Departure	Misc.
Order	November 1917	June 1920	
Dewar	May 1917	March 1920	
Carpenter	December 1917	July 1919	Away in April 1918 on Zeebrugge Raid.
Kenworthy	July 1917	December 1917	
Halliday	July 1917	June 1919	

**Table 1.6: Origins of ASD Officers, 1916-1918.**

Background	Numbers	Examples of Background
S/M Officers	4	
Former S/M Committee	2	
Technical	9	e.g. Experience of Kite Balloons, Torpedoes, Paravanes
Motor Boat Reserve	11	Mostly RNVR officers from Aux. Patrol work.
Destroyers	18	
Grand Fleet Capital Ships	7	
Misc. Backgrounds	6	
No Information on background	20	Mostly RNVR officers, fresh to the service.

**Table 1.7: Fit and Unfit. The overall picture.**

Fit	Unfit	% of total	Additional Information
380		76.7	Presumed Fit. No information to suggest otherwise.
5		0.9	Not unfit, but removed from previous job
7		1.3	Not unfit, but previous ship sunk.
6		1.3	Possibly unfit due to gaps in appointment dates
3		0.7	Not unfit but requested a home appointment
	126	19.1	Unfit for various reasons.

**Table 1.8: Fit and Unfit. Figures by service branches, based on Service Records.**

Group	Sub-Group	Fit	Unfit	% of total	Additional Information
<b>RNVR</b>					<b>RNVR Total = 192 officers.</b>
RNVR		139		72.5	Presumed Fit. No information to suggest otherwise.
RNVR		2	1		Not unfit, but removed from previous job
RNVR		4	2		Not unfit, but previous ship sunk.
RNVR		1		0.5	Not unfit but requested a home appointment
RNVR			10	5.2	Possibly unfit due to gaps in appointment dates
RNVR			36	18.8	Unfit.
<b>RNVR</b>	<b>RN Div</b>				<b>RN Division Sub Total = 16 officers</b>
	RN Div	1		6.2	Evidence suggests no illness etc.
	RN Div		15	93.8	Unfit due to wounds
<b>RM</b>					<b>Royal Marines Total = 44</b>
RM		32		73	Evidence suggests fit
RM		4		9	Presumed Fit. No information to suggest otherwise.
RM			8	18	Unfit
<b>X Officers</b>					<b>Executive Officers on Staff = 267</b>
X Officers		184		69	Evidence suggests fit
X Officers		3		1	Fit, but ship lost
X Officers		3		1	Possibly Unfit
X Officers		19		7	Unclear status or other reasons
X Officers			58	22	Unfit.
<b>Supply Officers</b>					<b>Supply Officers on Staff = 34</b>
Supply Officers		27		79.4	Evidence suggests fit
Supply Officers		2		5.8	Possibly unfit due to gaps in appointment dates
Supply Officers			5	14.8	Unfit.

**Table 1.9: Structure of the Trade Division on 11<sup>th</sup> August 1914.**

TD Section	Role	Section Commander
T.1	<u>Trade Routes</u> and all executive happenings - Movements of British, Allied and Enemy war vessels.	Commander Longden
T.2	<u>Armed Merchant Cruisers</u> , their selection, capabilities and general organisation.	Capt. Margesson
T.3	<u>Defensively Armed Merchant Vessels</u> , <u>Enemy Cruisers on Trade Routes</u>	Commander Fisher.
T.4	<u>British Mercantile Marine</u> , movements of <u>Allied Merchant Vessels</u>	Commander Tarleton
T.5	<u>Diversion of Shipping</u> – War Risks Insurance, Communications with War Risks Clubs, and other bodies. Accommodation at Ports.	Major Hawkins
T.6	<u>Wireless Code</u> – signalling	Capt. Foster.
T.7	<u>Enemy Merchant Vessels</u> -	Capt. English
T.8	<u>Stocks of Food, Fuel, and Raw Material</u> . Their whereabouts and movements	Lieutenant Ginman
T.9	<u>Fisheries, Mines</u> . All communications with Officials concerning prohibited areas. Regulations and issues of orders.	Mr Moss Blundell
T.10	<u>Contraband. Enemy Reservists</u> . Movements of <u>neutral merchant vessels</u> . (with E.2)	Lieutenant L. Goodhart
T.11	<u>Shipping matters</u> :- Disposal of cargoes. Markets and allied questions	Mr Leverton Harris.
T.12	<u>Overdues and casualties to British Shipping</u> .	Mr Moss Blundell.

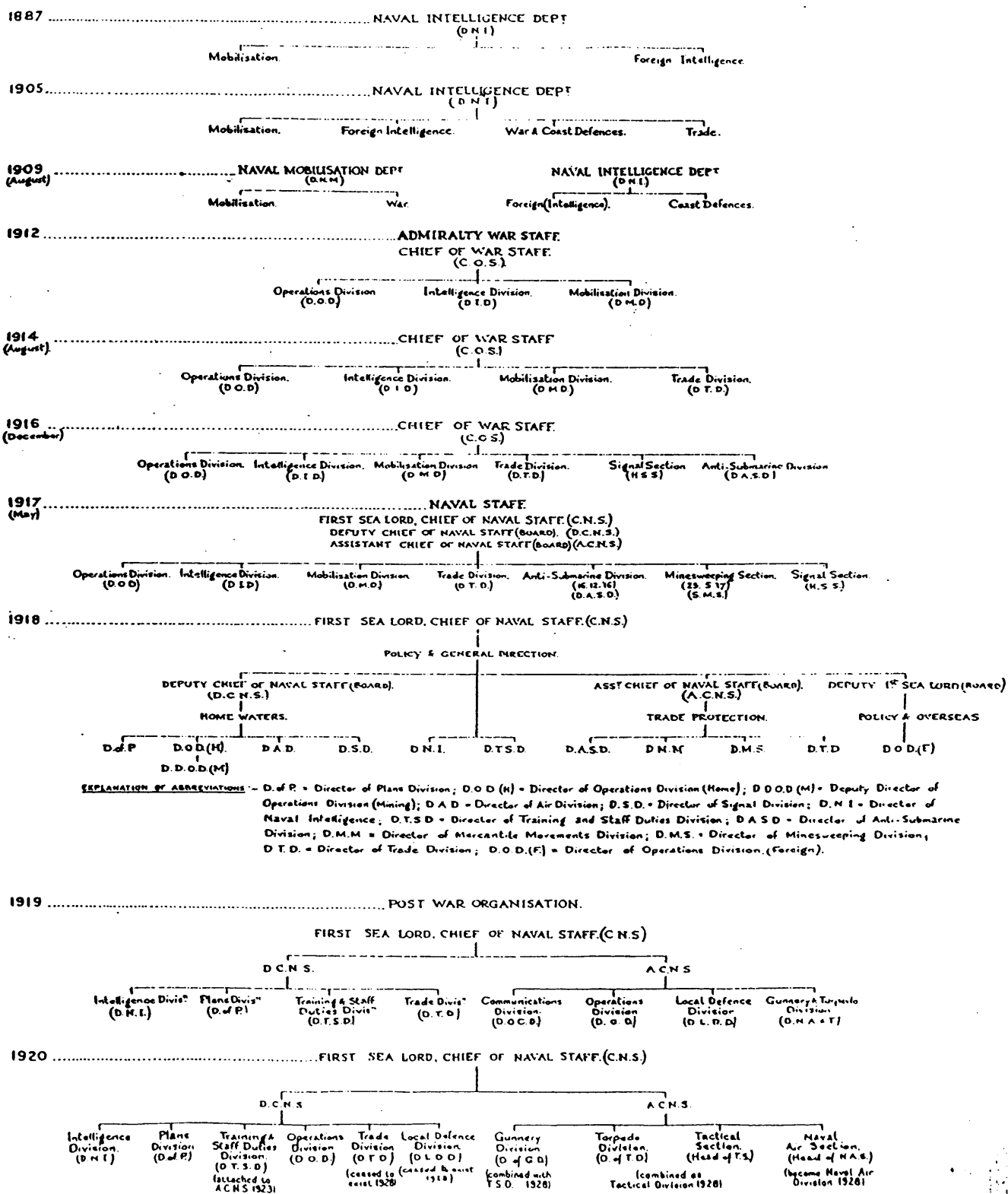
**Table 1.10: Changes to the Structure of the Trade Division, March 1915.<sup>1</sup>**

Section	Role	Membership
T.1	Contraband and all questions connected with goods on enemy origin, destination or ownership.	Commander Longden (also Contraband Committee), Commander Anderson RNVR, Lieut F. McCormick-Goodhart RNVR, Lieut L. McCormick-Goodhart RNVR, Lieut. W. Arnold Foster RNVR & 3 clerks
T. 2	All questions connected with Armed Merchant Cruisers	Capt. Margesson, Capt. Winthrop (also Committee of the London War Risks Club)
T. 3	Protection of Trade Routes, supplies to enemy vessels	Commander Fisher
T. 4	British Merchant Marine' incl. casualties, mines	Commander Tarleton, Commander Kenrick RNR, Mr Moss-Blundell, Mr Wyatt, Lieut. Stewart RNR
T. 5 & 6	Advise and Notices to Shipowners' as to trade routes etc; accommodation at ports, diversion of shipping. Issue of MV codes to shipping (T6)	Capt. Foster, Major Hawkins, Lieut.-Commander Bosanquet, Sir Frederick Bolton
T. 8	'Statistics' of imports and exports to and from neutral	Lieut. Ginman RNVR
T. 11	'Commercial and Financial questions; scrutiny of intercepted telegrams.	Commander Harris RNVR, hon. Robert Brand, Mr Blackwell

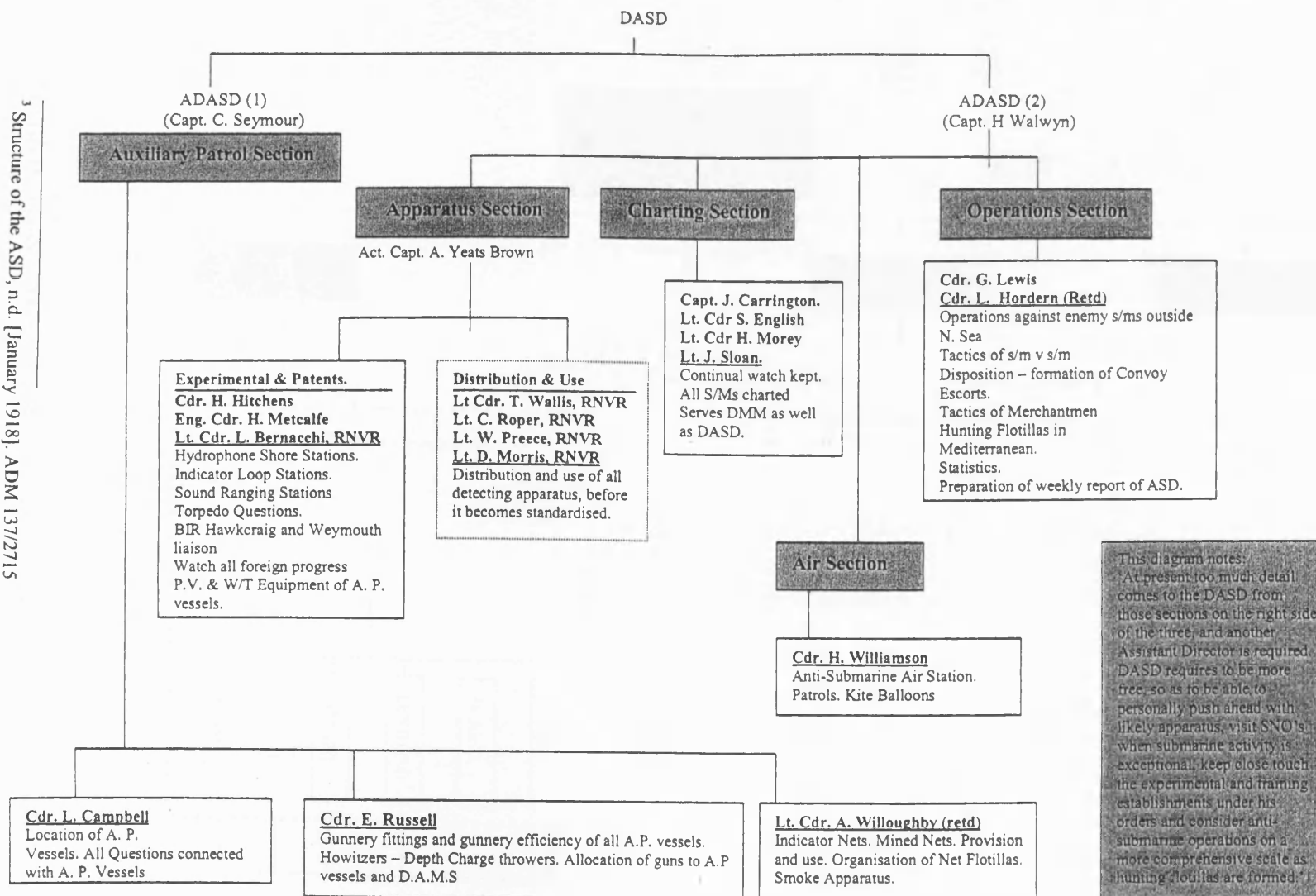
<sup>1</sup> Webb Memorandum, 'Redistribution of Work, 12<sup>th</sup> March 1915, ADM 137/2809

## Appendix D: Administrative Development of the Admiralty War Staff, 1912 – 18.<sup>2</sup>

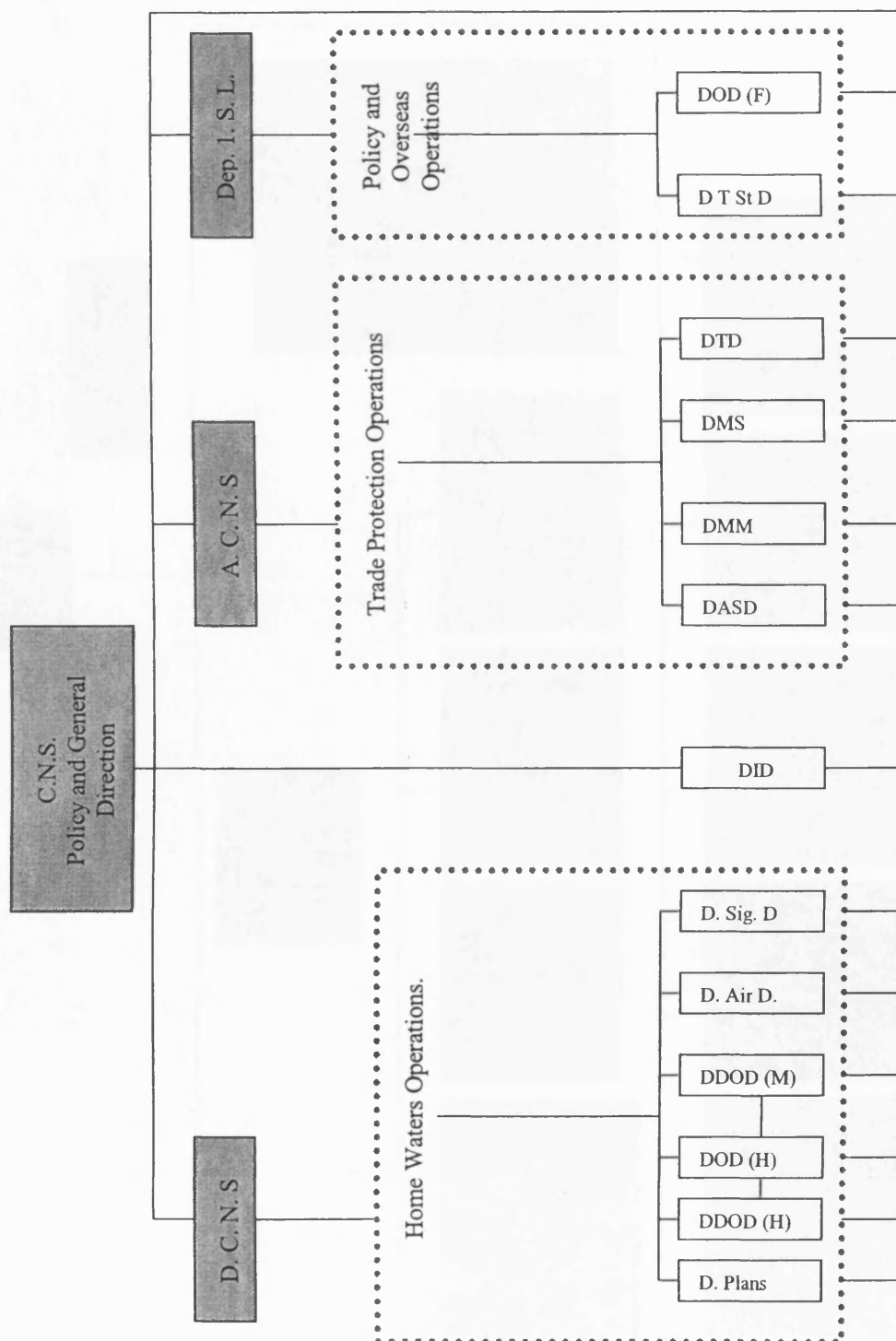
### NAVAL INTELLIGENCE DEPARTMENT AND THE NAVAL STAFF (1887 – 1920).



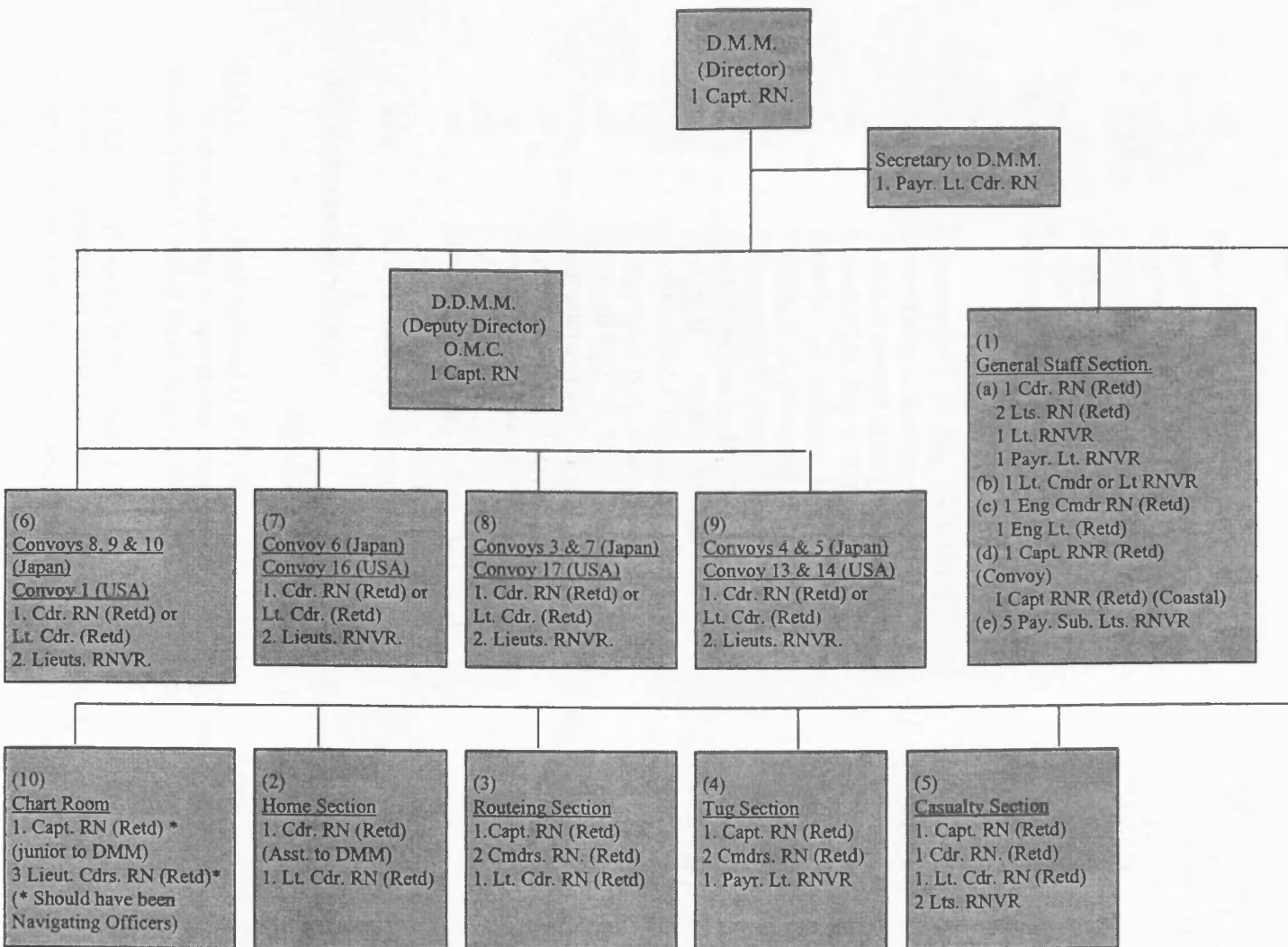
<sup>2</sup> The Naval Staff of the Admiralty: Its work and Development, 151



Appendix F. Organisation of the Naval Staff, January 1918.<sup>4</sup>



<sup>4</sup> Geddes Memorandum, 'Organisation of the Naval Staff', 14<sup>th</sup> January 1918. ADM 137/2715



<sup>5</sup> Admiralty Memorandum, n.d. [1917], 'War Time Expansion of M. M. Section T. D. into Mercantile Movements Division'. ADM 1/8518/74

## Appendix H: The Structure of the Operations Division, c. June 1917.<sup>6</sup>

### OPERATIONS DIVISION

		No. of Room
D.O.D.	Rear-Admiral G.P.W. Hope, C.B.	4 (Admy. House)
D.D.O.D.	Captain H.W. Grant, C.B., RN.	41 (Block III)
A.D.O.D.1	Captain C.P.R. Coode, DSO, RN.	67 (O.B.)
A.D.O.D.2	Lieut-Col. W.T.C. Jones, DSO, RMLI	38 (O.B.)
	(Captain A.F. Beal, RN. )	
Duty	(Captain W.M. Kerr, RN. )	1 (A.H.)
Captains	(Captain H.J.L.W.K. Willcox, RN. )	
Sections		
1	Commander C.C. Dix, DSO, RN.	38 (O.B.)
2	Commander L. Robinson, RN.	38 (O.B.)
3	Duties at present done by A.D.O.D.2	-
4	Captain C.D. Roper, RN.	B. (A.H.)
5	Captain A.G. Allgood, RN rtd.	38 (O.B.)
6	Captain H.M. Edwards, RN.	A. (A.H.)
7	Commander F. Bowden-Smith, RN rtd.	38 (O.B.)
8	Lieut-Commander J.P. Gibbs, RN.	66 (O.B.)
9	Captain R.P. Clutton, RN rtd.	B. (A.H.)
10	Lieut-Colonel F.J.F. French, RMA.	B. (A.H.)
11	Commander H.A. Williamson, RN.	38 (O.B.)
12	Commander T.W. Stirling, RN.	66 (O.B.)
12a	Commander H.E.H. Spencer-Cooper, MVO, RN	66 (O.B.)
13	Captain A.de K.L. May, RN.	B. (A.H.)
14	Captain C.G.S. Eeles, RN rtd.	Chart Room
15	Commander K.G.B. Dewar	Chart Room
20	Mr W.H. Hancock (Acting Clerk in charge of clerical staff)	39B (O.B.)
20a	Mr F.R. Bailey (Acting Staff Clerk)	39B (O.B.)

### OPERATIONS DIVISION

#### Distribution of Work.

D.O.D. (Rear-Admiral G.P.W. Hope, C.B.)

Matters relating to operations, distribution of the Fleet, minelaying, submarines, co-operation of Allied ships, hospital ships and air operations.

D.D.O.D. (Captain H.W. Grant, C.B., RN.)

Matters relating to transports and trade, sailing orders, trials, commissioning orders, all systems of communications, navigation, Board of Trade reports, fisheries.

A.D.O.D.1 (Captain C.P.R. Coode, DSO, RN.)

Matters relating to foreign stations (except such as are dealt with by D.D.O.D.), entry into defended ports at home and abroad, swept channels at defended

<sup>6</sup> AIR 1/279/15/226/127.



ports, traffic regulations, courts martial and courts of enquiry, administration of the Operations Division.

A.D.O.D.2 (Lieut-Col. W.T.C. Jones, DSO, RMLI.)

Matters relating to shore defences and the defence of vulnerable points on shore, at home and abroad.

Section 1. (Commander C.C. Dix, DSO, RN.)

Distribution of fleet (battleships, battle cruisers and light cruisers) and questions relating thereto (see also section 9).

Sailing orders for H.M. ships (referred by M. Branch).

Refits, docking, repairs etc. of H.M. ships.

New ships – programme of trials and commissioning orders.

British portion of Monthly Return of War vessels.

Reports of Courts-martial and Courts of Enquiry.

Visual signals.

Is responsible for seeing that other Departments concerned are informed of movements of ships.

Section 2. (Commander L. Robinson, RN.)

Systems of communication generally, including questions of policy regarding to wireless telegraphy (British and Foreign), laying and repair of cables, movements and work of cables, land-line telegraphs and telephones, communications between H. M. Ships and merchant vessels at home and abroad.

Section 3. (Duties at present done by A.D.O.D.2)

Harbour and coast defence of the United Kingdom, British Dominions and Colonies and India, including:-

(a) Disposition of guns, lights, mines, booms, etc., and personnel necessary for these;

(b) Examination service at all ports;

(c) Traffic regulations (see also A.D.O.D.1 and Section 4).

Section 4. (Captain C.D. Roper, RN.)

Instructions for Entry of H.M. ships into Defended Ports at home and abroad.

Swept Channels, booms, etc., at defended ports.

Confidential and public traffic regulations (see also A.D.O.D.1 and Section 3).

Fishing and fishing areas round the North Sea and Atlantic.

Section 5. (Captain A.G. Allgood, RN rtd.)

Movements of all H.M. Ships employed abroad and letters of proceedings from Commanders in Chief on foreign stations. (See also Section 10).

Corrects "Pink List" as regards H.M. Ships abroad.

Keeps wall charts in Chart Room corrected as regards vessels on foreign service.

Section 6. (Captain H.M. Edwards, RN.)

Controlled sailings in connection with French Coal Trade and ore trade from North coast of Spain.

Board of Trade reports.

Reports dealing with enemy submarines (see also section 8).

Courts of Enquiry relating to reports of sinkings of merchant ships.

Section 7. (Commander F. Bowden-Smith, RN rtd.)

Movements and letters if proceedings of 10<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadron, Grand Fleet destroyer flotillas, H.M. ships (not belonging to the Grand Fleet) at Home ports, H.M. ships stationed at bases, minelayers and mine-carriers in Home waters.  
Corrects "Pink List" as regards the foregoing vessels.

Section 8. (Lieut-Commander J.P. Gibbs, RN.)

All matters relating to distribution and employment of destroyers, patrol flotillas, submarines, sloops, special service vessels, auxiliary patrols, escorts by auxiliary patrols.  
Prepares daily statement of destroyer flotillas.  
Telegrams and reports dealing with enemy submarines (see also Section 6).

Section 9. (Captain R.P. Clutton, RN rtd.)

Movements of ships of the Grand Fleet when detached for repairs, and armed boarding vessels, minesweepers and supply vessels attached to Grand Fleet.  
White Sea – Trade and defence. Movements and refit of vessels stationed in White Sea.  
Matters relating to Hospital ships.  
Assists in Chart Room and takes duty there when required.

Section 10. (Lieut-Colonel F.J.F. French, RMA.)

Overseas operations.  
Naval Flotilla on Lakes Tanganyika and Victoria.  
Questions concerning Persia and Abyssinia.  
Letters of proceedings from Mediterranean, East Indies and China.

Section 11. (Commander H.A. Williamson, RN.)

Air Operations.  
Anti-aircraft defences.  
W/T and other communications with aircraft.

Section 12. (Commander T.W. Stirling, RN.)

Section 12a. (Commander H.E.H. Spencer-Cooper, MVO, RN)

Movements of troop and store transports, wheat, sugar and nitrate transports, mercantile fleet auxiliaries (colliers, oilers, store vessels, hospital ships, munition ships, tugs) and merchant vessels carrying valuable Government cargoes.  
Sailing orders and route instructions for the above.  
Board of Trade reports.  
Merchant ship casualties.  
Minesweeping reports.  
Matters relating to navigation.

Section 13. (Captain A.de K.L. May, RN.)

Mining operations and records.  
Matters relating to torpedoes.

Section 14. – Chart Room. (Captain C.G.S. Eeles, RN. retd).

Records of all telegrams referring to mines, wrecks, lights, buoys, swept channels, dangerous areas, etc., and plots positions of mines reported, suspicious vessels and objects, and dangerous and prohibited areas.

Superintends correction of reference charts by cartographer from Hydrographic Office.

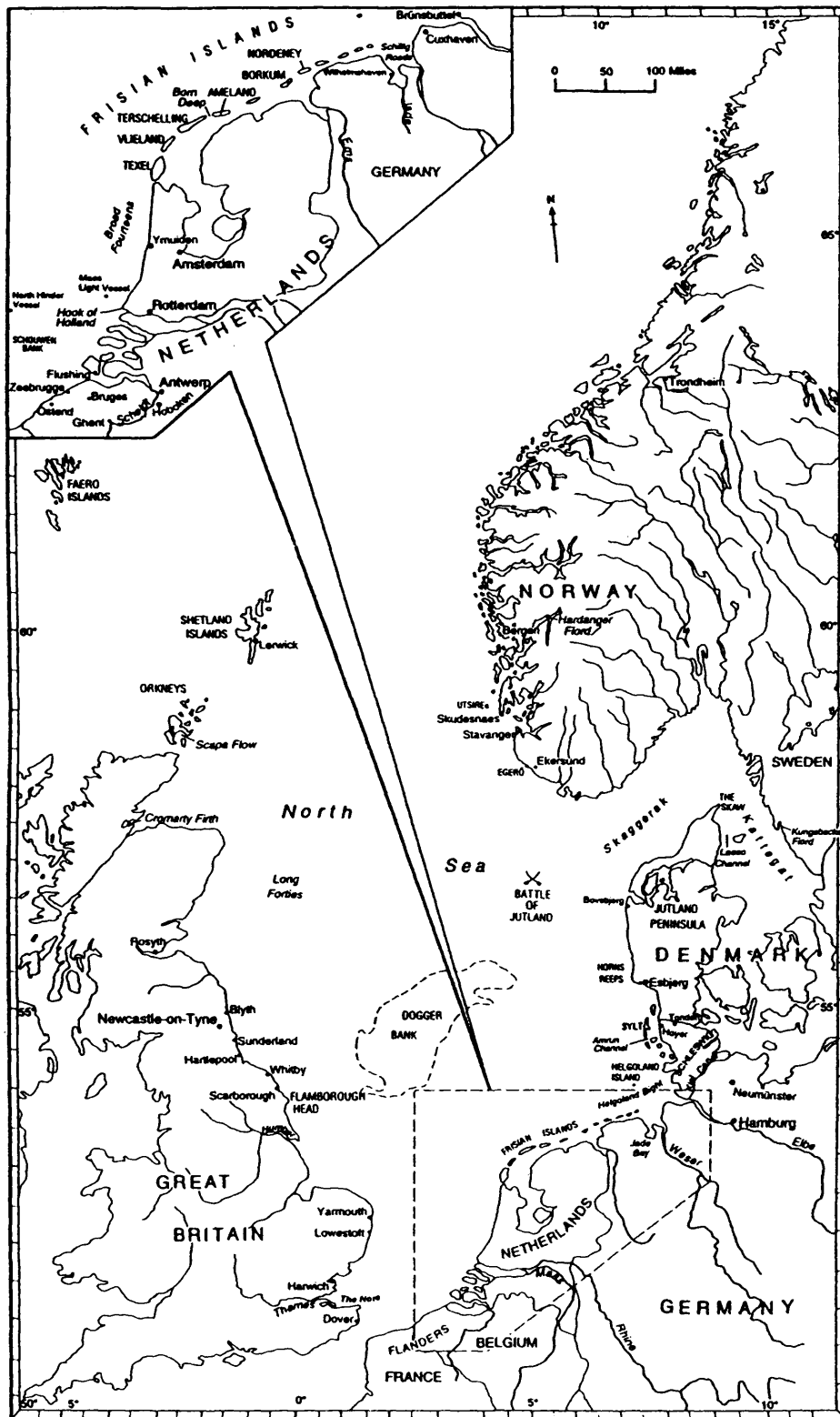
Section 15. (Commander K.G.B. Dewar, RN.)

Assists D.O.D.

Section 20. (Mr W.H. Hancock, Acting Staff Clerk in charge of clerical staff).

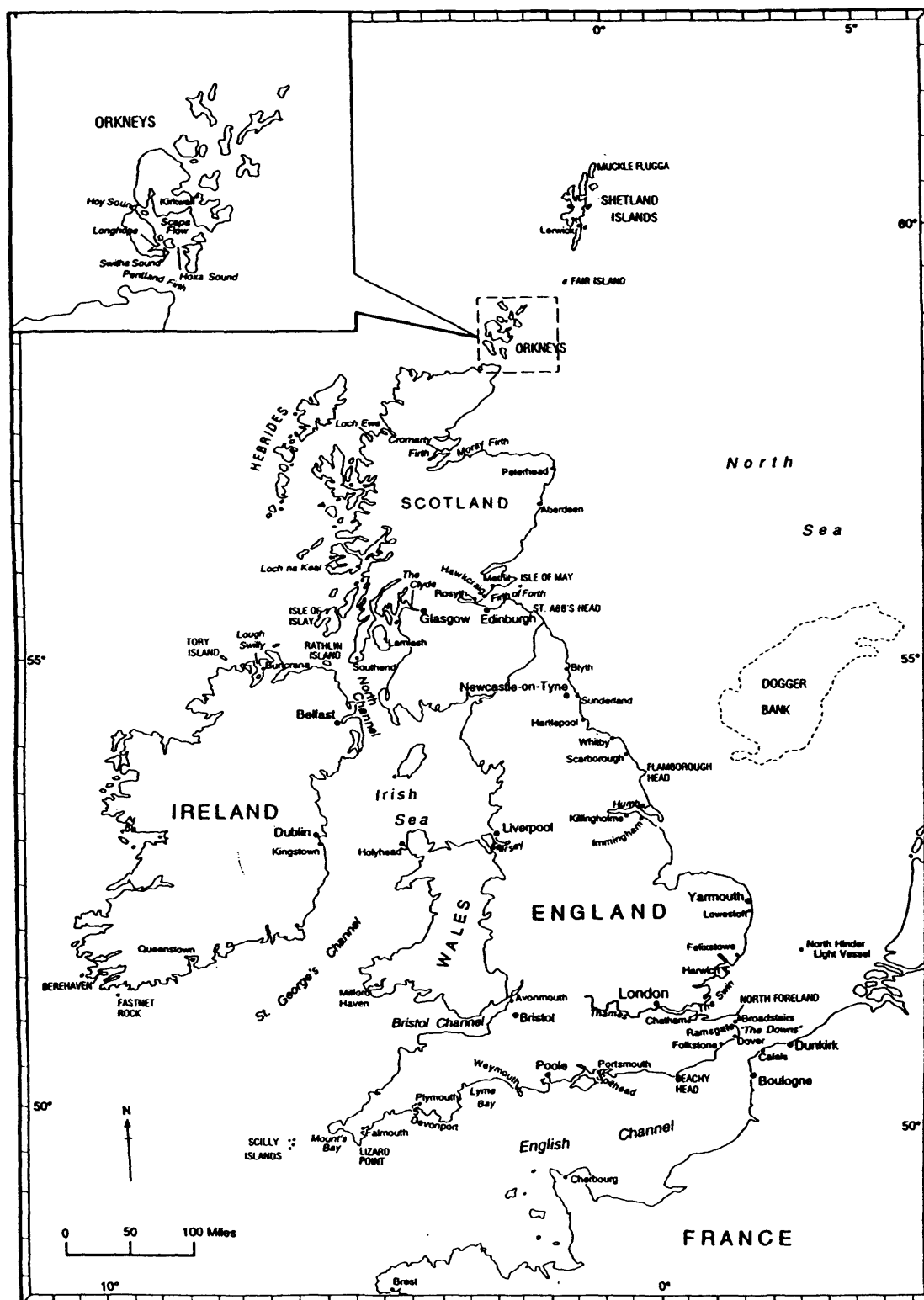
Section 20a. (Mr F. R. Bailey, Acting Staff Clerk).

**Appendix I: Maps.**  
**1. The North Sea.<sup>7</sup>**



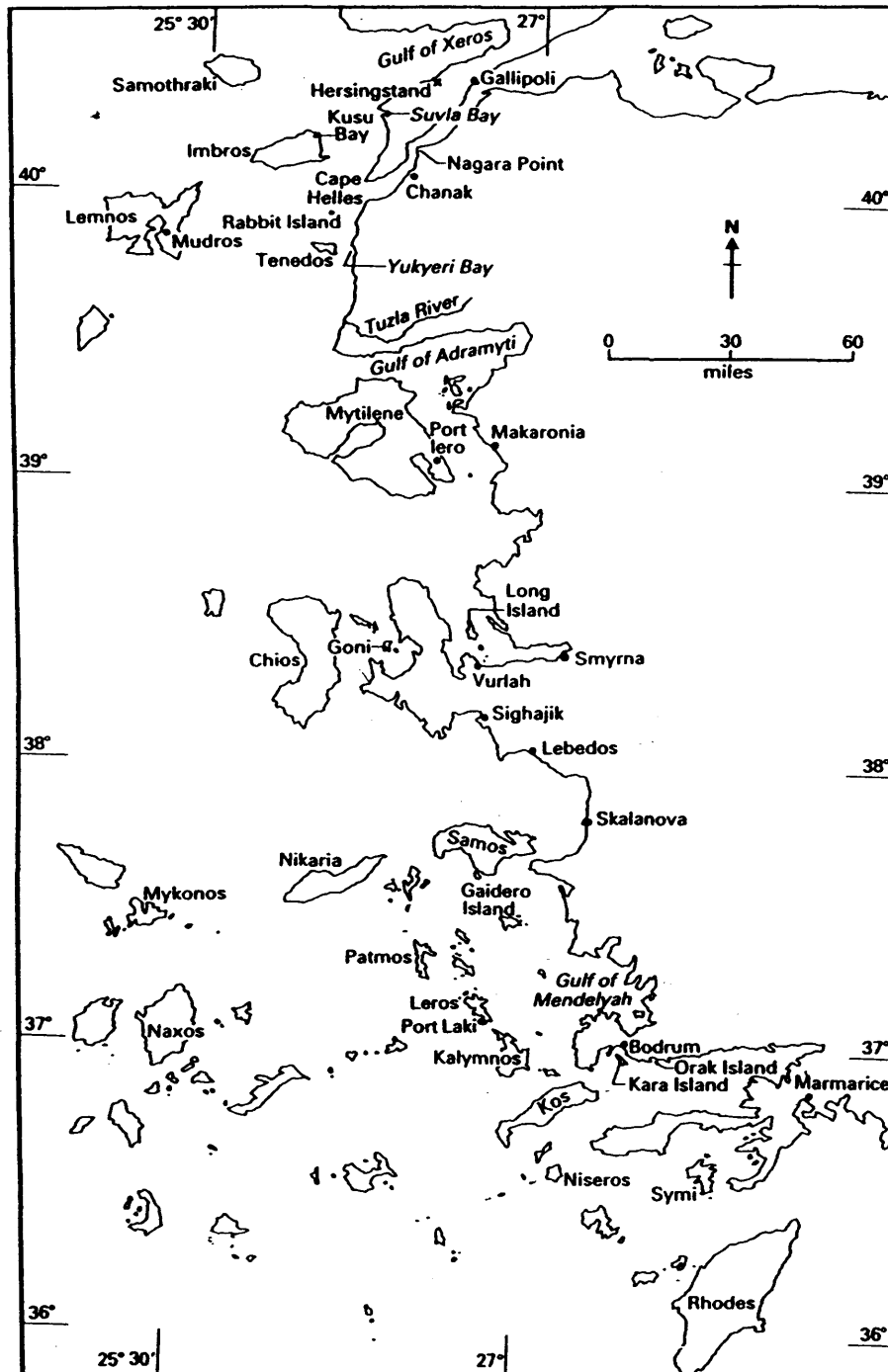
<sup>7</sup> Halpern, *Naval History*, 451

## 2. The British Isles.<sup>8</sup>



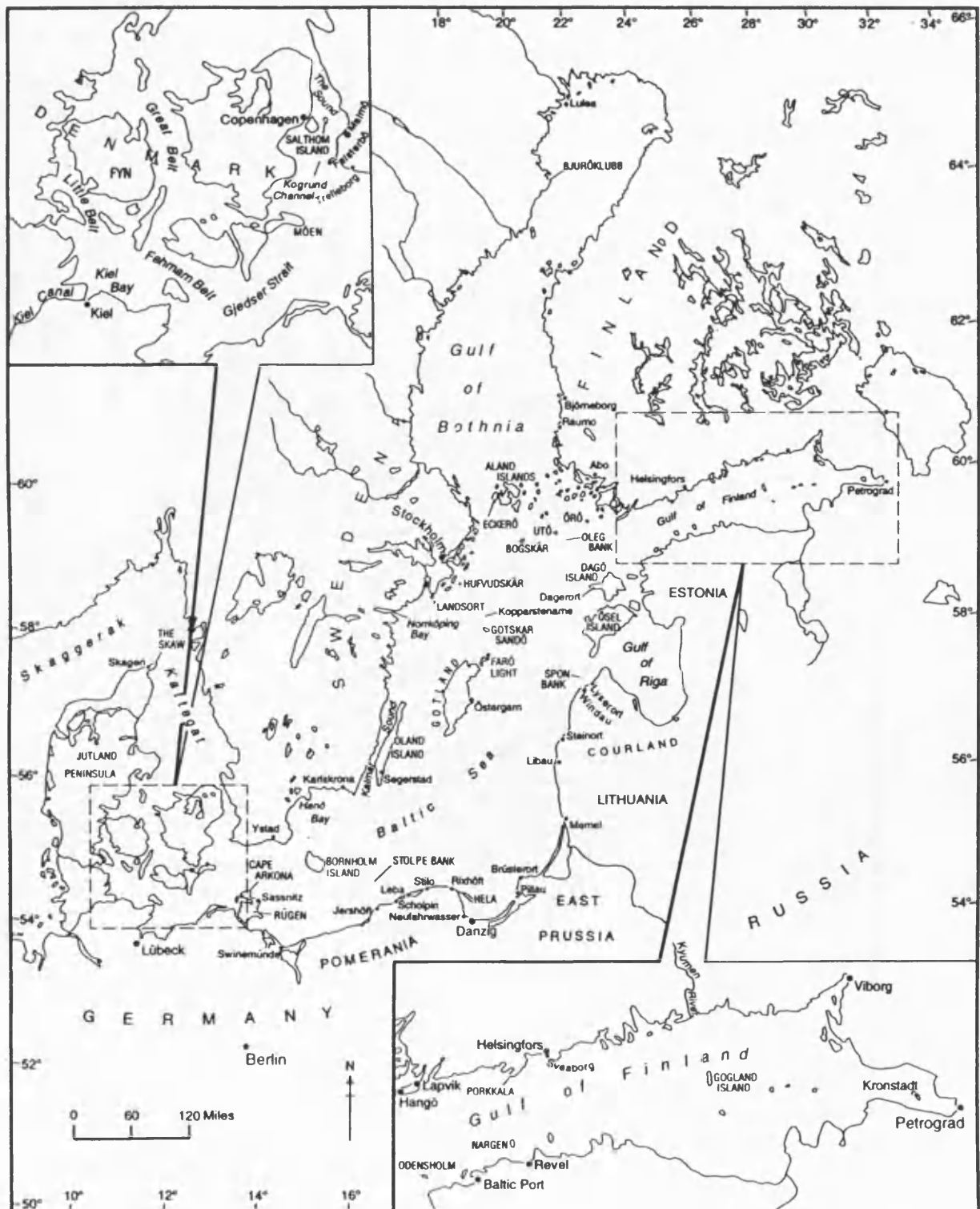
<sup>8</sup> Halpern, *Naval History*, 452

### 3. The Aegean Coast of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>9</sup>



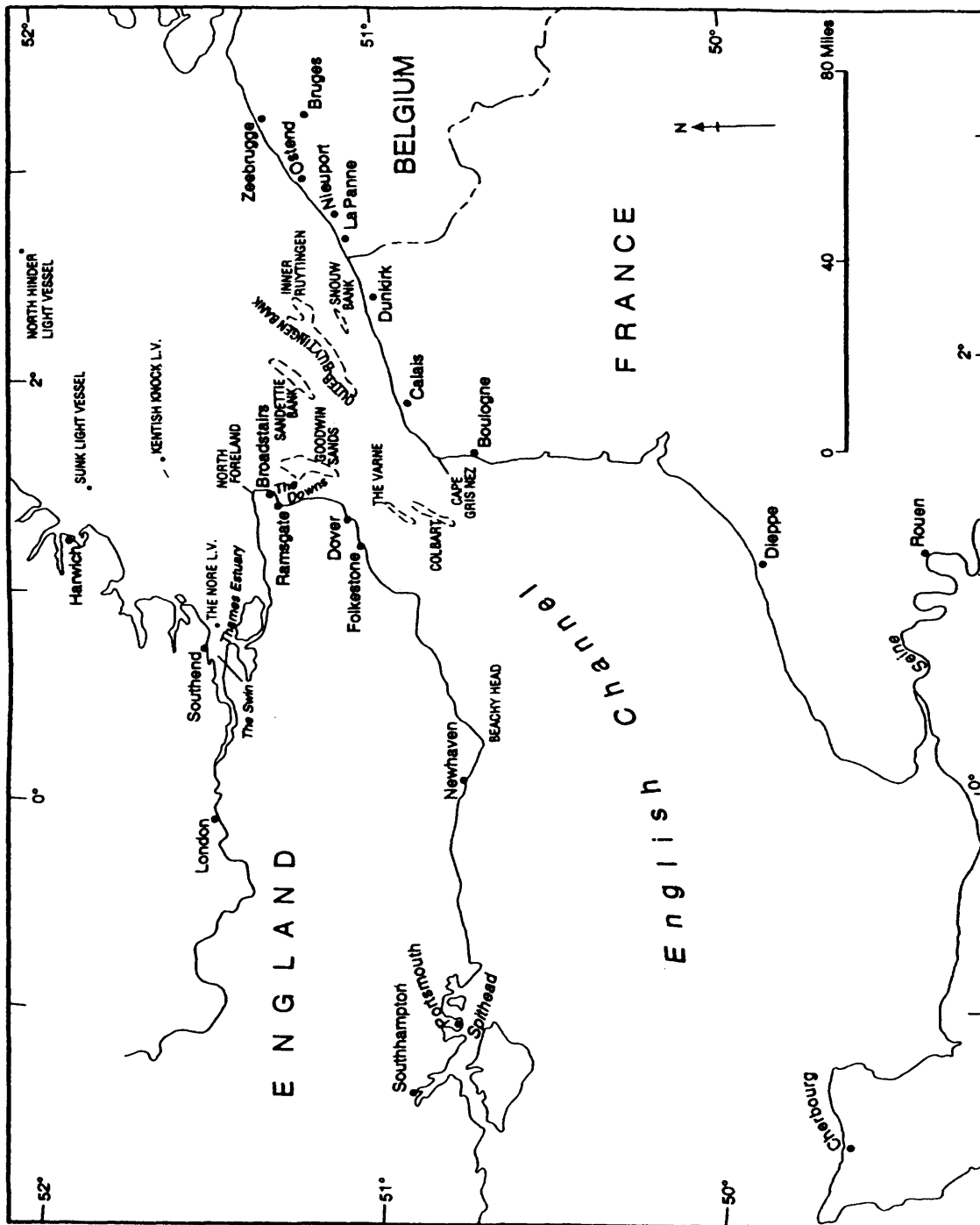
<sup>9</sup> Halpern, *Naval History*, 461

#### 4. The Baltic.<sup>10</sup>



<sup>10</sup> Halpern, *Naval History*, 465

## 5. The English Channel and Straits of Dover.<sup>11</sup>



<sup>11</sup> Halpern, *Naval History*, 472



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